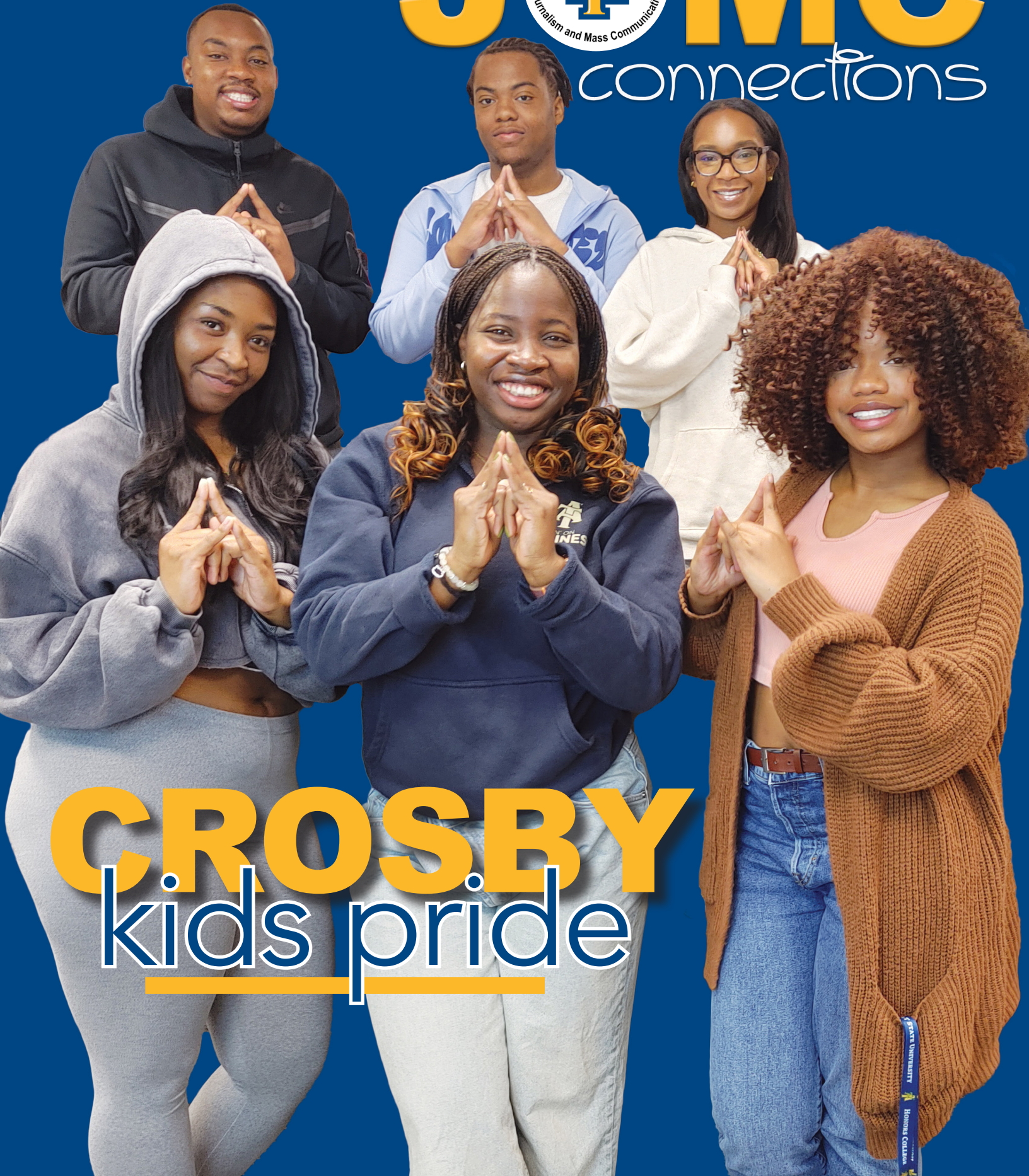


fall 2024

J M C



connections



CROSBY

kids pride

SPARTAN UNIVERSITY
HONORS COLLEGE

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JOMC Connections

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Spring 2024 Interim Chair

Dr. Yahya Kamalipour

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MANAGING EDITOR

Dr. Ecaterina Stepaniuc

WORD

FROM THE INTERIM CHAIR



Dear Readers:

Greetings and welcome to another exciting and information-packed issue of JOMC Connections, which is published in print and digital formats. As you page through, you will learn about the highlights of events, industry partnerships, internships, and notable achievements of students, faculty, alumni, and staff.

I sincerely hope you will enjoy this fall 2024 edition that illustrates how the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication continues to be a vibrant, engaged, progressive, and welcoming environment for our nearly 500 students majoring in Multimedia Journalism, Mass Media Production, and Public Relations.

Like the previous Spring 2024 issue, students enrolled in JOMC 396 (Publication Design and Layout), taught by Dr. Ecaterina (Kate) Stepaniuc, have participated in planning, contributing, designing, and producing this visually attractive and informative edition. My congratulations to Dr. Stepaniuc and her creative students for bringing this issue to fruition.

The lead story is about JOMC senior Kayla Hare, who was among 10 HBCU students participating in the National Newspaper Publishers Association Chevrolet Journalism Fellowship program, followed by another JOMC student, Coullen Colson's entrepreneurial ability in establishing a business in media and photography while pursuing a degree in mass media production. You will then learn about other JOMC students who participated in ESPN's Rhoden Fellows, and another student, Haley Pender, who founded *Thefivetwosociety*, which provides a platform for Black narratives, followed by many more inspirational stories and achievements.

On pages 18-19, you will learn about one of the successful annual events, the Alumni Takeover, coordinated by Ms. Caroline Jones, which brings many seasoned alumni and students together during the "JOMC Media Week."

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication is one of the three ACEJMC-accredited undergraduate degree programs in the State of North Carolina and one of the top HBCU producers of journalists and media practitioners in the United States. We are very appreciative and proud of our students, alumni, faculty, staff, and supporters for these notable academic standings. On page 21, get to know our new JOMC administrative support associate, Ms. Brenee Nicole Butler. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome her.

Finally, consider contributing to the JOMC Gifts Fund by completing and returning the form on page 32 of this newsletter. Your contributions will support students attending conferences or engaging in other academic activities.

Wishing you all the best!

Crosby Kids Take the Lead

How Journalism Internships Are Shaping the Next Generation of Media Professionals

by Chrysta Nichols

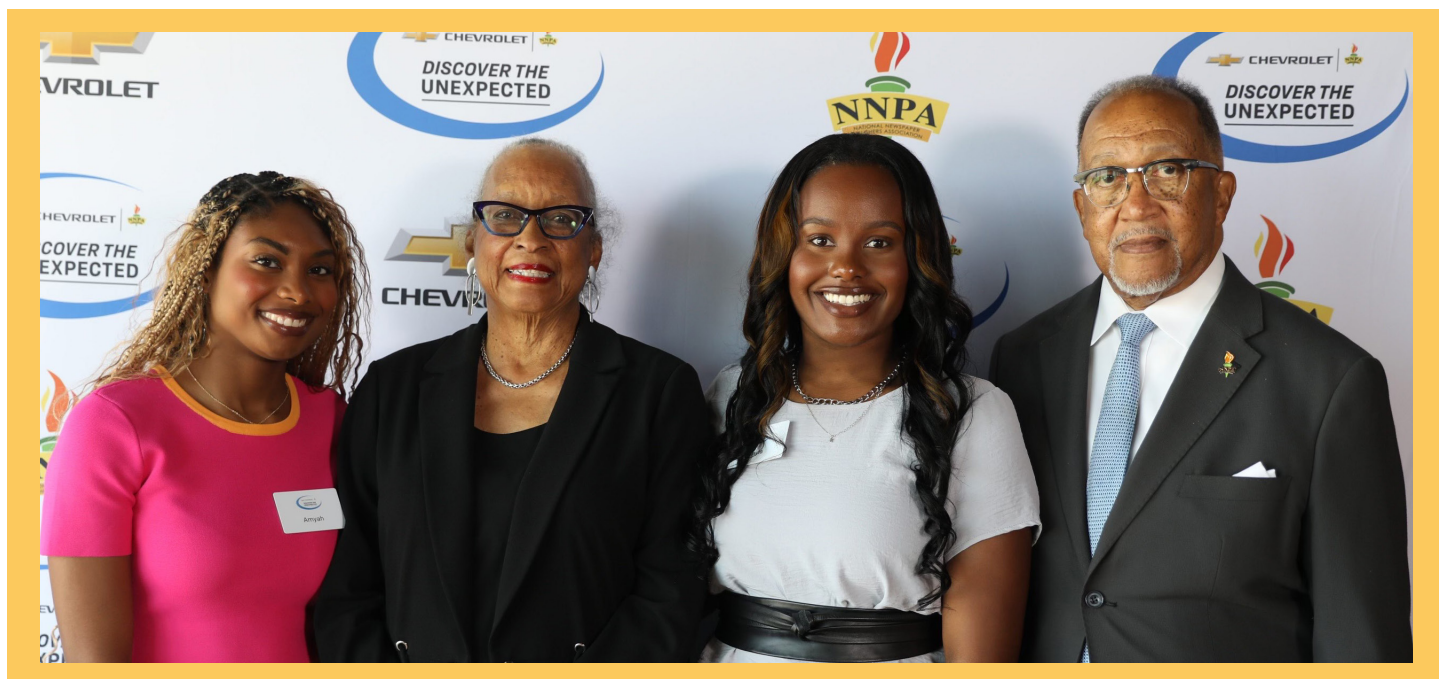
The need for Black media professionals is more crucial than ever to be able to represent our own voices, culture, experiences, and stories. My fellow students from Crosby Hall, known as the Crosby Kids, are rising to meet that demand through prestigious internships and fellowships, gaining real-world experience and preparing to lead the next generation of media.

This summer, 10 HBCU students, including some from Crosby Hall, participated in an exclusive program designed to develop their skills and prepare them for careers in media. Kayla Hare, a senior multimedia journalism major, was one of these students.

Hare spent several weeks traveling across the U.S. as part of the National Newspaper Publishers Association Chevrolet Journalism Fellowship. The unique internship blended hands-on journalism experience with a brand ambassador role, offering the students an unforgettable look at the media world.

“Each of us was given a 2024 Chevy Trax to share for the summer, and we drove across the country, visiting historic sites, writing news articles, creating video content, and starring in a promotional campaign with Terrence J for Chevrolet. It was unreal!” Hare said.

The fellowship took them to cities like Detroit, Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, where they completed various assignments. The group reported for respected NNPA publications, also known as The Black Press. Hare spent most of her summer in Dallas, reporting for The Dallas Examiner.



The 2024 Chevrolet DTU Bootcamp. Left to right Amyah Fountain (2024 DTU Fellow) Mollie Belt (Publisher, The Dallas Examiner), Kayla Hare, Dr. Ben Chavis (President & CEO, NNPA)



Photo by Sylvia Jarrus, Kayla Hare at bootcamp for Chevrolet DTU Internship.

"I wrote and published seven articles, created video content, and even attended MLB All-Star Week," Hare said. "It was amazing to be recognized for our work there. Other fellows were spread out in D.C., Houston, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, working on their own assignments."

While the fellowship helped Hare excel in journalism, it also sparked her interest in other communication fields. "Besides perfecting my journalism craft, I explored social media management, digital marketing, and other options I want to keep exploring," she said.

Hare admitted print journalism wasn't her initial focus, but the internship taught her that strong writing is the foundation of any journalism career. "Print was never something I wanted to do, but being a good writer is the most important step to becoming a good journalist—no matter what sector you're in," she said.

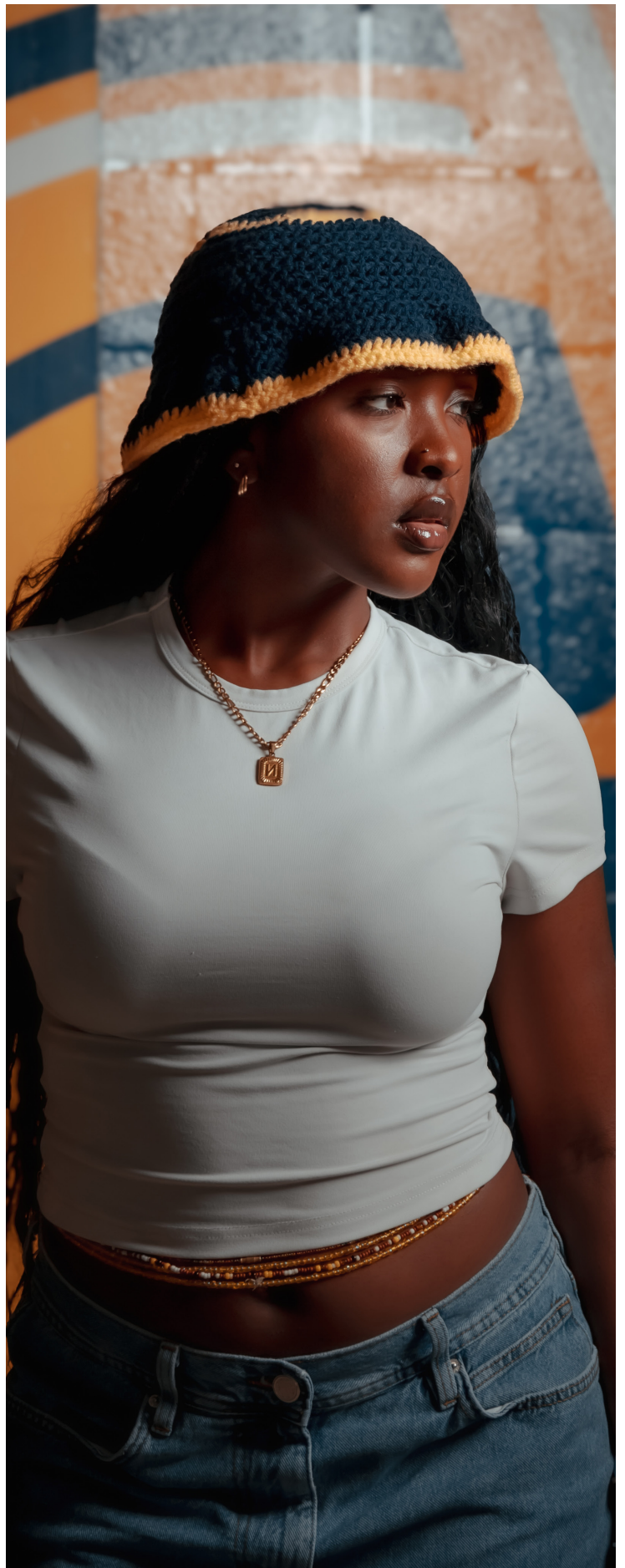
Throughout the summer, Hare practiced essential journalism skills: meeting deadlines, asking relevant questions, capturing key moments, and mastering AP Style. "AP Style is something I needed more practice with before my internship, and now I feel so much more confident with it. This experience gave me that chance," she said.

Working in a fast-paced environment sharpened Hare's abilities as a journalist and opened her eyes to the broader communications world. "This internship showed me there's so much more to journalism than just reporting," she said. "I saw how powerful social media is in storytelling and how digital marketing shapes a brand's narrative. It made me realize I have a lot of options after graduation."

For Hare, the internship was more than just gaining journalism skills—it was about experiencing the reality of the career she's been working toward. "You can read about a job all you want, but until you actually experience it, you don't truly grasp it," she said. "This internship gave me hands-on experience that helped me understand what to expect in the field. It also gave me clarity on my strengths and weaknesses."

In addition to honing her journalism skills, Hare had the chance to network with professionals and peers in the industry. "Networking was a huge part of this experience," she said. "I met so many professionals and connected with fellow interns. These are people I know I can rely on as I begin navigating my career after college."

For Hare, the internship was an opportunity to grow as a journalist, explore new communication avenues, and build a supportive network for her future. "I feel so much more prepared for what's next," she said. "This internship gave me a real taste of the media world, and now I'm ready to take the lead in my career." Thanks to experiences like this, Hare and fellow Crosby Kids are stepping confidently into the media world, ready to make their mark.



Photos submitted by Coullen Colson

Balancing Business and Education

Coullen Colson's Journey

by Marlee Jones

Running a business while pursuing a degree can be challenging for any student, but for Coullen Colson, the balancing act has paid off thus far. A junior at North Carolina A&T State University, Colson is studying Journalism and Mass Communications with a concentration in mass media. Despite his busy schedule, his business, "Coullen Colson Photography," founded in 2021, has taken off and expanded beyond expectations.

Colsons' entrepreneurial journey began with a love for media and film, which ultimately inspired him to buy his first camera. "I was more into film and wanted to do media, but when I got my first camera, I got into photography. I took my own pictures and posted them on social media. Once my posts became consistent, people asked me to take their pictures. That demand led to the business," he recalls. His passion grew into a full-fledged business that married his love for visual storytelling with his newfound talent in photography.

Transitioning his photography business to fit the schedule of being a college student was easier than anticipated. Largely thanks to the support of his university, he said, "If it wasn't for college, I probably wouldn't be as successful as I am," Colson admits. "The community at our school is big on supporting each other, and alumni are extremely supportive of younger Aggies and small businesses." That camaraderie at N.C. A&T provided him with a foundation to grow as a student and as a business owner.

Running a business, while taking a full course load, is a bit of a balancing act that is demanding at times, especially during busy seasons such as grad season or finals week, when the demand for photography or studying is increased. "Yes, it does have its challenges," Colson admits. "The school workload can get heavy, and there are moments where the photography work picks up, but owning my own business has allowed me to set certain parameters to ensure my workload isn't too much."

Among the accolades, college life as an entrepreneur is not without its setbacks at times. A setback came

when Colson's photography equipment was stolen from his dorm. "I was robbed of all my equipment, but it made me realize that the equipment doesn't make the art—the photographer does," he says. That experience taught Colson resilience and eased all his self doubt. His tools may have been lost, but his commitment to his craft reminded him that the most expensive gadgets are not necessary to make art.

Colson credits his education for enhancing his photography skills, particularly through his mass media courses. "I am a lot more intentional with my photos after taking classes in mass media. I've learned to tell stories through my pictures, just as you would with an article," he says. His coursework has helped him approach photography from a storytelling perspective, turning what he produces from simple pictures into visual stories that viewers can easily relate to.

For students with a mindset to start a business while in school, Colson shared words of encouragement from experiences: "Be patient with yourself. Don't get too hung up on receiving accolades within a certain amount of time. Do what works best for you and be accountable for your business while offering yourself grace to grow." He clarifies that the journey to success is a marathon, not a sprint, where one is expected to balance discipline with self-compassion.

With Colson continuing his degree pursuit while expanding his business, he truly embodies the representation of how "Aggies Do." We find success by leveraging our campus communities and all the resources available around us to our advantage. His journey served as a testament that though the road may be quite tough at times, it is doable. Colson's story is one of how he balanced his ambition with patience, and how education and business can enhance one another. You do not have to stop doing one to do the other; they can exist and thrive simultaneously. Aggie Pride!

Rhoden Fellows at NC A&T: A Testament to Excellence and Leadership

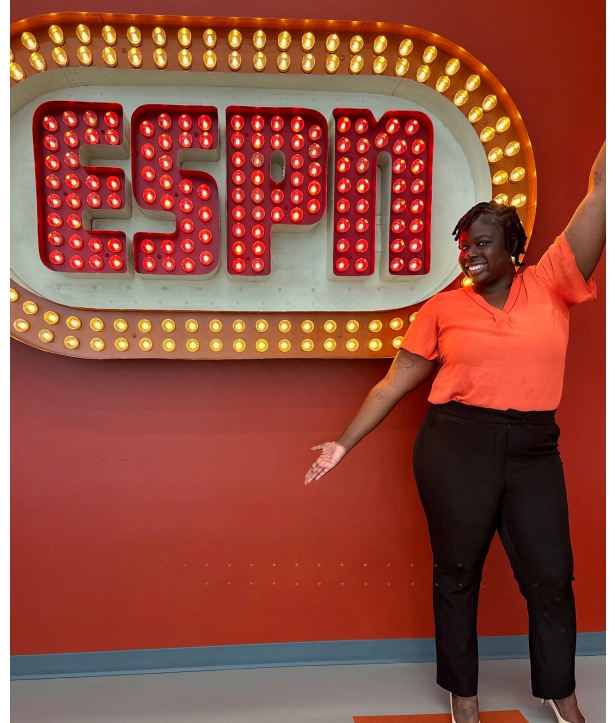
by Gabrielle Heyward

Since 2018, N.C. A&T has positioned student journalists with a chance to work with ESPN and Andscape through the Rhoden Fellowship. This year-long program, named after William C. Rhoden, Andscape's editor-at-large and award-winning columnist, is a stepping stone for aspiring sports journalists at HBCUs.

With this opportunity, students write and produce content on various platforms about race, culture, and sports, all while serving as their school's campus correspondents for Andscape. During the summer, the fellows are in Washington, D.C., at Andscape's office, and once the academic year starts, they return to their respective campuses. June of 2024 marked the first year this internship occurred at ESPN's headquarters in Bristol, Connecticut.

The fellows don't just learn about sports journalism—they live it. They gain hands-on experience by meeting executives, journalists, and different departments across the entire ESPN franchise, traveling to sporting events, working in the press box, and interviewing athletes and celebrities for podcasts and social media. This immersive experience is a testament to the practical nature of the Rhoden Fellowship.

Since its inception, six outstanding N.C. A&T students have been selected for this opportunity, propelling them into their future careers in journalism.



Gabrielle Heyward strikes a pose with ESPN's iconic marquee sign

Donovan Dooley, East Dockery, Alexis Davis, Alexis Black, Kamryn Jackson, and myself, Gabrielle Heyward, have continued a legacy of sports excellence that has come through N.C. A&T.

Currently, past fellows are exceeding in the journalism industry in various roles including social media manager for Dallas Wings, graduate school at George Washington University and sports reporter for the Greenville News and Spartanburg Herald-Journal in Spartanburg, SC.

Kamryn Jackson, Rhoden fellow, class of 2024 and recent N.C. A&T alum, detailed how being a Rhoden fellow shaped her as a journalist.



Rhoden Fellow Gabrielle Heyward on the set of ESPN's WNBA Countdown with the 'Big 3' and current cohort of Rhoden Fellows



Rhoden Fellow East Dockery interviews Karl Anthony Towns during the NBA All-Star game in 2022.

“My experience was great. I got to travel to places I never imagined I would like, like the Celebration Bowl in Atlanta and the Big East Conference championship in New York,” Jackson said. “It definitely was a nice resume booster. Other than that, it helped me improve my writing tremendously. I loved it.”

Within my first week as a Rhoden Fellow, I met more leaders in this industry and at ESPN who can help me in whatever endeavor I decide to pursue. The most remarkable experience thus far came at an unlikely time with an impromptu visit with an associate producer at the ESPN Pulse meeting. In two hours, we received spontaneous on-air training and scheduled a visit to watch the WNBA Countdown show live.

This year also marked the first time that the cohort was all-female, continuing the growth of the women in sports movement.

Rhoden Fellow, Alexis Davis, poses with hosts and analysts of ESPN’s WNBA Countdown during the WNBA All-Star Game in Arizona.

Attending the WNBA Countdown lit a fire in me that I didn’t even know existed. It opened my eyes to the fact that a trio of Black women can be passionate and intelligent about the sports they love and add their personality to the show. It inspired me to keep going and that black women can reach the top by being authentic.

HBCU Students enrolled as rising sophomores, juniors, or seniors prior to the internship can apply for the program during the fall semester through the United Negro College Fund website.



N.C. A&T Student Revolutionizing Black Media

Through the “Thefivetwosociety” Haley Pender’s Amplifies Black Culture

by Aliyah Chasten



Haley Pender is a junior Dowdy Scholar studying multimedia journalism at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. She founded the “Thefivetwosociety” upon arriving in her first year of college. The dynamic platform amplifies Black culture in all things; black media provides a space for untold stories that resonate with today’s generation.

“Since founding the social media platform, “Thefivetwosociety” has opened doors for me, allowing me to gain media notoriety and valuable opportunities,” Pender shares. Her work earned recognition in the award, reflecting her commitment to enhancing Black media through historical context and fostering understanding, especially those highlighting the often overlooked narrative within the black community.

From a young age, Pender was inspired to be an entertainer, channeling her passion for storytelling to create a media platform that promotes black narratives. Her mission is to emulate stories you may have yet to hear, bridging the gap between history and contemporary entertainment. The dedication is evident in her consistent efforts to highlight the contributions of black artists and creators throughout history, showing how the work has shaped modern entertainment.

Since its founding, “Thefivetwosociety” has experienced remarkable growth across social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok. Over the summer, Pender gained an impressive 10,000 followers on Instagram, bringing her total to 26,400 followers on the platform and 71,500 followers on TikTok.

Haley Pender reporting on the sideline at the N.C. A&T Football Game., on Oct. 19, 2024. taken by Cameron Smith

Collaborations with notable brands such as AT&T, Peacock, SiriusXM, and Hollywood Melanin reflect her influence and the demand for her insightful storytelling.

Pender aims to shed light on black history and media particularly for Gen Z. "I want to bring attention to aspects of black culture that Gen Z may not know," she explains. To keep her content fresh and relevant, she researches trending topics and crafts engaging stories from her followers each week. This rich content fosters an essential community among her audience. By sharing new narratives and infographics, she educates and inspires her followers. "Sometimes major networks dilute them," she notes. "I aim to provide a well-rounded perspective diving deeper into stories that matter."

The impact of the "Thefivetwosociety" is evident in the growth influence on the educational landscape surrounding Black artists and entertainment. Haley's platform has caught the attention of prominent figures like Anthony Hamilton, Damon Wayans, and Kandi Burruss, who have engaged with her post, reinforcing the importance of her work. Their support validates her mission and amplifies her reach within the industry.

After graduating, Pender envisions expanding her platform into a full-time endeavor, aiming for financial success while advocating for underrepresented communities. She aspires to collaborate with networks like BET and CBS to tell stories that resonate across generations. "I want to create content that entertains and educates," she says.



Headshot of Haley Pender, Photo taken by Alyssia Deanna.



@THEFIVETWOSOCIETY

Her audience includes Gen Z, millennials, generation X and Generation Alpha, and she actively engages with her supporters by responding to comments and fostering conversations. Through "Thefivetwosociety" Haley Pender is not just sharing stories. She is creating a movement that celebrates and uplifts Black culture's richness and complexity. Her work is a testament to the power of storytelling, shaping perceptions, bridging gaps, and fostering unity within and beyond the Black community.

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Interim Dean Dr. Sheila Whitley Shares Future Plans For The College

by Coley Kilpatrick

As the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences welcomes Sheila Whitley, Ph.D., as interim dean, her insights and ambitions promise to shape a new trajectory for the academic community. With deep familiarity with North Carolina A&T State University and its goals, Whitley is poised to make a significant impact during her tenure.

Dean Whitley recognizes the university's commitment to transitioning into a research-intensive R1 institution. She emphasizes the vital role humanities programs play in this mission, asserting that the JOMC department is often overlooked despite being integral to the student experience. Every student engages with humanities courses, specifically JOMC courses, and Whitley aims to ensure that these programs receive the recognition they deserve. Her top priorities include aligning the JOMC department with the university's vision, actively contributing to the R1 initiative, and enhancing the visibility of these programs. With the new chancellor, who brings a wealth of experience from an R1 university, Dean Whitley feels refreshed by the perspectives and innovative strategies being introduced.

Communication is key for Whitley. She has already engaged with student senators to discuss their aspirations for program improvements, emphasizing the importance of a two-way dialogue between faculty and students. This collaborative approach is crucial for fostering an inclusive and responsive academic environment.



Interim Dean Dr. Sheila Whitley

Dean Whitley is aware of the transformative power of technology in education. As we embrace digital advancements, she envisions a future where the JOMC department can leverage these tools to enhance learning and engagement.

An additional initiative Whitley supports is the "15 to Finish" campaign, encouraging students to complete 15 credits per semester to graduate in four years. This plan not only promotes timely graduation but also ensures that students can fully benefit from the university's diverse offerings.

As we embark on this new chapter with Dean Whitley, we are excited to see how her leadership will elevate our department and contribute to the university's ambitious goals. Together, we can create a vibrant academic community that values the JOMC program and prepares our students for a dynamic future.

Contia' J. Prince

JOMC Department Welcomes New Adjunct

by Xavier Mitchell

Contia' J. Prince, Ph.D., is a mass communications scholar and educator with a background in television, film, and interactive media. Prince has a bachelor's degree in cinema and television arts, and a master's in interactive media, both from Elon University. She earned her doctorate in journalism and mass communication from UNC Chapel Hill.

Initially, Prince had not intended to pursue a teaching career. However, during her fellowship, where teaching was part of her responsibilities, she found satisfaction in sharing knowledge with students. This experience shaped her perspective, leading her to blend teaching with her broader goals of running her own multimedia and film production company.

Prince considers herself more research-oriented over focusing purely on traditional teaching styles, which really shines when aligned with her passion for issues surrounding Black women's representation and discourse about their bodies in media. Prince's research specifically dives into topics such as race, feminism, and critical race theory as they relate to black women.

Teaching at North Carolina A&T has been personally and professionally supportive for Prince. She values the sense of belonging and representation at A&T. She finds solidarity with students and other faculty who understand the unique challenges Black women face, providing a more supportive environment that enriches her teaching and research.

Looking toward future goals, Prince aims to publish a book based on her dissertation, secure a tenure-track position, and build a prominent resource base to support Black female researchers along their own journeys.

Her greatest goal is to create a multimedia company similar to that of Disney, celebrating Black women and empowering future generations through di-



Contia J. Prince, new JOMC adjunct

verse and positive representations.

"Certainly, Disney has a checkered past when it comes to representing people who look like me but with a lot of the films I grew up on, that was the last time I felt like anything was possible".

She draws inspiration from family members like her great-great grandmother, Ola Mae Cheatham, grandmother, Jnetta Williams, and mother, Princess Camelia Williams, whose resilience and dedication shaped her drive. Additionally, she admires figures in literature and media such as Toni Morrison, Lemony Snicket, Zora Neale Hurston, Martin Scorsese, and Walt Disney, who have made her creativity and ambitions possible.

Throughout her academic and personal journey, Prince strives to leave a long-lasting legacy in media, advocacy, and inspiring Black women and others to make further strides in leadership.

Black Sportswriters Hall of Fame

How Rob Parker Works To Bring Sportswriter Ceremony to Campus in April 2025

by Jasmine Moore



Photo courtesy of Rob Parker, Logo for the Hall of Fame Ceremony

Rob Parker will introduce a new Hall of Fame ceremony in April 2025 to honor Black sportswriters and editors for excellence in journalism. The event will recognize outstanding achievements in sports journalism and provide the younger generation with a chance to network and learn the essentials of writing an impactful sports story.

Parker, known for his 34-year career, was inducted into the National Association of Black Journalists Hall of Fame in 2003. His vision for the Hall of Fame is to right historical wrongs stemming from the restrictions faced by Black professionals in mainstream media. "Honoring our best," reads an excerpt from Parker's outline. "Setting right what has been overlooked in journalism: A salute to the best sportswriters of color."

The April ceremony's deceased inductees will include Sam Lacy, Wendell Smith, Larry Whiteside, Thom Greer, Ralph Willey, and Bryan Burwell, who are known as 'the original six' for their contributions to sports writing in Major League Baseball.

Parker, current co-host of The Odd Couple on Fox Sports Radio, proposed this 'Hall of Fame' idea to David Squires, a facul-

ty member at North Carolina A&T State University, who has been helping to bring the plans to fruition.

Squires hopes the event will emphasize the importance of Wendell Smith, known for his influence on Jackie Robinson's signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, also wrote for the Pittsburgh Courier and served as a sportscaster on WGN-TV.

"I believe it is important to honor and preserve the achievements of Black sports journalists and editors," Parker said in an email, "for the students who come behind us and are looking to be inspired."

Squires, a fellow sportswriter, believes Parker's initiative is an excellent opportunity to honor Black sportswriters, especially as many began their careers young, but remained largely unknown to the public.

"For years before TV and the internet, these people were unknown," Squires said. "Sam Lacy and Wendell Smith helped Jackie Robinson enter Major League Baseball. Their bylines appeared in some Black newspapers, but for the most part, they were unsung heroes."

Establishing this foundation at student organizations, including The A&T Register and Aggies News, offers an opportunity for growth in sports writing on campus. Squires



Photo courtesy of Awful Announcing: Rob Parker

also hopes the event will emphasize the importance of hard work in journalism.

“The main takeaway [from the ceremony] is that people need to know that they have to work hard to be in sports journalism,” Squires said. “It’s one of the toughest jobs out there. Most young sports journalists want to be the next Stephen A. Smith, but they must build their credibility through hard work.”

Caulin Avery, sports editor of The SCORE at The A&T Register, shared his experience meeting Rob Parker and appreciated the guidance Parker offered.

“It was amazing to meet a professional at such a high level,” Avery said. “He’s had numerous opportunities at the highest levels, and his advice was invaluable.” Avery sees the Hall of Fame ceremony as a chance to learn and lead, helping prepare for future challenges in the field.

The goal for the inaugural inductee class is to feature at least four honorees. The ceremony, hosted at N.C. A&T, will include a luncheon with students and local media, followed by the evening’s main event.

Squires envisions this as a networking and mentorship opportunity, celebrating six deceased Black sportswriters and at least four living inductees.

Logistics are still in development, including location, student attendance, and the possibility of inviting students from other historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

The induction process will begin in December, with the official ceremony scheduled for April. Further details about the event’s time and location will be shared with students as the plans solidify.



Photo Courtesy of Getty Images; Wendell Smith

From Aggieland to the Academy

Alumnus Spotlight: Reflections with Oscar-Nominated Filmmaker Kevin Wilson Jr.

by *Jasmine R. Van Hagen*

The world is full of artists and creators chasing that elusive “I’ve made it” moment. Few realize that true success isn’t a final destination but the journey itself—a path marked by highs, lows, challenges, and triumphs. Kevin Wilson Jr. embraces this philosophy, savoring each step and discovering that the journey is the real reward.

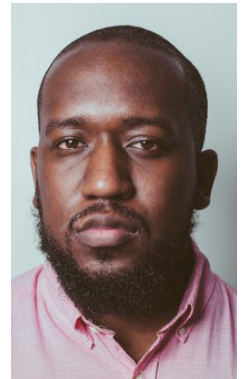
Crosby Kid

Kevin Wilson Jr. grew up around HBCU culture and community; his mother, a proud North Carolina Central University alumna, and an aunt, who attended North Carolina A&T, introduced him to the rich traditions of the homecoming experience. Initially, he dreamed of becoming an actor and pursuing a career in Hollywood. Seeking connection and opportunity, he found a home at North Carolina A&T State University, where a simple campus introductory DVD helped persuade his mother to allow him to enroll. Although Wilson initially hoped to major in theater, his mother encouraged him to consider business for its more practical job prospects. Eventually, after academic struggles and a dwindling interest in business, he joined the journalism program, attracted by its creative outlets and far fewer math courses. Honoring his mother’s wisdom and guidance, Wilson discovered a passion for filmmaking that he hadn’t anticipated.

One experience during Wilson’s time at A&T was attending a Thurgood Marshall College Fund conference in New York. He built connections with future mentors and industry professionals who would play instrumental roles in his early career. These relationships culminated in freelance

opportunities that allowed him to move to the city. Wilson credits the support of A&T professors like Ms. Gail Wiggins as invaluable. She continued to mentor him well beyond graduation, guiding him through crucial career decisions and offering insight into the industry.

Wilson advises current students in A&T’s Journalism and Mass Communication program, “Start now!” encouraging them to begin working on projects that align with their goals outside of class assignments. Leveraging campus resources can help them build portfolios, create films, write scripts, or tell local stories. Students can lay the groundwork for their future careers.



Kevin Wilson Jr.

New York University and the Spike Lee Production Fellowship

When he first moved to New York after graduation, Wilson set his sights on NYU’s outstanding film program, Tisch School of the Arts. Wilson rented a room in a woman’s house—a rough boarding setup. “For \$660 a month, I slept with the lights on because the place had roaches and bedbugs,” Wilson says. Despite the sketchy neighborhood and challenging conditions, he saw it as a rite of passage and was grateful to be in the city, pursuing his dreams. Wilson credits the people around him for their support in helping him stay afloat. His first application was unsuccessful, which felt like a significant setback.

Refusing to give up, he took various jobs in New York as a PA for NBC and at a bookstore, where he studied NYU film textbooks on his own and created short films to teach himself. His persistence eventually paid off when he reapplied and was accepted—granting him the opportunity to study with renowned film director Spike Lee.

Wilson’s journey demonstrates that setbacks are merely steps forward. While in grad school, Wilson created a short film titled “My Nephew Emmett,” which focuses on the pivotal event that ignited the civil rights movement: the tragic murder of



Photos courtesy of Kevin Wilson Jr. collection.



Kevin Wilson Jr. directing a scene on the set of *My Nephew Emmett* (2017)

“I want to make things that I don’t have to apologize for.”

Emmett Till. The challenges of creating “My Nephew Emmett” were significant. Due to the heavy subject matter, the film was riddled with inevitable emotional and logistical obstacles. Committed to telling Emmett Till’s story honestly, Wilson, despite the painful history and the difficulties of filming on location in Mississippi, showed his dedication to honoring Till’s legacy. Consulting Till’s family added responsibility, along with the film’s intense scenes—such as the living room scene with actor LB Williams, who was old enough to remember this period, as well as battling cancer while filming—illustrates the profound sacrifices made by the cast and crew.

Legacy

As Wilson’s career continues to evolve, so has his focus. His once uncompromising pursuit of success has now taken a more balanced approach that values personal and professional fulfillment. He aims to create meaningful, authentic representations of Black experiences while prioritizing family and aligning his role as an educator. He hopes to inspire a new generation of filmmakers and encourage diverse, truthful storytelling in media.



Wilson Jr. on set takes a moment to review dailies.

“I slept with the lights on because the place had roaches and bed bugs.”

Wilson’s path to an Oscar nomination is both humbling and inspiring. Once an NYU grad student who faced festival rejections, his journey shows that resilience and dedication to one’s craft can lead to recognition most will only dream of. A note he wrote, declaring his future Oscars attendance, underscores the power of visualization and determination.

Wilson wants his legacy to be defined by integrity, authenticity, and a solid cultural perspective that his family, especially his wife and children, can take pride in. “I want to make things that I don’t have to apologize for,” says Wilson. Producing culturally relevant work while being present for his family drives his approach today. Rather than chasing every project, he selects work that aligns with his values, makes an impact, and fosters opportunities for underrepresented voices. Wilson leaves a lasting legacy on screen and within the industry through his involvement in organizations like the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, contributing to a future that celebrates diverse voices and perspectives.



Wilson Jr. with actor LB Williams on the set of *My Nephew Emmett* (2017)

Special Treats of Wisdom

N.C. A&T Department of Journalism & Mass Communication Brings Special Guests to Students

by Xavier Mitchell

This school year, the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication has been dedicated to bringing in special guests to speak to current JOMC students. This pivot has been greatly beneficial to students as opportunities present themselves.

For this year's 10th Anniversary of Alumni Takeover, The Department of JOMC had the pleasure of taking on a plethora of guests to share vital information. Some of the leaders who were present throughout the week were Garry D. Howard, Keisha Cousar, Mike McCray, and Steve Morrison. These Aggie alumni and Aggie friends represent a multitude of companies and brands such as Coca-Cola, MSNBC, FOX Sports, CBS, Dow Jones, and many more.

Mike McCray's takeover session was a vital showing of the efforts that truly make the JOMC department amazing.



Crosby Hall Alum Mike McCray attends virtual session and shares experience with Crosby students.

McCray shared advice with students for their future careers, such as never settling and being comfortable in a position, taking advantage of every opportunity, and career planning. He also discussed his experiences coming from the halls of Crosby to becoming a senior editor of Andscape ESPN.

What's separates this year's JOMC department is the amount of work faculty have placed to put their students in great positions. Some of the more recent special guests were Charity Pourhabib, Chris Martin, and Raven Roberts of Wieden + Kennedy. They were able to provide beneficial opportunities such as scholarships as well as place students in a position to apply for their annual Admagic cohort.

A more recent event was Jennifer Sondag of Bloomberg News' visit to Crosby Hall. Sondag discussed her journey in the world of business journalism, detailing her experience from intern to senior editor at Bloomberg.com.

"When I think about writing stories, I think about who has the power, you know? Big companies".



Jennifer Sondag of Bloomberg news answers questions related to career path.

Although the semester guests have been great, The Department of JOMC isn't new to having amazing guests. From prior masterclass series to the annual "JOMC Week," the department has poured into their student body. Emmy-nominated television producer Tarvenia Jones spoke to JOMC students during their masterclass series, at the end of the spring semester. Jones spoke about her path to success and overcoming obstacles across her career journey.



Crosby Students pose with guest speaker Sydney Ross after “Alumni Takeover” presentation.

“I start every day with my intention and what I’m grateful for. To end my days, I journal and, again, list what I’m grateful for.”

The hard work and dedication of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication in building a legacy of leaders is impressive. Through Alumni Takeover events and partnerships with companies offering opportunities to Aggies pursuing careers in media, journalism, and communication, the department highlights the ever-growing potential of its current students.

Pairing this with their recent AEJMC re-accreditation in 2023, the cycle of pouring into students’ hopes to continue as more Crosby Kids begin their transition into their careers.

As students prepare for the following semesters, they likewise prepare for another successful rollout of key speakers, initiatives, and possibilities for their future careers.



N.C. A&T Alum Keisha Cousar poses with JOMC Administrative Support Specialist Caroline Jones.

Crosby Kids Traveling

Atlanta HBCU Investigative Journalism Workshop

by Jennifer Martinez

Mattie Moore, a senior journalism and mass communication student with a marketing minor at N.C. A&T State University, is deeply passionate about storytelling. At school, she serves as the managing editor of "The Register," A&T's student-run newspaper, and the community service director of the A&T chapter of a prominent Black Journalism organization. Moore is passionate about highlighting impactful stories. She is taking an investigative journalism course taught by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Nikole Hannah-Jones, which sparked her new interest in investigative reporting.

The course introduced Moore to a new style of journalism, one she didn't know she'd enjoy so much. Moore enjoyed her course, but she realized the class only offered a foundational understanding. She decided to follow this passion and continue building on the foundation of investigative journalism. That's what led her to attend the HBCU Investigative Journalism Workshop provided in Atlanta this past summer.

After Moore attended the event in Atlanta, she reflected on her experience at the workshop. Moore expressed how much she appreciated the in-depth explanation of investigative reporting. "Investigative journalism can be overwhelming," Moore said. While she found the content insightful, she noted that it would have been more effective if spread over a longer period. She hoped for more time to learn how to create the Excel sheets and the techniques covered. However, she did love how the event reserved a day for networking opportunities.



Mattie Moore poses at the HBCU Investigative Journalism Workshop in Atlanta.

Moore mentioned that during the workshop presenters shared their experiences in the investigative journalism field and emphasized the importance of conducting great interviews, maintaining networks, and the advantages of AI tools. From the different topics shared during the presentation, Moore enjoyed the focus on how to effectively file and organize interview content. She recalls the importance of active listening during interviews, a tip she will carry with her from now on.

Moore found the workshop to be incredibly informative. Moore had a solid understanding of investigative journalism, but the workshop offered a deeper meaning into the field. It helped her build ideas for the documentary she wants to create. Moore highly recommends these workshops to students interested in investigative journalism.



The HBCU Investigative workshop brought the participating students together.

JOMC Welcomes New Administrative Position

Brenee Nicole Butler started position as the new administrative support associate for Crosby Hall

by Chandler J. Harris

Before her transition to North Carolina A&T, Brenee Butler spent time teaching elementary school students. As she entered the second half of the school year, she realized that she was not a good fit for the role and discovered that teaching was not her passion. Desiring more flexibility and independence in her career path, she decided to take on this new position as an administrative associate.

"This was a great opportunity for me. My mother lives in North Carolina, and it was her support that encouraged me to make this transition," Butler said.

In her role, she assists professors, other administrators, and students alike. This can range from helping students sign up for certain courses in the journalism and mass communication curriculum to consulting other administrators regarding changes during the school year.

Butler is half Black and half Native American. In her small town in Waldorf, Maryland, she says her people are natives in the area. In discussing her identity as a Native American, she began to disclose information about her family and tribe, Piscataway-Conoy.

"People will sometimes go their whole lives without even knowing they're Native American, but based on your last name you can usually track down what tribe you come from," she said.

In terms of her administrative role, Butler also handles communication within the department, responding to inquiries from students, parents, and external stakeholders. In this position, Butler maintains databases, manages student records, and assists with the preparation of reports and presentations. Proficiency in office software is essential, allowing her to create documents, spreadsheets, and manage online platforms effectively.



Photo captured by Chandler Harris in Butler's office.

Additionally, Butler discussed playing a key role in supporting academic programs by facilitating the logistics of course registration and grading processes. Strong organizational and multitasking skills are crucial, as she must manage various priorities simultaneously. Communication is a very important tool in this position. Effective interpersonal and communication abilities help in collaborating with faculty, staff, and students.

In discussing her time in Greensboro, N.C., and whether it was difficult for her to be so far away from home, Butler said, "The move to North Carolina A&T has been very smooth so far. I am excited and grateful for the opportunity to utilize my administrative skills to help others around me."

Public Relations Students Partner with Local Nonprofit for Mental Health Campaign

University students gain hands-on experience creating a strategic PR campaign to raise awareness and support for mental health challenges in the community.

by Deja Maynor

Students in the JOMC 386 Public Relations course, are getting invaluable hands-on experience this semester by partnering with Mental Health Associates of the Triad, a local nonprofit dedicated to supporting individuals facing mental health challenges. MHA provides resources and assistance to individuals struggling not only with mental health issues but also with related barriers to housing, healthcare, and employment. This semester-long partnership is designed to help the organization broaden its community reach and raise awareness about mental health through a comprehensive public relations campaign.

Guided by Dr. Laura Marshall, students are learning the entire process of public relations campaign development. The course immerses students in campaign planning, strategy, and execution, offering practical experience that goes far beyond theory. Throughout the semester, students are conducting both primary and secondary research on MHA's target audiences, performing a detailed SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), and evaluating the nonprofit's past communication and social media efforts. These elements will serve as the foundation for a strategic campaign that aligns with MHA's mission and vision for expanding support to those in need.



Public Relations students working on research for Mental Health Associates of the Triad campaign.

The collaboration between JOMC 386 and MHA has been deeply interactive. Students have met with MHA's CEO, Eric Foushee, several times, both to understand the organization's goals and challenges and to share their preliminary research findings and campaign ideas. Foushee's feedback has been instrumental in helping students refine their strategy and adjust their approach. In addition to these meetings, a trip to the MHA facility is planned to give students a firsthand look at the organization's operations and the people it serves. The semester will culminate in a final presentation, where students will showcase a fully developed strategic plan that MHA can use to engage the community and enhance its outreach efforts.

Marshall has said this class is unique because it simulates real-world experience. Students are not only learning theoretical concepts but are also applying them directly to a campaign for a real client. Their success depends on active engagement, teamwork, and consistent collaboration, all of which are essential in the public relations field.

The students have been organized into groups, each focusing on different facets of the campaign, from social media strategy to community outreach initiatives. This project-based approach emphasizes a professional, job-like setting, where attendance, participation, and deadlines are critical. Marshall has made it clear that missing class or falling behind on assignments could hinder the campaign's progress, reinforcing the importance of each student's contribution.

"MHA does incredible work in helping individuals transition to better lives, and it's an honor to contribute to that effort," said Aliyah Chasten, a senior in the course. "Our goal is to create a campaign that not only raises awareness but also empowers the community to take action in supporting mental health initiatives."

Key components of the campaign include social media outreach, educational community events, and partnerships with local organizations. The students are already exploring a potential collaboration with a mental health club at A&T, which could further amplify their campaign's impact. The final campaign plan will include detailed strategies and tactics designed to educate the public on mental

health issues and combat stigma, with an emphasis on creating a supportive, inclusive community.

With a focus on making a real impact, this project offers students the opportunity to hone their public relations skills while making a meaningful contribution to a cause that directly affects lives. The collaboration between JOMC 386 and MHA is a powerful example of how classroom learning can extend beyond the university to benefit the community, supporting social change, and provide students with practical skills they'll carry into their careers.

By the end of the semester, students will deliver a fully realized strategic campaign plan that MHA can implement to better connect with the community, reach underserved populations, and ultimately help those struggling with mental health challenges to access the support they need. The experience also reinforces the value of public relations as a tool for advocacy and change, empowering students to use their skills in impactful, community-driven ways.



2024 Faculty Conference Updates

NCAT Professors Share Research at AEJMC and ICA Conferences

by Kalen Vasher

North Carolina A&T State University's journalism faculty members Dr. Kim Smith and Dr. Ecaterina Stepaniuc presented their latest research at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) 2024 Conference in Philadelphia. With only about 50% of research submissions accepted, the competitive nature of this conference made it a significant accomplishment for both professors and NCAT's Journalism and Mass Communication program.

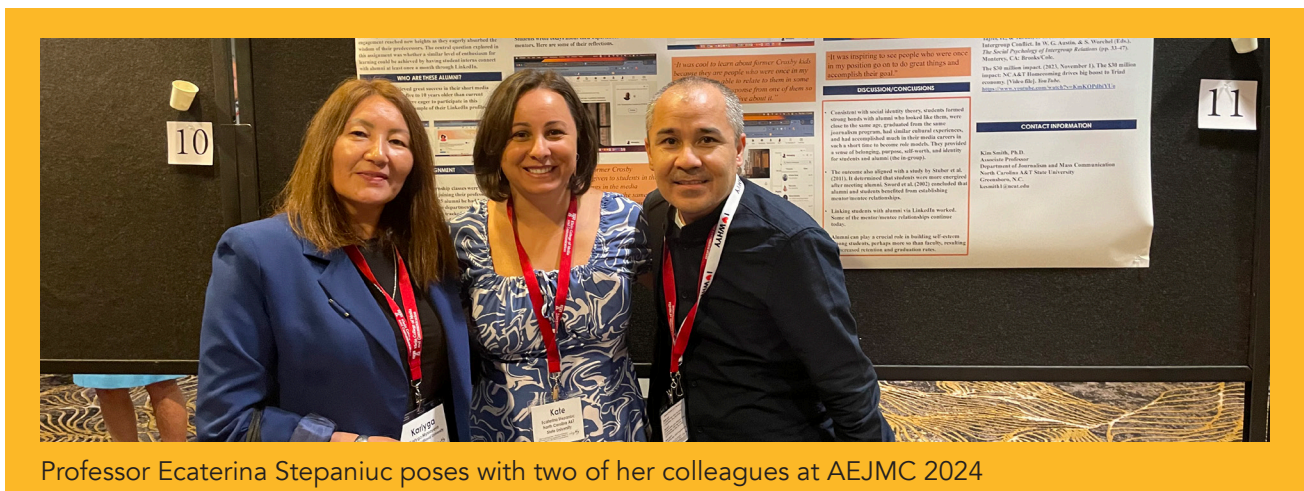
Though Dr. Smith was unable to attend in person, Dr. Stepaniuc presented his research on his behalf. Dr. Smith's study examined the impact of LinkedIn on internship opportunities, highlighting effective strategies for students to build connections and position themselves for career success.

Dr. Stepaniuc, in her own presentation, delved into John Oliver Emmerich's take on Southern racial integration from 1960 to 1964. Additionally, she joined a panel on student engagement where she discussed NCAT's popular "JOMC Alumni Takeover," a dedicated week that invites alumni to return to campus, teach classes, and share industry insights with current students.

Beyond sharing research and ideas, the conference was also a valuable networking opportunity for NCAT, as representatives from institutions across the U.S. and beyond attended. With NCAT aiming to advance to a "research one" designation, events like AEJMC provide a platform to form essential academic partnerships.



Photo Courtesy of @AEJMC, X Account



Professor Ecaterina Stepaniuc poses with two of her colleagues at AEJMC 2024

For Dr. Stepaniuc, the conference also held personal significance. Originally from Moldova, she has dedicated her career in the United States not only to honing her craft as an educator but also to becoming a pillar of support within Crosby Hall, home to NCAT's JOMC program. Known for her dedication and accessibility, she is someone students and colleagues alike can rely on for guidance.

Dr. Stepaniuc's influence at AEJMC extends beyond her presentations. In 2023, she was honored with the conference's 'Teacher of the Year' award under Small Programs Interest Group. This year, she chaired the competition for the next recipient. Looking ahead, she will spearhead the creation of SPIG panel proposals for the 2025 conference, positioning NCAT as a leader in academic thought and collaboration.

For NCAT, attending conferences like AEJMC is an important step toward achieving its goal of becoming a Research 1 university. By participating in these events, faculty members build partnerships, explore cutting-edge ideas, and bring back strategies that enrich the learning environment for their students.

As the JOMC professors continue to grow their influence and champion practical career tools for students, NCAT's JOMC program cements its place on the national stage—one research presentation at a time.



Ecaterina Stepaniuc presented the 2024 SPIG Teacher of the Year award to Newly Paul



AEJMC conference attendees analyzing Dr. Kim Smith's poster on the impact of internship opportunities

ICA Annual Conference

Dr. Maria Zhang presented two research papers in the 74th International Communication Association (ICA) Annual Conference hosted in Gold Coast, Australia, June 20-24, 2024. She is the leading author of the presentation titled "Investigating Brand-Issue Fit in Corporate Social Advocacy from the Perspective of Expectancy Violation".

This presentation reported the results of three online experiments/surveys that tested the effect of two types of fit between brands and the social issues they advocate for on consumers' boycott intentions. The study also explored corporate social responsibility reputation as an alternative type of fit influencing consumers' boycott intentions. The expectancy violation theory was applied to explain the impact of a brand-issue fit.

This research expands the discussion of the concept of fit within the context of corporate social advocacy and offers a psychological explanation for its impact on consumers' responses. These insights provide managerial guidance, encouraging brands to thoroughly understand both themselves and their target audience, and to communicate strategically when engaging in activism.

Zhang is the second author of another presentation titled "When the accuser meets the accused: Exploring the effect of non-profit legitimacy and corporate CSR reputation in corporate social irresponsibility." As corporate social responsibility (CSR) brings social capital to businesses, corporate social irresponsibility practices damage a brand.

Consumers learn about a company's irresponsible practices through

many channels, one of which is nonprofit advocacy.

Indeed, many environmental activist groups urge corporate changes by strategically exposing their unethical practices. Using two experiments, this study examined the effect of nonprofit legitimacy on consumer evaluations and its effect in the context of various corporate social irresponsibility types and prior corporate CSR reputation. Study 1 revealed that entity legitimacy and action legitimacy serve as two critical appraisals among consumers.

Study 2 indicated that nonprofit legitimacy overall serves as a secondary appraisal and could worsen consumers' evaluations when the company is in a good position to defend itself. The findings theoretically and practically enrich the discussion of corporate social irresponsibility.

This study was recently published in *Journal of Business Research* (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115047>).



Dr. Maria Zhang presenting at ICA Annual Conference hosted in Australia, June 20-24, 2024

From Student to Senator

by Amare Rearden

Brooke White likes to believe she is an advocate. The department of Journalism & Mass Communication is built on the concept of advocacy. Oftentimes, many matriculate from A&T to become journalists with the sole purpose of advocating for a certain audience. Of course, with two other concentrations: Public Relations and Mass Media Production, students of the JOMC department need advocacy on behalf of themselves to ensure they can continue to exemplify the very motto of North Carolina A&T State University, "Always doing, never done".

Getting the chance to sit down and speak with Public Relations Sophomore Brooke White, who recently got elected to the senate of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, I got insight into her "why" regarding her campaign for her prospective position. White described her experience as a journalism student as one of pride. She recognized a sense of

pride it takes as a student to be in this department, and often described students proudly identifying themselves as "Crosby Kids".

When asked why she wanted to run for the senate position, White described her own personal experiences of not feeling represented as a student within Public Relations.

Career wise White wants more of a chance for students to feel represented within the department, and ultimately wants students to have just as much of a chance for students to succeed in and outside of the JOMC department, in terms of business, marketing, production, and more.

Serving on the senate gave White a chance to work with leaders in the department to ensure that students felt properly represented and had an equal chance to succeed when it comes to post-graduation



SGA Senators, Fall 2024



Brooke White, JOMC student, SGA senator

Advocating and impacting as a student

fields. In an effort to ensure all students who wish to pursue these fields feel represented, White hopes to create events that cross over with other colleges at A&T to show the possibility of these careers.

Ultimately, advocacy is White’s motive and main initiative of her reasoning behind wanting to run for the senate, and the chance to work with and collaborate with other JOMC students within the college of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. This inspired her to act as a delegate for students within the department to provide a multitude of post graduate opportunity for those who feel there is a rarity at the moment.

opportunities. In terms of her leadership ability, White described her sense of a leadership ability in this sense as not being afraid to “speak her mind,” when it comes to issues that she feels strongly dedicated to advocate for, and wanted to contribute that sense of leadership towards providing opportunity for students within the JOMC department who feel underrepresented.

The majority of the senate cohort is JOMC students, so the sense of representation for our college doesn’t feel like a lone battle, but rather a collaborative one according to White. Speaking on collaboration, White also described her goals of working with the College of Business and Economics and the College of Science and Technology. She hopes they can plan an event that features career options and fields that act as an overlap between colleges, such as JOMC students wanting to explore careers within Marketing or Science Communication. JOMC students tend to pursue careers in a variety of

CAHSS SENATORS

Chrysta Nicols
Journalism & Mass Communication

Amaia Connell
Journalism & Mass Communication

Kyra Waters
Liberal Studies

Mamadu Tchamo
Political Science

Aliyah Chasten
Journalism & Mass Communication

Naomi Oliver
Liberal Studies

Madison Solomon
Journalism & Mass Communication

Brooke White
Journalism & Mass Communication



WRITING LAYOUT DESIGN

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Chrysta Nichols
Aliyah Chasten
Deja Maynor

Chandler Harris
Coley Kilpatrick
Amare Rearden
Xavier Mitchell
Marlee Jones
Jennifer Martinez

CON TRI BU TORS

Fall Outstanding Seniors

by Aliyah Chasten



Name: Jada Mayes

Major: Mass Media Production

"Work until you no longer have to introduce yourself."



Name: Kennedi Lee

Major: Mass Media Production

*"God is within her, she will not fall."
-Psalm 46:5*



Name: Ashton Griffith

Major: Multimedia

"Everything will come to fruition when you leave it in God's hands."



Name: Brandon Simpson

Major: Public Relations

*"Success consists of going from failure to failure without the loss of enthusiasm."
-Winston Churchill.*



Name: Tahkya Morrison
Major: Public Relations

"The Lord is my strength and my shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me and my heart is filled with joy." — Psalm 28:7



Name: Deja Maynor
Major: Public Relations

"Sonder is defined as that moment when you realize that everyone around you has an internal life as rich and as conflicted as yours."

GRADUATING *seniors*



Name: Madison McClendon
Major: Mass Media Production

"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive, and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style."
—Maya Angelou



Name: Jordan Rivers
Major: Mass Media Production

"I thrive on obstacles. If I'm told that it can't be done, then I push harder."
—Issa Rae

Invest in a Crosby Kid



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