

CENTER FOR ACCESS AND SUCCESS

SPRING 2025 UPDATE



As the spring semester comes to a close, we're excited to share the first-ever Spring Update from the Center for Access and Success. This news blast celebrates the many accomplishments, milestones, and transitions across our Center's programs. From welcoming new team members to enrolling new students and planning for summer, the enthusiasm and impact of this community are inspiring. Thank you for your continued dedication to supporting students from pre-K through college and beyond.

A Note from Dr. Ann Bullock, Interim Director

As my time as interim director of the Center comes to an end, I want to express how grateful I've been to work in the Center. The staff's commitment to our students and programs has made this a transformative experience. It's been a privilege to witness the staff's passion for education and the ways they foster opportunity and belonging at every level.

[Naeemah Clark](#) has played an essential role in supporting center-wide operations this year. A special thank you to Dr. Clark for her thoughtful leadership and guidance during this time of transition in the Center's search for a new executive director.

[Dr. Kim Pyne](#) concludes her service as the Faculty Scholar for Elon Academy. Kim has been in this role since 2008 and recently served as Interim Director for Elon Academy. Her passion and commitment to Elon Academy are strong and appreciated by students and staff. Thank you, Kim!

I'm thrilled to officially welcome [Elle Collins](#), who begins as the new executive director of the Center today- April 23, 2025. Elle brings a deep commitment to access, equity, and student success—and I know the Center will continue to thrive under her leadership. Elle also brings a wealth of experience and a strong commitment to student advocacy. Learn more about Elle in this feature in [Today at Elon](#).

Elon Academy

Under the leadership of [Director Emily Wiersma](#), the Elon Academy has had a dynamic and growth-filled year:

Staffing Updates: The team welcomed four new staff members this year—Emily Wiersma (Director), Gaby Vazquez (Program Associate), Manny Campos (Assistant Director), and Kristin Ring (Associate Director), with two additional hires joining in May.



- **New Scholar Class:** The Academy just welcomed 25 new Scholars with surprise celebrations at their high schools.
- **Summer Preparation:**
 - New Scholar Orientation: May 10
 - Summer Academy: June 15–July 3
 - Transition to College Academy: July 29–31
- **New Courses and Partnerships:** This summer, the Academy is introducing courses in financial literacy, wellness, and career exploration in partnership with Financial Aid and SPDC.

- **Faculty Engagement:** The search for a Faculty Fellow is underway (applications due April 20), and mentor/academic coach recruitment for the next academic year is soon to follow.
- **Celebrations:** In May, the Academy will celebrate 27 graduating high school Scholars.

Odyssey Program

The Odyssey Program, led by Director [Marcus Elliott](#), continues to support an outstanding cohort of Scholars:

- This year's incoming class (Class of 2028) was the largest ever, with 68 students.
- Retention and success remain high:
 - 98% retention rate for the Class of 2027
 - 80% anticipated graduation rate for the Class of 2025
 - 3.505 average GPA across 197 Scholars
- The Class of 2029 is in the final stages of selection, with another strong group of 60+ Scholars expected.
- Odyssey Week (the program's summer bridge orientation) will be held July 12–19.
- **Special cheers to program leaders [Martha Lopez Laviás](#) and [Emma Calhoon](#) for their continued work—and a special congratulations to Emma, our amazing apprentice, who will graduate this May!**

First-Generation Student Support Services

Led by [Kenneth Brown Jr.](#), the First-Generation Student Support Services team has continued to build community and visibility:



- More than 300 students engaged through programs this year
- Five core values established: Community, Celebration, Authenticity, Empowerment, and Passion

- \$2,500+ raised on Elon Day (surpassing a \$1,000 goal!)
- Expanded collaborations, especially with El Centro
- Upcoming Event: The 2025 First-Generation Stole Ceremony is scheduled for Wednesday, May 21 at 1 p.m. in McKinnon Hall. It will be livestreamed and will honor the Class of 2025, including the newest Class of 1891 award recipients.

Beyond 12: Middle School Programming

[Vanessa Diggs, PhD](#), has led another successful year with **Beyond 12**, empowering middle school students to explore college and career readiness:

- In the opening **College Knowledge Survey**, every student—regardless of background—expressed the desire to attend college.
- One-third of students weren't sure which careers required a degree, reinforcing the program's critical mission.
- In their final survey, students said they found the program valuable and would recommend it to current 7th graders.
- **Upcoming Events:**
 - April 28–29: Closing panels with college students from Elon, WSSU, and UNCG
 - June 9–10: Students present college posters, hear from a campus panel, and tour Elon
 - Recruitment for volunteers resumes in August 2025.
- **Spotlight:** Volunteer **Venus Soto Castaneda**, a freshman and alum of one of the partner middle schools, has been an inspiring presence—always showing up and modeling leadership for her mentees.



It Takes a Village

[Laura Clemmons](#), Assistant Director and Lead of the Village Project, reports tremendous growth this year:

The Little Village (PreK):

- Fall 2024: ~15 students at Haw River
- Spring 2025: ~30 students across Haw River and Newlin with 3 teachers

The Big Village (K–5):

- Fall: Served ~850 students with 101 teachers and 125 Elon students; dinner provided nightly
- Spring: Serving ~1,000 students with 125 teachers and 150 student volunteers (from Elon and ABSS)

Family Engagement:

- English conversation classes added at Haw River (30 parents weekly)
- Two bilingual parent workshops added this spring

Special Programs:

- *Music in the Village* (grades 3–5): Weekly music instruction at the Center for Fine Arts
- *Start Early in Medicine* (grades 6–11): Held at the Gerald Francis Center
- *Engineering in the Village* (grades 5–7): STEM-focused activities in Fall 2024

Celebrations:

- Fall and Spring Book Bashes—featuring food, crafts, certificates, and 3,000+ free books distributed this May

Looking Ahead: A second AmeriCorps VISTA joins the team in June to support volunteer coordination and communications.

Thank you for reading through all of our exciting updates for the center. We're grateful for your continued dedication to access and student success.