2ND EDITION FALL 2026

CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

FOCUS MAGAZINE



MOVING FORWARD THE BRUINS WAY

INNOVATE · CONNECT · TRANSFORM


CAROLINA
UNIVERSITY
INNOVATE · CONNECT · TRANSFORM
BRUINS



FOCUS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

04
MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

05
EVENTS RECAP

06
ATHLETIC HIGHLIGHTS

07
ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

09
STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

10
IN THE COMMUNITY

11
FACULTY/STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

13
WHAT'S BRUIN ALUMNI NEWS

15
BUSINESS NEWS

16
INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

17
WHO IS BARON THE BRUIN?

18
UPCOMING EVENTS / NEWS

FOCUS ISSUE NO. 2
Fall 2026

Edited by: Jared Eldridge



CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

We are excited to share the second edition of *Focus Magazine* and keep our Carolina University community connected. Our campus looks beautiful following this summer's landscaping and residence hall renovations, with more improvements ahead. Seeing students and families enjoy these spaces makes that progress especially rewarding.

Some of my favorite moments are conversations with students and their families. From May commencement to Bruins Bash in August, those connections remind me of the people at the heart of our Christ-centered mission.

Our BioSpherix partnership and new minors in Biobusiness Leadership and Regenerative Medicine reflect our commitment to expanding academic pathways for students. We look forward to building on these opportunities. Throughout this issue, we celebrate the students, faculty, staff, coaches, and alumni contributing to CU's future.

I invite you to wear your CU gear wherever you are on Tuesdays for our new CU Spirit Day and share our story with others.

Thank you for your commitment to Carolina University. Your continued involvement and generosity help create opportunities for our students as we innovate, connect, and transform together.

We are CU!

- Dr. Heather Burkard, President of Carolina University



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

In the days of Nehemiah the remnant had returned, the temple was built but the gates and walls lay in ruins. Years passed, the task seemed daunting, many thought impossible, until Nehemiah asked God to show him favor. Released by the king to survey the task, Nehemiah told the people that God's hand was upon him and they said; let us rise up and build. (Neh. 1-2)

Through the years we have witnessed God's good hand of blessing upon our university. During the last six months we have watched Dr. Burkard and her team rise to every challenge, while positioning Carolina University to deliver high-quality education in a welcoming environment.

The spirit on campus is matched by the trustees following the inauguration of our fifth president, Dr. Heather Burkard. We are excited about the bright future ahead and are blessed to be a part of the Carolina University family.

- Dr. Shahn Wilburn, Chairman of the Board of Trustees



EVENTS RECAP

A Historic Milestone: Commencement 2026



Spring marked a record-breaking moment for Carolina University as we celebrated our largest graduating class in the university's history, with **243 graduates** earning their diplomas. The ceremony featured an exceptionally rare honor: two co-valedictorians who achieved an exact, perfect tie in both cumulative GPA and semester-by-semester grades. **Elena Castro** and **Amy Portillo** shared the highest academic distinction and both addressed their fellow classmates, faculty, and guests from the commencement stage.



Building Bridges: The Inaugural Bruins Brunch

Carolina University launched a new tradition this April with its first annual **Bruins Community Brunch**, inviting prominent business, education, and government leaders from across the region to campus. The event provided local leaders a firsthand look at the university's mission and growth while creating valuable networking opportunities for faculty, and staff to showcase the important work taking place on our campus.

Kick-Off Energy: Bruins Bash



The campus was filled with energy and spirit this August as students, faculty, and staff gathered for **Bruins Bash 2026**, our annual back-to-school celebration. Designed to welcome incoming Bruins and reunite returning students, the event set an enthusiastic tone for the academic year ahead. Attendees connected over food, carnival games, a live DJ and dance floor, a crowd-favorite dunk tank, and even a car smash to kick off the semester with excitement.



Carolina University is stepping into an exciting new era, upon our official acceptance into the **Appalachian Athletic Conference** for the 2027–2028 academic year. In addition to this honor, the Bruins continue to set the standard for institutional excellence, earning recognition as a Champion of Character Gold Level institution and being named a **#KingChasing institution** for the NCCAA.





Individual and team achievements continue to highlight the dedication of Bruins athletics. **Ashlyn Ellenburg** was named the Continental Athletic Conference Athletic Trainer of the Year, while **Britney Comoli** (senior, women's volleyball) earned the CAC A.O. Duer Scholarship Award. Academic excellence remained on display as **Men's Basketball** earned the National Association of Basketball Coaches (NACB) Team Academic Excellence Award and **Women's Volleyball** received the AVCA Team Academic Award.







ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS

CASE & BioSpherix: Biomedical Science & New Minors

During Fall 2026 (Session I), Carolina University's School of Computing, Applied Sciences, and Engineering (CASE) launched its first course under the CU + BioSpherix partnership. Taught by Mr. Collins Gbegbeawu (a scientist at the Cytocentric Center for Technology and CU adjunct professor) Fundamentals of Biomedical Science connected foundational theory with practical experience at BioSpherix's workforce development hub in Winston-Salem. Students developed their skills in aseptic technique, cell culture, and experimental design, with an emphasis on scientific reasoning, laboratory safety, and real-world applications. Building on Summer 2026's Biotech Bootcamp, CU also introduced two new interdisciplinary minors: a Minor in Regenerative Medicine and a joint CASE–Patterson School Minor in BioBusiness Leadership to prepare students for the rapidly growing life sciences sector.



Investigative Excellence: The Homicide Cold Case Review Team

Even while serving as Carolina University's president, Dr. Heather Burkard remains connected to students by teaching the Homicide Cold Case class, bringing more than 25 years of experience in forensics to the classroom. Students analyze cases and present their completed analyses at a professional roundtable, where they network with active and retired detectives and agents, attorneys, forensic scientists, and other professionals.

Experiential learning has included visits to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Aviation and Homicide units, the Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner's Office, and other law enforcement settings. These experiences connect classroom learning with professional practice and give students first hand exposure to investigative resources and career possibilities.

One of the most exciting outcomes is seeing students pursue employment and secure positions in their fields of interest, taking their next steps toward meaningful careers that reflect their interests and academic preparation.





Engineering the Future: Accreditation & Advanced Tech

Carolina University reached another milestone in August 2026 as Dr. Rasitha Fernando and Dr. Murchtricia Jones submitted the ABET Readiness Review for CU's engineering programs, aligning curriculum and resources with national accreditation standards. Simultaneously, Dr. Wiseborn Danquah led in CU's designation as an official Cisco Networking Academy, offering Computer Science and Data Science students direct certification pathways. Dr. Danquah also expanded hands-on technology research by integrating the U.S. Department of Transportation's "CAVE-in-a-Box" connected-vehicle platform into student workshops, preparing Bruins for emerging computing and intelligent transportation sectors.

Community Impact & Clinical Fieldwork

Bridging academic theory with real-world application, Dr. Tehmina Khan and Dr. Murchtricia Jones established a strategic partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina, enabling Health Promotion students to design active health campaigns addressing regional food access. For Psychology majors, the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences instituted an internship program with clinical psychologist Dr. David L. Mount at the Mind Body Institute Beyond in Winston-Salem, where student interns shadow licensed counselors and train in neuropsychological testing procedures.

Licensure Standards & Career Acceleration

In the School of Education, Dr. Railsback presented CU's Educator Preparedness Program (EPP) to the State of North Carolina for official CAEP approval, ensuring education courses satisfy state criteria for immediate licensure and teaching employment. Supporting career readiness across all disciplines, the Career Development team launched the Opportunity Newsletter, delivering curated professional updates, career tips, and live internship and job openings directly to student inboxes.



Global Research and Theological Leadership

CU's graduate programs demonstrated strong global and spiritual leadership this year. In July, doctoral candidates gathered on campus for the annual PhD Residency for intensive scholarly workshops and collaborative research, culminating in a celebratory banquet. Piedmont Divinity School launched five new graduate certificates (Divinity, Theology, Bible, Counseling, and Ministry) and a BA Bible Minor, while finalizing a strategic articulation agreement with Charlotte-based Camino University. PDS also celebrated six student professions of faith during a spring chapel service led by alumnus Pastor Tim Worles.





STUDENT **HIGHLIGHTS**

Industry Recognition and Scientific Milestones

Carolina University students continue to stand out in their fields through practical achievement and advanced technical training. Master of Data Science student **Michael Farrell** received the **Innovation Award from HealthTrust**, his Group Purchasing Organization (GPO), in Summer 2026. The award recognizes Michael's exceptional ability to apply complex data analytics to solve real-world organizational challenges, reflecting CU's focus on creating immediate workplace value. In the sciences, Biology major **Laura Chavez** and Electronics & Electrical Engineering major **Walther Ramos-Silva** became the first CU students to successfully complete the intensive BioSpherix Biotech Bootcamp. Their immersive work in advanced biotechnology and regenerative medicine environments marks a key milestone in CU's ongoing industry partnership with BioSpherix.

Faith in Action: Student Ministry Leaders

Demonstrating a strong commitment to service and spiritual growth, five standout student leaders (**McKenna VonCannon**, **Allison Doomy**, **Adden Charles**, **Luke Garrett**, and **Tlotlo Lekobane**) are making a significant impact both on campus and in the broader Winston-Salem community. Working **with Two Cities Church**, these students help direct large-group gatherings for the local college ministry while simultaneously leading weekly on-campus Bible studies at CU, fostering a vibrant culture of mentorship, fellowship, and faith among their peers.

Building Community: Clubs & Campus Involvement

Campus life is full of creative energy as the fall club season gets underway. The **Criminal Justice Club** launched its regular meetings, bringing together Criminal Justice majors and students from across various disciplines to collaborate on upcoming campus events, career networking, and leadership opportunities. Meanwhile, the university celebrated the launch of its first-ever book club, **CU Reads**. Designed to connect students through a shared love of literature, CU Reads offers a welcoming space for Bruins to explore diverse books, engage in thoughtful discussions, and build strong friendships outside the classroom.





CU IN THE COMMUNITY

Advocating Literacy: Monthly Community Literacy Events

During the 2025-2026 school year, the **Career Development Office** partnered with the George M. Manuel Library Director, **Karen Barker** to start a new literacy program for the community. On the second Saturday of each month, Carolina University opens its library doors to local families with young children for our ongoing **Community Literacy Events**. Organized to promote early childhood reading and strengthen educational foundations in the surrounding area, these interactive mornings feature CU staff and student leaders reading stories and guiding hands-on literacy activities designed to ignite a lifelong love of learning.

During these events, our CU student leaders read alongside Karen and participate in creative, book-themed activities designed around each month's selected story.

Student Employment in Action: Community Impact Leaders

Through CU's student employment program, our **Community Impact Leaders** serve in the on-going efforts of local youth outreach. Dedicated student leaders (including **Britney Comolli, Brian Nichols, Charlee Hale, and Selah Hampton**) work directly with local area elementary and preschools to mentor, tutor, and engage children through structured play and academic support.

Leadership Winston-Salem Insight

Carolina University President **Dr. Heather Burkard** completed **Leadership Winston-Salem Insight**, participating throughout spring 2026 and concluding the program during the summer. The experience provided an opportunity to deepen her connections within the Winston-Salem community and engage with fellow leaders. Her participation reflects CU's commitment to building relationships beyond campus and strengthening its connection to the city it calls home. As the university continues to innovate, connect, and transform, community engagement remains an important part of creating opportunities for students and advancing CU's mission.





FACULTY/STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

#WeAreCU







Promotions and Homegrown Talent

Carolina University continues to strengthen its institutional leadership by celebrating key faculty promotions and retaining standout student talent. **Dr. Jerry Chandlee** was promoted to Dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS) and Director of Criminal Justice, stepping into the full-time role after serving for three and a half years as a dedicated adjunct professor across both Criminal Justice and Leadership programs. Meanwhile, fresh off her memorable graduation as co-valedictorian, **Elena Castro** officially joined the university staff as a full-time member of the IT department, seamlessly transitioning into the role after serving as an IT student team lead for over three years.

Regional Leadership and Pedagogical Innovation

Dr. Murchtricia Jones, Dean of the School of Computing, Applied Sciences, and Engineering (CASE), earned major regional and national recognition this year. Dr. Jones was nominated for the **Greater Winston-Salem Under 40 Leadership Award**, which honors emerging leaders driving meaningful professional, industry, and community contributions across the Winston-Salem area. On the academic front, Dr. Jones was selected to present a poster at EDUCAUSE 2026 titled **"Write to Learn: Handwritten Cornell Notes in Hybrid STEM Classrooms."** Her research examines evidence-informed, active-learning strategies that help STEM students actively process complex course material and take greater ownership of their academic success.

Scholarly Publishing & Research Methodology:

Demonstrating a deep dedication to research methodology and scholarly growth, **Dr. Lutheran Carter** recently became a published co-author of ***A Step-by-Step Introduction to Mixed Methods Research for Developing Researchers*** (2026). The publication serves as an accessible guide for emerging researchers, providing structured frameworks to help scholars build confidence and execute rigorous academic research. Dr. Carter's book highlights Carolina University's commitment to advancing scholarship and equipping students and faculty with essential research tools.

Expanding Research Horizons

Demonstrating CASE's commitment to expanding scholarly inquiry, **Dr. Wiseborn Danquah** was selected to participate in the **2026 NSF CISE Aspiring PI Workshop** hosted by the National Science Foundation in August. Designed for researchers preparing to secure major external funding, the workshop equips participants with the tools to develop highly competitive NSF research proposals. Dr. Danquah's participation marks a strategic step forward in growing Carolina University's overall research infrastructure, elevating faculty scholarship, and creating new grant-funded research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students.

Advancing Expertise in AI and Cloud Computing

Dr. Ikram Daidai continues to keep Carolina University at the leading edge of technology education through advanced professional certifications and specialized AI training. Dr. Daidai officially earned the **AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner** designation, expanding the university's expertise in cloud architecture and enterprise cloud solutions. In addition, she completed advanced coursework in *Machine Learning for Natural Language Processing (NLP)* and participated in the specialized workshop *"Human–AI Partnership: Distinguishing Performance from Learning."* Her ongoing mastery of emerging technologies ensures CU students gain direct exposure to real-world artificial intelligence practices and industry-recognized credentials.

FEMA Security Grant Awarded

Carolina University has secured over $530,000 through **FEMA's Nonprofit Security Grant Program** following three successful grant applications. The funding will bring vital technology and physical security enhancements to Lee, Patterson, Pope, and Deeds halls.
"We are grateful for this significant investment in Carolina University," shared President Dr. Heather Burkard, noting that the upgrades will directly "strengthen the safety and security of our campus community."













WHAT'S BRUIN ALUMNI NEWS

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: TIMOTHY WORLES



Carolina University alumnus Timothy Worles (B.S. '16, M.Div. '24) has carried his passion for servant leadership from the basketball court to the pulpit. During his undergraduate years, Timothy was a standout student-athlete, serving as a four-year starter, leading the Bruins to a 2015 Conference Championship, and earning 2nd Team All-Conference and NCCAA All-Academic honors. Off the court, he actively shaped campus life as President of both the Student Council and Kappa Kai Preachers Fellowship.

After earning his Bachelor's in Biblical Studies, Timothy stepped into pastoral ministry, serving as Interim Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in late 2017 before officially taking the helm as Lead Pastor in April 2018. Committed to personal and spiritual growth, he continued his studies at CU's Piedmont Divinity School, earning his Master of Divinity in 2024. Today, his ministry centers on prayer, biblical exposition, strategic vision, and congregational care.

Timothy and his wife, Hannah-Kait (both Radford High School graduates), count it a joy to minister in a community they have loved for years, raising their two children, Lillian and Grant.

In April 2026, Pastor Timothy returned to his alma mater as a guest Chapel speaker. Preaching from 1 John 4:9–15 on "God's Initiating Love," he delivered a compelling message on divine sacrifice and how knowing God's love casts out fear. The service marked a joyous moment for the campus community, culminating in six students raising their hands to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior; a beautiful reflection of Timothy's enduring heart for gospel impact.

ALUMNI SUCCESS STORIES

Chely Mahler – Class of '22

After graduating with her Criminal Justice degree, Chely joined the **Catawba County Sheriff's Office** as a **correctional officer** and successfully completed **Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET)** in May 2023. After graduation, she added **serving warrants** to her credentials alongside her detention operations. Chely is currently taking some time to focus on family, but plans to return with her law enforcement certifications being held by the department for her future return to service.

Elmer Cevallos– Class of '26

Less than six months after graduation, Elmer founded **Something ELSE Studios LLC**, a tech and digital innovation enterprise spanning professional services, educational software, and connected smart products. Partnering with fellow CU alumnus **Elmer Funez**, he is currently developing **UniVerse**, a next-generation digital campus ecosystem designed for university students to connect, learn, compete, and trade within a futuristic operating system.



Join Our Alumni Database

Alumni, please scan the QR code above and fill out the following form to stay connected with Carolina University after you graduate, and to share your successes with us.

#WeAreCU



Strengthening Carolina University for the Future

At Carolina University, financial stewardship is about more than balancing a budget. It is about building an institution strong enough to fulfill its mission today while preparing responsibly for tomorrow.

Over the past year, University leadership has taken deliberate steps to strengthen Carolina's financial and operational foundation. Under the direction of the President and Board of Trustees, and with financial strategy led through the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, the University has enhanced budgeting, expense management, cash-flow oversight, purchasing controls, financial reporting, and operational accountability.

The results are meaningful. Carolina ended the fiscal year in a positive financial position, improved expense controls, strengthened financial and operational systems, and was removed from Financial Monitoring by the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS).

But progress is not created by strategy alone. It is carried forward by people.

Carolina University's Business Services team has been at the center of this work, supporting purchasing, accounts payable, cash management, payroll coordination, financial reporting, and the many daily processes required to keep the University moving.

The numbers tell the story, but the Business Services team helped write it.

Much of their work happens behind the scenes, yet it touches nearly every area of the institution. Their commitment to accuracy, accountability, service, and stewardship has helped turn stronger processes into stronger results.

This progress reflects disciplined leadership, thoughtful decision-making, and a team committed to doing the work well every day.

The work continues, but so does the momentum. Carolina University is stronger because of the people behind the progress.



INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Transforming Living Spaces: Residence Hall Renovations

The Student Services and Institutional Advancement departments spearheaded several large updates across campus residential facilities to elevate the day-to-day student experience. Halls and student rooms received fresh paint, hallway flooring was fully replaced, and new furniture was installed alongside thorough deep-cleaning initiatives. These upgrades ensure that residential Bruins have modern, comfortable, and welcoming spaces to live, study, and recharge throughout the academic year.



Campus Beautification & Winston-Salem Garden Club Grant

Carolina University's grounds underwent a vibrant transformation designed to foster connection across all areas of campus. Recent landscaping projects featured extensive grounds work, new plantings, tree maintenance, fresh mulching, and custom stonework. Rather than relying on a single central gathering area, these outdoor improvements create inviting nooks for fellowship, relaxation, and outdoor study throughout the entire campus. In recognition of these beautification efforts, the Winston-Salem Garden Club Council awarded Carolina University a landscaping grant to aid in continued campus greening projects.



Strengthening Regional Ties: Local High School Engagement

Expanding CU's presence within the local community, Institutional Advancement launched a direct outreach initiative focused on regional secondary education leaders. By establishing relationships with local high school principals, the university is creating direct bridges to prospective students, sharing the Carolina University mission, and building clear pathways for the next generation of Bruins.





WHO IS BARON THE BRUIN?

Baron. You know him, you love him.
But he hasn't always had the same look...

Unveiling the History and Heart of Baron the Bruin, Carolina University's Beloved Mascot.

In 2018, when our university was still called Piedmont International University, the athletics department was coming up with a new mascot for the school. They settled on a bruin (which is a historical and literary term for a brown bear) for the iconography, but the next question was what to name him. The athletics department decided to hold a campus-wide contest allowing students, faculty, and staff to submit ideas, tasking a selection committee with finding a name that carried genuine purpose.



On October 15, 2018, under the lights of Midnight Madness (an annual 5K race for charity), the PIU athletics department officially unveiled the name Baron the Bruin. Rooted in Hebrew, Baron translates to "son of strength and vigor, the noble fighter." This name was chosen to connect the university's biblical scholarship with athletic determination.

The evolution didn't stop there. In 2020, alongside the university's official transition to Carolina University, Baron received a major redesign to match the university's new identity. Re-modeled into the version we know and love today, he debuted a sleek, collegiate look featuring our now-iconic blue and gold colors. Today, whether energizing the crowd at home games or welcoming new students on campus, Baron stands as the symbol of Bruin pride.



UPCOMING EVENTS

National Day of Giving

December 1, 2026

The National Day of Giving (also known as GivingTuesday) was established to shift the focus of the holiday season away from consumerism towards generosity and community connection. On this day, we are asking all staff, faculty, students, alum, and friends to invest in Carolina University through a tax-deductible charitable donation. Your gift will support the efforts of enhancing the Carolina University experience and presence in our local and global community.

Founder's Day Celebration

January 22, 2027

Founder's Day is a higher education tradition celebrating legacy, values, and community impact. This celebration will feature insights from our university leadership, opportunities to learn about the history of the school, and opportunities for current students and alumni to gather and share stories of the school. Founder's Day 2027 will connect past achievements to future vision. In January 2027, Carolina University proudly marks its 80th anniversary, honoring eight decades of educational leadership and service.

2nd Annual Bruins Community Brunch

April 20, 2027

After the success of our 2026 inaugural Bruins Community Brunch, we are opening our doors again in April to have community leaders from education, business, and government, gather in the spirit of connection and to share what Carolina University is all about.

WANT TO SUPPORT CAROLINA UNIVERSITY?

When you invest in Carolina University, you are doing more than supporting an institution, you are empowering the next generation of leaders, scholars, and innovators. Your generosity supports the student experience, enhances academic programs, and equips our dedicated faculty and staff with the resources needed to cultivate an environment of excellence and faith-rooted purpose. If you believe in the mission of Carolina University and want to make a lasting impact on the lives of our students and community, we invite you to join us as a financial partner today. Every gift opens doors of opportunity, strengthens our campus, and helps shape a brighter future for generations to come.

SCAN HERE TO HELP SUPPORT CAROLINA UNIVERSITY


GRATIAE ET VERITATIS
1903
UNIVERSITAS CAROLINA