



Welcome

Each program within College Access Partnerships works diligently to serve students, families, and educators across western North Carolina, and at times, in the thick of our work, we can feel like each department becomes siloed. In an effort to share the amazing work of each and every staff member and CAP program, we are beginning a quarterly newsletter series highlighting the recent successes of GEAR UP, Upward Bound, College Advising Corps, YES, and ETL in order to help elevate the work within our team.

We hope as you receive this information, you will learn more about your colleagues, become more familiar with the scope of current projects, and identify potential ways to collaborate across the department in new and engaging ways!



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RCOE Transition Update

As you know, CAP transitioned to RCOE last July 1st with the beginning of the new fiscal year AND we transitioned to a new travel system as well as changes in the behind-the-scenes contracts and invoice system. We've also had to work with Special Funds Accounting and Accounts Payable being very understaffed which increased the response time for just about everything! We have worked closely with the RCOE administration and Dean's office, the Controller's office and the Academic Affairs business office during this time, and at this point, many of the kinks in the system have been worked out.

Overall, our transition has gone very smoothly thanks to **your** patience, persistence, and support with things like travel authorizations, approvals, expense reports, and our overall financial operations. We should see things begin to speed up now. Thank you, and way to go, team!



Edwin Duncan Reno Plans

We will have more details in future editions of the CAP newsletter, but we do have a tentative plan for relocating CAP offices during the upcoming Edwin Duncan renovations. Our timeline is to vacate in late July 2023 for renovations that will be completed by June 2025. There is swing space set aside for CAP in East Hall during the renovation. We will ensure that the spaces we occupy are an appropriate working environment for CAP during this time.



Our CAP home, EDH, is slated to undergo renovations this summer.

Latest Feature Stories



GEAR UP & Participate Learning Join Partnership to Focus on Western NC Schools
Jan 17, 2023

A new partnership between GEAR UP and Participate Learning seeks to join forces with 10 western North Carolina school districts to help promote college and career readiness through leadership... GEAR UP



Behind the Scenes of First Generation
Jan 9, 2023

Growing up, I knew nothing about college. My mom and dad had me soon after they graduated high school. My dad attended trade school and still is a truck driver.

College Advising Corps



Perspective | North Carolina schools are anything but 'low-performing'
Dec 16, 2022

This article was originally published on EdNC®, and was written by... Empowering Teacher Learning

Have an Idea for a CAP News Story?

We are always looking for new content to include on our [Features Page](#), and we welcome your input. Please share story ideas from your program with Elyssee Gibson (gibsonse@appstate.edu), and we will work together to spread the news of your great work!



NEWS UPDATE

Employee Spotlight: Aaron Gersonde

Let's get to know **Aaron Gersonde**, Director of Upward Bound! Aaron is the longest tenured CAP employee and has the ability to make almost anyone crack a smile with his dry sense of humor (as you'll see below).

1. How long have you worked with CAP? *I started in December of 2009. I was hired as the Coordinator of the recently funded Upward Bound Math Science Grant. We had zero students in the program, limited contacts in the schools, and most of us were shiny brand new to our jobs at that time. We spent countless hours figuring things out, talking to anyone who would listen to us, and wondering what on earth we had gotten into, just hoping we were doing everything in our power to build up a quality program for kids.*

My saving grace: I like to run and ride a bike: lots of sanity-runs and rides to keep the brain balanced and (mostly) moving forward. A favorite memory of those first days: I was in a cl-office in DD Dougherty that I'm convinced contained the entire heating and cooling system in its ceiling. I had to duck to get around to the desk, and when the heat was cranking (and I mean CRANKING), I would have to step out to take phone calls so people on the other end wouldn't confuse me with someone who worked on a helicopter landing pad.



Aaron in Sedona, AZ near a trail called The White Line (look it up! Spoiler: He walked it.)

2. What's your favorite book/movie/album/song? Pick one and explain why. *Too many to list, but regarding music: My soul-music is the Grateful Dead. If you ever want to listen to this band, talk about this band, play their music (on instruments - everything but bagpipes perfectly acceptable), please find me. I'm also reading a remarkable book right now called Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver. It will likely go onto my list of the top 3 novels of all time. It's about a boy who grows up in/out of foster care in rural Western Virginia. It's inspired by the Dickens classic David Copperfield. The main character is so incredibly resilient, likeable, intelligent, and hilarious. I highly recommend it.*

3. What would your perfect/ideal day look like? *Easy: Coffee and hang out in the morning with Kerry (my roommate, turned girlfriend, turned fiancé, turned best friend, turned wife, turned mom of our kids - and still best friend!), some time outside (preferably on a mountain bike riding a trail), a really tasty meal, a little reading, playing some music with family or friends, some more time with Kerry and our kids (maybe a game, maybe going out to eat somewhere, maybe just sitting around the house with our dog, making each other laugh by using the voice we've invented for her - you know you do the same thing, pet lovers!), and a little work on some type of construction related house project. That's a full day...I'm tired now.*

4. What fictional place would you like to visit? *The Special Funds Accounting Office. There is no way that's a real place.*

5. What's something you'd like to do that you've never done? *I would love to take a trip with Kerry and the kids to Ireland to see my sister and brother-in-law. They are two of our favorite people in the world, and we used to be able to see them by getting in a big vehicle and driving crazy miles while eating all the snacks the store sells and listening to every Taylor Swift album (thanks, kids). Since they've moved over there, we miss them and want to make them listen to Taylor all day (and the Grateful Dead of course).*



Family Design Nights

During the pandemic, we all struggled to make and maintain connections with those in our community. Distance, fear, and school closures were all barriers that prevented many basic services from happening within our GEAR UP community. The Academic Innovation Team saw this as an opportunity to bridge the gaps with a new program called Family Design Night. In its first iteration, the program started out as a partnership with NC State's Science House with guided design challenges where individual kits of materials were distributed to families, and all stakeholders connected through Zoom. We saw students creating solar powered cars in their bedrooms, building folding microscopes at their kitchen tables with their neighbors, and through it all, something exciting had begun. In the latest iteration of Family Design Nights, we see students from all of our districts with their families taking over media centers in new open-ended interdisciplinary challenges led by the Academic Innovation Team. Students and their families are now engaged in exciting collaborative challenges that employ diverse content areas and standards ranging from art, music, history, science and math. We now receive registrations for up to 100+ students and see as many as 6-7 districts hosting these events online with us. The program continues to grow and evolve. Stay tuned to see what the next iteration of Family Design Night becomes!



Participants engage and learn during the 2022 inaugural Academic Innovation Conference presented by GEAR UP.



Students and their families create components of the next generation space suit at part of the Racing Into Space Family Design Night at Ashe County Middle School. Learn more [here](#).

Academic Innovation Conference

Last year, GEAR UP hosted the first Academic Innovation Conference in Asheville where we saw almost *one hundred* educators from our community of GEAR UP schools. The conference served as a mechanism for recognizing all of the amazing ideas and innovations that our teachers put into their classrooms every year. Programmatic sessions were led by teachers, faculty, and vendors highlighting all of the amazing opportunities that GEAR UP brings to this region.

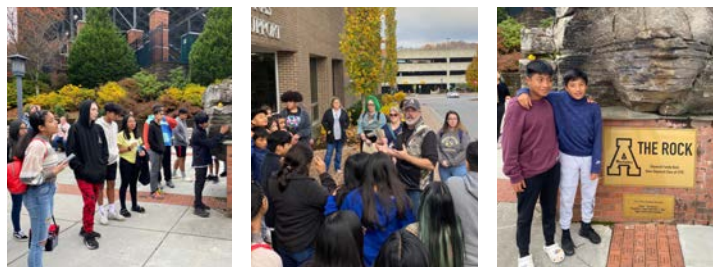
We are very excited to announce that this year's conference will be scheduled for **June 12th-14th** in Asheville. We will be spotlighting the best practices and approaches in the classroom ranging from behavior management, instructional strategies, and technology. If you would like to attend the conference and experience the energy, please [register for the conference](#). Your department would need to cover your hotel and mileage expenses; however, there is no cost for registration.



Campus Visits

Research from the previous GEAR UP grant indicates that student participation in a campus visit increases the likelihood of postsecondary enrollment, even when the visit happens as early as middle school. Building on that evidence, the College Impact Team began making enhancements to the campus visit process by taking it from a basic visit to an educational experience. Students have been able to experience what it's like to participate in an educational pathway by learning from professors in multiple science disciplines: math, psychology, and sustainable development. Having students experience learning directly from professors should help the students see themselves as capable of being successful in higher education. In fact, some of the feedback from post-visit student surveys said that exact thing: In learning concepts from a college professor, they feel much more confident in their academic abilities.

The Impact Team hosted over 1,000 students in the months of October and November, and we look forward to our spring visits!



Over 1,000 students visited App State during GEAR UP campus tours last fall.

Launch of the Counselor Network

Through work with the National Postsecondary Strategy Institute, the GEAR UP program has learned how crucial counselor leadership is to the postsecondary access process. It is from that base that the Counselor Network was born. Network participants collaborate in monthly virtual meet-ups on topics of their choosing to share ideas and resources. Much of the group is also participating in an online PD facilitated by Go Alliance around equity in postsecondary access.

Counselors attended a day of professional development on the App State campus last month where they discussed the issue of equity of access and launched the course. Learning from both the online meet-ups and the Go Alliance course will help grow counselor competencies measured in observations and summative reviews, as well as build capacity for counselor leadership in the area of postsecondary access.



The inaugural cohort of the Counselor Network converged on App State's campus last month.



50 Years of Upward Bound at Appalachian State

Upward Bound was established as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 signed into law by President Johnson. It became one of the nation's first college access programs, and over the past 57 years, over 2 million students have participated in Upward Bound nationally. The Upward Bound Program at Appalachian State was established in 1972, and the program has been celebrating its 50th anniversary this past year. Read more about the work of Upward Bound over the years here.

Annual Performance Report

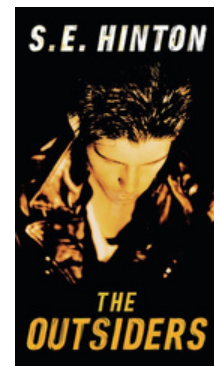
The Upward Bound annual performance report shows some encouraging numbers from 2022: Program participants met our Standardized Testing objective (proficiency in Math and Language Arts), and our recent graduates far exceeded our Enrollment objective: 95% of students enrolled in postsecondary education in 2022!



Teacher Spotlight

Christy Merritt at Macon Middle has been using digital tools to improve the learning experiences of dependent readers. Working with the Introducing Digital Literacy Tools micro-credential empowered Ms. Merritt to leverage technology to enhance her students' understanding of concepts within *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton.

Students used search engines to map concepts and deepen their understanding of the plot, setting, and characters. Googling images and reading descriptions of unfamiliar vocabulary allowed more dependent learners to broaden their schemas and connect with the text. Students at Macon Middle are gaining confidence in their ability to use technology to enrich their reading experience! This achievement allowed Ms. Merritt to achieve the professional learning goals she set out for herself at the beginning of the year. Way to go, Ms. Merritt!



Social Work Student this Semester

Upward Bound will host a Bachelor's of Social Work student for the Spring 2023 semester. Unique Perez will be shadowing UB staff, attending student advising meetings, learning about federal policy that affects Upward Bound, and working on data analysis of our work with recent high school graduates. Be on the lookout for a new face in the office, and be sure to introduce yourself to Unique.

Additional Funding

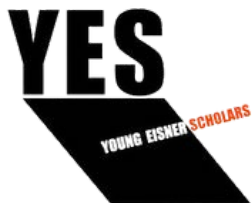
In September, the Department of Education awarded Upward Bound \$1.5M for funding for 2023-2028. The program will continue to serve approximately 65 students annually who are potential first generation college students, many of whom are from modest income households. Qualifying students live in Avery County, McDowell County, Alleghany County, or attend Freedom High School.

ETL Project Update

Schools and teachers have earned \$91,000 so far and submitted 56 Micro-Credentials to Digital Promise.

Perspective | NC Schools are Anything but 'Low-Performing'

This [article](#) was originally published on EdNC, and was written by Rachel Nelson, Assistant Director for Teacher Outreach for the Empowering Teacher Learning Project.



YES is Officially a Staff of 3

Carly Stephens joined YES as the Lead Middle School Educator last summer and is doing phenomenal work engaging 8th grade students in GEAR UP schools in Ashe and Watauga Counties. Rebeca Figueroa and her husband, Cody, added Hesus to their family on July 28, 2022. Rebeca works from Raleigh as the YES Appalachia Branch Operations Manager. YES Appalachia is excited about its growing staff to support their growing group of Scholars!



YES staff members (L-R): Susan Saule, Carly Stephens, Rebeca Figueroa

Connecting Scholars on Campuses

Susan Saule, the YES-Appalachia Branch Program Director, took five students from Ashe and Watauga Counties to Philadelphia in October 2022. They met up with three scholars and the YES Program Director from Los Angeles and had a fantastic time getting to know one another, touring colleges in the area, and connecting with older YES Scholars who are students at the schools. They packed in visits to Drexel, Haverford, Swarthmore, Dickinson, Gettysburg and Lehigh in 4 days.



YES scholars tour Lehigh University last fall.

Class of 2023

Of the fourteen YES Scholars graduating from high school this year, eight have already received offers of acceptance to schools. Six of the fourteen have been accepted to Appalachian State, and one has already committed to attend. The YES team is excited about the future of one of their Scholars who has chosen to enlist in the Army, and it's been great to get Scholars out of virtual visits and on campuses this last summer and fall.



YES scholars tour Berea College last fall.

Classes of 2028 and 2029

Last year, YES, as an organization, decided to pause on selecting a cohort in 6th grade to allow students to have more time in their classrooms post-Covid. YES-Appalachia is currently focusing on selecting a cohort from current 7th graders so Carly can start meeting with them in the second semester, and they are rolling out the application process for current 6th graders to have a new cohort identified before May!





Appalachian State
University



Mid-year Progress

The advisers are making incredible progress toward meeting their KPIs! Take a look at the mid-year progress report for the College Advising Corps at Appalachian State:



1:1 Completion: 64% (national avg 53%)

Family Engagement: 25% (national avg 15%)



FAFSA Completion: 25% (national avg 16%)

FAFSA Assistance: 27% (national avg 19%)



1+ College Apps: 27% (national avg 13%)

3+ College Apps: 14% (national avg 13%)

2-year College Apps Submitted: 225

4-year College Apps Submitted: 2,271

Total Acceptances: 595

