



## Director's Message

We had a discussion during our last All-CAP meeting about happiness, and more specifically, a study that found the key to happiness is relationships. One of the questions posed to extend the discussion was about how we might think about the value of relationships in our work (and how focusing on work relationships may lead to some level of work happiness). In a sense, you are all living this, and today's newsletter has many wonderful examples of how you are leveraging relationships in our work.

We have a great cohort of EPFP made up of teachers, CAP staff and RCOE faculty that are partnering with others, building new relationships, and learning about educational policy and advocacy. Our new RPED grant allows us to deepen our relationships and work with community college partners. Yolanda is helping us



*EIR Directors' meeting in Washington DC  
attended by Tyrel Winebarger, Rachel Shepherd,  
& Jim Beeler*

build new relationships with Spanish-speaking students and families. The CAC team traveled to San Diego for their national conference ... and I can assure you, traveling together is a great way to build stronger relationships! The ETL team deepened their team relationships by co-presenting at a conference in Cocoa Beach and attending the Directors' Meeting in Washington DC. This work with partners extends to after school and weekends as shown with the YES after school sessions and the UB Weekend Academy. Build out your own work relationships by learning more about this great CAP team in this newsletter. Enjoy!

- Jim Beeler,  
Executive Director- College Access Partnerships

## Newsletter Highlights

### Welcome

Director's Message  
Employee Spotlight  
Latest Feature Stories  
On Ramp Appalachia

### GEAR UP

EPFP Cohort  
February QCM  
GEAR UP Appalachianos

### ETL

Personnel Update  
ISSDL Symposium

### CAC

CAC Summit in San Diego  
VolunteerNC LeaderCorps  
KPI Highlights

### Upward Bound

Weekend Academy

### YES

Class of 2024  
Bits & Bytes NC State  
After School in Ashe County



## Employee Spotlight: Hannah Langley

Let's get to know CAP Digital Communications Specialist, Hannah Langley!

### 1. How long have you worked with CAP?

I've been working with CAP for about 5 years now. I started as a GEAR UP student worker in 2019, then I was the GEAR UP Communications Assistant, and now I am the Digital Communications Specialist for CAP.

### 2. What's your favorite book/movie/album/song? Pick one and explain why.

I don't watch a lot of TV but when I need a good comfort show to watch or rather rewatch, I choose *Gilmore Girls*.

### 3. What would your perfect/ideal day look like?

I am very much a homebody! So a perfect day would be getting up without an alarm, some cuddles with my cat Gabe, and having a slow morning watching TikToks. After a few scrolls through some videos, I would make coffee, put music on, and tend to my plants. And on a perfect day, the weather would be nice enough to open all the windows and let all the fresh air in. This gives me the perfect environment to start painting in the studio where I will spend most of my day. Finally, to finish off the day I'd make dinner and put on a movie that I would promptly fall asleep to.

### 4. What fictional place would you like to visit?

There is this little game called *Stardew Valley*, where you play as a farmer who has inherited your grandfather's land. That is the place I would like to visit (Pelican Town). Give me some land, and I'll help fix up that community center in lightning speed!

### 5. What's something you'd like to do that you've never done?

I would love to take an overnight train ride. In one of those old fancy steam engines, where they serve you tea and scones. Then spend my day just looking out the window at all the beautiful views.



## Latest Feature Stories



### **Psalms 46:5 / Failure was never an option**

Ever felt like a disappointment? It's been 10 years of perseverance, sacrifice and faith that has gotten me through the toughest moments of my life.

[READ MORE](#)



### **Camp NASCAR Coming this Summer**

Rising GEAR UP sophomores and juniors can race into summer learning with a 5-day camp on the campus of Appalachian State University June 17-21.

[READ MORE](#)



### **Growing Up as a Military Child: The Struggles of Connection**

Growing up, moving was normal and something I expected pretty frequently. My Step-Dad was in the Army and every few years he would get stationed somewhere new...

[READ MORE](#)

## 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](mailto:gibsonse@appstate.edu)), and we will work together to spread the news of your great work!



## **New College Access Grant Added to CAP**

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded a \$2.2 million Rural Postsecondary Economic Development (RPED) grant to College Access Partnerships (CAP) at Appalachian State University. The program entitled *On Ramp Appalachia* will work to help students make the transition from high school to community college.

The scope of the grant includes four community college partners and their corresponding school districts currently affiliated with Appalachian GEAR UP and Appalachian State University Public School Partnership and will serve nearly 2,000 rural students in 11th grade through their sophomore year of college. MyFutureNC, Participate Learning, The Hunt Institute, and the High Country Workforce Development Board serve as ongoing advisors and will support the mission of the project.

On Ramp aims to promote increased access to postsecondary education and workforce development particularly for students in rural areas, helping students who do not have college and career plans to identify their pathway to college and careers, and increasing college graduation rates.

Director of CAP Operations and Appalachian GEAR UP, Corinne Smith says, "This grant was a very intentional step toward our vision of bringing more resources to the students of western North Carolina to improve educational outcomes. We are thrilled to support the community colleges in the area, recognizing their pivotal role in postsecondary access and as catalysts of economic development in our communities."

GEAR UP Assistant Director for Higher Education Partnerships, Adam Warren will lead the grant, and the program will launch this Spring. More information about On Ramp will be released later this semester.



## **Education Policy Fellowship Program Cohort**

Ten staff members from CAP and the GEAR UP family will be participating in the Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP). Representing CAP is Gloria Medina, Rachel Nave-Lewis, Doug Thompson, and Holly Weaver. GEAR UP representatives include Alma Rodríguez Jones, Karen Lail, Sarah Laws, Tracy McGuire, Gordon Prince, and Debra L. Rodriguez. RCOE faculty members in the cohort include Dr. Ashley Carpenter, Dr. Shanan Fitts, Dr. Julie Hasson, and Gillian Hill.

The EPFP program, hosted by the Public School Forum, is designed to help participants learn more about education policy in North Carolina. Our own director of GEAR UP and CAP Operations, Corinne Smith, is the Western NC EPFP Coordinator. Learn more about the EPFP cohort [here](#) and more about the program [here](#).



Cohort members include (L-R) Dr. Ashley Carpenter, Dr. Shanan Fitts, Dr. Julie Hasson, Alma Rodríguez Jones, Karen Lail, Sarah Laws, Tracy McGuire, Rachel Nave-Lewis, Gloria Medina, Gordon Prince, Debra L. Rodriguez, Doug Thompson, Holly Weaver and Gillian Hill (no image).





## **February QCM**

GEAR UP kicked off the year with their first QCM of 2024. AIM Grant awardee, Tonya Denny of Ashe County Schools, spoke about her "My World in a Backpack" project.



## **GEAR UP Appalachians**

We are excited to announce the launch of a new social media account, **GEAR UP Appalachians**. GEAR UP Assistant Director for Student Leadership & Parent Outreach, Yolanda Adams, will be curating and sharing relevant, culturally-responsive, college access content aimed at supporting our Spanish-speaking GEAR UP families. Learn more about the Facebook page [HERE](#).



## **Personnel Update**

Dr. Rachel Shepherd has recently joined CAP as the Interim Program Director role for ETL. Katherine Chesnutt will continue to serve ETL in a more limited capacity, and we are so happy to have had her at the helm for the last several years. During her time as director, she successfully launched the pilot program in 2 districts and helped to expand ETL into a current 29 schools in 11 districts with 359 teachers. We look forward to Dr. Shepherd joining the team!

## **ISSDL Symposium**

Earlier this year, ETL Navigators presented at the 37th International Society for Self-Directed Learning (ISSDL) Symposium. Our paper presentation, "Exploring Teachers' Initial Perceptions of Self-Directed Learning within a Teacher-Directed Professional Learning Program," was a qualitative analysis of teachers' responses to self-directed learning as it pertains to goal-setting. This research was led by Dr. Nelson.

We are thrilled to inform you that the presentation was very well-received and followed by an engaging discussion with fellow educators and researchers. This provided an invaluable opportunity for us to immerse ourselves in the latest research and developments in the field of self-directed learning. We came back inspired and ready to apply new insights to our ongoing work!

We plan to submit our paper for publication in the ISSDL Journal and look forward to sharing updates soon. We are grateful for the support of CAP in allowing us to share what we are learning as we continue working with our wonderful teacher-participants!



*Dr. Erin West, Holly Weaver, Sherry Paddie, and Heather Childress-Custer attend the ISSDL Symposium in February.*



### **CAC Summit in San Diego**

In December, advisers and program staff attended the CAC Summit in San Diego, CA. This three-day summit gave our team the opportunity to share best practices and network with the 800+ advisers and program staff in the country. Our very own Geneva Watson and Kenley Jackson presented on the national stage and represented AppCAC well!



Advisers attend the CAC Summit (top) and Geneva and Kenley present on the national stage (bottom).

### **VolunteerNC LeaderCorps**

In January, Geneva Watson and Ashley Bingman, who serves as the AppCAC representatives in VolunteerNC's Leader Corps group, attended a training at Montreat College. They assisted with the facilitation of the program staff workshops, completed a service project, and had the opportunity to network with LeaderCorps representatives from programs across the state.

### **KPI Highlights**

- An average of 36% family engagement across our program (compared to 21% national average)
- Advisers have met with an average of 70% of their seniors on a one-to-one basis
- An average of 40% of seniors across the program have submitted at least one college application
- On average, advisers have assisted 30% of their seniors with the FAFSA



### **Upward Bound hosted a Weekend Academy**

11th grade students sat for a timed practice ACT exam, while 12th graders completed the FAFSA, applied for scholarships, and shared their most recent college acceptances. Students have been accepted to App State, UNC Greensboro, Chapel Hill, Asheville, ECU, Warren Wilson, Montreat, NC State, and Lees McRae (among others). One student is eagerly awaiting his interview with an Admissions representative from Harvard! The UB 12th grade class has worked incredibly hard over the past few months!



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL





## **YES Class of 2024**

The YES Class of 2024 has worked hard throughout the college application season and continues to do so and are starting to hear back from schools! Of the twelve graduating seniors, eight have been accepted to at least one school and one has chosen to pursue a career education program for dental assisting. Acceptances include App State, Berea College, Columbia (our first QuestBridge match!), Drexel, Elon University, ETSU, Guilford College, Lehigh University, Meredith, Salem College, UNC Asheville, UNC Charlotte, and UNC Wilmington. We couldn't be more thrilled as students discern which opportunity will be their next place to grow and thrive.

## **After School in Ashe County**

Starting in February, Ashe County middle school YES families took up our offer to meet their scholars at Ashe County High School for after school sessions every Thursday from 3:45-5:45 pm. High school and early college students are invited as well. We're using this time to help scholars strengthen organizational and study skills and have a little fun! It's been great to have siblings together and friendships developing within the YES family. We're excited to do this in March and April, too!



*YES scholars have fun & develop friendships within the program*

## **Bits and Bytes at NC State**

On Friday, January 26 YES took four middle school students to NC State's Bits and Bytes program hosted by the Engineering Program. Students rotated through three hands-on engineering challenges and learned or learned again about the engineering design process and engineering habits of mind. The challenges focused on Biomanufacturing, MagLev Trains, and AI in society. We moved throughout the Centennial Campus and caught up with a Watauga YES scholar and engineering student, Ben, at lunch!



*YES Scholars participate in NC State's Bits & Bytes*



*Congratulations to YES Scholar Whitley on her acceptance to Columbia University!  
Read more [here](#).*