



This communication aims to provide updates on accomplishments, current projects, and personnel and operational changes.



Greetings Fellow Gothic Knights!

Summer at NJCU has been as bright and exciting as a day at the boardwalk! From the sound of beach waves to the sizzle of the grill, we've kept the energy high while celebrating our biggest victories in academic student success and retention. In May, we honored the hard work and armor our Gothic Knights wore on their journey to success. From Youth Corps scholars earning their high school diplomas, to GearUp/College Bound seniors heading off to college, to our graduates living our motto –“Enter to Learn, Exit to Serve” – this season has been full of milestones worth celebrating.

This year, the Academic Affairs Student Success and Retention team made waves by improving our academic standing policy, reducing the number of failing grades, and increasing the number of incomplete grades that turned into passing ones. Even better, we celebrated 55 students who turned things around from not meeting academic standing in Fall 2024 to achieving good academic standing by the end of Spring 2025.

And the summer fun didn't stop there! I taught a dual-enrollment GEAR UP/College Bound class and was excited to see that NJCU's GEAR UP program has grown from being one of the lowest-enrolled in the state to now ranking among the top three largest in New Jersey. Additionally, I celebrated Youth Corps graduates with their families, and even joined TRiO/TLC for a Broadway trip to see “The Outsiders” (one of my favorite movies). Just like summer days, student success moments are best when shared. As we trade flip-flops for backpacks and dive into a new academic year, remember: at NJCU, supporting student success isn't just a seasonal activity; it's something we do every single day. Over the summer, I worked with faculty, staff, and administrators to review and improve NJCU's Orientation to College (OTC) course. We discussed past practices and new strategies to support first-year student success, and created a new tagline: Knight's Quest: Your Journey to College Success. Thank you to the committee for your commitment to this work.

I am happy to report that NJCU has been awarded continuation grants for TRiO (TLC), Youth Corps, and NJ College Bound. We are also awaiting final confirmation of federal funding for the GEAR UP Program.

Here's to riding the wave into another great academic year,

Dr. Jonelle Knox

Assistant Provost (Academic Affairs) – Student Success and Retention

## UNIVERSITY ADVISEMENT CENTER

Since June, the University Advisement Center (UAC) has expanded services for continuing and incoming students through several initiatives. UAC hosted First-Year presentations, Transfer Tuesdays, Express Registration drives, and Walk-in Wednesdays/Freshman Registration Walk-In Day.

In June, advisors completed training with individual assessments to prepare for the fall registration period. UAC also facilitated OSAS trainings for the NJCU community on upcoming student support tools. On June 12, the All-Advisement Council Retreat brought together advisors from across campus to align goals, review resources, and strengthen partnerships. At the UAC retreat on August 7, staff reflected on their roles, built team connections, and prepared for the semester.

A highlight of the summer was the Summer Registration Luau, co-hosted with Alumni Relations on June 24 and 26. The event connected students at different stages of their academic journey with resources for the fall semester. Collaborations with the Foundation, Financial Aid, Registrar, Transfer Resource Center, OSP, TLC, and HWC supported student registration and success.

On July 25, UAC participated in the first summer New Student Orientation. Advisors Ashley Merchant and Manica Jacques served as emcees, while Director Vivianne Jimenez joined a panel discussion on the role of academic advising.

Final registration drives took place the week of August 18, followed by the Freshman Pre-Orientation presentation series titled 'Academic Advisement: A Partnership in Support of Your Academic Journey' on August 19.





## TRIO LEARNING COMMUNITY [TLC]

### TLC's 27th Annual TRIO Award Ceremony

The 27th Annual TRIO Award Ceremony, held on May 6, 2025, recognized students for academic excellence and distinction. In all, 42 received outstanding academic achievement awards, 48 were honored for academic achievement, 34 were recognized as May graduates, and 12 received special awards. More than 130 students, staff, faculty, and guests attended.

TRIO participants shared how TLC supported them throughout their undergraduate journey. Staff and faculty were also acknowledged for their contributions, including staff members Jeffrey Dessources, Dr. Jonelle Knox, Dr. Fatma Tat, and representatives from the Registrar's Office. The event concluded with reflections and expressions of gratitude.

### Summer Updates and New Developments

Over the summer, TLC prepared for the upcoming academic year and announced key developments. In July, NJCU was awarded the TRIO Student Support Services grant, securing funding for the next five years.

On July 17, TRIO hosted the First-Gen Jam, where incoming freshmen and transfer students learned about TLC's services. Interviews for new participants continued throughout the summer. On July 30, students attended a cultural event in New York City to see "The Outsiders," a Broadway production that added a meaningful and memorable experience to the summer calendar.

At the end of August, students participated in the Summer Engagement and Leadership (SEAL) Retreat at Camp High Rock in Massachusetts. The retreat introduced new students to team-building activities and college-readiness workshops, while engaging continuing participants. These activities are designed to challenge comfort zones and build confidence.

The retreat also addressed the academic uncertainty many first-generation students face. By normalizing these experiences, TLC helps reduce fear and foster a sense of belonging. The goal is to create an environment where students feel supported and valued by their peers. TLC looks forward to the start of the academic year in September and to all that our students will achieve.





## LEARNING COMMONS AND TUTORING



The Learning Commons wrapped up the Spring 2025 semester with more than 250 tutoring appointments. During the Summer 2025 sessions, tutors supported students with over 160 appointments.

On Thursday, July 28, 2025, the Learning Commons joined NJCU's New Student Orientation, sharing tutoring and resource information with incoming students and parents through a panel discussion and resource fair.

This summer, the team began developing the Fall 2025 workshop schedule, which will feature sessions on time management, study skills, note-taking, and exam preparation. Recruitment for new tutors is underway, and returning tutors are preparing to welcome students for the upcoming semester.

In addition to supporting students enrolled in the Orientation to College course, the Learning Commons has partnered with the Hispanic Educational Technology Services (HETS) consortium to offer free access to Peterson's Test Prep. Students can take practice tests for the DAT, GMAT, GRE, LSAT, MCAT, PCAT, and PRAXIS.

Visit us in the Congressman Frank J. Guarini Library (First Floor to the Left) or at the School of Business (Room 106). Learn more on the [Learning Commons Website](https://www.njcu.edu/learning-commons) or make an appointment at: [njclc.mywconline.com](https://njclc.mywconline.com)

## DR. LEE HAGAN AFRICANA STUDIES CENTER

The Dr. Lee Hagan Africana Studies Center is currently in the process of on-boarding a new coordinator, Attorney Linda McDonald. She is expected to begin with NJCU during the month of September and will bring a wealth of knowledge and connections to NJCU. More information about programming and a formal introduction of Linda will be available in a future edition of Knightly News.



**Lee Hagan Africana Studies Center**



## GEAR UP/COLLEGE BOUND



### Celebrating Student Success

On May 17, 2025, NJCU GEAR UP/College Bound students, families, and staff gathered to celebrate the End-of-Year Ceremony, honoring 150 scholars for meeting program requirements. The event brought together 275 guests, showcasing the program's commitment to student achievement. That same day, five graduating seniors received the \$1,000 NJCU Commitment Scholarship in recognition of their decision to enroll at NJCU, marking the second consecutive year of this partnership award.

### Recruitment and Enrollment Milestones

From May 26 to June 7, 2025, GEAR UP staff conducted recruitment at five target schools, engaging students in grades 6–12, with strong interest leading to full enrollment in multiple grade levels and the creation of a waitlist. Over 120 students confirmed summer attendance, with an additional 100 students in the confirmation process. Outreach efforts extended to the 2025 Parents as Partners Conference and Lincoln High School's Day of Empowerment. These efforts resulted in more than 50 new student interest forms.

### Expanding Student Support Services

GEAR UP/College Bound Staff completed training on Level All, the program's student support platform, enhancing service delivery capabilities. Preparations also began for dual enrollment resources, including scholarship information, enrichment opportunities, and college readiness workshops.

### Statewide Engagement and Events

A group of GEAR UP students represented NJCU at "Grit N' Wit," an obstacle course-style event hosted by Mercer County Community College GEAR UP in collaboration with partner programs statewide.

### Summer Program Launch

In June, summer logistics were finalized, including instructor assignments, mentor pairings, and classroom placements. Staff conducted 12 in-school recruitment sessions and supported district graduations while assisting high school seniors with EOF/OSP transitions. To prepare for the upcoming program, GEAR UP/College Bound staff completed three days of professional development and participated in a Family Orientation designed to ensure a strong start to summer learning. Summer programming launched on June 30, with more than 200 students enrolled.

### Summer Programming in Action

Throughout July, GEAR UP delivered daily programming for an average of 150 students, supported by more than 40 staff members. More than 25 students participated in an English-Effective Speaking dual enrollment course, allowing students to earn college credits. This is the second summer that high school students were able to participate in a dual enrollment course, further preparing them for success in college. Activities over the summer included three field trips, a summer close-out trip to Six Flags, a Field Day, and two Pool Days in partnership with NJCU Athletics.

### Community Partnership Highlights

On July 8, 2025, Partners in Prevention hosted the Paint Your Happy Place workshop for middle school participants. Students explored artistic self-expression by painting personal "happy places," promoting reflection, resilience, and positive reframing of life challenges. On July 22, 2025, Hudson Partnership CMO and NJCU's GEAR UP Pre-College Program co-hosted an interactive youth mental health workshop. Middle and high school students engaged in four rotating stations focused on emotional awareness, self-care, career/financial literacy, and physical fitness. The event concluded with a panel discussion, emphasizing experiential learning, community mentorship, and wellness strategies.



### 40th Anniversary Celebration

This year, the New Jersey Youth Corps (NJYC) proudly celebrated its 40th anniversary—four decades of empowering young people through education, workforce training, and community service. The milestone also honored 38 years of impactful service at NJCU, home to one of the longest-running NJYC sites in the state.

At NJCU, the program reached more than 3,000 young people, celebrated over 1,000 high school graduates, and maintained a program completion rate of over 80%. Corps members connected with job opportunities, advanced training, and higher education, while contributing hundreds of thousands of hours in community service. Their efforts included building playgrounds, restoring parks, supporting food banks, and developing museum exhibits for children.

As part of the anniversary celebration, NJYC at NJCU hosted several service events and the statewide culminating event took place on May 19, 2025, at Liberty State Park. Youth Corps sites from across New Jersey came together for a celebration, recognizing 40 years of impact and looking ahead to the future. The event featured service projects, tributes, and a ceremonial program co-hosted by NJCU's own Melinda Estrada and NJ DOL Office of Youth Programs Director, Patricia Jordan. The celebration included reflections from the mother of Youth Corps member Carolyn Wallace, Jersey City Council President Joyce E. Watterman, former Youth Corps director Gary Patnosh, and corps member spotlights featuring Daniel Bratten (Class of 2024) and Chandra Cordes (Class of 2023).

### End Of Year Celebration

On Thursday, June 26, 2025, NJ Youth Corps staff, family, community leaders, and stakeholders came together to celebrate the accomplishments of the Class of 2025. Awards were given to the Class Valedictorian, Salutatorian, Outstanding Achievement, Corps Member of Year, My Sister's Keeper, and Esprit de Corps awardee. Our Salute to Graduates was delivered by Dr. Jonelle Knox, Assistant Provost, who also recognized the previous recipients of NJCU's Commitment Scholarship. The Youth Corps Department was proud to serve 63 corps members in FY25 and is looking forward to continuing to serve the community for years to come.

### Community Service Learning

A former NJ Youth Corps Director returned and led a session on operating the Jersey Explorer Children's Museum Traveling Puppet Theatre, offering corps members a hands-on learning experience focused on collaboration and technical skills. As the newest community service site, NJ Youth Corps is excited to bring these mini STEM lessons led by the interactive puppets to K-5 classrooms in the 2025- 2026 school year.

### NJ Youth Corps Grant Award

Congratulations to Nikketa Pressley, Program Director of NJCU's New Jersey Youth Corps and the entire NJCU Youth Corps team for their work on being awarded a \$900K continuation grant by the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Established in 1988 through state legislation, NJYC has served as a vital re-engagement program for young adults ages 16-25 who left high school before earning a diploma. Since its inception, the program has transformed thousands of lives by offering academic instruction, employability and life skills training, and instilling a strong sense of civic responsibility. This funding will support the continued operation and expansion of the NJ Youth Corps program in Jersey City, ensuring it remains a cornerstone of opportunity and growth for the young people it serves.

