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Student Success Center

BI-ANNUAL REPORT

ECU

Table of Contents

Summary	3
Mission	4
Vision	4
Strategic Goals	4
Staffing	5
Tutoring	6
Embedded Gurus	7
Mentoring	8
The Chellgren Success Series	9
Student Agreements	10
OT Capstone Projects	11
Other Involvement	13
Marketing	14
Future Plans	15

Summary

As a school of opportunity, Eastern Kentucky University is committed to fostering the intellectual and personal development of all students. In alignment with this mission, the ECU Student Success Center supports students' academic and personal growth by empowering them to actively shape their college experience. Through intentional support and engagement, the Center contributes to improved student performance and increased retention and graduation outcomes.

During Spring 2024, the Center enhanced campus engagement through a special Solar Eclipse initiative, distributing 500 pairs of eclipse glasses ahead of the April 8 event. This project supported a meaningful learning opportunity while increasing visibility and awareness of the Student Success Center across the ECU community.

This report provides an overview of Student Success Center activities during the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 academic years. It highlights the types of student check-ins completed, outlines our programs and services, and details staff efforts in outreach and marketing.



Mission

Through a comprehensive approach to student support, the ECU Student Success Center provides integrated advice, direction, and access to high-impact services that promote student success.

Vision

As a school of opportunity, ECU fosters the intellectual and personal growth of all students. In accordance with this University mission, the ECU Student Success Center will address the academic and personal needs of students, empowering them to take control of their college experiences, thereby improving performance and increasing both retention and graduation rates.

Strategic Goals

In cooperation with Institutional Research, the Student Success Center set the following Strategic Goals:

1. Tutors and mentors will reach CRLA tutor and mentor training benchmarks.
2. Students who participate in regular mentoring sessions will exhibit their understanding of strategies for academic success by developing their own plans to achieve educational goals.
3. Students who participate in SSC programs will perform at higher academic rates than similar students who did not participate.
4. The SSC will collaborate with faculty to expand opportunities for student academic assistance.

Staffing

Over the past two years, the Student Success Center has experienced significant transformation. The most notable change is in its reporting structure. As of January 1, 2025, the Center transitioned from the Division of Student Success, Engagement, and Opportunity to Academic Affairs. With this shift, Dr. Ashley Sweat, Director of the Student Success Center, now reports directly to the Associate Provost for Student Academic Affairs, Dr. Jeremy Mulholland.

Dr. Sweat provides strategic leadership for the Center, overseeing programming direction, hiring and supervision of staff, outreach to campus departments and offices, and the implementation of research-based best practices used in college learning centers across the country. Her work is centered on improving student retention and graduation outcomes.

In staffing updates, Tyesha Jackson, formerly the Coordinator of Student Engagement, accepted a position at another institution. As a result, we concluded the Spring 2025 semester with that role vacant.

Meanwhile, Marcus Thornton, Coordinator of Peer Tutoring and Learning Services, continues to expand and enhance our academic support offerings. He specializes in designing and delivering training that meets the College Reading and Learning Association's (CRLA) tutor certification standards, ensuring our peer tutors are equipped with high-quality, research-based strategies.

A cornerstone of our tutoring program is the ECU Gurus—peer leaders who serve as both tutors and mentors to students across campus, including those in online programs and at ECU regional campuses. Their dual role as academic guides and personal motivators plays a vital part in fostering student success across the university community.

Our Graduate Assistants, Cassidy Cain (2023–2024) and Rebecca Riegler (2024–2025), lead programming efforts for the First Colonels Living Learning Community. This initiative is designed to create a supportive and engaging environment specifically for first-generation college students, helping them build connections, confidence, and a strong foundation for academic success.

These changes and initiatives reflect our enduring commitment to providing exceptional support and promoting academic excellence for all ECU students.

Staffing

Director: Dr. Ashley M. Sweat

Coordinator, Student Engagement: Tyesha Jackson

Coordinator, Peer Tutoring and Learning Services: Marcus Thornton

Graduate Assistants: Cassidy Cain (2023 - 2024); Rebecca Riegler (2024 - 2025)

Occupational Therapy Capstone Students: Sarah Roberts (2024); Cassidy Cain (2025)

2023-25 Gurus:

- Daniel Arend (Spring 2024 Grad)
- Bayli Barker (Spring 2024 Grad)
- Abigail Belcher (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Emily Bryant (Lead, Embedded Gurus; Spring 2024 Grad)
- Cassidy Cain (Lead, Training Initiatives; Spring 2023 Grad)
- Lillian Carroll (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Randal Caudill (Fall 2023 Grad)
- Emily Colonel
- Kaysey Cooksey
- Abigail Belcher (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Corinne Campbell
- Cloey Collins
- Ellie Craft (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Sohmer Davis (Spring 2024 Grad)
- John (JC) Dyer (Spring 2024 Grad)
- Olivia Fulcher
- Zander Gallutia
- Jasmine Gaona
- Connor Hadley (Spring 2024 Grad)
- Justin Kerr (Spring 2024 Grad)
- Sophie Kleinman (Lead, Special Projects; Spring 2023 Grad)
- Bradley Lackey (Fall 2023 Grad)
- Madeline Lewis (Spring 2023 Grad)
- Michelle Li
- Madelynn Linet (Lead, Social Media Initiatives)
- Ava Meyer (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Lauren Meyer (Spring 2024 Grad)
- Kyle Miller
- Kyra Mills (Lead, Social Media Initiatives)
- Andrew Mohr
- Megan Moore (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Sophie Moore
- Jeilisha Moreno
- Sarah Neuspickel (Spring 2023 Grad)
- Danielle Nolan
- Kaleigh Oldham (Lead Guru, Training Initiatives; Spring 2024 Grad)
- Becca Riegler (Lead Guru, Social Media Initiatives; Spring 2024 Grad)
- Rin Romich (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Alissa Schumacher (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Ashley Smith (Spring 2025 Grad)
- Zander Sparkman
- Taylor Stamper
- Hannah Taylor (Lead, Social Media Initiatives, Spring 2023 Grad)
- Mia Thomas
- Dustin Tucker
- Rachel Vascassenno (Lead, Social Media Initiatives; Spring 2023 Grad)
- Jordan Watson
- Jake Weston (Lead Guru, Slate; Spring 2024 Grad)

Tutoring

The Student Success Center is proud to hold Level II certification through the College Reading and Learning Association's International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC). This prestigious certification recognizes excellence in tutor training programs at the postsecondary level, affirming our commitment to high standards and student support. ITTPC sets internationally recognized benchmarks for tutor skills and preparation, providing both accountability and encouragement for ongoing excellence. We successfully completed our re-certification process in 2023 and are certified through June 2027.

The Student Success Center logged a total of 1,788 check-ins for tutoring during the 2023 - 2024 academic year, accounting for 1,869 walk-in tutoring hours. The SSC logged a total of 2,018 check-ins for tutoring during the 2024 - 2025 academic year, accounting for 2,257 walk-in tutoring hours.

The Gurus provide tutoring services to students in a variety of subjects covering over 150 classes at Eastern Kentucky University. The most common subjects that the Gurus tutored were business, chemistry, anthropology, and economics. By the end of Spring 2025, Abigail Belcher, Cassidy Cain, Cloey Collins, Madelynn Linet, Ava Meyer, Kyra Mills, Megan Moore, Sophie Moore, and Rebecca Riegler achieved ITTPC Level II certification.



Embedded Gurus

In Fall 2019, the Student Success Center launched the Embedded Gurus program with support from a grant provided by Kentucky's Council on Postsecondary Education. This initiative placed trained peer leaders—known as Gurus—into high-enrollment, freshman-focused courses to support student success, particularly among high-risk populations. Gurus attended class alongside students, facilitated out-of-class study groups, and provided tutoring and mentoring tailored to each course.

The program has grown since its initial pilot. During the 2023–2025 academic years, Embedded Gurus supported a broader range of courses. A list of those courses is provided below:

ANT 120 - Spring 2024; Fall 2024; Spring 2025

ANT 201 - Introduction to Biological Anthropology - Every Semester

ASL 101 - Fall 2024

EMC 110 - Spring 2024

HIS 100 - Spring 2024; Fall 2025

HIS 205 - Skirting the Edges of Russia - Fall 2023

MUS 117 - Applied Music Theory I - Fall 2023; Fall 2024

MUS 118 - Applied Music Theory II - Spring 2024; Spring 2025

POL 101 - Introduction to American Government - Fall 2023

PSY 200 - Introduction to Psychology Spring 2024

SOC 205 - Sexualities and Social Issues - Spring 2024, Fall 2024

SOC 232 - Social Statistics - Every Semester



Mentoring

The Student Success Center is certified through the College Reading and Learning Association's International Peer Educator Training Program Certification, Level II (IPTPC) through June 2027. This certification is recognized internationally as a best practice because it ensures that mentors receive quality training and meet specific standards met by CRLA. This certification is challenging to earn as it required a great deal of extra training and 25 face-to-face hours for Level I and 50 for Level II. Five Gurus and one Graduate Assistant earned IPTPC certification by the end of the academic year, Cassidy Cain, Bradley Lackey, Kyra Mills, Kaleigh Oldham, Rebecca Riegler, and Sarah Roberts.

In addition to training the Gurus, Student Success Center staff trains or provides training guidelines for mentors in NOVA, Colonels Mentoring Colonels, the Department of First Year Courses and Learning Communities, and the Bratzke Center for Student Athletes.

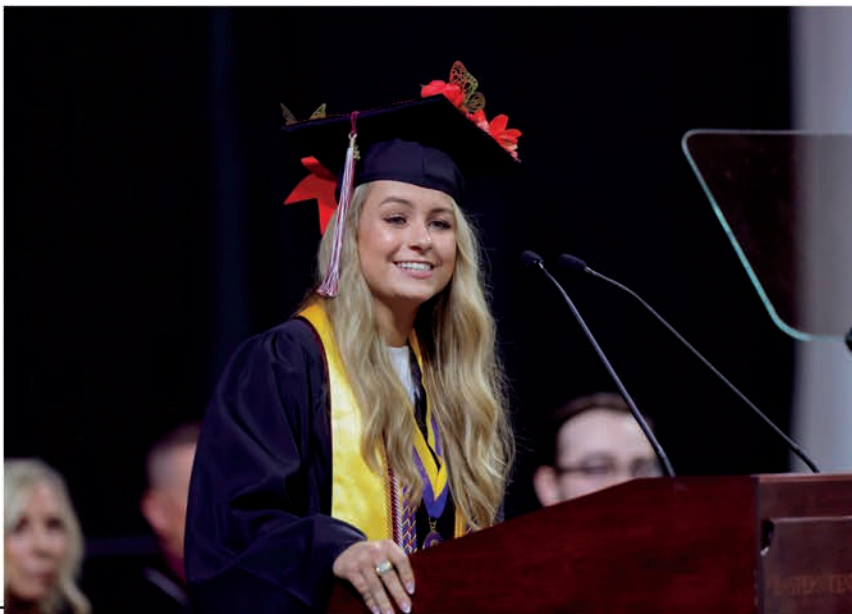
In the Fall 2023 semester, we created the M&M (Mentor & Mentee) Mixer to further create a welcoming environment for mentees. Mentoring numbers for the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 academic years increased from the previous year, with the following reported:

Fall 2023 - 266 check-ins (159 hours and 13 minutes of mentoring)

Spring 2024 - 330 check-ins (148 hours and 19 minutes of mentoring)

Fall 2024 - 297 check-ins (148 hours and 2 minutes of mentoring)

Spring 2025 - 334 check-ins (154 hours and 39 minutes of mentoring)



The Chellgren Success Series

Funded through an endowment from Paul and Deborah Chellgren, the Chellgren Success Series offers workshops to ECU students to improve their college experience and prepare them for success during and after college. This year, we created a ECU Platforms 101 workshop geared at educating our student population on how to use Blackboard, MyECU, and Engage/Corq (the platform used to showcase student events). The workshop was offered to the student success seminar professors through the department of First Year Courses and Learning Communities. The workshop was presented to 11 first-year seminars to a total of 251 students.

Not including the ECU Platforms 101 presentations, the Student Success Center held 24 different in-person academic workshops during both the 2023 - 2024 and 2024-2025 academic years. The workshops were held at different dates and times to accommodate student schedules. In addition to workshops, we held the "Rise and Shine Event", an event where registration assistance was provided to rising sophomores as they registered for the upcoming Fall 2024 and Fall 2025 semesters. We provided donuts, coffee, and t-shirts, and facilitated drawings for special prizes. We also had special workshop requests from the Center for Student Parents, BIO 271 and Music Theory Study Groups, and workshops for our ECU Online population.

Workshops were facilitated by SSC staff as well as many campus partners, including the Office of Academic and Career Services; the Study Abroad Office; and Big E Central.

- Study Skills, critical reading strategies, time management, test-taking strategies, and other workshops designed to help students with metacognition;
- Growth Mindset and Success in College;
- Applying for Scholarships;
- What Does It Mean to Be Career Ready?;
- Midterm Mania (an event to de-stress);
- Dealing with Stress Management and Test Anxiety;
- Writing resumes and cover letters and networking and building personal social media brand from the Office of Academic and Career Services.

Student Success Agreements

New freshmen placed on academic probation after their first semester, as well as students returning from academic suspension, are required to complete a Student Success Agreement. As part of this agreement, students must select two academic success actions. Students may choose to either (1) meet weekly with an academic mentor for eight meetings during the semester or (2) complete weekly check-ins at the Student Success Center for the semester. In addition, students must choose one external engagement option: attending a minimum of four academic or career workshops offered by the Student Success Center or the Office of Advising and Career Services, or participating in an institutional engagement program such as NOVA, El Centro, Dr. Rodney Gross Scholars, or Residence Hall Community Programming.

Through these agreements, staff are able to offer individualized support within a structured framework—guiding students in staying motivated, building strong study habits, and connecting with campus resources that support their academic goals.

Fall 2023 - 28 Freshmen; 16 Sophomores; 12 Juniors; and 2 Seniors

Spring 2024 - 116 Freshmen; 13 Sophomores; and 2 Juniors

Fall 2024 - 30 Freshmen; 11 Sophomores; 9 Juniors; and 1 Senior

Spring 2025- 98 Freshmen; 17 Sophomores; 10 Juniors; and 1 Senior



Occupational Therapy Capstone Projects

The Student Success Center is proud to have served as the site for two occupational therapy doctoral capstone projects, both led by former Gurus/Graduate Assistants who once supported students in the Center themselves. Their projects combined their passion for helping others with their advanced training in occupational therapy, resulting in innovative initiatives that strengthened the Center's impact on student well-being and academic success. The following summaries highlight each capstone project and their contributions to the mission of the Student Success Center.

Sarah Roberts: Explore the Effectiveness of a Student-Based Mentorship Program for College Students to Improve Academic Performance

This capstone project, developed and implemented in Spring 2024, examined the impact of an educational session informed by the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) on college peer mentors' self-efficacy. The project emerged from the experience of a student employed within a college peer mentoring program and integrated principles of occupational therapy to help peer mentors understand the relationship between human well-being and academic success among the students they support.

The final product consisted of a presentation designed for peer mentors, accompanied by pre- and post-surveys to assess their confidence in delivering mentoring services and their perceived level of difficulty in fulfilling those responsibilities. Data analysis revealed that participation in OT-informed educational sessions enhanced peer mentors' sense of the importance of their role. Interestingly, it also increased their perception of task difficulty—likely due to a deeper understanding of the many components involved in effective peer mentorship.

Overall, this 14-week capstone project demonstrated that OT-led educational interventions can enhance peer mentors' self-efficacy and deepen their awareness of the complexities inherent in their student-support roles within higher education.

Occupational Therapy Capstone Projects

Cassidy Cain: Stress Management through Sensory for College-Aged Students

This capstone project, implemented in Spring 2025, explored the use of sensory-based interventions to support college students in managing stress and improving well-being. The project was developed in response to the growing challenges students face when transitioning from everyday life to college, a period often marked by increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness. At the Student Success Center, staff work closely with students on academic probation and first-generation students—groups that are particularly vulnerable to these stressors.

The project aimed to provide both Gurus and their mentees with practical techniques to identify and manage stress through sensory interventions, while also offering a safe environment for students to explore their individual sensory preferences. Participants completed an hour-long training session focused on understanding the neurological effects of stress and learning to identify sensory tools and strategies that best supported their personal coping needs.

Following the training, a sensory bag was made available in the Student Success Center for four weeks, allowing students to experiment with various items to determine which interventions were most effective for them. Based on pre- and post-intervention surveys, participants identified weighted stuffed animals, fidget cubes, and mindfulness practices as particularly beneficial for managing stress during end-of-semester exams.

Overall, this capstone project demonstrated that sensory-based education and access to sensory tools can enhance stress management among college students. The Student Success Center plans to continue incorporating this sensory processing program into future training and mentoring efforts to promote ongoing student well-being and success.

Other Involvement on Campus

The Student Success Center is committed to supporting both prospective and current students in achieving academic success and personal growth. Over the past two years, the Center has engaged in numerous initiatives designed to increase awareness of our services among students, faculty, and staff. These outreach efforts include participation in the following events:

- **EKU Spotlight** – A series of recruitment events that introduce prospective students to Eastern Kentucky University and its academic and support services.
- **College of Health Sciences LEAD & Puente Academic Resource Mixer** – An event within EKU's bridge programs aimed at increasing awareness of campus resources available to students in the College of Health Sciences.
- **Colonel Craze** – A signature fall event showcasing EKU programs, campus involvement opportunities, and student employment options.
- **Gen1 Conference** – Hosted on National First-Generation College Celebration Day, this event honors first-generation college students and explores strategies to support their success at EKU.
- **EKU Transfer Social** – Held during National Transfer Student Week, this event connects current and prospective transfer students with EKU faculty, staff, and campus resources.



Marketing

Online

The Student Success Center (SSC) staff utilized multiple communication platforms—such as The Loop, Fourth Week Progress Reports, Midterm Reports, and student referral forms—to proactively reach out to students via email and telephone. Fourth Week Progress Reports, in particular, provide early alerts for hundreds of students referred for tutoring by faculty or identified as making unsatisfactory progress in one or more courses.

In addition to direct outreach, the SSC maintains an active presence on social media platforms including X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Discord, Facebook, and Engage. These channels allow us to stay connected with campus events and communicate important resources and opportunities to students. Due to the significant growth of our online presence since the pandemic, two Lead Gurus now oversee and manage our social media accounts.

Our social media reach continues to expand, with over 2,500 followers on X and an annual average of more than 8,000 impressions. We also maintain strong engagement across platforms, including more than 3,000 followers on Facebook, over 1,800 followers on Instagram, and more than 400 users engaged on Discord.

Campus

The Chellgren Success Series flyers continue to be distributed to more than 70 campus partners, offices, and residence halls. Digital versions are also shared with the Eastern Advising and Retention Network (EARN), the English Department, and University Housing to expand outreach.

The Student Success Center actively promotes its services through branded marketing items such as stickers, fidget toys, color-changing pens, and other giveaways. These items are distributed during Big E Welcome, workshops, and tabling events, with focused efforts toward engaging first-year and first-generation students. At campus events, we also provide information cards and flyers highlighting the positive impact of tutoring on student retention and graduation outcomes.

During orientation, we share promotional items with incoming students and parents and deliver presentations on Student Success Center services, as well as key information about Eastern Kentucky University to support a strong start to their academic journey.

Future Plans for 2024- 25

While the Student Success Center team truly values our current space, we have begun to outgrow it due to the expansion of our programs and services. In collaboration with my new supervisor, I plan to explore potential opportunities for expansion to ensure the SSC continues to provide a welcoming and functional environment for students.

Over the past year, the Director met with the Departments of Mathematics and Science as well as the College of Health Sciences to discuss SSC services and the student support referral form. Building on this momentum, the SSC plans to connect with additional academic departments to strengthen partnerships and better support student success across the university.

Many students select mentoring as one of their Student Success Agreement goals. With the upcoming hire of a new Coordinator of Student Engagement, the SSC will have renewed capacity to expand programming and enhance the overall student experience. This position will focus on developing initiatives that strengthen mentor–mentee relationships, foster a sense of belonging, and provide additional opportunities for meaningful student engagement throughout the semester.

The SSC will also continue to strengthen collaborations with campus partners, including El Centro, First-Year Courses and Learning Communities, and the Study Abroad Office, among others, to promote holistic student engagement and achievement.





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