



# KNIGHTLY NEWS

STUDENT SUCCESS AND RETENTION UPDATES



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



Dear NJCU Gothic Knights:

As we step into spring and watch the campus come alive with blooming flowers and warm weather, I'm reminded of the energy this season brings—not just in nature, but in the work we do together at NJCU.

This time of year always fills me with a sense of purpose. We're getting closer to Commencement, where we'll celebrate another group of students reaching their goals and stepping forward as globally prepared Gothic Knights. It's a powerful reminder of why we do what we do.

In this edition of KnightlyNews, I'm excited to share updates and efforts focused on supporting student success and retention. I hope you find this issue both informative and useful as we continue our collective work to help students thrive.

Best Regards,  
Dr. Jonelle Knox

Assistant Provost (Academic Affairs) - Student Success and Retention



## YOUTH CORPS

New Jersey Youth Corps has relocated to a more accessible space in Vodra Hall 143B. Applicants and alumni are encouraged to ask questions or visit the updated website to apply and share their success stories. Twelve Cohort 2 members earned their High School Equivalency Diplomas. Some have started college, others are building job skills, and several began Patient Care Technician training at Hudson County Community College. The rest continue classes and are expected to graduate by the year's end. In January, Cohort 2 participated in a field trip to the American Dream Mall, which included visits to the Museum of Illusions and a Laser Tag session. Youth Corps staff also hosted the annual professional development day, which focused on team-building and strategic growth.



Congratulations to Instructor/Counselor Jahshae Stewart, recipient of the 2025 MLK Service Award presented by the Lee Hagan Africana Studies Center. Stewart's dedication to the Youth Corps and his community engagement through Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. continue to inspire students and colleagues throughout Hudson County. The program received over 60 applications for its final cohort, and recruitment is now closed. Staff reviewed applications, administered exams, and conducted interviews. A Parent Engagement Session occurred on March 6, and student orientation was held on March 10. NJ Youth Corps Jersey City exceeded its enrollment goal by 3%.



Youth Corps partnered with the Life Independence and Future Transitions (LIFT) program at A. Harry Moore School. The collaboration began in December with a student-led skit and grew into a weekly service initiative. Starting in March, members will assist twice weekly with classroom tasks, office support, and school climate efforts.

Program Director Nikketta Pressley attended the 40th Annual Corps Network Conference in Arlington, VA, joining youth-focused organizations nationwide. This year marks the 40th anniversary of The Corps Network and New Jersey Youth Corps. A statewide celebration is being planned, with an event in Jersey City. More details to follow.





## TRIO LEARNING COMMUNITY [TLC]



In recognition of the 39th anniversary of National TRiO Day, TRiO programs across the country highlighted the continued need to support first-generation and income-eligible students. At NJCU, TRiO/TLC observed the occasion with a week of events from February 24-28 focused on student engagement and advocacy.

The week began on February 24 with a TRiO Instagram Takeover, where student stories and program highlights were shared to raise awareness of TRiO's role in student success. On February 25, TLC Tales: Sharing Your Story invited students to submit photos and videos about their TRiO experiences. These submissions were shared with the NJCU community to illustrate the program's impact. February 26 featured TRiO and Treats, which encouraged students to participate in discussions about the purpose of TRiO, a federally funded initiative.



The campaign with TRiO was held on February 27. Students wrote letters to members of Congress in support of continued funding and legislative backing for TRiO programs.

The week concluded on February 28 with the first New Jersey Statewide TRiO Student Conference, where approximately 150 students and staff from various institutions convened to network and engage in conversations about student advocacy. Throughout the week, stories from TRiO alumni were shared to reflect on their educational paths and the program's role in their development.



In addition, TRiO/TLC Program Director M. Christina Velez was selected to attend the 2025 Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) Policy Seminar, held March 17-18. The seminar convened TRiO professionals nationwide to meet with lawmakers and advocate for first-generation, income-eligible students and students with disabilities.



## MEN OF COLOR INITIATIVE



In February, the Men of Color Initiative (MOCI) hosted the Level Up Panel, which brought together notable professionals, including the President of the Urban League, the youngest Director in Prudential's history, an MOCI alum, a doctor who is also an NJCU graduate, and a sitting college president. The panel, attended by 31 students, highlighted diverse career journeys and the impact of mentorship, leadership, and education.

Pastor, author and Ph.D. candidate Rohin Beach led a training on purpose and spiritual development, drawing from his experience growing a 3,000-member congregation. He emphasized community strength and introduced "sneaker leadership" as part of his academic research and lived experience.

Lewis Spears, Director of The Lee Hagan Africana Studies Center, engaged MOCI students in a session on leadership, personal growth, and responsibility. He shared lessons from his work and life and challenged students to reflect on their roles in shaping positive change. Following the session, three MOCI members accompanied Spears on a site visit to Microsoft for experiential learning and exposure to the tech industry.

MOCI continued its focus on career development through a series of workshops and guest engagements. These included a joint session with Career Services on authentically navigating professional spaces, a financial literacy workshop led by JPMorgan executive and NJCU alum William Pimentel, and an informal mentoring discussion with New Jersey State Trooper Clarence Turner, who offered guidance on public service pathways.

Over the past six weeks, more than 75 students have participated in MOCI or campus-wide events, reflecting the program's growing commitment to community, leadership, and personal growth.

## UNIVERSITY ADVISEMENT CENTER

The UAC has partnered with the admissions team to enhance support for first-year, transfer, and readmitted students. Freshmen Fridays and Transfer Tuesdays have been introduced to streamline the transition process and provide guidance as students integrate into the NJCU community. The advisement team has also strengthened its partnership with faculty, department chairs, and deans to align advisement efforts with academic programs to increase student success.



As part of registration and enrollment efforts, the UAC launched the "Get Knighted Registration Kickoff" on March 4, 2025, marking the start of Fall 2025 registration. The initiative features a competition among students based on credit standings, with categories designated as Pages (0-30 credits), Warriors (30-60 credits), Commanders (60-90 credits), and Knights (90+ credits). Each group is represented by a distinct knight symbol, and students accumulate points through advising sessions and registration events. The class with the highest participation earns the UAC Registration Trophy presented at the inaugural **Get Knighted Registration Fair** in late April.

In February, Douglass Bailey led the workshop "Executive Functions: How to Manage Your College Life," which provided students with strategies to stay on track academically. In March, Kathleen Banks facilitated "Degree Decode," a session that guided students through their degree progress reports, helping them understand major requirements and graduation pathways.

The UAC's engagement extends beyond workshops. "Knightly Chats with the UAC," a podcast hosted by advisors Douglass Bailey, Manica Jacques, and Steve Haber, has entered its third season on Spotify. The podcast shares academic insights, university resources, and discussions that reflect student experiences, serving as an additional platform for advisement and student engagement.

Through these initiatives, the UAC continues to foster student success, streamline advisement processes, and strengthen connections within the NJCU community.







## GEAR UP/COLLEGE BOUND

GEAR UP joined the Boys & Girls Clubs of Hudson County for their Mentoring Mixer, where students were introduced to the program and a new partnership was formed to expand mentoring opportunities. Additionally, the inaugural Parent Association meeting welcomed families into meaningful dialogue around upcoming events and ideas, further solidifying parent engagement in student success.

Program staff and scholars participated in the GEAR UP & EOF Town Hall, hosted by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, showcasing collaboration between the two statewide initiatives.

A new career development initiative was launched for 11th and 12th grade scholars, providing students with resume-building workshops, LinkedIn profile support, and mock interviews conducted by NJCU professionals. In partnership with Gothic Rack, scholars received professional attire for interviews and headshots.

Throughout February, upperclassmen scholars volunteered during breakfast and lunch periods, serving meals to their peers. These efforts contributed to their community service requirements—each scholar must complete a minimum of 25 hours to graduate. As a result of these efforts, the program earned second place in the statewide NJ GEAR UP competition for community service hours in February.

Saturday programming sessions have focused on preparing 11th and 12th grade scholars for life beyond high school. Activities include resume building, professional development, and mock interviews. NJCU professionals engaged directly with students to simulate real-world interview experiences, further supported by professional attire and headshots provided by Gothic Rack.

The program also welcomed Rowan University's GEAR UP/CHAMPS scholars to NJCU for a Saturday session filled with connection and collaboration. The visit offered an opportunity for students from both programs to build meaningful relationships and engage in peer learning.

On February 8, NJCU's Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program hosted an informational workshop for GEAR UP's 11th and 12th grade scholars. The session provided essential insights into the college application process and support services available, equipping students with tools to plan for their academic futures.



## LEARNING COMMONS AND TUTORING



Since launching on Wednesday, February 5, the Learning Commons has become a key hub for academic support at NJCU. With over 100 tutoring appointments held and 53 individual students served, the center continues to meet the growing academic needs of the campus community.

In response to student demand, services have expanded to include a second location at the School of Business in Room 106, increasing student accessibility across disciplines. Efforts to onboard additional tutors are ongoing, focusing on covering a wider range of courses and providing targeted support aligned with student requests.

The Learning Commons collaborates closely with faculty and academic departments to deliver personalized tutoring, study strategies, and course-specific support. It has quickly grown into more than just a study space—it is a supportive academic community designed to help students build confidence and succeed in their coursework. Students can visit the Learning Commons in the Congressman Frank J. Guarini Library (First Floor, to the Left) or the School of Business, Room 106. For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit the [Learning Commons Website](https://njlc.mywconline.com). Make an appointment at: [njlc.mywconline.com](https://njlc.mywconline.com)





## DR. LEE HAGAN AFRICANA STUDIES CENTER

The NJCU community gathered for a meaningful conversation exploring the significance of Black history and its connection to student excellence and success. Special thanks to Dr. Joy Smith, Associate Vice President for Student Persistence, for leading the discussion. The event was presented in partnership with the Black Alumni, Administrators, Faculty, Students & Staff Organization (BAAFSSO) and the Lee Hagan Africana Studies Center. A student in attendance noted, "Now this was an event worth going to!"

The Lee Hagan Africana Studies Center hosted the 35th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship Brunch, celebrating the legacy of Dr. King through the theme: "From Dream to Duty: Catalysts for Change and Hope for the Future."

Dr. Larry D. Johnson, Jr., President of Stella and Charles Guttman Community College, served as the keynote speaker. His address encouraged attendees to move beyond aspiration and engage in purposeful action toward social and educational progress. The event brought together students, staff, faculty, and community members in a shared commitment to educational equity and student success. Participation in this event supports the university's ongoing mission to empower students, promote academic persistence, and foster leadership grounded in service.

On March 14, middle school students in Bayonne engaged in a session focused on literacy and leadership during Read Across America. The speaker discussed his personal journey and read from his book, "You're the Answer to the Problem: From the Hood to Harvard and Back Again." Students also learned about the mission of the Lee Hagan Africana Studies Center and its commitment to mentoring young men. Appreciation is extended to Principal Monique Bullock for facilitating this outreach opportunity.

Second-grade students participated in a Read Across America event where the focus was on the value of literacy and learning. The visit included interactions with NJCU alumni and discussion about academic and community leadership. Thanks to Ms. Futrell and Brandi Warren for supporting the event and providing opportunities for student engagement beyond campus.

Council President Joyce Watterman visited NJCU for a Women's Herstory Month Chat & Chew, where she spoke about empowerment, leadership, and service. As the first Black woman to serve as Council President, her message, "Be Empowered & Activate," emphasized community impact over titles. Students and community members participated in a dynamic exchange centered on leadership, responsibility, and purpose.

