

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

# BEHOLD

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 1 • SPRING 2025

Dr. Robert Scott '91  
President  
Albany State University





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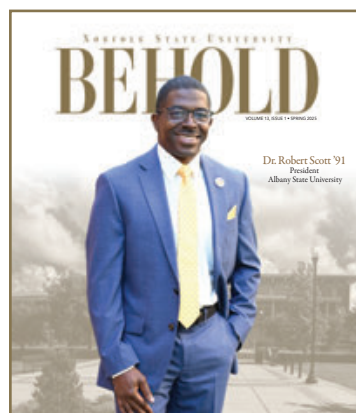
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Dr. Robert Scott '91  
President  
Albany State University  
Photo by Reginald Christian





*The groundbreaking ceremony for the New Science Building was held in April. The construction is anticipated to take approximately 2.5 years to complete. The site for the New Science Building is located in the open area between Brooks Library and Rosa Alexander Hall.*





# From the Desk of the President of Norfolk State University

As I begin my 7th year as the 7th President of Norfolk State University, I continue to be amazed at the transformative power of Norfolk State University. In this issue of *Behold*, we celebrate two milestones that remind us of our enduring legacy to change lives for the better.

One of our own, Dr. Robert Scott, who was shaped by NSU's renowned Dozoretz National Institute for Mathematics and Applied Science (DNIMAS), has recently become the president of a leading Black university, demonstrating the power of an NSU education to build leaders who uplift communities.

Dr. Scott began his tenure as President of Albany State University in Albany, Georgia, on May 1 (page 17). A graduate of DNIMAS, he stood out as the sole finalist in a nationwide search for president of the HBCU.

At the same time, we honor an emeritus professor who is approaching 100 years old. Throughout the decades, this trailblazer broke barriers in journalism and dedicated his life to shaping the voices of storytellers, fact finders and community advocates, ensuring truth and representation in media.

Dr. Grady James has had an indelible imprint on Norfolk State (page 3). His high standards and vision helped create a department that is recognized throughout academia and the professional world.

Together, these moments reflect Norfolk State's impact—empowering students to become leaders and cultivating educators who change the world through every life they touch. This is what it means to be a Spartan. This is how we change lives.

Please enjoy this issue of *Behold* as we honor and celebrate leaders and legends who have and who continue to change lives forever.

BEHOLD!

Sincerely,

*Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D.*

Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D.  
President, Norfolk State University



# NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY BEHOLD

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 1 • 2025

A MAGAZINE WITH GLOBAL REACH

The word "**Behold**" is often used by those who love Norfolk State. It sums up the excellence of the University and pride felt for it. That is why when it came to naming the magazine featuring the accomplishments and progress taking place at Norfolk State, "**Behold**," easily came to mind.

Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D.  
University President

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# A LEGACY IN FOCUS:

## *Honoring Dr. Grady James as He Approaches 100*

**A**s Norfolk State University prepares to celebrate the 100th birthday of Professor Emeritus Dr. Grady James in January 2026, we pause to honor his life's work, spanning decades in education, broadcasting, and mentorship, which has inspired generations.

This was epitomized in 2023 when Dr. James received the Distinguished Virginian Award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters and in 2022 when he was inducted into the university's Emerald Society for his longtime support.

Born in Ocala, Florida, Dr. James is a U.S. Army veteran whose educational journey reflects a lifelong commitment to learning. He earned bachelor's degrees from Bethune-Cookman College and Columbia College, a master's

degree from Indiana University, and a doctorate in educational media from Temple University—earned while in his fifties.

"You're never too old to learn and pursue a degree," said Dr. Stan Tickton, Professor Emeritus of Mass Communications & Journalism. "Grady taught us that by example."

Dr. James joined Norfolk State in 1960—then the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College—as Director of the Educational Media Center. He designed NSU's first television studios and equipped them with color cameras, lighting systems, news sets, and teleprompters. These facilities became the backbone of what would evolve into the Department of Mass

CONTINUED ON PG. 4





“

He was the first local African American to host a weekly TV show in our market,” “He made history and opened doors.”

—Stan Tickton, Professor Emeritus,  
Mass Communications and Journalism

CONTINUED FROM PG. 3

Communications and Journalism. He also helped launch WNSB 91.1 FM, the university’s radio station, and taught courses in television and radio production, setting standards in professionalism and performance.

“As an award-winning journalist and broadcaster, all of his students benefited from his expertise,” said Tickton. “He emphasized meeting deadlines, accuracy in writing, and clarity in announcing.”

Dr. James was more than a teacher—he was a doer. At WTAR-TV (now WTKR), the CBS affiliate in Norfolk, he produced and hosted Norfolk State Highlights, a weekly public affairs program that aired after the 10 p.m. news. The show, which ran for eight years, showcased NSU’s programs, students, and athletics, and earned the National Unity Award in 1977 for Best Educational Series.

“He was the first local African American to host a weekly TV show in our market,” said Tickton. “He made history and opened doors.”

Regina Mobley, ’81, anchor and reporter for WAVY-TV 10/WVBT FOX43, credits Dr. James with teaching her how to navigate the complexities of the newsroom.

“He offered a master class on how to survive and thrive in a television newsroom,” Mobley said. “He also made us aware of the subtle ways bias could appear in news production and insisted we hold ourselves to the highest standards. I share these lessons with pride, admiration, and love for Dr. Grady James.”

Dr. James’s most enduring contribution may be the Communications Conference he founded in 1985. The two-day event brought local and national media leaders to NSU, often at their own company’s expense, giving students rare face-to-face access to top professionals.

“These actions brought positive publicity and credit to the university,” Dr. James recalled. “These initiatives were routine, which we thought were important to the process, and the appropriate things to do.”

“He used to say that no one was bringing media professionals to campus, so ‘we’ should be the ones to do it,” said Dr. Wanda Brockington, former longtime Chair of the Department of Mass Communications and Journalism. “His ‘we’ was always both singular and collective.”

Brockington remembers the high-profile talent Dr. James brought to campus. National professionals included Mike Tirico, Michael Wilbon, Robin Roberts, Al Roker, Deborah Roberts, David Brinkley, Helen Thomas, Greg Gumbel, and Oprah Winfrey—just to name a few. Some, like Peter Jennings, were teleconferenced in via live satellite link.

**Above Left:** Dr. Grady James with the late Greg Gumbel, sports broadcaster.  
**Left:** Dr. Grady James; Helen Thomas, pioneering journalist and then-NSU President Dr. Marie D. McDemmond.



Photos courtesy of Norfolk State Archives



And these professionals were happy to participate.

“He always makes us feel valued and thanks us for enriching his students,” said Mark Walton, Associate Professor of the Professional Practice in Media Management at The New School. “But truthfully, it’s Grady who enriches us the most, just by being himself.”

“My favorite day of all was the Alumni panel on Thursday,” Brockington said. “Eventually, the funding ran out, but we resurrected it in 2005 as MCJR Week,” which continues annually on campus through the Department of Mass Communications and Journalism.

Dr. James always put the focus of each conference on student opportunity, which reflected his philosophy of teaching and professional experience.

“His tenure at Channel 3 led to many internships and job placements for students,” Brockington said. “And his example of excellence and advocacy helped launch careers across the media industry.”

Dr. Paula Briggs, retired Associate Professor, met Dr. James as a working professional years before joining NSU.

“I worked as a videographer at WTAR in the early ’80s. I kept hearing about this sports guy from Norfolk State who had created a program for the station,” she said. “Years later, I was honored to be his colleague. His career and his care for our students are unmatched.”

Beyond the classroom and the conference stage, Dr. James was known across campus as “the man with the camera.” Through his lens, Dr. James independently documented the visual history of NSU for over half a century. He also captured rare interviews, including Dr. Lyman Beecher Brooks and Muhammad Ali.

His accolades reflect that legacy. Dr. James is a member of the Hampton Roads Black Media Professionals Hall of Fame, the Virginia Commonwealth Communications Hall of Fame, and the NSU Athletic Hall of Fame.

Yet for all the awards and honors, it’s his character, consistency, and care that most define his legacy.

“For over 30 years, I have known Dr. Grady James as a devoted father, university professor, leader in broadcasting, churchman and dear friend,” said Bob Gore, President of Bob Gore Productions. “He was deeply committed to instilling not just technical skills but an understanding of the power of media in shaping culture and society. His emphasis on the importance of representation, ethics, and social justice in every story told continues to inspire and motivate us all.”

Happy 100th, Dr. James. We honor your story. We carry your lessons. We behold your legacy. **B**

“

He offered a master class on how to survive and thrive in a television newsroom,”

—Regina Mobley, News Anchor

Photo courtesy of Robert Randall



Mr. Grady James, Audio-Visual Aids

Photo courtesy of Norfolk State Archives

**Above Right:** Dr. James with the Distinguished Virginian Award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters along with his children: Dr. Patricia James and Christopher James.

**Above:** A photo of Grady from the NSU yearbook, 1971.





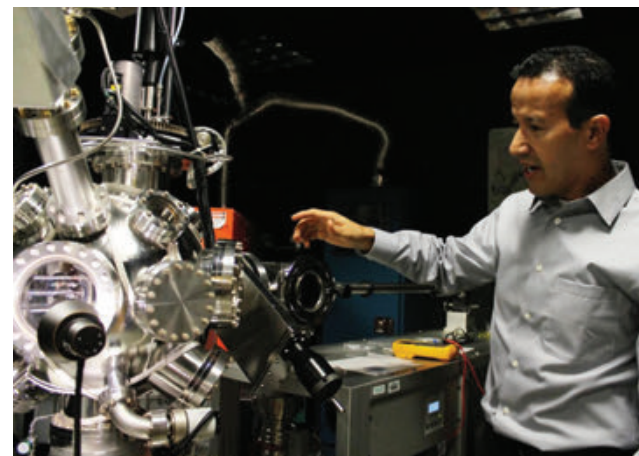
# Dr. Messaoud Bahoura Receives SCHEV & Dominion Energy 2025 Outstanding Faculty Award

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (M.A.'04)

If you need a lesson about nanotechnology that is factual and not what you see in science fiction movies or graphic novels, seek out with all due haste, Norfolk State University's Dr. Messaoud Bahoura — a 2025 recipient of the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) and Dominion Energy Outstanding Faculty Award. Bahoura is a distinguished professor of engineering and the director of the Center for Materials Research (CMR) at NSU. The CMR was established in 1992 and has grown into a leading facility for cutting-edge research, faculty development and student training in materials science disciplines.

"Receiving the SCHEV and Dominion Energy Outstanding Faculty Award is both humbling and deeply affirming. It represents a profound acknowledgment, not just of my individual efforts, but of a lifelong commitment to education, discovery and service. This honor reflects the culmination of decades dedicated to advancing innovation in renewable energy and materials science, while nurturing the academic and personal growth of students, especially those from underrepresented and first-generation college backgrounds," stated Dr. Bahoura. Fueled by the insatiable curiosity of youth, his early

education began at the University of Science & Technology – Houari Boumediene (USTHB) in Algeria, where he studied the physics of radiation. "From here, I nurtured my curiosity under the mentorship of renowned professors. This led me to graduate studies at the University of Paris XI, where I specialized in laser and matter at the Laboratoire Aime' Cotton." Bahoura received his Ph.D. in 1998 and was selected for the National Research Council's Associateship Award to work at NASA Langley.



Professor Bahoura has been with Norfolk State University since 2000, when he accepted a position as a research associate professor. Since the beginning of his tenure, he has been on the forefront of various types of cutting-edge research, including studies in renewable energy technologies, quantum materials, plasmonic materials and advanced nanomaterials. As the director of the Center for Materials Research and under his leadership, the CMR has secured more than \$22 million in research funding. "Our faculty has achieved significant scholarly output, including two patents, three book chapters, more than 175 peer-reviewed journal articles, and contributions to nearly 300 conferences," he stated with pride. Throughout his career, Bahoura has mentored hundreds of students, advised nearly two dozen doctoral and master's students, authored over 280 publications and procured over \$36 million in research grants.

Dr. Bahoura continues to drive innovative research and mentor the next generation of scientists through an ever-changing higher education environment. In a climate when higher education appears to be under attack, his philosophy on education's goals and dedication have never faltered. "Higher education is indeed a demanding and evolving landscape, especially today — but my commitment has never wavered. For over 25 years, I have served as a professor at Norfolk State University, an HBCU whose mission resonates deeply with my own: to empower, uplift and transform lives through education. What keeps me motivated is the impact I witness every day in the lives of my students."

Dr. Bahoura believes that education is more than just the conveyance of knowledge. "I believe that education is not just the transmission of knowledge, but a powerful catalyst for personal and societal change. I am constantly inspired by the resilience and potential of my students, many of whom enter my classroom uncertain of their place in the world and leave as confident leaders, scientists, engineers and innovators."

"This honor is not simply a personal milestone," he continued. "It is a celebration of NSU's collective vision — one where faculty are fully engaged, students are fully supported, and education serves as the greatest equalizer. I am proud to be part of a university community that believes in lifting others, creating opportunity, and living up to the charge of service, equity, and justice in everything we do."

**From the entire Norfolk State University family... Congratulations, Dr. Messaoud Bahoura! B**





NSU's Center for African American Public Policy, in partnership with YWCA South Hampton Roads and Dominion Energy, hosted the fourth annual Conference on R.E.S.T., which featured a keynote fireside chat with author and activist Mikki Kendall.

## 2025 Tenure Appointments

Congratulations to the Faculty who have received tenure, promotions or both. Eight faculty members received tenure, including six who also received promotions.

**Dr. Timothy Goler,**  
College of Liberal Arts,  
Tenure and Promotion to  
Associate Professor

**Dr. Proshot Kalami,**  
Associate Professor, College  
of Liberal Arts, Tenure

**Dr. Stephen Magu,**  
College of Liberal Arts,  
Tenure and Promotion to  
Associate Professor

**Dr. Shao-Hui Chuang,**  
College of Science,  
Engineering and  
Technology, Tenure  
and Promotion to  
Associate Professor

**Dr. Renny Fernandez,**  
College of Science,  
Engineering and Technology,  
Tenure and Promotion to  
Associate Professor

**Dr. Kingsley Nwosu,**  
College of Science,  
Engineering and Technology,  
Tenure and Promotion to  
Associate Professor

**Dr. Sujan Pant,** College of  
Science, Engineering and  
Technology, Tenure and  
Promotion to Associate  
Professor

**Dr. Bebonchu Atems,**  
School of Business,  
Dean, Tenure



## WNSB-FM Celebrates Big Wins in Coastal Virginia's 2025 "Best Of" Awards

WNSB-FM/HOT91 was recently recognized in the **Coastal Virginia Magazine 2025 "Best of" Readers' Choice Awards**, which celebrates the outstanding businesses and individuals who make Coastal Virginia such a vibrant community.

WNSB-FM earned honors across three categories:

- **Best Local Radio Station – Silver Winner**
- **Best Female Local Radio Personality – Silver Winner: Alana Mercedes**
- **Best Male Local Radio Personality – Bronze Winner: Ron TV**

The "Best Of" Awards are an annual tradition that highlight the people and places that make Hampton Roads exceptional. Winners are selected by popular vote, making these recognitions especially meaningful.

## Nicholson Earns MEAC Coach of the Year

Norfolk State head softball coach Angie Nicholson has been named Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) Coach of the Year. She is just the second coach in Norfolk State's program history to receive the honor after James Inzana achieved the feat in 2019 and 2021.

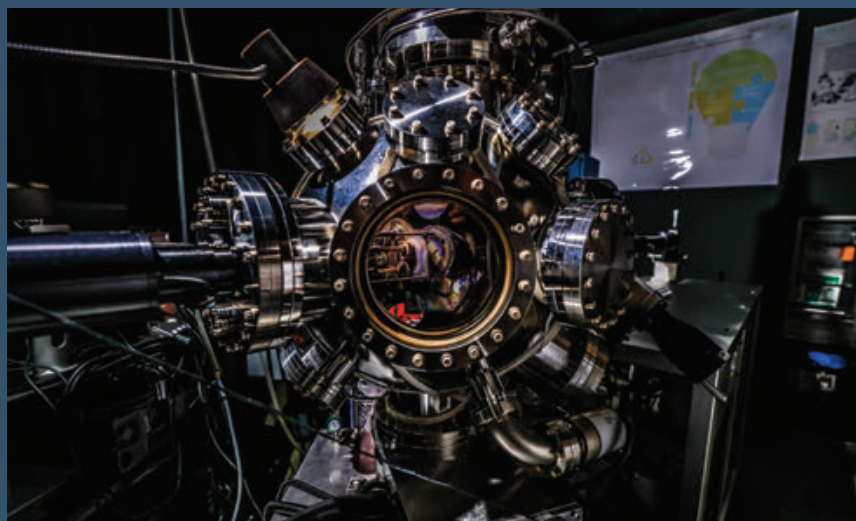






# *Norfolk State University Receives New Coveted* **CARNEGIE** **CLASSIFICATION**

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (M.A.'04)



Tuesday, April 1, 2025 marked another historical moment in the archives of Norfolk State University history . . . NSU is now ranked among the top 12 percent of colleges and universities in the United States. A few months ago, Norfolk State University received a new ranking in the American Council of Education (ACE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Carnegie Foundation) when the organizations published the 2025 Research Activity Designations. Norfolk State University has been classified as a Research College and University (RCU) identifying the university as an institution that has built solid research enterprises. “Norfolk State University is proud to be one of just over 500 schools in the nation to reach Carnegie Research classification,” said NSU President Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston. The Carnegie Foundation and the ACE simultaneously “unveiled an updated methodology designed to better account for and reflect the multifaceted, wide-ranging research



landscape of higher education institutions” in the United States, according to its news release. Previously, NSU’s Carnegie Classification was based on the institution’s master’s degrees granting status.

“We have worked hard and continue to work hard to be recognized as a University and College Research institution,” added Dr. Adams-Gaston.

According to the Office of the Provost, “This new designation recognizes our grant expenditures and doctoral programs.”

“The new Carnegie Classification recognizes Norfolk State as a research university and acknowledges our productivity with respect to our scholarship and research that the faculty are doing. It also recognizes the level of grants and contracts being completed at the university.” NSU’s annual grant acquisitions are upward of \$30 million.

Norfolk State University faculty are conducting a myriad of research including nano technology, quantum computing, and environmental impact studies on the Elizabeth River and the surrounding communities. Every day our faculty are being awarded with new grants and submitting proposals.

This latest Carnegie Classification puts Norfolk State University in the top 12 percent of research universities in the country. It’s the research that raises the level, not only impacting

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**“It’s the research that raises the level, not only impacting our students but impacting the wider society by the research we’re producing.”**

**–Office of the Provost**

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our students but impacting the wider society by the research we’re producing. The Provost Office said that “We’re on the precipice of meeting the criteria for R2 High Research status, an achievement that speaks to the commitment to intellectual growth and innovation at Norfolk State University.”

The 2025 Research Activity Designations are categorized in three different areas including Research 1: Very High Spending and Doctorate Production, defined with a clear threshold of \$50 million in total research spending and 70 research doctorates awarded annually; Research 2: High Spending and Doctorate Production, continues the previous requirement of \$5 million in research spending and 20 research doctorates awarded annually; and Research Colleges and Universities (RCU), a new designation that identifies research happening at colleges and universities that have historically not been recognized for their research activity. The new RCU designation, which includes NSU, comprises any non-R1 or R2 institution that spends more than \$2.5 million on research annually. Two-hundred and sixteen institutions hold the RCU designation.

Timothy F.C. Knowles, president of the Carnegie Foundation, said the recent changes to the Carnegie Classification were necessary to update the ranking system. “These updates to the Carnegie Classifications are the first step to bring a decades-old system into the 21st century. We are expanding our recognition of the range of ways colleges and universities engage in research and development. Over time, this will be good for the sector, for scholarship, for policymakers and for students.” According to the American Council on Education fact sheet, these updates are only the first steps in a series of significant changes to the Carnegie Classifications that will better reflect the multidimensional nature of higher education in America. **B**





# Supporting the Success of GLOBAL SCHOLARS

By JALEESA MANLEY



Ph.D. candidate Ved Reddy at the Council on Social Work Education Conference

Whether through athletics, research or graduate programs, international students choose Norfolk State University to be a part of their academic journey.

Over 100 international students, representing 21 countries, are enrolled at the University. The mixture of undergraduate and graduate students makes engineering, computer science, and public health the top fields of study. Recruitment for international students happens in various ways. Undergraduates are enlisted by NSU's Athletic Department. Graduate students apply according to their interests and the availability of desired programs.

Ph.D. candidate in Social Work, Velur Vedvikash Reddy, sought out the Ethlyn R. Strong School of Social Work. "Before coming to the USA, I worked as an Assistant Professor of Social Work in India. I completed an M.A. in Development Studies and a Master of Social Work from India," Reddy says. "I chose NSU because of its well-established reputation in Social Work. The research-based

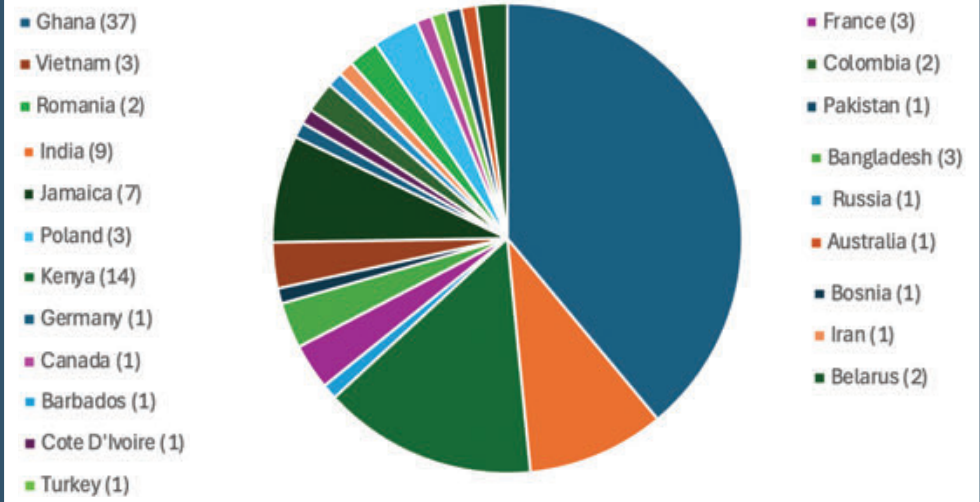
curriculum and mentorship under the renowned faculty at NSU aligned with my career goal, which made it a perfect fit."

Before international students can begin their new chapter at NSU, they must complete an application, official record of academic work (in their native language and English), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) for non-English-speaking students, SAT or ACT, Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) form, financial documents, Transfer Eligibility Certificate, and obtaining a VISA and Passport.

To support them through this transition, NSU's Office of International Student Services promotes academic success through high-quality educational assistance and services. To accomplish this, the Office generates required documents, processes petitions for nonimmigrant students, provides advisory and counseling services, and liaises between students, university departments, and foreign government agencies. It also facilitates



## International Student population at NSU (By Country)



**Left:** Flag Parade Day during International Festival Week.

the assimilation of international students in the larger Norfolk community and provides support services to enhance student success. They also hold numerous events throughout the academic school year, including International Festival Week.

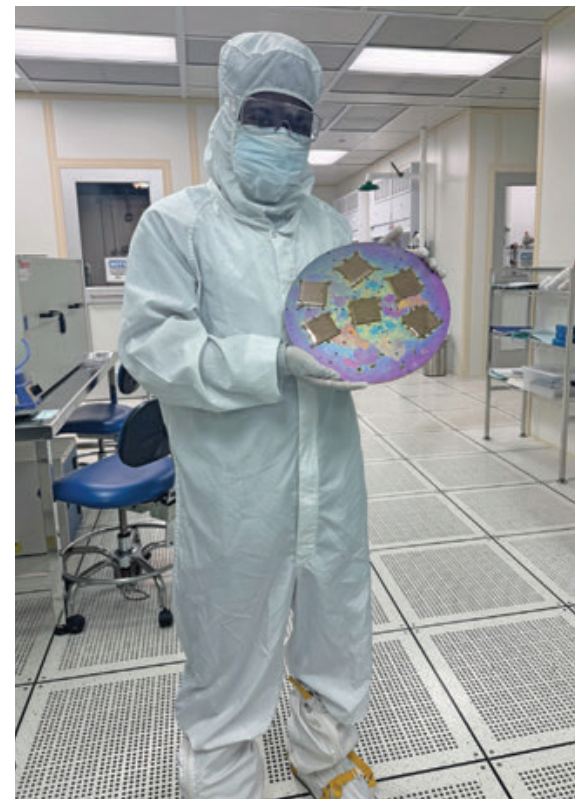
For Ghana native Cecil Manford, who is pursuing a Master of Science in Electronics Engineering, attending NSU has made college in the States smooth. "NSU has been incredibly supportive. The Office of International Student Services provides essential guidance on immigration matters, cultural adjustment, and academic resources," Manford states. "Faculty and staff in the engineering department have been approachable and invested in my success, which has made the transition smoother. The African Students Association and the Graduate Students Association communities here have helped me feel more connected and confident in my academic and personal growth."

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are known for their supportive

environments and commitment to student success, an aspect crucial for international students adjusting to life in the U.S. This exchange of ideas between domestic and international students at HBCUs promotes cross-cultural understanding, diverse perspectives, unity, and a shared commitment to global excellence.

"International students not only thrive academically at Norfolk State University, but they also find a strong sense of belonging within the Spartan community," reflects Mary Banks, Director of the Office of International Student Services. "Through supportive faculty, peer connections, and inclusive campus programs, students are made to feel seen, heard, and valued—creating an environment where they know they matter. This deep sense of connection contributes to high levels of satisfaction as they navigate their academic journey." **B**

**Right:** Graduate student Cecil Manford in the Micron-NSU Nanofabrication Cleanroom.





# *Thank You to Our Donors and Supporters.*



The Emerald Society recognizes individuals whose lifetime giving to Norfolk State University is \$50,000–\$99,999. Members of this prestigious group are honored with an elegant lapel pin featuring an emerald.



Norfolk State University received a \$400,000 gift from TowneBank in support of our student-athletes. The presentation was made during a special reception at the Chrysler Museum Friday, February 28, where the University also welcomed new head football coach Michael Vick. The TowneBank Endowed Athletic Success Fund will provide current and endowed essential scholarship support for student-athletes.



# NOW IS OUR TIME: **THE CAMPAIGN** for Norfolk State University

**We're in the final stretch of the Campaign  
—and we're so close to our \$90 million goal!**

Your support can help us finish strong and create real impact: more scholarships, better programs, and life-changing opportunities for our students.

**LET'S CROSS THE FINISH LINE BOLDLY  
—LIKE ONLY SPARTANS CAN!**



## **GIVE NOW.**

Text **nowisourtime** to **41444**.

▶ Give online at [www.nsu.edu/givenow](http://www.nsu.edu/givenow).

**Be a part of the most ambitious fundraiser in our history!**

# **NOW** IS OUR TIME

THE CAMPAIGN FOR  
NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

[www.nsu.edu/nowisourtime](http://www.nsu.edu/nowisourtime)







# HEALING IN UNIFORM:

By JALEESA MANLEY

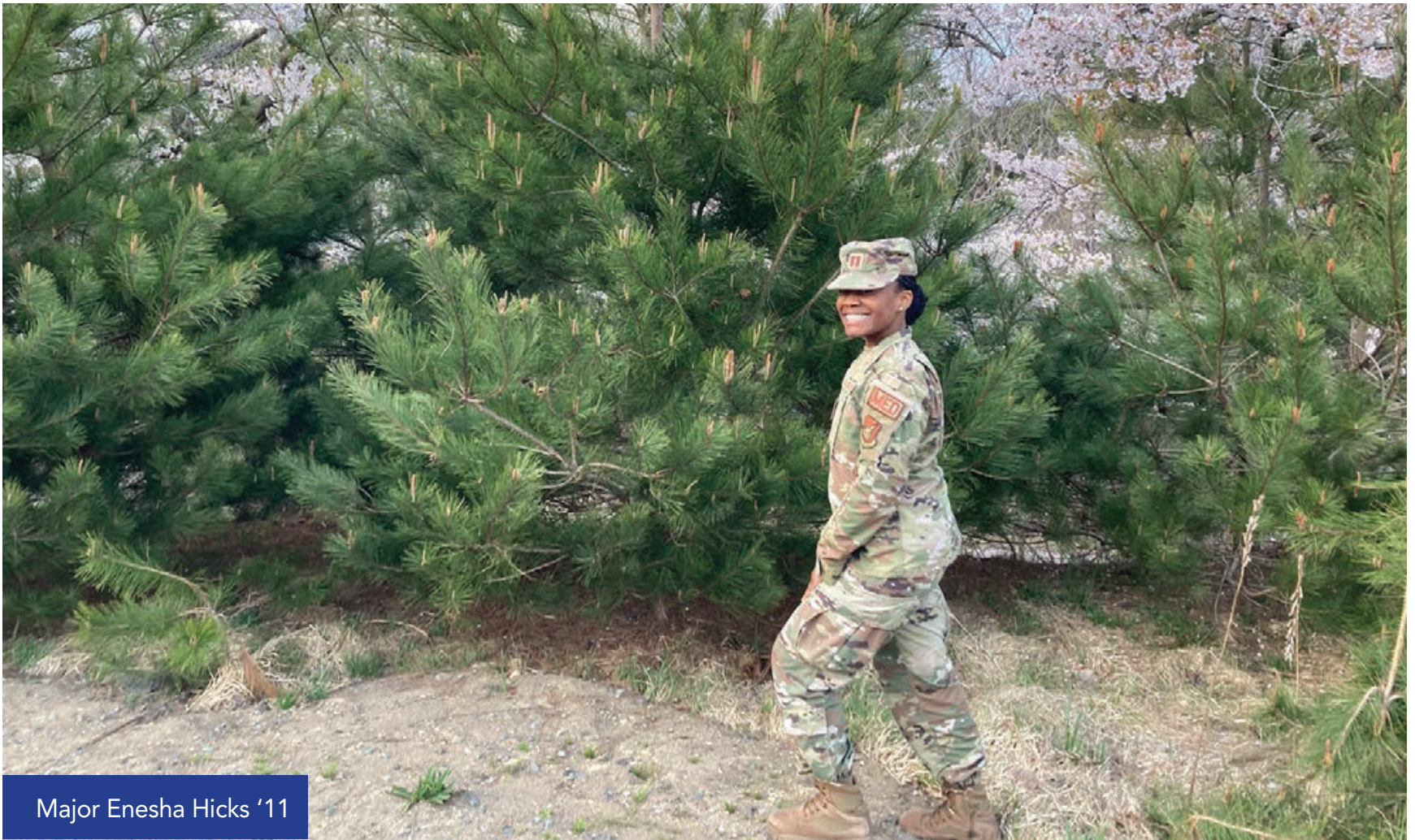
## *Nursing Alumnae Who Serve*

**T**wo of Norfolk State's nursing alumnae, Captain Kirsten Dickerson '11 and Major Enesha Hicks '11, have answered a higher call, serving in the military where they combine clinical expertise with unwavering dedication to care for those on the front lines. Both were in the Nursing Program under Dr. Bennie Marshall, then-chair of the Department of Nursing and Allied Health.



Captain Kirsten Dickerson '11





Major Enesha Hicks '11

Captain Dickerson is a Clinical Nurse at the 31st Medical Group, Aviano Air Base, Italy, where she plays a vital role in enhancing combat medical readiness. Inspired by her elementary school nurse, she attended Norfolk State University to receive her Associate Degree in Nursing and Capella University for her Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In January 2022, Captain Dickerson was commissioned into the Air Force and graduated from Officer Training School in March 2022. Since joining the Aviano Air Base, she has provided direct patient care, specializing in assessments, procedure assistance, patient education, newborn care, and telephone consultations, ensuring adherence to the highest standards set by the Defense Health Agency and The Joint Commission.

During her time at NSU, she heavily utilized Nursing and Allied Health's C.I.N.E. Simulation Lab, as it was her favorite place to learn and practice nursing skills, even on Saturdays. "The realistic mannequins and hands-on scenarios with the nursing instructors created an environment to strengthen my critical thinking, encouraged personal growth, inspired innovation, fostered compassionate patient interaction and most importantly built my confidence in providing safe, reliable patient care," she reflects. "I have been able to integrate what I learned at NSU into the military daily to support the mission of delivering quality care, improving health, and enhancing readiness with similar training technology to our members."

Major Hicks earned her undergraduate Nursing degree from Norfolk State in 2011. She received her graduate degree in Public Health Nursing from Johns Hopkins University in 2014 and holds a Doctor of Nursing Practice in Nursing Administration from George Mason University earned in 2020. Joining the Air Force in 2014, she serves as the En Route Patient Staging System Flight Commander at Joint Base San Antonio, Texas. In this role, Major Hicks directs team operations that support the Transportation Command mission, transferring wounded warriors from deployed locations to appropriate levels of care. She also served as a Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examiner and managed an expeditionary medical support hospital team that provided disaster relief in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria.


She credits Norfolk State for helping her become the leader she is today. "Norfolk State University laid the foundation for me to become a versatile leader with the resilience, critical thinking, and adaptability essential for success in dynamic environments like the military," she states. "The faculty exemplified a culture of excellence for students to model. I am profoundly grateful for their guidance and remain committed to paying it forward for future generations through mentorship, continuing NSU's rich legacy."

Captain Dickerson and Major Hicks show that healing doesn't stop at the bedside—it continues wherever they are called to serve. **B**









# DR. ROBERT SCOTT Scholar *Takes Helm of Georgia HBCU*

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**A**s a graduating high school senior, Robert Scott was grateful for the opportunity to attend Norfolk State University that coming fall. He would become the first in his family to attend college. At that time, he never imagined that it would lead him on a journey that would place him at the helm of a higher educational institution.

Last March, after a seven-month national search, Dr. Scott emerged as the single finalist to lead Albany State University as its 11th President and began his tenure May 1. He intends to use the lessons he learned as a student and professor at Norfolk State and his experiences in the corporate world to lead the Georgia Historically Black College and University.

According to its website, Albany State University is one of three public HBCUs in Georgia and has a \$266 million economic impact on the area. The University has an enrollment of 6,800 students and offers more than 35 undergraduate degree programs and multiple graduate programs.

CONTINUED ON PG. 18





## About Dr. Robert Scott

**Hometown:** Suffolk, Virginia

**High School:** John F. Kennedy

**Major:** Biology

**Class Year:** 1991

**Terminal Degree:** Ph.D., Georgia Tech, 1996

**NSU Professor of Biology**

### Educational Achievements:

- DNIMAS Graduate
- GEM Graduate Fellowship
- 1st DNIMAS Scholar to earn Ph.D.
- Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow
- Merck Postdoctoral Fellowship

### Corporate Achievements:

- Patented Inventor and creator of innovation in support of over \$20 billion brands
- Completed the Coca-Cola Catalyst Executive Leadership Program
- Lived in Mexico for almost 4 years as a Coca-Cola vice president
- Led global teams in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and Canada
- Mentored 100s of students and executives to have more impactful careers

### Corporate Positions

- Divisional Vice President of Global Product Development, Abbott Nutrition
- Vice President of Research and Development Latin America, Coca-Cola
- President of Research and Development, Kraft Heinz North America

**NSU Alumni Association Inc.: Lifetime Member**

**NSUAA Chapter Affiliation: DNIMAS**

**Giving to NSU: Emerald Society Member**

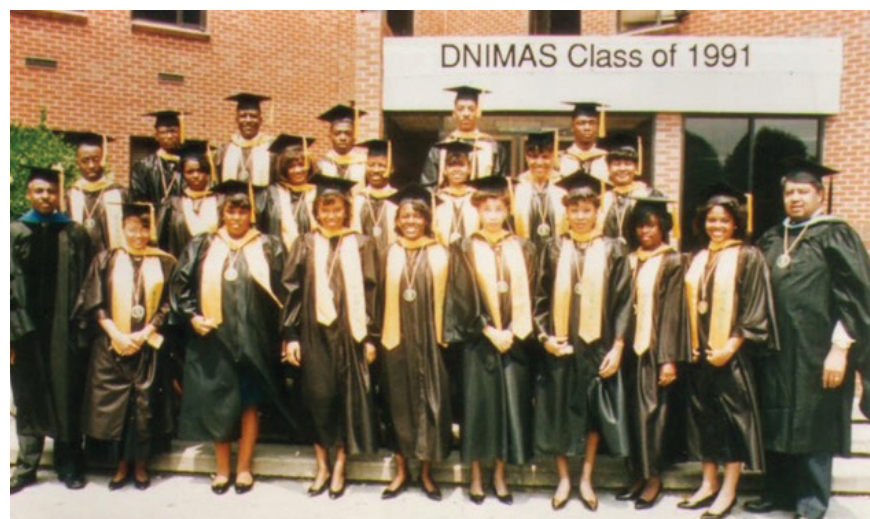
“On the surface, I may look a little atypical. But today’s university presidents are coming from outside academia.” — Dr. Scott

CONTINUED FROM PG. 17

“Once I got into college and began to understand what a university was and the work of a University President, I knew I wanted to impact the lives of young people the way that Norfolk State had impacted my life and the life of my family,” said Dr. Scott. “Norfolk State made me better than they found me.”

He entered the Dozoretz National Institute for Mathematics and Applied Sciences (DNIMAS) program, majoring in biology. Started by NSU President Harrison B. Wilson Jr., the scholars program seeks to address the shortage of minorities in science and technology and enrolls students who have the ability to earn terminal degrees. President Scott became the first DNIMAS graduate to achieve that goal, earning a Ph.D. from the Georgia Institute of Technology.

**Above:** NSU graduation picture with other DNIMAS graduates.  
**Right:** Sophomore year in front of DNIMAS office.



Photos courtesy of Dr. Robert Scott





## Learning, Earning and Giving Back

The DNIMAS program and Dr. Wilson left a lasting imprint on Dr. Scott. He was part of one of the first classes to graduate from the program, which had its first freshman class in 1986. He has praise for all of his professors and the staff of the program. “The DNIMAS program stands out, and every faculty member associated with it. They raised me and taught me how to be successful.”

Dr. Scott came to understand the full power and value of what he learned at Norfolk State when he arrived at Georgia Tech—a university much bigger than Norfolk State, with high-caliber students from across the country. He wondered how he’d measure up. He got his answer while taking a course that included graduate students and senior research candidates. “I remember being in my graduate-level biochemistry course and taking my first set of exams,” Dr. Scott recounted. “And when they handed out the scores for the first set of exams, I was among the top scorers in the class. That moment alone changed how I viewed my work and readiness for the next level. After that, I took off like a rocket ship.”

He’s always had the goal and the passion to give back. Dr. Scott understands that he owes Norfolk State more than a debt of gratitude.

And so it was important to him to be a role model—living proof that students like him—being the first in their families to attend college—see that they can be successful and what they can achieve. After earning his Ph.D., he chose to come back to teach at Norfolk State. “Dr. Wilson, the president at the time, and I spoke, and he gave me my first job. It was a full circle—he created the opportunity for me to go to school and then gave me my first job.”

## Dr. Scott’s resume is a mixture of academic and corporate experiences.

After teaching at Norfolk State, he went on to serve as an associate dean at Boston College and Spelman College. He later left academia and entered corporate life, working for some of the biggest companies in the world. Those experiences, he believes, have also helped prepare him to be president of ASU.

“I started my corporate life at Procter & Gamble. I spent most of my growing up and learning how to be in the corporate world at Coca-Cola,” President Scott explained. While at Coca-Cola, Dr. Scott led teams in the United States, Europe and Asia. He later headed up Coke’s Latin America research and development efforts as Vice President of Research and Development. He was Divisional Vice President of Global Product Development at Abbott Nutrition before serving as President of Research and Development at Kraft Heinz North America.

“On the surface, I may look a little atypical. But today’s university presidents are coming from outside academia,” said Dr. Scott. “The leadership for higher education and the leadership for corporate is not different. It’s very similar.”

“Corporate life has taught me how to make hard, fair and good decisions. It’s taught me how to prioritize resources. It’s taught me how to have conversations at all different levels, from federal government to local government. It has made me ready for the presidency.”

Because Norfolk State provided him with a life that he could not have imagined as that high school senior, Dr. Scott is ready to give back. He has a hunger and an ambition to provide students at Albany State with the kind of opportunities that made such an impact on his life.

“I’m in this job 100%. Schools like Albany State and Norfolk State are huge changers in social mobility,” he said. “Albany State is my opportunity to give back.” **B**



Photos courtesy of Dr. Robert Scott



**Above:** Dr. Scott with his team at the Coca-Cola Mexico office where he led the company’s Latin America research and development efforts.

**Bottom:** My wife (Rosalind) and children (Robert, Lydia and Nadia).



**MEAC**

# WE are the CHAMPIONS

Photo courtesy of Kinetic Stills Photography



**MEN'S  
BASKETBALL 2025**



Photo courtesy of Kinetic Stills Photography



**WOMEN'S  
BASKETBALL 2025**



Photo courtesy of Kyron Chiku-Martinez



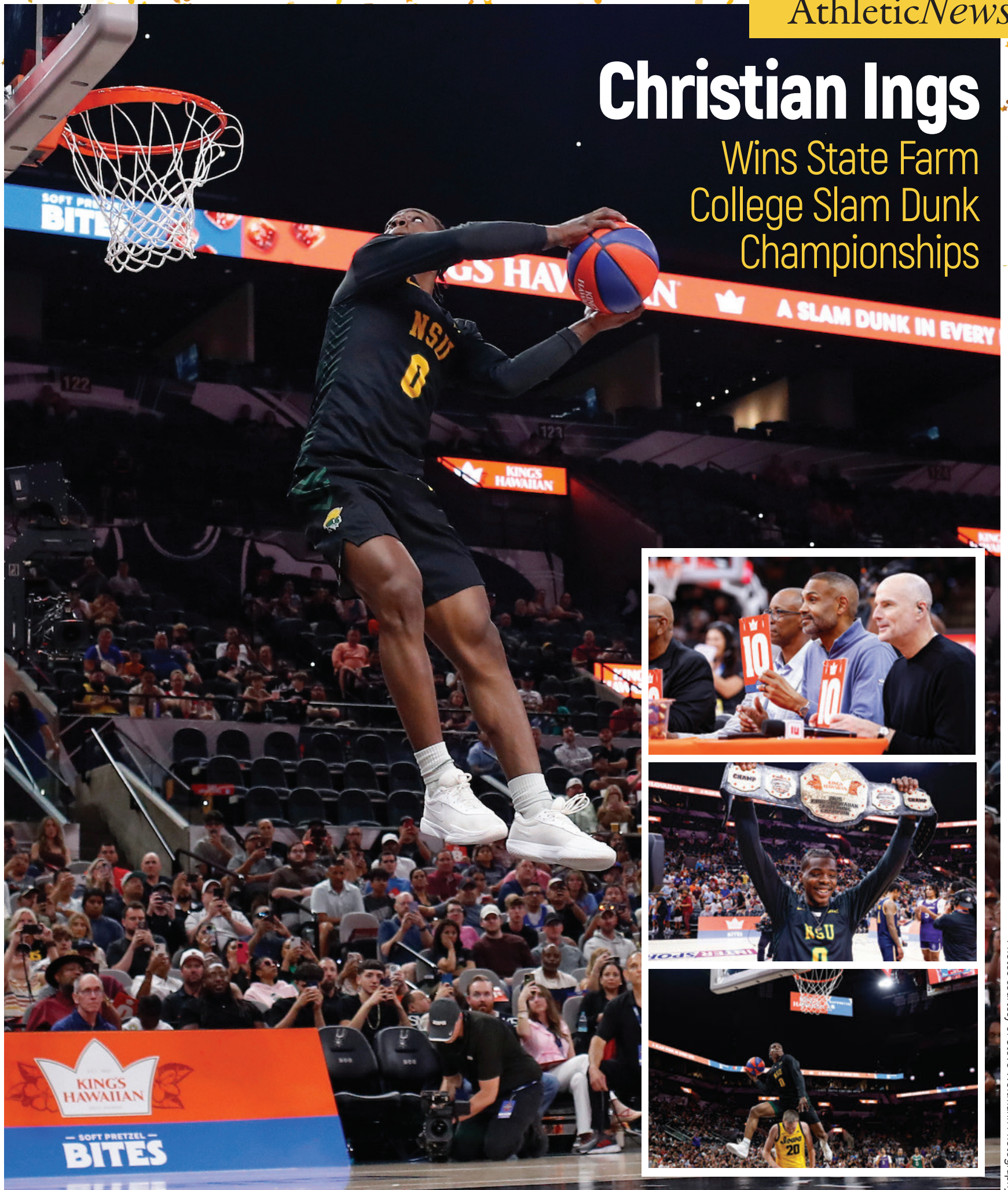
**CROSS COUNTRY 2025  
TRACK AND FIELD 2025**





# Christian Ings

Wins State Farm  
College Slam Dunk  
Championships



Photos courtesy of Steve Woltmann Photography



# WOODS RETURNS HOME

## to Lead with Heart and Purpose at Norfolk State

By NOAH SCHLEKEWAY



Photo by Monica Simon

For Jermaine Woods, basketball wasn't part of the original plan. He never dreamed of pacing the sidelines, drawing up plays, or guiding young athletes through college and life.

But sometimes, purpose finds you, especially when you're rooted in the community you're destined to serve.

"It all started at a JV game," Woods said. "I was watching my cousins play, and they weren't seeing eye to eye with their coach. During the game, they started coming over to me on the sideline, asking for advice. They ended up winning that night."

That moment stuck with Woods. Soon after, principal Cynthia Watson called with an opportunity to lead the JV boys' basketball team at Booker T. Washington High School.

That chance sparked a journey from the classroom to the court, from assistant roles to leading college programs, and ultimately back to where it all began.

Raised by a single mother in Norfolk, Woods speaks with deep gratitude for the educators and coaches who shaped his life. Names like David Floyd, Lonnie Blow, Darren Sanderlin, John Baker, and Cornell Parker come up often, each leaving a mark on his coaching style and values.

"Coach Blow was a big X's and O's guy, technical," Woods said. "Sanderlin taught me skill development and leadership, while Baker gave me the blueprint for handling the things off the court. They were all different, but they each helped shape who I am today."

Woods built his coaching resume one step at a time, from JV to varsity and to the collegiate level as an assistant and head coach. At Coppin State, he led his own program to success, while also changing the culture.

While at Coppin State, Woods successfully directed a strategic transformation of the program. Under his leadership, the Eagles recorded their winningest season in over a decade during the 2024-25 campaign to earn a berth in the WNIT Tournament, claiming a historic victory over Colgate. The win marked the program's second-ever postseason win.

Now, as he enters his fourth year as a head coach and first at Norfolk State, he calls it a "full circle moment."

"I needed to leave to grow. I wasn't ready a few years ago," Woods said. "But now I'm back, not just to be home, but to do the work. I'm here on business and I'm here to build."

He describes the transition to NSU seamless. From the



Photo by Monica Simon



**Left:** Woods accepts head coaching position. Athletics Director Dr. Melody Webb (left) and NSU President Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston (right) stand with him.

administration to academic support, Woods credits the people around him for creating an environment where he can thrive.

Woods also points to the strong sense of community on campus as a key factor in his positive experience. He says he feels genuinely supported and valued, both as a coach and as an individual.

"From President Dr. Javaune Adams-Gaston to the business department and athletics staff, everyone's been so welcoming," Woods said. "It's been smooth, and I'm so happy to be back where it all started."

Woods makes one fact clear: his vision goes beyond wins and losses. His mission centers on transforming lives and preparing young women for life after basketball.

He emphasizes the importance of developing the student, not just the athlete. Through mentorship, academic accountability, and a focus on character building, Woods strives to equip his players with the tools needed to succeed in every aspect of life. For Woods, the true measure of success is seeing his players graduate, grow as leaders, and make a positive impact in their communities.

"I don't want to be known for my record. I want to be known for what these young women do when they leave me," he said. "Graduation, jobs, building a life. That's the win."

As a leader, Woods lives by three core principles: assign roles, collaborate, and execute.

He believes that clearly defined roles create accountability and empower individuals to take ownership of their responsibilities. By ensuring everyone knows their purpose and how they contribute to the bigger picture, Woods fosters a culture of trust and efficiency within his team.

Collaboration is the glue that holds everything together. Woods encourages open communication and values diverse perspectives, knowing that the best solutions often come from collective effort. Once a plan is in place, he emphasizes execution, turning strategy into action with discipline, focus, and consistency.

"I want everyone to feel a part of this. Yes, I'll have the final say, but we build together," Woods said. "The culture is about the people, not the other way around. I need good people around me who share the same vision."

That vision already resonates with his players. Anjanae Richardson and Da'Brya Clark both entered the transfer portal following the

season. After Woods took the reins, both chose to return.

Both Clark and Richardson played key roles in leading Norfolk State to MEAC Tournament titles in 2024 and 2025. Both players received All-MEAC Third Team honors last year, while Richardson earned MEAC Sixth Player of the Year accolades.

"I decided to come back to NSU because I saw Coach Woods' vision for me and for our team," Richardson said. "Even when I was in the portal, our talks made me believe we could pick up right where we left off. Da'Brya and I have two years of chemistry, and we're ready to take it further."

Off the court, Woods finds strength in family. He speaks with deep pride about his mother and wife, the two anchors in his life.

Their unwavering support, he says, has been the foundation of his journey, shaping his values, grounding his decisions, and fueling his drive to lead with compassion and purpose. Whether celebrating milestones or navigating challenges, Woods leans on their wisdom and encouragement, crediting them as the steady forces behind his resilience and success.

"My mom raised me by herself. Everything I do is to make her proud," he said. "And my wife, she's a hall of famer. We went to school together from elementary through high school. She's held it down raising our kids while I was away coaching, and her jersey needs to be retired."

With new recruits on the way and a strong foundation already in place, Woods plans to build on the legacy of Norfolk State women's basketball, while making it distinctly his own.

His players have jumped on board, beginning with Cire Worley, who transferred from Coppin State to rejoin Woods. Worley said the decision to follow her coach was rooted in trust and purpose.

"Coach Woods helped me regain my confidence when I needed it most," Worley said. "Following him to Norfolk was a no-brainer as I believe that his leadership on and off the court is something to admire and embody. He leaves a footprint everywhere he goes, and I want to be part of that legacy."

Woods doesn't chase accolades, he builds lives. He leads with intent and purpose, aiming to leave a legacy that exists beyond the scoreboard.

Woods makes his impact in the quiet moments, offering a word of encouragement after a tough practice, checking in on a player's academic progress, or reminding them that who they are matters more than what they do on the court. He plants seeds of confidence and integrity, knowing they'll continue to grow long after the final buzzer.

Woods doesn't measure his legacy in banners or trophies. Instead, he looks to the lives of the young women he's helped shape. When they leave his program believing in themselves, valuing hard work, and striving to uplift others, Woods knows he has fulfilled his mission.

"I want people to say I did it the right way. That my players left as better people, better students, and we won some games too," he said. "I want the community to be proud, and that's the legacy I'm working for." **B**





Photo by Matt Patterson

# Vick Relishes Homecoming Opportunity at Norfolk State

By ALEX LEHMBECK

Prior to the 1997 opening of state-of-the-art facility William "Dick" Price Stadium, Norfolk State football fans flocked to Foreman Field on Saturdays to see the premiere program in the area. One confident kid made his way into the venue with his middle school football team, taking in his first breaths of a college football atmosphere. A talented athlete with gridiron dreams of his own, he quickly came to recognize the pride and respect given to the phrase "Behold the Green and Gold" throughout the games he attended. Playing for the "Spartans" Pop Warner team during his youth, the child felt a connection to the program – almost in an ironic sense. He called himself a Spartan in the earliest stages of his playing career, before the fame and status he'd earn years later. Before hearing his name called first in the 2001 NFL Draft. Before earning four pro bowl selections. Before transforming the quarterback position



for decades to come. Over two decades later, the stars aligned to bring the now legendary figure back home. Norfolk State Director of Athletics Dr. Melody Webb formally introduced Michael Vick as the University's 19th head football coach on Dec. 23, 2024 – a full-circle moment for one of the greatest athletes Hampton Roads has ever seen. From the moment Norfolk State announced the hiring of Coach Vick, buzz and anticipation built rapidly around the program. The monumental move drew headlines from all the modern heavyweights: ESPN, Sports Illustrated, The Athletic, NBC News, and more. Coach Vick's presence and the ensuing attention brought an immediate limelight to one of the top public universities in the south – and the largest Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Virginia.

The era began with a star-studded press conference on NSU's campus just a few days after making the hire. Media members filled up the medium-sized venue, as well as several household names that carry significant weight both in the Hampton Roads community and on a national level – NBA Hall of Famer Allen Iverson and NFL Hall of Famer Bruce Smith smiled and photographed the moment with the same enthusiasm as the Norfolk State alumni in attendance.

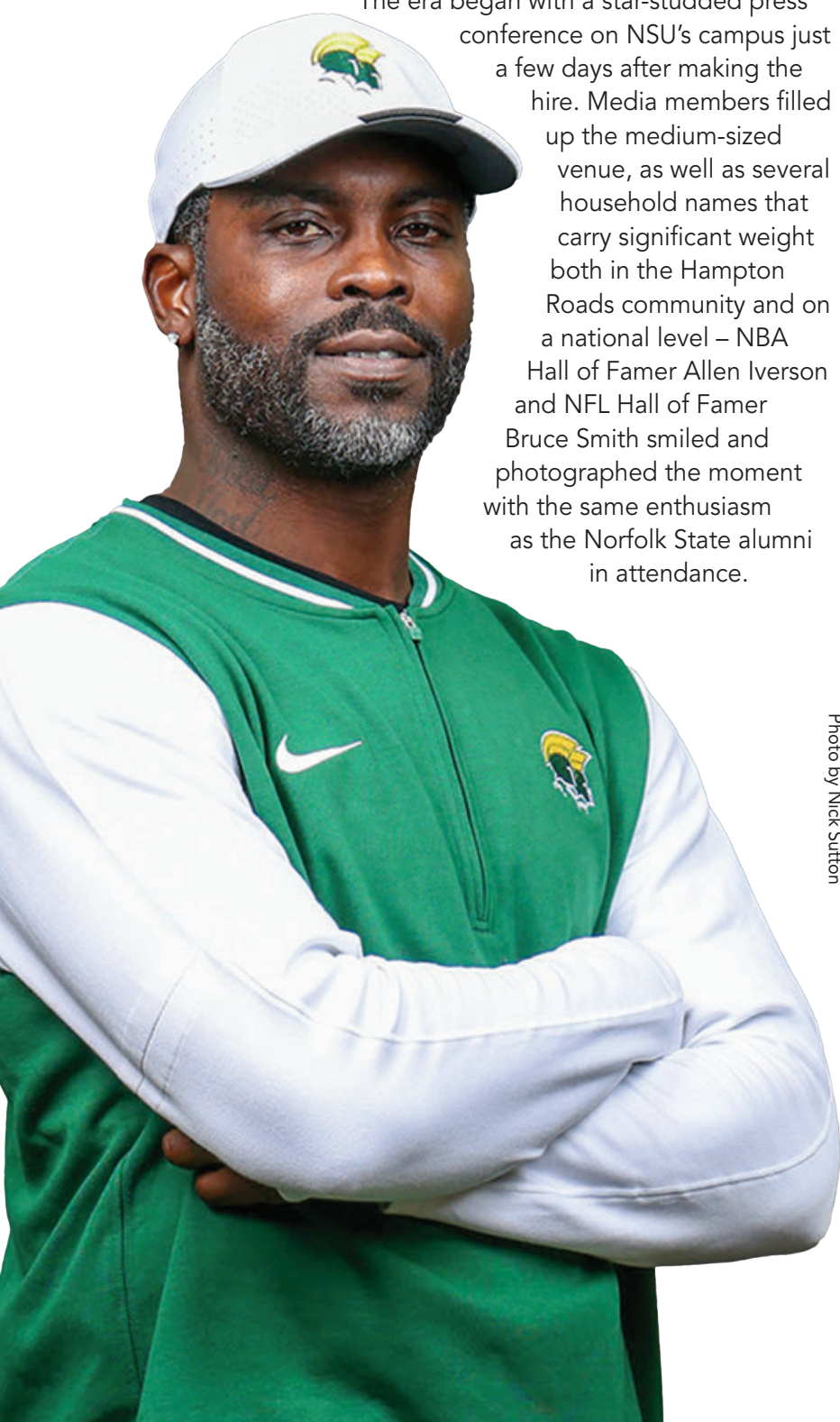


Photo by Nick Sutton

**"I've been away for so long, ever since I went away for college I haven't been here consistently. Now I have a chance to be around my loved ones, so that means more to me than anything."**

– Michael Vick

"I'm just happy," Iverson told reporters after the ceremony. "I'm proud of him. We deserve this. It's a beautiful day, and I'm just happy to be a part of it." Vick outlined the mindset he brings to the program, and the steps it will take to cultivate the winning environment he envisions. Every member of the team – from the coaching staff to the student-athletes to the student managers – will play a pivotal role in a broader movement to accomplish a championship goal. Grateful for the opportunity to lead the next generation through the sport that shaped his life, Vick paid homage to Norfolk State's motto: We see the future in you. "You see the future in me, I see the future in myself, and I hope that the young men that we serve see the future in themselves," he said. "That is the most important part of all of this. We are going to make the most out of this. We're going to win–; we're going to have fun and give this 110 percent." After a three-week search process, Vick announced the first eight additions to his coaching staff. The prestigious group included four former NFL players and several award-winning leaders. Manning the defense, Terrence Garvin played in the NFL for six seasons, crossing paths with Vick as members of the Pittsburgh Steelers organization during the 2015 season. Previously holding the co-defensive coordinator title at Florida Memorial, he preaches an aggressive, energetic style of football – the Lions forced a SUN-conference best 13 fumbles last season while ranking second in the league with 13 interceptions. Four-year NFL offensive lineman Elton Brown leads the offensive line unit, coming to Norfolk State from the Apprentice School. A consensus All-American at Virginia, his jersey No. 61 was retired by the Cavaliers in 2011. Vick and his staff wasted no time attacking the transfer portal, attracting talent from across the country to join the culture-building movement at Norfolk State. The Spartans announced 30 signees on National Signing Day – 22 mid-year enrollees and eight high school seniors. A hometown hero, Vick faced little difficulty recruiting the 757 – a hotbed of football talent for decades. The impressive class included four transfers

CONTINUED ON PG. 26





Photo by Matt Patterson

**Left:** Michael Vick with offensive line coach Elton Brown overseeing football practice at NSU  
**Below:** NBA Hall of Famer and Michael Vick's long-time friend Allen Iverson attends Vick's press conference.



Photo by Nick Sutton

CONTINUED FROM PG. 25

from Battle of the Bay rival Hampton, as well as former Delaware State defensive back Kahleef Jimmison, a standout from Newport News. While student-athletes rush to join the buzz Michael Vick has brought to the area, he has taken the time to appreciate his familiar surroundings. The life-changing decision to enter the coaching realm has brought him closer to family, friends and mentors. "I've been able to be with my mom every day, being able to see her and my sisters and my cousins – seeing everybody growing up," Vick said on ESPN's Sportscenter last month. "I've been away for so long, ever since I went away for college I haven't been here consistently. Now I have a chance to be around my loved ones, so that means more to me than anything." After a month of offseason strength training and conditioning, the new faces on the roster – as well as the long list of players from the fall who chose to return – could not wait to get spring practice underway. The time had come to put the pads on and play some football. The team responded positively to Vick and his staff from their first moments on the field. USF transfer signal caller Israel Carter emphasized the significance of every piece of advice he received from the man who molded the most important position on the field. "It's everything a young quarterback wishes for," Carter said. "I'm following his path. He led the way for us, so I'm trying to implement my game into that." While making some of his largest contributions to the sport at the professional level, Vick holds an esteemed status from his college days as well. Accumulating a 22-2 record in two years as Virginia Tech's starting quarterback, Vick led the Hokies to the national title game in a magical freshman campaign – finishing third in the Heisman vote in the process (the top finish ever by a VT player). Less than a month after receiving the Norfolk State head coaching job, Vick was selected as a member of the 2025 College Football Hall of Fame Class. Now in a leadership position, Vick can pass his knowledge along to the next generation of quarterbacks. He

welcomes the learning curve of his own, however, as he navigates his first season on the sidelines. "Experience is the best teacher," Vick said. "Just getting out here and doing it, believing in it, standing up in front of the guys each and every day trying to deliver the right message– trying to get them motivated, trying to get them pumped and ready to go. There's a lot of moving parts, but at the same time it's nothing like standing in the pocket with 300-pound linemen coming at you. This is a lot easier, so I feel like I can handle it." Over a dozen carefully crafted practices culminated in the day Norfolk State fans anticipated most – well, aside from the first fall kickoff. Fans flooded Dick Price Stadium for the team's annual spring game, eager for their first peek of Vick on the sidelines. The event lived up to the highest of expectations, producing a tremendous crowd that included several Hampton Roads legends. Iverson, NFL veteran Tyrod Taylor, lightweight champion boxer Keyshawn Davis, Virginia state senator Aaron Rouse and congressman Bobby Scott headlined the celebrity lineup of attendees. "It was good to see," Vick said. "Those guys have been telling me they are going to come out and support, and I expect to see that all season. It's good to have the local hometown heroes come out. Guys who our players can look at as role models, great citizens of the Hampton Roads and just good people." The Spartans take on Towson in a Thursday night home matchup on Aug. 28 to open the 2025 season, and Vick vows to put a team on the field that will make the Norfolk State fanbase proud. "I've got to be accountable," he said. "I've got to be responsible. I have to do all the things that I have to do to show [the players] that I'm trying to be the best head coach that I can be and the best leader that I can be." When the Spartans run out of the tunnel for the first time, Norfolk State students and alumni will not be the only supporters in attendance. The entire Hampton Roads has this team's back. **B**





# ERIC MINOR: From the Gridiron to the Gamepad

By BRIA HARRIS

**E**ric Minor's journey into the world of Esports was not born from a desire for fame or fortune, but with a simple Twitch stream. What he saw there wasn't just entertainment, but opportunity. As he watched tournaments, something clicked. The game he casually dominated among friends had a competitive scene, one that paid. One he could win.

Minor recently won the RallyCry National Championship for EA Sports College Football 2025, sponsored by Tyson Foods. Each finalist was a student of Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

A former two-sport athlete, Minor played both football and baseball, the latter at the collegiate level. That background gave

him more than physical skill, it gave him a mindset of a competitor. "I never lose, I either win or learn," he says, echoing a mentality forged through years of grinding on the field. That same fire now fuels his presence in competitive gaming, where his deep gaming experience and athletic discipline give him an edge many players don't possess.

His entry into the tournament scene wasn't strategic — it was organic. Friends and acquaintances, impressed by his skill, would sometimes sign him up for competitions before even telling him. "They had that much confidence in me," Minor says. That confidence was not misplaced. As someone who's been gaming as long as he can remember, Minor believes he just sees the game differently. Faster reactions, smarter plays, and a stronger sense of timing—traits developed from years of sports and sharpened through endless gaming sessions.

Though he doesn't have a formal sponsor yet, Minor isn't lacking preparation. He trains consistently with a close-knit crew of friends, breaking down film, learning new strategies, and staying sharp on the sticks. These sessions, more than anything, reflect his athlete's approach to gaming: practice, refine, repeat.

Although Minor entered his competition as an individual, Norfolk State has a growing competitive esports team. In April, several students competed using the gaming space in the Lyman Beecher Brooks Library.

Justin Ellis, Associate Director of Student Activities and the esports team coordinator, believes the team is more than just about gaming. "The vision of the esports team is to provide students an opportunity to connect in commonality of their love for video games," Ellis says. For many students, the team offers space to build camaraderie and express shared interests in a structured, competitive setting. The Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC), to which Norfolk State belongs, has been an active proponent of this digital revolution. "The MEAC has been a major supporter of the esports community at its member schools," Ellis notes. Their backing has helped programs like NSU's gain traction and legitimacy within the academic and athletic dynamics. As esports continues to evolve, universities like Norfolk State are ensuring their students have a place in the game —literally and figuratively. With an increasing institutional interest and a rising tide of interest nationwide, the future of collegiate esports looks brighter than ever.

As Eric Minor looks ahead to a December 2025 graduation, his passion for esports remains grounded in the thrill of true competition. While he's currently stepping back from active tournaments, that break might only be temporary. With a mindset powered by focus and purpose, Minor lives by the words: "Your lack of commitment is an insult to those who believe in you"— a reminder that whether in the game or in life, dedication makes all the difference. **B**



# AUDRICIA McKINNEY: ADJUST, ADAPT, EXCEL

By KESHA WILLIAMS



**Above:** Audricia McKinney in a Interview with Carla Babb, Voice of America in Afghanistan.

**W**hen Audricia McKinney retired after 23 years of service in the U.S. Army, she knew that she wanted to continue serving in a meaningful way. In November 2024, she was named the Executive Director of Women in Defense. The organization engages, cultivates, and helps women to advance in the national security sector.

"This role aligns perfectly with my purpose. Having spent over two decades in uniform, I understand how vital it is to support and strengthen the national security workforce—not just through professional development, but also through mentorship,

**Below:** Trip to the Middle East with the Secretary of Defense.



"The more opportunities you give yourself to experience different things, the more likely you are to find the career path you are supposed to be on."

– Col. McKinney

connection, and access to opportunity," she said. "As Executive Director, I have the privilege of giving back, shaping future leaders, and helping ensure that talent, regardless of background or pathway, is recognized and cultivated. In today's evolving security environment, we need innovative, capable leaders across all sectors, and Women In Defense plays a critical role in building that pipeline."

McKinney, who retired at the rank of Colonel, was commissioned as a second lieutenant at Norfolk State on May 1, 2002, and retired on the same date in 2025. As the daughter of two veterans, she always saw herself serving in the military. "I just imagined it differently. I wanted to be a drill sergeant!" she said. "However, my veteran parents encouraged me to go to college and apply for an Army ROTC scholarship. I did, and I received a four-year scholarship to Norfolk State University."

"That set me on the officer path. Looking back, I'm incredibly grateful for their guidance. It opened doors for me to lead, grow, and experience things I never could've imagined, from providing counsel to senior leaders at the Pentagon to mentoring the next generation of national security."

According to U.S. Department of Defense reports, the percentage of women of color who reach the rank of Colonel is very low.

"In fact," said McKinney, "less than two percent of officers make the rank of Colonel, and with the Army being approximately 80 percent men and 20



**Right:** Audricia McKinney receiving an award in Egypt as a member of the Multinational Force & Observers.

**Below:** Her promotion to Lieutenant Colonel.



percent women, the number of women who reach that level is already low." She continued, "I recognize the significance of that achievement, and I don't take the responsibility lightly."

McKinney earned a degree in Business with a concentration in Finance. However, her career path took her in another direction.

"I graduated the year after 9/11 (Spring 2002), during a time when the Army—like the nation—was undergoing rapid change. The section of the Pentagon that was struck on 9/11 housed many of the personnel records used to determine branch assignments for new officers. As a result, that year's assignment process became highly unpredictable," she explained.

Around 2005, the Army began experiencing a significant loss of officers leaving the service. A pilot program was introduced to help retain talent by allowing junior officers to enter specialty fields earlier than usual. One of those fields was Public Affairs.

"I was offered the opportunity through that program. At first, I

was hesitant; after all, I had majored in business finance and had not considered a communications track initially," said McKinney. "But once I stepped into the role, I quickly discovered I had a natural gift for storytelling, messaging, and strategy. What began as a career adjustment soon became a calling."

"I attribute my climb in the communications field to curiosity, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning. I sought challenging assignments, embraced feedback, and learned from mentors who helped shape my approach. That journey led me to serve with the Secretary of the Army, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Pentagon, and numerous political appointees. I helped lead strategic communication efforts on some of the Department of Defense's most complex and high-profile initiatives." Consequently, McKinney's advice for today's college ROTC students: don't discount your ability to adjust career paths.

"The more opportunities you give yourself to experience different things, the more likely you are to find the career path you are supposed to be on."

McKinney is enjoying her new role and the opportunities it presents, but she can't help remembering where it all began.

"It all seemed to happen so fast," she said. "I can still remember graduation day with Norfolk State's battalion wearing those white gloves." **B**



# Norfolk State Celebrates THE 114TH COMMENCEMENT



Degrees were conferred to approximately 600 students on Saturday, May 10, during Norfolk State University's 114th Commencement. The ceremony, held at William "Dick" Price Stadium on the NSU campus, also saw the commissioning of six second lieutenants in the U.S. Army.

Actress, producer, activist and author Sheryl Lee Ralph, was this year's special guest. Ralph, whose career spans film, TV and theater, was honored recently with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in the TV category. She currently stars in ABC's hit show *Abbott Elementary*, for which she earned an Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series for her portrayal of "Barbara Howard," Abbott's veteran teacher.

During the ceremony, Ralph received the Presidential Commencement Medallion. **B**









## Graduating to Greatness

Norfolk State University honored six of its alumni at the 2025 Alumni Awards Reception & Dinner. These graduates demonstrated exemplary leadership in their professions and in the community. They personify the mission and goals of the University. Five graduates were selected to receive the 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award.



**Ms. Rhonda L. Allen**, a native of Chesapeake, Virginia, received a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from Norfolk State University in 1983. After graduating from NSU, Ms. Allen began a successful civil service career with the U.S. Department of Defense, where she held a variety of positions for 37 years. In 2015, she retired as a senior budget analyst for the Military Intelligence Program Resources Directorate, which was under the auspices of the Office of

the Secretary of Defense for Intelligence at the Pentagon. For more than 30 years, Ms. Allen has dedicated her time, talent and treasures to the Norfolk State University Alumni Association serving in various positions, including Ms. Alumni (2015-16) and a two-term chapter president of the Military Alumni Chapter Foundation, Inc.



**LTC (Ret.) Larnell B. Exum** is the principal and founder of a boutique government consulting firm, The Exum Group LLC. A highly decorated retired U.S. Army Ranger, LTC Exum has decades of legislative experience, having served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for House Affairs under the Obama Administration. Prior to his appointment in the Obama Administration, LTC Exum was the Deputy Chief of the Senate

Army Liaison Office where he was responsible for building and strengthening relationships between the United States Senate, its staff and the U.S. Army leadership. LTC Exum received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Norfolk State University in 1985.



**COL (Ret.) Leonard W. Jones** is an Attorney-at-Law with more than 30 years of experience focusing on matters involving Bankruptcy Law, Commercial Real Estate Law, Estate and Probate Law, and Civil and Criminal Litigation. After being admitted to the bar, COL Jones served as Asst. General Counsel for the N.Y.C. Dept. of Probation and later opened a private law practice in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y., and Chicago, Illinois.

Simultaneously, he served in the United States Army Reserves in the Transportation Corps and the Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps. COL Jones received a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from Norfolk State University in 1988.



**Mr. Robert M. Randall**, affectionately known as "Frog," was drafted into the United States Army and served a tour of duty in Vietnam. After completing his Army obligation, Mr. Randall returned to NSU and earned his Bachelor of Science degree in education in 1973. He then accepted a position as a Housing Inspector with the City of Norfolk. After years of service, he was promoted to Senior Inspector. Mr. Randall retired from the City

of Norfolk after 38 years of service.





**This year's "Graduate of the Last Decade Award" recipient is William T. Bynum.**

Mr. Bynum received his Bachelor of Science degree in music education from Norfolk State University in 2020. Currently, he is the Associate Director for Student Activities & Leadership at Norfolk State University, where he fosters inclusive, engaging experiences that empower students and enhance campus life. He also mentors students through various leadership initiatives, including the Male Initiative Programs, and serves as an advisor for the Student Government Association and the Royal Court.



**Viola Vaughan-Eden, Ph.D.**, is a professor and program director for the Ethelyn R. Strong School of Social Work at Norfolk State University. Dr. Vaughan-Eden is nationally and internationally recognized for her expertise in child maltreatment. As a forensic and licensed clinical social worker, she has evaluated and/or consulted on more than 3,000 cases of maltreatment and provided expert testimony more than 700 times. Throughout her 35-year career, she has lectured across the globe to multidisciplinary professionals on topics related to child and family welfare. Dr. Vaughan-Eden received her Master of Social Work from Norfolk State University in 1987. **B**



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Frank Elliot, NSU instructor of music, is a long-time Faculty member who consistently gives back to the University. He stands with a miniature version of his Now is Our Time lamp pole banner. The larger banners line Presidential Parkway. Thank you for your generosity!