



COLLEGE *of* HUMANITIES,  
SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND THE ARTS

# 2024-25 Annual Report



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# WELCOME TO CHSSA!

In organizing as a new academic unit within UNCW, the College of Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts seized the opportunity to establish and define our strong, shared identity. Our rich variety and breadth of disciplines all speak to being human in important ways, and those lessons reach across campus to virtually every UNCW student, regardless of major.

This has been our north star in charting our path forward and in defining our identity as a new college and community here at UNCW. We are necessarily focused on the holistic elements of higher education: interdisciplinarity, innovation, and preparing students to be global citizens. Our faculty and staff foster a shared sense of purpose, ensuring a supportive environment that values mentorship, collaboration, governance, transparency and academic achievement.

We follow through on these values with conviction to promote excellence, build career readiness, advance knowledge and cultivate creativity. This annual report is intended to provide a snapshot of how we work to fulfill those goals through institutional data and stories of great moments throughout the year. I eagerly anticipate how future reports will chronicle CHSSA's continued growth and development.

*Discere Aude*, Dare to Learn, has been UNCW's motto since its founding in 1947. It's displayed in my office hallway and even on my computer as both a reminder and a source of inspiration. To learn is to create, to take a risk, to move through the complex processes of growth. We adhere to this motto and build on this challenge with every decision, and you'll see that reflected here.

I invite you to immerse yourself in CHSSA: the inspirational research of our faculty and students, the culture of academic rigor and the construction of a connected community that prepares students to thrive and meet the challenges of our modern world.



Sincerely,

Stephanie Caulder  
Founding Dean

# Inspired. Connected. Prepared.

These three descriptors are the embodiment of CHSSA's mission and vision. Selected and deliberated on by a group of dedicated college stakeholders, they have become strategic pillars under which we define our strengths and our goals.

You'll find those pillars embedded in the [Strategic Plan](#), established this year to steer and inform the development and growth of CHSSA as it moves toward a bright future in an evolving academic landscape. Aligned with the UNCW Strategic Plan, it lays out specific action items for how the college will strive toward those goals.

[Learn more about our pillars and the Strategic Plan >](#)

This year, the college recognized its first group of honorees for the CHSSA Faculty and Staff Awards: those who exemplify the values and strengths inherent in these pillars. Congratulations, all!

- Inspired: CHSSA Research Award – Recipient forthcoming
- Connected: CHSSA Service Award – Colleen Reilly
- Prepared: CHSSA Teaching Award – Abigail Upshaw
- CHSSA Staff Excellence Award – Maggie Bannon





# Building Our Community

The Dean's office gave out pizza, swag and good luck for finals during the CHSSA affinity event this spring. Join us next time!



## Thinking Outside the Test Tube



What does research at CHSSA look like? A qualitative community survey of public policy impacts. An examination of the cultural legacies of an arts movement. Analysis of how we learn a second language. Our academic community is making a measurable impact through their research, and CHSSA's upcoming research celebration will showcase that.

[Learn more about CHSSA research >](#)

# CHSSA

## Numbers at a Glance



**3,332**

Enrolled in  
CHSSA majors  
or graduate  
programs

**1,031**

Graduates



**76%**

Graduation rate

**133,445**

Credit hours



29.8% of credit  
hours at UNCW

**87%**

Retention



2024  
2025

# ACADEMICS

## 100 Programs

**30** Undergraduate  
majors &  
pathways

**15** Graduate  
programs

**46** Minors

**9** Certificate  
programs

## New Programs

CHSSA offers innovative opportunities for students that transcend traditional academic “silos” of study. These programs were recently added to our expansive catalogue:

- Interdisciplinary Studies, BA and MA
- Art & Art Education Bachelor's/Masters Combined Program
- Digital Arts minor
- Digital Humanities minor
- Linguistics minor
- Political Entrepreneurship and Leadership minor
- Pop Music minor





# Nature, Culture and Resilience: The Down East Project

An interdisciplinary team of students in the Master of Coastal and Ocean Policy (MCOP) and undergraduate film studies program launched an exciting new project in the coastal Down East region.

Led by Jennifer Biddle and Laura Dunn, they conducted personal interviews with residents about their lives and livelihoods, synthesizing them into a documentary that examines the impacts of coastal policy.

“Speaking with locals who have deep generational ties to the land, culture, and coastal politics gave me insight that will forever shape how I approach my work,” said MCOP student Kenney Huntsman. “Stepping into the role of producer reinforced the importance of meeting communities where they are and engaging with politically and scientifically complex issues with greater empathy and care.”

“This experience will undoubtedly make me a better political and legal advocate, and I hope the film students involved can say the same about their own growth within their discipline.”







## Head Over Heels for UNCW Musical

In November, the Departments of Music and Theatre teamed up for their first musical in 15 years, and audiences fell in love.

Hailed as a “must-see” and “an endlessly entertaining experience” by the state journal Cultural Voice of North Carolina, the university’s production of *Head Over Heels* sold out on opening and several other nights.

The jukebox musical comedy was based on the 16th-century romance *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* by Sir Philip Sidney, set to a soundtrack by 1980s pop band sensation The Go-Gos.

“This collaboration was a natural outgrowth of the work done on crafting the Musical Theatre and Dance Minors and the deep artistic relationships between our faculty,” said Nancy King, chair of the Department of Music and professor of voice. “Students always love to participate in a musical, and giving them the chance to shine in this interdisciplinary medium was of paramount importance to us.”

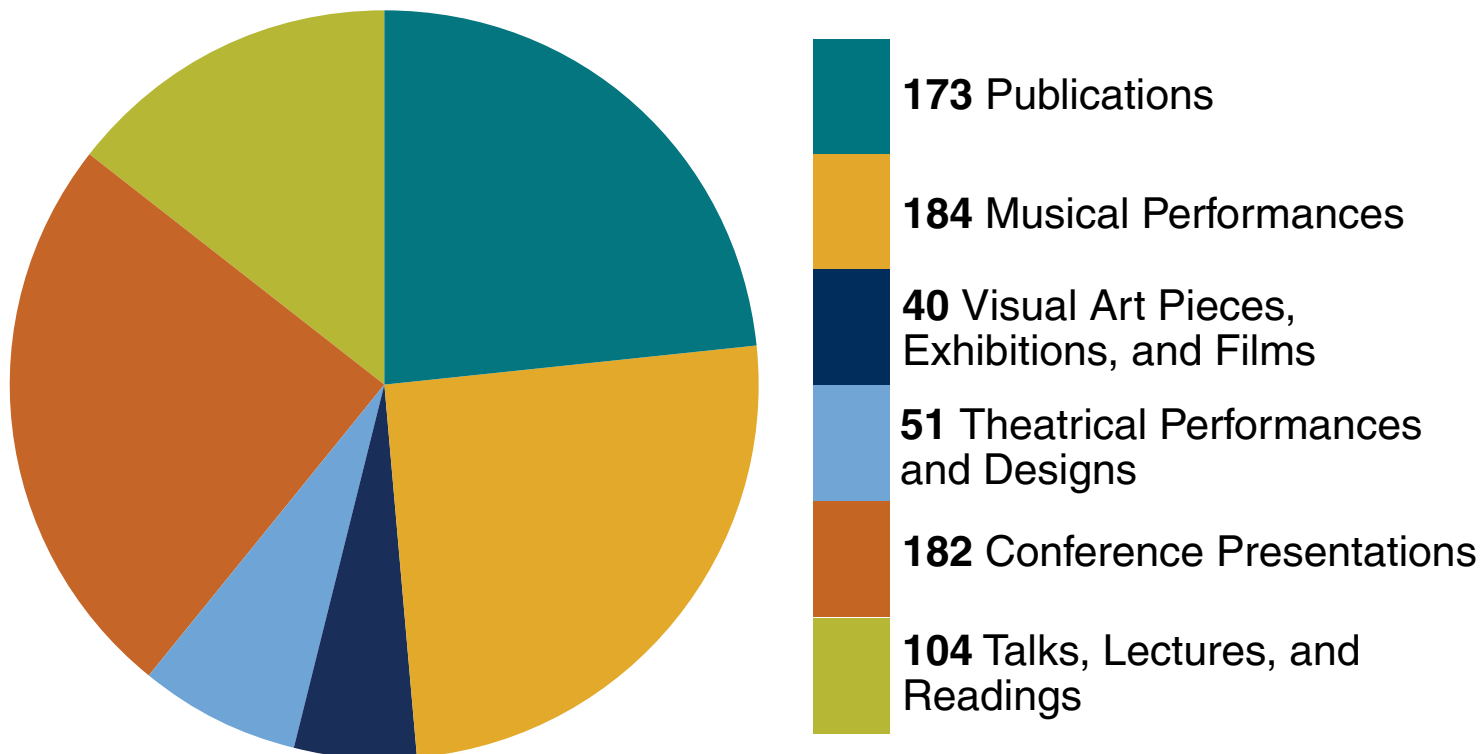
Under the direction of Mark Sorensen, professor of costume design, and Nancy Podrasky Carson, dance instructor, the beautifully costumed cast “got the beat” against a Renaissance-era backdrop.

Students from both programs participated in the production. Music faculty member Bettsy Curtis was nominated for a 2025 Wilmington Theater Award in the category of Musical Direction for her work on *Head Over Heels*.

Theater and music lovers won’t have to wait another 15 years for another collaboration. The departments aim to provide an interdisciplinary production every two years.

# RESEARCH

At CHSSA, research and scholarly activity take many different forms. Take a look at our faculty's accomplishments throughout the 2024-2025 academic year.



The Department of Anthropology has added an exciting new research facility to Sartarelli Hall: the Rogers Ancient DNA Laboratory. In this controlled environment, researchers can examine material to extract and analyze ancient DNA samples.



**\$238,845**  
Awarded internal grants

**\$1,293,864**  
Awarded external grants





Jill Waity, professor of sociology and chair of the UNCW Department of Sociology and Criminology, was selected as one of four 2024-2025 RTI University Scholars, opening up new and collaborative research opportunities.

This is the first time a UNCW faculty member has been selected as part of the yearly cohort since the program started in 2014. In it, researchers from RTI, a large nonprofit institute, partner with senior academics to develop joint research opportunities.

Waity's research into disaster-related food security and public health communication was well-suited to the institute's project goals.

Alongside her RTI partners, she worked with community organizations in rural areas on disaster preparedness and related communication strategies, navigating the different ways people communicate.

## Broad Research, Real Impact

Associate professor of Spanish and linguistics Danielle Daidone was chosen this spring for a Fulbright Postdoctoral Research Award, through which she'll be researching second language acquisition in Barcelona.

Daidone's research project, "Learning Similar-Sounding Words in a Second Language: A Help or a Hindrance?" will analyze how bilingual Spanish and Catalan learners perceive different sounds in English and how that perception influences their acquisition of English words.

"We know vocabulary size matters, but what about your vocabulary makes a difference?" she explained as the crux of the study. "If you learn a lot of words that sound very close to each other, does that help you notice how they are different? Or does that only confuse you?"

Daidone will be the first World Languages and Cultures faculty member to receive a Fulbright award while at UNCW, and the project will be her first in-depth language research opportunity in Spain.







# ADVANCEMENT & GIVING

Support from the CHSSA community helps advance priority initiatives and programs across the college, increasing access to student opportunities and enhancing the Seahawk experience. Whether it's learning on the latest and greatest technical equipment, debuting a groundbreaking new project or giving back to others, donations make great moments possible.

## Seahawks Give 2025

What a wave of support! CHSSA set records during Seahawks Give, our primary fundraising event in April.

**\$77,690** raised

**100%** of giving challenges met

**2.5x** increase in donations from 2024



## A New Chapter for Kenan

This year, the Kenan Auditorium Expansion Fund launched to support the future of a performing arts venue that has served Wilmington for over 50 years.. Donations will contribute toward an updated reimagining of this historic building, with improved audience amenities and innovative arts education spaces.

## Make It Possible

Your contributions help make all this possible.  
Contact Katie Crosby to learn more.





# Scholarship Development

Seahawks Give also planted seeds for two new scholarships this year! These go directly to our students, enabling outstanding achievement and academic support.

- Doug Cameron Memorial Scholarship in Film: the first endowed scholarship in Film Studies, created by Charles and Pat Cameron in memory of their son.
- Bolduc/Kirscher Award in Media Production: an endowed scholarship for Communication Studies students who are out to make a serious impact through their work.

Other scholarships launched this year:

- Sally Edgerton Fellowship in Creative Writing
- Sampson Broughton Scholarship in Communication Studies
- Charlotte Wessell Public History Travel Fund

During Homecoming, the Department of Communication Studies dedicated its new Applied Learning Classroom, made possible by the Tom and Mimi Cunningham Support Fund for Communication Studies.

The classroom is equipped with state-of-the-art podcasting equipment, a smart board, pod seating, and huddle spaces that collectively provide a professional and engaging environment for students in the applied learning program, Pier601, to host client meetings, brainstorming sessions, and record their podcasts. The classroom also serves as a learning space for students across the communication studies curriculum.

**“Mimi and Tom have been our most steadfast and significant partners over the years. This applied learning space will get our students ready for the marketplace.”**

- Rick Olsen '87, chair of the  
Department of Communication Studies

Mimi Cunningham served as the director of university relations and director of community relations over the course of her 26-year career with UNCW. She led UNCW's 50th anniversary observance in 1997-98 and a \$3.1 million higher education facilities bond issue with 13 area community colleges in 2000; managed crisis communications for the university through six hurricanes; and taught and mentored more than 150 communications student interns until her retirement in 2008.







## Moore Retires from CHSSA Leadership

CHSSA bid farewell to Senior Associate Dean Kemille Moore this year, celebrating her legacy as a steadfast and devoted advocate for faculty and students alike.

Her December retirement closed out 33 years of advancing academic excellence in a variety of administrative roles, extending her expertise and guidance to so many across the campus community.

[\*Read more about her retirement >\*](#)

**We thank each of these retirees for their contributions to UNCW and the CHSSA community, and wish them all the best!**

- David Bollinger, Communication Studies
- Mark Cox, Creative Writing
- Jane MacLennan, English
- Ken Mentor, Sociology & Criminology
- Valerie Rider, World Languages & Cultures
- Jerald Shynett, Music
- Pam Toll, Art & Art History

# Dean's Office Team Grows

This year, CHSSA filled its leadership and staff ranks.

- Paul Townend, Associate Dean for Student Success and Policy
- Gail Killman, Assistant Dean for Administration and Resource Management
- Rachel Mahoney, Public Communication Specialist
- Nkem Ozoemenam, Research Administrator
- Rhianna Sloan, Business Officer
- Jamie Brummitt, Faculty Fellow
- Nathan Pilkington, Faculty Fellow

Also this year, CHSSA fully staffed its Academic Resource Center. The ARC team plays a vital role in promoting student success through personalized and coordinated advising that empowers and inspires students in all aspects of their academic journey.

## Welcome, New Chairs!

CHSSA thanks these four outgoing department chairs as they hand over the reins to their colleagues.

### Art & Art History:

Aaron Wilcox ► Andi Steele

### Creative Writing:

Mark Cox ► Melissa Crowe

### Film Studies:

Tim Palmer ► Carlos Kase

### Philosophy & Religion:

Teddy Burgh ► Heath White







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