

2025-2026

# EDUCATION BUZZ

Centenary University's School of Education and Humanities Newsletter

## Artists, Authors, and Activities Galore at CycloneCon 2026

Stormtroopers, artists, local authors, and a hometown celebrity came to Centenary on Saturday April 11th for our 3rd annual pop culture experience, CycloneCon. This year's event featured nearly 100 vendors, artists, authors, and video game developers in the exhibitor hall, including Centenary alum author Kristina Garlick and artist Elizabeth Calienni (Calienni Creates). Special guests in the exhibitor hall included Tim Jacobus—the original Goosebumps illustrator—and cartoonist and illustrator Darren Auck.

The day included a jam-packed schedule of workshops, panels, trivia, and other activities for all ages. Guests attended workshops in stage combat and theatrical makeup (led by CU theatre professor Stephen Davis), Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Trivia (organized by CU alum Maria Turker), story time with superheroes (with CU education majors and faculty), and a horror movie screening (which featured costumes by CU fashion professor Jolene Richardson). Check out a full rundown of all the activities at the [CycloneCon website](#).

The CycloneCon team also partnered with the County College of Morris's Student Electronic Gaming Organization (SEGO) to organize a Super Smash Bros tournament. A classroom full of gamers convened for heated matchups to find the champion for the day.



At the Sitnik Theatre, BAFTA- and Emmy-nominated actor (and Hackettstown native) Jimmi Simpson joined event director, Dr. Erica McCrystal, and class of 2026 valedictorian, Tanner Sullivan, on stage for an interview followed by an audience Q&A. Mr. Simpson shared stories about growing up in Hackettstown, his early acting career, and plans for the future. He then met with students and CycloneCon attendees for photos, autographs, and further questions.



CycloneCon 2026 showed energetic community engagement on campus, bringing together pop culture fans of all ages. Students, faculty, staff, alum, local businesses, and local community members came to Centenary for a day to celebrate fandoms and show appreciation of art, comics, film, theatre, gaming, and literature.

## Centenary Seniors Honored with Science Teacher Scholarships to Inspire the Next Generation

Main Engine Start, a New Jersey nonprofit organization dedicated to sparking student interest in science and engineering, proudly awarded the fourth annual Christopher John Stupak Scholarship for the Next Generation of Elementary School Science Teachers to four exceptional graduates of the Raritan Valley Community College Associate of Arts in Education program.

This year's recipients — Amy Sandoval Cruz (Flemington, NJ), Kaitlyn Farnon (Bridgewater, NJ), Jessica Powell (Stirling, NJ), and Ashling Rodriguez (Branchburg, NJ) — are currently seniors at Centenary University majoring in Elementary Education. Each student received a \$6,000 scholarship to support their upcoming full-time, unpaid student-teaching semester during Spring or Fall 2027.

Established in memory of Christopher John Stupak, a beloved and award-winning 5th and 6th grade science teacher, the scholarship recognizes future educators who demonstrate both academic excellence and a passion for making science exciting, accessible, and fear-free for children. With this year's awards, Main Engine Start has now surpassed \$70,000 in total scholarship support over the past four years.

"These remarkable future teachers truly reflect the spirit of Main Engine Start and the legacy of my brother Christopher," said Peter R. Stupak, founder and president of the nonprofit. "They possess not only strong academic ability, but also the enthusiasm, empathy, creativity, and energy needed to help children see science as an adventure filled with curiosity and discovery. Their excitement for learning will inspire countless young minds."

The scholarship recipients emphasized that their experience at RVCC provided far more than a strong academic foundation. They described a close-knit and supportive learning environment in which classmates encouraged one another to grow personally and professionally while developing confidence as future educators.

"RVCC is once again proud to celebrate alumni of the Associate of Arts in Education program who were named recipients of this generous scholarship as they have gone forth



to position themselves as exceptional teacher candidates," said Professor Kathryn Suk, Coordinator of Education Programs at RVCC.

"These scholarship recipients represent the very best qualities we hope to cultivate in future teachers," said Professor Jaqueline Arturi, Program Advisor and Director of the RVCC/Centenary Partnership Program, "They are intelligent, caring, resilient, and deeply committed to helping children succeed. It has been a privilege to support them on their educational journey."

The four recipients have already distinguished themselves through innovative, hands-on teaching approaches and a genuine commitment to fostering scientific curiosity and confidence in elementary-aged students. They will begin full-time student teaching placements in elementary classrooms during the upcoming academic year.

"As we celebrate these scholarships today, we are also witnessing the beginning of four meaningful careers," Stupak added. "These young educators will touch lives in ways they cannot yet fully imagine. Through their work, they will help shape the next generation of scientists, engineers, healthcare professionals, teachers, and innovators — one inspired child at a time."

### About Main Engine Start

Main Engine Start was established by Peter R. Stupak to help students of all ages discover their aptitude and passion for science and engineering through engaging, hands-on learning experiences. The organization also provides financial assistance to aspiring educators through the Christopher John Stupak Scholarship, helping ensure that future generations of children are inspired by passionate and science-capable teachers.



## Future Educators Making a Difference

### Kappa Delta Epsilon Education Honor Society

This year, Kappa Delta Epsilon Education Honor Society spread some kindness to older adults by making cards to share with residents in senior housing. Click [HERE](#) to see photos of all the activities and events that KDE organizes and participates in.



Professors Turrisi, Davis, Pratschler, and Welsh volunteered at the Annual Alumni Association Egg Hunt with Kappa Delta Epsilon (KDE) Education Honor Society and Delta Xi Nu.



This April, Kappa Delta Epsilon (KDE) Honor Society looked forward to another year of service to the community by inducting new members and officers. Read more [here](#).



Raritan Valley Community College has had a longstanding partnership with Centenary's School of Education and Humanities. These future educators enjoy reading aloud to preschool students in the RVCC Learning center. The students planned and facilitated a read aloud using interactive read aloud strategies, kinesthetic activities for deeper understanding of concepts, and a hands-on craft to apply their understanding of animals in our world.



For over ten years, education students and faculty at Centenary University, with the support of [Taylor Memorial Library](#), have been volunteering to host story hour for the local community. Students in Foundations of Literacy Instruction EDU 3053 plan story hour as a class assignment. This provides them with great experience working with children and interacting with families and caregivers. As a testament to the quality of the program, last year there were almost 650 visits by community members. Please join us on Wednesdays at 10am for stories, scavenger hunts, projects, and music!

# Congrats to our Graduates!

## Fall and Spring Education Forums

After completing their student teaching, future educators at Centenary University have the opportunity to network with school leaders during the Education Forum. Local school leaders volunteer each semester to provide advice and coaching to the student teachers as they complete their clinical placements. The students also enjoy motivational advice from President Schol and Dr. Jordan and then share their student teaching accomplishments during their clinical placements. The School of Education and Humanities at Centenary University is excited to congratulate these students as they begin their careers making a difference in New Jersey's public schools.



### Fall '25 Clinical Interns

Lauren Aaron  
Julia Feldman  
Francisco Mata  
William McNeir  
Jaelynn Miller  
Nascha Smith  
Madison Trevaskiss

### Spring '26 Clinical Interns

Sarah Blanchard  
Emily Boniface  
Jessica Catanzaro  
Claudia Cordero-Zeledon  
Karalyn Cornell  
Alixandra Ditchey  
Heather Doherty  
Nora Dornich  
Anthony Fraser  
Nicole Gyeski  
Trista Hough  
Karlie Kaiser  
Noah Ludwigsen  
Pamela Mejia-Medina  
Jennifer Monteiro  
Brianna Moreno  
Arianna Morillo  
Sarah Moschella



Alaina Okun  
Samantha Parlato  
Madison Paseler  
Jillian Pullis  
Alexis Schumacher

Jessica Smith  
Sydney Smith  
Jasmin Walker  
Emily Weed

Dover Public Schools and Centenary University partnered to train cohorts of ESL teachers, demonstrating a commitment to best serving our Multilingual Learners of English. Over 25 teachers were certified as of last semester with their NJ PK-12 ESL Teacher certification. Congrats to these educators for completing Centenary's ESL Certification Program!







## Rita Keene '20

Taylor Memorial Library  
User Experience Manager

**What originally drew you to Centenary as a student, and what inspired you to return as a library manager?**

I was drawn to Centenary for the education program because that was the path I was on. Once I began working at TML as a work-

study, I thought about the person who drew me to education in the first place: my elementary school librarian. I realized that if I changed course slightly, I could have it all—helping and interacting with students in an educational setting and working in a library!

**What has been the most rewarding part of working at your alma mater?**

One of the most rewarding parts of working at my alma mater has been learning more about the institution's history and becoming part of that living history myself. I especially enjoy interacting with new students and helping shape their college experience, much like the faculty and staff did for me! Being able to support students as they navigate their academic and personal journeys is incredibly rewarding.

**How did being an English major shape the way you approach your work in the library? How do you think studying literature helps students develop skills beyond the classroom?**

Being an English major taught me the global importance of literature and its impact on culture, politics, human rights, and society. It also reinforced the value of critical thinking, research, and effective communication. Skills that are essential far beyond the classroom!

Many people assume that working in a library is primarily about reading books, but it is so much more than that. Reading has the power to influence people, inspire change, heal, and transform lives.

By engaging deeply with literature and research, students develop the ability to think critically, evaluate information

thoughtfully, and better understand the world around them. No matter what profession they pursue or what path they choose, these skills provide a strong foundation moving forward.

**What do you think is the most important role a college library plays in student success today?**

A college library is so much more than a collection of books. At its core, the library exists to support students, faculty, and staff in any way it can! We strive to meet the evolving needs of our campus community and provide resources, services, and spaces that help them succeed.

The library is also a place on campus where everyone is welcome! Whether someone needs help finding an article, a quiet place to study, access to printing, a place to warm up, or simply a moment to sit and recharge, the library is there for them. In a world where so many spaces require you to spend money or give something in return, the library remains a space intentionally designed to uplift, support, and empower everyone who walks in.

**What advice would you give current students about making the most of the library during their college years?**

Explore! College libraries offer more resources than many students realize, and those resources are carefully curated to support student success. Taking the time to explore what is available can save students time, reduce stress, and open doors to opportunities they might not have known existed.

The library provides access to valuable information sources and search tools for both academic and personal use that can make a significant difference in a student's experience. The more students engage with their library, the more likely they are to uncover tools and opportunities that help them achieve their goals!

**What advice would you give current English majors who are unsure about career options?**

In a time when the humanities are challenged and critical thinking skills are diminishing, there is a need for strong thinkers and individuals willing to do meaningful work in fields that need them the most. What you learn throughout your education can lead you in many different directions, but you will have the opportunity to make a difference.

## STORIES FROM THE CLASSROOM

## The Lesson from the Ladybug

By Michele Ganova '26



Students entered the classroom and began unpacking their backpacks for the day. Little did we know, there was a small visitor near their cubbies...a ladybug. One student noticed it and shouted, "There is a ladybug!" Students quickly gathered around, each trying to pick it up. I walked over to supervise the students surrounding the ladybug and told them that I would carefully move it to a safer location. Many students volunteered to help, and I asked one student to get a tissue. The students were worried that the ladybug would get squished, reminding me to be careful. I reassured them that the ladybug would be okay and explained that I would place it on the windowsill in the hallway.

I redirected the students to finish unpacking for the day and return to their seats. As I walked into the hallway, the ladybug crawled onto my hand and would not get off. I began speaking softly to it, saying, "Come on little buddy, it's okay. This is a safer spot for you," while gently trying to guide it off my hand. What I did not realize was that two students were standing at the doorway watching me. Suddenly, I heard one of them say, "Awww, Ms. Ganova, that was so sweet and kind of you." I smiled and replied, "Thank you so much. The ladybug was just a little nervous." What the student said next was something I will never forget. She replied, "No wonder why you teach us about kindness so much, because you're so kind."

The simplest situation led to such an important realization for me as an educator. In that moment, lessons about kindness went beyond read-alouds, classroom discussions, and writing prompts. It became a real-life example that showed my students kindness is not just something taught by their teacher but something that is lived every day.

Leading by example is one of the most important responsibilities we have as educators. Students are constantly observing the adults around them because we are their role models. These observations help shape the culture of the classroom. Oftentimes, educators focus heavily on planning meaningful lessons for students, but sometimes the most meaningful and powerful lessons are the ones that are unplanned.

This ladybug taught the students more than they may have realized. Not only did they build meaningful connections to prior knowledge, but they also learned that kindness is not just about doing something nice for a friend or helping someone in need. Kindness is about showing empathy, compassion, and understanding toward all living things, even the smallest creatures. As a teacher, this experience reminded me that students learn far more from us than academics alone. They learn from the way we respond to challenges, how we treat others, and the compassion we show in everyday moments. Something as small as helping a ladybug became a powerful lesson because my students were able to connect what they heard in classroom discussions to what they witnessed in real life.

Unplanned moments are often the ones students carry with them long after they leave the classroom. Every interaction, no matter how small, has the potential to shape the way students view kindness, empathy, and the world around them. So, thank you, ladybug, for teaching us all something important that day.

## Events

### Future Educators Day

On October 24, 2025, the School of Education and Humanities hosted its 8th annual Future Educators Day. Over 130 high school students and community college students; 17 of their teachers from area schools in Morris, Sussex, Warren, and Hunterdon County; and nine past County Teachers of the Year attended the event. New Jersey 2025-26 County Teachers of the Year from Warren, Sussex, and Hunterdon Counties along with the 2025 NJ State Teacher of the Year highlighted the event with an opening keynote presentation in the Sitnik Theater followed by workshops where attendees engaged with each Teacher of the Year in small group presentations, demonstrations, and workshops. This year's presenters were Stefanie Lachenauer (2025 NJ State Teacher of the Year), Amy Stevens (2025-26 Sussex County Teacher of the Year), Laura Wojick (2025-2026 Warren County Teacher of the Year), and Caroline Mann (2025-2026 Hunterdon County Teacher of the Year). We also enjoyed having the 2019 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, Jennifer Skomial, participate in the day along with nine previous teachers of the year who have presented for us in the past. Attendees also participated in a Q&A session with Centenary Education students and faculty. Additionally, Centenary University education majors provided insightful and engaging presentations in Centenary's designated Education Clinical Classroom.

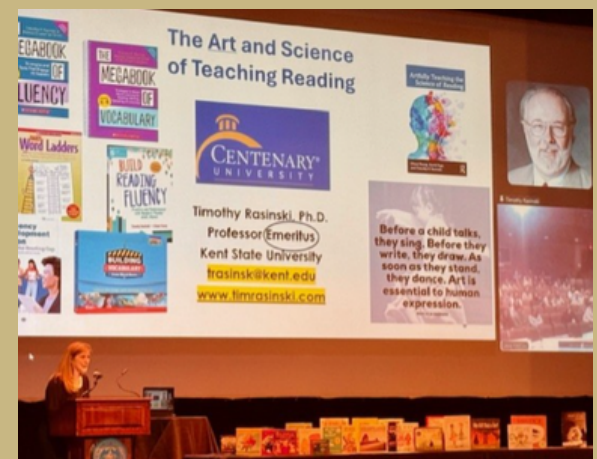
As in past events, Visions Federal Credit Union sponsored a delicious lunch in the cafeteria for all 171 attendees. High school students and teachers in attendance provided the following feedback: "We really enjoyed the day, and I also always leave inspired by the teachers of the year and your students and staff." "You all did a beautiful job! It was welcoming, informative, and inspiring. I am a huge fan of Centenary, and I truly feel it is somewhat of a hidden gem that offers so much! State Teacher of The Year Stefanie Lachenauer commented, "I thoroughly enjoyed the day with the high school students and connecting with other CTOYs. The students were so engaged and asked great questions. The energy in the room was impressive!"

Centenary University's School of Education and Humanities is committed to preparing innovative, reflective, and dedicated educators who are ready to make an impact in classrooms across the region.

### Centenary's 2026 Literacy Conference Was a Hit!

On March 27th, the School of Education and Humanities Graduate Literacy / ESL Teacher Certification Program welcomed educators from across the State of NJ to campus to learn about The Art and Science of Teaching Reading.

Organizer and Graduate Director, Lexis McCoy, EdD, shares a comment from a school leader who was in attendance, "I cannot begin to tell you how energized I was by Friday's conference. I found it to be well organized, special (I loved the refreshments...especially the soft pretzels), and informative. I enjoyed each session I attended and walked away with a lot of takeaways in the areas of AI, early reading, and new books on the market! Thank you for also organizing the vendors, and the book exchange, and an overall wonderful day." Click [here](#) to read details about the conference.





## Events Continued...

### Education Advisory Board

Each semester, educational leaders meet with stakeholders in the School of Education and Humanities to discuss current programs, provide ideas to improve the field moving forward, and suggest new programs. There is a direct pathway between public school districts and educator preparation. The ESL certification program and the Master of Education and Literacy Instruction Programs are a result of feedback from area school leaders sharing the needs within the district.

### Jane Austen Tea

Students studying Jane Austen in Dr. McCrystal's ENGLISH 4015 class enjoyed a tea party hosted in Taylor Memorial Library. During the event, the students shared their research with attendees and led small group discussions.



## Scholarship

Stacy Davies, Graduate Instructor in the School of Education and Humanities and CU Alum, publishes opinion piece in Education Week. Check it out here: [Has Our Zeal for the Science of Reading Created a Cycle of Confusion? \(Opinion\)](#).

## Awards

**2025 Centenary University/Visions Federal Credit Union Educational Leader of the Year:** Dr. Jenine Kastner (Centenary Ed.D. 2020), Director of Special Services, Clinton Public Schools

**Alyce Hunter Dissertation Award:** Carie Norcross-Murphy, *The Effects of Stipendiary Teacher Residency Programs on Teacher Recruitment and Retention*

**Distinguished Clinical Interns:** Three Centenary University students were recognized for excellence at the New Jersey Distinguished Clinical and Cooperating Teachers Awards Ceremony. The awards are co-sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Centenary University students honored this year were:

- Francisco Mata
- Madison Trevaskiss
- Jennifer Monteiro

**Harry Strickhausen Endowed Memorial Scholarship:** Kaitlyn Adams, Maria Ratsimor, and Poppy Skjonnemand

**Cathleen Benedict Memorial Scholarship:** Pamela Mejia-Medina

**Doris L. Moore Award:** Carmen Wright



## DEFENSIVE CORNER

The following Ed.D. candidates defended their dissertations in the 2025-2026 school year:

**Edward Banduk:** *Integrating Leadership Behaviors and Organizational Effectiveness: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis*

**Brian Bosworth:** *A Comparative Study Examining New Jersey Senate Bill S-2 and its Effects on Student Achievement and Graduation Rates in Public Schools*

**Michal Ferenc:** *The Relationship Between High-Impact Tutoring and Student Achievement in New Jersey*

**George Greaves:** *A Qualitative Exploration of How Online Course Availability Influences First-Year Student Enrollment Decisions in Caribbean Higher Education Post-COVID-19*

**Monica Heinze:** *School Staff Perceptions of the Influence of Therapy Dog Programs on Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Well-Being Among Students Receiving Special Education Services*

**Jason Kupcha:** *Teachers' Self Efficacy in Managing Challenging Behaviors*

**Joseph Lepo:** *Transition from Elementary School to Middle School: The Parents' Perspective*

**Carie Norcross-Murphy:** *The Effects of Stipendiary Teacher Residency Programs on Teacher Recruitment and Retention*

**Sarah Northrop:** *Empowering and Equipping Teachers in the Changing Landscape of Student Mental Health: Evaluating Perceptions, Prioritizing Professional Development, and Understanding the Impact on Well-Being*

**Priscilla Ortiz:** *Bridging the Gap: Exploring the Impact of Instructional Practices and Generational Perceptions on Generation Alpha and Generation Beta in Math*

**Rhonda Pevorus:** *School Principals' Preparedness for Safety Events Before Their First Year on the Job*

**Ashley Reddick:** *Early Intervention Professionals: A Qualitative Descriptive Study Examining Cultural Responsiveness*

**Maureen Riva:** *Leading for Inclusion: A Qualitative Exploration of School Leadership, Teacher Practices and Professional Learning to Build Inclusive Systems for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities*

**Tara Rossi:** *A Quantitative Study of the Relationship Between Administrative Experience and Student Achievement in Rural Public School Districts in Northern New Jersey*

**Ken Russo:** *Intelligent Design: Charting the Trajectory of AI in Educational Paradigms: A Historical Analysis of AI Integration, Its Educational Impacts, and Future Prospects in Learning*

**Kyle Sosnovik:** *Multilingual Learner English Language Proficiency Performance in Secondary Education: An Embedded Case Study in Hackettstown Public School District Environments*

**Kathy Turrisi:** *AI Adoption in Higher Education: Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use and the Moderating Roles of Academic Role and Discipline*

**Darlene White:** *The Architecture of Joy: A Conceptual Design Framework for Educational Environments*

**Stephen Wisniewski:** *Teacher Perceptions of Inclusion in a Co-Teaching Model*

**Lauren Zugale:** *Perceptions and Practices of General Education Teachers and Their Knowledge Base of Special Education Law*