

# IMPACT REPORT



**Advancement  
and Partnerships**

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA





# MOMENTOUS UCF

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# SUPERCARGED



Dear UCF Supporters & Friends,

At UCF, our commitment to *Unleashing Potential* is deeply rooted in our DNA. As America's Space University, we were founded to provide the talent and innovation needed to fuel our nation's ambitious race to the moon – a challenge that seemed impossible at the time, but became an incredible reality through bold vision and relentless effort.

Today, UCF continues to embrace challenges and push the boundaries of what is possible. We are a community of bold thinkers, innovators and leaders, united by a shared mission to build the future.

This year we have celebrated remarkable milestones that demonstrate our impact, including:

- UCF is recognized as one of the nation's **top five public universities for innovation** and the **most innovative university in Florida for the seventh consecutive year** by *U.S. News & World Report*.
- We are ambitiously scaling our engineering and technology programs to meet workforce needs, growing by 1,800 students since 2022 with a goal to enroll 20,000 students in these fields by 2032.
- Through investments in our academic success coaching model, we are guiding students on individualized pathways to graduation, achieving a 4.5% increase in 4-year graduation rates over the past year, enabling even more students to enter the workforce and pursue careers in high-demand industries.

With these and other accomplishments, we are growing as Florida's Premier Engineering and Technology University by providing the workforce and research infrastructure needed to fuel Florida's growing high-tech economy through excellence in education and research and a commitment to meaningful interaction with industries and partners.

We cannot achieve this bold vision alone. Your leadership and support empower us to push the limits of imagination, explore the unknown and transform challenges into opportunities.

Together, we are shaping a legacy of innovation and impact that will endure for *generations*.

I look forward to continuing to dream big and build boldly.

**Go Knights! Charge On!**



*Alexander Cartwright*

**Alexander N. Cartwright, Ph.D.**  
President and Professor of Electrical  
and Computer Engineering



# UNLEASH MOMENTS



Dear UCF Donors,

Thank you for making Fiscal Year 2024 a historic fundraising year in terms of dollars raised, impact made and donors engaged! Between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024, donors committed \$104,403,814, and this generosity was showcased in current use funds, capital and endowments.

Last year, we engaged more than 160,000 alumni, including gifts from more than 39,000 of them, leading us on a path to exceed our strategic plan goals.

In FY24, UCF added two Pegasus Partners: Addition Financial and Nemours Children’s Health. These partnerships drive industry advancements, spur cutting-edge research across fields and create strong career trajectories for UCF alumni ([see page 18](#)).

Additionally, in alignment with UCF Athletics’ Mission XII initiative ([www.missionxii.com](http://www.missionxii.com)), the ChargeOn Fund is critical to delivering championship-caliber services to UCF student-athletes by providing exceptional athletic facilities for competition, practice, training, recovery, nutrition and enhanced fan experience. As part of the Big 12, our priority remains fostering an environment where our student-athletes can excel, highlighted by the average GPA above 3.0 that has been achieved for 33 consecutive semesters. Our goal is to build and maintain the highest-quality athletics facilities for all student-athletes and fans, starting with the UCF football campus ([see page 17](#)).

Furthermore, last year, our Women Supporting Science group toured UCF’s Exolith Lab ([see page 25](#)). The lab is home to the world’s largest regolith bin, large enough to accommodate a lunar rover, and plays a pivotal role in advancing space science by supplying these simulants to research facilities and companies worldwide. With space exploration rapidly growing as an industry, the demand for these materials is surging — and Exolith is thriving!

Donors contributed to countless other projects, including Day of Giving ([see page 11](#)), student scholarships ([see page 13](#)) and so much more.

I’m inspired by the impact our donors’ extraordinary generosity will have in driving forward solutions for tomorrow and empowering UCF to unlock the potential of people and ideas to create a brighter future.



Charge On!

**Rodney M. Grabowski, CFRE**

Senior Vice President for Advancement & Partnerships  
CEO, UCF Foundation, Inc.

# UCF ADVANCEMENT

## MISSION

Unleashing the potential of people and ideas to positively change the world

## VISION

Powering partnerships and transforming lives through philanthropy

## TALENT

145 employees serving 70,000+ students across 13 colleges and more than 240 degree programs



## INTEGRITY

We show integrity by being honest, having strong moral direction and following ethical standards. A fundamental aspect of character, integrity builds trust and respect in relationships. We work to ensure everyone we interact with views us as trustworthy and reliable, operating with integrity in all that we do and in every relationship.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

We show accountability by thoughtfully recognizing the impact of our actions on the team’s collective goals and shared purpose, as well as the success or failure of our work. We believe that there are consequences to our actions and use missteps as opportunities for growth and learning.

## COLLABORATION

We show collaboration by approaching our daily work with open communication, mutual respect and a spirit that values each person’s unique skill set. By conducting our work in this way and prioritizing both UCF’s and our partners’ interests, we will achieve stronger outcomes together.





# ANOTHER HISTORICAL YEAR OF

# FUNDRAISING AND IMPACT

## JULY 2023

Richard Lapchick, UCF Professor Emeritus and Founder of UCF's the DeVos Sports Business Management Program, honored by ESPN with the Stuart Scott ENSPIRE Award celebrating "individuals who have taken risks and used an innovative approach to helping the disadvantaged through the power of sports."

UCF received \$110,000 grant to help prepare middle school career and workforce education teachers to incorporate exploration of space careers into classroom curricula.

UCF and Valencia College announced expansion plans for a pilot program to support at-risk transfer students who transition to UCF from Valencia College, thanks in part to a \$1.3 million grant from the Helios Education Foundation.



Helios  
Education Foundation



## AUGUST 2023

Congratulations to the 120 students who celebrated their first day of medical school this month! The Class of 2027 includes a former ballerina and an earthquake survivor.

## SEPTEMBER 2023

Knight parents established the Danny Solis Pedroza Legacy Scholarship.



## OCTOBER 2023

UCF's Constellation Society hosted an event to celebrate donors who have given \$100,000 cumulatively to any area of UCF.

Educated Here, Employed Here: alumna Briana Capasso '20 shares why she chooses to work at UCF.



UCF Knight Hacks drew a record 700 students from across the state. Hackathon participants had just 36 hours to conceive and develop an original "hack" or innovative solution.

## NOVEMBER 2023

Ryan DeVos, vice president of shareholder engagement for the Orlando Magic, was the featured speaker at Crossroads: The Intersection of Business and Philanthropy.



Knight Market, the first-ever UCF alumni-owned small business fair and market debuted Saturday, Nov. 18, at the FAIRWINDS Alumni Center.



UCF's Rosen College of Hospitality Management again ranked No. 1 in the nation.



UCF's student cybersecurity team defeated more than 94 teams from across the country to win the university's fourth U.S. Department of Energy CyberForce Competition, marking its third consecutive win.



Army combat veteran and triple-Knight Walt Napier '15 '16 '20MA shared his journey.

Giving Tuesday, Nov. 28: Nearly 700 donors contributed more than \$495,000 to various colleges, funds and services throughout UCF. Thank you, Knight Nation!



GIVING  
TUESDAY



UCF DAY OF  
GIVING



## DECEMBER 2023

Knights Battle Georgia Tech in Gasparilla Bowl!

Some of the top gifts for 2023 included a \$250,000 grant to support the UCF STEM Aviation Showcase from the Emil Buehler Perpetual Trust; \$250,000 from Ramesh and Neena Chopra to support the Indian Community Endowed Chair for the India Center (amplified by a \$50,000 match through the UCF Challenge); and a \$1+ million gift from the Florida Blue Foundation for the UCF College of Medicine Community Engaged Service-Learning Initiative and the Florida Blue Endowed Professorship for Healthy Communities Fund at UCF. (See Page 20)

## JANUARY 2024

University of Central Florida students, donors and administrators celebrated breaking ground on the Dr. Phillips Nursing Pavilion, a state-of-the-art building that will strengthen patient care by facilitating the graduation of 150 nurses each year. (See Page 19)

## FEBRUARY 2024

UCF alumnus Taylor Gerring '05 committed \$6.5 million to UCF Athletics and The Kingdom, our NIL collective. His generosity will provide a new football administration and coaches building to be named the Taylor A. Gerring Football Center. (See Page 17)

The UCF College of Business celebrated its Hall of Fame event, and two Foundation Board members were honored. Eva Tukdarian '90 '91 was inducted into the college's Hall of Fame, and Mark Plaumann '74 '79 received its Legendary Knight Award. Sara Bernard '00, a past Alumni Board president and past Foundation Board member, was also recognized with an Honorable Knight Award.

## APRIL 2024

Our most successful Day of Giving yet! Read more via the QR Code.

Welcome Nemours Children's Hospital as our newest Pegasus Partner. Through the Pegasus Partner Program, Nemours Children's Hospital and UCF will work collaboratively toward the overall advancement of pediatric healthcare. (See Page 18)

## MAY 2024

Thanks to our wonderful longtime supporter, Kenneth Dixon '75 for his \$10 million commitment to UCF Athletics programs and UCF's Career Services. (See Page 17)

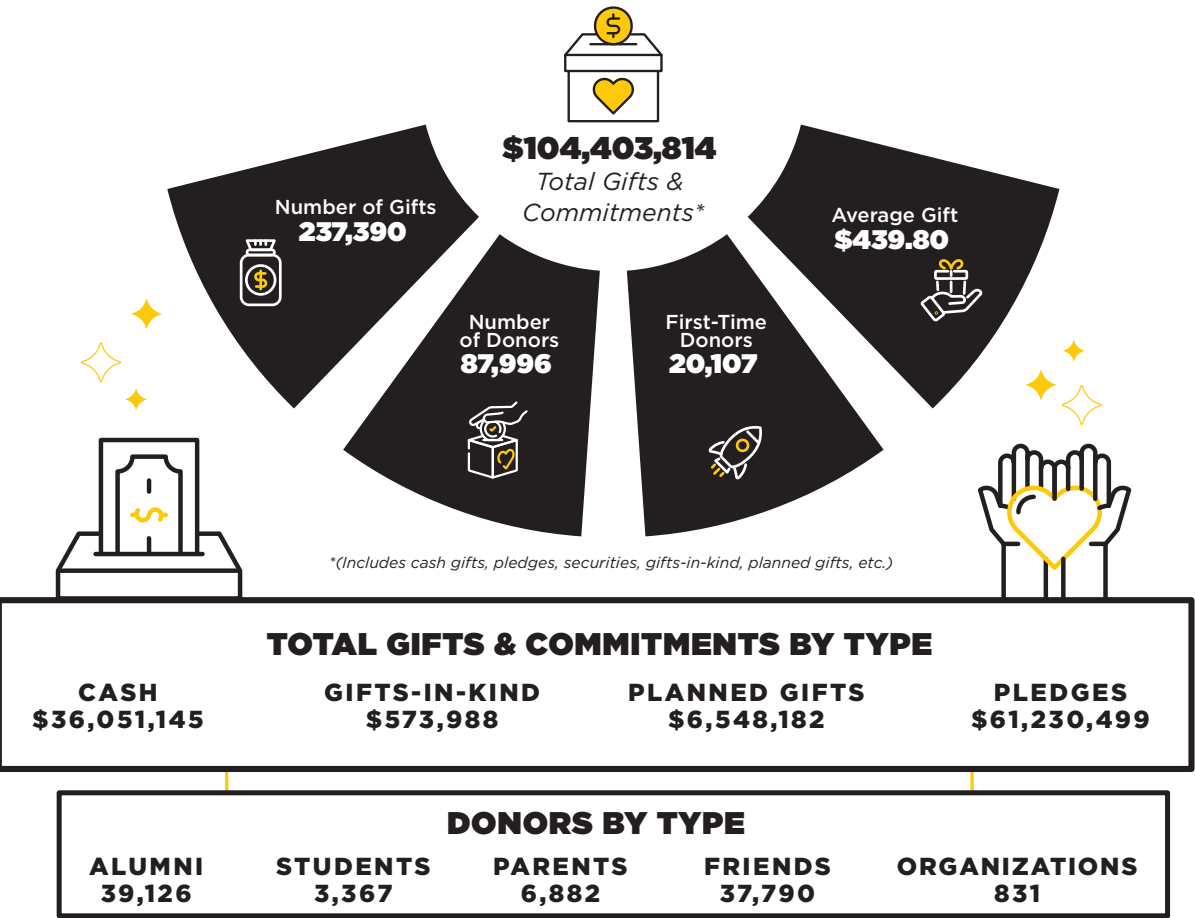
## JUNE 2024

UCF Burnett Honors College student and political science major Daniel Rivera spends the summer in Washington, D.C., interning with the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Hear more about his experience!

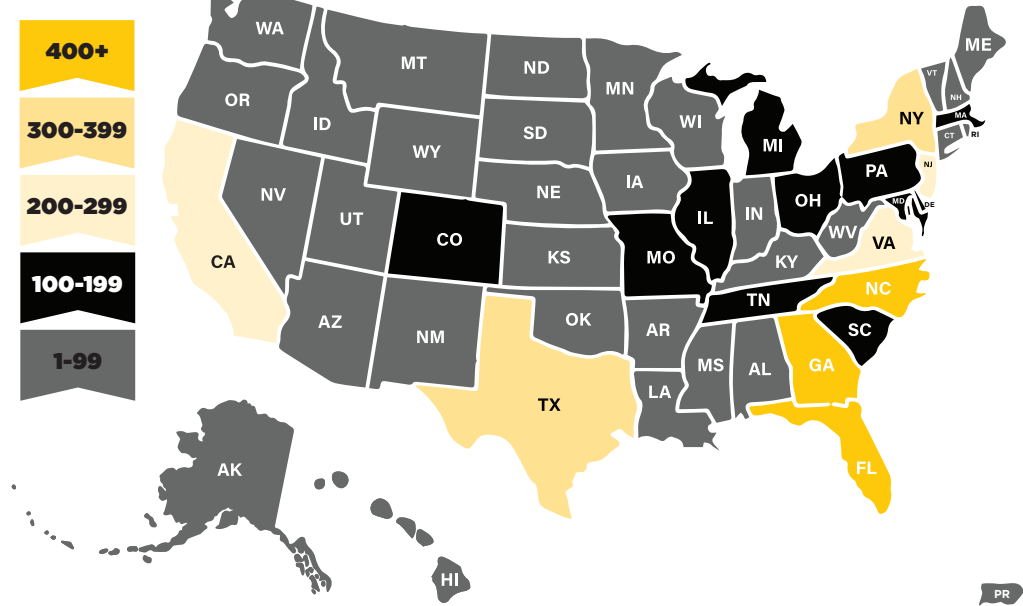
We did it! With the help of our generous donors, we officially surpassed our FY24 attainment goal, ensuring that UCF students and faculty will have the necessary resources to turn their dreams into reality. We also took a critical step in achieving our 2027 Strategic Plan goal of \$100 million in annual attainment. Go Knights! Charge On!

# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

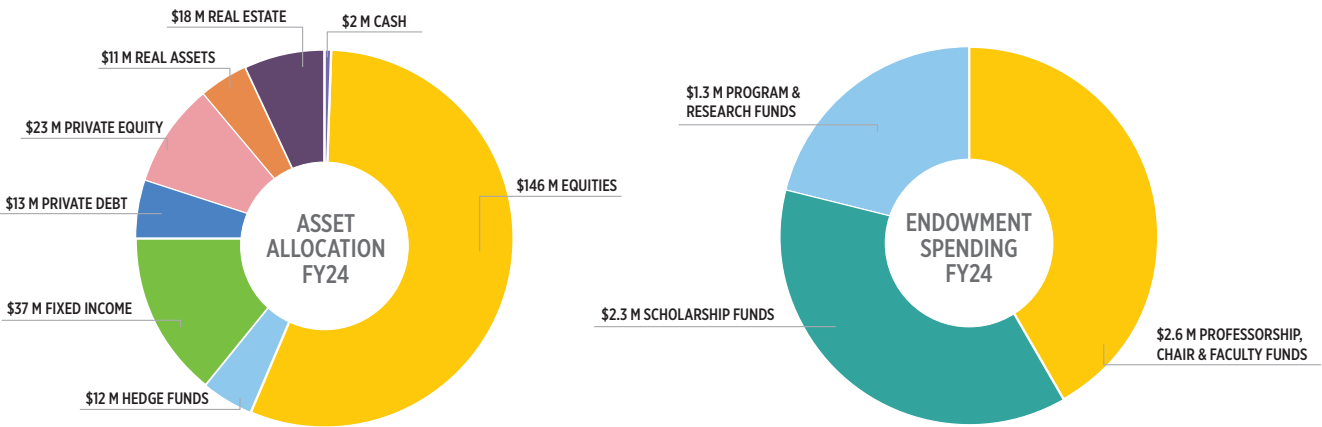
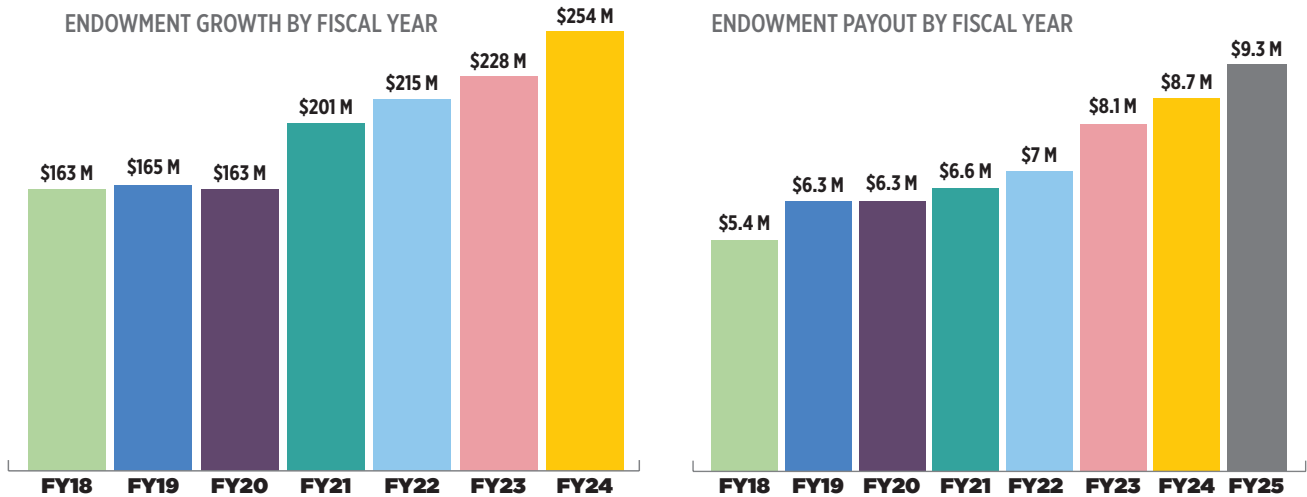
JULY 1, 2023—JUNE 30, 2024 (FY24)



## OUR DONOR FOOTPRINT



## ENDOWMENT GROWTH



### Maximize Your Giving With UCF's Monthly Giving Program!

Increase your giving level while spreading your contribution throughout the year. Automatic monthly deductions made through debit or credit card allow you to make an impact on the lives of current Knights in a budget-friendly, meaningful way.

[Sign up today!](#)





# BY THE NUMBERS

## OUR STRENGTHS IN NUMBERS

- #1** Most Innovative University in Florida; 14th in U.S. *\*US. News & World Report*
- #1** for Hospitality and Tourism Management in the Nation *\*ShanghaiRankings*
- #1** Choice for Modeling and Simulation Advanced Training for DOD
- #1** Graduate Video Game Design Program in World *\*The Princeton Review and PC Gamer Magazine*
- #29** Best University for Optics *\*U.S. News & World Report*



## OUR PEOPLE

- #1** Supplier of Graduates to U.S. Aerospace and Defense Industries *\*Aviation Week*
- 20** Fulbright Scholars from Around the World Chose UCF for Graduate Research
- 37** National Science Foundation Career Awards
- 70,000+** Students Enrolled
- 3,200+** Military-Connected Students and Veterans

## RESEARCH

- #35** U.S. Public Universities for Patents *\*National Academy of Inventors*
- \$229M** in Research Funding



UCF Knightfluencers are a NEW group of volunteers who use their social media platforms to advocate on behalf of the University of Central Florida.

Help us spread the word about programs, events, Knight news and more.

[Become an influencer for UCF!](#)



As a dedicated nursing student majoring in Nursing, my goal has always been to specialize in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Your support is more than just financial aid; it is a powerful affirmation of the dedication, care, and excellence that I strive to embody in my nursing practice.

**Joshua Haren**, UCF College of Nursing Student and Recipient of the Gabriela Grace Endowed Memorial Scholarship



*\*Data as of Nov. 1, 2024*





## TRANSFORMING LIVES: *The Power of UCF's 2024 Day of Giving*

For 24 hours, starting at midnight on April 11, 2024, Knight Nation united for Day of Giving, celebrating with enthusiasm and generosity, that resulted in more than **\$9.1 million** from **10,356 individual gifts**.

Established at UCF in 2018, Day of Giving supports academic programs, life-changing scholarships, groundbreaking research and essential initiatives. While contributions can be made any day of the year, Day of Giving embodies a spirit of teamwork and shared sense of community that resonates deeply with all Knights.

### Impacting Students' Lives

As the single most important day for sustaining scholarships and funds across the university, Day of Giving offers countless valuable ways to participate. In 2024, several initiatives stood out not only for the overwhelming support they received, but also for their profound impact on UCF students.

The UCF Student Emergency Fund is one such example. It plays a crucial role in supporting students facing financial hardships that could hinder their education. It also assists with tuition, textbooks and personal emergencies such as rent and car repairs.

As one student shared, "I survived one of the scariest years of my life, and you helped keep my head screwed on when I'd all but lost hope. Because of your efforts, I was able to safely start the spring semester and finish my degree.

***When my life was a mess, you handed me the map.***"

**200+**  
AREAS OF FUNDING  
RECEIVED SUPPORT

**3,400+**  
SPOTIFY QUIZZES TAKEN

**800+**  
GIFTS MADE VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

**2,300**  
GIFTS MADE THROUGH EMAIL



### Making a Difference to Every UCF Program

Since its inception, Day of Giving has elevated the visibility of lesser-known funds, allowing them to make a significant impact.

The Florida Prison Education Project received \$1,165 from 44 gifts this year, helping provide high-quality education to incarcerated individuals in Central Florida, thereby preparing them for employment and reducing recidivism rates. Similarly, UCF Global raised \$3,478 from 205 gifts—an astonishing 3,317 percent increase since last year!

### New Ways to Get Involved

In a creative twist, the Day of Giving team incorporated geocaching by digitally hiding seven Knightro plushies across campus. Participants received clues and a map for a treasure hunt, fostering excitement and engagement throughout the event.

There were even Spotify playlists to reflect different "vibes" during the event, allowing participants to connect personally with the experience. Were you Pegasus, Knightro, Citronaut or maybe even the Spirit Splash Duck? Let the tunes tell you.



SAVE THE DATE FOR UCF'S  
NEXT DAY OF GIVING:  
**April 10, 2025**



### A Look Ahead to Day of Giving 2025

We can expect even more surprises and challenges for next year's Day of Giving, happening April 10, 2025. The excitement around this special celebration is not only a way to build community, but also a chance to highlight the university's critical needs. There are so many ways to join the fun, and the goal, as always, will be to bring everyone together for a common purpose.

"We want every gift to feel important to every donor, every time," said Rodney M. Grabowski, UCF senior vice president for advancement and partnerships and CEO of the UCF Foundation, Inc. "By keeping everyone engaged throughout the 24 hours, we hope they will see the impact of their contributions and the unity of Knight Nation rallying together."

Looking to get involved with Day of Giving in a bigger way this spring? Email a gift officer at [dayofgivingteam@ucf.edu](mailto:dayofgivingteam@ucf.edu).



# SCHOLARSHIPS

## PERSEVERING AND GIVING BACK

Mark Norato '91 dreamed about life beyond the walls of the 850-square-foot duplex in which he grew up. His mother, who worked two jobs to pay the bills as a single parent, instilled in him the value of education. That, he remembers her telling him, was the ticket out of poverty.

"My mother believed strongly then, as I do now, that for those who grow up in lower socioeconomic backgrounds, a college education is the surest pathway to success," Norato said.

Like many low-income students, Norato had to work while taking night classes to earn his college degree. It took more than 10 years, but he graduated from UCF with a bachelor's in business administration and is now a successful entrepreneur.

Though he's come a long way from those days of living in poverty, he hasn't forgotten where he came from and wants to give others the opportunities he never had.

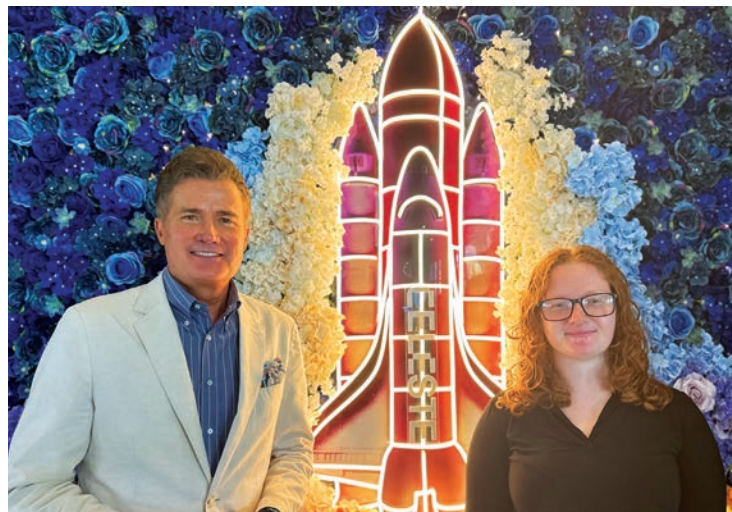
He recently established The Taking Flight Foundation Scholarship Fund, which provides a \$25,000 annual scholarship to an incoming UCF freshman from a single-parent household. The scholarship, whose name pays homage to his mother's career in aviation, covers all school-related expenses so that students can focus on their studies without needing to worry about finances.

This fall, he met his first scholarship recipient, Faith Kidwell, a music major who dreams of becoming a music instructor so she can help others find healing through music. She spent years in foster care due to her mother's drug addiction and was adopted by her sister at the age of 12. Despite her traumatic childhood, she said her life experiences have shaped her into the person she is today.

"We all have a path in life, and I believe mine is helping others," she explained.

While the purpose of the scholarship is to open doors for aspiring students, it also encourages them to look back someday and remember how they got ahead — and to pay it forward.

"If my story inspires just one person to make a difference in someone else's life," Norato said, "then I consider it a success."



This scholarship is a game changer for me. It will allow me to focus on school, do what I love and not need to constantly worry about whether I can make rent or tuition. I hope to get my degree in music education. I want to be a person who makes a positive impact on those around me.

**Faith Kidwell**, UCF College of Arts and Humanities Student in the Music Education Program, Primary Instrument: Tuba



## NURSING SCHOLARSHIP HONORS STUDENT LEGACY

Throughout her battle with late-stage cancer, Chrioni Lenertz never stopped planning for the future. The merchant marine officer hoped to earn her master's degree in communications from UCF, get a job and pursue her career goals.

However, cancer was not willing to cooperate. Lenertz passed away in 2021 at the age of 40, ending her six-year fight against stage four breast cancer.

"Chrioni was so impressive the first time I met her," said Colleen McLarnon, a retired Navy captain who served as nursing director on a hospital ship with Lenertz. "I could tell she was an amazing young officer."

McLarnon, who became a caregiver to Lenertz until her passing, is intent on carrying on that vision. She established the Chrioni E. Lenertz Memorial Endowed Scholarship Fund, which will not only honor the life of her close friend, but will also provide the financial support for another UCF student to finish their own educational journey.

To those who knew her, Lenertz was all about giving others the support they needed to succeed. When cancer treatments interrupted her studies at UCF one last time, Chrioni gifted her \$1,000 tuition reimbursement to a classmate. In that same spirit of giving, McLarnon said the endowed scholarship she created will support nursing students who plan to study oncology.

"I thought, what a great way to pay tribute to Lenertz by setting up a scholarship to assist another graduate student," said McLarnon. "Chrioni wasn't a nursing student, but she was a UCF student who was grateful for the care she received from oncology nurses."

Despite the hardships, Lenertz viewed her diagnosis as an opportunity to reprioritize what she wanted to do in the future. To that end, she enrolled at UCF, began working toward a master's degree, and thrived by helping the Oviedo community as a volunteer.

McLarnon remembered Lenertz studying during chemotherapy — always optimistic despite the challenging times. "As a captain in the Navy, I can size up people pretty quickly," said McLarnon. "And Chrioni brought joy to everyone — the doctors, the nurses, everyone she met."

Now, McLarnon believes she has captured and repurposed that sanguineness, to be experienced annually by UCF nursing students through an endowed scholarship in her friend's name.

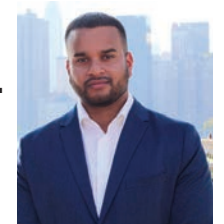
"It's sad to say, but we need more nurses dedicated to oncology," concluded McLarnon. "If this scholarship can play a critical role in achieving that goal, I think Chrioni would be pleased that her legacy has created a lasting impact."

**1,000+ ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS WERE AWARDED LAST YEAR**



We are all part of something bigger. The legacy we leave isn't just about our individual achievements, but the impact we make on others.

**Rafiqul Chowdhury '09 '11** Reflects on the Establishment of the Quadrant Engineering – Chowdhury Family Future Leaders Endowed Scholarship





# SCHOLARSHIPS

## ASPIRING PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT NEVER TOO BUSY TO HELP

One day she might be training bionic kids how to use their artificial limbs. Another day, she might be checking the vitals of a middle-aged woman at a free health clinic for the homeless. Annelisa Swiersz '25 is pursuing a bachelor's in health sciences at UCF. Despite her busy academic schedule and volunteerism, she is never too busy to think of others.

In between her course work and weekend job as an emergency medical technician, Swiersz volunteers at Limbitless Solutions, a UCF nonprofit that customizes bionic prosthetic limbs for children, and at Hearts for the Homeless, which provides preventative healthcare services to underserved communities in Orlando.

Swiersz credits the UCF First Ladies Endowed Scholarship from the Women's Club at UCF for helping her meet her own financial needs, so she can continue being of service to others. "This scholarship makes a significant difference by allowing me to dedicate more time to my research at Limbitless and my role as medical information officer with Hearts for the Homeless, where I educate individuals on vital health topics like heart health and infectious diseases. It supports my goal of becoming a physician assistant and advocating for my patients, helping them achieve the best possible quality of life."

The Women's Club at UCF supports scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students regardless of gender. Since its establishment in 1969, the organization has raised \$500,000 to fund endowed scholarships. To date, 70 scholarships, totaling \$137,530, have been awarded to 65 different students.



Read more about Limbitless Solutions and the incredible work they're doing on pages 21—22.



I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to everyone who had a hand in my receiving the Dr. Jeffrey T. Weinland Memorial Endowed Scholarship, especially the donors. This scholarship has allowed me to add another class onto my workload — an introductory course to internships. I am hoping to receive an offer for a Universal internship I applied for, which would allow me to open Epic Universe, probably the grandest theme park in modern history, but also allow me to do so in the entertainment industry, which is my single greatest dream.

Caitlyn Stapleton, UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management Student Majoring in Theme Park and Attraction Management

## PHILANTHROPIC FIGURES

\$5.7M

SCHOLARSHIP DOLLARS AWARDED

1,818

STUDENTS RECEIVED SCHOLARSHIPS

2,112

SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

\$9.2M

SCHOLARSHIP DOLLARS RAISED

25

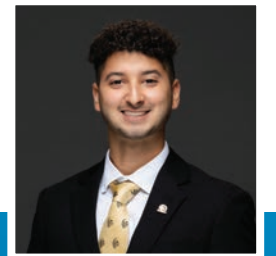
ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS CREATED

76

SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS CREATED

Scholarships have helped me pay for tuition and enabled me to take advantage of research assistant opportunities within UCF, exploring intellectual curiosities that I'd only dreamed of in high school. Now I'm actually doing these things hands-on and providing intellectual property to the future of the world. Thank you so much for investing in me!

Alejandro Lopez Zelaya,  
UCF College of Optics and Photonics  
and College of Engineering and  
Computer Science Student Majoring  
in Photonic Science & Engineering



## TRAVELING KNIGHTS

The UCF Traveling Knights program offers tours to destinations around the world. Our trips are adventurous, engaging, and most importantly, provide a wonderful way to connect with your fellow UCF alumni, family and friends.





## FUELING CAREER READINESS

By any account, Kenneth Dixon '75 has had a successful career, beginning as an accountant before transitioning to real estate and becoming the founder and CEO of Leland Enterprises. The accounting major acknowledges the role UCF played in his success.

"UCF launched my career," he said. "The school of accounting actually made me what I am today."

In 2004, Dixon recognized his alma mater's role in shaping his trajectory with a generous gift endowing the Kenneth G. Dixon School of Accounting. Twenty years later, he's expanding that generosity to bolster student success. His recent \$5 million commitment will establish the Kenneth G. Dixon Career Development Center, helping to prepare UCF students for the workforce, particularly in high-demand fields such as engineering, computer science, healthcare and other areas pivotal to Florida's economic prosperity.

Last year, more than 9,000 students and nearly 500 employers participated in Career Services' career and internship expos, and more than 10,300 attendees participated in resume and career exploration workshops. Dixon's gift will enable the expansion of these offerings and create new platforms and spaces to enhance career readiness.

# TWO ALUMNI PROPEL UCF ATHLETICS TO NEW HEIGHTS

UCF Athletics has had a meteoric ascent since its first game — a men's basketball game — was held in 1969. Since then, the Knights have gone on to compete in their first NCAA Final Four tournament (women's soccer in 1987), entered the history books with one of the longest win streaks in the NCAA record book (football, 2017–19) and won their first game as part of the Big 12 Conference (women's soccer, 2023).

Two alumni, with recent gifts totaling \$11.5 million in support of Athletics, are helping to ensure the Knights continue along that upward trajectory.

In February, Taylor Gerring '05, a business administration major turned blockchain pioneer and co-founder of Ethereum Foundation, pledged \$5.5 million to UCF Athletics — the largest single cash pledge commitment ever by an individual — and \$1 million to The Kingdom, UCF Athletics' official NIL collective. His generosity will enable UCF to create a one-of-a-kind football campus, ensure UCF's successful transition into the Big 12 Conference and help student-athletes capitalize on and monetize their name, image and likeness.

His gift includes \$5 million to help fund construction of a new building for football administration and coaches. Named the Taylor A. Gerring Football Center, it will be part of the larger Hagle Football Gateway project, which will include Nicholson Plaza; McNamara Cove, where student-athletes can heal and recover from injuries via hydrotherapy and a recovery river; a renovated Wayne Densch Sports Center, which will include an expanded football team locker room, the Thow Family Locker Room; the Wayne Densch Practice Complex; a new VIP parking lot; and a pedestrian promenade.

The remainder of his pledge will be invested in the Taylor A. Gerring Athletics Facilities Endowment Fund.

"I am proud to make this investment in UCF Football," said Gerring, whose love of the Knights began during Delta Sigma Pi events and continued when he moved to Chicago and helped launch the Chicago UCF Knights networking and fan group. "Our competitive success on the field is very important to the comprehensive growth and progress of the university. This is my way to do what I can as we enter the Big 12 Conference."

Building on that momentum, in June, Kenneth Dixon '75 pledged \$5 million to help with the Hagle Football Gateway project in the Kenneth G. Dixon Athletics Village, a 95-acre-space on campus dedicated to athletic competition as well as the health and wellbeing, academic success and professional development of UCF's student-athletes. His generosity will also foster key initiatives aimed at maintaining competitive excellence in the Big 12 Conference.

"I am excited about the Knights' future in the Big 12 and helping to further enhance our athletics facilities and deliver championship-caliber resources to win big," said Dixon, who previously committed \$5 million to UCF Athletics in 2017. "It is an honor and a pleasure to be able to help



## UCF'S PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM FOSTERS INNOVATIVE COLLABORATIONS TO MEET INDUSTRY DEMANDS

In spring 2024, the University of Central Florida formally established its partnerships program, an effort that strengthens our mission of expanding corporate relationships to transform educational experiences and drive industry advancement.

The UCF partnerships team takes a holistic approach to industry partnerships, working as a corporate concierge to qualify needs across a spectrum of engagement channels, including corporate capstone, sponsored research and executive education, among others.

UCF and so many future Knights in this way. I truly hope this will inspire others to also help when they are able."

In honor of Dixon's longstanding commitment to UCF Athletics, the School of Accounting and now the Career Development Center, the UCF Board of Trustees voted to rename North Orion Boulevard, one of the main roads within the Kenneth G. Dixon Athletics Village, to Ken Dixon Way.

"Taylor and Ken represent the very best of what it means to be Knights," said UCF President Alexander N. Cartwright. "Their generosity and commitment are paving the way for future student success, both on and off the field. We are grateful for their investment in the future we are building together, and we look forward to the lasting impact their support will have for our student-athletes and the entire UCF community."

Both Gerring's and Dixon's investments are part of advancing Mission XII. The strategic fundraising campaign is designed to position UCF Athletics to win conference and national championships, successfully transition UCF into the Big 12 Conference and provide championship-caliber services to student-athletes in both their educational and career pursuits.

"UCF is looking at industry-academia collaborations in a new way to solve real-world problems and build unique, mutually beneficial partnerships," said Michael Harding, associate vice president of partnerships. "By connecting business needs with curated experts and departments across campus, we ensure a two-fold outcome: students receive valuable internship experience while companies gain access to our faculty expertise and diverse talent pipeline."

A major accomplishment this past year was the addition of Nemours Children's Health and Addition Financial as Pegasus Partners, the highest designation bestowed to corporate partners that engage across the university in ways that create meaningful value for both organizations.

UCF's partnership with Nemours Children's Health, one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, will train the next generation of pediatric physicians to help mitigate Florida's growing healthcare worker shortage.

Addition Financial will further bolster this effort through its support of the Dr. Phillips Nursing Pavilion, the new and expanded

home for UCF's College of Nursing that is anticipated to open in fall 2025 and will enable the university to graduate 150 much-needed additional nurses each year.

UCF's Pegasus Partners also include AdventHealth and Orlando Health. Together with these industry leaders, UCF is harnessing the power of people and ideas to answer the talent demands of today and anticipate the corporate needs of tomorrow.

"We're only beginning to scratch the surface of what we can offer corporate partners — not just locally, but nationally and beyond," Harding said. "With a rapidly changing world, industry demands a highly skilled, well-trained workforce to solve complex challenges. Our efforts take a bold approach to corporate engagement that will propel UCF forward as it continues to shape the future of technology, research and innovation."

[LEARN MORE ABOUT UCF PARTNERSHIPS](#)





# BUILDING THE COLLEGE OF NURSING FOR THE FUTURE

Fueled by partnership and community support, UCF broke ground in January 2024 on the Dr. Phillips Nursing Pavilion — a state-of-the-art building that will strengthen patient care by enabling UCF to graduate an additional 150 highly qualified, compassionate nurses each year.

Florida is projected to have a shortage of 37,400 registered nurses by 2035. UCF is already helping fuel a talent pipeline of skilled nurses. Each year, UCF graduates 260 newly licensed nurses, and 85% of its more than 16,000 Knight nurse alumni live and work in Florida.

The groundbreaking ceremony marked a major milestone demonstrating the potential that can be unleashed with the power of philanthropy when many key stakeholders join together to tackle one of the community’s greatest challenges.

In addition to helping address the critical nursing shortage, the new home to UCF’s College of Nursing will foster greater collaboration and innovation thanks to an optimal location on UCF’s Academic Health Sciences Campus.

“A building is space where you’re able to do what you need to do. For the UCF College of Nursing, it will be a venue where great thinkers live, future nurses learn, and innovators and scholars work together to solve our world’s most pressing healthcare problems,” said College of Nursing Dean Mary Lou Sole. “At the Dr. Phillips Nursing Pavilion, UCF will unleash potential that will have an immeasurable impact for generations to come.”

Since the ceremonial turning of the dirt, there has been much progress on this transformational project. In September, UCF and its community partners celebrated the completion of structural framing with a hard hat tour. The building is currently 40 percent complete and anticipated to open in fall 2025.

[GET THE LATEST NEWS ON THE DR. PHILLIPS NURSING PAVILION](#)



# CREATING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Florida Blue Foundation, the philanthropic affiliate of the state’s leading health insurer, invested an additional \$500,000 in UCF’s College of Nursing to establish the Florida Blue Endowed Professorship for Healthy Communities — growing an endowment established in 2003.

Appointed to the inaugural role is aging expert Ladda Thiamwong. As a nurse, researcher and educator, Thiamwong has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to ensuring healthy communities for the growing number of older adults in the U.S. and around the world.

“Building healthy communities requires a commitment to improving conditions for healthy living for all members of the community, and I plan to continue bringing communities and disciplines together to address our challenging health issues,” said Thiamwong.

Her research builds upon two decades of clinical practice in caring for community-dwelling older adults in the U.S. and her native Thailand. A global expert on fall prevention, she has led research that has been awarded more than \$7 million in funding to date. Most importantly, her efforts have improved access and enhanced strategies to preventative care for low-income older adults.

Through her scholarly activities, Thiamwong mentors future scientists and fosters interdisciplinary collaboration. She currently leads an interdisciplinary team of researchers on a \$2.3M National Institutes of Health funded study to develop and test an innovative fall prevention intervention in partnership with the City of Orlando.

Thiamwong has been on the faculty at UCF since 2016 and currently serves as a professor in the College of Nursing. She has earned numerous awards for her teaching and research excellence, including the prestigious Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing and distinguished Fellow in the Nursing Academy of the National Academies of Practice. In addition to her faculty appointment, she has served on the Orlando Mayor’s Committee on Livability and Healthy Aging since 2019.

“Both UCF and Florida Blue Foundation are committed to the health and well-being of our Central Florida communities, and we are thankful for Florida Blue Foundation’s continued support,” said Mary Lou Sole, dean of UCF’s College of Nursing.



# A SPACE WITH BIG REACH

Samantha Migliore '25 recalls the first time she got to watch a patient grab a small bright blue plastic cup, pick it up and place it on top of another.

“He was a teenager, and I was nervous he wouldn’t like this activity I put together for him,” said Migliore, a health sciences major at UCF. “But the look on his face after being able to do what may seem like a simple or arbitrary task — it was something else. His whole face lit up, and everyone in the room started celebrating with him. That has become a core memory for me.”

The teenager was a patient with Limbitless Solutions, a nonprofit that began at UCF and is dedicated to empowering individuals through personalized, creative and expressive bionic arms. This year, Limbitless celebrated 10 years, during which time they’ve worked with more than 60 families to provide arms for children with limb differences — in some cases providing several as the child grows.

Over the past decade, the company has worked with roughly 500 student workers as part of the Limbitless Scholars Program, a multi-semester experience where students from nearly every major engage in interdisciplinary work and project-based learning. One of 55 current Scholars, Migliore has worked with Limbitless since August 2022, gaining real-world experience in physical therapy, which she plans to pursue as a career.

“Through the Scholars program, our students are able to conduct research, attend and present at conferences, and edify their career paths, whether that be for graduate school or in industry,” said executive director and co-founder Albert Manero '12 '14MS '16Ph.D.

Manero started Limbitless while in graduate school after hearing a radio segment about the first 3D-printed mechanical hand. That was in 2013, and he went to his lab and began gathering a team of people — including fellow engineers and other students from a range of disciplines. A year later, the team gathered around a kitchen table to do the final checks on their very first 3D-printed bionic arm.

“We wouldn’t be able to fulfill our mission without the help of students and the generosity of donors,” Manero said. “What started at that kitchen table 10 years ago is now a very large program of students, faculty and staff working to help change the world for these kids.”

One of those kids is Annika Emmert, who was born without a right hand and received her first bionic arm from Limbitless when she was 10. She went on to participate in Limbitless’ first clinical trial, which was announced in 2018, and is now a second-year UCF student, working with patients as a Limbitless Scholar. She’ll tell

you, for her and kids like her, receiving an arm isn’t about being able to pick up things; it’s about being empowered to do everything from designing what their arm looks like to how it functions and having the opportunity to work with a team that supports and cares about them every step of the way.

“I started working at Limbitless Solutions on UCF’s campus last year with the Clinical Research Team,” said Emmert, who is majoring in international and global studies. “During the 2024-2025 academic year, I will work on the outreach team, supporting industry partnerships, and at events like the 10th anniversary gala and K-12 field trips. My role is to bridge the gap between what people think about disabilities and their reality.”

For Limbitless Scholars like Emmert and Migliore, the position is more than just an internship they can list



on their resume. It’s about creating real impact for real people. Pavan Senthil '25, a senior majoring in electrical engineering and biomedical sciences, has been conducting research with Limbitless since Spring 2022. He and Migliore have been able to attend regional and national conferences, where they’ve won awards for their undergraduate research. Senthil’s research studying how bird claws are adapted to grasping objects in the wild could be used in prosthetics won him first place this year at the Southern Biomedical Engineering Conference and was published in the *Biomimetics* journal.

Now, that research is a success story, but in the middle of it, Senthil found himself in a rut. He couldn’t see how this research would be useful.

“We were setting up the model bird claw we designed in Fusion 360 and printed using Limbitless’ Stratasys 3D printers to test it, and a patient stopped by during the end of her clinical visit and asked what we were working on,” he said. “I explained and she was like, ‘Oh, when do I get one of those?’ We weren’t even at that point, but she helped me see the connection between the work we were doing and the end user.”

For Manero, that’s the value in having everyone from students and healthcare professionals to patients working together in one space. It allows students to see potential in abstract concepts, and to see the impact of their work, such as someone being able to pick up a blue cup for the first time. And it allows patients to dream alongside students and staff members about all the things they can do, design and become.





# EXPANDING CARE

## FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Most nights, nearly 100 people line up in the parking lot of the Christian Service Center in downtown Orlando for food. They are among the approximately 3,000 people experiencing homelessness in the area. In fact, the number of people sleeping outside or in cars has more than doubled in the Orlando region since last year.

On select evenings, you'll find UCF medical students beside them, offering skin and wound care and distributing everything from essential supplies to vaccines as part of the Chapman Compassionate Care for the Homeless program, an important initiative funded by the generous support of the Jules B. Chapman, M.D., and Annie Lou Chapman Private Foundation.

Since January 2019, when UCF medical students staffed the first Chapman Clinic, more than 1,000 patients experiencing homelessness have benefitted from their services. Student volunteers have treated 357 skin conditions and distributed at least 500 Narcan packets, which they provide through a partnership with the University of Florida College of Pharmacy.

In the last year alone, 117 medical student volunteers have seen 70 patients and served 422 patrons (people who receive personal care products, such as new socks, baseball hats, sunblock, insect repellent and personal hygiene products). While the one night a month they've had funding to staff the clinic has proved life-changing for many, care needs among this vulnerable population continue to grow.

As part of a generous donation from the Florida Blue Foundation, the number served will soon increase, as the clinic now has funding to operate twice a month and is ramping up to weekly. Their donation will also enable one student to receive a paid internship focused on gaining a better understanding of the needs of the community, social determinants of health and the challenges of people experiencing homelessness.

This summer, the recipient of the internship was Kelviyana Walker, a second-year medical student, who said the internship was a blessing for her academically, financially and professionally and that it allowed her to learn more about the complex challenges people experiencing homelessness face in accessing mental healthcare and resources — without experiencing financial stress herself.

"One of my most memorable experiences at the Chapman Clinic was interacting with the community advocates and clients during the outreach program," said Walker, who is a first-generation college student. "Hearing client stories firsthand highlighted the resilience of the human spirit and reinforced my commitment to advocating for better mental health resources for the homeless community. It was incredibly rewarding to see how even small acts of support like getting someone a granola bar and a Band-Aid could make a significant impact on their lives."



Providing scholarships opens the door of opportunity for students to have a bright future. This will undoubtedly help students succeed. It will also help agencies like the Orlando Police Department (OPD) hire the best to join our agency.

Orlando Police Department Chief **Eric Smith '93** on the Establishment of the Orlando Police Department Endowed Scholars of Excellence Fund

# HONORING A TRUE AMERICAN ART FORM:

## JAZZ FUND CREATES ESSENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AT UCF

From the syncopated rhythms of Louis Armstrong to the dulcet melodies of Miles Davis, jazz ushered in a cultural revolution that reshaped America in the early 20th century, a time of deep social unrest but also of bold artistic innovation. With its energetic style and emotional depth, jazz became a symbol of freedom, individuality and rebellion against the constraints of society.

Because jazz is so integral to the American story, it is vital to keep its spirit alive — making jazz education programs all the more necessary.

For nearly 30 years, UCF's Jazz Studies Program has cultivated a jazz culture as dynamic and vibrant as the music that produced it. The program conducts nearly 40 student concerts a year and is home to The Flying Horse Big Band, a premier student jazz ensemble that has seen multiple records reach No.1 on the professional jazz charts. UCF is also one of the only performing arts schools in the nation with a 24/7 NPR jazz station (89.9 FM) and an in-house recording label, Flying Horse Records.

A primary driver of success for the program and its students has been longtime Jazz Studies director, Pegasus Professor and world-renowned saxophonist Jeffrey Rupert. Rupert spearheaded the Jazz Studies track at UCF, positioned legendary musicians on the faculty and founded Flying Horse Records. Under his direction, The Flying Horse Big Band appeared at the Montreux, Switzerland, and the North Sea Jazz Festivals, as well as numerous festival and concert appearances domestically.

"Ensuring we can continue giving our students these kinds of real-world experiences is paramount to helping us maintain the highest level of education and outreach opportunities," Rupert said.

Recently, an anonymous donor pledged up to \$100,000 as a dollar-for-dollar match to support the Jazz Studies Program, establishing the Jeffrey M. Rupert Jazz Studies Excellence Fund. The purpose of this gift is to create an endowment that will provide operating funds to the program in perpetuity. Funding will assist with recording and production costs as well as scholarships to promising jazz students. It will also bring in professional guest artists to conduct master classes and interface with students.

"Meeting working musicians is so important because it helps students realize there are ancillary revenue streams in the music business," Rupert said. "For students to have an understanding of that is something very unique at UCF and certainly within the Southeast region."

What has long distinguished jazz from other genres is its embrace of self-expression and ability to resist traditional art forms, a sound defined not by technical precision but by the spontaneity of emotional compulsion — from the percussive beat of the drums to the stirring trills of the trumpet.

"We can use art to express what words cannot," Rupert said. "By listening to jazz and having that individual experience within a shared cultural setting, people can make the connection between being an American and what the essence of jazz music is all about."



*Let's keep the spirit of jazz alive!*

We still need your help to reach our matching goal of \$100,000 and unlock the full potential of the Jeffrey M. Rupert Jazz Studies Excellence Fund.

[GIVE TODAY](#)





# INSPIRING THE COMMUNITY: A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

You wouldn't typically find a 40-foot city bus repurposed as a mobile learning lab parked outside a residential home in Winter Park. But last March, there it was.

Its placement in front of the home of JJ Mackle 'OOMA was intentional. Mackle arranged it for an event she was hosting — the first for what was then a newly created group called Women Supporting Science, organized by the College of Sciences. The concept was simple: serve wine and hors d'oeuvres, open your doors to neighbors, classmates, and colleagues and bring the exciting STEM-related work happening at UCF directly to the community, all with the goal of inspiring more people to pursue and support the sciences.

That time, the STEM-related work showcased geospatial technology, from an augmented reality sandbox to a drone flying station, aimed at making science more accessible and understandable for people of all ages.

"We wanted a new way to connect the community with the university beyond typical events," said Mackle, who serves on the College of Science's Dean's Advisory Board. "For this one, we had neighborhood kids and families coming in to explore the sciences."

The next event invited guests to join Associate Professor Addie Dove for a tour of UCF's Exolith Lab, where researchers produce simulated dirt from the Moon and Mars to better prepare spacecraft and suits for exploration on their surfaces. Mackle's close friend, Cynthia Chamberlin '95 '98MBA, attended and met students who were mothers, students working multiple jobs and students who were both. Touched by their stories, she wanted to do something to support their education and relieve their financial burden.

As a result, in April, Chamberlin and her husband, John '91MBA, made significant cash and estate gifts to establish the John E. and Cynthia A. Chamberlin Scholarship Fund, which provides scholarships to nontraditional students in the College of Sciences. It's the largest gift to result from Women Supporting Science.

"We want our community to have more conversations about STEM research and be more excited about STEM education," Mackle said. "What's wrong with being excited about advancing our society, our university and each other — and having fun while we're doing it?"



# SELLING THE KEYS TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Sales may be a five-letter word, but it certainly can feel like a four-letter word to some. For Madison Igdalsky '25, though, it was the perfect avenue to marrying her interest in marketing and business with her competitive spirit and passion for people — a powerful combo.

"It wasn't until I took the required professional selling course that I learned what sales actually is," said Igdalsky, a senior at UCF's College of Business. She's currently pursuing her degree in marketing through the professional selling track. "It's not what many of us initially think — that typical car salesman that pops into your head. There's a lot of value in sales, great flexibility, travel opportunities — that really motivates me."

And that value Igdalsky references extends far beyond just the sales professional. At its core, sales is about effectively communicating a product or service in a way that someone can truly understand. Sales professionals are there to ensure that what we're buying will actually fulfill the want or need.

That value takes center stage at the College of Business every fall with the State Farm Professional Selling Program Competition, an opportunity open to all students in UCF's nationally recognized Professional Selling Program, which benefits winners with \$1,500 scholarships funded through State Farm.

Now in its seventh year, the competition requires students to develop a client-facing video pitch. This year's challenge, selling the best fitting insurance portfolio to a client hoping to buy a new home and car in addition to supporting their unwell father, was made tricky by the client's penchant for gambling.



"We had to find a way to allow them to live their dreams, but also give them a healthy dose of reality by saying, 'Hey listen, these are the things that you have to sacrifice now so you can reach those big goals in the future,'" said Igdalsky.

"We wanted to help prepare students to be more life-integrated ready, so they can use those skills when those first paychecks start coming in, and they



**High-Impact Educational Practices (HIPs) are learning opportunities that occur throughout students' undergraduate years and impact their ability to develop intellectually and gain practical skills**

**HIPs include special interest learning communities like the professional selling program; UCF Abroad; internships; research opportunities and more**

**97%** of all students participating in a study abroad program found jobs within 12 months of graduation

**Participating in more than two HIPs increases the likelihood of "on-time" graduation by more than 75%**

can help others on this journey," said State Farm agent Justin Bauknight. "So, we created a scholarship to challenge them. As part of the competition, students are asked a lot of questions regarding what you should do when you're trying to reach your dreams and still meet all of your needs."

State Farm awarded six scholarships to the students who competed in the 2024 State Farm Professional Selling Competition, including one to Igdalsky, and has since announced the renewal of their \$10,000 grant to help students in UCF's Professional Selling Program.

Igdalsky said the scholarship provided much-needed support as she prepared for a two-week study abroad with the College of Business. "I would love to live abroad one day, and making those connections, learning how others do business — how it's similar to us in America, how it's different — provided a really great experience for me."





# Thank You

Captured in this report, you'll find just a sampling of the tremendous impact you have personally had on our students, programs, research and university as a whole.

Every story was carefully curated to welcome you on a journey — a journey similar to the one that your donation dollars have made as they travelled throughout our UCF community.

Together this fiscal year, we've built a new state-of-the-art facility to address the nursing shortage and planned an extensive expansion to our career services offerings. We've even commenced work to further develop our football program's facilities, positioning staff and players for success in the Big 12.

We've given out more than 2,100 scholarships to hard working students who can spend more time and energy on their classes, research opportunities and internships, and a little less on making ends meet.

We've contributed to the launch of programs like UCF Jazz Studies and the growth of world changing UCF-based organizations like Limbitless Solutions.

Your hard-earned dollars are working harder than ever. For this, and for the ever so many other avenues your gift may have taken along the way, we thank you.

***Go Knights. Charge On!***

## Volunteer Leadership

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Members of the UCF Foundation Board of Directors give generously of their time, their expertise and their resources to advance the University of Central Florida. The following directors served through Fiscal Year 2024. A current board roster is available at [ucffoundation.org/board](https://ucffoundation.org/board).

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The UCF Alumni Board formulates and executes strategies and programs that build a culture of service and philanthropy among UCF's alumni. The following members served through Fiscal Year 2024. A current board roster is available at [ucfalumni.com](https://ucfalumni.com).

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