



NEWSLETTER

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REACH GREATER HEIGHTS IN THE ARTS,
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Upstate's Child Protection Training Center Offers Exclusive Learning Opportunities for Students, Community

By Jack Gibson

At USC Upstate, students are gaining hands-on experience in protecting children and supporting families through the Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) minor and the Child Protection Training Center (CPTC). Together, these resources provide interactive environments and help students gain emotional insight into child welfare, setting Upstate apart as a leader in child protection education.

Ms. Jodie Martin, MA, LPC, who oversees both the CAST minor and the CPTC, said the programs are designed for students in a wide range of majors who plan to work with children or families.

"We're here to support students who are going to enter fields where they'll have contact with children and families," Martin said. "I get a lot of (students with) minors in Criminal Justice and Psychology, but also from areas like Exercise Science and Early Childhood Education. Really, anybody who's going to work with kids can benefit."

The CAST minor operates under the Zero Abuse Project, a national organization focused on ending child maltreatment through education and advocacy. USC Upstate is the only university in South Carolina to offer this program, giving its students a distinct advantage.

A key component of the CAST program is its partnership with the CPTC, where students participate in immersive training. The CPTC features a fully furnished mock house and mock courtroom, allowing students to experience real-world scenarios they may encounter in the field.



The mock courtroom allows students and local professionals to gain hands-on experience in child protection training. Photo provided by USC Upstate.

"It's different when you read about a case in a book versus walking into a home and seeing it," Martin said. "The mock house helps students identify risk factors, notice red flags, and understand what those signs might mean."

In the mock courtroom, students act as judges, attorneys, and caseworkers under the guidance of Dr. Jennifer Gray, assistant professor of Psychology at Upstate.

The experience helps them understand how family court proceedings work and how legal and social services intersect in child protection cases.

The CPTC is also open to the community as well. Martin said local school districts, law enforcement, and community organizations can also use the facility for professional development.

"We've had groups like Oconee County Schools come for training," she said. "Sometimes it's just about helping teachers understand how their students live. It gives them a different perspective."

CAST students are also required to complete internships, which allow them to apply what they've learned before entering the workforce.

Martin says it's important for students to have these hands-on experiences.

"Kids need to get out of the classroom," she said. "Books are important, but there's something to be said for real-life application. I want students to go out and be good stewards of our community."

For more information about the CAST program or the CPTC, please visit the [CAST website](#).

Homecoming: Alum Sneed Returns to Where it all Started

By Avery Beaton and Evan Lawrence

A decade after she graduated, Zoe Sneed is back on campus as the Theater Department's new Technical Director. She was hired for the role in June when the position became available after it was affected by a hiring freeze.

After the previous Technical Director retired, the position was frozen by the state, meaning it couldn't be filled for two years.

Sneed, who had been working at Upstate on a freelance basis managing and coordinating events at the Humanities and Performing Arts Center (HPAC), applied for the position once it became available in the summer of 2025.

Sneed said, "So when I left (Upstate), I had not just a rolodex of things on my resume, of things I've done and places I've worked, but almost more importantly, people that knew people that helped. And the professors were great with that too."

In her current role, Sneed, who also owns and operates her own woodworking business, is responsible for a number of different tasks, including working in and overseeing the scene shop where she and students work together to build backdrops and sets for theater productions. Sneed also works to make sure that all sets are built on time, safely, and effectively.



Upstate's new Technical Director, alum Zoe Sneed. Photo courtesy of USC Upstate.

Since being hired, Sneed has been a tremendous asset to the department and has helped the theater run more safely and efficiently.

Sneed graduated from USC Upstate in 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication with a Theater concentration and a minor in Business Administration (The BA in Theater had not yet been established when she was a student). Sneed is excited to be back on campus and is settling in.

"Overall, it's a great new challenge," she said.

Sneed's previous work experience includes Walt Disney World, Carolina Ballet, GW Wiley Theatre, Chapman Cultural Center, Warehouse Theatre, Children's Museum of the Upstate, and freelance stage management.

To learn more about Zoe Sneed's work or to get involved in this season's theater activities, click [here](#) for more information.

Life Under the Lights: Taylor Leaves His Mark on the Stage



Taylor in last spring's production of "Rent" at Upstate. Photo provided by Krischan Taylor.

By Gabriel Byrd

Viewing a theatrical performance can be a thrilling experience, as the performers bring a new world to life right before audiences' eyes. For USC Upstate student Krischan Taylor, that's what he lives for.

Taylor, a senior at USC Upstate, has been involved in theater ever since his middle school days. However, he didn't find his love for it immediately.

He said, "In elementary school, I hated doing theater. I just didn't think it was for me."

It wasn't until middle school that Taylor found his passion for performing in theater.

"Something just clicked, and I've loved doing this ever since," he said.

Since beginning his theater career, Taylor has been given the opportunity to make many great memories. One of those memories was visiting England twice with the USC Upstate Theater Department.

He said, "Every time I went to England with USC Upstate, I've had the opportunity and the privilege of going to the Globe Theatre to get to see Shakespeare where it was originally produced and see it how it is intended to be performed. I've gotten to experience other cultures through theater, whether it is through their stories or physically being there."

Whether performing abroad or at a local theater, Taylor has built an impressive resume of roles over the years, from being Romeo in "Romeo & Juliet" to Lysander in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." However, the role that stands out the most is playing Mark in the play "Rent."

Growing up, Taylor and his mom would sing along with the soundtracks of many theatrical productions, including "Rent."

Taylor said, "Having the full circle moment of getting to sing the songs that used to be karaoke nights to my mom, who was in the audience on closing night, just brought my theater journey up to that point full circle."

For him, it was more than just a normal role – it was huge milestone.

As he nears the end of his college days, Taylor looks ahead to what he wants to pursue next in the world of theater, and he has a plan.

"My five-to-ten-year plan is to graduate and pursue professional theater work while, at the same time continuing my personal studies with the [Society of American Fight Directors](#), eventually hoping to attain certified teacher status with them."

His end goal, however, is to teach as a way to pass on what he's learned.

"I want to pursue my Master's (degree) and then start looking into finding a university to settle into, eventually pursue a tenure track (position), and begin a collegiate-level teaching career."

Taylor graduates from Upstate in May 2026.

Love, '17, Chases His Dreams Through the Storms

By Anna Exall

When Alex Love graduated from USC Upstate in 2017, he was ready to chase the news wherever it took him.

Now a multimedia journalist at CBS affiliate [KCTV 5](#) in Kansas City, MO, he has spent nearly a decade covering some of the nation's most impactful stories, from hurricanes on the Gulf Coast to blizzards in upstate New York.

Love said, "You have to be prepared ahead of time. It is all about doing your homework, following the news, and knowing why it matters."

Since graduating from USC Upstate, Love has built a flourishing career as a multimedia journalist, working in news markets across the country from Mississippi to New York and now Kansas City. Each day brings something new, and that constant change is what keeps him motivated. He said success in the newsroom depends on preparation and curiosity.

"You come into the newsroom with story ideas ready," Love said. "You need to know

who is involved, why it matters, and be ready to sell that story to your editors."

Some of his favorite assignments have involved covering extreme weather. He has reported live during hurricanes, tornadoes, and snowstorms, often standing outside in harsh conditions to show viewers what was happening in real time.

"It can be dangerous, but someone has to do it," Love said. "The more you document the damage, the easier it is to show government officials and organizations what communities need."

Love said one of the most powerful moments in his career came in 2019 when he covered one of the largest workplace immigration raids in U.S. history at several chicken plants in Mississippi. Nearly 700 workers were detained by federal agents, and Love found the children who were left behind waiting in a local gym for their parents.

"They were eating pizza off the floor and did not know what was going to happen next," he said. "That story exploded, and it really changed how people were talking about immigration and what happens to families."



Love graduated from USC Upstate in 2017 and currently works as a multimedia journalist for KCTV 5 in Kansas City, MO. Photo from KCTV 5.

The coverage quickly went viral, and his footage was shared by major national networks, bringing attention to both the workers and the community that was left behind.

Love credits his time at USC Upstate for giving him the skills and confidence to succeed in an ever-changing field.

"Everything I do now started in those classrooms," he said. "The professors at Upstate taught me how to tell a story, how to work hard, and how to stay ready for whatever comes next."

'Be the Youngest Person in the Room,' DeloSantos, '19

By Jasmine Smith

Drake DeloSantos, class of 2019, started his college career with the intention of going into broadcast media.

"I always thought that I'd be in television news," he shared. "But after shadowing (at) local stations, I realized that lifestyle wasn't for me."

That realization led him to pivot into public relations, a move he calls "the best decision I made in undergrad."

He chose Upstate to pursue his education because of the affordability, smaller class size, and personalized instruction.

"At USC Upstate, you're known by a name, not a number," he said. "I could walk into office hours, and my professors knew me personally. That's something you won't get in a 300-seat lecture hall."



DeloSantos graduated from Upstate in 2019 and currently works for Prisma Health in Columbia. Photo provided by Drake DeloSantos.

His education laid the foundation for a career built on communication, empathy, and adaptability. In his current role as Community Relations Manager for Prisma Health Midlands Region, DeloSantos manages community sponsorships and public engagement, often fielding both praise and criticism from the public.

He also discussed how the field has evolved since his graduation just six years ago.

"TikTok wasn't even a thing," he said. "Now we pitch events for Instagram reels instead of traditional news coverage."

He added that now, it's all about targeted storytelling and influencer engagement.

He emphasized the importance of internships and networking, sharing how his mentor helped him land multiple jobs through personal connections. Being willing to work outside of your comfort zone is also important.

"Be the youngest person in the room. It's scary, but it means you're doing something right."

Whether navigating crisis communication or building brand trust, DeloSantos' story is a testament to the power of mentorship, adaptability, and showing up with confidence. As he put it, "You hit the ground running, and people notice."

Upstate Gospel Choir Named Contemporary Choir of the Year

By Zaria Benson and Mary Wilkins

The University of South Carolina Upstate's Gospel Choir was recently named the Contemporary Choir of the Year by [Avidity Awards](#), an independent leader in the gospel music industry.

Under the direction of Mr. Alphaeus Anderson, who has led the group since 2013, the Gospel Choir released its debut album, *Elevate*, in March of 2025, following the success of its single "Already Done," which charted on Billboard and Mediabase.

Anderson shared that the choir's origins date back to 1979, when Dr. Warren Carson, professor emeritus, established the group.

For Anderson, leadership of the choir is deeply personal.

He said, "Dr. Carson actually used to pick me up as a teenager in Spartanburg to play piano at his church. Years later, I came to USC Upstate, saw the choir perform, and never imagined I would eventually take over."

Perhaps also hard to imagine was the national recognition the group would earn after its success.

In addition to the Avidity Awards, the Choir has also been nominated for other industry accolades.

"This year, USC Upstate was the only University nominated for a Stellar Gospel Music Award," Anderson said. "Obviously, we did not bring it home, but the nomination was everything. From the very first recording, to being in the same conversation as greats like Kirk Franklin, CeCe Winans, and William Murphy, it's the ultimate honor."

Participation in the choir is open to all USC Upstate students, regardless of musical background. The choir also aligns with the Popular Music Studies program, offering students a pathway to engage academically



USC Upstate's Gospel Choir was established in 1979. Photo provided by Mr. Anderson.

with music and performance.

As the choir looks ahead to the next Stellar Awards ceremony and others, Anderson remains hopeful for continued recognition and growth.

"We don't just sing songs; the students worship through struggle, joy, and purpose," he said. "Our success is shared by the whole choir."

For more information, follow the Gospel Choir on [Instagram](#).

This newsletter is distributed by the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS) at USC Upstate. Students in the Fall 2025 section of the JOUR 331: Advanced PR Writing class have contributed content and visuals for this issue.

We would love your feedback. Please contact Allison Lane at acantre@uscupstate.edu or Dr. Tanya Boone at tanyabh@uscupstate.edu with any comments, suggestions and/or questions. Please look for our next edition in Spring 2026.

'Pop in' to see Upstate's Vocal Ensemble in December

By Nisha Stark

The USC Upstate Vocal Ensemble will present its end-of-semester showcase, "Popping In" on Dec. 2 at 7:30 p.m. in the HPAC Theater. This production offers an innovative take on popular music through choral arrangements.

The audience can expect more than a concert; they will also experience a celebration of connection, creativity, and community.

Led by Ms. Siri Howard, professional performer and adjunct music faculty member, the ensemble reimagines today's pop hits through choral artistry while honoring the original energy and emotion behind each song.

Howard said, "This program helps students understand music on so many different levels. We're doing popular music in choral arrangements, but we're maintaining the stylistic elements that make pop what it is."

This semester's lineup blends eras and genres – from Billie Eilish's "Birds of a Feather" to Bill Withers' soulful "Lovely Day" and Cyndi Lauper's classic "Time After Time." The ensemble also explores artists like Laufey, whose jazzy, dreamlike sound introduces students to the fusion of pop and jazz that's shaping the charts today.

For Howard, who has performed with symphony orchestras and appeared on Broadway, the show isn't about perfection – it's about meaning.

"Art is about connection and storytelling," she said. "I tell my students to find what the song means to you and bring that to the table."

That message resonates deeply with students like Dorthanious "Dee" Slade, a junior Theatre major with minors in Criminal Justice and Popular Music Studies, who has been part of the vocal ensemble for several semesters.

Slade said, "I think it's cool how Siri has turned the program into something really meaningful. This semester, we're focusing on more than just the notes – it's about performing the lyrics in a way people can feel them."

For more information, visit the Popular Music Studies' [website](#).

Giving Tuesday is Dec. 2, 2025

Celebrate Giving Tuesday on Dec. 2 by supporting the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences.

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