INSIDE SPELMAN

JUNE 2023

CELEBRATING THE SPIRIT OF SPELMAN

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Dear Spelman Community, Friends and Supporters,

Welcome to the June edition of Inside Spelman, our monthly digital magazine. The cover of this edition provides a snapshot of my inaugural year as the 11th president of Spelman College, as we wrap up the 2022-23 academic year. This has been an inspiring year filled with much learning, new relationships and excitement about the future! The first semester kicked off with a welcoming reception by the NAASC during the True Blue Sister Summit in Chicago. Soon after we—the campus community—came together to welcome the Class of 2026 during New Student Orientation. The campus community also returned to full-time in-person learning. There were so many special moments on campus that followed, including the new faculty orientation, homecoming, my first Board meeting, my Blue Record interview, kicking off my first series of Courageous Conversations: Black in the C-Suite, the annual Spelman-Morehouse Christmas Carol Concert and attending alumnae events from coast to coast.

The second semester ushered in the season of spirited spring events that included a celebration of Women’s History Month in March and the relaunch of Inside Spelman, as well as the end of a five-year historic capital campaign and virtual celebration featuring President Emerita Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell and Spelman College Board Chair Rosalind “Roz” Brewer. The momentum continued with Spelbound, Research Day, Founders Day, my inauguration ceremony and festivities, followed by a week of culminating events, including Alumnae Reunion, Class Day, Baccalaureate and Commencement for the Class of 2023! We also celebrated the remarkable leadership of our outgoing Board Chair Roz Brewer and welcomed the new chair, Lovette Russell. Every experience has continued to help me grow in my knowledge, appreciation and pride in Spelman and its community.

While the semester has come to an end, this edition will continue to highlight the stories and accomplishments of our outstanding faculty, staff, alumnae and students. After such a remarkable first year, I’m looking forward to the next chapter of our journey together, as we prepare for the next academic year.

Thank you for your continued support of Spelman College.

President Helene Gayle
Commencement Highlights

- On May 20, the Class of 2023 was joined by family, friends and faculty and staff for Baccalaureate at the Georgia International Convention Center. The Rev. Traci Blackmon, associate general minister of justice and local church ministries for the United Church of Christ, served as speaker and – along with President Gayle and Dean Nichelle Guidry of Spelman’s historic Sisters Chapel – offered words of uplift and encouragement to the graduates.

- Rarely does a college announce multiple co-valedictorians. At Spelman College, it’s a part of the culture! Tied by less than thousandths of a percentage were the Class of 2023’s four co-valedictorians – Maya Blasingame, Amaia Calhoun, Chandler Nutall and Sydney DuPree.

- This was the first class to receive a charge and to have their degrees conferred upon them by President Gayle.

See photos and watch the full commencement ceremony, including speeches from our co-valedictorians on our website.
Celebrating Spelman College’s First Lavender Class

As part of the Class of 2023 graduation ceremonies, Spelman College held its first Lavender Graduation ceremony in celebration of its LGBTQIA+ students.

The ceremony, which was planned by Spelman’s Office of Student Life and Engagement, the Wisdom Center, the Women’s Research and Resource Center and Afrekete took place in the Camille Olivia Hanks Cosby, Ed.D., Academic Center.

The ceremony included rainbow-colored stoles, the pinning of bell hooks and the presentation of pride awards to College faculty and alumnae, including Evelyn M. Hammonds, Ph.D., C’1976 (she/her) and Ruiz O’Neal, C’2018 (he/him).

Hammonds received the Pauli Murray Award for her support of human rights and justice for people of African descent, while O’Neal received the Audre Lorde Award for his public stance on gender equality and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ equity and issues. The event was moderated by Chauna Lawson (she/her), the associate director of the HBCU Program at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation.

C’2023 STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

From Switchboard Operator to PED Scholar: Wanda Anderson, C’2023, Answers Spelman’s Call

Wanda Anderson’s journey to attain a degree from Spelman College unknowingly began in 2005. That year, she began working at the College – a choice she made after her career as a bank teller ended with the closing of the bank. Forced to seek employment as a single parent, Anderson was referred to Spelman.

“I began working at Spelman in the Facilities Management and Services department as a temporary housekeeper. From there, I became a full-time housekeeper working in the Manley dorms,” she recalled. “That was a very difficult time for me. However, I realized that God had other plans when a position opened for a switchboard operator.”

Nineteen years later, Anderson still serves the College and has a new title – telecommunications operator.

Anderson’s college experience initially began as a student at Monterey Peninsula College in Monterey, CA. Her decision to withdraw stemmed from a desire to focus on raising her children and working – a tough balancing act.

Years later, while working at Spelman, she was inspired to resume her academic journey as a Pauline E. Drake (PED) Scholar, a delightful moment for her children and grandchildren who witnessed her graduate during the Class of 2023!

“My experience has been at times challenging. I would say next to raising my children, returning to school to finish my degree has been the hardest thing that I have done,” she said. “Oftentimes, the first days of classes would be a little stressful because the students naturally assumed that I was the professor. After getting past that, they treated me like any other student.”

An important piece of the journey to completing her studies was sisterhood. According to Anderson, other PED Scholars pushed her to stay on track and keep going forward, even when her schedule was tough. She squeezed in classes and study sessions during her lunch break and in the evenings at the end of a long workday.

“Many days, I just wanted to go home after work, but I stayed in my office to do my homework – returning home late at night. It was a sacrifice! I am grateful for my supervisors Jackie James and Ron Borgelin, who always worked with me and my schedule.”

READ MORE ABOUT WANDA ANDERSON, C’2023
A “Choice” Deferred: Faune Watkins, C’2023, Takes A Star-studded Journey to Commencement

In 1994, Spelman alumna Faune Watkins, C’2023, made the choice to change the world upon acceptance to Spelman College. She would have the typical Spelman experience as a first-year student and sophomore, but, in the spring of 1997, a major opportunity changed the course of her life and education.

“I was a junior at Spelman when I got a phone call to go on tour with Michael Jackson,” said Watkins. “So, at that moment it was the question of, ‘Do I go and pursue this incredible once in a lifetime opportunity? Or do I stay and finish school?’”

Her decision? She chose the HI Story tour with the legendary Michael Jackson.

Watkins’ passion and devotion lies within the performing and creative arts. The Atlanta native grew up dancing and started her professional career at the age of 16. During her time at Spelman, she danced for the Atlanta Hawks basketball team and, after touring with Michael Jackson, danced with Janet Jackson and appeared in Destiny Child’s “Say My Name” music video. Later, as an actress, Watkins appeared in such films as “White Chicks,” “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,” and “Epic Movie,” to name a few. She also became a writer and producer.

Despite her success in Hollywood, Watkins said there was never a question of if she would one day return to Spelman, but when. When the coronavirus pandemic caused a global shutdown in 2020, she took that as her cue to finish the academic dance she started in 1994.

“It was always a goal to achieve. I come from a long line of educators and a legacy of college graduates in my family,” she said proudly. “I wanted to continue that legacy.”

In addition to her two children, legacy is what has kept Watkins motivated. “I did some research on the correlation between legacy and history, and it’s so important to understand and know what’s come before you for innovation to take place. You must understand what foundation you’re building upon to innovate.”

The College’s legacy and continuous advocacy for women are among the many reasons Watkins felt confident to withdraw in 1997 and return 25 years later. When asked about her first experience touring, she credits Spelman for her success.

“Traveling is an education, and I was blessed enough to be able to experience the arts, the industry and business with a front-row seat—literally. I may have put down the books, but I didn’t stop learning. My education took on an experiential format,” she explained.

“Even in dance, specifically at Spelman, there’s an anthropological lens. Traveling the world and being able to experience the food, culture and traditions, then take that information and love into the passion I have for dance and for the arts, creates such a cohesive and beautiful environment for creativity and fosters excellence.”

Returning with a lifetime of lessons and experiences under her belt, Watkins returned to Spelman in 2021 and enrolled in the Pauline E. Drake Scholars program, which provides adult learners with the opportunity to re-enroll in college or begin their studies for the first time with the goal of earning a bachelor’s degree. She studied dance performance and choreography with online and hybrid on-campus courses.

“I was like the auntie in the room,” she exclaimed. “I think the difference for me is having those lived experiences that I came back to school with. I definitely had an appreciation for the moment and my time in the classes. I felt more confident in answering questions or asking questions and sharing my ideas.”

“I had to adjust to the workload, but I really enjoyed the experience. I felt embraced, celebrated, welcomed, supported, and encouraged to complete my degree as a PED Scholar,” she said.

Watkins completed her coursework in two years and graduated this spring with the class of 2023. “I’m so grateful. My mom said that my smile was just beaming. Watching my husband and children cheering and screaming – it was beautiful,” she said. “Moving that tassel over to the other side was a very special moment that fills my heart with joy and pride.”

With her new degree in tow, Watkins’ post-graduation plans include travel and developing more projects that fuse her passions for music, dance and producing.

When asked what she would tell her younger self, she said, “Pursuing your degree will open doors of opportunity that will take you into a life beyond your wildest dreams. That is what happened to me.”
Breaking Barriers and Forging Pathways: Marionette Holmes, C’90, Trailblazes Efforts for Black Women in Economics

For Marionette Holmes, Ph.D., C’90, associate professor and chair of Spelman College’s economics department, pursuing a career in economics is a family tradition.

“I decided early on to pursue economics as a career,” said Holmes. “When I attended Spelman, my father, who was a political science professor, suggested that if I really wanted to influence the landscape for African-Americans, I should go into economics. He saw economics as a way to effect policy and make both a cultural and global impact.”

According to an American Economic Association (AEA) 2018 report, Black economists comprise only 3.6% of all economics faculty in the United States. Similarly, a 2020 AEA study revealed that Black women face significant underrepresentation, with only 0.7% of Ph.D. economists in the nation identifying as Black women. Holmes has aspirations of reshaping the field while championing the inclusion of these women.

Under Holmes’s leadership, efforts are underway to amplify the presence of Black women in economics. As the principal investigator of a grant funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, she is driving initiatives to increase the representation of Black women in economics doctoral programs.

The Sloan Foundation grant supports Spelman’s commitment to enhancing Black women’s representation in STEM. These comprehensive endeavors encompass a variety of activities, including a summer bridge program designed to strengthen mathematical competencies; a distinguished speaker series showcasing accomplished women of color in economics; and initiatives focused on enhancing graduate program applications through a journal club and research experiences with esteemed economics faculty from Stanford University and Howard University.

“I am deeply committed to creating pathways for Black women in economics and empowering them to excel in the field,” said Holmes. “Through these initiatives and the support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation grant, we are breaking barriers, fostering inclusivity, and inspiring future generations of economists to contribute to meaningful change.”

Spelman Trustee, Alumna Lovette Twyman Russell, C’83, Appointed New Board Chair

On June 1, Spelman College’s Board of Trustees (BOT) appointed alumna and long-time trustee Lovette Twyman Russell, C’83, as chair, following the retirement of chair emerita Rosalind (Roz) Brewer, C’84. Russell was initially elected to the BOT in 2009, working alongside Brewer who served 12 out of her 17 years as board chair.

“Spelman College has long been a leader in educating, empowering and shaping the lives of young women. My experience as a Spelmanite provided me with an incredible educational foundation and a powerful sisterhood that continues to enrich my life today,” Russell said. “I am honored that my colleagues have entrusted me with the responsibility to serve as chair of Spelman’s Board of Trustees.”

Russell, an Atlanta native, has been a senior consultant with Coxe Curry & Associates for nine years. Coxe Curry & Associates provides professional counsel to help greater Atlanta nonprofit organizations attract resources, accomplish their missions, and serve the community. Earlier in Russell’s career, after earning her bachelor’s degree in psychology from Spelman College, she worked as a computer programmer for a small firm, then worked in sales and marketing for the Xerox Corporation. Throughout it all, she has remained a community advocate and volunteer committed to working for children’s causes.

“As a member of the board for more than 10 years, I am committed to building upon our successes and leveraging new opportunities to deliver leadership that supports this exceptional institution and our students,” said Russell.
Spelman College Students Awarded Brent Faiyaz’s “Show U Off” Grant

In April 2023, recent Spelman College alumnae Vanessa Edokpayi, C’2023, and Brooklyn Reed, C’2023, earned $10,000 for their startup, EVEN, through the third annual “Show U Off” grant competition.

Through this opportunity — in collaboration with the creative collective UnitedMasters and Grammy-nominated singer and producer Brent Faiyaz — six Black businesswomen are awarded $60,000 annually to empower Black female voices and support their success.

EVEN — a Business-to-Business-to-Consumer Software as a Service (B2B2C SAAS) workspace platform — is designed to normalize the four-day workweek by alleviating corporations of low employee productivity and increased financial loss. EVEN is reimagining work culture through their efforts to reform the balance of work and personal wellness.

“Ultimately, EVEN’s vision is to bring wellness back into the workplace,” explained Reed, an EVEN co-founder.

With the resources to turn a plan into action, EVEN is motivated to inspire a new mindset for the traditional workforce environment.

“In the next five years, we hope to see EVEN on the market and readily available for our customers (corporations) and their employees to utilize,” exclaimed Reed. “We also hope that we can bring attention to, and spark conversations that contribute to, additional change surrounding the negative attitudes attributed to the ideology of the ‘toxic workplace’ and the outdated 40-hour workweek system currently in place.”

“ASPIRE”-ing to Greatness: Four Spelman Students Chosen for U-M Summer Policy Research Experience

This summer, four Spelman College students will participate in the University of Michigan’s Applied Social Policy Internship and Research Experience (ASPIRE) — a seven-week summer program run by the Youth Policy Lab (YPL) at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy and the Institute for Social Research. The applied research experience will help these outstanding Spelmanites develop quantitative social science research skills and a greater understanding about pursuing a career in public policy research.

The inaugural cohort includes seniors Keyla Anderson, Theo Burden, Lexi Turner and Aleasa Parker, C’2025 — all chosen for their passion for creating social policy change and their strong backgrounds in research methods and data analysis.

“As a proud Spelman alumna, I am overjoyed to welcome Keyla, Theo, Aleasa and Lexi as our inaugural cohort of ASPIRE research fellows,” said Celeste Watkins-Hayes, Dean of the Ford School. “Their training, perspectives, and talents will contribute to the Ford School’s policy research impact.

Moreover, the Ford School-Spelman partnership demonstrates a shared institutional commitment to creating positive social change through rigorous analysis, service, and advocacy.”

During the program, the cohort will explore research questions and complete individual research projects in one of YPL’s core policy areas: early childhood education, maternal and infant health, adolescent mental health, career technical education, or workforce development. The students will also attend professional workshops and hear from UM faculty and staff about careers in social policy.

READ MORE ABOUT THE U-M SUMMER EXPERIENCE
2023 Reunioners in Attendance and Alumnae Giving

Reunion 2023 proved to be another remarkable Forever Blue spirited event! The Division of Institutional Advancement is pleased to share the attendance and donation outcomes from this year’s reunioning classes (specifically class years ending in 3 and 8).

The week of activities included the Sisterhood Breakfast, Reunion Convocation, Golden Girl Tea (C’73 only), March Through the Alumnae Arch and the True Blue Gala. During the True Blue Gala – the grand finale event, which took place on Saturday, May 19, 2023, at the International Ballroom of the Georgia International Convention Center – the following accolades were announced:

The Reunion Philanthropy Awards acknowledge classes that exceed expectations and contribute significantly to the long-term sustainability of Spelman College. Classes across four distinct categories were honored:

- **Every Woman, Every Year Award**
  - **Highest Five-Year Average Class Participation Award (Top 3 Classes)**
    - 1st: Class of 1973 45.10%
    - 2nd: Class of 2003 39.21%
    - 3rd: Class of 1988 38.96%

- **Beacons of Excellence Award**
  - **Highest Five-Year Total Giving Award**
    - 1st: Class of 2003 $1,135,786.12
    - 2nd: Class of 1973 $750,782.99
    - 3rd: Class of 1993 $567,978.03

- **Supreme in Sisterhood Award: Highest Fiscal Year Average Class Participation Award (Top Class)**
  - The Golden Girl Class of 1973 – 56.12%

- **Through the Arch Award: Highest Fiscal Year Total Giving Award (Top Class)**
  - The Golden Girl Class of 1973 – $309,507.93

The Office of Annual Giving is happy to announce a cumulative Reunion Five-Year Class Gift Total of **$5,414,452.90** and a Five-Year Average Class Participation Rate of **28.44%**.

We would like to extend heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all Reunion alumnae who have made a gift to the College during the 2023 fiscal year. Because of the collective generosity of our alumnae, we reached a grand total of $1,712,033.60 and 35.45% participation.
Spelman College is once again inviting our entire community to make a meaningful and transformative impact on the life of a student.

The College has thrived throughout the years, thanks to the unwavering support of our community. As you know, our rich legacy is upheld by the collective efforts of our alumnae and friends who share a deep connection to Spelman. We invite you to join us in continuing this tradition by supporting Spelman Strong, the College’s unrestricted fund.

By contributing to Spelman Strong, you will play an integral role in shaping the future of our beloved institution. Your generosity will not only honor our storied past but also lay the groundwork for transformative change that will benefit generations to come.

We kindly request that you consider making a gift to Spelman College before Friday, June 30, 2023, at 11:59 pm EDT, so your contribution can be counted towards the 2023 fiscal year. Your support makes a significant difference. Your support has the power to create a ripple effect that will shape the lives of Spelman students for years to come.

Thank you for your continued commitment to Spelman College. Your dedication is an inspiration to us all.

For more information, contact Renee Foster, Director of Annual Giving, at spelmanstrong@spelman.edu.

Deloitte Foundation Scholarship to Support STEM Education at Spelman

Spelman College is pleased to announce the establishment of the Deloitte Foundation Scholarship Fund, powered by a $200,000 contribution from the Deloitte Foundation.

Aiming to create lasting impacts in the lives of Spelman students while advancing inclusivity in STEM fields, the Deloitte Foundation Scholarship Fund will support 20 incoming juniors who are pursuing bachelor’s degrees in economics, computer science or mathematics. Each scholarship recipient will be awarded $10,000 during the 2023-2024 academic year.
Mandatory Wellness Curriculum Benefits Campus and Community Members

Spelman College added required physical activity courses to its curriculum in 2015, benefiting students and staff as well as creating a more active campus culture.

Vice President of Student Affairs Darryl Holloman is quoted in the piece.
4/26, SOURCE: INSIDE HIGHER ED

Gravity of Black Arts Movement poets covered in new book ‘Revolutionary Poetics’

NPR interview with Spelman College assistant professor of English, Sarah Rudewalker, on her new book covering the influential Black Arts Movement.
4/28, SOURCE: WABE

US companies, nudged by Black employees, have stepped up donations to HBCUs

Spelman College's senior vice president for institutional advancement, Jessie Brooks, is quoted—speaks to the significance of donor resources. Spelman graduates from the 136th Commencement Ceremony pictured.
6/01, SOURCE: AP NEWS ONLINE (also published in The Durango Herald Online, KTVZ - ABC4.com and WBRE-TV Online)

Tracee Ellis Ross encourages Black women to ‘make space for yourself’ while receiving honorary doctorate from Spelman College

5/22, SOURCE: GOOD MORNING AMERICA

Spelman College Makes History Again With 4 Graduating Valedictorians

Spelman celebrated four young women who all made history as valedictorians for the Class of 2023.
5/22, SOURCE: BLACK ENTERPRISE

‘Black Portraiture: Imaging the Black Body in the West’ celebrates its 10th anniversary

Inaugural Director of the Atlanta Center University Center Collective for the Study of Art History and Curatorial Studies, Cheryl Finley, Ph.D., will attend was featured on the Parisian television show “Perspective,” to discuss the positioning of Africa and the African Diaspora and their depiction in Western art.
5/30, SOURCE: FRANCE 24 ONLINE

Spelman Students Chosen for U-M ASPIRE Summer Policy Research Experience

This summer, four outstanding Spelman College students will participate in the University of Michigan’s Applied Social Policy Internship and Research Experience (ASPIRE) – a seven-week summer program run by the Youth Policy Lab (YPL) at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy and the Institute for Social Research.
5/30, SOURCE: HBCU NEWS

4 valedictorians to be celebrated at 2023 Spelman College commencement

For the fourth time in history, the school will have multiple valedictorians.
5/17, SOURCE: 11 ALIVE

Spelman Celebrates Four Young Women as Valedictorians

For the fourth time in history, the school will have multiple valedictorians.
5/17, SOURCE: 11 ALIVE
The Inauguration of Spelman’s 11th President

On April 28, 2023, Dr. Helene Gayle was formally installed as Spelman College’s 11th president – nine months after she began serving in the role on July 1, 2022. Under her leadership, the College has continued to build upon key priorities with a renewed, post-pandemic spirit of collaboration, including securing new financial commitments, expanding essential programs and producing historic partnerships to accelerate change.

Increasing Pathways to Success for Black Entrepreneurs

During this academic year, the Black Economic Alliance (BEA) Foundation announced two $5 million funding partnerships to support the Center for Black Entrepreneurship (CBE): with Cisco, a leading systems technology company, and with the Visa Foundation. The partnerships will help grow the pipeline of Black entrepreneurs and connect them to investment opportunities. The CBE is a collaboration among the BEA Foundation, Spelman College and Morehouse College. These commitments will expand current CBE programming at Spelman and Morehouse, supporting the next generation of Black entrepreneurial talent and increasing economic mobility for Black students.

Empowering Adult Learners through eSpelman

eSpelman's certificate programs – Entrepreneurship, Cosmetic Science, Diverse Leadership, Project Management, Business Essentials and Leading Self and Leading Others – have expanded to accept adult learners of all ages. To learn more about eSpelman's offerings, visit the eSpelman website.

OceanX and Google.org – Increasing Diversity in STEM Education

Spelman College has partnered with the nonprofit OceanX to offer Spelmanites an in-depth educational experience on ocean exploration and operations. This collaboration will help to eliminate gaps in the marine sciences by providing employment opportunities, research and curriculum development, and partnership building to help increase diversity in STEM education. Similarly focused is Google.org, which recently awarded $5 million to Spelman’s Center of Excellence for Minority Women. This is the largest single grant the organization has awarded to support a project focused on women of color in STEM, which aims to develop a data dashboard that reveals the impact of Black women leading, working and studying in the STEM fields.

The Next Generation of Content Creators on the Rise

NextGen, a Spelman-Spotify partnership program designed to infuse, activate and grow podcast culture on Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU) campuses nationwide.

Inaugural HBCU Game Jam Supports the Next Generation of Game Developers

In February, the HBCU Game Jam gave Atlanta University Center (AUC) students an opportunity to apply their theoretical CS & design knowledge as they competed to build their own video games, learn directly from community & industry partners through skill-based workshops and connect with industry representatives to learn about the many career pathways into tech/gaming.

New Major in Documentary Filmmaking

Spelman is also the first HBCU to offer a bachelor’s degree in documentary filmmaking – made possible by a $1 million gift from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation.

Spelman College Students Gain Intercultural Skills, Global Competence During Study Abroad Program to Japan

This month, a group of 26 Spelman College students and two professors are currently embarking on an intensive study abroad program in Japan thanks to assistance from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, Japan.
MISSION STATEMENT

Spelman College, a historically Black college and a global leader in the education of women of African descent, is dedicated to academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences and the intellectual, creative, ethical and leadership development of its students. Through diverse learning modalities, Spelman empowers the whole person to engage the many cultures of the world and inspires a commitment to positive social change.

Accreditation: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award baccalaureate degrees

Member: Atlanta University Center Consortium

Inside Spelman is published monthly by the Division of Strategic Communications and Marketing. All editorial correspondence should be directed to the editor at: publicrelations@spelman.edu.

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