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TUTORING TOWARD TESTING SUCCESS

STUDENTS GO OFF CAMPUS TO HELP IN SPANISH GED CLASS

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | April 19, 2024*Read time: about 3 min*

Hannah Dennis took on tutoring at a local community center because she needed the volunteer hours for a class.

But what started as an academic obligation quickly turned into a deeply meaningful opportunity. Dennis found purpose and joy as she worked to help prepare Spanish-speaking community members to take the Spanish GED (high school equivalency diploma).

“The most influential part of my experience at CNU was volunteering at the GED program. It is honestly hard for me to put into words how wonderful an experience it was as all of the students and teachers were just so kind and welcoming,” said Dennis, ‘26 [Biochemistry](#).

Dennis, who is also minoring in [Spanish](#), was one of the students from Dr. Kevin Anzzolin’s Spanish in the Community class who ventured weekly to the [Katherine Johnson Adult Education Center](#) in Newport News to work with residents to ensure they passed the exam in their native language.

“I fell in love with the GED environment and ended up doing more hours than required,” Dennis said. “I have always believed that no one is ever too old to learn something new, and this class proved that sentiment again and again.”

The project is one of Anzzolin’s many efforts to integrate students from his Spanish classes into CNU’s hometown of Newport News in hopes of building relationships. It’s also an example of CNU’s commitment to serving its

community, whether [assisting residents complete their tax forms](#), [helping schoolchildren master math](#), or [offering English as a Second Language classes on campus](#).

The Katherine Johnson initiative, Anzzolin said, provides a way for the students to improve their Spanish skills by using them in a real-world environment, while also helping the GED students succeed so they can improve their lives. Anzzolin's mission is to forge meaningful collaborations between campus and the city, thus giving CNU students a chance to use the skills learned in the classroom to make a difference in the world.

"It's really about optimizing educational opportunities for everyone," he said.

"CNU students bring linguistic proficiency, cultural understanding, and a passion for helping others to the table. Their ability to communicate effectively in Spanish allows them to connect with GED students on a deeper level and tailor their tutoring to meet their specific needs," said Amy Gaidmore, regional adult education specialist for the Peninsula Regional Education Program, which runs the GED program in partnership with Newport News Public Schools. "Their enthusiasm for education and volunteerism creates a positive and supportive learning environment."

Katherine Johnson recently began offering a Spanish GED preparatory class. Approximately 12 percent of Newport News' population identifies as Hispanic.

"Newport News is the perfect size city to see the practicality of Spanish in the real sense," Anzzolin said.

The partnership between CNU and Katherine Johnson has been incredibly successful, both for the GED students and the CNU tutors. The connections between students and tutors have been invaluable, he said.

"It has allowed our students to see the value of learning a second language," Anzzolin said. "It gives them amazing practice in Spanish and promotes real-world interpersonal skills."

The CNU students, who are all on different major tracks, have embraced the chance to work with the GED students, and learn about their backgrounds and stories.

"Many of these individuals may face language barriers that hinder their access to educational resources, so having Spanish-speaking tutors can greatly improve their chance of success," Gaidmore said.

At Katherine Johnson, the GED candidates are hoping that being able to pass the GED will help them excel in the workforce.

"The Spanish GED is in its second year, but its importance cannot be overstated. For Spanish-speaking individuals who may have struggled in traditional educational settings or did not have the opportunity to complete their high school education, earning a GED can open doors to better job opportunities, higher education, and improved quality of life," Gaidmore said. "By offering the GED preparation and testing in Spanish and providing support services like tutoring, communities can empower Spanish-speaking individuals to achieve their academic and professional goals."

Gaidmore said it has been most rewarding to see the relationships that have formed between the CNU and GED students.

"There are many heartwarming anecdotes," she said. "For example, witnessing a GED student's confidence grow as they make progress in their studies, or seeing a CNU student develop empathy and cultural competence through their interactions with GED students, highlights the positive impact of the partnership on both groups. These moments of connection and growth demonstrate the power of collaboration and education to transform lives."

Sophia Evans, '24 [Communication Studies](#), has experienced that firsthand. She says working with the GED students has not only improved her Spanish skills, but also allowed her to get to know them.

"It has been a transformative experience," said Evans, a Spanish minor. "I continue to volunteer at Katherine Johnson even after my Spanish in Community class ended because it gives me the time to practice my Spanish with native speakers and I love engaging with the students who are working so hard to achieve their GED. The best part is getting to learn about each student's backgrounds and their goals."

CNU students have also tutored students in ESL classes at the Katherine Johnson Center. Via Dr. Patricia Siewie Seuchie's [Cross-Cultural Awareness class](#), Jaime Steigerwald '25, has helped newly-arrived immigrants from all across the globe improve their English skills.

“It has opened my eyes and inspired me in a variety of ways. I love working with students as they are all very eager to learn and improve their English skills,” she said. “This opportunity has also widened my cultural awareness greatly. It has been truly rewarding!”
