



April - May 2024

The PANTHER

SERVING CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY WITH PRIDE

19-YEAR-OLD CLAFLIN GRAD DETERMINED TO ACHIEVE



Madison Gordon. (Special to The Panther)

SAVANNAH JEFFERSON, Reporter

She starts her day as early as 8 a.m. with prayer, making sure she takes a moment to show God he has her attention at the beginning of every day.

She fixes up her bedroom area, listens to uplifting music and prepares her first meal of the day.

After breakfast, she looks over her schedule and gets ready for class.

When she's done with her classes, she organizes and looks over her notes. She prepares to get ahead on assignments posted for the week.

Once she's done with schoolwork, she makes sure she gets lunch and tends to any maintenance or chores.

Some days she has gospel choir practice with the Claflin Dream Gospel Choir, an award-winning group that travels. Their purpose is to use their voices and spread the gospel through praise and song.

Outside of this, she is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. and takes time throughout her week working on their mission and taking part in different projects and community services events.

This explains a regular day with Madison Gordon at Claflin University.

A 19-year-old graduating senior, Gordon started her college journey at just 16. She was born in Sumter and raised between both Sumter and Summerton. She has always taken pride in her work ethic and constant drive to overachieve and take every opportunity that is available.

Gordon is an honors student and being in the program has shaped her in many ways.

“It allows you to see that no matter how hard or different you think something is, you can achieve whatever it is you put your mind to,” she said.

Something from her background that's also shaped her is understanding that it's not about where you come from or how much money you have, it's about the work you're willing to put in to achieve your goals.

“Growing up, my family and I weren't always the most fortunate, but we were appreciative. I've learned how to make lemonade with lemons, how to remain humble, and lastly how to complain about nothing but in everything give God thanks,” Gordon said.

She spreads her love for music and talent for braiding across campus by providing hair service for students and singing for different events.

Some of her many accomplishments on campus are:

- Miss Asbury 2021-22
- Freshman Class SGA Secretary 2021-22
- Honors College Inductee 2022
- Miss Orange and Maroon 2022-23
- Pledged Delta Sigma Theta Spring 2023
- President's List
- Financial secretary for the Gamma Chi chapter of Delta Sigma Theta 2024

Gordon plans to attend graduate school and after that she will go into law school. She plans to be become a criminal defense attorney.

WARMACK LOOKS AHEAD AS PRESIDENT COMPLETES 5 YEARS

DAMAIA DAVIS, Reporter

“It has been a remarkable run,” Claflin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack said.

He spoke with student reporters April 9, reflecting on the 2023-24 academic year as well as his upcoming five-year benchmark as Claflin’s president.

“I am unapologetic while stating that I serve the most amazing students in this country, the most fantastic faculty and the most stellar staff, and an awesome alumni base,” Warmack said.

Warmack said a five-year review is in progress. “It’s going to be a reflective piece on what we have been able to do here as a team.”

It will include how “we’ve increased our endowment more than we have in 150 years, by probably about \$39 million. We are roughly about \$67 million today in endowment,” Warmack said.

Warmack is proud of there being no tuition increase during his tenure.

“I said in the first interview that I would do everything in my power not to raise tuition and we didn’t do it for five years.” Circumstances will dictate whether an increase is in the future.

First appointed in 2019 as Claflin’s ninth president, Warmack said he is grateful for the work of those before him.

“I’m fortunate to stand on the shoulders of eight amazing leaders that came before me,” Warmack said. “We celebrate 155 years of existence here at Claflin this year and only to be the ninth president speaks volumes to who we are as an institution and who we are as a collective.”

Warmack said that retaining student satisfaction has always been his main goal. With the new student center complete, the university is shifting its focus to constructing new nursing and biotech buildings.



Claflin President Dwaun J. Warmack speaks to student reporters on April 9. (Panther Photo)

The president said he has tried not to give into the “white noise” of criticism. Addressing the ongoing issues around student safety and the plan to close a portion of Goff Avenue through the campus, he said it was the first matter to feel “personal” for him as the presidential residence is nearby.

“I am in the business of education, not politics,” Warmack said of the debate surrounding Orangeburg City Council’s decision on Goff. “I have sworn to protect and serve every student that comes to this campus.” (The council OK’d the closure on April 16).

Warmack said a primary goal going forward is to see Claflin “be one of the top liberal arts institutions in the country, to be able to compete with every type of school in the country, to continue to increase our graduation rates, our retention rates and to ensure student satisfaction.”

“When those things happen, our alumni participation continues to happen,” Warmack said. “Our alumni giving has continued to be top in the nation for 14 consecutive years.”

As for Warmack’s work continuing at Claflin, he said, “I told the board that I was going to do 10 years, that was my goal.” But a decision on the future is not his.

“I am doing God’s work until God releases me,” Warmack said in calling his position a ministry. “What I am committed to doing is giving 175% every day to this institution.”

'SAFETY IMPERATIVE': COUNCIL OKS GOFF CLOSURE

GENE ZALESKI, Reporter for The T&D

Orangeburg City Council has given its final OK to the closure of a portion of Goff Avenue near Claflin University.

Claflin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack said the road is not being closed to block anyone from campus, but to improve safety.

The university has "375 residents living on Goff Avenue with addresses there between High Rise and Goff, between Clark Street and Magnolia Street," Warmack said.

"It is imperative that we protect those citizens like no other. It is imperative that we keep these babies safe," he said.

Orangeburg City Council delayed the third and final vote on the closure twice before to ensure all neighbors' concerns could be heard on the matter. Council also wanted to make sure the ordinance legally guarantees property owners directly impacted by the road's closure perpetual access to their properties.

The body voted 4-2 on April 16 to approve the road's closure.

Orangeburg Mayor Michael Butler, Councilwoman Liz Zimmerman Keitt, Councilman Richard Stroman and Councilman Dr. Kalu Kalu voted in support of the closure. Councilwoman Sandra Knott and Councilman Jerry Hannah voted in opposition.

Councilwoman Annette Dees Grevious was absent but has abstained from all discussions and votes on the issue because of a conflict of interest. She is a professor at the university.

The vote received a round of applause from the Claflin students in attendance in a standing-room-only council chambers.

The ordinance allows the city to accept ownership of Goff Avenue from the state. The city would take control of the area from Clark Street to Magnolia Street.

The city could then close that portion of the road and turn it over to Claflin, which would allow the university to control the area along its campus.

Claflin safety officials said there is a plan to have a gate at Clark and Magnolia streets. Goff Avenue would primarily be closed at night.

Emergency, fire and law enforcement services will have unimpeded access to the road, as will property owners, Claflin officials say.

Property owner Norma Murdaugh has consistently been opposed to the road's closure, saying it would impede her ability to rent out her property.

The other property directly impacted by the road's closure is uninhabited.



The new Claflin student center is located at Magnolia and Goff. (TheTandD.com)

Prior to Tuesday's vote, Murdaugh asked council if a proposal to fence off Goff Avenue has been submitted in writing so that the citizens can review it.

"It is imperative that citizens that are going to be impacted by the proposal be given the same courtesy as the board and a chance to study and review the written copy," Murdaugh said.

She asked that Claflin administrators set up a meeting with concerned citizens to address their concerns.

The ordinance contains language that grants, "legal access rights to any real property owners ... whose property abuts Goff Avenue." It also says that, "Claflin University is required to simultaneously convey individual perpetual access and utilities easements to, and for the benefit of, any real property owners whose property abuts Goff Avenue, which easements shall be in recordable form."

Claflin University Director of Auxiliary and Facility Services Bill Kropff discussed the planned gate system.

Signs will indicate when the road is closed and direct people to either Clark or the open portion of Goff.

There will be two lift-arm gates that will be triggered by pressure plates, Kropff said. A call button will allow people to contact public safety to enter if they cannot enter electronically, Kropff said.

There will be an area for people to turn around if they are not admitted.

Where Magnolia and Goff intersect, there will be a double solid gate that will be opened and closed by public safety and there will speed bumps on Goff Avenue to slow traffic, Kropff said.

Councilwoman Liz Zimmerman Keitt expressed her appreciation at the presentation and the proposed gate.

"It is professional and it looks really great and I think that anyone with a prayerful mind would appreciate what you are doing," Keitt said. "I am hoping the residents will realize that once the gate and all of this is done that they are going to find out that it is going to be much quieter for them."

"They won't have the traffic. A gated area makes sure only certain people come and go and this is what we need on Goff Avenue."

NEW STUDENT CENTER MEETS WITH APPROVAL



Claflin University students explore their new student center. (Larry Hardy/TheTandD.com)

DEONDRA DARBY, Reporter
SAVANNAH JEFFERSON, Reporter

The newly inaugurated student center at Claflin University is meeting with student approval.

The facility at Magnolia and Goff Avenue opened on March 22.

Students are putting it to use and are excited about the state-of-the-art movie theater.

Plus many students have been using the study rooms to prepare for exams and complete projects.

"I think the student center gives Claflin a new feel. I've seen many people take advantage of the study rooms and food options," said Briana Davis, Claflin's next Miss Homecoming.

"I love the new student center, especially the movie theater. It's a great, safe place to unwind after classes and just hang out with friends," said Anthony Mack, a freshman majoring in mass communications.

Students have been able to watch first-run movies at the new theater, including "Godzilla x Kong," "Kung Fu Panda 4," "Challengers," and "One Love.

"I would always drive to Columbia to go to the movie theater, but the prices at the school are way more affordable. I've enjoyed a couple movies here already," said Jahsandra Lloyd, a sophomore political science major.

Some students are eager for more interactive activities.

While the student center offers a range of offices and conference rooms, students feel there is a need for more recreational options, so they won't have to leave campus.

"I appreciate having a place like the student center where I can relax, but it would be even better if there were more activities to engage in. It feels like there's so much potential here that's not being fully utilized," said Jocelyn Porsches, a junior studying accounting.

"We spend much time on campus, so having more recreational options would enhance the student experience. It would be nice to see more events or clubs utilizing the space for activities," said Makenzie Evan, a sophomore majoring in computer science.

PANTHER EDITOR IS SC COLLEGIATE JOURNALIST OF YEAR

Tyuanna “Ty” Williams, editor of Claflin University’s student newspaper, The Panther, on April 12 received the South Carolina Press Association Collegiate Division’s highest individual honor, S.C. Collegiate Journalist of the Year for colleges and universities with under 5,000 enrollment.

Williams, who became the seventh Panther journalist to win the award since 2014, an unprecedented run, will be known in her senior year at Claflin as The Panther editor deciding to return to a print edition at a time when most newspapers are focused on online publication.

Her plan: Continue emphasis on the virtual but open up students’ horizons and provide a new way for the world to get student-produced Claflin news.

The result: A return of The Panther in a newsletter/newspaper format, with Williams taking the lead in producing the “print Panther” pages, seeing that they are printed and distributed, and making the print format in PDF form available via email to students, faculty, administration and alumni.

Beyond the role as editor, Williams has been active in the field, taking on assignments and reporting key stories such as a Claflin instructor being elected to Orangeburg City Council, students attending the D.C. observance of MLK’s “Dream” speech, students operating their own businesses, Claflin’s president focusing on improving Orangeburg, a pandemic expert talking vaccines and masks, and student government leaders identifying priorities.

Williams broadened her journalist horizons in 2023 by spending three months as a reporter/intern at The Times and Democrat, for which she continues to report periodically.

Her T&D work includes an FOIA project, “How transparent are state, local governments?”; stories from business to police and councils, plus topics as diverse as Juneteenth, the Civil Air Patrol, restoration of the historic bowling alley tied to the Orangeburg Massacre, honors for internationally acclaimed artist Leo Twiggs, an Orangeburg native in Disney’s “Haunted Mansion” and the decline in South Carolina’s wild turkey population.

A Claflin senior graduating in May, Williams is currently enrolled in the 4+1 program with Claflin and the University of South Carolina. The program allows her to take graduate courses toward a degree.

From Gilbert, she is a senior mass communications major, double minoring in Spanish and African American Studies. She is a member of the Alice Carson Tisdale Honors College, an NBCU scholar, a Claflin career ambassador and member of the NAACP.



Ty Williams designs Panther pages.

Other former Claflin student journalists winning the award as S.C. journalist of the year/under 5,000 are:

2021 – Jaliah Robinson

2020 -- Marcus Hamilton

2018 – Olanma Hazel Mang

2017 – Bradley Harris

2015 – Andres Waters

2014 – Princess Williams

The Panther was presented other awards by SCPA:

Ty Williams, second place, General Excellence, for The Panther's September, October and November print editions.

Damaia Davis, Panther editor for the 2024-25 year, second place, Photograph, for her image of Keith Shoates, chief operation officer of Student Freedom Initiative, speaking during a forum at Claflin. Damaia is from Ladson.

Ty Williams, third place, Photograph, for her image of journalist and commentator Roland Martin speaking with Claflin students. He was at Claflin as part of the Hilltop Lecture Series for Black History Month in 2023.

The SCPA Collegiate Division meeting during which the awards were presented was held at Winthrop University in Rock Hill.



Award winners Ty Williams, left, and Damaia Davis with Panther adviser Lee Harter at the SCPA Collegiate Division meeting at Winthrop University on April 12, 2024.

CALA-BASH IN PHOTOS



The 2024 CALA-Bash expo at Claflin saw increased attendance. (Photo by Latricia Jones)



The 2024 CALA-Bash expo at Claflin saw increased attendance. (Photo by Latricia Jones)



Supporters watch the 2024 Neophyte Presentation of the Theta Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (Photo by Malcolm Gamble)



The spring '24' initiates of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. present April 12, 2024, during the Greek yard show as part of CALA-BASH. (Photo by Jordan Patterson)

***MORE ARTICLES
AVAILABLE ONLINE***



claflin.edu/news-events/the-panther