

**Vanessa Ellis, Muscogee County School District 2022 Teacher of the Year
8th Grade Social Studies Teacher, Veterans Memorial Middle School**

"Education must not simply teach work-- it must teach life"-- W.E.B. Dubois

How My Graduate Studies at CSU Prepared Me for the Teaching Profession



My graduate studies at Columbus State University prepared me for the teaching profession by offering meaningful research opportunities related to my degree. These opportunities consisted of an action research project on the effectiveness of graphic organizers in social studies and also local research at the CSU library/Archives, City Hall, and Fort Benning. CSU provided unique learning opportunities that included simulations of living history performances, teaching scenarios, and role playing, in which I investigated a local historical murder mystery and did a public Mock Trial. I also took a Baroque dance class with the Schwob School of Music and participated in a public performance at the River Center. My graduate

professors organized field trips or excursions and I had the opportunity to visit the Archives at Florida State University and local historical places across Columbus. These are just a few of the meaningful learning opportunities I engaged with at CSU that prepared me for the teaching profession.

The Impact CSU Has Had on My life

The foundation for my pedagogical philosophy and teaching strategies was formed at Columbus State University and I am still very much connected to CSU to this day. I invite my students to anything that CSU hosts—debates, lectures, community events. I still attend and present at professional development sessions at CSU through which I have gained invaluable strategies, networking, and collaboration with K-12 teachers. Dr. Victor Salazar, Director of the Ivey Center at CSU, is a huge part of my success as a teacher. It was through him I learned the Cultural Approach to History, a framework through which students study a time and place from the lenses of politics, society, economics, intellectual developments, religion, and the arts. I've received grants and donations to my classroom through his work with the Ivey Center and have also been able to travel and see the historic places I teach about. Dr. Salazar not only taught me instructional strategies, he taught me how to be a caring and empathetic educator. I try to emulate how Dr. Salazar shows up for his students and colleagues. He is a quiet cheerleader, always there, willing to give, willing to help, willing to put you in connection with people to network and further your impact. In terms of history education, my professors at CSU were amazing. I have learned so much about Columbus, about the United States of America and this world because of them. I've learned about Bibb City; I've learned about Black history in Columbus; and I've learned about Native American history. Our city has a rich history that the students deserve to know. I teach Georgia history now, and I'm able to incorporate Columbus history as well, so my professors at CSU truly did set me up for success in the teaching profession.