TRiO Upward Bound @ Johnson C. Smith University

# Director's Message

## Greetings Upward Bound Students, Parents, and Families!

What an incredible summer we shared! Summer Component 2026 was filled with growth, discovery, achievement, and unforgettable experiences. As we embraced our theme, **"Created for Greatness: Grow. Serve. Lead,"** we witnessed students challenge themselves academically, build meaningful relationships, develop leadership skills, and discover new possibilities for their futures.

While the summer component has ended, our journey is far from over. This powerful theme will continue to guide us throughout the **Academic Year Component 2026-2027** as we encourage every participant to grow in knowledge, serve their communities, and lead with purpose and integrity.

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome each of you to another exciting academic year in the Upward Bound Program. We are grateful that you have chosen to continue this journey with us. To our new participants, and to those students who will be experiencing their first Academic Year Component with Upward Bound, congratulations and welcome! You are joining a community of ambitious scholars, dedicated educators, supportive mentors, and caring staff who are committed to helping you reach your fullest potential.

As we begin this year together, I want to remind our students that success does not happen by chance. Your future is shaped by the choices you make every day. The opportunities, resources, and support systems provided through Upward Bound are designed to help you excel, but you must be willing to embrace them. Take ownership of your education. Challenge yourself academically. Ask questions. Seek support when needed. Most importantly, believe in your ability to achieve greatness.

The Upward Bound staff remains steadfast in our commitment to providing high-quality educational experiences that promote academic excellence, leadership development, cultural awareness, and service. We are dedicated to helping every participant successfully graduate from high school, enroll in postsecondary education, and ultimately achieve their career and life goals.

## A Message to Parents and Families

Parents and guardians, thank you for trusting us to be a part of your student's educational journey. Student success is strongest when families, schools, and programs work together toward a common vision. Your partnership is essential to helping students thrive.

The work we do is not accomplished by one person alone. When we bring our strengths, talents, and ideas together, we create results that are far greater than what any one of us could achieve individually. As Helen Keller so powerfully reminds us, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." This philosophy perfectly reflects the spirit of Upward Bound. Together, we can build a powerful support system that helps students overcome obstacles, maximize opportunities, and achieve their dreams.

We invite you to play an active role by:

1. Encouraging and ensuring your student participates in Upward Bound activities and events.
2. Monitoring your student's academic performance and remaining informed about important reporting deadlines.
3. Keeping the Upward Bound office informed of changes in contact information, academic status, or circumstances that may affect your student's success.
4. Supporting and participating in the Parents Association through meetings, activities, and collaborative initiatives.

Your involvement sends a powerful message that education matters and that your student's future is worth investing in.

## Our Commitment to Excellence

As we move forward, the Upward Bound Program will continue to evaluate, innovate, and strengthen our services to ensure the highest level of support for our participants. Our focus remains centered on student achievement and college readiness.

We will continue to:

- Evaluate programs and services through feedback from students, families, educators, and community stakeholders.
- Strengthen support systems that promote academic success, on-time graduation, college enrollment, persistence, and completion.
- Expand opportunities in STEM fields, including science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and computer science.

- Foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and hands-on learning experiences that prepare students for future success.

## Our Plan of Action

**Strengthening Student Support**

- Build strong partnerships among parents, teachers, counselors, mentors, and Upward Bound staff.
- Expand early identification and intervention systems to address academic and personal challenges before they become barriers to success.
- Increase access to mentoring, tutoring, and individualized support services tailored to student needs.
- Develop programs that promote positive social development, life skills, leadership, wellness, and purpose.

## Preparing Students for College and Careers

- Provide rigorous academic and college-preparatory experiences aligned with high standards.
- Increase participation in opportunities that bridge the gap between high school and postsecondary education.
- Expand career exploration, workforce readiness, and college awareness initiatives.
- Support students in pursuing academic pathways that align with their interests, strengths, and future goals.

## Building Community Partnerships

- Strengthen the Parents Association to empower families and increase engagement.
- Recruit and retain highly qualified educators and mentors who are committed to student success.
- Create meaningful opportunities for students to serve, lead, and contribute positively to their communities.
- Foster collaborative partnerships that enhance educational opportunities and support student achievement.
- Celebrate and expand the transformative partnership between **Johnson C. Smith University** and **Upward Bound.** As our sponsoring institution, Johnson C. Smith University continues to invest in the dreams and aspirations of our participants by providing a welcoming collegiate environment, access to resources, and opportunities that expose students to the possibilities of higher education. The University's unwavering support strengthens our ability to develop scholars, leaders, and change-makers who are prepared to excel in college, careers, and service to their communities. In addition, we are especially privileged to share campus space and collaborate with two other exceptional

**TRIO** programs, **Student Support Services** and the **Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program**. These partnerships expose our students to a broader network of support, mentorship, academic enrichment, leadership experiences, and college-going resources. Together, Johnson C. Smith University and Upward Bound remain committed to creating pathways to achievement, opportunity, and lifelong success.

## Looking Ahead

The Academic Year Component 2026-2027 promises to be a year of growth, opportunity, and achievement. We are excited about what lies ahead and remain committed to helping every participant realize their fullest potential.

Throughout the year, we will keep you informed of important updates, events, and program developments. Should you ever have questions, concerns, or suggestions, please know that our doors are always open.

On behalf of the entire Upward Bound staff, thank you for allowing us to be part of your educational journey. We look forward to partnering with you as we continue to inspire excellence, cultivate leadership, and empower students to achieve greatness.

***Together, let us Grow. Serve. Lead.***

With sincere appreciation,

*Magdalyn Lowe-Smith*

Magdalyn Lowe-Smith, Director
Upward Bound Program