

WINTHROP UNIVERSITY

UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP & CREATIVE ACTIVITY 2026

The Office for Student Success and Winthrop University are proud to present *Undergraduate Scholarship and Creative Activity 2026*. This fifteenth annual, university-wide collection platforms the exceptional accomplishments of our students and their faculty mentors. The projects featured within this book emanate from nearly every academic department and reflect the diverse scholarly and creative pursuits by students from all institutional colleges: College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), College of Business and Technology (CBT), Reily College of Education, Sport & Human Sciences (CESHS), College of Visual & Performing Arts (CVPA), School of Graduate, Continuing & Online Education, and the Honors College.

Experiential learning is the central focus of this compilation, with students gaining real world application through internships, research, and creative scholarship. As articulated in Winthrop's Mission, Vision, and Values statements we expect our graduates to be more than well-rounded individuals, rather our aim is to "empower them to create the future" by exposing them to "rigorous instruction and experiential learning that will prepare them for success and leadership." This year's collection of work truly embodies that initiative and serves as a benchmark for the next generation of students that follow.

Excellence, curiosity, dedication, resilience, grit – these are the qualities our students embody and the character traits that underpin the scholarly pursuits you will encounter in the following pages. Equally important, yet far less visible, are the days and months of sustained effort behind these projects including the obstacles faced, the early failures endured, and the sacrifices made, all overcome through perseverance and resolve. Each student brings a unique story and perspective to the research projects and creative endeavors presented here.
Aligned with our commitment to experiential learning, this year marks the inaugural inclusion of students who participated in internships. We are excited to showcase their experiences in both the abstract book and at SOURCE. This addition supports our continued commitment to preparing our students for their future and to showcase the diverse array of engagement opportunities both within and external to the academic classroom.

We are immensely proud of all student scholars featured in this collection and extend our sincere congratulations for their significant contributions to the creation of new knowledge, the advancement of creative expression, and the development of professional competencies. The benefits of participating in undergraduate research and creative scholarship are numerous and irreplaceable. Several of our students have presented these projects at local, regional, national, and international conferences and many have received top awards and honors. These achievements have positioned them to pursue nationally competitive awards, advanced academic and professional degrees, and meaningful careers in their respective fields.

We especially want to recognize senior design major, Ibeth Vasquez, who developed this year's theme *Currents of Discovery*, and produced this book's cover and internal graphics. Drawing inspiration from ocean exploration, the thematic illustrations echo the journey students take as they navigate classes and projects, actively absorbing knowledge and uncovering new skills along the way. Every project begins with a question or inquisition that sets each student down a path of discovery. Guided by dedicated faculty mentors, Winthrop students are driven by their academic curiosity to uncover new ideas, test experimental hypotheses, and produce unique artistic creations.

The SOURCE event and this book are the result of a collaborative and dedicated effort by many individuals, for whom we are very grateful. We would like to take a moment to extend a sincere thank you to Dr. Nick Grossoehme, Dean of the Honors College, for his continued support and behind-the-scenes technical capabilities that keep the many digital systems running smoothly. We acknowledge the many faculty members who serve as mentors, coordinators, thesis readers and reference writers for our students. Their dedication and guidance are critical in fostering student success and sustaining an intellectually rich and inviting environment on campus. Thank you to all the donors who support undergraduate research and scholarship as well as creative endeavors at Winthrop – your generosity makes many of these student opportunities possible. We would also like to thank all the Winthrop faculty and staff volunteers whose contributions make SOURCE a success. Finally, we extend our immeasurable gratitude to Jaden Lemmonds and Jess Peeples for their efforts toward editing the content of this book and overall support to the Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship throughout the year.

We trust that you will find this publication impressive and inspiring, a true testament to the dedication of our students and faculty, and clear evidence of the impactful experiential learning opportunities that propel our students along their own personal *Currents of Discovery* journey at Winthrop University.

Salvatore Blair, Ph.D.
Director of Undergraduate Research & Creative Scholarship

Leigh Poole, Ph.D., MBA
Assistant Provost for Student Success

My theme "Currents of Discovery" is a colorful ocean theme that's meant to represent how ideas flow through a community like currents in the ocean. I had so much fun making the different types of jellyfish and corals, and on the cover the jellyfish is holding a little book. Overall I tried to keep the assets pretty diverse, and in a way the different species of jellyfish represent how special and different each student is, and all the bubbles are sort of like thought bubbles, showing all the different thoughts and views each person has and how they all live together in one environment.

- Ibeth Vasquez



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Winthrop University Undergraduate Research Initiative

The Winthrop University Undergraduate Research Initiative supports a student centered learning environment that fosters student research, scholarship, and creative activities.The Initiative encourages students and faculty mentors to collaborate in the design and implementation of projects and the dissemination of results.

Undergraduate Research Advisory Committee:

Salvatore Blair, Ph.D.
College of Arts & Sciences,
Committee Chair

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Mathematics

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William Schulte, Ph.D.
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Aubrey Sejuit, Ph.D.
Social Work

Michael Sickels, Ph.D.
Sociology, Criminology, & Anthropology

Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.
Psychology

Ephraim Sommers, Ph.D.
English

Mary Zick, Ph.D.
Chemistry, Mathematics

Honors Theses



This year marks an important landmark for the Honors at Winthrop University – as of July 1st, 2025, the Honors Program transitioned to the Honors College, an exciting new initiative founded on the principles of leadership, community, scholarship, and service. The Honors Program has been an important component of the Winthrop community designed to enrich the college experience for highly talented and motivated students. The program provides qualified students the opportunity, through interactions with a vibrant scholarly community of talented faculty and peers, to build specific skills and knowledge that will allow them to succeed in graduate school, professional school, and post-educational employment. More particularly, the program offers students opportunities to engage in directed scholarly research and creative endeavors directly related to their fields of study and their post-Winthrop plans.

The program has a rich history. Founded in 1960, Winthrop's Honors Program is one of the oldest in the nation. President Charles S. Davis, realizing the importance of an enriched education for high-achieving students, appointed faculty member John S. Eells as the founding director. Eells joined the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), which received funding from the Carnegie Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the U.S. Office of Education to help establish honors programs at colleges and universities across the U.S.

When the ICSS disbanded in 1965, several members of that group formed the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), which is committed to maintaining a professional association of honors educators. Eells was elected the fourth President of NCHC in 1970. Over the years, the Winthrop University Honors Program has continued to flourish, and in the early 1980s the program was divided into a program for entering freshmen and a program for upperclassmen. At that time, there was a national trend toward creating "learning communities," and Winthrop created the Clustered Learning Units for Educational Success (C.L.U.E.S.) program in which new honors freshmen enrolled in a cluster of three honors classes. This program later became the Freshman Honors Program. Seeing the need for a more cohesive honors experience, President Anthony J. DiGiorgio led a 1997 initiative that combined the freshmen program with upper-class offerings, which was directed by Dr. Kathy Lyon until 2019, and Dr. Michael Lipscomb until 2024. During their tenures, Dr. Lyon and Dr. Lipscomb built the program into a thriving and crucially important part of the Winthrop experience.

Today, the Honors College at Winthrop University enrolls over 400 students from each of the degree-granting colleges of the university. To graduate with an Honors degree, a student must complete 24 hours of honors courses, which includes completing an Honors Culminating Experience Project while maintaining at least a 3.30 grade point average. During the Honors culminating experience, students work collaboratively with a faculty director and two additional thesis readers to complete a scholarly project that evaluates knowledge, concepts, and methodology; examines major issues; integrates complex information; and develops and appropriately defends an argument, and/or appropriately curates an artistic project or an original performance. The project may consist of an original research project; creative work or a performance accompanied by supporting written and visual documentation; a project with practical or commercial application accompanied by supporting written and visual documentation; or a critical literature review.

The Honors College students and I would like to thank the faculty members who have worked as Honors culminating experience directors, readers, and committee members throughout this process. Their expertise, guidance, and commitment is crucial to the continuing success of the Winthrop Honors College.

Nicholas E. Grossoehme, Ph.D.
Dean, Honors College

Honors Thesis Committee: Salvatore Blair, Ph.D.; Victoria Frost, Ph.D.; Evan Dewey, Ph.D.; Carter Wolff, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL450H - Salvatore Blair)

Effects of Rain Events on Fish Gill Physiology and *Escherichia coli* Presence in Freshwater Streams

Lily F. Doyle

Rain events affect water chemistry and can lead to contamination of river systems, including increased bacteria loads. The presence of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) is a common indicator of fecal contamination in river systems. Changes in water quality can affect fish health and induce gill remodeling, altering lamellar surface area through interlamellar cell mass (ILCM) shrinkage or growth. This project aimed to understand the effect of rainfall on gill physiology and on microbial populations in river water, fish gills, and skin. The hypothesis is that precipitation events will increase bacterial concentrations, specifically *E. coli*, in river systems, and that heavy rainfall can also alter fish gill physiology. Fish (Bluegill and Redbreast sunfish) and water samples were collected in Fishing Creek (York County, SC) before and after a rain event. Bacterial concentrations were quantified by counting viable *E. coli* colonies (Colony Forming Units; CFUs), and by measuring the optical density (OD600) of water samples and swabs of the fish skin and gills. ILCM to lamellae ratio measurements were taken, and water chemistry data were analyzed. After the rain event, in addition to dramatic shifts in a variety of water parameters, bacterial levels increased in water, skin, and gill samples, including higher *E. coli* counts. The ILCM to lamellae ratio also decreased, indicating greater lamellar surface area exposed to the environment. These results suggest that rainfall events can elevate bacterial exposure as well as influence gill physiology of fish in small freshwater river systems.

Honors Thesis Committee: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.; Silvia Wozniak, Ph.D.; Jennifer Bossi, Ph.D.

SOURCE, April 2025

Comparing High Volume Training and Monthly Undulating Training for Muscle Hypertrophy: A Pilot Study

Cam Davis, Jacob Myers

There is controversy among bodybuilders whether high intensity training (HIT) or cycling high volume training (HVT) and HIT training is more effective for muscle hypertrophy. The latter training style is block undulating periodization (BUP), and studies on the subject are sparse. Although literature suggests muscle hypertrophy is maximized via volume training, there is a need to explore those limits. The purposes of this pilot study were to compare muscle hypertrophy outcomes between HVT and BUP, and to validate this pilot study's design. Three healthy, untrained college students completed a 12-week exercise intervention consisting of different exercise routines for the left limbs and for the right limbs. The left limbs only performed HVT while the right limbs performed BUP. It was hypothesized that HVT and BUP were equally effective for muscle growth, as both methods achieve high muscular tension. Limb circumferences and an air displacement plethysmography (ADP) scan were taken pre- and post-intervention: on average, participants gained .3kg of lean mass and lost 0kg of fat mass during the 12-week intervention. Left and right upper arm circumference increased by .5cm and .3cm on average, left and right upper thigh circumference increased by 1.2cm and 1.3cm on average. The small sample size precluded reliable findings. Tools used to assess body composition were suboptimal, and data were biased by participant 1. The pilot study's limited findings support the hypothesis, and the overall pilot study design is valid, with a need for more recruited participants.

Honors Thesis Committee: Daniel Stovall, Ph.D. (Sponsor); Kathryn Kohl, Ph.D.; Laura Glasscock, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE, NIH/NIGMS; NIH/NINDS

(BIOL450H - Daniel Stovall, HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

Effects of Ectopic RYBP on Glioblastoma Cell Proliferation

Rachel A. McCollum

Glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) is the most common and lethal cancer of the central nervous system with a median survival rate of around 15 months. The RING1 and YY1 binding protein (RYBP), a transcription factor, displays decreased expression in GBM and is a member of the Polycomb group (PcG) of proteins. We hypothesized that RYBP exerts tumor suppressive effects in glioblastoma cells by inhibiting cell proliferation. Based on extensive research in other cancers, RYBP widely behaves as a tumor suppressive gene across tissue types and can lead to inhibition of cell proliferation. However, there is no current research on the phenotypic effects of losing RYBP in GBM. We first cultured five GBM cell lines and determined the endogenous RYBP levels in each. U-87 and U-251 GBM cell lines, which had the lowest endogenous level of RYBP, were then transduced with lentivirus to force ectopic expression of RYBP. Infection with a control virus that did not express RYBP was also included. After optimizing transduction and confirming successful RYBP expression, we determined that there was no statistically significant difference between cell proliferation in RYBP-expressing and control cells for either U-87 or U-251 cell lines, based on two independent experiments in each cell line. These experiments need to be repeated with greater technical precision. Future directions will also focus on studying the effects of RYBP on other GBM cell phenotypes, such as invasiveness, and determining RYBP's direct gene targets.

Honors Thesis Committee: Kyahdric Moses, B.F.A; Steven ; Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.

SOURCE (Winthrop University, April 2026)

Steeped Tea

Molly I. Wilson

Tea is a part of my daily routine and has been for many years. I have never enjoyed soda, coffee, or energy drinks, and so much of my time in the morning, and throughout the day, is dedicated to enjoying the age-old practice of drinking tea. I have a deep respect for the art and find it very engrossing. Steeped is a modern tea brand that recognizes the craft and emphasizes the ritual of drinking tea while presenting it in an evolved fashion through modern design. Unlike many beverage brands that focus on efficiency or ease, Steeped views tea both as an art form and a sensory exploration. The brand is founded upon intense research and respect for the teas it represents. The origin, historical importance, and brewing traditions associated with each tea are fundamental to the brand narrative. The vision is to create a tea brand that bends the gap between tradition and modern aesthetics to appeal to both the established tea drinkers and a younger generation of consumers who are looking for a little more intentionality in their drink choices. An important aspect to the brand that sets it apart from others is analyzing the notes in each tea, similarly to how notes in cologne or perfume are highlighted. This gives way to a creative avenue to market along and also a way for the tea to be used in bartending and mixology, as if these refined teas with highlighted notes could be paired well with certain liquors.

Honors Thesis Committee: Michael Matthews, Ph.D.; Joanna Jackson, Ph.D.; Nathan Miller, J.D.

(HONR450H - Michael Matthews)

The Inter-Influence of Health Systems and Public Health

Avery Jolley

The United States' response to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a need for a more cohesive, standardized relationship between state health systems and public health agencies. The U.S. responded reactively to the outbreak of COVID-19 focusing on minimizing the effects of COVID-19 and reducing its transmission rather than eliminating it. The effectiveness of a country's response strategy was largely determined by that country's capacity to exercise the organizational demands of its chosen response strategy; an effective reactive response required intensive institutional coordination to quickly respond to and mitigate critical situations. The U.S. adopted a reactive response strategy to COVID-19 but could not successfully mitigate critical situations due to its healthcare system's inability to effectively coordinate, in part, because of the lack of a standardized response among states. This study will evaluate the relationship between public health and state health systems across five different states, in response to COVID-19, to identify if there is a state response strategy that yields better health outcomes. This study will identify if the health system's relationship with public health in each of the five states is proactive or reactive, and the states' level of response to COVID-19. A state's response level will then be examined in relation to the state's COVID-19 hospitalization and mortality rates to determine if there is a correlation between either a proactive or reactive response strategy and better health outcomes, and if this correlation supports the standardization of a response strategy across all states.

Honors Thesis Committee: Kathryn Kohl, Ph.D.; Jena Chojnowski, Ph.D.; Evan Dewey, Ph.D.

(BIOL450H - Kathryn Kohl, BIOL471 - Kathryn Kohl, BIOL471 - Kathryn Kohl, HONR449H - Nicholas Grossoehme, HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

Characterization and Mapping of Mutagen-Sensitivity Gene *mus311* in *Drosophila melanogaster*

Austin Hale

DNA repair is a vital component of cellular health and proliferation across all forms of life. In all living things, DNA is constantly broken and altered due to a variety of internal and external factors, sometimes resulting in harmful mutations. Depending on the type of damage faced, different specialized repair mechanisms are engaged. This study investigated the characteristics and genomic location of *mus311*, a putative DNA repair gene in *Drosophila melanogaster*, the common fruit fly. *mus311* mutants were assessed for sensitivity to nitrogen mustard, a mutagen known to cause DNA interstrand crosslinks, a type of damage that impairs replication and transcription. Since the mutants did not show sensitivity to this mutagen, it is unlikely that *mus311* is involved in DNA interstrand crosslink repair. Following efforts used eight defined genome deletions to localize *mus311* in the *Drosophila* genome in a technique known as deletion mapping. In this assay, flies were treated with the alkylating agent methyl methanesulfonate, which *mus311* flies are known to be sensitive to, to identify which deletion uncovered the *mus311* mutagen-sensitivity phenotype. *Df(3R)BSC476*, which removes a 137 kilobase region of the third chromosome containing 20 genes, was found to have the lowest relative survival when bred with *mus311* flies. Future studies will attempt to verify the low relative survivability of this deletion, identify likely *mus311* known candidate genes, and sequence the candidate gene to determine the location of *mus311*.

Honors Thesis Committee: Cheryl Fortner, Ph.D.; Donna Nelson, Ph.D.; Samsara Soto

(HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

Parentification in Different Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Contexts

Morgan C. Baxter

I explored parentification in different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic contexts using a systematic review, a quantitative survey, and several semi-structured interviews to better understand the role sociodemographic factors play in influencing outcomes for parentified children. The systematic review highlights findings from empirical articles published within the last 10 years in peer-reviewed, academic journals. These articles highlight findings pertaining to the prevalence of parentification in different sociodemographic contexts; discuss the psychometric evaluation of assessments of parentification; examine relationships between parentification and physical and mental health, other psychological factors, and vocational outcomes; and explore characteristics of parentification in different social and cultural contexts. I used a qualitative survey to explore relationships between aspects of parentification and to compare prevalence rates of parentification in different sociodemographic groups. A sample of adults (N = 68; M = 22.4 years; SD = 6.3 years) were used for data analysis. Results revealed a significant, positive relationship between parent- and sibling-focused parentification. Additionally, we found that higher levels of parent- and sibling-focused parentification were significantly associated with lower levels of perceived benefits of parentification. Finally, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with young adults who were parentified during their childhood.Interviewees' responses centered around four main themes: Types of Responsibilities, Cultural Expectations and Breaking Generational Cycles, Emotions Towards Parentification, and Empathy for Parents. This research demonstrates the importance of examining the cultural, individual, and situational factors surrounding experiences of parentification and highlights the importance of considering culture when creating targeted mental health interventions for parentified youth.

Honors Thesis Committee: Kori Bloomquist, Ph.D.; Ashley Garrick, M.S.W.; Adolphus Belk, Ph.D.

(HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

Through Our Eyes: Examining Adultification and the Lived Experiences of Black Girls

Neveah Sutton

This thesis investigates the lived experiences of Black girls, specifically adultification and its effects on well-being and identity. Adultification refers to the act of Black children being viewed through adult qualities and stripping them of their childhood. Adultification typically leads to the villainization of Black children compared to their White counterparts. Much of adultification stems from historical racist stereotypes such as the "Jezebel" and the "Sapphire" characteristics. The adultification of Black girls typically begins at home and follows them into their schools, public areas, and their futures. The basis of this thesis is to highlight how systemic racism has historically stripped Black girls from their childhood before they reached any age of maturity. This qualitative research study uses interviews with Black women ages 18-24 to learn more about their childhood experiences. Qualitative data from this study provide firsthand accounts of the topic. Each interviewee in this study shared common experiences, yet different backgrounds. Research indicates the erasure of Black girls' childhood leads to inadequate treatment which raises the levels of adultification they endure. There is a lack of research regarding adultification in Black girls which leads to a lack of understanding of the Black female experience. This thesis seeks to fill a gap in literature concerning the lived experiences of Black girls regarding to adultification.

Honors Thesis Committee: Daniel Nail, Ph.D.; Leslie Bickford, Ph.D.; O. Jennifer Dixon-McKnight, Ph.D.; Brooke Bauer (University of Tennessee Knoxville)

Showcase of Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors (SOURCE), Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

(ENGL494 - Koster, Josephine)

The Importance of Multiculturalism with a Special Look into The Importance of Black and Native American Literature

Makayla A. Campbell

Multiculturalism serves as an important framework for understanding the diverse experiences that shape American society, especially as these experiences are expressed through literature. This paper discusses the importance of multiculturalism by exploring Black and Native American literature, which has historically been marginalized within the American literary society. Through highlighting historical context, the teaching of important authors and their works in classrooms, common themes, and interviewing teachers who discuss the works from these marginalized groups, the paper showcases how the literature within these two groups challenges the dominant society that often excludes their perspectives. Black American literature discusses themes of identity, resistance, and systemic oppression, bringing awareness to the lasting effects of racism and the struggle for self-identity. Similarly, Native American literature stresses connection to land, cultural survival, and the impact of colonization, showcasing worldviews that are starkly different from Western ideals of individualism. By incorporating the literary works of these communities into a conversation, the paper illustrates how multicultural literature expands readers' understanding of history, culture, and identity. The teaching and incorporation of Black and Native American literature into education reveals the complexity and diversity of voices that contribute to a nation's identity. Ultimately, this paper argues that engaging with Black and Native American literature is important to multicultural education, as it promotes empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Teaching, recognizing, and respecting these perspectives not only enhances the diversity of literary studies but also promotes a more inclusive and accurate representation of American culture and literature.

Honors Thesis Committee: Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.; Andrew Rouser, Ph.D.; Kelly Ozust, M.F.A.; Brian Franco-Winn, M.F.A.

Held in Murmuration

Brooke N. Trigg

Held in Murmuration is a performance art piece that combines ceramics, printmaking, drawing, and dancing. At the center of the work is a pair of ceramic pointe shoes. Traditional pointe shoes are delicate and physically demanding; by recreating them with clay, I emphasize their fragility even more. These shoes reflect both the physical and mental strain dancers experience, as well as the pressures that often accompany artistic dedication and the pursuit of perfection. Whether worn during a live performance or presented through video, the shoes become symbols of pressure, endurance, vulnerability, and the breaking point between perfectionism and passion. During the performance, I interact with sheer fabric printed with imagery of starlings in flight and murmuration using screenprinting techniques. The birds symbolize the constant pressure to keep moving, while also representing freedom, beauty within chaos, and the loss and reclamation of individuality. As I dance with the fabric, moments of entanglement and resistance emerge, reflecting the push and pull of expectations and self-imposed pressure. The murmuration imagery also suggests moving forward and the possibility of letting go. This piece stems from my experience of loving many disciplines yet feeling stretched thin by all of them. By combining these media, I resist the pressure to choose only one path or achieve perfection in a single form. Instead, I embrace experimentation and imperfection as essential aspects of both artistic practices and lived experience, recognizing vulnerability and evolution as evidence of growth.

Honors Thesis Committee: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.; Samsara Soto; Sarah Reiland, Ph.D.

South Xarolina Psychological Association, Beaufort County, South Carolina, 03/13/2026

(PSYC471H - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer, PSYC472 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer, HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

Moral Injury, Psychological Well-being, and Post-Traumatic Growth

Peyton D. Kidd Burgess

Moral injury occurs when a person has intense and lasting psychological consequences after engaging in, or witnessing, a behavior that violates their moral code. Researchers have primarily focused on moral injury in high-stress occupations, such as law enforcement personnel. We continued this research by hypothesizing that moral injury and subsequent post-traumatic growth would be seen in the general public. We also hypothesized that higher moral injury would predict lower well-being. Participants (n = 101) were adults with a mean age of 21.55 years old (SD =7.94). They were primarily women (70%) and White (55%). Participants responded to a psychological well-being scale, shared a moral injury experience in an open-ended field, and then completed scales to assess moral injury distress and post-traumatic growth following the injury. Our hypotheses were supported. We found surprisingly high rates of clinically significant moral distress across demographic categories. We also found that higher levels of distress predicted lower psychological well-being. Post-traumatic growth was possible following moral injury and appeared to be more likely if the individual passively participated in the situation versus actively caused the moral injury. In summary, moral injury is not limited to high-stress occupations, suggesting that all types of people are vulnerable to the experience. Well-being may be a protective mechanism, and post-traumatic growth is possible. The commission of moral injuries is likely to be more psychologically damaging than witnessing or not preventing a moral injury. These findings add to our knowledge of this relatively new research concept and may guide therapeutic efforts.

Honors Thesis Committee: Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.; Stephanie Sutton, M.F.A.; Karen Stock, Ph.D.

Playing the Social Game

Kit A. Crosby

Playing the Social Game is an interactive installation. It contains a video projected down onto a table where a curious and confusing card game is played out between three individuals, a unique card deck, and a small game table for viewers to play against the artist themself. This piece invites the viewer to inspect social dynamics and rules through the lens of a card game. Specifically, the artist invites the viewer to take on the perspective of a neurodivergent individual. Neurodivergent individuals often struggle with understanding societal rules and dynamics which are commonly learned by observing our families, peers, and teachers. These rules are mainly shown through nonverbal communication, something neurodivergent individuals, especially those with Autism and ADHD, struggle to comprehend. This often leads to socially detrimental mistakes and potentially isolation (self or socially induced). However, the neurodiverse individual who made the mistake may not understand why their move was seen in that way. This creates confusion and frustration. In the projected video and the live game, the rules are not clearly defined and are left to the viewers to unravel. One of the players in the video is placed in the same position. Moments of penalties/rewards and confusion in the game reflect the intense social experience a neurodivergent individual may face daily. It is up to the player to discern the rules and what their moves should be, but they must be ready to face the consequences if what they thought was right turns out to be wrong.

Honors Thesis Committee: Jena Chojnowski, Ph.D.

Summer Undergraduate Research Experience, Rock Hill, SC, October 2025

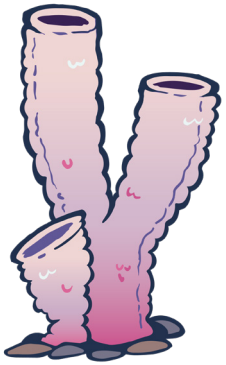
Supported by INBRE

(BIOL371 - Chojnowski, Jena)

Corneal Development in Embryonic Chickens and Humans: A Comparative Analysis

Kennedy B.D. George, Zoë Jackson, Nadia Smith

The cornea is a transparent structure composed of epithelial, stromal, and endothelial tissue that plays a crucial role in vision and ocular protection. Comparative analysis of corneal tissue between species helps identify biological similarities and supports the use of animal models for studying human ocular development, structure, and processes. In this study, chicken eyes were dissected at multiple embryonic ages, preserved using histotechniques, and analyzed microscopically. Using ImageJ software, measurements were performed to determine the corneal epithelial cell count and stromal thickness. Analysis will evaluate the development of ocular tissue in chicken embryos in relation to established human ocular data. Understanding these developmental processes may provide insight into the mechanisms of ocular development, regenerative medicine, and tissue repair strategies.



Honors Thesis Committee: Timea Fernandez, Ph.D.; Jason Hurlbert, Ph.D.; Victoria Frost, Ph.D.

South Carolina American Society of Microbiology, Columbia, SC, November 2025

Supported by INBRE, EPSCoR, NSF #1655740 Winthrop University College of Arts and Sciences

2nd place in poster presentations at SC ASM Fall 2025 from USC Columbia.

(CHEM552H - Lammi, Robin, HONR451H - Grossoehme, Nicholas)

Nucleic Acid Aptamer Gold and Silver Nanoparticle Chimera Conjugates as Trojan-Horse Drug Delivery Vehicles in the Fight Against Bacterial Infections

Julianne V. Phu

Bacterial infections remain a major public health concern as many microorganisms have become increasingly resistant to existing antibiotics. Consequently, repurposing established drugs for new therapeutic strategies is gaining importance. The long-term goal of this project is to develop nucleic acid aptamer–nanoparticle conjugates as targeted vehicles for delivering antibiotics to resistant bacteria. We are investigating nucleic acid–gold/silver nanoparticle conjugates as carriers for tetracycline and ampicillin to treat infections caused by Gram-negative model organisms. We hypothesize that nucleic acids capable of binding antibiotics and gold/silver nanoparticles will form conjugates that function as a “Trojan-horse” delivery system, transporting antibiotics into bacterial cells without detection. When used simultaneously with DNA aptamers originally designed for pathogen detection, we hypothesized the antibiotic–nanoparticle conjugates are targeted more effectively to specific bacterial species. In addition, gold or silver ions released from the nanoparticles may enhance antimicrobial activity. To evaluate this concept, we used DNA aptamers previously developed to detect tetracycline and ampicillin in drinking water, as well as DNA aptamers designed to detect E. coli in food, and optimized conditions for attaching them to gold and silver nanoparticles. The antimicrobial activity of these aptamer–nanoparticle chimera conjugates were tested using the Gram-negative model organism *E. coli* (ATCC strain 29522). Mammalian cell viability (MTS) assays confirmed that these conjugates do not harm mammalian cells. Our results indicate that gold nanoparticle–antibiotic conjugates inhibit the growth of Gram-negative model organisms more effectively than the corresponding antibiotics alone while remaining non-toxic to mammalian cells.

Honors Thesis Committee: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.; Tony Hobert, Ph.D.; Jennifer Disney, Ph.D.

Janurary 2026 Southern Political Science Association Conference

Statehood Recognition: The Subjective Contexts Behind Becoming a Recognized State

Olivia Whitfield

This paper hypothesizes that standard, recognized criteria for the formal recognition of nation-states only tells part of the story about the basis for that recognition. Nation-state recognition has become a largely subjective measure even though it appears to be based on objective parameters. On the one hand, unrecognized states often fulfill all prescribed elements of a functioning and independent state, yet are not recognized. On the other hand, some states that do not fulfil the standard requirements for formal state recognition are recognized as states. This paper hypothesizes that the discrepancy between the understood characteristics of what counts as a legitimate state and its formal recognition can be explained by the specific contexts, such as international political alliances, in which questions about formally recognized statehood occur. Through a qualitative, comparative analysis of Taiwan, Palestine, and Northern Cyprus, this paper provides descriptions of how these states/aspiring states are situated in relation to the question of formal statehood.

Honors Thesis Committee: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.; Samsara Soto; Sarah Reiland, Ph.D.

South Carolina Psychological Association, Beaufort County, South Carolina, 03/13/2026

(PSYC471H - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer, PSYC472 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer, HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

A Comparative Analysis of International Constitutions and Their Impact on Institutional Racism

Taylor I. Noble

A country’s constitution provides a general framework for the rest of the country's laws. It outlines the goals and principles that are important to a government and its people. Some country constitutions have provisions that mention racial discrimination or racism in broader contexts, such as the United States Constitution’s 15th Amendment, which prohibits voter disenfranchisement based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. This thesis asks whether there is a potential causal relationship between country constitutions that mention race or racial discrimination and instances of institutional racism. Using a comparative analysis, this paper looks at the relationship between constitutional mentions of racism and levels of institutional racism in Australia, China, Cuba, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States, paying particular attention to the areas of access to education, availability of housing, and voter engagement across racial lines. This paper also examines how common institutional norms may impact institutional racism. This thesis hypothesizes that there is a negative correlation between constitutional provisions that mention race or racial discrimination and institutional racism, but that outside factors contribute more. The goal of this analysis is to understand how the constitutional and institutional norms of a country can contribute to racial inequality and how this inequality harms citizens of the country.

Honors Thesis Committee: Victoria Frost, Ph.D.; Eric Birgbauer, Ph.D.; Evan Dewey, Ph.D.

SC INBRE Science Symposium, Columbia, SC, February 2026; SC ASM Spring Meeting, Newberry, SC, April 2026

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL450H - Victoria Frost)

Isolation of ExplosioNervosa lysogens and subsequent investigations of their superinfection immunity

Ciaran L. Murphy, Karissa M. Wilczak

ExplosioNervosa is a cluster A9 temperate bacteriophage (phage) that infects the bacterial host *Mycobacterium smegmatis (M. smegmatis*), and can integrate its genome into the host genome, forming a lysogen. Lysogeny is maintained by repression of the phage lytic cycle which is predicted to be mediated by a phage-encoded immunity repressor. This immunity repressor is also predicted to protect the lysogen from repeat phage infection (superinfection). ExplosioNervosa has a mutant population with a genome deletion of approximately 4,000 bp, which includes the predicted immunity repressor gene. The necessity of the immunity repressor for lysogeny was tested by attempting to create lysogens of both wild-type and mutant ExplosioNervosa. Plates were first seeded with a high concentration of phage, then spread with a dilution curve of *M. smegmatis* to promote lysogeny by gradually decreasing host density. Selected colonies were quadrant-streaked to purify lysogen candidates. Lysogens were verified by testing for phage release, a consequence of spontaneous reversion of the prophage to the lytic cycle. Eight stable wild-type ExplosioNervosa lysogens were identified among 22 wild-type candidates (~36%). Superinfection immunity assays were performed by applying various phage lysates to lawns of verified lysogens to determine resistance to reinfection by the same phage (homotypic defense) and/or by phages from different clusters (heterotypic defense). All lysogens were found to be capable of homotypic defense and, to some extent, of heterotypic defense. No stable mutant ExplosioNervosa lysogens were isolated. The isolation of only wild-type ExplosioNervosa lysogens supports the theory that the immunity repressor is essential for stable lysogeny.

Honors Thesis Committee: Nicholas Moellman, Ph.D.; Terri Guidry, M.B.A.; Parker Kevin, Ph.D.

S.O.U.R.C.E; Rock Hill, SC (Winthrop University); April 2026

(HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

Defying Economics: The Financial Success of *Wicked* Over a 20-Year Period

Danielle Hollis

My abstract discusses *Wicked's* sustained economic success over the course of 20 years. Through an interplay of financial management, innovative marketing, and audience engagement, *Wicked's* trajectory from a 2003 Broadway premiere to a major film franchise in the 2020s is nothing short of wonderful. Adopting a mixed methods approach, my study combines quantitative analysis of financial data such as ticket sales, gas pricing, production costs, etc. with qualitative examination of marketing strategies, audience demographics, and digital initiatives. I compare the financial performance of *Wicked* with productions like *The Lion King* and *The Phantom of the Opera* along with the cultural factors that shape long-term relevance. My findings, demonstrated through a written component, multimedia presentation, and short video, underscore how financial planning and cultural strategy enabled *Wicked's* ongoing commercial prominence and cultural resonance.

Honors Thesis Committee: Hope Lima, Ph.D.; Laura Glasscock, Ph.D.; Silvia Wozniak, Ph.D.

Determinants of Breastfeeding Outcomes and the Use of Infant Formula Supplementation in Early Feeding Practices

Victoria K. Williams

Breastfeeding is widely recognized as the optimal feeding practice for infants. It promotes growth and development, and provides immune support and decreases the long-term risk of select chronic health conditions. For the lactating parent, there are decreased risks of postpartum complications, such as hemorrhage and depression, while also lowering long-term risk of certain health conditions. Despite this, infant formula supplementation is still a widely used feeding method. This study aimed to identify the predictors of formula supplementation. Using responses from a lactation survey, we developed a binomial regression model to identify predictors of this outcome. Statistical analysis indicated that our model was significant and could correctly predict supplementation outcomes with almost 70% accuracy. A diagnosis of Insufficient Glandular Tissue (IGT) was not a significant predictor of supplementation. This result contradicts common clinical assumptions, as supplementation is the response by providers to a diagnosis of IGT. This contradiction demonstrates the importance of language used by providers to patients, and a need for increased provider training within the field of lactation. Within the context of public health, this study also highlights the need to address disparities in health access and care quality, and opportunities to improve maternal and infant health outcomes.

Honors Thesis Committee: Aaron Hartel, Ph.D.; Christian Grattan, Ph.D.; Cliff Calloway, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

(CHEM552H - James Hanna, CHEM552 - James Hanna)

Preparation of silyl enol ethers from 2-acylazirdines using silyllithium reagents

Kayla A. Hall, Abbie C. Nation

Silyl enol ethers are useful intermediates in organic synthesis, capable of serving as enolate equivalents and forming key carbon-carbon bonds in many valuable nucleophilic addition reactions. This research is focused on developing a regio- and stereoselective method for preparing silyl enol ethers from 2-acylaziridines using silyllithium reagents. The reaction mechanism begins with nucleophilic attack of a silyllithium at the carbonyl carbon of the 2-acylaziridine. This is followed by a Brook rearrangement – migration of the silyl group from carbon to oxygen – and aziridine ring opening which facilitates the reaction and provides regioselectivity. Reaction conditions have been optimized, including temperature, solvent, and the amount of silyllithium reagent added, to preferentially form the desired silyl enol ether intermediate and suppress its desilylation to the Mannich base. A general method has also been developed for the preparation of 2-acylaziridines. Various substituted 2-acylaziridine substrates have been prepared and will be used to explore the scope and limitations of this reaction. Current efforts are focused on the isolation and purification of silyl enol ether products via column chromatography, as initial attempts led to product degradation.

Honors Thesis Committee: Jeremy Lopuch, Ph.D.

(HONR449H - Grossoehme, Nicholas)

Historic and Systematic Inequalities in Educational Policy Across South Carolina and its Effects on Students of Color

Adriane Alston

My presentation will examine the historic and long-term impacts of education based policy that have produced persistent inequities for students of color in the United States. Through a historical and policy-focused lens, the study traces how structural decisions in education, such as unequal funding, exclusionary practices, and biased policy implementation have contributed to disparities in access, representation, and students educational outcomes over time. Drawing on survey data and student based testimonials, the presentation will highlight how these inequities continue to shape the educational experiences and trajectories of students of color in modern day classrooms. Particular attention is given to the ways students describe navigating systems historically designed without their success in mind, and how these experiences influence their academic confidence, career aspirations, and sense of belonging.The presentation also explores how targeted initiatives can challenge and disrupt these longstanding patterns. As a case study, the Call Me MISTER program is examined as a model for counteracting historical inequities by initially recruiting and supporting men of color in the teaching profession. Student narratives from the program illustrate how mentorship, financial support, and community-centered leadership development help participants overcome structural barriers while preparing them to serve as educators and role models. By highlighting contemporary student experiences within a broader historical policy context, this presentation argues that programs like Call Me MISTER demonstrate how intentional, equity-focused interventions can address the persistent legacy of racism in educational policy while expanding pathways for representation and opportunity in education.

Honors Thesis Committee: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.; Martha Rivera, Ed.D.; Anna Boddicker, D.A.T.

(PESH381H - Wojcik, Janet)

Analyzing Return to Play Protocols for Concussions in High School Football: A Systematic Review

Ryan Locklair

Sport related concussions (SRC) and how to manage them are timely topics within sports medicine. SRC have short-term risks such as disturbances in daily activities and long-term risks such as increased risk for repeated concussions and musculoskeletal injuries. This review took 15 articles on return to play (RTP) focusing on concussions in high-school football athletes and categorized them into clinical aspects, non-clinical factors, and psychosocial factors in evaluating return to play. The clinical aspects section was further broken down into rest and exercise, development and use of a mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) clinic, RTP recommendations, and factors that predict SRC. The current research is the most detailed on how to manage SRC, but there are several areas where further research can be encouraged. Areas that need further research include how having more than two prior concussions affects health outcomes and RTP times, increasing athletic trainer accessibility especially in lower socioeconomic settings, the effectiveness of an mTBI clinic, comparing high school SRC to different skill levels such as college or professional, clarifying if retrograde and posttraumatic amnesia predicts health outcomes as previously thought, and how psychosocial factors can be considered in a RTP protocol. Overall, optimal protocols for RTP following SRC are emerging topics.

Honors Thesis Committee: Michael Sickels, Ph.D.; Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.; Brad Tripp, Ph.D.

(SOCL519 - Sickels, Michael)

The Growing Families of the Internet: A Comprehensive Analysis of TikTok Families and Advertising

Helen C. Murray

TikTok is a social media platform whose primary source of content comes from less than one minute videos. On this platform there is a subculture of creators that primarily focus on family content. This paper analyzes this subculture in relation to how they incorporate advertisements using the theories from The Cultural Industry as Deception and the Networked Self and Platforms. The purpose is to understand the relationship between being a family creator, monetization, and how they are able to bring viewers back or keep them connected. There are ten creators that have been analyzed - five are traditional and the other is non-traditional. Each page there has been 20 videos selected, transcribed, and analyzed through cultural themes and use of family in the advertisements. The emerging themes that can be found is the dependence on children participation and effort for viewer engagement - mostly through the happiness and effectiveness of the product in relation to being part of a family unit. In the beginning there has been some evidence that may be shown between the two categories of families. Traditional families are more willing to use their child in videos whereas non-traditional families tend to not rely solely on the child's engagement in the video. The main message of this research is to understand the new dynamics that may be appearing in new social media trends that contribute to effective advertising.

Honors Thesis Committee: Kori Bloomquist, Ph.D.; Julie Orme; Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

(HONR449H - Nicholas Grossoehme, HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

Forensic Interviewers of Child and Youth Victims of Abuse

Emma Calhoun

The Processes used to investigate events of childhood violence, abuse, and neglect must be carefully tailored to the developmental and cognitive needs and abilities of the children being questioned. Techniques to prevent additional trauma are critical to the investigative process. Forensic interviews are a process in which a child is asked non-leading questions in a safe, recorded, environment, typically a child advocacy center, where the interview can potentially be used later as evidence in a criminal trial. Forensic interviews are performed by trained advocates whose goal is for the child to direct the conversation and feel safe to disclose any abuse or neglect that they may have experienced or observed. The environment in which the interview occurs, the questions asked, and the disposition of the interviewer are all important factors in the reliability of a forensic interview. The goal of this thesis is to explore the role that forensic interviews play in the investigative process of child abuse cases, the multi-disciplinary interaction in forensic interviews, and the experiences of forensic interviewers. This analysis uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews with trained forensic interviewers from Child Advocacy Centers and other child-serving agencies in South Carolina to reveal key components and experiences of forensic interviewing with children and youth who have experienced abuse.

Honors Thesis Committee: Kristen Abernathy, Ph.D.; Arran Hamm, Ph.D.; Jennifer Schafer, Ph.D.

A Data-Driven Approach to Estimating Migratory Connectivity in the Golden-cheeked Warbler Using k-Means Clustering

Gwendolyn Tomlin

Migratory connectivity describes the degree to which individuals or populations remain geographically linked across different stages of the annual migratory cycle. Understanding migratory connectivity is particularly important for endangered species such as the Golden-cheeked Warbler (Setophaga chrysoparia), as conservation policies and management decisions depend on identifying how breeding and non-breeding populations are spatially connected. Traditional approaches to estimating migratory connectivity often require substantial financial investment and intensive field effort, limiting their accessibility and scalability. In this study, we implement a rapid, cost-effective alternative by applying k-means clustering to relative abundance data to construct simulated seasonal populations. Using these clusters, we infer migratory connectivity through a Bayesian framework under the assumption of parallel migration. This approach provides an accessible, data-driven method for estimating population linkages and offers a scalable framework for conservation-focused analyses of migratory species.

Honors Thesis Committee: Jason Hurlbert, Ph.D.; Christian Grattan, Ph.D.; Cliff Calloway, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

(CHEM552H - James Hanna, CHEM552H - James Hanna)

Elucidation of Enzymatic Activity and Structure of Putative Acetyltransferase Effector, XopJ2a, for the Design of Novel Resistance Breeding Strategies

Elizabeth C. Ryerson

Characterized by spots of necrotic tissue on all aerial parts of tomato and pepper plants, Bacterial Spot Disease (BST) causes the loss of 23-44% of host plants. *Xanthomonads*, especially *Xanthomonas perforans*, are the primary causal agents of this seedborne disease. Upon infiltration of the host through stomata or wounds on the fruit, the phytopathogen directly injects a panel of effector proteins into the host cytosol to suppress the plant immune response. Phytopathogenic expression of one such effector, the *Xanthomas* Outer Protein J2a (XopJ2a), increases *X. perforans* dispersal velocity, making it an attractive target of resistance breeding strategies. Currently, both *in planta* and *in silico* analyses classify XopJ2a as a member of the YopJ superfamily of acetyltransferases. Notably, this superfamily of acetyltransferases is expressed by numerous pathogens that infect a range of hosts to cause diseases including potato rot, gastroenteritis, and typhoid fever. In addition to both *in planta* and *in silico* analysis, *in vitro* characterization of XopJ2a structure and activity is necessary to confirm its function. This study outlines a workflow for purification of this enzyme and aims to provide structural and functional characterization using X-ray crystallography, ITC, MALDI-TOF, and kinetics analyses. Together, these data would confirm the function of XopJ2a and guide the design of resistance breeding strategies to suppress BST. Furthermore, characterization of new members of the YopJ acetyltransferase superfamily may guide the design of novel human disease treatments.

Honors Thesis Committee: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.; Jennifer Schafer, Ph.D.; Nicholas Grossoehme, Ph.D.

(VCOM487H - Bradley Young, VCOM486 - Bradley Young, HONR449H - Nicholas Grossoehme, HONR451H - Nicholas Grossoehme)

Sustainable Water Sports: Brand Identity and Environmental Campaign

Marianne Jenkins

This project developed the visual identity for a theoretical, non-motorized water sports brand called HighTide Water Sports Co. that incorporates a conservation campaign as part of the brand's values and promise. The project's intention was to analyze how visual aesthetics and commercial appeal can be balanced with conveying informative and ethically-driven messages. The environmental campaign promoted research and awareness for the Million Mounds, the largest deep-sea coral reef system on the planet, located on Blake Plateau off the southeastern coast of the United States. This focus was chosen due to the reef system's proximity to the brand's location in Charleston, South Carolina, the reefs' important role in marine biodiversity, and increasing anthropogenic threats towards those reefs. This multi-media thesis created a style guide, a brand brief, product mockups, laser-engraved wooden keychains and packaging, a product and campaign booklet, and a final website design for the brand. Materials used included Adobe Creative Suite, Figma, Procreate, a laser-cutter, and an external print vendor. The website and booklet combined both commercial elements with the environmental campaign to support deep-sea coral reef preservation.

Honors Thesis Committee: Bettie Parsons Barger, Ph.D.; Lane Wesson, Ph.D.; Miranda Sigmon, Ph.D.

SOURCE

How Children's Literature Impacts Children's Reading Comprehension

Madison K. Chapman

This research project explores the question, *How does children's literature impact reading comprehension*? The purpose of this study is to examine how children's literature supports or impacts the development of comprehension skills among students from early childhood through upper elementary grades. Reading comprehension strategies are defined as purposeful methods students apply before, during, and after reading, including predicting, visualizing, questioning, making connections, and summarizing. When these strategies are combined with engaging literature and diverse instructional resources, they can significantly strengthen students' ability to construct meaning from text. Drawing on scholarly articles, course materials, and field observations, this research also explores how children emotionally connect with literature, how they navigate texts through elements such as illustrations and other text features, and how these factors influence engagement and understanding. Observations of a small group of children further examine how students choose books, interact with texts, and apply comprehension strategies while reading. Overall, the findings suggest that meaningful and engaging children's literature plays an important role in promoting student engagement and improving reading comprehension skills.

Honors Thesis Committee: Samsara Soto, ; Sarah Reiland, Ph.D.; Marshall Jones, Ed.D.; Kathleen West

The Role of Perfectionism in Students' Emotional Reactions to Academic AI Use

Davyn C. Osborne

In recent years, generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been rapidly incorporated into students' academic routines. While students have mixed opinions about AI tools, universities are concerned about academic integrity and the long-term consequences of submitting AI-assisted work. Maladaptive perfectionism, defined by a fear of failure, concern about mistakes, and self-criticism, significantly impacts students' academic performance and mental health, as these traits are associated with heightened anxiety and guilt in academic settings. Existing research examines why students use AI in academic contexts, but this study addresses this gap and focuses on how students emotionally respond to ChatGPT usage and the individual differences that may shape these reactions. This study explores whether students with higher levels of maladaptive perfectionism are more likely to use ChatGPT for low-stakes academic tasks (e.g., proofreading or summarizing) and whether these students experience more negative emotions after using ChatGPT. Participants (n=153) were undergraduate students, primarily women (71.9%) and Caucasian (58%). Participants completed an online survey that assessed their use of ChatGPT, emotional reactions to that use, and perfectionistic behaviors. Results indicated no significant association between perfectionism and academic AI use except for the subscale concerns about mistakes (COM), which predicted negative emotional responses to AI use. Although perfectionistic traits did not predict AI use, exploratory correlational analyses revealed that academic AI use for low-stakes tasks was associated with positive emotional outcomes.

Honors Thesis Committee: Salvatore Blair, Ph.D.; Laura Glasscock, Ph.D.; Jena Chojnowski, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

(HONR451H - Grossoehme, Nicholas, BIOL450H - Blair, Salvatore)

Does Turbidity have an Effect on Gill Remodeling in Cooler Temperatures?

Shakinah M. Murphy

Heavy rain events affect water chemistry and lead to transient contamination in river systems. Excessive rainfall increases turbidity by introducing large amounts of sediment, debris, chemicals, and bacteria through runoff, potentially creating physiological stress and other challenges for aquatic organisms. Freshwater fish can sense changes in water quality (oxygen, temperature, contaminants), which can trigger physiological responses such as gill remodeling. Gill tissue is altered in response to contamination of the water, specifically the region of the interlamellar cell mass (ILCM). The focus of this study was to examine whether rainfall events and associated increased water turbidity affect gill remodeling when extreme temperature should not be a factor. Individuals from the sunfish family were targeted to compare gill remodeling during pre- and post-rain conditions. To test this, we collected water samples and fish samples (n=8) before and after a rain event and obtained gill tissue from each fish. Histological analysis indicated that collectively there was no significant difference in the ILCM: lamellae ratio between the pre- and post-rain samples. Disaggregated data also indicates no significant changes in ILCM within individual species between pre- and post-rain. Therefore, although we observed a 10-fold increase in overall water turbidity (2.5 to 25 NTU), and a 50% reduction in overall conductivity and salinity following the rain event, we conclude these changes in water quality resulted in no significant changes of gill surface area. Further PCR analysis on gill tissue was performed to observe changes in target gene expression between the pre and post rain conditions

Honors Thesis Committee: Adolphus Belk, Ph.D.; Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.; Tony Hobert, Ph.D.; John Holder, Ph.D.

Political Polarization in the United States: Rapid Changes, Rapid Divides

Alex M D'Addario

In recent years, polarization within the political parties in the United States has increased. This increase in polarization has led to an inability of Congress to function properly. This paper examines how extreme the consequences of polarization can become and displays a way for us to repair the political divide in the United States. If this problem persists, we run the risk of lengthy government shutdowns that risk economic and political instability. This paper hypothesizes that there are many parallels between the modern polarization and the polarization experienced in the Civil War era. To test my hypothesis, I will be examining primary sources and secondary scholarly literature about current American polarization and Civil War era politics.

Honors Thesis Committee: Michael Sickels, Ph.D.; Brad Tripp, Ph.D.; Ida Oesteraas, Ph.D.

Analyzing the Collaborative Efforts Between Law Enforcement and Community Organizations in Combating Human Trafficking in North and South Carolina

Madilyn M. Spenner

To effectively combat human trafficking, both law enforcement and community organizations are becoming aware of the increasing need for cross-sector collaboration. Specifically, in North and South Carolina, various approaches have been implemented to promote collaboration between government and non-government organizations through the implementation of state-wide trafficking task force. Regional efforts are also being made to bridge gaps and standardize strategies for human trafficking prevention, protection, and prosecution. The goal of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the collaborative efforts being made by both law enforcement and community organizations to combat human trafficking in North and South Carolina. In this study semi-structured interviews were conducted with law enforcement officials and nonprofit employees who work with human trafficking victims. Participants were invited to participate in one-hour interviews. Seven interviews were conducted using a pool of twenty-five different questions covering demographics, theory-based content, and advocacy-related topics. Afterward, interviews were transcribed for coding and thematic analysis. Some expected preliminary themes are that cross-sector collaboration is strong across the state of South Carolina, mainly due to the implementation of the State Human Trafficking Task Force. Additionally, regional task forces play a large role in the standardization of combatting practices as well as facilitating cross-sector collaborative efforts. Other themes found: changing legislation, gaps in funding, and barriers in professional language. Overall, collaboration between government organizations and community organizations is strong, but there is room for improvement. These findings can contribute to understanding the state of current cross-sector practice, further bettering these already established relationships.

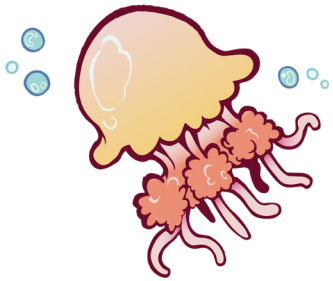
Honors Thesis Committee: Bradley Young, Ph.D.; Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.; Stephen Hicks, Ed.D.; Nicholas Grossoehme, Ph.D.

(VCOM487H - Tselentis, Jason, VCOM487H - Tselentis, Jason)

FunCups

Yazmin A. Rivers

FunCups are personified mushrooms who wear tea cups as hats, exploring the beauty of experimentation and play while creating. The FunCups characters- The Creator, The Baker, and The Inker- include personalized tea cups, backgrounds, outfits, and props to illustrate their personalities. I will produce smaller posters and colorable paper dolls of each playful character. People can choose their favorite from the bunch or collect all the character posters and paper dolls.



Honors Thesis Committee: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.; Amy Clausen, Ph.D.; April Mustian, Ph.D.

SC CEC, Myrtle Beach, SC - February 2026 National CEC, Salt Lake City, UT - March 2026

(HONR451H - Grossoehme, Nicholas)

Pre-Determined Limitations; The Infantilization of Individuals with Disabilities

Riley A. Brodie

This research aims to provide insight into a pervasive branch of ableism, infantilization, with the goal of spreading awareness and assisting in its dismantlement. Infantilization misrepresents the capabilities and limits the autonomy of those with disabilities by likening them to children. Understanding the systems and implications of this phenomenon is essential to directly confronting it. To explore this phenomenon, I will be presenting findings collected from the recalled and related experiences/beliefs of students with disabilities in inclusive-post secondary education programs. I predict that experiences of infantilization impact individuals' self-efficacy/self-esteem.

Honors Thesis Committee: Christian Grattan, Ph.D. (Sponsor); Jason Hurlbert, Ph.D.; Nicholas Grossoehme, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE, McNair Scholars Program, NSF Award #2203467 (Grossoehme) SC-INBRE (NIH) Winthrop University Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, Grant #P217A230073

SOURCE 2025 Best Poster Presentation

(CHEM552H - Lammi, Robin)

Exploring the Mechanism of Cadmium (II) Toxicity Through the Analysis of Binding Affinity Within the Troponin Protein Complex

Morgan Dukes

Cd^{2+} is a toxic heavy metal known to negatively impact cardiovascular muscle function. Muscle contraction works via a complicated mechanism that involves several proteins working synergistically to carry out and regulate the process. The troponin complex, composed of troponin-C, troponin-I, and troponin-T, serves as the link between brain signaling and muscle function. Upon nerve impulse, Ca^{2+} binds to troponin and signals muscle contraction. Troponin-C is the calcium-binding subunit of the complex and interacts with troponin-I when Ca^{2+} binds, specifically troponin-I's switch peptide and 1-73 region. Recent evidence shows Cd^{2+} can bind to troponin in place of Ca^{2+}. Our hypothesis is that the mechanism of Cd^{2+} toxicity is related to the interaction between calcium-binding proteins and metal. The aim of our research is to understand how Cd^{2+} impacts the interaction between troponin-C and the troponin-I switch and 1-73 peptides. To date, our research has established reliable purification strategies for the maltose binding protein (MBP)-tagged troponin-I constructs and confirmed a low-affinity calcium-dependent interaction between troponin-C and troponin-I. Current efforts are focused on optimizing quantitative strategies to investigate this interaction.

Honors Thesis Committee: Timea Fernandez, Ph.D.; Cliff Calloway, Ph.D.; Jason Hurlbert, Ph.D.

SC American Society for Microbiology (ASM) 2025 Fall Meeting, Columbia, SC, November 2025 Winthrop University Summer 2025 SURE Fair, Rock Hill, SC, October 2025 McNair/SSS Symposium 2025, Atlanta, GA, June 2025

Supported by INBRE, EPSCoR, McNair Scholars Program, NSF #1655740

Second Place Award for Undergraduate Poster SC ASM Fall 2025 Second Place Award Life Sciences category SAEOPP 2025

(CHEM552H - Lammi, Robin)

Nucleic Acid Aptamer Gold Nanoparticle Conjugates as Trojan-Horse Drug Delivery Vehicles in the Fight Against Bacterial Infections

Cierra A. Randolph

The alarming rise in antibiotic resistance has been documented extensively, with studies indicating that the misuse/over-prescription of antibiotics contribute significantly to this crisis. Without effective antibiotics, routine surgical procedures and treatments for common infections could have heightened risks, mirroring conditions from past decades when infectious diseases were the leading cause of death. This situation highlights the urgent need for innovative strategies to deal with drug-resistant bacterial strains, particularly as no new class of antibiotics has been developed since the 1980s. Strategies that combine existing technologies are urgently needed to handle these drug-resistant bacterial strains. Our research proposes the creation of modular nanodevices for the targeted delivery of antibiotics to bacterial strains using nucleic acid aptamers. These nanodevices are able to selectively target bacterial strains by using a strain-specific aptamer. The modular nature of the nanodevice makes it readily tunable to effectively eliminate desired strains. We investigated the therapeutic potency of nucleic acid-gold nanoparticle conjugates as carriers of tetracycline and ampicillin to treat infections caused by *E. coli*. We optimized the attachment of tet and amp as well as *E. coli* specific DNA aptamers to gold nanoparticles. Using growth inhibition assays, we found that these conjugates are more potent antimicrobials against *E. coli* 29522 than use of antibiotics or nanoparticles alone. Using MTS assays, we verified that the conjugates are not harmful to mammalian cells. Currently, we are investigating how the size, shape, and charge of the nanoparticles can enhance their antimicrobial activity in the context of targeted antibiotic treatments.

Honors Thesis Committee: Evan Dewey, Ph.D.

67th Annual Drosophila Research Conference, Chicago, IL, March 2026

Supported by INBRE

Examination of fancm Mutants in Repair of CRISPR/Cas9 Double Strand Breaks Reveals Increased Usage of Theta-Mediated End Joining

Hannah E. Duncan, Aiyana Williams, Bryson Vaughan

For multicellular life to survive, genome stability must be maintained. DNA is exposed to tens of thousands of sources of damage each day, including ten to fifty double strand breaks per cell cycle, and it must combat this damage to prevent genome instability and cancer. Often, our cells use Homology Directed Repair (HDR) to repair these breaks. HDR must be appropriately regulated to ensure use of the identical sister chromatid, not the non-identical homolog. This is to prevent crossovers between non-identical homologs, which can lead to cancer and disease. It is known that CRISPR/Cas9 induces double-strand breaks (DSBs), but little is known about the role of HDR in repair following a Cas9 DSB and how key HDR genes are regulated in this process. Our research focuses on the roles of one such gene, fancm, in regulating HDR for CRISPR-induced breaks. To do this, we mutated fancm in the Drosophila melanogaster model and cut a target homolog with CRISPR/Cas9 in developing male germline cells to watch how the cells repaired the broken target using an unbroken template. Interestingly, rather than the expected HDR products, we observed products of a backup pathway, Polymerase Theta-Mediated End Joining (TMEJ). This process involves the annealing of DNA microhomologies by DNA polymerase Theta, which causes small deletions. The use of this pathway suggests that when fancm is mutated, cells may be prevented from invading the template and performing HDR, instead using the backup TMEJ pathway. Further investigation is required to fully understand fancm's role in HDR.

Honors Thesis Committee: Joni Boyd, Ph.D.; Anna Boddicker, D.A.T.; Martha Rivera, Ed.D.

(PESH381 - Wojcik, Janet)

Exploring the Relationship Between the Menstrual Cycle and Exercise Performance in College-Aged Women

Hannah D. Paris

In recent years, there has been increasing attention to the relationship between the female menstrual cycle and athletic performance. As research continues to explore sex-specific differences in training and recovery, understanding how hormonal fluctuations associated with the menstrual cycle influence physical performance has become an important topic of conversation. Despite the growing focus on menstrual cycle effects in competitive athletic contexts, its application to the everyday exercise habits of college-aged women has received insufficient attention. Understanding these effects is critical, as it has implications not only for performance optimization but also for overall health and well-being. Historically, the menstrual cycle has been regarded as a taboo or uncomfortable topic within society, including in educational settings, athletic environments, and even within the family unit. This cultural aversion has contributed to persistent gaps in knowledge and misconceptions regarding the physiological and hormonal changes that occur throughout the different phases of the cycle. As a result, exercise recommendations have often failed to account for these biological variations, potentially limiting both performance as well as overall well-being. I am seeking to address these knowledge gaps by providing a scientific foundation for understanding the menstrual cycle in relation to physical activity, with the aim of exploring how exercise strategies may be tailored to align with the phases of the cycle to enhance performance.

Honors Thesis Committee: Christian Grattan, Ph.D.; Jason Hurlbert, Ph.D.; Fatima Amir, Ph.D.

(HONR451H - Grossoehme, Nicholas)

Photopolymer Resin Development: A Chemist's Guide to Structure-Focused Formulation

Lila Dailey

This review explores various components of photopolymer resins used for 3D printing in stereolithography apparatus (SLA) and digital light-processing (DLP) technologies. Oligomers and monomers are the backbone of all photopolymer resins, as they make up the bulk of the formulation. Their structures directly impact the final mechanical properties of the printed parts. Mechanical properties are critical parameters by which a resin can be evaluated by customers. A unique knowledge of polymer chemistry is required for designing these resins. Radical-induced cross-linking of monomers and oligomers produces network polymers, whose final amount of polymerization is unpredictable. While there are extensive resources available for polymer synthesis and structural analysis, there is little information specifically discussing 3D printing resins formulated for photopolymerization. This work seeks to dually highlight the mechanisms for polymerization and the unique structural properties of monomers and oligomers that lend them their mechanical properties. With this foundation established, other resin additives meant to home in on properties can be examined. Every finalized property is a result of monomer, oligomer, photo-initiator, and dozens of possible additives interacting. Identifying structure-based trends allows for easier functionality prediction and thus guides the research and development of emerging photopolymer resins.

Honors Thesis Committee: Matthew Hayes, Ph.D.; Scott Huffmon, Ph.D.

American Psychology-Law Society (AP-LS) Annual Conference; Reno, Nevada; 2026

Policy and Perceptions: How Involuntary Commitment Policy Shapes Help-Seeking Behavior

Sarah Gonzalez

Executive Order (EO) 14321, "Ending Crime and Disorder on America's Streets," issued in July 2025 promotes punitive approaches to solving homelessness through involuntary commitment. Involuntary civil commitment has been a longstanding American policy issue, balancing public safety and individual liberty; however, concerns arise regarding order breadth and intentions. Prior studies suggest help-seeking behavioral intentions are influenced by trust and attitudes towards mental illness, though does not address the influence of policy. This study investigated if knowledge and perceptions of EO 14321 manifested in help-seeking behavioral intentions. A quantitative survey was administered through Qualtrics, and participants were recruited through university email lists and social media. 130 full responses were received, where participants responded to validated measures of help-seeking intentions, attitudes toward mental illness, passive news exposure, trust in federal government, and trust in mental healthcare providers. Two researcher-developed scales measured knowledge and perceptions of EO 14321. Knowledge and perceptions of the EO did not independently predict help-seeking behavioral intentions. However, participants with a lower socioeconomic status had greater help-seeking intentions but only with negative perceptions of the EO. Higher trust in providers and less passive news seeking resulted in greater help-seeking behavioral intentions. Positive mental health attitudes were marginally indicative of greater help-seeking behavioral intentions. These findings suggest that instead of policy awareness, personal backgrounds, interpersonal trust, and information environments have a larger impact on help-seeking behavioral intentions. Future research should involve more representative populations and further explore the impact of media framing on policy perceptions and help-seeking behavioral intentions.

Honors Thesis Committee: Joanna Norman, Ph.D.; Erin Patel, M.B.A.; Jane Thomas, Ph.D.

The Proliferation of AI in Modern Advertising: A Measure of Consumer Attitudes and Purchase Intentions in Response to AI in Advertisement

Ne'Vaeh B. Walker

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into advertising has transformed creative production processes, yet consumer responses to AI-generated advertising remain theoretically and empirically underdeveloped. This study investigates whether AI-generated advertisements influence perceptions of brand authenticity and purchase intentions, particularly when consumers are unaware of the advertisement's source. Drawing upon authenticity theory and anthropomorphism research, this study proposes that AI-generated advertisements reduce perceived brand authenticity relative to human-created advertisements. Further, this effect is expected to be moderated by advertising appeal type (agentic vs. communal) and perceived anthropomorphism. A randomized between-subjects experiment assigns participants to view either AI-generated or human-created advertisements across multiple brands. Brand authenticity, purchase intentions, AI attitudes, AI literacy, anthropomorphism, and advertising appeal perceptions are measured using previously validated scales. Results are expected to demonstrate that AI-generated advertisements reduce authenticity perceptions, particularly when communal appeals are emphasized and when advertisements are perceived as highly anthropomorphic. The findings contribute to emerging literature on AI in marketing by identifying conditions under which AI-driven creativity may undermine brand reputation.

Honors Thesis Committee: Timea Fernandez, Ph.D.; Maria Gelabert, Ph.D.; Aaron Hartel, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL450H - Fernandez, Timea, BIOL472H - Fernandez, Timea)

Nucleic Acid Silver Nanoparticle Conjugates as Trojan-Horse Drug Delivery Vehicles for Targeted Antibiotic Delivery in the Fight Against Bacterial Infections

Hadarah Ashley Francisco Lara

The continued escalating crisis of antibiotic resistance has been found in studies to be heavily driven by misuse and over-prescription of antibiotics, which has threatened modern medicine, introducing a potentially fatal issue. The reality is, without properly functioning antibiotics, common infections and routine surgical procedures could lead to deadly outcomes. This alarming situation calls for a solution or, at best, alternative strategies to tackle antibiotic resistance, substantially with the understanding that no new class of drugs developed since the 1980s is effective enough to manage this problem independently. The research conducted proposes the following strategy: create conjugates of gold and silver nanoparticles in combination with antibiotics. The nanoparticles used are 40nm AuNP-streptavidin and 5nm AgNP of silver, which would be attached to the antibiotic tetracycline, an antibiotic used to treat bacterial infections, such as respiratory tract infections. The bacterial strain used for this research will be part of the Gram-positive bacterium, called Staphylococcus epidermidis or S. epidermidis. S. epidermidis a Gram-positive strain that was selected, given previous research which was focused on Gram-negative strains. Using the nanoparticles and antibiotics in synergy has the potential to be far more effective than when competing or using them individually.

Honors Thesis Committee: Ronald Parks, Ph.D.; Kristen Wonderlich, D.S.W.; Leonard Lewis, Ph.D.

(HONR451H - Grossoehme, Nicholas)

Audio and Visual Media: Differences in Audio Development Between Visual Mediums

Anthony Michael Lupinaccio

Audio and visual media are often used in conjunction in order to deliver attentive results to the senses. In the audio field, being able to create various sounds and samples is a necessity, though the specifics needed for differing visual mediums are vastly different. This analysis and presentation utilize examples from previous personal works as well as personal favorite works that served as inspiration during college in order to analyze and present the methods and preparation needed to create different audio for various visual and media types, focusing on voice acting, foley production, and musical composition and orchestration.

Honors Thesis Committee: William Kiblinger, Ph.D.; Adam Glover, Ph.D.; Sandy Rogers, Ph.D.

(RELG495 - Kiblinger, William, RELG495 - Kiblinger, William)

Audio and Visual Media: Differences in Audio Development Between An Old-But-New Approach to Romans 1:26-27

Noah E. Goins

Within modern Christian circles, there has been a great sense of division generated by the issue of LGBTQ+ social politics. Much of this debate centers around an analysis of the contents of Paul's letters where, according to many, there is a condemnation of homosexual activity. This paper engages with one of these texts — Romans 1:26-27 — in an effort to shed light on the Pauline mind when speaking about what is commonly thought to be some form of homosexual practice. An exploration of the language used by Paul and the cultural and literary context in which Paul is found helps to elucidate the way Paul expresses his views. Taking into account arguments made by Murphy as well as an independent look at various ancient writers, a minority view — but one whose natural implications are found in historic Christian circles — presents itself. There is ample reason to suppose that Paul might have considered sexual activity that disallows the possibility of procreation to be παρ φύσιν — that is, "beyond nature". The works of ancient Greco-Roman writers, Jewish writers, and early Christian exegetes conform to this notion well while also allowing what is perhaps a more plausible interpretation of Paul's discreet language.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS & PERFORMANCES

Mentor: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.

SOURCE, Winthrop University, April 2026

(PESH381 - Janet Wojcik)

Overuse Injuries In Sports From Tendonitis to Tendinopathy: Evidence-Based Insights

Andrew J. Knapp

Overuse injuries pose a substantial challenge across youth, collegiate, and elite sports, contributing to chronic pain, reduced performance, and long-term dysfunction. These conditions occur gradually as repetitive microtrauma overwhelms the body's capacity for repair, resulting in degenerative structural changes within tendons, muscles, and bone. This literature review uses ten scholarly articles to examine the epidemiology, diagnostic considerations, rehabilitation strategies, and psychological correlates of overuse injuries. Epidemiological findings demonstrate that while acute injuries are more common, overuse injuries affect a significant proportion of athletes and frequently occur during training rather than competition. Research consistently shows that overuse injuries, particularly tendinopathies, involve failed healing responses characterized by collagen disorganization, altered vascularity, and impaired tissue remodeling. Diagnosis relies heavily on clinical evaluation and detailed history taking, with imaging reserved for uncertain presentations. Rehabilitation research highlights the importance of progressive loading, eccentric exercise, biomechanical correction, and targeted strength training as the foundation of recovery. Psychological studies reveal that overuse injury severity is associated with reductions in positive affect through time, underscoring the need for holistic athlete support. Collectively, the literature emphasizes that overuse injuries are multifactorial and require integrated diagnostic, rehabilitative, and psychological approaches to optimize athlete outcomes.

Mentor: Daniel Gordon, B.A.

SOURCE, Winthrop University, April 2026

(THRA261 - Daniel Gordon)

Lighting Design in Theatre

Savannah C-R Amos

The different reasons why female lighting designers used to be more abundant than now and the consequences of that in theatre would be the unconscious bias happening in theatre. As the historical and theatrical impact of women in lighting design, and their influence on current theatre designers. Examples of historical or modern lighting designers who have made contributions would include Jean Rosenthal, Anna Sartin, and Shirley Prendergast, etc. As there is a "drop off" that is occurring within theatre specifically for female designers who are in lighting or other male dominated roles. Betsy Adams noted in her article that the lighting industry, especially after university, is very competitive in entertainment fields such as theatre. The gender gap is very apparent in lighting design within theatre, especially in modern times, where there are less female lighting designers than before. There are very few female lighting designers, especially in modern times, showing how the current representation has dropped since the seventies. I noticed a lack of statistical data in the 70s for female lighting designers. Even in the seventies, there were few female lighting designers, who were often mistreated by other male designers or having to conform to societal expectations like not being assertive. In the article from Adams, it talks about "how females are labeled bossy but when men assert, they are a leader". Current representation in lighting design for females has dropped, with fewer females being recognized for awards or higher roles.

Mentor: Tony Hobert, Ph.D.

Southern Political Science Association Conference Jan. 2026

(PLSC510 - Anthony Hobert)

The Subjectivity of Gaining Global Legitimacy as an Unrecognized State

Olivia Whitfield

Throughout the existence of all time, unrecognized states have risen, fallen, persisted, and thus become a part of this vicious reinforcing cycle of a plight for legitimacy. Without this legitimacy from the global stage, existence and recognition as a formal state cannot take place. Today, state recognition has become a subjective journey in which unrecognized states must gain recognition and legitimacy from powerful global players before they are ever recognized officially. This is even the case for unrecognized states, which, despite being seen as illegitimate, fulfill all other prescribed elements of a functioning and independent state. This article will explore the concept of legitimacy for unrecognized states using a qualitative empirical analysis of the three unrecognized states of Taiwan, Palestine, and Northern Cyprus, and their unique plights for legitimacy. Further, this paper will explore existing normative prescriptions for what elements of statehood should be present in an unrecognized state for it to become recognized regarding Taiwan, Palestine, and Northern Cyprus. In doing this, discrepancies in current normative prescriptions and reality will be noted and used to develop a unique and objective set of elements that can be used to note what should be present for a state to be recognized without the need for global legitimacy.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association Conference, New Orleans, LA. March 2026.

(PSYC302 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

Nostalgia, Depression, and Future Orientation

Brooklyn Armstrong, Jessica Crowell

We examined relations among nostalgia, future orientation, and depression. Because nostalgia can be a coping strategy, we hypothesized that we would find higher levels of nostalgia in adults with higher levels of depression. We also tested the idea that nostalgia motivates people to think about the future, hypothesizing that higher levels of nostalgia would predict higher levels of future orientation. Participants were 120 adults, with a mean age of 35.45 (SD = 17.32). The majority were white (63%) and women (76%). Participants responded to scales to measure nostalgia, depression, and future time orientation. We asked participants to rate the extent to which they felt nostalgia about 20 topics that often provoke nostalgia. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. They were asked to recall and write about a memory from the past that evoked either negative or positive nostalgia. Participants indicated the extent to which the experience impacted them and their ease of recall. We did not find support for our hypothesis. Depression and future time orientation did not predict nostalgia. One reason might be that we found high rates of nostalgia across adults. One exception was that African American adults reported more nostalgia than Caucasian adults. Although nostalgia rates were high across the sample, younger adults, women, and African American reported feeling nostalgia about a greater breadth of topics. Our data confirms nostalgia is a common human experience. We also failed to find support for the theory that nostalgia's underlying mechanism is to focus on the future.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association Conference, New Orleans, LA, March 2026

(PSYC302 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

Parasocial Relationships, Social Media Addiction, Imposterism, and Social Support

Georgia K. Murrie, Katheryn N. Sikes

We examined parasocial relationships, social media addiction, perceived social support, and imposter feelings. Because parasocial dependence predicts many negative outcomes, we hypothesized that stronger parasocial interactions would predict 1) lower social support; 2) higher imposterism; and 3) higher social media addiction. We also examined whether the target (real/fictional) influenced these outcomes. Participants (n = 115), recruited from fandom sites, had a mean age of 22.18 (SD = 5.88). We had a very diverse sample - primarily women (59%), White (38%), and equally represented across sexual orientation categories. We assessed participants' parasocial relationships, perceived social support, imposterism, and social media addiction. Our hypotheses were supported and contributed to the existing knowledge. Adults with strong parasocial interactions reported lower family support and relied on their target to meet many of their psychological needs. Perhaps, people who lack support turn to parasocial relationships for fulfillment or conversely, investing in parasocial relationships may damage real- life relationships. Adults with strong parasocial relationships reported feelings of imposterism, which may reflect the fact that parasocial relationships are one-sided and not real. Last, we found that strong parasocial relationships predicted social media addiction. Heavy engagement with social media may introduce adults to, and provide the means to maintain, parasocial relationships. The observed negative outcomes were particularly strong for adults with fictional, versus real, targets.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association Conference, New Orleans, LA, March 2026

(PSYC302 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

Adults' Self-talk Predicts Higher Performance Anxiety and Lower Resilience

Lindsey Dangelmaier, Darrah Nickens

We examined different types of self-talk among adults across a range of performance anxiety situations and added resilience as a variable. We hypothesized that adults who engaged in more negative self-talk would experience more performance anxiety and lower resilience, while adults who engaged in positive self-talk would report the opposite pattern. Participants were 146 adults with a mean age of 23.14 (SD = 9.33); participants were primarily white (56%), women (67%), and heterosexual (61%). Participants responded to scales that measured their self-talk, resilience, and performance anxiety. We also asked participants to reflect on an intense performance situation, providing examples of their self-talk. Our hypotheses received mixed support. Negative self-talk predicted greater performance anxiety. This outcome is logical as anxiety is likely to result from internalizing criticism and discouragement. However, we were surprised to find that even positive forms of self-talk (e.g., cognitive and motivational) predicted greater performance anxiety. Resilient people relied less on self-talk. Young adults and women were more vulnerable to negative self-talk and performance anxiety, and we found evidence that the impact may persevere over time. One protective mechanism might come from parents. Participants who heard motivational messages from their parents engaged in the same type of self-talk and were more positive when remembering a past performance anxiety situation. These findings extend our understanding of self-talk in a broader population, particularly the notion that even positive forms of self-talk are linked to performance anxiety. In addition, athletes may use self-talk more successfully than others do.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association Conference, New Orleans, LA, March 2026

(PSYC302 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

Social Media Judgments Impacted by Emotional Priming and Social Media Addiction

Hailey Mefford, Brooklyn Armstrong

We examined adults' judgment and feelings of being judged on social media after asking them to recall either a positive or negative evaluation made about them on social media. We hypothesized that harsher judgments on social media would be predicted by: 1) recalling a cruel post, versus a kind post, about themselves; 2) feeling more judged on social media; and 3) higher levels of social media addiction. Participants responded to scales to assess their feelings of being judged on social media and social media addiction. Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the conditions, participants were prompted to write about the "cruelest thing" or "nicest thing" someone had written about them on social media. Then, participants were shown four pairs of social media posts. Each pair showed a celebrity, once in an unposed, less flattering photo and once in a posed, flattering photo. We asked participants how many likes, and the type of comments, the photo would receive. Supporting our hypotheses, participants primed to recall a cruel judgment about themselves on social media evaluated others more harshly. Specifically, the cruel prime did not impact people's perceptions of flattering photos but made them harsher in response to unflattering photos. The more participants felt judged in general on social media, the more they reported being judgmental towards others. These findings show that judgmental attitudes can be elicited simply by recalling a single, prior judgment experience. Adults who spent the most time on social media were most vulnerable to feeling judged.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

SEPA, New Orleans, LA March 25

(PSYC302 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

Moral Injury as a Predictor of Coping Strategies and Social Support

Peyton D. Kidd burgess, Charles Thornburgh

Our goal was to examine whether moral injury could be found in a general population, and we examined whether moral injury co-occurred with specific coping strategies or types of social support. Participants (*n* = 101) were college students with a mean age of 21.37 (*SD* = 3.91). Slightly more than half were women (64%) and White (55%). Participants responded to scales to assess their coping style and perceived social support. Participants were then prompted to tell us about a time, in an open-ended field, when they experienced or witnessed a situation that violated their moral code. Participants were prompted to think about the incident while completing a scale that quantified the extent of their moral injury. We found support for our hypothesis that moral injury exists in a general population sample. In support of our hypothesis, we found that adults with greater moral injury relied more on emotional and avoidant coping. We did not find support for our prediction that greater moral injury would predict less social support. Instead, we found that adults who were experiencing the most positive outcomes following their moral injury reported healthier coping strategies and more social support from friends. Our findings enhance our understanding of this relatively new concept. First, moral injury exists in a broader context than previously established. Additionally, moral injury co-occurs with less healthy coping strategies, and a lack of social support predicts worse outcomes for those who have experienced moral injury.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

SEPA 2026, New Orleans, LA, March 26th

(PSYC302 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

Predictors of Loneliness and Perceptions of Others' Loneliness

Peyton D. Kidd Burgess, Anita G. Gridley

We investigated whether loneliness is related to cognitive distortion and how personal perceptions of loneliness related to perceptions of others' loneliness. We hypothesized that higher levels of loneliness would relate to higher presence of cognitive distortions and a belief that others were less lonely. Participants were 133 adults with a mean age of 23.16 (*SD* = 6.71). They were primarily white (60%) and women (62%). Participants responded to scales that assessed loneliness, cognitive distortions, and resilience. Then, participants were asked to imagine the "average person" and complete the loneliness scale again with that person in mind. We hypothesized that higher loneliness would be predicted by higher cognitive distortions. This hypothesis was supported. Lonely people were prone to distorted thinking. Even though our lonely participants had cognitive distortions, they were accurate about being lonelier than other people. Ironically, their accuracy, like their cognitive distortions, likely serve to reinforce their feelings of loneliness. Loneliness and cognitive distortions co-occurred with lower resilience, another factor that likely contributes to the intertwined effects. These findings held true across age and race. Men believed they were lonelier than the "average person;" but we found no sex differences in loneliness and cognitive distortion scores. Our study offers a secondary piece of evidence that loneliness co-occurs with cognitive distortions and suggests that internal thoughts may be more predictive of loneliness than demographic characteristics.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

SEPA, New Orleans, April 2026

(PSYC472 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

PED-Related Media Use Predicts Male Exercisers' PED Use but Not Knowledge

Camden Davis, Collin Smith, Nicholas Sharp

We examined exercisers' performance enhancing drug (PED)-related social media use along with PED attitudes and knowledge. We hypothesized that male exercisers who consumed more PED-related media would 1) desire greater muscularity, 2) have more positive PED attitudes, 3) be more likely to use PEDs, and 4) have lower PED knowledge. We found mixed support for our hypotheses. Adults, especially older adults, who spent more time on PED-related social media were more likely to use PEDs and feel positive about them. This finding reflects the nature of social media, which normalizes PED use. Spending time on PED social media did not predict knowledge, which reflects that media's normalization of PED use is typically accomplished with biased, not factual, information. Adults might not realize they are viewing biased information, because those with higher engagement in PED media had false confidence in their knowledge. Failing to support our hypothesis, PED social media use did not predict a higher desire for muscularity. The lack of a relationship suggests that these factors (PED media use and desire for muscularity) might exert unique types of pressure on men to use PEDs. Additional analyses revealed that adults who used PEDs had higher knowledge scores. Adults who relied on PEDs to improve their appearance reported being willing to try a variety of PEDs and planning to use PEDs for the rest of their lives. This study confirmed that PED media engagement increases PED use. PED media use does not increase knowledge about PEDs.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

The Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana March 28th, 2026

(PSYC302 - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

Presentation Format and Viewer Characteristics Influence Susceptibility to False Mental Health Information

Morgan C. Baxter, Shania Demeary, Megan Kissiah, Mackenzie Luschowski

We examined adults' willingness to diagnose self and others with a fictitious mental illness that was presented online in two different formats. Adults (n = 115) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions where they learned about the fake mental health issue, Manic Academia Anxiety Disorder (MAAD). In one condition, participants saw a list of symptoms. In the second condition, participants read a narrative of a person who claimed to have the disorder. After a validity check, participants indicated whether they had the disorder or knew someone who had the disorder. Participants then responded to scales to measure locus of control (LOC) and social media addiction. Participants believed that our false disorder existed. Contradicting our hypothesis, they were quicker to diagnose others if presented with the information in a formal, scientific format versus an informal, narrative format. In other words, if the information appeared scientific, it was more likely to be perceived as factual and accurate. Adults with social media addiction were more vulnerable to self-diagnosing, suggesting that social media reliance may decrease critical thinking about social media content. Adults with an external LOC were more likely to self-diagnosis, perhaps because the symptoms somewhat overlapped those of an external LOC (e.g., lack of personal control). We also found that women and non-heterosexual adults were more likely to self-diagnose. These findings help us better understand the influence of social media and how information is perceived is a function of the information format as well as the characteristics of the viewer.

Mentor: Samsara Soto

Southeastern Psychological Association Conference, New Orleans, LA, March 2026

Supported by the McNair Scholars Program

1st place in social science category at the Southeastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (SAEOPP) SSS/ McNair National Research Conference, Atlanta, GA.

Guided by Representation: The Impact of Mentorship on Latinx Students' Academic Self-Efficacy and College Persistence

Ywomie Mota, Dr. Samsara Soto

The Community Cultural Wealth Framework describes how students of color use cultural knowledge and resources (capital) to persist through college (Yosso, 2005). This study examines how mentorship affects Latinx students' capital; specifically, how the presence of a culturally/ethnically similar mentor builds students' capital, which in turn, increases their academic confidence and motivation toward degree attainment. We expect such capital (e.g., navigational, aspirational, social, and resistant) to mediate the relationship between mentorship and educational outcomes. We also expected Latinx students with mentors to score significantly higher general academic self-efficacy (GASE) and college persistence (CP) than those without a mentor. This work analyzed results from a 75-item survey of 291 Latinx college students, who were recruited through prolific and university-affiliated platforms. Findings indicate that mentorship is important because it increases Latinx students' cultural capital, making them feel more confident and likely to persist in their academic journey. In light of ongoing challenges to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) legislation, our findings emphasize the continued need for initiatives that create spaces where students' cultural wealth capitals are acknowledged and expanded to promote academic success. The implications for DEI policy, mentorship practices, institutional support, and avenues for future research are discussed.

Mentor: Gihanee Senadheera, Ph.D.

21st Regional Mathematics and Statistics Conference, University of North Carolina Greensboro, October 2025.

Supported by INBRE

Walt and Susan Patterson Prize, MAA-SE Conference, High Point University, March 1, 2025, Mathematical Association of America

Family of Generalized Continuous Bernoulli Distributions: Properties and Applications

Garrett J. Nix

Due to data becoming more complex, there is a growing need for flexible models that are able to more accurately describe it. This research aims to introduce new families of generalized continuous Bernoulli distributions using the T-R{Y} framework. These distributions are called T-continuous Bernoulli{Y} families, and arise from the quantile functions of the exponential, Weibull, logistic, Cauchy, and extreme value distributions. Some of the general properties of the T-continuous Bernoulli{Y} families are investigated and discussed. Two new generalized continuous Bernoulli distributions are discussed and applied to three different datasets to observe the performance of these generalizations.

Mentor: Monique Constance-Huggins, Ph.D.

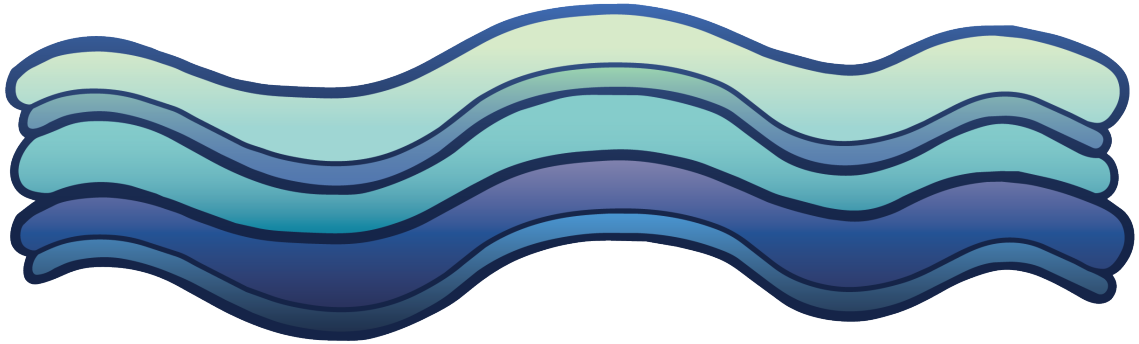
SAEOPP, Atlanta, GA July 2025

Supported by the McNair Scholars Program

Exploring Mental Health Care Preferences of Latinx Immigrants

Evelyn Salinas

Mental illness is a growing concern among all racial and ethnic groups including Latinx. Accordingly, attention must be given to how individuals address their mental health. Despite being the largest minority group in the U.S., Latinx immigrants' experiences are underrepresented in the literature. This study helps to fill the gap by using semi-structured interviews to get a deeper understanding of the mental health-care preferences of Latinx immigrants. Common themes will be identified across the responses through qualitative analysis. The results from this study have implications for social workers practice with Latinx individuals as well as mental health research and education.



Mentor: Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

Rutledge Gallery, April 2026

(ARTS498 - Claudia O'Steen)

Reclaiming Space: The Color of Resilience

Syriah D. Alcide

Reclaiming Space: The Color of Resilience explores the lived realities of being Black in America through material, memory, and color. This exhibition confronts the ways the Black Community have been portrayed, marginalized, and constrained within social and historical structures, while simultaneously celebrating resilience, survival, and embracing ancestral obstacles. Working primarily in acrylic and experimental materials, I combine traditional and nontraditional mediums, including quilting and mixed media sculpture to create layered narratives of endurance. Quilting serves as both a historical reference and a symbolic language, recalling its role as a tool of communication and preservation during slavery. Through stitched surfaces and constructed forms, histories that were once silenced are reclaimed and reasserted. Color operates not only as a visual strategy but as an emotional and political force. Bold palettes disrupt passive viewing and demand recognition, transforming space into a site of visibility and affirmation. A mixed media boat form evokes themes of migration, displacement, and survival, while reimagining vessels of trauma as symbols of strength and continuity. Rather than centering defeat, Reclaiming Space: The Color of Resilience insists on endurance. It asks viewers to reconsider preconceived narratives and to engage with Black identity as complex, powerful, and self-defined. In reclaiming physical and conceptual space, the work honors struggle while foregrounding resilience as an act of resistance.

Mentor: Darren Ritzer, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association Conference, New Orleans, LA, March 2026

(PSYC471A - Merry Sleigh-Ritzer)

Religious Depictions in Film Across Time: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Hana Kandil, Samantha Schusterman, Breanna Waters

Popular media portrayal of different races, genders, sexual orientation, and religion may impact how associated individuals are treated in modern society. Unfavorable or negative portrayals can reinforce bias and discrimination, while positive portrayals can help to promote understanding and dismantle harmful stereotypes. We hypothesized that older movies would have more negative and inaccurate depictions of religious groups. Nine movies representing three religions were chosen. Movies were selected from 1970s (roughly 50 years ago), the late 1990s – early 2000s (roughly 25 years ago) and recently (within the last 5 years). Each researcher identified with one of the mono-theistic religions and assessed the accuracy of the religion's depiction. Observers also recorded the number of positive and negative depictions of each religion. We ran a 3 (Religion) X 3 (Timeframe) ANOVA and found no interactions. We found a significant main effect for the accuracy of religious portrayals over time [$F(2,6)=8.33$, $p= .019$]. Specifically, compared to older movies, more recent movies (the last 5 years) had more accurate portrayals of Christianity. While the accuracy and depictions of Islam were not statistically significant, there was a trend of decreasing accuracy and increasing negative depictions of Islam in films over time. Our hypothesis was only partially supported. Because Christianity is the most common religion in the United States, there may be more widespread knowledge about the religion. Representations of Islam, reflective of a very small percent of the U.S. population, were more negative and inaccurate, although this pattern was a trend and not significant.

Mentors: Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.; Stacey Davidson, M.F.A.

Dina's Place, Winthrop University Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

(ARTS498 - Claudia O'Steen)

the frog prince

Alia J. Kemp Davis

the frog prince is a series of paintings that navigate a romantic relationship in which one person changes and the other responds, culminating in their individual metamorphoses and ultimate doom. These paintings are very drawing intensive with loosely applied washes of watercolor and ink that break traditional expectations of illusionistic painting, focused on highlighting and altering the mundane. Most importantly, these works re-examine political brainwashing through a physical, body-horror based transformative process. The works engage with visual distortion, unusual perspectives, and images of the home and body to create surreal settings that emphasize tension, change, and reflect emotional distress. Social media has revolutionized politics and accelerated the spread of hateful ideologies by providing platforms for the rapid, algorithmic amplification of extremist content, normalizing prejudiced narratives, and facilitating the recruitment and radicalization of users. These platforms foster echo chambers that breed disgust, contempt, and paranoia, consuming these individuals' humanity and destroying social cohesion. Among the most notable trends or ideologies emerging from these spaces are the Alpha Male and Trad Wife/ Husband movements, and white nationalist groups like the Groypers; all founded in anti-feminist, far-right ideology that promotes strict patriarchal gender roles and a return to traditional social structures. Through my work, I question the societal framework that has allowed these ideas to manifest, our reactions to violent rhetoric and the upholding of systems that enable violent action. We have consistently responded with a negligent system of empathy that has only nursed and allowed the problem to grow.

Mentors: Shaun Cassidy, M.V.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.; Mark Hamilton, B.F.A.

Hyper-Boil, Charlotte, NC, March 2026

(ARTS532 - Shaun Cassidy)

Seeing Through All Eyes

Forest Rain

I once heard a Sufi mystic comment about the divine, "It is written. No eyes can see me, yet I see through all eyes." This sculpture captures the essence of that idea: something that feels alive and interactive, yet omnipresent and unreachable. *Seeing Through All Eyes* is an interactive and audiovisual experience shared between two people. While the digital world is increasingly seeking to distract and disconnect us with fear, this work counters it by enveloping people in a mystical space that reignites our childlike wonder and curiosity. It is designed to increase empathy and awareness by illuminating the invisible transference of energy in the space between us. The experience is otherworldly and intimate, with each participant standing at the ends of the giant kaleidoscope and looking towards each other for up to ten minutes. Whether shared with a loved one or a stranger, this work is intended to nurture and deepen interpersonal and spiritual connections to those who are open to it.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

SOURCE 2026 Conference, Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

The Historical, Political, and Societal Influences on Limited Legal Prostitution Laws: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of the United

Heaven N. Lawson

This research asks how have the historical and political differences in the United States, United Kingdom, and Japan shaped the development of prostitution laws in those countries. This paper hypothesizes that differences in historical development, political institutions, and social norms have led these countries to implement distinct forms of limited legal prostitution laws. Even though sex work is often stigmatized and morally debated, it is legal in all of these countries. In the United States, prostitution is mostly criminalized, though it is legal in ten counties in Nevada. In the United Kingdom, selling and buying sex is legal, but organizing or managing sex work, as well as street solicitation, is illegal. In Japan, prostitution is banned only when it involves vaginal intercourse for money, while other sexual services remain legal. This paper will use a qualitative comparison of how countries with different histories, political systems, and social norms develop similar forms of limited legal prostitution laws.

Mentors: Shaun Cassidy, M.V.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

Dina's place, artist talk, April 9th

(ARTS498 - Claudia O'Steen)

Vanity Altar

Issy Sutton

In *Vanity Altar*, I explore the concept of healing myself through unending love and unbiased servitude to my fellow humans. Through this, I explore relationships with myself, my life partner, and familial ties. My early childhood influences were often negative, and I use my creative processes to understand and unlearn these influences and expand my development. I create a found-object sculpture using wax and color to unify the piece. The base of the piece is a vanity, with layers of latex and wax to solidify the objects atop the vanity, making the two units exist as a whole. I use objects that represent worship of the divine feminine, ritualistic processes, religious and sacrificial iconography, and cliche love symbols. The video collage that is projected onto the mirror atop the vanity contains clips that focus on the relationship that I have been building with myself and explores how that has impacted my relationships, specifically romantic relationships. The clips illustrate physical interactions with myself as well as intimate but pure interactions with my partner. I view these as acts of worship while also expressing acts of service and physical touch. The video plays in silence with candles burning atop the altar. It exists as a personal, religious artifact that asks the viewers to partake in my forms of worship. This piece incites the viewer to reflect on the intimacy and respect within the relationships in their own life.

Mentors: Shaun Cassidy, M.V.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

Sonder: Lived Experiences, Senior Thesis Exhibition, Rutledge Gallery, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, Spring 2026

Congregation

Sarah Anne Lanaghan

Congregation is a hanging sculpture composed of wood, clay, and steel. The work draws inspiration from schools of fish, the way they move as both individuals and as a unified group, as well as from the fluid movement of water itself. The piece is defined by its simplicity, the accumulation of many elements, and its overall scale. The process of creating Congregation involved long periods of sanding and smoothing each component. This repetitive act became meditative and absorbing, mirroring the calming experience of watching fish glide through water. Through this process, the work developed into something more than just a physical object, but also as a reflection of the quiet rhythm and repetition that can be found in nature. Installed between two large columns in the Rutledge Gallery at Winthrop University, the sculpture hangs approximately seven feet high, hovering just barely above the floor. The vertical space created by the gallery's tall ceilings allows the piece to occupy the air in a way that suggests a vast and open environment, echoing the expansive spaces where schools of fish move together. Like the meditative experience of observing fish and water in motion, the work invites viewers to slow down and engage with its quiet rhythm. The repetition of forms and their subtle variations create a sense of movement and synchronicity, evoking a graceful and collective flow of a school of fish. Through this experience, the sculpture offers the viewers a moment of stillness and contemplation in this fast-paced world.

Mentors: Victoria Frost, Ph.D.; Kristi Westover, Ph.D.

Science Education Alliance Symposium, Virtual, April 2026.

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL270 - Victoria Frost)

Unearthing Novel Bacteriophages Lucia, Reccee, and Cleatunium from Local Winthrop Soil

Karen Uribe-Huizache, Cadyn E. Bagley, Logan Beasley, Carson K. Caskey, Ella S. McCulloch, Kelsey G. Martin, Elizabeth R. Matthews, Myles Moore, Ciaran L. Murphy, Emmie D. Nightingale, Nathaniel Pham, Arianna F. Thompson, Emarie M. Toirkens

The Science Education Alliance (SEA) Course Research Program is an initiative between HHMI and institutions worldwide that enables undergraduate students to experience meaningful research as early as possible. The research revolves around the discovery and characterization of Bacteriophages. Phages are viruses that infect bacteria and hijack their cellular machinery to make many copies of themselves. To discover novel phages, SEA students at Winthrop collected soil samples from around campus. The samples were separated from solid material, and the filtrates were inoculated with the bacterium *Mycobacterium smegmatis* mc2155 (*M. smegmatis*) directly, or by enriching the sample with the bacterial host for 5 days at 37° C. Several plaque assays were performed to purify and amplify the phage population to create a high-titer lysate (HTL). The lysate was then used to isolate phage genomic DNA for initial characterization using restriction enzyme digests and gel electrophoresis. Each student isolated a unique phage that was imaged using transmission electron microscopy. The majority of the phages had a long-flexible siphovirus tail morphology, while one phage had a myovirus short contractile tail morphology. Three of the phages, Lucia, Cleatunium, and Reccee, were selected by the team for sequencing. This semester entails annotating the genomes of all three sequenced phages using a variety of bioinformatics databases and techniques to predict the function of each gene. These are the first steps towards understanding the roles that phage genes play in interactions with their bacterial hosts.

Mentors: Kristi Westover, Ph.D.; Victoria Frost, Ph.D.

Science Education Alliance Symposium, Virtual, April 2026

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL271 - Kristi Westover)

Using Bioinformatics to Annotate Bacteriophage Lucia's Genome

Emmie D. Nightingale, Cadyn E. Bagley, Logan Beasley, Aaliyah Y. Bennett, Dylan C. Lee, Kelsey G. Martin, Elizabeth R. Matthews, Myles Moore, Nathaniel Pham, Arianna F. Thompson, Emarie M. Toirkens, Karen Uribe-Huizache

During the Science Education Alliance (SEA) Research Program, students isolate and characterize novel bacteriophages from the local environment. Sequenced phage genomes were analyzed using a suite of bioinformatics tools, including a program developed by SEA faculty (PECAAN) that integrates several comparative tools, including Phamerator, HHpred, and NCBI BLASTp. Predicted gene start sites and open reading frames are also analyzed using Starterator, GeneMark, and Glimmer. In this way, genomes can be compared with known genetic sequences to enable predictions about the presence, length, and function of phage genes. Lucia is a subcluster F1 phage with a genome length of 54,700 bps, with approximately 40% of the 103 putative genes having predicted functions. Many of these functions are related to the structure of the phage, such as capsids, tail proteins, and tail tubes. Other predicted functions involve DNA replication, including an HNH endonuclease and a DNA polymerase III subunit. There is one predicted function that is highly conserved among six phage clusters (F included) called the mycobacteriophage mobile element 1 (MME1), which is thought to play a role in genetic diversity and evolution. Oftentimes, we cannot assign a function to a specific gene due to a lack of evidence. To reveal these functions, the next step is to clone phage genes and perform phenotypic assays to detect interactions between phage proteins and host proteins. Implementing these methods allows us to gather more evidence to support our fundamental understanding of bacteriophage genes and their roles during host infection.

Mentor: Jennifer Schafer, Ph.D.

Annual Meeting of the South Carolina Entomological Society; Clemson, SC; October, 2025.

Supported by Research Council Grant

Runner-Up Outstanding Bachelor Student Poster Presentation

This is a sticky situation: Exploring allocation to carnivory and prey trapping in pink sundew

Maite Torres Guilhamelou, Nicholas Stalford, Amber Mercer, Kerrington Norman, Jennifer L. Schafer

Carnivorous plants live in low nutrient environments and acquire nutrients from animals. Pink sundew (*Drosera capillaris*) is a carnivorous plant with a rosette growth form and has leaves with sticky glandular trichomes that trap and digest their prey. We conducted research on pink sundews in seasonal ponds within the Florida scrub ecosystem. We tested the hypotheses that pink sundews experience a trade-off between allocation to carnivory and reproduction and that pink sundews passively trap arthropods. To assess the effect of reproductive status on allocation to carnivory, we measured the size and counted the number of leaves of flowering and non-flowering pink sundews. Flowering sundews had a larger area and more leaves than non-flowering sundews, which suggests that pink sundews do not experience a trade-off between reproduction and nutrient acquisition and that they might not flower until reaching a particular size. To determine if pink sundews passively or actively trap arthropods, we set out sticky disks next to sundews of similar sizes. We counted and identified the arthropods trapped on the pink sundews and paired sticky traps. Sundews caught fewer arthropods than sticky traps and we found similar arthropod taxa on traps and pink sundews. This suggests that pink sundews passively trap arthropods. Trapped arthropods were in the groups Collembola, Diptera, Acari, and Araneae. Our research indicates that pink sundews trap more arthropods when they are flowering and do not actively attract arthropods.

Mentors: Victoria Frost, Ph.D.; Kathryn Kohl, Ph.D.

National SEA Symposium - April 2026

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL526 - Victoria Frost)

Uncovering Phage Gene Function Through Cloning and Phenotypic Investigations

Norah Kay, Kailyn Cabana, Claire Gurrieri, Felix Lady, Saachi Mehra, Olivia Morgan, Ciaran Murphy, Ash Olivet, Wyatt Reese, Sasha Vorontosv, Aiyana Williams, Mohommad Zyara

Bacteriophages are viruses that infect bacteria and are found throughout nature. They offer an alternative to antibiotics, as antibiotic resistance and multidrug-resistant bacterial infections are increasing at an alarming rate. However, only about 30% of phage genes have predicted functions. For phages to be considered as a viable alternative to antibiotics, the knowledge gap must be closed. Yorick, a bacteriophage isolated on *Mycobacterium smegmatis* at Winthrop University in 2021, is an F1 subcluster temperate phage. Using bioinformatic tools, Yorick's genome was annotated, revealing 42 of the 99 genes to have a predicted function. The research described here is the next step towards gathering more evidence at the bench to support phage gene function. Each individual gene was amplified by polymerase chain reaction (PCR), and size verified using agarose gel electrophoresis. After the amplicon size was confirmed, the DNA was purified and cloned into the pExTra plasmid through isothermal assembly. These plasmids were transformed into *Escherichia coli* and selected using kanamycin. Surviving colonies were confirmed to contain the plasmid via clone verification. After confirmation, each plasmid was purified and transformed into the bacterial host *M. smegmatis*. Phage genes were expressed in *M. smegmatis* to assess phenotypic effects on host growth. The majority of Yorick genes have been cloned into pExTra, and future work will test the phenotypic effects of each gene on *M. smegmatis*. This information can highlight interactions between the host and phage and will help elucidate the function of phage genes.

Mentors: Victoria Frost, Ph.D.; Kathryn Kohl, Ph.D.

SCASM

Supported by Research Council Grant

Investigating Protein-Protein Interactions at the Phage-Host Interface

Layla G.M. Herndon

For over 100 years, humans have harnessed bacteriophages (phages) for use in biomedical, environmental, and food industries. Despite this, knowledge of the intricacies of phage biology remains limited; most phage genes have no known function. However, when studying phages, knowledge of one phage or phage gene may be applied to similar phages or genes. Here, the interactions between phage Cain genes, their respective homologs, and the *Mycobacterium smegmatis* mc^2 155 host proteome were studied using the bacterial-2-hybrid (B2H) assay. As a result of the B2H assay, *M. smegmatis* mc^2 155 LpqN lipoprotein was determined to interact with Cain gp84. Using the B2H co-transformation assay, Cain gp84 homologs Waterfoul gp71 and Larva gp70 were determined to have the same interaction with LpqN. To predict specific interacting residues between Cain gp84 and LpqN, AlphaFold 3 was used. It was hypothesized that Cain gp84 residues L55, T187, and D190 are involved in the interaction with LpqN. Site directed mutants of these residues were generated to test this hypothesis. However, the interaction with LpqN was sustained in the site-directed mutants. Using this finding, it was hypothesized the predicted residues may not be essential for the interaction between Cain gp84 and LpqN. The discovery that homologs can interact in similar ways, but that other factors must also influence the interaction beyond single amino acids, collectively furthers our understanding of the relationship between phages and their hosts.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Chris Doehling, M.F.A.

Winthrop University, Pop Mart Officials

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

Mr. Little Joy

Asaru A. Watson

For my thesis project, I will create a toy bear collection, with prototype-packaging and promotional items provided. I hope to partner with the SOURCE stakeholders, to further develop my plans.



Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.; Kristen Arledge (Lexington Two Innovation Center)

SOURCE, Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

She Rises: A Collaged Journey of Black Womanhood

Breana Alissa Jones

She Rises: A Collaged Journey of Black Womanhood is a body of digital collage work that explores identity, visibility, and the lived experiences of Black women. Through the process of layering images, textures, and symbolic elements, this project reflects the complexity of navigating spaces where Black women are often judged, misunderstood, or overlooked. The collages serve as both personal reflection and social commentary, highlighting the tension between how Black women are perceived and how they define themselves. The title She Rises speaks to empowerment, resistance, and the consistent strength of Black women despite historical and contemporary challenges. Each collage contributes to a larger narrative that centers presence, voice, and self-definition. The layering within each work represents resilience, growth, and the multiple dimensions of Black womanhood. By overlapping materials and visual symbols, the work creates depth and texture that invites viewers to look closely and consider the stories embedded within each piece. The work encourages viewers to reflect on the ways Black women are seen, interpreted, and valued within society. Ultimately, this thesis positions collage as a powerful storytelling tool, using visual layering to explore themes of identity, community, and resilience. She Rises invites viewers to witness a journey that is both deeply personal and widely shared among Black women, while encouraging reflection, empathy, awareness, and deeper cultural understanding.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr.

SOURCE, Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

A Degree in Becoming

Calvin Alexander Rascoe II

My project will focus on creating a series of tarot cards to gain a deeper understanding of myself and why events unfold the way they do. Through these illustrations, personal aspects of my life will be incorporated to create a more personal experience for the story I want to share about my college experience. I have always wanted to learn more about tarot, and designing my own set helped me to see how the messages can translate in regard to my life. In this series, there are 15 cards that I have created to bring the story to life, incorporating tattoos that I have, as well as important family symbolism, and totems that I treasure. I will also dive deeper into tattoo creations as these are meant to be a dual representation of tattoo designs.

Mentors: Victoria Frost, Ph.D.(Sponsor); Mindy Engevik (MUSC)

The South Carolina IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (SC-IN-BRE) Program, Columbia, SC, February 2026

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL463 - Silvia Wozniak)

Exploring Synergistic Interactions Between *Acinetobacter baumanii* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*

Claire Gurrieri, Mindy Engevi, PhD

Burn wounds are highly dynamic, nutrient-rich environments that can support complex polymicrobial communities and promote colonization by opportunistic pathogens. Despite growing appreciation for the microbiome in human health, the burn wound microbiome has been relatively understudied for ~50 years, largely due to reliance on culture-based diagnostics that detect only a fraction of microbes in clinical specimens and the clinical emphasis on isolating individual pathogens. As a result, the diversity of burn wound-associated communities and functional interactions between organisms remain poorly defined. We **hypothesized** that burn wounds harbor distinct microbial signatures and that microbial interactions contribute to inflammatory outcomes. We performed next-generation sequencing on burn wound samples and identified 65 unique bacterial species, with communities ranging from 2-15 organisms per wound site. Notably, *Acinetobacter baumannii* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* were frequently detected. To assess whether these organisms could coexist and exhibit cooperative behaviors, we established mono- and co-cultures and quantified growth across three media conditions using CFU enumeration and imaging. Both species grew robustly in co-culture, indicating stable coexistence without competitive exclusion. Conditioned media generated from mono- and co-cultures did not enhance proliferation of either organism, suggesting that secreted soluble factors were not sufficient to promote growth. Using Biolog Phenotypic Microarrays, we found evidence of niche partitioning, with *P. aeruginosa* preferentially utilizing arginine and lysine while *A. baumannii* consumed distinct amino acid substrates. Co-culture did not increase quorum sensing activity, and biofilm biomass in co-culture was comparable to *P. aeruginosa* mono-culture. Despite limited synergy in growth or biofilm formation, co-cultures exhibited significantly increased antibiotic resistance to kanamycin and tetracycline compared to mono-cultures. Finally, murine keratinocytes exposed to conditioned media from mono- or co-cultures demonstrated increased inflammatory cytokine production. This data shows that *A. baumannii* and *P. aeruginosa* can stably coexist and that community context enhances antibiotic tolerance and inflammatory signaling even without synergistic growth or biofilm phenotypes. This highlights the importance of polymicrobial dynamics in burn wound infections and therapeutic susceptibility.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, March 2026

Parent Gender Differences in ACE Effects on Children in Black Families

Morgan C. Baxter

We examined gender differences in parenting stress and behaviors among Black parents and tested gender differences in pathways linking parents' adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to children's behavior. Sixty Black mothers and 40 Black fathers were recruited through Cloud Connect. The mean age was 38.1 (*SD* = 9.5). Participants were provided with a link to an online survey that included the ACE Questionnaire, the Parenting Stress and Coping Inventory, the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, and demographic questions. Participants reported on their oldest child within the age range of 4-16 (*M* = 9.5, *SD* = 4.9). Using independent samples *t*-test, we found that fathers reported significantly more neglectful parenting and corporal punishment than mothers. Interestingly, they also reported significantly more social support than mothers. Mothers reported significantly more positive parenting than fathers. We used Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 6) to conduct serial mediation analyses to examine differences in pathways linking mothers' and fathers' ACEs to their child's problem behaviors. We found that maternal ACEs affected child outcomes only when parenting stress translated to negative parenting behavior. For fathers, we found that parenting stress served as the primary mechanisms linking their ACEs to their child's outcomes. Our findings highlight the need for interventions tailored to reducing stress and promoting positive parenting for both mothers and fathers in Black families. This could help break intergenerational cycles of trauma in the Black community.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, March 2026

1st Place in the Social Sciences category, June 2025, Southeastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (SAEOPP) McNair/ Student Support Services (SSS) National Research Conference

Child Outcomes in Black Families: The Influence of Parental ACEs, Racial Discrimination, Social Support, and Parenting Stress and Behaviors

Morgan C. Baxter

We explored how Black parents' early experiences and current stressors influence their parenting and their children. Sixty Black mothers and 40 Black fathers were recruited through Cloud Connect. The mean age was 38.1 (SD = 9.5). Participants were provided with a link to an online survey that included the ACE Questionnaire, the Parenting Stress and Coping Inventory, the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, and demographic questions. Participants reported on their oldest child within the age range of 4-16 (M = 9.5, SD = 4.9). We used Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 6) to conduct serial mediation analyses to understand relationships between parental ACEs, racial discrimination, and social support; parenting stress and behaviors; and child problem behaviors. Results revealed that the association between parental ACEs and child problem behavior was mediated by higher parenting stress, which was linked to more negative parenting behaviors. Experiences of racial discrimination were also linked to more child problem behaviors indirectly through higher parenting stress. In contrast, higher social support was associated with fewer child problems indirectly through lower parental stress. Our results carry important implications for mental health interventions for Black families, highlighting the need to support high-ACE parents through increased social support, promotion of positive parenting, and attention to racial stress.

Mentor: Jennifer Schafer, Ph.D.

South Carolina Entomological Society Meeting, October 2025, Clemson, SC

Supported by INBRE

The midge behind it gall: Investigation of galls in *Palafoxia feayi*

Amber Mercer, Kerrington Norman, Maite Torres Guilhamelou, Jennifer Schafer

Gall-forming insects deposit eggs in host plants, causing plant tissue inflammation and alteration of plant structure. In some cases, parasatoids exploit gall-forming insects. We investigated aspects of the interaction between *Palafoxia feayi* and the gall-forming midge *Asphondylia* sp. (a dipertan). *Palafoxia* is a multi-shoot perennial that is native to Florida, where it occurs in scrubby flatwoods and Florida rosemary scrub vegetation types within the Florida scrub ecosystem. We sampled *Palafoxia* individuals in scrubby flatwoods and rosemary scrub in burn units with different times since fire. We measured shoot height and recorded the number of branches with and without galls, and counted and collected galls when present. We measured gall size and counted the total number of arthropods (midges, parasitoids, and caterpillars) in the gall. Overall, 27% of *Palafoxia* individuals had galls, and 76% of the galls contained midges and/or parasitoids. We found a positive relationship between *Palafoxia* height and the probability of gall presence as well as a positive relationship between the number of branches on the Palafoxia individual and the number of galls. Gall volume was positively correlated with both the probability of parasitoid presence and the total number of midges and parasitoids. Our results suggest that midges are better able to detect taller *Palafoxia* individuals and that more branches in *Palafoxia* provide more apical meristems for gall-formation.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.

Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

Crafty Crew: A Personal Toy Design Campaign

Malik Johnson

This senior thesis project focuses on the development and design of a personal toy campaign; Crafty Crew that will be accompanied by a comprehensive brand portfolio that reflects my creative vision, design expertise, and individual identity. Although the campaign highlights the marketing aspects of the toy brand, the project is not intended for commercial promotion or investment purposes; rather, its objective is to cultivate original toy concepts that resonates on a deeply aspirational and personal level. This thesis campaign is informed by my personality traits, motivational objectives, challenges and solutions, creative abilities, and the research conducted in relation to the toy characters. Collectively, these elements will contribute to the development of a brand that embodies personal purpose, significance, and potential legacy while also serving as a source of inspiration for others pursuing similar creative aspirations. Each deliverable component will be subjected to a rigorous design process encompassing research, sketches, references, color, logos, and other creative iterations. This systematic approach will ensure that each element progresses toward a finalized and polished campaign outcome. All materials will be consolidated into a comprehensive campaign guide, which will present the author's complete branded portfolio and document the developmental trajectory of the toy designs. I've contacted with my experts; Jason Tselentis and Bradley Young to receive many suggestions during both Senior Thesis I & II. The more I keep getting advice from my experts that would help my thesis on my toy campaign design, the expansion of the deliverables will curate within my senior year.

Mentor: Evan Dewey, Ph.D.

67th Annual Drosophila Research Conference, Chicago IL, Spring 2026

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL371 - Evan Dewey)

Studying Non-Crossovers in *fancm* mutants using CRISPR/Cas9

Aiyana E. Williams, Hannah E. Duncan, Bryson E. Vaughan

DNA is subject to tens of thousands of damage every day. Repair of this damage is crucial to maintaining genome stability, but genes involved in the repair process are at risk of mutations of their own. Homology Directed Repair (HDR) is responsible for precisely repairing double strand breaks using homologous chromosomes as a template. During HDR, two products can result: a crossover, when large swaths of DNA are exchanged between homologs, and non-crossovers (NCOs), when only the minimal amount of DNA needed for repair is swapped between homologs. Misregulated HDR leading to COs can lead to genome instability and cancer. Our research examined NCOs in *Drosophila* with a *fancm* gene knockout. *Fancm* is responsible for starting the Fanconi Anemia (FA) pathway which removes Interstrand Crosslinks (ICLs), creating a double strand break (DSB) to be repaired by HDR. To study HDR products lacking *fancm*, we induced CRISPR/Cas9 double strand breaks in the germline cells of fancm mutants at specified locations. This is done in one allele of the rosy (*ry*) gene (target homolog), but not the other (template homolog), via a single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP). These males are then crossed with females containing a deletion in the *ry* gene to recover repair products. The paternal chromosome, housing potential HDR repair products in resulting progeny, can then be selectively amplified via PCR using primers directed to the deleted *ry* region. If a NCO occurred in the parental male's germline it can be detected and reconstructed in the amplified products from the mixed presence of target and template SNPs. We see varying lengths of template DNA in NCOs in *fancm* mutant males which may suggest compromised repair synthesis. More analysis is needed to fully understand the effects of *fancm* loss on HDR.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Chris Doehling, M.F.A.

Showcase of Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors (SOURCE), Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

Inside the Creative Mind, The Feel Reals

Rafael Hernandez-Rangel

Society has always had mixed views as to what it takes to be an artist. Whether it's from ignorance or pure stereotypes, most people tend to undermine the role of an artist. I want to create a lineup of characters known as the "Feel Reals." The Feel Reals are meant to embody the emotions and internal struggles that most art students encounter in a personified manner. My vision is to show how each character has a particular "superpower" that makes their host act in a certain way. The project will consist of character sheets, posters and gifs. The goal of this project is not only intended to enlighten viewers of the hardships of being an artist but also to build a sense of connection within the artist community.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

Junior Dance Showcase, Rock Hill, April 2026

(DANT301 - Kelly Ozust)

Outside Conformity's Box

Dakarai Vann

This story addresses the two-fold topic of suppressing creativity & personality, as well as the cause of such suppression. This will be achieved through a combination of hip-hop, contemporary, and ballet styles. Dance concepts such as call and response, formation dynamics, and contrasting energy will also be utilized. In life, we often encounter individuals who are convinced that things must be done their way, shaming and punishing those who dare to be different. If allowed, this form of bullying limits the growth of others' creativity and personalities. In my experience, after dealing with these individuals, we tend to jump straight to labeling them as controlling, evil, etc. Then we ask a simple question vainly, “Why are they like this?” If we were to ask this question, willing to look for the answer, we could start by realizing people don’t just start their lives wanting to be mean. This is where my psychological study on Operant conditioning comes in. This is a learning process developed by B.F. Skinner, where one's choices and behavior are modified through reinforcement or punishment. The experiences people have in life significantly shape how they operate as adults. I additionally researched Christian theology. In my reading, the Lord allowed me to realize that though we may be born into sin and a sinful world, He created us to Love. If we take a moment to operate in that Love and consider the lives of others, we can begin to break cycles of the suppression previously mentioned.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Chris Doehling, M.F.A.

Senior Show, Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

Character Portfolio of *The Runner*

Carlos J. Frank Jr

I will be creating a character portfolio for a comic book. The portfolio will contain character designs, and stories of each character. I may include environments, a cityscape, and locations where the characters reside. I am creating this portfolio of characters to showcase my skills in character design and to represent myself and my life growing up, in an exaggeration but mainly accurate to my life growing up as an athlete.



Mentor: Michael Sickels, Ph.D.

Southern Sociological Society - April 2026

hey ChatGPT generate a research study title: Cultivating Critical AI Use through Academic Policy

Emilee Cornelius, Nadia R. Kolodji, Madison L. Harley, Rachael Bogner

As large language AI models like ChatGPT become more commonplace and sophisticated, universities across the country have struggled to build a set of best practices for incorporating or restricting the use of AI in the classroom. As of yet, there is limited empirical evidence regarding how students engage with AI programs in their work, the extent to which they critically evaluate their own AI use, and the broader implications of AI in contemporary society. This project seeks to understand student use and perception of AI, with an emphasis on how they are affected by university and class AI policies. Through participatory action research, which employs the expertise of the affected population, we will engage in semi-structured interviews with our peers. This data will be derived from approximately twenty interviews with undergraduate students of a variety of majors and class standings at Winthrop University. Findings will represent how students think about AI use in relation to academia, established policy, broader society, and their personal values. This project will aid in building critical AI use through the development of institutional and class policies that reflect the lived experiences of students. These policies derived from research will be implemented with the goal of academic and organizational advancement and will be further studied as the effects of their application materialize.

Mentor: Sangwon Sohn, M.S.

SOURCE, Winthrop University, April 2026

(INDS357 - Sohn, Sangwon)

Crisis Housing: Sudan's Civil War

Samajha A. Clinkscales

Humanitarian crises caused by natural disasters and armed conflict often leave millions of people without safe and stable housing. Around the world, communities face displacement due to wild-fires, floods, and war, forcing families to live in temporary shelters or overcrowded environments with limited access to basic resources. In many countries, including the Philippines, Kenya, and India, inadequate housing conditions further contribute to health risks and reduced quality of life. This project examines how interior design can improve living conditions for individuals and families affected by these crises. The focus of this study is Sudan, where the ongoing Sudanese Civil War, since 2023-present, has displaced millions of people and created an urgent need for temporary and sustainable housing solutions. Many displaced residents are currently living in refugee camps or informal settlements that lack privacy, sanitation, and safe interior environments. These conditions highlight the importance of thoughtful, human-centered design in emergency housing. This project explores how interior designers can develop adaptable, cost-effective, and culturally sensitive housing solutions that provide safety, comfort, and dignity for displaced communities. Design strategies such as modular layouts, multifunctional furniture, natural ventilation, and locally sourced materials will be considered to create healthier and more livable spaces. By focusing on efficient use of space and essential human needs, the design aims to improve both the physical and psychological well-being of residents.

Mentors: Scott Werts, Ph.D.; Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

American Geophysical Union Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, December 2025

Supported by Research Council Grant

Relationship between clay mineralogy and carbon content of terraced agricultural areas in the Colca Valley of Peru

Alisa M. Olive, Scott Werts, Lauren Kohut, BrieAnna Langlie, Matthew Velasco

This study explores the relationship between clay mineralogy and carbon sequestration from agricultural terraces in the district of Achoma (Caylloma, Arequipa, Peru) in the Colca Valley. At the time of the Spanish conquest, the Colca Valley was one of the most densely terraced regions in the Americas. Agricultural terraces here date to at least 1000 CE and include a mix of rainfed and irrigated complexes with wide variations in geologic material. Soil samples from the surfaces of cultivated, fallow, and abandoned agricultural terraces were collected in the summer of 2024. By integrating geochemical analysis using both powder X-ray diffractometry and elemental analysis, we assess how variations in mineralogical composition influence carbon preservation in these contexts. It is widely known that certain clay minerals play a large role in the stabilization of organic matter and do a better job of long-term preservation of organics than others. This study is the first step in evaluation of the carbon and clay relationship of other pre-Inca archaeological sites occupied in the region at the same time, but in different geological material, ultimately investigating differences in preservation potential across the landscape and the ability of the high-altitude soils overall to sequester carbon.

Mentor: Daniel Stovall, Ph.D.

McNair Conference in Atlanta, GA, June 2026

Supported by Other, NIH/ NINDS R16NS14172

(BIOL370 - Stovall, Daniel)

Validation of Potential RYBP Gene Targets in Glioblastoma Cells

Karen Uribe-Huizache, Daniel Stovall

Glioblastoma Multiforme (GBM) is a lethal central nervous system cancer. The RING-1 and YY1-binding protein (RYBP) is a transcription factor that is frequently downregulated in GBM cells and thus may play a tumor suppressive function. To determine the potential gene targets of RYBP, our lab previously used U-87 and U-251 cell lines transduced with lentivirus overexpressing RYBP or a control and performed RNA sequencing. We observed six significantly upregulated and five significantly downregulated genes that were common to both cell lines overexpressing RYBP. In the present study, we sought to validate these findings using RT-qPCR. We have successfully observed a seven-fold increase in one gene target and a three-fold increase in another in RYBP-overexpressing U-87 cells compared to control. Our future directions are to validate these genes in U-251 cells and to validate the remaining putative RYBP gene targets identified by RNA-sequencing.

Mentor: Daniel Stovall, Ph.D.

National IDeA Symposium of Biomedical Research Excellence in Rockville, MD, June 2026

Supported by Other, NIH/ NINDS R16NS14172

(BIOL471 - Stovall, Daniel)

Does RYBP sensitize glioblastoma cells to temozolomide?

Daniel B. Stovall, Israel Bellinger, Paris Nelson

Glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) is an aggressive central nervous system cancer with poor clinical outcomes. Treatments include combinatorial radiation and the DNA-damaging chemotherapy temozolomide (TMZ), which only increased patient survival by about 2.5 months compared to radiotherapy alone. Thus, research that investigates and targets the underlying cellular and molecular mechanisms that allow for GBM cell survival and proliferation is needed in hopes of discovering more targeted therapeutic pathways. RING1- and YY1-Binding Protein (RYBP) is often downregulated in GBM. While the exact effects of RYBP on GBM are unknown, it has been shown to disrupt DNA repair by competitively binding double-strand break sites with BRCA proteins. Therefore, we wondered if RYBP may sensitize GBM cells to TMZ. We previously transduced U-87 and U-251 glioblastoma cells, which have low levels of endogenous RYBP and demonstrate TMZ sensitivity, with lentiviral vectors containing the RYBP coding sequence or a control. We then conducted WST-1 assays to measure differences in cell proliferation between control and RYBP-expressing cells in the presence or absence of TMZ. Our preliminary results suggest that RYBP suppresses U-87 cell growth compared to control cells. Future experiments need to replicate this observation and dissect the effect of RYBP on TMZ sensitivity in both U-87 and U-251 cells.

Mentor: Daniel Stovall, Ph.D.

American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology in National Harbor, MD in March 2026

Supported by Other, NIH/ NINDS R16NS14172

(BIOL472 - Stovall, Daniel)

An emerging role for G-Quadruplexes in regulating RYBP transcription in glioblastoma cells

Daniel B. Stovall, Evonna Kinloch, Hannah Nation, Ariyana Felder-Grooms

RING1- and YY1-Binding Protein (RYBP) is a Polycomb protein that regulates chromatin compaction and gene expression. Because guanine nucleotides constitute 33% of the RYBP gene promoter, we investigated whether glioblastoma cells may decrease RYBP by aberrantly resolving G-quadruplexes (G4s), a secondary DNA structure formed by guanine-rich sequences. We treated U-87, U-251, and T-98 cells with G4-stabilizing ligands Phendc3 or pyridostatin and observed significantly increased RYBP mRNA levels compared to vehicle-treated controls. These results suggest that G4s in the RYBP gene promoter may activate RYBP transcription. Next, we synthesized oligonucleotides (oligos) bearing wild-type or mutated versions of RYBP promoter sequences that are predicted to form G4s. After transfecting these oligos into U-87 and U-251 cells and immunostaining with a G4-binding antibody, we detected G4s in wild-type-transfected (but not mutant-transfected) cells, indicating that the RYBP promoter sequence is capable of forming G4s in cells. To determine if G4-resolving helicases, which are frequently overexpressed in glioblastoma, may unwind these G4s and thus contribute to RYBP downregulation, we treated U-87, U-251, and T-98 cells with different siRNAs targeting six different G4 helicases. Surprisingly, we observed either no effect (e.g. from DHX36 knockdown) or significant decreases (e.g. from DDX5 knockdown) in RYBP mRNA levels, suggesting that loss of one G4 helicase can be compensated for by other G4-resolving proteins. Overall, our data suggest the RYBP gene promoter can form G4 structures and that their inappropriate resolution contributes to RYBP dysregulation in glioblastoma cells.

Mentors: Kristen Abernathy, Ph.D.; Zach Abernathy, Ph.D.

University of North Carolina Greensboro Regional Math and Statistics Conference, Greensboro, NC, November 2025

Supported by EPSCoR

A Dynamics Informed Neural Network Model for Measles Transmission

Jake Matthews, Eddie Wenker, Camryn Whipple

Dynamics Informed Neural Networks (DINNs) combine traditional compartmental models within the architecture of a neural network. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the use of DINNs have been applied to published COVID data to more accurately predict transmission rates with limited data. In this project, we apply this technique to the study of measles transmission in the United States. We use an SEIRV compartmental model to track the spread of measles through the population. We then construct a DINN that uses the SEIRV compartmental model with current US measles data to predict transmission rates and numbers of infections. We compare the results from the DINN to predictions from a corresponding neural network that excludes the dynamics structure. We find that excluding dynamics in the neural network architecture produces a transmission rate profile and basic reproductive ratio that are not supported by data. With the dynamics architecture, the neural network produces a transmission profile with peaks preceding rises in infection.

Mentor: Leslie Bickford, Ph.D.

Winthrop English Department 19th Annual Undergraduate & Graduate Research Conference, Rock Hill, SC, 2026

(ENGL515 - Bickford, Leslie)

"Stubborn back-looking ghosts": Cyclical Time and Mythification in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Gabriel E. Tristano

One of the most prominent themes found in William Faulkner's 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!* is the decay of the Old South and the resulting intergenerational psychological turmoil faced by the families that had dominated this society. This paper argues that, throughout the novel, Faulkner conveys the idea that the aristocratic Southern families in the novel, such as the Sutpens and Compsons, effectively lead to their own demise by clinging to a lost past that cannot be achieved again yet is deeply ingrained in them through the cyclical nature of time. The paper highlights not only how the novel portrays the vast-reaching influence of events in the past, but also the role of the mythification of history through storytelling in sustaining a cyclical procession of time. As each narrator tries to make sense of the past, their attempts to utilize the past as a way to cope with their own lives generate the mythical story at the center of the novel while also leading to each character's eventual self-demise. Special attention is given to Quentin Compson's unique role as being the character at the center of the temporal tragedy. The essay presents the idea that his role is not quite as simple as being the fatalistically determined victim of the past as proposed by some scholars. Rather, he prevents himself from escaping the cycle of time by continuously creating a myth of the past.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

Southeastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personel, Atlanta, GA 2025

Supported by McNair Scholars Program

Mental Landscapes: How Imagined Environments Affect Emotional and Social Well-being

Maria (Angie) D. Torres Bastidas

Research has shown that exposure to natural environments reduces stress and lowers anxiety, improves attention, mental clarity and supports cognitive restoration. Direct sunlight has been found to improve mood and to reduce depressive symptoms, and mood and work satisfaction can also be improved even with indirect sunlight. Unfortunately, many individuals don't have access to nature and sunlight due to residing in an urban setting or experiencing confinement for reasons such as illness or institutionalization. Positive mental imagery may be an accessible alternative to nature exposure, providing similar benefits. For example, mental imagery has been shown to improve attention, memory and cognitive performance. Nature-based imagery (e.g., visualizing forests or green spaces) helps regulate emotions. Mental imagery has even been leveraged to enhance cognitive behavioral therapy effectiveness for major depression, anxiety, PTSD, and social phobia. However, few studies have explored how the presence of sunlight, indoor versus outdoor settings or imagined social connection influence the effects of mental imagery. Our study found that compared to a control condition, participants in the mental imagery conditions reported significantly reduced negative emotions and social disconnect, and increased social trust. In addition, imagery involving a sunny environment significantly increased positive emotions compared to cloudy or indoor landscapes. Our findings suggest that positive imagery can improve emotional and social well-being. This may be a valuable tool for mental health support, especially in circumstances where real exposure to nature is not possible.

Mentor: Gihanee Senadheera, Ph.D.

UNC Greensboro Regional Mathematics and Statistic Conference, Greensboro, NC, November 2025

Supported by INBRE

Creating New and Flexible Distributions Using The T-R{Y} Framework

Steven Stokes, Miguel T. Villano

This research explores the utilization of the T-R{Y} Framework, an approach to constructing flexible probability distributions through generational inheritance by compositing three distributions. Each generation inherits parameters, bounds, and graphing power from its predecessor, resulting in a flexible generalization. The Kumaraswamy distribution is given particular emphasis due to its established versatility and universal bounds, so long as data can be scaled to the unit interval. Parameter estimation is carried out using Maximum Likelihood Estimation, supported by Differential Evolution optimization method. The distributions are then evaluated on New York Air Quality Data through AIC and BIC scores. The results confirm that the T-R{Y} Framework consistently yields superior fits, as demonstrated by a better fit compared to generic distributions.

Mentor: Tony Hobert, Ph.D.

Southern Political Science Association; New Orleans, LA; January, 2026

Supported by Research Council Grant

(PLSC510 - Hobert, Tony)

Clemency or Condemnation: A Comparative Study of Gendered Stereotypes in Psychiatric Labeling, and Their Impact on Death Penalty Sentencing

Sarah Gonzalez

Gender-based discrepancies within sentencing of capital crimes raise constitutional concerns regarding equal protection under due process of the law. Vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by gender-based discrepancies, and the outcome may significantly vary by state. There is a scarcity of data that analyzes the potential impact of mental illness diagnostic and clinical bias between genders on sentencing. This article provides a cross-jurisdictional look into the demographics of several capital cases that involve the death penalty verdict and relevant mental diagnoses, examining the extent to which gender bias has a role in sentencing outcome, and if it is related to mental health diagnoses or insanity acquittals. Cases with male and female defendants from Texas, Florida, and Pennsylvania have been analyzed to retain consistent conclusions across varying occurrences. The findings suggest that mental health diagnoses are generally not treated as objective evidence, especially if the recorded diagnosis falls under an anxiety or mood disorder, where it is frequently deemed irrelevant. Personality disorders are often diagnosed retrospectively in female cases and introduced during sentencing for male cases and serve to perpetuate gender-biases associated with the gender of the defendant. This case analysis uncovers the lack of standardized criteria for mitigating the death penalty with mental illness, which even more so varies by state. The discrepancies may be interpreted as a sign of judicial bias: all six cases were prosecuted under a jury trial and, in this case, judicial bias can result in wrongful verdicts to death.

Mentors: James Hanna, Ph.D.; Christian Grattan, Ph.D.

National Meeting of the American Chemical Society, Chicago, IL, August 2026

Supported by Other, NSF grant

New Catalysts for Visible-Light Photoredox Chemistry

T. Christian Grattan, Sarah Buchanan, James Hanna

Most chemical reactions require a catalyst to occur. Catalysts can be dangerous to work with and require numerous safety precautions. A relatively new field of chemistry called photoredox catalysis utilizes light to excite the catalytic cycle. These catalysts are cheaper to produce and safer to use when compared to traditional catalysts. A new organic catalyst with a unique central structure has been synthesized to be more efficient, safer, and cheaper to make. So far, these unique catalysts have been tested in an imine alkylation reaction, fluorination reaction, and lactonization reaction. All three reactions show better yield when compared to the commercial acridinium photoredox catalysts; in some cases, the yield is doubled compared to the commercial catalyst. Variations of the catalyst with the same unique central structure have been designed to produce better results for specific reactions. Future research plans include testing the catalyst in new reactions and testing the new variance catalysts.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association, New Orleans, 2026

Imagining Social Connection: Effects on Perceived Social Self-Efficacy

Maria (Angie) D. Torres Bastidas, Dr. Donna W. Nelson, Dalton Kimbrell

Mental imagery has been shown to influence emotions, cognition, and well-being, yet little is known about how imagining social interactions affects confidence in one's social abilities. The present study examined whether guided mental imagery involving a positive social interaction would increase perceived social self-efficacy and whether the setting of the interaction (indoor vs. outdoor) mattered. Because attachment-related avoidance and anxiety influence how people anticipate and approach social experiences, these tendencies were also examined as potential moderators. Seventy- seven adults were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: imagining a positive social interaction in an indoor setting, imagining a positive social interaction in an outdoor setting, or imagining a neutral daily routine. After completing the guided imagery task, participants reported their perceived social self-efficacy and completed measures of attachment avoidance and anxiety. Participants who imagined positive social interactions reported significantly higher social self-efficacy than those in the control condition. This effect was evident for both indoor and outdoor imagery scenarios. Avoidance moderated the results, such that imagery increased social self- efficacy for individuals low or average in avoidance, whereas participants high in avoidance showed improvement only in the outdoor imagery condition. Attachment anxiety predicted lower overall social self-efficacy but did not change the effectiveness of the imagery conditions. These findings suggest that briefly imagining positive social interactions can increase individuals' confidence in their ability to navigate social situations. Guided social imagery may represent a simple, accessible strategy for strengthening perceived social competence and supporting social functioning.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

Source: Showcase of Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors

(ECON495 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

Effects of Majoring in Accounting, Finance, and Economics on Black Individuals Wealth in America

Wok Inka

This paper investigates the effect of majoring in accounting, economics, and finance at the undergraduate level on Black individuals in the U.S., specifically homeownership and wealth accumulation of Blacks in contrast to other demographic groups. Using data from the American Community Survey (ACS) spanning 2021 to 2023, the study employs ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression to estimate the homeownership and wealth accumulation attachment associated with an undergraduate accounting, finance, and economics degree for Black individuals. While empirical results are forthcoming, I hypothesize that holding an accounting, economics, or finance degree is positively associated with not only homeownership and wealth accumulation, but higher homeownership and total wealth accumulation for Black individuals compared to alternative degree paths that Black individuals participate in, holding demographic and regional characteristics constant.

Mentor: Sangwon Sohn, M.S.

SOURCE, Winthrop University, April 2026

(INDS357 - Sohn, Sangwon)

Crisis in the Ukraine

Kaytlynn Crater

Our research looks at how temporary crisis housing could help people in Kharkiv, Ukraine who lost their homes during the war. The problem we are looking at is how designers can make simple and affordable homes for people who need them. The goal is to provide basic needs like shelter, electricity, water, a place to cook, and a bathroom for people in Ukraine. Kharkiv is in eastern Ukraine and has very cold winters and moderate summers. Ukraine also has large areas of chernozem, which is a dark soil that holds moisture and affects the stabilization of building foundations. The war has destroyed more than 2.5 million housing units and around 10.6 million Ukrainians don't have a home to go back to and are forced to find housing elsewhere. Materials commonly used in Ukraine such as brick, steel, sand, glass, and mineral wool. Traditional Ukrainian construction methods guide our design, including wood frame construction, wattle and daub, brick, and galvanized sheet metal. Because some materials like concrete are harder to access during war and are not necessarily temporary, our design focuses more on traditional materials such as clay and mud brick. Our design also considers the daily systems people need. Water systems use polypropylene, PVC, and cross-linked polyethylene pipes, solar panels are used to provide electricity, clay ovens allow cooking without electricity, and insulated composting toilets provide sanitation without proper plumbing.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

South Carolina Psychological Association Conference Hilton Head, SC, March 2026

(PSYC471A - Sleigh-Ritzer, Merry)

Revenge Bedtime Procrastination Predicts Compensatory Thinking, Executive Dysfunction, and Shame

AnnaGrace O'Brien

Revenge Bedtime Procrastination (RBP) is spending time before bed focusing on selfish pursuits ("me time") to compensate for the inability to do so during the day. We hypothesized that RBP would predict higher compensatory thinking and executive dysfunction, as well as higher levels of guilt and shame. Participants (n = 126) were adults with a mean age of 25.50 (SD = 11.95). They were primarily white (52%) and women (75%). Participants responded to scales that assessed RBP, compensatory thinking, executive dysfunction, and guilt/shame. Most of our hypotheses were supported. RBP predicted compensatory thinking. In other words, people who compensate for lost time during the day with RBP also rely on compensatory thinking in other areas of their lives. RBP predicted executive dysfunction. Perhaps the inability to cognitively organize and manage schedules leads to a loss of personal time during the day, increasing the desire for "me time" at night. Partially supporting our hypothesis, RBP predicted shame but not guilt. Guilt is behavior and repair focused, while shame is self-blaming, which suggests that RBP can elicit negative emotions. Participants who engaged in RBP reported conflicted feelings because they felt it was beneficial to them but also admitted feeling guilty afterwards. Our findings expand the limited knowledge on this topic, demonstrating that RBP is a wide-spread behavior associated with unhelpful thinking patterns and emotional distress.

Mentor: Joanna Jackson, Ph.D.

Emory University Sure Summer Symposium, Atlanta, GA (July 2025) Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students, San Antonio (Nov 2025)

Poverty, Violence, and Mental Health Risk Among Children in Black Single-Mother Households: A Spatial Analysis of Fulton County, Georgia.

Tim Speaks

In the United States, 23% of children are raised in single-mother households (Chavda, 2023), and Black families are disproportionately represented, with approximately 64% of Black children living in single-mother households (Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.). These households have increased socioeconomic challenges, including low income, poverty, and low educational attainment, which are factors for poor mental health outcomes in children. Depression is particularly prevalent in low-income and high-stress households. However, few studies use geographic tools that illustrate how race, household structure, and economic hardship intersect at the local level. This study focused on Black single-mother households in Fulton County, Georgia, examining how low socioeconomic status contributes to children's risk for developing depression. It also considers how exposure to neighborhood violence and crime in economically disadvantaged communities may increase these mental health risks. Using census tract-level data, choropleth maps were created to display poverty rates, educational attainment, income levels, and the proportion of Black single-mother households. The results revealed that areas with a high proportion of Black single-mother households overlapped with economically disadvantaged areas, which increased vulnerability to childhood depression. These insights revealed a critical need for mental health resources and policy changes in underserved communities to help support Black single mothers and their children.

Mentor: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.

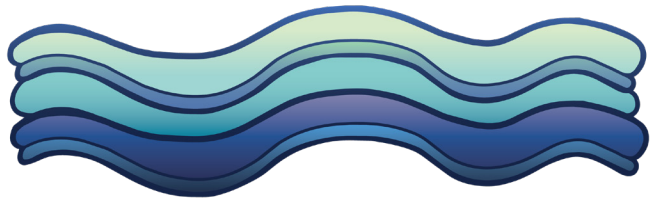
Showcase of Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors, Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

(PESH381 - Wojcik, Janet)

Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy in Retired Football Players

Ann Grace Donahue

Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) is a neurodegenerative disease that results from repetitive head impacts often seen in football. Individuals who have made a lifetime career out of football have often developed cognitive, behavioral, and mood dysregulations. Studies show a dose-response relationship between the prevalence of CTE and the number of years spent playing football. Symptoms of CTE often come about years after retirement, and there is currently no way to diagnose the disease during life. This research will discuss the prevalence of CTE, the lack of public knowledge, and how we are getting closer to diagnosing the disease in living people.



Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Association Conference, Louisiana, New Orleans, March 2026

(PSYC471 - Sleigh-Ritzer, Merry)

PED-Related Media Use Predicts Male Exercisers' PED Use but Not Knowledge

Nicholas Sharp, Colin L. Smith, Camden S. Davis

We examined exercisers' performance enhancing drug (PED)-related social media use along with PED attitudes and knowledge. We hypothesized that male exercisers who consumed more PED-related media would 1) desire greater muscularity, 2) have more positive PED attitudes, 3) be more likely to use PEDs, and 4) have lower PED knowledge. We found mixed support for our hypotheses. Adults, especially older adults, who spent more time on PED-related social media were more likely to use PEDs and feel positive about them. This finding reflects the nature of social media, which normalizes PED use. Spending time on PED social media did not predict knowledge, which reflects that media's normalization of PED use is typically accomplished with biased, not factual, information. Adults might not realize they are viewing biased information, because those with higher engagement in PED media had false confidence in their knowledge. Failing to support our hypothesis, PED social media use did not predict a higher desire for muscularity. The lack of a relationship suggests that these factors (PED media use and desire for muscularity) might exert unique types of pressure on men to use PEDs. Additional analyses revealed that adults who used PEDs had higher knowledge scores. Adults who relied on PEDs to improve their appearance reported being willing to try a variety of PEDs and planning to use PEDs for the rest of their lives. This study confirmed that PED media engagement increases PED use. We added to the existing research by demonstrating that PED media use does not increase knowledge about PEDs but does predict users' increased confidence in their knowledge.

Mentor: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.

Postpartum Exercise After Cesarean Section

Kiersten Gutierrez

Thirty percent of births result in a C-section in the United States. During this intervention, a woman is surgically cut through her abdominal muscles and uterus to deliver the baby. Recovery time is approximately eight weeks. Women recovering from a C-section need specialized training to strengthen the abdominal muscles. A study evaluated fifty-four women with similar activity levels, 22 nulligravida and 32 postpartum (19 vaginal and 13 c-section). Both groups performed tests evaluating trunk stability, strength, and fatiguability. The postpartum group was evaluated at 8-10 and 24-26 weeks postpartum. At both evaluations, both postpartum groups were weaker, more fatigable, and less stable. The c-section group was also more fatigable than the vaginal delivery group at 8-10 weeks with no differences by 24-26 weeks. Exercise prescription can be provided after medical clearance. Aerobic training FITT-VPP 8 weeks postpartum is 7 days a week, low intensity walking ("talk test"), 20-30 minutes. Time can be increased each week. Resistance Training FITT-VP is 2-3 nonconsecutive days, low intensity (slow and controlled), 2-3 sets of 12-15 repetitions, 8-10 body weight exercises. Progression should be with weights and intensity. Flexibility FITT should be limited to static stretching before and after exercise for 20-30 seconds each stretch. Daily diaphragmatic breathing should be incorporated as neuromotor exercise. Results prove that postpartum women need specialized care and exercise prescription to address musculoskeletal and other pregnancy-related issues postpartum.

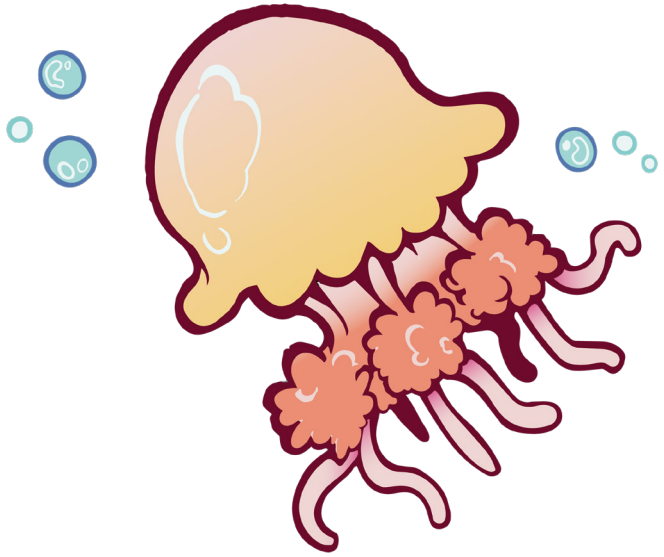
Mentor: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.

(PESH381 - Janet Wojcik)

Physical Activity Effect on Burnout in College Students

Jazzmyne Miller

College student burnout, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, poor academic performance, and decreased motivation, has grown to be a major concern. Regular exercise may be an effective strategy to reduce the symptoms of burnout, according to recent research. With a focus on physiological and psychological factors, this study investigates the connection between physical activity and the reduction of burnout in college populations. Exercise improves emotional stability and cognitive performance by releasing endorphins and lowering stress chemicals. Regular exercise also promotes social interaction and time management abilities, both of which protect against emotional and academic stress. Recent research indicates that even moderate physical activity, like yoga, walking, or recreational sports, may significantly decrease perceived stress and improve overall health.



Mentors: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.; Daniel Drane, Ph.D.; Jason Chung, Ph.D.

(PESH381 - Janet Wojcik)

Modern Scouting and Player Evaluation in High School Baseball

Quinton J. Hall

Modern scouting and player development have changed how high school baseball pitchers are evaluated. While traditional scouting relied on observation and intuition, modern methods use technology and data analytics to assess player performance. Metrics such as pitch velocity, spin rate, and biomechanics provide a measurable look into a pitcher's potential. Tools like motion capture and radar tracking help scouts identify strengths and areas for improvement with better precision. There is also a growing focus on cognitive and visual skills, emphasizing reaction time, decision-making, and mental awareness. This research looks at how these data-driven approaches influence player development, recruiting, and long-term success. The goal is to understand how combining analytics and human observation creates a fair and effective way to evaluate young baseball talent.

Mentor: Jennifer Disney, Ph.D.

(WMST450 - Jennifer Disney)

The Queer Identity: Beyond Sexuality

Ariel Moscat

Feminist theory and the liberation of women have opened avenues of advocacy for other minority groups such as homosexuals. Queer theory dismantles the notions of gender, sex, sexuality, and identity being biological and argues that they are socially constructed. Queer theorists focus on the concept of heteronormativity, which assumes heterosexuality as the default, and they challenge traditional academic standards. However, queer theory has its plot holes, similarly to feminist theory, where the focus has been on white gay men or has relied too heavily on a western perspective. There are four topics I aim to discuss in this project.The first is understanding queer theory in the Global North and the Global South through a comparative lens. The second is contemplating Cheryl Clarke's idea of the lesbian "decolonizing" her body and viewing queerness as a decolonized identity. The third is a discussion of a more recent phenomenon of a gay identity versus a queer identity and asking the question, "does this translate transnationally?" The fourth is exploring the connection between queerness and art as a transnational form of resistance healing.

Molly R. Bandinelli

Mentor: Josephine Koster, Ph.D.

(ENGL494 - Josephine Koster)

Christ the King in the Heart of Tolkien: The Myth of Middle-earth Representing Frodo and Aragorn as Dual Images of Christ

Molly R. Bandinelli

Far from being a mere fantasy, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is fashioned as a mythic narrative intrinsically shaped by his Christian imagination, in which spiritual truth appears through story. Frodo and Aragorn function as dual Christ-figures that capture a multi-faceted view of the suffering of Jesus's Passion and the restoration of His Resurrection. By avoiding strict allegory, Tolkien let theological meaning emerge organically through myth. This project examines Tolkien's legendarium from three critical perspectives: theological, historical, and anthropological. From a theological standpoint, Tolkien's idea of sub-creation and his concept of eucatastrophe enlighten how the Divine is revealed through beauty, sacrifice, and unexpected grace within Middle-earth. Historically, Tolkien's moral attention against the backdrop of World War I elucidates how the horrors of trench warfare shaped the trilogy's focal points of endurance, mercy, and hope that arise from suffering instead of a desire to escape or discount reality. On the anthropological side, the research draws on human pattern, structural, and mythic theories that encapsulate Tolkien's exploration of opposing moral and cultural constructs that reflect universal human struggles. In this light, Frodo stands as a figure of the suffering servant, exhibiting compassion, selflessness, and wounds in a way that resonates with the Passion. In contrast, Aragorn appears as the healer-king, whose restoration of order embodies the promise of the Resurrection. This division of the Christ-image allows Tolkien to portray redemption as a communal achievement rather than a solitary one. Through his myth, faith breathes and hope abounds.

Mentor: Jennifer Disney, Ph.D.

Reconstructing History: Spanish Colonialism and Its Impacts on Aztec Women

Mercedez Hernandez

It is widely known that the fall of the Aztec Empire is associated with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. The lives of this powerful indigenous group were changed completely, with many aspects of their culture erased. What remains underdiscussed, however, is the extent to which Spanish colonialism impacted Aztec women. My research into the fields of Mexican American, Chicano, and Indigenous studies has shown me that history tends to be explained through the masculine perspective, excluding women's experiences. The primary sources of history often lack a critical focus on the unique lives of women. To understand the impact of colonialism on Aztec women, I conducted a comparative historical analysis. This paper analyzes Aztec society before and after the Spanish conquest, examining the specific changes women experienced due to colonialism. My research reveals that previously, Aztec women existed within a gendered, but structurally balanced society, one where being a woman did not necessarily mean you were less than. Aztec women were able to hold multiple roles of authority that guaranteed their own feminine individual autonomy. The arrival of the Spanish and their monotheistic religion clashed with the Aztec Empire; to assimilate the Aztecs into Spanish standards, the Spanish forcibly imposed their religion on them. It was impious to prosper outside of the home, so the Spanish destroyed any public realm where women could thrive, leaving them with one option: the home. The overall result was a transformation in which women experienced a decrease in value, autonomy, and independence.

Mentor: Darren Ritzer, Ph.D.

Current and Emerging Topics in Leadership Research

McKenna R. Bruce

A review of the Leadership research literature provides us with an understanding that there are topics, both current and emerging, that can take precedence moving forward. One prominent current topic is emotional intelligence. It is defined by the skill of self-management and the ability to create and manage relationships. In its application to leadership, it is a proven predictor of success, as leaders with high emotional intelligence better navigate complex and emotionally-charged situations with more efficiency. Resilience, an emerging topic rather than current, also has its pertinent applications to leadership practices. It is defined by the capacity to rebound and persevere, as well as accept new responsibility and encourage progress. As more complex situations come to the forefront in organizations, leaders with a degree of resilience can better navigate these situations than those without. A more obscure topic, but one with just as much significance to leadership as the aforementioned qualities, is the topic of "wicked problems." These issues are known for their complexity and the "gray area" that surrounds their solutions. Not only do leaders need to be able to address these issues, signifying their importance, but leadership itself is a wicked problem, in that there is no singular answer to what makes a good leader, and there is a general complexity to how we teach and practice different forms of leadership. This poster will present three current tracks of Leadership research and discuss potential studies and implications.

Mentor: Jennifer Disney, Ph.D.

Packaging Patriarchy in Pink: How Christian Nationalism Rebrands Modern Femininity for Political Ends

Jayden L. Gaskins

Conservative women's contributions to political mobilization are often overlooked when discussing ideological history. Women have been central to the mobilization, messaging, and spread of conservative ideology from early Republican women's clubs in the 1920s to modern Christian nationalist organizations and online influencers. However, this involvement in conservative politics raises a question: why do women actively participate in and promote socially conservative movements that reinforce patriarchal structures and contribute to the loss of their own autonomy? This paper argues that conservative and Christian nationalist movements answer this contradiction by reframing traditional gender roles. By analyzing modern political organizations and digital influencers, including Concerned Women for America, Turning Point USA, Conservative women influencers, this research demonstrates how gendered framing, aesthetics, and relatability are used to mobilize young women online. Conservative women have found a way to promote patriarchal dynamics and oppose feminism by advertising to other women that traditional values are as empowering as non-traditional ones. This analysis explores how Christian Nationalism adapts gendered rhetoric to "empower" women while ultimately reinforcing patriarchal and authoritarian ideas by examining the history of conservative women's organizing, their relationship to Christian Nationalism, and modern strategies used by conservative influencers to mobilize young women.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

Moral Injury as a Predictor of coping Strategies and social support

Peyton D. Kidd Burgess, Charles Thornburgh

Our goal was to examine whether moral injury could be found in a general population, and we examined whether moral injury co-occurred with specific coping strategies or types of social support. Participants (n = 101) were college students with a mean age of 21.37 (SD = 3.91). Slightly more than half were women (64%) and White (55%). Participants responded to scales to assess their coping style and perceived social support. Participants were then prompted to tell us about a time, in an open-ended field, when they experienced or witnessed a situation that violated their moral code. Participants were prompted to think about the incident while completing a scale that quantified the extent of their moral injury. We found support for our hypothesis that moral injury exists in a general population sample. In support of our hypothesis, we found that adults with greater moral injury relied more on emotional and avoidant coping. We did not find support for our prediction that greater moral injury would predict less social support. Instead, we found that adults who were experiencing the most positive outcomes following their moral injury reported healthier coping strategies and more social support from friends. Our findings enhance our understanding of this relatively new concept. First, moral injury exists in a broader context than previously established. Additionally, moral injury co-occurs with less healthy coping strategies, and a lack of social support predicts worse outcomes for those who have experienced moral injury.

Mentor: Yi Shen, Ph.D.

Applied Financial Research Using the CFA Research Challenge Framework

Ngan Nguyen, Matthew Blanks, Andrea Samaniego, Andrew Wheaton

This project involves applied financial research with student researchers using the CFA Institute Research Challenge framework to produce analyst-grade equity research outputs. Student engages in rigorous financial statement analysis, valuation modeling (DCF, relative valuation, dividend discount models), ESG assessment, and risk analysis under professional standards. Student researchers author the final research deliverables under faculty methodological oversight. This project builds on Winthrop's prior success and regional recognition in the CFA Research Challenge and formalizes a sustainable student-faculty research process.

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

Women's Resistance, the Colonized Mind, and Bridging Multigenerational Experiences of Women in the Latin Caribbean

Ariel Moscat

Women's resistance literature offers a first-hand recount of the injustice experienced by Latin Caribbean women during historical times of corruption. While utilizing Gloria Anzaldúa's Colonial Mindset's framework, I analyzed the narratives of these women specifically in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and of Latin Caribbean descent in the United States to draw connections to the shared identity struggle that Latina women have inherited through colonial influences to understand how Latin culture has shifted through generations of resistance. This presentation offers implications to understanding the multifaceted identity of Latina women and how they navigate political and social constructs.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.; Maddie Foss

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young, VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

Design for Change: Reframing the Bystander Effect through UX Design

Tiah E. Galloway Sherrill

The bystander effect—a psychological phenomenon when people are less likely to act because others are present—continues to shape how harassment, discrimination, and unsafe situations play out in public spaces. This thesis asks: how can user experience (UX) design help change that? How can it guide people to respond, even in small ways, when hesitation and uncertainty take over? Drawing from behavioral psychology and ethical design, this project looks at how an app's design can encourage people to act while simultaneously offering a support system to the user. The result is a mobile safety app prototype that supports individuals facing harm while inviting nearby community members to take informed, low-risk action. The design centers clarity, discretion, accessibility, and emotional awareness—because moments of crisis are rarely just logical, and people need care as much as guidance. Rather than treating digital tools as neutral, this project positions UX as a kind of social infrastructure, shaping how communities respond and share responsibility. By structuring interactions intentionally, the prototype shows how thoughtful design can interrupt passive witnessing, help people move from awareness to action, and ultimately reinforce the idea that safety is something we create together.

Mentor: Kelly Ozust, M.F.A.

Internship Experience at Jami Masters School of Dance: Insights into Dance Studio Operations and Administration

Alicia J. Littlejohn

Internships provide essential hands-on experience, connecting academic learning with professional practice. This poster presents the experiences of an intern at Jami Masters School of Dance, a large performing arts studio in Charlotte, NC. The intern gained exposure to multiple facets of studio operations, including costume management, retail inventory, office administration, client interaction, and social media marketing. Key responsibilities included assisting with preschool dance classes, managing costume orders and measurements, updating social media content, and performing daily office tasks. Through this experience, the intern developed skills in organization, time management, communication, and marketing within a performing arts setting. This presentation highlights the intern's learning outcomes, challenges encountered, and the broader understanding of the collaborative efforts required to maintain a successful dance studio.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

Embedded Inequality: How Medical Institutions and Policy Fail Black Mothers

Jazmine Marie Richardson

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the 2023 maternal mortality rate for Black Women was 50.3 deaths per 100,000 live births and was significantly higher than rates for White, Hispanic, and Asian women. While mortality rates declined for White and Hispanic women, they increased for Black women, highlighting a persistent and widening disparity across racial groups. My research tests the hypothesis that Black women experience systemic neglect in the United States' health care due to intersecting racial and gender bias embedded within medical institutions and public policy. Racialized myths regarding Black women's pain tolerance, along with historically exclusionary medical practices, have contributed to disparities in diagnosis, treatment, and postpartum care. Through an extensive literature review and supporting quantitative data, this study finds evidence of how the historical development of American medicine and contemporary maternal health policies have failed to adequately address the inequalities Black women face. This paper reframes the crisis of Black women's health care as a product of systemic injustice rather than individual choices.

Mentor: Victoria Frost, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

Isolation of Bacteriophages on Novel Bacterial Hosts

Sasha J. Vorontsov, Simon Cherry

Bacteriophages (phages) infect bacteria and use the host cell machinery to replicate. Typically, the cell then lyses, releasing new phage and allowing the process to repeat. Previous research in our lab has shown that a collection of phages isolated on *Mycobacterium smegmatis* can cross-infect bacterial strains within the same genus, including *Mycobacterium nonchromogenicum* and *Mycobacterium aurum*. The ability of phages to infect alternative hosts is important because, although the bacteria used in these studies are nonpathogenic, they belong to the same genus as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis,* a pathogen and the leading cause of death from a single infectious agent in many parts of the world. The goal of this research was to isolate phages using *M. nonchromogenicum* and *M. aurum* as the original isolation hosts. Twenty-three soil samples were collected from different places around Winthrop University's campus and shaken for 2-16 hours at room temperature. Filtrates were incubated (37° C) with bacterial host *M. nonchromogenicum* or *M. aurum* to enrich for mycobacteriophages. Standard plaque assays were used to detect phage presence. PinkLady and LadyMaria were isolated on *M. nonchromogenicum* and produced clear plaques. GreatGreta and Midna were isolated on M. aurum and produced turbid and clear plaques, respectively. After obtaining high-titer lysates, DNA was isolated, and the phage genomes were analyzed using a suite of restriction endonucleases. Transmission Electron Microscopy of PinkLady and GreatGreta revealed siphoviral and myoviral tail morphologies, respectively. Expanding the collection of bacterial hosts used to isolate phages may increase phage diversity for practical applications, particularly if they can infect multiple hosts.

Mentors: Stacey Davidson, M.F.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

Me, Myself, and Yep Still Me

Angellina M. Bosch

My practice has a mind and personality of her own, almost like she's her own living, breathing entity. She is stubborn, demanding, and at times dramatic, and she never comes alone. She usually brings her lackeys: Distraction and Burnout. These figures hover, interrupt, and negotiate. They linger in the studio, interrupting momentum, pulling me away midthought, convincing me to second-guess a brushstroke that was working a mere five minutes ago. It feels like we are in constant disagreement, as though we occupy the same studio but speak two different languages. In *Me, Myself, and Yep Still Me*, I confront these tensions directly. Across five acrylic paintings, my artistic practice and her goons become physical characters, constructed through a crude process in which I cut and assemble cardboard forms with hot glue, and paint with acrylic paint. Through this process, I create portable figures that are both fragile and defiantly alive. The exhibition follows the narrative of trying to complete a single piece while negotiating with this other half. Ultimately, these paintings acknowledge the average artist's struggle: the constant back and forth with one's own process. By giving my practice physical form, I externalize what is often invisible. These paintings are not about the polished outcomes but about the tug of war between discipline and avoidance. *Me, Myself, and Yep Still Me* brings hidden tensions to the forefront in a satirical manner to highlight that sometimes creating is not about winning the fight, but about showing up for it anyway.

Mentors: Mark Hamilton, B.F.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

Untitled

Justin Branch

My artwork is an act of self-discovery, exploring my own experiences, struggles, and identity. I focus on themes of introspection, mental health, masculinity, and spiritual experience as a black male. By using self-portraiture in my photographic practice, I construct visual spaces where these themes confront the viewer through the interplay of light and shadow. This series enters into dialogue with F. Holland Day's Christ's Last Words, in which he used his own body to embody spiritual suffering and transcendence. Similarly to Day, I use self-portraiture, making myself both subject and site of inquiry. Though, where his work draws from martyrdom and overt religious symbolism, my work considers spirituality as a lived, internal, and culturally embodied experience, compelling the viewer to have their own introspective moment in time. (Untitled) reflects my spiritual journey as a process of realization, where the physical act of layering and re-photographing the image parallels my own unfolding understanding of self. After photographing myself, I print, alter and re-photograph the images, elevating their ethereal quality with prisms, fractured light or lens filters. The use of glass prisms suggests the transparency required for introspection, acting as a threshold between the physical and non-physical. Light passing through the surface becomes diffused—almost divine—echoing the reverent illumination in Day's imagery. Ultimately, these works serve as a liminal threshold, inviting the viewer to step beyond the captured image and inhabit the quiet, unmapped territories of their own spirit.

Mentors: Shaun Cassidy, M.V.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

Why Fight This?

Micayla Massey

Why Fight This? is a piece about death, letting go, and the power of grieving someone who is still there. It is a series of two large metal sculptures, covered in sheer fabric. They stand on black platforms of varying sizes. There are a plethora of Spider Lily flowers made from aluminum, covering the smaller platform. This piece depicts two canines facing each other, one standing in a patch of spider lilies and the other on a barren surface. The figures are cloaked in the same blue and purple fabrics, but the barren platform's figure is tattered. One figure's fabric is neat and attached to the figure's full skeleton, while the other's shroud is ragged, allowing the viewer to see its frame and insides, both of which represent the health and spirituality of the canines. The fear of death and letting go are the most prevalent themes in this piece. Spider lilies in the language of floriography represent death and the afterlife. Blue and purple fabric acts not only as a skin, but as a shroud commonly used by people during the grieving process. The canine on the barren platform has the petals of the flowers intertwined with the fabric strands in the torso. The other has no petals and is guarding the remaining flowers. It is a show of desperation to stop what awaits us all. The guarding canine is only prolonging the inevitable, and the confrontational figure longs for the end and to be let go.

Mentors: Mark Hamilton, B.F.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

A Body Like Yours

Paxton Pliska

A Body Like Yours is a photography series exploring the transcendental aspects of identity in relation to the human form, the physical changes one undergoes to align with their bodies, and how society inherently forces people to be defined by labels. Displayed in the room are large white silks draped on the left and right walls, containing multiple layers of portraiture in various colors. Each layer is dedicated to a specific primary pigment: cyan, magenta, and yellow. Underneath white light, the viewer can only see fragments of the human body. The colors lead the eyes throughout the piece, but obscure the dynamic poses the subjects assume. Only when viewed under their complementary colors— or the primary colors of light: red, green, and blue— can the true images be distinguished. These pigments that make up the artwork embody the physical control we have over our bodies and how we present ourselves to others, whilst the colored spectrum of light behaves much like our human essence, something that can be shaped and manipulated, but its properties fundamentally remain unchanged. Every model in the piece is someone who does not conform to the standard idea of sexuality and gender identity, but is organized in the room the way our society would deem fit. The walls divide male and female orientations the individuals were born with or raised as, but once underneath the transitioning colors of light, the walls are no longer separated, and their individuality is finally revealed amongst the colorful amalgamations.

Mentors: Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.; Mark Hamilton, B.F.A.

Unmade, What Remains

Tayler Mason

Unmade, What Remains is about the relationship between the environment and personal self-growth. I have a strong connection to nature because of its continuous transformation through time, space, and seasons. Similarly, my identity is dynamic in this way. It continually evolves, sheds layers, and reconstructs itself through my life experiences and my creative process with art and fashion. *Unmade, What Remains* features four 12x14 photographs in various sizes. Initially, the images appear to be close-ups and scenes of nature. However, as the viewer gets closer, the photographs start to transform. I am posed within the natural settings in "trashion" clothing. Each clothing design is created from discarded materials, including trash, fabric remnants, and found objects. These once-overlooked items are regarded as undesirable and useless, often overconsumed before being discarded. Through the process of turning trash into "trashion," I traverse themes of rejuvenation, strength, and self-rediscovery. I take inspiration from nature's ability to decompose and regenerate, and the materials I use are reshaped into something that represents growth emerging from what was once neglected. All of the images are created in black and white, which establishes a sense of unity and stillness. Despite this restrained palette, elements that demonstrate growth and self-discovery are embedded within each photograph. These elements are layered into the image through collage and varying opacity to create depth and dimension. While the photographs initially appear dormant, they ultimately evoke feelings of liberation and self-acceptance through their engagement with nature.

Mentors: Stacey Davidson, M.F.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

Reverie

Saquoia Harris

Reverie uses acrylic paintings to explore real and imagined places. They explore where I have been and places where I want to go. I mix poetry and painting to create pieces that transport the viewer to these locations allowing them to reflect on how these images affect them on a deeper level. Each acrylic painting is on watercolor paper and is paired with poems that further set the setting and form the image. Beyond the Clouds depicts images of what I imagine Heaven, Valhalla, and Paradise to look like. Memorable Beach, depicts vignettes from a trip I took to Folly Beach. I chose Folly Beach because of the memories I created there with my partner. Beyond the Clouds explores my identity as a spiritual person and my curiosity in the great beyond. Depending on what the viewer believes in, this work allows them to connect with their spirituality. These two pieces also symbolize my past and future, but are appreciated in the present to remind the viewer and me to stay in the moment.

Mentors: Mark Hamilton, B.F.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

All the Time and Every Opportunity

Renee Cartledge

All the Time and Every Opportunity is an immersive installation that explores the topic of human waste and the deterioration of our environment. This work contains elements of photography, video collage, projection, and sound to create an atmosphere in which the viewer is face-to-face with a world left to rot. Now more than ever, we are experiencing the effects of climate change. It is the consequence of our passiveness and our unwillingness to look at the issue, to understand just how real the effects will be. Many people try to ignore the problem or distract themselves until they feel comforted by anything else. This work confronts the viewer and denies them the comfort of being indifferent. The video collage depicts nature as it slowly becomes consumed with trash until it is unrecognizable. As the sound piece plays, we see the slow decay of our world and the chaos that will consume us if we do not act. By the end, the viewer will be left in the dark, left to sit in their own thoughts and reflect on how they had the opportunity to be more conscious of their waste and how they disposed of it.

Mentors: Shaun Cassidy, M.V.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.; James Connell, M.F.A.

Prompting ...

Corrina Spratlin Leverett

Prompting… explores various elements found within change, such as how specific life events affect people over time, how changes can influence the future, and alter the environment. The installation focuses on how each individual work is placed in space and how that affects the viewer and their experience. Some works are displayed low to the ground, appearing submissive and allowing for the viewer to establish a subtle dominance over the piece, while other works are tall and commanding. Additionally, the work focuses on the formal elements of line, shape, movement, and repetition. This element of repetition is present in each work as it serves as a study of habits that are present in daily life and how the change within these habits affects individuals over time. This series consists of five sculptures that combine both ceramic and sculptural processes. The methods that are utilized to create these works are just as important as the works themselves due to the poetic nature that can be found in process and materials. The ceramic elements within this body of work utilize raku salt and gas firing processes. This vital moment of change shows the addition and removal of various elements within the process, affecting the work, and therefore demonstrating a study of change in relation to how the work has been built.

Mentors: Shaun Cassidy, M.V.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

you can go back (but no one will be there.)

Emmy Neal

you can go back (but no one will be there.) is an exploration of the past through the use of installation and interactive sculpture. the installation features four interactive sculptures that the viewer can move within, as well as a video walkthrough. elements within the installation reference human life, shrines, and grief, and implement sensory elements in order to get the viewer to ask questions about not only what they are seeing in front of them, but also about themselves and the way they process thoughts about the past. you can go back (but no one will be there.) the past is the past. time marches on. the carousel never stops turning.it hurts less to think about it now. i'm either healing or forgetting. perhaps a mix of both. the light at the end of the tunnel is dimmer than i imagined. or maybe i've just gotten used to it. nevertheless, i persist. i'm done being trapped by cages of my own creation. i want to break free. i need to…the light is brighter than i imagined

Mentors: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.; Scott Werts, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb, PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb, PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

Who Gets Clean Water? A Comparative Analysis of Water Quality in Marginalized Communities and Privileged Communities

Emma B. Bonasia

Access to safe and reliable drinking water is often treated as a universal right, yet the reality in the United States tells an entirely different story. This paper examines how marginalized neighborhoods are consistently facing poorer water conditions than more privileged areas and argues that these disparities are rooted in long standing structural inequalities. This analysis focuses on four major factors: 1) aging infrastructure that is rarely upgraded in low income or minority communities, 2) regulatory gaps that allow for uneven enforcement across states and municipalities, 3) economic barriers that limit both household protections and local government investment, and 4) broader patterns of environmental injustice that normalize unequal exposure to risk. Using policy analysis, case studies, and environmental justice research, this paper shows how these factors create a system where some communities benefit from proactive maintenance and frequent inspections while others are left with deteriorating pipes, inconsistent monitoring, and delayed responses to contamination. Understanding these disparities is essential when creating equitable water policy, and this analysis ultimately points towards reforms that demand investment, stronger regulatory enforcement, and community-centered decision making in order to address long standing water quality inequalities.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

Comparative Study of Child Welfare Jurisprudence for Indigenous Peoples in Australia and Canada

Celeste M. Danbury

Indigenous peoples are disproportionally represented in the child welfare system globally; generations of forced separation and historical trauma continue to disrupt families and promote government distrust for indigenous families. Australia and Canada have both mistreated their native populations within their child welfare system: Australia forcibly removed the First Nations children until the early 70s, leading to “The Stolen Generations,” while Canada has had a similar controversy with “cultural genocide.” Both countries have since implemented protections to decrease the number of indigenous children in out-of-home care; however, this paper will explore how well those protections have held up in court and how Canada’s constitutional protections have provided more legal leverage for indigenous populations as compared to the solely statutory protections in Australia. Using a most similar systems constitutional comparative analysis of both Canada and Australia, including an examination of legal cases, this paper will explore how explicit constitutional protections of indigenous groups can provide greater protection from intense child welfare intervention in indigenous communities than statutory protections.

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

(WRIT433 - Heather Listhartke)

Internship Experience in a Local Newsroom: Strengthening Skills in Writing, Research, and Communication

Julia O. Swygert

Internships provide students with an opportunity to develop their academic writing skills into professional, journalistic writing. This poster presents the experiences of a news intern at a local newspaper, where the intern collaborated with reporters and editors in a newsroom to deliver accurate, meaningful journalism to members of the local community. The intern contributed to story research, took photographs, conducted interviews, and wrote/contributed to multiple articles. Some key responsibilities of the intern included staying up to date on local events, attending community meetings such as city council meetings, conducting interviews with community members and leaders, researching and writing news articles, and editing content. Throughout this internship, the intern strengthened hard skills in journalistic writing, research, and interviewing, as well as soft skills like communication and collaboration with colleagues and community members. The intern learned about the practices and methods of journalism, gaining valuable knowledge to support a career in writing. This presentation highlights the intern's learning outcomes, challenges faced, and the role of local news in informing and engaging the community.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

Southern Perceptions of Elitism and the Rise of the Alt-Right in the South

Reagan Watson

In the United States, the South has been stereotyped as uneducated, poor, and racist. Despite this reputation, this reduction mis-describes a complex and dynamic region. Through an intensive literature review, this paper complicates our understanding of the South by exploring its anti-establishment roots, its perception of media and the Democratic Party as elitist, and how those factors have played a role in the rise of an alt-right media pipeline that has become predominant in the region. By analyzing voting records and the Southern Honor principle, this paper constructively critiques how the current Democratic party has failed to effectively market itself to southern Americans, which has contributed to the success of the alt-right media pipeline and Donald Trump's victories in the 2016 and 2024 presidential elections.

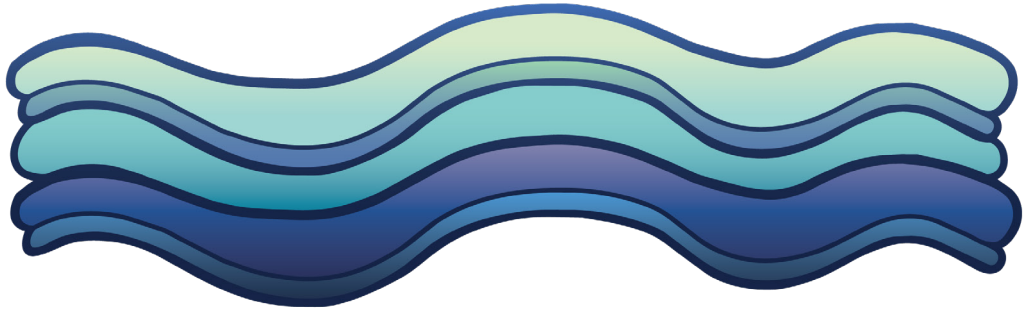
Mentor: Silvia Wozniak, Ph.D.

(BIOL463 - Silvia Wozniak)

Interning at CVS Pharmacy: Diving Deep into Pharmacy Practice and Patient Interaction

Rachel A. Leek

Interning at CVS Pharmacy as a certified pharmacy technician provides practical exposure to the daily operations of a retail pharmacy and to the care team's role in patient care. As a pharmacy technician, daily responsibilities include working with the pharmacist in processing prescriptions, organizing medications, interacting with customers, and managing inventory. With new exposure and daily challenges, this experience helps to strengthen important work and life skills, including communication, time management, teamwork, and problem-solving, as well as reinforces knowledge of pharmacology, patient safety, and pharmacy procedures. Overall, the pharmacy internship offers significant insight into the healthcare system and preparation for future careers in pharmacy and related medical fields.



Mentor: Jennifer Disney, Ph.D.

(PLSC473 - Jennifer Disney)

Internship Experiences Across Federal and State Government: Insights into Legislative Research and Constituent Engagement

Benjamin M. Byrd

Internships in government and public affairs provide students with valuable opportunities to observe how legislative institutions operate and how elected officials engage with constituents. This poster presents the experiences of an intern who worked in several legislative offices at both the federal and state levels, including the offices of Ralph Norman, Lindsey Graham, Tim Scott, and Kambrell Garvin. Through these internships, the student gained exposure to various aspects of the legislative process in both United States Congress and the South Carolina House of Representatives. Key responsibilities included conducting legislative research, drafting constituent correspondence, and assisting staff with policy briefs related to issues such as cybersecurity, foreign affairs, and federal budget discussions. The intern also communicated with constituents through phone and email, addressing inquiries related to federal programs and legislative actions. In addition, the student attended hearings, committee meetings, and public events, gaining insight into how policymakers evaluate legislation and respond to public concerns. These experiences allowed the intern to observe differences between federal and state legislative environments while developing skills in policy research, communication, and constituent services. This presentation highlights the learning outcomes of these internships and reflects on how hands-on legislative experience can deepen students' understanding of the policymaking process and representative government.

Mentor: O. Jennifer Dixon-McKnight, Ph.D.

(HIST300 - Otha Dixon-McKnight)

The Hippie Way of Life: How the Vietnam War Started a New Culture

Talia K. Jefferson

The Hippie movement was a counterculture movement that stemmed from the effects of the Vietnam War in the early 1960s. Hippies served as a symbol of the anti-war agenda, and they did so through their music, art, clothing, and nonviolent political standpoints. The Vietnam War spanned 20 years, starting on November 1, 1955, and ending on April 30th, 1975. The Vietnam War began when communist North Vietnam tried to make South Vietnam communist as well. The U.S. was brought into this war when North Vietnam forces fired upon the U.S. Maddox stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin. The Vietnam War was the tipping point for Americans during a time of resistance; thus, it sparked the counterculture movement, which in turn put the hippie movement in full swing. Since the American people were able to see the atrocities of war, it led to protests against the American government. These Protest lead to the subculture called hippies, which gave way to Counterculture. Counterculture is a cultural group or movement whose behaviors and values oppose those of the mainstream. Historians viewed Hippies through the lenses of social and political activism, counterculture, lifestyle, self-expression, and music. Given the length and violence of the Vietnam war it led to widespread rejection of societal norms and mainstream values, putting counterculture on the rise.

Mentors: Stacey Davidson, M.F.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

Feminine Feline

Sydnie K. Bowens

In my collection of work titled Feminine Feline, I explore feminine power and beauty among women of different races alongside the “big cats”: lion, tiger, and cheetah. This pairing is intentional, as these magnificent creatures embody strength, grace, independence, and raw power, qualities that mirror the diverse expressions of femininity I aim to show. By placing women of different racial backgrounds alongside these apex predators, I challenge conventional beauty standards and highlight the universal yet culturally unique manifestations of feminine strength. The series depicts interactions between animals and women, creating visual dialogues that explore themes of kinship, mutual respect, and shared power. The aesthetic draws inspiration from the Y2K era of the late 1990s and early 2000s, with its signature characters defined by bold colors, synthetic materials, bright metallics, and unapologetic confidence. I also incorporate vintage styles to add layers of nostalgia and timelessness. The resulting series comprises three acrylic paintings on canvas, enhanced with colored pencils for added texture. This range accommodates both vertical compositions and wider, expansive formats that support complex interactions and detailed environments. The series includes dual portraits that explore the dynamic relationships between women and these animals. These paired works explore visual and symbolic connections, depicting harmony, mirroring, and powerful coexistence. Rich, layered backgrounds immerse viewers in settings ranging from lush natural landscapes to abstract dreamscapes and Y2K-inspired environments. These backdrops enhance the narrative, establish mood and atmosphere, and deepen the symbolic bonds between subjects and their surroundings, making each painting a complete visual story.

Mentor: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.

(PESH381 - Janet Wojcik)

The Relationship Between Physical Activity Levels and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome Symptom Severity in Female Athletes

Anastasia Beaver

Although polycystic ovary syndrome, also known as PCOS, is one of the most common endocrine disorders that effect women, its impact on female athletes is often overlooked. PCOS can cause hormonal imbalances that lead to symptoms such as irregular menstrual cycles, insulin resistance, fatigue, and changes in body composition, all of which may impact athletic performance and overall health. Physical activity is commonly recommended as a primary strategy for managing PCOS symptoms; however, female athletes already engage in structured and often intense training programs. It is not fully understood how different levels of physical activity influence the severity of symptoms in female athletes. This project will examine the relationship between physical activity levels and PCOS symptom severity in women athletes and discuss how increased awareness of this relationship can help other athletes, coaches, healthcare providers, and the broader community better understand and support women managing PCOS.

Mentors: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.; Kelly Ozust, M.F.A.

Cultivating Creativity: A Summer Internship with the STARTS Arts Program

Morgan K. Belton

Immersed in a dynamic environment of music, movement, and visual art, I spent two summers as a student assistant in the STARTS arts program, guiding middle school students in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts. Each day, I led creative activities, assisted with rehearsals, and mentored students as they prepared for a culminating performance. I also facilitated collaboration among students and supported instructors in managing the classroom. Through this experience, I strengthened leadership, communication, and organizational skills while gaining a deeper understanding of arts education and youth development. Working closely with students allowed me to witness the transformative impact of creativity on confidence, teamwork, and self-expression. The STARTS program inspired my growth as a dancer, educator, and mentor, and this abstract highlights my contributions, challenges, and personal and professional development fostered through immersive participation in the arts.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Donna Nelson)

Psychology Internship Experience: Supporting Advocacy and Trauma Support in a College setting

Brooklyn Armstrong

Internships provide psychology students with opportunities focused on prevention, awareness, and translating theoretical knowledge into practice. This poster presents the experience of a psychology intern working in the Office of Student Advocacy and Trauma Support at Winthrop University, which provides confidential support, resource referrals, and advocacy for students experiencing crises or trauma. The intern contributed to campus resource fairs, outreach events, and awareness campaigns to promote student well-being and services.Key responsibilities included planning campus events and awareness campaigns, creating outreach materials such as flyers and social media content, and contributing to research on best practices in student advocacy and trauma-informed support services. For example, every week the intern assisted with creating a new portion of the training manual for the counselors at Winthrop University. The intern also collected and analyzed event feedback, and assisted in summary reports used to improve programming. Through this experience, the intern developed stronger communication, research and planning skills while gaining a deeper understanding of the advocacy process, trauma-informed practices, and the role of advocacy and counseling services in student success. This internship highlights how psychology training can contribute to prevention-focused campus initiatives and help connect college students with support resources.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

(IDVS490 - Virginia Williams, IDVS490 - Virginia Williams)

Theatre Education in Fostering Youth Development and Mitigating Mental Health Crises

Kameron Gwin

The ongoing youth mental health crisis has proliferated following the lingering effects of Covid-19, with 1 in 5 children experiencing at least one mental disorder as of 2025. Studies show that increased social isolation, academic pressure, and high technology usage are directly linked to these spikes in adolescent mental illness and stunted development. With a multidisciplinary approach using the research of psychology, education, and theatre scholars, alleviating this crisis can be possible. Education scholars look at the policies and laws dictating and/or inhibiting school curricula for students, including funding adversity and standardized testing practices which affect the place of arts programs in schools. Scholars in developmental psychology build upon this foundation, studying the effects of different modes of learning on children's retention, development, and stress levels in an educational environment. Theatre scholars come in from a holistic perspective, providing research on the performing arts and any positive or negative effects this discipline has had on youth learning and development. The question stands: What impact does the suspension of theatre programs in schools have on youth socioemotional development and mental health? Synthesizing all three disciplines aforementioned finds that increased implementation of holistic learning (theatre education) has a positive impact on children's academic retention, socioemotional skills, and overall mental health; however, pushback from state and federal policies and funding cuts makes it difficult for these programs to be thoroughly applied and efficiently provide for student needs.

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

Grant Writing Internship Experience: Assisting a Social Work Professor in Grant Proposal Development

Megan Rose Hewes

This internship provides English students with a valuable opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the full proposal writing process, as well as real-world applications to communication and working with a team of professionals in the applied field. Key responsibilities include assisting with researching acceptable RFP opportunities, developing project goals, objectives and timelines, budgeting, and time management. The intern observed team meetings, helped with the drafting process, answered grant-related questions, and assisted in the project development process. Through this experience, the intern developed stronger writing skills, grant proposal process knowledge, time management skills, communication skills, and organizational skills while gaining a deeper understanding of the entire grant writing process from start to finish, multidisciplinary collaboration, and the role of social work within the community or international scope. This presentation highlights the interns role, learning outcomes, challenges faced, professionalism, and the importance of the project within the community or international scope.

Mentor: Josephine Koster, Ph.D.

(ENGL494 - Josephine Koster)

You're Only Made of Moonlight: The Monstrous as a Mask for Man

Emily Tatum

This paper explores the ways in which supernatural horror media utilizes the presence of otherworldly entities to allow for the narrative displacement of responsibility for human sexual and gendered violence from male perpetrators to monsters. Traced within this paper are the narrative tropes introduced by foundational texts like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and their influence on the modern day fiction in Stephen King's *Gerald's Game* and David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* saga. Discussed within this paper are the ways that *Dracula* shaped the supernatural horror genre and the implementation of the monster character as an allegory for realistic patriarchal violence and oppression, *Lolita*'s impact on the ways that literature and culture regard child sexual abuse and its victims, and the evolution and rejection of these tropes and stereotypes within the modern narratives detailed in *Gerald's Game* and *Twin Peaks*. This paper also explores how literature responds to an evolution in understanding of feminist theory and rape culture across literature from different time periods, and considers experiential identification and reader response theory within its analysis. Through careful analysis of multiple forms of media across the horror genre, this paper determines that though the horror genre has greatly improved in its depictions of gendered and sexual violence, allowing these stories to transfer responsibility for these cycles of abuse from male perpetrators to supernatural creatures continues to prevent readers from grasping the severity of the impact of such acts of gendered and sexual violence.

Mentor: Salvatore Blair, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

Illustrating Carolina Native Fish Species at Southern 8ths Farm: A Fish Guidebook

Abby G. Bowers

Knowledge of native fish is vital to the success of resident populations. South Carolina contains roughly 150 native freshwater fish species, from the diverse and inconspicuous minnow family *Leuciscidae*, to the well known bluegill sunfish. Southern 8ths farm is an emerging ecological station on the South-North Carolina border where the piedmont and coastal plain meet. The owners and stakeholders are dedicated to the creation of a "corridor of green", and committed to ecological preservation/documentation. Following a robust fish population survey by our lab and in association with Carolina Wildlands Foundation, we have now published a publicly available series of digitally rendered images detailing the variety of native fish observed in Thompson Creek which flows through the property. Illustrations were rendered down to scale counts and fin rays which are often critical in distinguishing between similar species. In total, 17 high resolution images were created comprising a 32-page native fish guidebook. As the first university-initiated publication in this series, "Fish Species of Thomson Creek at Southern 8ths," is now the third of three regional Piedmont naturalist guides now available to the public.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

SOURCE, Rock Hill, South Carolina, 2026

(IDVS490 - Virginia Williams)

Oil, life blood of Authoritarianism?

Aidan C. Godsey

The act of nationalizing oil has become synonymous with authoritarian policy with the wake of regimes nationalizing oil in order to create a stream of revenue for the party untouched by private labor. This consensus is predominantly that underdeveloped natural resource rich countries are likely to fall down this path of nationalization in order to fund authoritarian governments much like what can be seen in Latin America. This notion was dubbed the “resource curse”, coined by Richard Auty in 1995. The question then becomes what effects on polity does the nationalization of oil and does the long standing idea of a resource curse apply to these contexts? In order to come to a conclusion a range of disciplines must be employed to understand this issue from as many angles as possible. Primarily the discipline of economics is being used as nationalization is a key economic tool of creating an insular economy. This discipline also contains the origin of the resource curse which was determined using global economic and political data from South America. Secondly political science is inversely just as important. This discipline provides a political basis for nationalization that existed out of economic agenda in order to paint a more precise depiction of the areas of study. Beyond the economy, political instability is likely the second largest reason for nationalization of resources. Lastly is the discipline of history as this is the throughline to all other disciplines. Providing historical context to these events and places further characterizes what happened and allows for a more thorough analysis of individual case studies. My thesis is that though tied to authoritarian policy, the nationalization of resources does not set countries on a path to authoritarianism with the link being used from the outdated concept of the “resource curse”.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

A Comparative Analysis of Anti-Discrimination Protections in the United States, France and Germany

Daylen Berry

This paper compares the equality and anti-discrimination protections in three different countries’ constitutions: the United States, Germany, and France. Each country claims to support equality, but they approach it in different ways. The Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution provides for equal protection under the law. Germany and France also protect equality, but their constitutions explain these protections more fully. Germany’s Basic Law states that all people are equal before the law and specifically bans discrimination based on sex, race, language, religion, or political beliefs. France’s Constitution and the Dection of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen focus on the idea that all citizens are equal and should have the same rights and opportunities. This paper compares how these countries have written equality protections into their constitutions and how those protections work in practice. What is the reality of discrimination in these countries? What groups are protected? How have courts interpreted these constitutionally protected rights? How have legislatures passed specific laws to protect these rights? This comparative analysis demonstrates that although all three countries value equality, their constitutional approaches reflect different legal traditions and political histories, and those differences have important impacts on how rights are experienced in the day-to-day lives of those living in these countries.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

GIS Applications for Organizing Local Charity Support In York County, South Carolina

Aidan Godsey, Maya Flynn

Charitable organizations play a crucial role in community aid, often giving support where state and federal support fall short. Additionally, many of these charitable organizations rely on word of mouth as they don't receive local data regarding where to focus their efforts. This study examines distribution of current faith based service organizations in order to help them reach communities that historically have not been adequately serviced by charity organizations. In collaboration with Mike Corrigan of All Saints Catholic Church in Lake Wiley, we use geographic information systems to assess charitable needs in York County, South Carolina. These needs are defined in three categories being food, shelter, and spiritual needs, which are placed into ArcGIS to determine areas of overlap in need of charitable work. The project pinpoints a range of aid offered in the community such as churches, hospitals, shelters, and food pantries. Demographic data of the York County area, such as income level, race, car access, language spoken at home, and renter status allows us to identify areas of high need. Overlaid against each other, these two data sets allow us to address areas of low support, and offer suggestions for charity organization collaboration. The goal is to create an easily accessible map which can be used to coordinate local charitable support.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Lipscomb, Michael)

Christian Nationalism’s and Conservative Media’s Effect on Young Male’s Political Identity in the United States

Ja'Quez J. Scarborough

Christianity rapidly declined in American society between 2007 and 2019 from approximately 78% in 2007 to 62% in 2019. This decline has now levelled out and has increased to 64% in 2024. At the same time, younger male Americans in the 18–29-year-old age group are experiencing a shift away from the Democratic party towards the Republican party. In this study we use data taken from conservative media political groups, decisions on key political issues, and election data to track the rise of conservative identity for American males between the ages of 18 and 29, paying particular attention to whether or not that shift is correlated to rising rates of Christian faith.

Mentors: Stacey Davidson, M.F.A.; Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.; Mark Hamilton, B.F.A.

(ARTS498 - Claudia O'Steen, ARTT400 - Claudia O'Steen)

Cycles, Unseen

Kierra Monique Jenkins

Cycles, Unseen consists of three 24 x 30 inch mixed media panels that explore the coexistence of trauma and everyday life through fragmented portraiture, layered photography, painting, and bold surreal color. This work is about awareness, and as someone who navigates trauma daily, I am not interested in showing it through a single event, specific emotion, or something to be fixed. Trauma doesn't always cause destruction or need immediate healing, it lives through functionality and stages within.This work centers on three individuals and how they coexist with their trauma, and explores their shaped identity and behavior over time. It examines the multiple outcomes trauma produces, showing that dealing with this has no linear path but produces various stages of resilience, vulnerability, and suppression. Through portraiture, layered imagery, and fragmentation, Cycles, Unseen shows that these states do not happen separately; they overlap and create one big psychological narrative. Collage and vibrant color is used to show emotional weight and tension between what appears alive and what feels heavy, asking the viewer to question mood and identity. This work invites viewers to consider how inherited and lived experiences continue to shape who we become.

Mentor: Claudia O'Steen, M.F.A.

(ARTS498 - Claudia O'Steen)

HYDROCARBON WINGS

Mars J. Simpson

HYDROCARBON WINGS is a series of sculptures that address the entanglement of the human psyche and the material world. Its focus is to confront the audience with narratives, imagery, and juxtapositions of ideas that leave the viewer with questions. This sequence serves as an invitation for one to examine their own relationship to the materiality of the world around them. More specifically, the psychological confinement we have placed on ourselves throughout centuries upon centuries, and how in the year of 2026 we have reached an apex point of complete and absolute obsession with the material world. In the work, casts of the human body are meshed with objects that have been sourced from local scrapyards, industrial sites, and city streets. This process of fusing the human body with the discarded and abandoned materials of our industrial wastelands, acts as a visual cue for the viewer to contemplate the similarities between the life cycles of humans and objects. This idea of abandonment of the cosmic, of the metaphysical and divine and unnatural adoption of the material and self-obsessed world we reside in today is the core of this body of work. The casts of the human body are counterfeit experiences of the self, the post-industrial scraps of the world act as counterfeit experiences of reality. Both come together in an ultimate attempt to address the synthetic prison we have allowed ourselves to live inside of for millennia.

Mentors: Jennifer Disney, Ph.D.; Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

Pi Sigma Alpha 2026 Student Research Conference, Washington, DC, February 2026.

Second Place Humanities Category, June 2025, SAEOPP Atlanta McNair SSS Research Conference.

A Forgotten Feminism: Where Does Chicana Feminism Stand Today?

Mercedez Hernandez

History has traditionally been told through the narrow scope of a white, male lens at the expense of seeing the lived experiences of women of color. To prevent the erasure of these experiences, this paper reexamines history through an intersectional perspective, bringing the socially, economically, and politically marginalized to the center of scholarly focus. More specifically, this work traces the changing definitions and understandings of Chicana feminism using a genealogical approach with the aim of understanding the near disappearance of Chicana feminist discourse. We hypothesize that the vanishing visibility of Chicana feminism can be traced to its region-specific focus on the Southwest United States and its inability to distinguish itself from other forms of feminism, such as Latina feminism. Using the groundbreaking work of Fraser and Gordon as a model, we have constructed a genealogy of Chicana feminism from 1960 to the present. We find that Chicana feminism was initially centered around the family and la raza (the race/the people) and upheld patriarchal gender roles. As Chicana Feminism further developed, it began to emphasize mestiza consciousness and the intersectional production of the Chicana subject. Moving into the twenty-first century, some aspects of Chicana feminism have found expression in Latina feminist discourse, while its explicit articulations remain centered on its geographical origins. Our genealogy allows us to better understand how the current theoretical discourses of Chicana feminism are related to existing Chicana and Chicana-related organizations and how that relationship informs the current status of the Chicana feminist movement.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

Divergent Legacies: A Comparative Analysis of How Superpower Occupation Sculpted the Political Landscapes of the Two Koreas

Serena Sin

This paper hypothesizes that the rift between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea can be traced to the actions of the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The research compares the institutional blueprints of North and South Korea, with an emphasis on their evolution from the three global superpowers. The focus will be on qualitative data from peer-reviewed articles and first-hand accounts of life in the Korean peninsula before and after the partition. This research highlights how the influence of the United States, in the case of South Korea, and that of China and the USSR, in the case of North Korea, transitioned into extreme versions of the United States, China's, and the U.S.S.R.'s capitalist and communist ideologies. The result is the birth of two nations that directly reflect the rhetoric of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the Korean peninsula was a flashpoint for the larger conflict between the U.S. and China and the USSR, culminating in the Korean War and its two-state resolution. The division of the peninsula into North and South Korea persists to this day, and it continues to affect daily life in both countries and to have broader international consequences. By clarifying how the division between these two countries reflects the Cold War aspirations of the U.S., China, and the USSR, this research provides a basis for addressing the continuing problems caused by this rift.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

Revolutions in the Global South: A Reinterpretation of Marxist Theory from Class Conflict to Anti-Imperial Nationalism

Grant Tanis

This paper examines whether the communist revolutions in the Global South represent a realignment of Marxist revolutionary theory from class-based emancipation towards anti-imperialist nationalism. The theories posited by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels identified class conflict in an industrial society as the ideal setting for a revolution to occur, yet many communist revolutions succeeded in predominantly agrarian societies entrenched in foreign economic domination. Through a comparative analysis of primarily qualitative data on revolutionary theory and political mobilization in China and Cuba, this paper argues that imperial dependency shifted the priorities of Marxist revolutionaries, making anti-imperial nationalism the central mobilizing force, specifically through a shift of rhetoric and propaganda that stems from a Leninist reinterpretation of Marx's theories which redefine the revolutionary subject as "the people" or "the nation" under foreign domination rather than the proletariat within a society. This shift signifies the evolution of Marxism into a theory of sovereignty as much as it is a theory of class liberation.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

(VCOM486 - Bradley Young, VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

Serenity - Dolls

Naziah E. Foster

Serenity-Dolls is a brand of physical blind box collection that focuses on African American women, our culture, and bringing attention to the lack of rest that impacts African American women. The Serenity doll line will showcase a group of black women figurines that shows the softer and more feminine side of African American Women. The brand will include three figurines plus one rare figurine that shows the different characters: Serenity, Deja, and Nora practicing healthy self-care habits. Each box will include an introduction card of said character and ways the buyer can have healthy habits and boundaries when dealing with stressful situations. The dolls will come with accessories that include some aspects of the culture, such as hair products and clothing, which will have a combination of 3D printed and hand sewn items. The facial structure of the dolls have heavy African features such as a large nose, textured hair, and melanated skin. My inspiration for the Serenity-Dolls blind box series was to highlight the needed representation for other ethnicities, particularly, African American women in the blind box market. I hope to encourage more blind boxes to explore more diverse complexions and cultures. With the past and recent stigma of racism, sexism, and the harmful stereotypes depicting African American women, I will highlight how these stressful and damaging situations affect the mental and physical health of African American Women.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

The Basis of Polarity: How Legislators Use Polarity to Strengthen Their Power

Taylor R. Morgan

Is political polarity a function of legislators' efforts to increase voting access in order to strengthen their partisan advantages? This paper hypothesizes that legislators see greater voter access as an opportunity amplify polarity between parties by appealing to their district's majority, which is itself often a function of gerrymandering aimed at creating safe seats for their party. These efforts, this paper argues, entails legislators defining their positions in contrast to the opposing, minority party in their district or jurisdiction. This paper looks at the number of districts and jurisdictions that have clear majoritarian partisan preferences, how legislators in such districts use polarizing rhetoric and take polarizing actions, and what these reinforcing behaviors mean for the integrity and viability of the democratic process.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

The Emergence of Fascism in the Contemporary United States: A Historical Comparative Analysis

Elizabeth Barnes

In what ways does our understanding of the historical emergence of fascism in the 1930s help us understand current political circumstances in the United States? Can the current circumstances in the United States be understood as a form of fascism? If so, in what ways, or alternatively, why not? This essay hypothesizes that the current actions of the U.S. government should be understood as fascist and that the study of fascism's history is key to understanding current circumstances in the United States. Through an extensive literature review of that history and of the rise of scholarly and journalistic attention to an emergent fascism in the United States, this essay seeks to understand U.S.'s current drift towards fascism, both in terms of how it can be understood as part of a historical continuum and how it differs from previous fascisms. This essay positions itself normatively by arguing that a historical understanding of fascism is key to resisting its pernicious, anti-democratic politics.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

Born Free but Signed to Chains: A Social Contract Analysis of the NFL's Collective Bargaining Agreement

Isaiah N. Henry

This paper uses the social contract theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Rawls as a basis for critiquing the NFL's collective bargaining agreement. Despite having a place at the bargaining table, NFL players are still situated in a hierarchy in which owners have a preponderance of power and in which players continue to be disempowered. Rousseau argues that individuals are "born free" and that legitimate authority arises when the people collectively constitute the sovereign. Rawls argues that justice is fairness and that a just social order would ensure fairness for those at the bottom of the economic ladder. Using these theoretical frameworks, this study looks at NFL contract structures, player demographics, and patterns of financial or reputational discipline. Sovereignty is not produced by players acting as free agents, but rather by general managers and league owners, who create contract limitations that affect players. Young Black athletes disproportionately bear the costs of discipline, contract insecurity, and reputational punishment. This paper shows that the players are not agreeing to or benefiting from the terms of the contracts that are possible under the current collective bargaining agreement.

Mentor: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.(Sponsor)

(PESH381 - Janet Wojcik)

The prevalence and prevention of hamstring injuries among professional soccer players

Caleb Swenson

Musculoskeletal injuries are very common in athletes, particularly among players in soccer, with hamstring strains being both the most common injury sustained by players and having the greatest impact on time lost from competition and length of playing career. The high demand for players in soccer, including repeated sprints, rapid acceleration/deceleration, and explosive direction changes over the course of a long season, exposes the posterior musculature of the thigh to significant mechanical stress, thus predisposing players to a high incidence of both first-time and recurrent injuries. Therefore, identifying patterns of hamstring injury prevalence, identifying effective preventative training strategies, and successfully implementing these strategies may be the keys to ensuring athlete availability and optimizing athletic performance. This project will examine the current prevalence of hamstring injuries in professional soccer players, as well as evaluate the evidence supporting specific interventions that may assist with decreasing the incidence and recurrence of hamstring injuries among professional soccer players. Specific attention will be focused on four primary interventions: eccentrically-based strength training, neuromuscular training, monitoring of training loads, and the use of an organized warm-up protocol. Emphasis will be placed on how/if these injury prevention strategies can be systematically incorporated into a professional soccer training environment to increase player resiliency, improve performance, and decrease the overall impact of hamstring injuries on elite soccer players.

Mentor: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

The Lazy Lass - Luxury Dog Beds

Mary Jane Karas

The Lazy Lass is a design centered project that reimagines the traditional dog bed as a thoughtfully branded and aesthetically driven product. Many dog beds wear out quickly and often do not fit well within the style of a home. This project explores how design and branding can improve a common pet product. The beds are made using upholstery grade fabrics, supportive foam, and removable washable covers to create a durable and comfortable product. Each bed is handmade locally in South Carolina. The final outcomes include a brand identity system, product prototypes, social media content, packaging concepts, and a Shopify website. Photography, video, and promotional materials will support the brand launch. The goal of this project is to create a functional and visually cohesive product that combines comfort, durability, and thoughtful design.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.; Katharine Hubbard, Ph.D.; Kyahdric Moses, B.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young, VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

Poema Perfume Brand

Claudia Sandoval

My thesis will explore classical artistic and historical aesthetics through niche perfumery branding, with a focus on emotion-driven storytelling through scent and presenting fragrance as an art form. This brand was created to appeal to young people with an interest in the arts and humanities who may not resonate with conventional mass-market perfume branding, opting instead for personal fragrance products that align with their personal interests. Throughout the fall semester, I conducted research into historical works of art and literature, spanning from the early Renaissance to the late 19th century, as well as research into niche perfumery and conventions of perfume branding and advertising. Throughout the spring semester, I was able to create a logo and branding assets as well as product designs and prototypes. Overall, this brand is intended to break away from convention and encourage young people to view perfume not strictly as an accessory, but as an art form and sensory experience that anybody can enjoy.

Mentor: Meredith Jones

Impact of Uninvolved Parenting Style on Adolescent's Self-Esteem: A Systematic Review

Ainsley Fraser

While parenting styles are a frequent topic in the Human Development Family Science (HDFS) field, it has become increasingly obvious how little is known about the uninvolved parenting style in comparison to its counterparts. The purpose of this systematic review is to explore the body of literature by focusing solely on the uninvolved parenting style and how it impacts adolescents self esteem. The studies selected were published between 2014 and 2025, sourced from peer-reviewed, academic articles. To narrow down search results, the terms “parenting”, “adolescents”, “self esteem”, “mental health”, “parenting styles”, “grade school students”, “parenting typologies”, “uninvolved style”, “emotional wellbeing”, “adolescent wellness”, and “parental involvement” were used in several combinations to locate the subsequent information. Knowing more about uninvolved parenting is critical not only for a more well-rounded understanding of the parenting styles as a whole, but also to better recognize what causes parents to become uninvolved in the first place, what we can do to prevent it, and how we can support adolescents experiencing uninvolved parenting. Findings of the review confirmed the gap in the literature regarding this parenting style, with only ten articles proving relevant to the search criteria. This highlights the challenges researchers face exploring this particular parenting style. A recommendation from this review is for researchers to consider the nuances of uninvolved parenting and to delve into the reasons a parent may fall into this category.

Mentor: Meredith Jones

(HDFS594 - Tenisha Powell, HDFS594 - Tenisha Powell)

An HDFS Internship Experience at Project Calm LLC

Kinsley A. Reed

This poster presents the experience of a Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) intern at Project Calm LLC in Rock Hill, SC. This organization serves people of all ages including children, adolescents, their caregivers, and adults by caring for their mental health and wellbeing. For example, through 1-on-1 counseling sessions, group sessions, and community outreach. This internship started January 2026, thus far the intern has built rapport with clients, helped with office documentation, observed counseling sessions, debriefed sessions, and continues to learn more about the program. In August 2026, the internship will continue and the intern will have an active role in co-facilitating individual and group sessions and co-collaborating on progress and case notes. The field of HDFS is guided by ten core Family Life Education (FLE) principles. The intern will gain experience in the following FLE content areas: Families and Individuals in Societal Context, Internal Dynamics of Families, Interpersonal Relationships, Parent Education and Guidance, and Professional Ethics and Practice. This internship has introduced the intern to new professional avenues in the field of HDFS.

Mentor: William Schulte, Ph.D.

(MCOM441 - William Schulte)

Assessing Confinement: Living Conditions in South Carolina Correctional Institutions

Madyson J. Brown

Under the Eighth Amendment, correctional institutions are required to provide imprisoned individuals with resources for basic living conditions that meet minimal health and safety standards. South Carolina correctional institutions struggle with deficiencies in staffing, oversight, infrastructure, and mental healthcare that contribute to unsafe and inhumane living conditions. Subjection to these conditions can lead to higher recidivism rates as prisoners reel from long term physical and psychological effects and are less likely to be able to properly re-enter society, and thus ineffectively rehabilitate individuals from committing crime. These outcomes raise questions about the institutional and administrative factors that allow these conditions to persist despite policy reform. This study was conducted through the acquisition of FOIA requested documents surrounding the violent nature within South Carolina correctional institutions from the South Carolina Department of Corrections and the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division. Additionally, open records were used as research for this study. Population counts, internal data and sexual harassment reports, and DHEC food inspection reports were accessed from SCDC’s website as research for this study. Additionally, investigations into incidents of neglect and abuse from South Carolina facilities along with death rates were also used. Data on sexual abuse allegations, violent deaths, and facility conditions suggest that despite reforms and legal mandates, these structural deficiencies persist and undermine the ability of prisons to provide safe and constitutional living conditions. However, exposing these conditions as institutions still continue to operate with little to no change creates a culture of governmental accountability.

Mentor: William Schulte, Ph.D.

(MCOM441 - William Schulte)

The Cost of Consumerism: Fast Fashion and Sustainability

Kennedy Stephens

This study investigates the growing concern of fast-fashion and its effects on the environment, communities and workers. Government agencies are regulating the issue while addressing environmental impacts and concerns. The public doesn’t often understand how sustainable alternative methods like thrifting and recycling are. Furthermore, greenwashing and deceptive sustainability claims amongst fashion brands mislead consumers. This research intends to explore the life-cycle of a piece of clothing from production to landfills. I conducted the study through FOIA requests to the Environmental Protection Agency; to see any environmental violations by the top fast fashion brands and the CBP to see polyester imports from China to the U.S. I interviewed a sustainability coordinator at Winthrop to get a perspective on sustainability, and the social justice impacts of textile waste. I accessed public records from the CBP, GAO, EPA and USCC to access government actions taken toward the issue. I found that microfibers from our clothing still pass through our water in spite of regulation, tariffs disproportionately favor Chinese e-commerce firms, allowing companies, such as SHEIN, to ship packages that avoid inspection, and the life-cycle of a piece of clothing typically ends at a landfill as its last destination, even if sent to a local thrift store when not sold or recycled. This research increases public awareness of fast-fashion and textile waste by highlighting consumer habits (what we buy, who we buy it from, how much we buy and what we do with it) and its impacts on disadvantaged communities and the environment.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Chris Doehling, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

Creation, Worship, and Death

Emma M. Deller

I will be exploring comics rendered in the manner of fine art paired with oil paintings. The art will be fully rendered digitally in styles not unlike John William Waterhouse, NC Wyeth, or Norman Rockwell. The page will contain less than the traditional amount of panels; swapping 3-9 for 1-4 major panels. The oil painting will fill in the space of a comic panel, but will be stand-alone as well. The works will progress through the typical religious aesthetics of creation, worship, and death. This will reflect the original inspiration of thousands of years of sequential art telling god-centric stories. The works will be portrayed with heavy themes of femininity and personal growth to balance out any misinterpretation. The works are not religious propaganda or a critique of God, rather, they are to be a criticism of the church. A large portion of my research has been reading an assortment of books recommended by my advisors, as well as works I felt would best impact my story. The most notable of these, in my opinion, has been *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. In my own thesis I want to present themes in similar gray areas. The comic follows the story of two deities deciding the fate of a group of women killing their abuser. They pose the question of "who may decide if their actions are good or evil?" "What god can understand the nuance of human morals?"

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Michael Lipscomb)

An HDFS Internship Experience at Project Calm LLC

Anna G. Caldwell

Victim Rights refer to the set of protections guaranteed to individuals through public policy in government. Although victim rights are often framed as politically neutral, presidential administrative changes produce ideological and legislative shifts in victim policy. These shifts can advantage some victim groups while marginalizing others, particularly with those situated at intersecting axes of structural disadvantage. Following some changes in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) under the Trump administration, there has been a significant restriction placed upon those who self-petition, which not only affects the protection of women but also the protection of immigrants. The purpose of this paper is to examine the shift in immigration policy over the framing rhetoric used in the Trump administration regarding domestic violence victims' rights. This paper hypothesizes that victim policy reflects broader partisan constructions of the moral worth of victims, particularly when those victims are women and minorities. This research uses a mixed-methods-based model, analyzing data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Office on Violence Against Women, as well as the rhetoric deployed by Donald Trump and other members of his administration to demonstrate how changing social constructions of different victims' worth have had a substantial impact on the victim rights of immigrants, minorities, and women.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

(IDVS490 - Virginia Williams)

The Influence of Resistance Training and Protein Intake on Muscle Protein Synthesis

Chloé Waché

Sport has always been part of my life. I have practiced different physical activities, including weight training which allowed me to better understand how the body works. Lats semester, I experienced a significant weight loss of 22 pounds in three months. Beyond losing body fat, I also lost muscle mass because my diet wasn't adapted to my goal which was to lose fat while maintaining my muscle mass. This is something I regretted once I reached my goal. That is why I decided to make this topic the focus of my paper as I find it both interesting and important to raise awareness about it. My topic focuses on muscle protein synthesis (MPS) and how it's influenced by nutrition and training. It's an important subject because muscle mass is essential for overall health. It improves strength, mobility, metabolism and overall quality of life. It also helps prevent certain conditions such as sarcopenia. To study this topic, I will rely on three disciplines: exercise physiology, nutrition and cellular biology. Exercise physiology helps explain how muscles adapt to training, nutrition analyzes the role of proteins and essential amino acids, and cellular biology explains the internal mechanisms that regulate muscle building. My thesis is that weight training stimulates muscle protein synthesis, but an adequate and sufficient protein intake is essential to maximize hypertrophy and limit muscle loss. In other words, nutrition and exercise work together and must be combined to be fully effective.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young, VCOM487 - Bradley Young, VCOM486 - Bradley Young)

The Palestinian Thobe

Rawan Nimer

I am exploring the cultural and visual significance of the traditional Palestinian thobe. The thobe is a significant expression of Palestinian identity and heritage, and the project focuses on its history, symbolism, and regional embroidery patterns. The work highlights the craftsmanship and narrative ingrained in the garment by creatively interpreting traditional motifs and patterns through research and visual exploration. The ultimate result seeks to present the Palestinian thobe through modern visual design while honoring and preserving its cultural significance.



Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Donna Nelson)

Understanding Drug Court Through a Psychological Lens

Samantha A. Schusterman

Internships allow students to take part in on-site training experiences where they can utilize the skills and techniques that they have adopted in the academic setting. This poster highlights an undergraduate internship at the Sixteenth Circuit Solicitor's Diversions Office in York County, where the intern worked with Adult Drug Court and Probation Adult Drug Court programs that support individuals in recovery from substance use disorders. The intern worked alongside social workers, licensed counselors, solicitors, public defenders, and judges in the endeavor of providing treatment and formulating recovery plans for those in the criminal justice system who struggle with addiction. Responsibilities included utilizing the prosecution program to generate requirements for Pre-Trial Intervention (PTI), Adult Drug Court, and Probation Adult Drug Court clients based on crime(s) committed. Additionally, the intern engaged in different Adult Drug Court group therapy sessions (i.e. confronting antisocial and criminal thinking, Moral Reconation Therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, substance use disorder treatment, etc.). The intern also had the valuable opportunity to participate in Adult Drug Court staffing for court hearings with the diversions' staff, the solicitor, the public defender, and the presiding judge to discover what was best for the participant based on the current stage of their recovery and their sanctions and incentives received. Overall, this internship demonstrates how psychological principles and evidence-based treatment approaches can be integrated within the criminal justice system to support recovery and behavioral change.

Mentor: William Schulte, Ph.D.

(MCOM441 - William Schulte)

Disability Discrimination: Stigmas, Misconceptions, and Existing Laws

Cara Jones

The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990, to protect disabled people from discrimination in public services and accommodations in the workplace. Although the law is 36 years old, disabled employees are still faced with discrimination in the workplace. Many disabled people want to work, but biases and stigma regarding their disability from employers in the workplace prohibit them from doing so. These stigmas and biases placed on them from employers and other employees often affect other aspects of their lives. This investigation was conducted using expert interviews from special education experts and educators. Research from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Government Accountability Office (GAO). I found that subtle discriminatory action is more common than overt discrimination, as employers can cover behavior regarding disabled employees. Biases towards disabled employees are difficult to prove. This work shows that disabled employees have similar performance and higher retention rates than non-disabled employees. There are employers who want to hire disabled employees and create a more diverse workplace. Without both legal responsibility and societal change, equal opportunity for disabled people will continue.

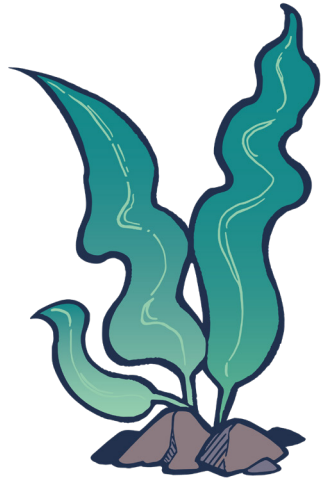
Mentors: John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.; Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

Comic Diversity Using Traditional Media

Nicole Curtis

Comic books have historically not had much diversity, with people of color not having much character depth and not becoming mainstream until the late 20th century. I have created a range of characters of different backgrounds to show that representation of many different perspectives should be the standard, not something done simply for the sake of saying a story has diverse representation. The art will use traditional media, such as paint and ink on canvas and paper, as I believe the rise of digital programs have caused traditional artistic methods to become overlooked in modern times. Through a series of illustrations including comic covers, character sheets, and concept art, I will emphasize the importance of diversity and traditional media usage in my work.



Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Kelly Ozust)

Still Moving

Grayson Skidmore

"Still Moving" is a physical exploration of the non-linear process of healing, and its imprint on the body and mind. Each dancer tells an individual story of hardship and the difficult journey of acceptance and recovery. It highlights individual moments while also sharing motifs to create a through-line of unity. Drawing on somatic practices, the piece emphasizes through a contemporary-modern style how tension and trauma are stored in the body and can be released through movement. Heavily inspired by Tadashi Suzuki - a theatre director, author, and educator- and his methodology, "Still Moving" implements elements of grounding, "animal energy", and intentional movement. His "Slow Ten" exercise, in which the dancers execute a modified version of in the piece, has an individual visualize a goal and move towards it in deliberate discomfort, relating to somatic awareness and emotional processing. This work interprets how Suzuki's techniques, coupled with modern somatic practices, embody the intricate journey of healing. The music for the piece, "Music for The Elements: Sunrise on a Clear Day" by Ezio Bosso, Giacomo Agazzini, and Relija Lukic, and Adrienne Lenker's "mostly chimes", supports the dancers' individual narratives and their meditative connection to the body. Orchestral dynamics highlight the individual expression and collective harmony, while the meditative track encourages grounding and introspection during the modified "Slow Ten" exercise. The work is deeply rooted in the research of modern somatic practices and the teachings of Tadashi Suzuki. Through this physical journey, "Still Moving" encourages and creates a space for reflection, hope, and renewal.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.

(VCOM487 - Bradley Young, VCOM487 - Bradley Young)

Cafe Branding: Forming Connections Through Creative Branding

Lauren Dula

This project showcases branding for a cafe/bookstore called Meet Me in the Garden. The brand has three key characters, Dandy the Daisy, Tutu the Tulip, and Rosa the Rose. These characters make the brand identifiable, with their positive, friendly, and welcoming designs. Meet Me in the Garden is intended for people in the community, drawing them to come together, to help them make connections and enjoy the cafe and bookstore atmosphere. During the research phase of this project, there was emphasis on the key reasons as to why a cafe becomes such an important establishment for the everyday worker or student. Cafes become third spaces for people – a third space being the third most place a person visits. These spaces are usually inviting and feel safe for the individual to go to, and usually a place that they themselves have a choice in frequenting. This was kept in mind during the development of the brand and influenced stylistic choices. As the name suggests, Meet Me in the Garden is a place for people to meet and connect together.

Mentor: Sangwon Sohn, M.S.

After the Storm: Philippines Relief Homes

Josie M. Fletcher, Pablo N. Morales, Zaria Y. Windley, Madalyn E. Humphries

The Philippines faces significant housing and infrastructure challenges due to rapid population growth, frequent natural disasters, and limited access to essential resources such as water and energy. Located along the Pacific Ring of Fire and consisting of over 7,000 islands with an extensive coastline, the country is highly vulnerable to severe weather events, particularly typhoons that occur during the rainy season from June to November. These storms often cause widespread flooding, structural damage, and displacement of communities. This project explores the design of a crisis housing center that addresses the immediate and long-term needs of populations affected by typhoon-related disasters. Research emphasizes the importance of resilient infrastructure that responds to the Philippines' hot, humid tropical climate, clay-dominant soils, and flood-prone coastal conditions. The design incorporates sustainable and locally sourced materials such as bamboo, coconut lumber, rice hull ash cement, and sawali, which provide flexibility, durability, and natural ventilation while remaining economically accessible. Additional systems, including rainwater harvesting, small-scale solar photovoltaic energy, and low-cost sanitation solutions, support self-sufficiency and disaster recovery. By integrating principles of universal design, cultural awareness, and sustainable construction methods, the proposed crisis housing center aims to create adaptable, resilient environments that support families and communities during and after typhoon events. This approach demonstrates how thoughtful interior and environmental design can contribute to long-term resilience and improved quality of life in disaster-prone regions.

Mentor: William Schulte, Ph.D.

The Effect of Social Media on Privacy

Omar Antonio Woods

Social media websites and services are subject to numerous data breaches and questionable data collection practices. Users of social media websites and services who often frequenting these online companies puts them at risk of having their data and privacy infringed upon as a result of invasive data collection practices and without their knowledge. Privacy is an important aspect of the online experience, including when using social media. Many social media users are unaware of how their data is being used or any threats to their privacy. This study was conducted through the acquisition of public and open documents. studies from primary sources, expert interviews, and FOIA requests. News stories of certain events were also used as references. The data collected from this study has revealed that due to the certain structures of specific social media websites, for example, Facebook, can lead to users having less control over how their personal information is shown. The information also revealed that users of social media become less trustworthy of these services when they feel that their privacy is compromised. This loss of trust also leads to social media users abandoning their accounts altogether. With social media steadily on the rise and showing no signs of slowing down, the search for better data collection practices and privacy collection hasten.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

Supported by Other, College of Arts & Sciences Readiness Internship Award

Internship Experience at Carolina Immigrant Alliance: Insight into the Immigration Application Process

Jessica Garcia

Internships provide students with the necessary real-world experience in their desired field, helping them grow as professionals. This poster presents the experience of an individualized studies student focused on International Affairs who is working with the Carolina Immigrant Alliance. The intern works alongside accredited representatives and translators. The intern has gained exposure to the legal world and how the immigration process works. Key Responsibilities included working with clients and staff to complete intake questionnaires, collect and copy immigration documents to submit with applications, complete online applications, and assist with client signing conferences. The intern developed intake interviewing techniques and learned how to read immigration documents and extract information pertinent to each case. Throughout this experience, the intern translated documents and interpreted in client meetings. This experience included application completion, application preparation, and accompanying documentation for submission to USCIS. In addition, the intern has helped with a women's support group partnered with the Carolina Immigrant Alliance, which taught the intern new skills. The intern developed organizational skills, an understanding of workplace dynamics, stronger problem-solving, communication, and leadership skills through working at Carolina Immigrant Alliance. This presentation highlights the intern's achievements, the development of common immigration application forms, challenges faced, and learning outcomes

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

Respectability, Speech, and Credibility on Trial: Racial Inequality in the Criminal Justice System

Kaitlyn Bodison

This thesis investigates whether the criminal justice system's assessment of believability— based on speech, tone, and manner—reinforces racial inequality. Despite courts' claims that they evaluate defendant behavior and testimony objectively, research indicates that some speech patterns—especially those linked to middle-class, white norms—are seen as more reliable and trustworthy. However, people typically perceive culturally unique speech patterns and expressive styles as impolite, hostile, or dishonest. To make the case that the legal system penalizes culturally unique forms of communication while covertly promoting "respectable" speech, this study examines judicial procedures, believability standards, and studies of implicit bias. This paper hypothesizes that this dynamic disproportionately impacts Black defendants, that such acts reflect implicit rather than explicit bias, and that credibility evaluations are cultural judgments influenced by social power rather than objective instruments of justice. This study will examine how judges characterize and assess defendants' speech and attitudes by analyzing sentencing remarks, trial transcripts, and court opinions. To understand how cultural norms affect reliability assessments, it will also consult sociolinguistic and psychological studies on implicit bias and perceptions of credibility. This thesis argues that credibility assessments are cultural judgments that disproportionately harm Black defendants, rather than impartial instruments of justice, by fusing legal analysis with social science research. In the end, the study argues that judicial "respectability" standards are an unofficial means of maintaining inequality in an ostensibly impartial system.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Maddie Foss

Ghost in the Machine: The Afterlife of Obsolete Technology

Sylvia A. Shealy

I have created a mixed-media graphic design exhibition exploring digital nostalgia and the emotional residue left behind in obsolete technology. While modern AI becomes increasingly autonomous, older technologies sit silently in attics, closets, and junkyards, waiting to be turned back on. Through research on digital nostalgia and its ability to evoke emotional responses, this project investigates how familiar digital interfaces can function as design tools to reconnect audiences with technology they once depended on. Using processes including lenticular printing, projection, motion design, typography, and sculptural collage, the exhibition recreates and distorts recognizable interfaces such as Windows XP and DVD screensavers to portray attempts at communication from these obsolete systems.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Stephen Hicks, Ed.D.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

Flutter Fizz: That Good Local Taste

Aubrie Riley

Flutter Fizz is a brand of prebiotic soda that uses natural, locally sourced ingredients. These sourced ingredients come from three farms: Black's Peaches, Bush & Vine and Windy Hill Orchard. These three farms have been a staple when it comes to fresh, local produce in the Rock Hill and York. A soda brand would highlight this history of South Carolina being a state whose focus is mainly agriculture. For marketing purposes, there are also bug mascots to be featured in merchandising material. Bugs are used in this way due to their untapped market in being used as a way to market a product. Additionally, they are used due to their symbiotic relationship with many farms, either it be pollinators, a natural pest control, or soil engineers. Outside of farmers, these mascots create an inviting environment for everyday consumers. Some cross-merchandising will help promote this idea at a bigger scale.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

GB Design: A Maximalist Exploration of Overlooked Creatures

Grace Briatico

Although the current trending aesthetics found in modern design and illustration are muted and minimalist, this does not reflect the multicolored, complex world we live in. This thesis aims to highlight the beauty of Earth’s smallest complexities through the use of maximalist design and illustration. Using digital media tools such as Procreate and Adobe Illustrator, as well as the expert advice and resources of professionals in the design field, I aim to create a line of greeting cards, prints, stickers, and a coloring booklet under my personal brand. These deliverables will serve as bold and personable gifts to bring happiness and awareness to all the creatures of earth.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Stephen Hicks, Ed.D.

Fear, Mystery, & Design: A Gothic Poster Showcase

Anna M. Star

Fear, Mystery, & Design: A Gothic Poster Showcase is a collection of posters and bookmarks that are inspired by five different classic Gothic literature novels. The novels that I am using for inspiration for my work are “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886)” by Robert Louis Stevenson, “Dracula (1897)” by Bram Stoker, “The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890)”, “Frankenstein (1818)”, and “The Phantom of the Opera (1909)”. Within the makings of my thesis project, I have designed five posters and five matching bookmarks that both show the theme(s) of each novel. By doing this, I want to present my thesis to share the importance of Gothic literature and how it has shaped our perception of societal norms and standards. For the designs of the posters and bookmarks, I wanted to include a color palette for each that resonates with each novel to show the intense emotions and the formidable aspects that are shown in each story. When making these, I wanted to keep the gothic feel and look for each as it holds an important aspect within the literature world. Using dark colors and textures helped to create an authentic look and feel that captures each theme for each novel.

Mentor: Sangwon Sohn, M.S.

Housing Crisis Project - South Africa

Melina Lopez-Hernandez, Javon McHoney, Aliana Myers

This research focuses on designing temporary housing for people affected by settlement displacement in Mafikeng, South Africa using easily accessible and sustainable materials. Previous research has shown that rapid population growth, economic inequality, and environmental challenges have contributed to the expansion of informal settlements and housing shortages in many regions of South Africa. As a result, many displaced individuals and families are forced to live in overcrowded or unsafe conditions with limited access to adequate shelter. This research examines how interior design strategies and sustainable construction materials can be used to develop temporary solutions for displaced individuals in Mafikeng, South Africa. This study is guided by the way designers can create affordable, functional, and dignified living environments using materials that are locally available. Existing studies on humanitarian and disaster-relief housing highlight the importance of adaptability, cost efficiency, and community needs in temporary housing design. However, there is still a need for solutions that combine sustainable materials with thoughtful interior spatial planning. This research analyzes case studies of temporary housing projects, evaluates locally accessible materials, and explores design strategies that prioritize safety, comfort, and sustainability. The findings suggest that integrating sustainable materials that focus on the primary health of its occupants can significantly improve living conditions for displaced communities. This research ultimately demonstrates the potential for interior design to contribute meaningful solutions to the global housing challenges and support more resilient and humane living environments.

Mentor: Jeremy Lopuch, Ph.D.

Lessons from Mentoring: The mentoring experiences of teacher candidates in Call Me MiSTER

Jacob Adams, Jimmy Brown, Ibraheem Abdul-Aziz, Julian Simmons, Melvin Mikell

The purpose of this presentation is to offer the experiences of several members of Call Me MiSTER in developing and putting into practice an after-school mentoring program for middle school students. Call Me MiSTER (acronym for Mentors in Schools Toward Effective Role models) is a national university program for teacher candidates who desire additional preparation to make them stronger teachers. Participants will learn about the experiences of creating a mentoring problem from start to finish. Participants will learn lessons from the field related to specific events and reflection during the mentoring process.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.

Baker In Color: Exploring Coastal Life Through Watercolor

Emily L. Baker

Baker In Color is a watercolor print making business I started, aiming to capture the beauty of historical coastal areas around the Southeast Coast. I chose to create a coastal art brand because I have always appreciated the beauty of spreading history through art, while also giving people a sense of calmness through coastal sites around the South Carolina coastline. When we look at coastal art, most of the time it's centered around beaches or oceans, however, the Southeast Coast is filled with history and beautiful cityscapes that have historical meaning. Baker in Color mostly focuses on the breathtaking hidden areas around Charleston, SC, along with all the beautiful sea life that fills the ocean around the area.I explore sharing my designs through different media, combining graphic design with illustration by incorporating typography into my work. Through analyzing all the little details of traditional and trending art in the Charleston area, I have compiled a series of products for Baker in Color that represent the charming historic landmarks that I hope bring a feeling of calm to peoples home.

Mentor: Silvia Wozniak, Ph.D.

Where patient care begins: reflections from a CNA internship

Corrine J. Richardson, X'Zayviyonna A. Reese

Our experience as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) interns has been one of the most meaningful steps in connecting our education to real patient care and strengthening our desire to become physicians. Working closely with patients allowed us to apply what we have learned in our coursework while developing practical skills such as taking vital signs, assisting with daily care, and communicating with healthcare professionals. More importantly, the experience helped us see the human side of medicine. We learned how important compassion, patience, and clear communication are when caring for patients who may be scared, in pain, or vulnerable. Observing physicians and nurses work together to diagnose and treat patients gave us a deeper appreciation for the knowledge, responsibility, and dedication required in medicine. These experiences not only improved our clinical skills but also confirmed that we want to dedicate our careers to helping people through healthcare. Our CNA internship has motivated us even more to continue our education and pursue our goals of becoming physicians who provide both skilled and compassionate care.

Mentor: Carter Wolff, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

Asymmetrical warming impacts lady beetles as a biological control of aphids

Kyle Smith, Carter L. Wolff

Anthropogenic climate change is elevating global temperatures. Historically, researchers simulate climate warming by introducing a static temperature increase to treatment groups. However, this experimental change does not accurately reflect predicted trends of climate warming. Rather, warming is asymmetrical, with some locations showing increases in average daily minimum temperature (night warming), while other locations show increases in average daily maximum temperature (day warming). Thus, the timing of climate warming may introduce different temperature regimens that organisms must respond to. We asked if asymmetrical warming alters top-down control in a prairie ecosystem. We exposed lady beetles to one of three warming treatment groups: day warming, night warming, and a no warming control. For each trial, we placed individual lady beetles in environmental chambers to create warming treatments and monitored them for 24 hours. During this time, we gave lady beetles a known amount of aphids to measure foraging rate and installed action cameras to record lady beetle movement. We found lady beetles consumed more aphids in both warming conditions compared to the control treatment. In addition, the mass of aphids consumed was higher in night warming treatments compared to day warming and control treatments. This indicates night warming conditions may increase lady beetle performance, suggesting that the timing of warming can lead to differing effects on lady beetle fitness and its ability to control lower trophic levels.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(BADM391 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

Income and its Effects on Health

Khaeleb Jones

This study will investigate the importance of income and its effects on overall health using the BRFSS data conducted by the CDC. Within the dataset, the general health of American adults is studied from 2017 to 2022. For the analysis of this project, linear probability models will be used to determine income's overall impact on health. I hypothesize that there will be a highly positive correlation between income and general health that spans across multiple demographics including age, sex, and state of residence.



Mentor: Jason Chung, Ph.D.

(SPMA390 - Chung, Jin Wook)

Connecting Fans Beyond the Game: Social Media's Role in Sport Marketing

Ezequiel M. Iglesia

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed the sports industry by reshaping how teams, leagues, and athletes communicate with audiences and cultivate fan engagement. The current research examines the impact of social media marketing on key areas of sport consumption, including the relationships between the fans and teams, merchandise purchasing behavior, ticket sales, game attendance, and more. By utilizing research and case studies from professional and collegiate organizations, the current research explores how different social media platforms enable teams to build personalized, interactive relationships with fans that strengthen brand loyalty and increase consumer activity. The findings suggest that effective social media strategies such as live content, influencer athlete branding, targeted advertising, and community engagement campaigns have the ability to, not only enhance emotional attachment, but also drive measurable financial outcomes. These outcomes include increased merchandise revenue, higher conversion rates for ticket promotions, and improving attendance through digital engagement initiatives. Overall, the current research highlights social media marketing as a critical component of modern sport business operations and analyzes its role in sustaining fan interest in an increasingly digital sport marketplace

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle, DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

Cost of Perfection

Remiya L. Jackson

Cost of Perfection is a contemporary-jazz fusion piece that consists of five all-Black women dancers that explores the psychological and physical consequences of the relentless pursuit of flawlessness. This piece reflects on the unique pressures many face to appear strong, capable, and exceptional in environments where they are often underrepresented or scrutinized, along with acknowledging how expectations of excellence can become intensified through cultural narratives surrounding resilience, respectability, and achievement. My work examines how the desire to achieve perfection can evolve from motivation into a source of emotional strain by drawing from personal experiences and broader cultural context with comparisons, external expectations, and internalized pressure to succeed. The title refers to the often-overlooked cost associated with perfectionism, exhaustion, self-doubt, and eventually burnout when excellence becomes a rigid expectation rather than a conscious choice. The choreography integrates the fluid vulnerability characteristics of contemporary movement with the precision, sharpness, and dynamic intensity of jazz technique. The fusion of jazz and contemporary allows the movement to embody the tension between control and collapse. Accompanying the dancers is a Black spoken-word artist, who also authored the poem, whose live text serves as a narrative thread throughout the piece. The spoken word component amplifies the emotional landscape of the choreography that gives a voice to the internal dialogue, societal pressures, and collective experiences of striving, self-questioning, and resilience. The movement and spoken word create a layered performance that reflects the personal and cultural dimensions of perfectionism.

Mentor: Michael Lipscomb, Ph.D.

(PLSC490 - Lipscomb, Michael)

"*Star Wars* Isn't Political": Comparing Perceptions of Fascism in Fiction to Perceptions of Emerging, Real-World Fascism

Nicky Guernsey

This study investigates the contrast in public perceptions of fascism in popular fictional narratives compared to perceptions of emerging and present fascism in real-world contexts. It explores how individuals who may recognize authoritarian overreach as evil in fiction, such as the Galactic Empire in *Star Wars*, could simultaneously support real-life political movements exhibiting similar patterns and characteristics, such as Trump's "Make America Great Again" agenda. Most specifically, this research asks how perceptions differ when fascism is presented in fictional narratives as opposed to how it is experienced in response to contemporary political developments within the United States, and what is the basis of that difference? Examining the rise of "America First" rhetoric over time, as well as the influence of conservative media and Christian Nationalism on identity politics, moral disengagement, and moral absolutism, this paper hypothesizes that individuals, especially conservatives, are more apt to recognize fascism in fictional narratives as a "narrative evil" than they are to recognize those same patterns in real-world, non-fictional events. Through a careful reading of selected fiction, in both literature and film, and a historical consideration of how fascism actually arises, this research illuminates the complex interplay between media consumption, historical consciousness, and civic engagement in shaping public responses to rising fascism.

Mentor: Michael Sickels, Ph.D.

(SOCL519 - Sickels, Michael)

Spill the Fizz: How Local Anonymous Social Media Affects Campus Communities

Evi Houston, Gianna Tamburello, Jayden Gaskins, Jada White, Isabelle Jones

This research will examine the social role of the application Fizz, a geo-bound anonymous platform popular among students, and the ways in which it reflects and affects campus culture. Fizz is unique among online communication spaces for its limited user base of college students, therefore providing a rich data source on a well-defined population. This work aims to determine whether anonymity promotes more distance and negativity among students, or encourages a deeper level of self-disclosure and campus community on Fizz. The study will include 15-20 semi-structured interviews with university students about their experiences with and perceptions of Fizz. Students interviewed will broadly represent the student body of Winthrop University and be regular users on the platform. Content analysis of posts on the platform during a one-week period will be used to assess the most common and popular themes on Fizz as well. We expect students to primarily use Fizz as a form of entertainment, but also rely on the platform to make larger judgments about fellow students and the University as an institution. Prior research shows that anonymity, in tandem with online interfaces, disinhibits users to discuss emotionally intimate, hateful, and explicit content more easily. We intend to test our assumptions of the platform and apply this information to the broader online culture implicit in student life.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(ECON495 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

College Majors, Occupations, and the Gender Wage Gap

Clare Carpenter

This paper examines how college majors and occupations contribute to earnings differences between men and women. Using data from the American Community Survey (ACS) spanning from 2021-2023, the study applies a log transformation of earnings to estimate the earnings premium associated with specific majors and occupations for men and women. While empirical results are forthcoming, I hypothesize that men will have higher representation in college majors and careers that are positively associated with log earnings.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(BADM391 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

Probability of Homeownership: Evidence from ACS Data

Luke J. Fesperman

This paper investigates the connection of household income and the probability of homeownership in the U.S. Particularly, this study shows how income can affect the possibility of an individual having a home, while controlling for demographic factors such as age, gender, race, and marital status. The analysis uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS) covering the years 2021–2023. To estimate the relationship, the study utilizes an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression within a linear probability model framework. The primary hypothesis is that higher household income will be positively associated with the likelihood of owning a home. The expectation is that higher income increases an individual's ability to afford down payments, qualify for mortgage credit, and manage the long-term finances that is associated with homeownership.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(ECON495 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

The Effect of Workload on Efficiency Metrics in the National Basketball Association

Karis J. Murphy

This paper shall analyze the effects of player workload on performance outcomes in the National Basketball Association (NBA) from 2010 to 2020. The research shall be accomplished through the use of NBA metric panel data for the top 50 players with the highest usage rates (USG) from seasons from 2010 to 2015, and then the top 50 players with the highest USG from 2015 to 2020. The study utilizes ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression to estimate the effect of workload variables like average minutes played per game (MPG) and USG on efficiency metrics such as effective field goal percentage (EFG) and average three-point percentage per game (3PT). While the empirical results are pending, I hypothesize that higher values of workload variables are associated with lower efficiency metrics, holding player position and team characteristics constant.

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

(WRIT433 - Listhartke, Heather)

Political Science Student Intern for State-Wide Newspaper Reports on Local Stories: Connecting Writing, Civic Engagement, and Career Readiness

Nicky Guernsey

This poster illustrates the work of an undergraduate news intern for the *Post and Courier*, combining the student's academic pursuits of political science and writing to produce meaningful articles. The *Post and Courier* focuses on in-depth, investigative journalism, covering local issues throughout South Carolina. Examples of articles written over the course of the internship describe the celebration of City Manager David Vehaun as the longest-serving in Rock Hill's history, as well as the local chapter of a silent book club, highlighting the impact that these subjects have on the local community and providing avenues for readers to get involved. Stories were thoroughly researched, then multiple subjects were interviewed for each story to provide the full scope of the narrative for the reader. Interviews were manually transcribed to ensure accuracy, and information was fact-checked before stories were written and edited to be fit for publishing. This experience provided the student with a real-world application of classroom skills, emphasizing the practice of writing feature articles based on the student's desire to increase competency in this area. All goals set by the student at the beginning of the semester were achieved, including taking photos for a story, shadowing a reporter on an assignment, assisting with layout for the paper's monthly print edition, and publishing at least three stories. This presentation will discuss the student's learning outcomes, development of post-graduate career readiness, and the importance of local press as a pathway for civic engagement.

Mentors: Stephen Hicks, Ed.D.; Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason)

Chōwa Tea

Rachel Wagner

For my senior thesis project I have designed a tea company, Chōwa Tea. This project is focused on branding and product creation through the lens of cultural exploration. Chōwa is a tea company inspired by international travel and experiencing regional flavors. The aim of Chōwa is to showcase unique flavors from different countries, while making them accessible to tea lovers locally. The first set of Chōwa flavors were influenced by my time living in Japan. The Japan set features three loose-leaf blends and one matcha, showcasing flavors from Okinawa, Kyoto, Hokkaido, and Shikoku Island. These blends combine traditional teas from each area with local fruity, citrus, and floral flavors found in each region.

Mentor: Tony Hobert, Ph.D.

A Comparative Analysis of Interplanetary Law in the Star Trek Universe and its Relation to International Legal Institutions

Valentina M. Tziotzos

It is said that fiction draws inspiration from real-life, and the Star Trek Universe is a stellar example of this occurrence, in particular through the United Federation of Planets and the Federation's Supreme Court, which bear a striking resemblance to the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. Through a comparative analysis of these institutions, it was concluded that the legitimacy of the Federation's Supreme Court is weakened without the addition of the Klingon and Romulan Empires as member entities. Its legitimacy is further lessened by influential members who refuse to comply with interplanetary law. In a similar vein, the legitimacy of the ICJ is compromised due to member states having withdrawn their compulsory jurisdiction in addition to remaining noncompliant with the Court's decisions. To reach this conclusion, an examination of pertinent events within the Star Trek Universe and an investigation into the International Court of Justice and the United States' noncompliance were conducted, with a particular focus on these cases: *Nicaragua v. United States* (1986), *Avena and Other Mexican Nationals* (2003), and *Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States* (2018). Other cases such as *Chisholm v. Georgia* (1793) and *Calder v. Bull* (1798) were analyzed to further explore the power dynamics and issues concerning sovereignty that occur within the United States. The purpose of this research is to deduce the reasoning behind the legitimacy crisis faced by legal institutions and how the issue may be rectified to improve not only national and international legal systems, but interplanetary ones as well.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

Patterns of U.S. Interventions in Latin America

Piper G. Keenan

From the early 19th century to the present, the United States has treated Latin American as a training ground for foreign policy ambitions. Over time, the region became the site of repeated military interventions, training grounds for right-wing dictators, covert operations, and the ideological battle ground in the Cold War that aimed at expanding the U.S. influence. These efforts were justified by both the United States government and public through the constant changes of narratives such as anti-European colonization, anti-communism, anti-drug, and the Wars on Terrors. Despite the different reasons for U.S. involvement in Latin America, the reasons always relate to securing economic dominance and controlling domestic unrest in Latin American countries. The U.S. foreign policy for Latin America evolved in justifications and methods but retained a core logic of its intervention and regime manipulation through use of covert torture sites, the institution of the School of the Americas, and counterinsurgency which later shaped the U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

Softness In The Open

Lyric Clancy

The title of this dance piece is called Softness In The Open. This contemporary ballet piece explores vulnerability, finding support from others, and using that support to build confidence. I have been vulnerable for the past couple of months, from studying abroad last semester to creating this piece as well as submitting this abstract. I have found support from my instructors and peers because they have been or are in the same state of vulnerability. It made me feel less alone. Talking to them about how I am feeling put me in a vulnerable place, but it gave me the confidence to be able to accomplish my goals. In this piece, there is movement that is soft and light, which represents vulnerability. In contrast, there are some grounded movements that represent the support from others. At the end of the dance, there are sharp and quick movements that represent the confidence gained from the support of others. "Vulnerable" explores human emotions and the idea of being emotionally open with others through social and psychological research. It also relates to personal relationships by showing trust, fear, and the struggle to be honest about emotions. Vulnerability can be viewed as both a weakness and a strength.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

Pieces Returning

Natalie Palmo

Pieces Returning is about how dancing can become a toxic environment. The dancers start off as a team until they start to see each others' flaws and judge each other on them. The research I used was social media and personal based to help me develop a toxic environment amongst dancers. The dancers will be wearing brown bodysuits with velcro sewn onto the suit. There is a prop of velcro words the dancers will be sticking to other dancers' bodies. Each word will be different and will represent words that many dancers have heard at least once throughout their career. The first song is Swimming by Flawed Mangoes which represents the dancers being very close to one another then recognizing each other's flaws. The audience will see the dancers talking about one another and spreading mean words on each other. The second song is you don't know what to feel anymore by a vow. The audience will see the dancers looking at the words that have been said about them and going into a depressive episode. The third song is Healer by Khmair Music which shows the dancers ripping the velcroed words off their body and loving themselves again. The ending shows the dancers dancing as a whole again and loving the way they look and the way their peers look. This dance was made to draw attention to what a toxic environment in a dance space can look like and the effect it can have on the dancers.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Kelly Ozust)

Finding Beauty

Kya Spurgeon

There are biological, psychological, and social processes we undergo to become human. Though these are essential, I wanted to know what it would look like when you try to follow the process of another species and world, fungi. To understand fungi is to see life not just as survival and reproduction, but as a vast interconnected web of decay, rebirth, cooperation, and transformation. They are not just a kingdom of nature; they are a lesson in humility, complexity, and the invisible forces that sustain us all. Their understanding of identity is viewed as a special and unrepeatable moment in constant transformation. The title of my piece is Finding Beauty; it is an active and infinite search for identity. The story depicts a dancer falling into a blank space of self-identity and expression. The character has an inner conflict to find themselves again, and they go through the rabbit hole of experience, community, discovery, and acceptance. Through this, it will create another version of the same character using a different dancer to acknowledge the feeling of transformation. I came into college as a blank canvas artist, and through the years, I have found and lost myself like a revolving door, sometimes within the same day, building this messy and sometimes rotten process of finding and losing to create an identity. But I find a profound beauty in constantly experimenting and celebrating the disharmony generated by biological and natural processes charged with my immense power and potential.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Chris Doehling, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.; Amy Bagwell, M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason)

Semblance

Ky Abreu Arroyo

My thesis project is a cold-case mystery game told through a variety of documents and artifacts within one package. This product will be accompanied by a set of posters that set the tone of the story and give hints into the threat within it. Items that will be included are as follows: unsolved case document, medical documents, a voice-recording transcription, character notes, a map and a letter from a character introducing you to it. These items will help the customer put together the story of a detective working on a bizarre case with a supernatural element at the center of it. Throughout my senior year, I have been advised through this process by many of my professors. Bradley Young, who ran the first section of Senior Thesis 1, Jason Tselentis, who ran Senior Thesis 2, Chris Doehling, who advised and guided me through the early stages of my thesis, and Amy Bagwell, who advised my narrative for this product.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Nelson, Donna)

School Psychologist Internship; Exploring the Responsibilities, Challenges, and Impacts of Educational Professionals

Riley A. Brodie

This poster describes my undergraduate internship experience in school psychology and highlights the range of responsibilities school psychologists perform. During the internship, I observed and participated in multiple aspects of the evaluation and intervention process, including classroom observations, psychoeducational assessments, eligibility meetings, and crisis response planning. I also contributed to writing sections of psychoeducational reports and observed how assessment results inform educational decision-making for students.In addition to evaluation procedures, the internship provided exposure to school-based intervention systems such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Observing how school psychologists collaborate with teachers, administrators, and families helped illustrate how psychological principles are applied to support student learning and well-being. Through these experiences, I gained a deeper understanding of the practical roles school psychologists play in identifying student needs, supporting intervention planning, and participating in multidisciplinary teams. The internship also highlighted challenges schools face, including limited resources and gaps in programming available to support students' academic and psychological needs. Overall, this experience provided valuable insight into the daily work of school psychologists and strengthened my interest in pursuing a career in school psychology.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(BADM391 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

The Effects of Healthcare Coverage and Cost Barriers on Medical Care Avoidance

Presice Lee

Social and economic inequalities shape the conditions in which people live and directly affect their health issues. Using a sample of South Carolina residents drawn from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) spanning from 2017 to 2022, this study examines whether lacking health insurance or being unable to afford a doctor makes people less likely to seek medical care, and whether these effects differ depending on where people live. The study employs ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression to estimate how insurance coverage and cost barriers affect whether people skip doctor visits, lack a personal doctor, or avoid routine checkups. I hypothesize that there will be a positive association between lacking insurance and avoiding medical care, meaning that as insurance coverage decreases, healthcare avoidance increases. I expect cost to be an important factor in delaying care, particularly for residents in lower socioeconomic positions. Additionally, rural residents are expected to have higher rates of healthcare underutilization compared to urban residents, as they often face additional barriers such as limited transportation and difficulty taking time off work to access care.

Mentor: Jennifer Schafer, Ph.D.

Using iNaturalist to find potential study sites for Carolina pink (*Silene caroliniana*) research

Olivia C. Watson, Jennifer L. Schafer

Understanding population dynamics of a species requires knowledge of local distributions. The objective of this project is to determine locations of Carolina pink (*Silene caroliniana*) in both South Carolina and North Carolina to identify potential study sites for future ecological research. Carolina pink is a perennial flowering plant native to Eastern North America. It can occur in areas that range from full sun to partial shade and can thrive in dry to moist soil. iNaturalist is a website and app that allows users to post sightings of plant and animal species. For observations of Carolina pink posted on iNaturalist, we recorded the geographic location, date of observation, whether they were flowering, the flower color, and whether the identification was research grade. In total, 113 observations were recorded in 25 counties across the Carolinas. Most observations were recorded in April, when Carolina pink was flowering. Flower colors ranged from bright pink to white. Sites with multiple Carolina pink observations that might be good locations for population demography research include Peachtree Rock Heritage Preserve (located in South Carolina) and the McDowell Nature Preserve (located in North Carolina).

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Kelly Ozust, M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason)

Designing Performance: Posters as Visual Storytelling for Ballet and Theatre

Molly I. Wilson

As an extension of my internship creating promotional materials with the Department of Theatre and Dance at Winthrop University, my Visual Communication Senior Thesis is a collection of posters for ballets and plays that are based on books/written stories. I am exploring how illustrated visual design can communicate the story, movement, and tone of live performance. Along with this, I chose performances that were originally books, novels, and short stories to understand story themes and visual tone. Reading them, although many ballets and theatre performances are changed for stage production, will allow me to pull from visual motifs and be more intentional and creative about the details. I am interested in exploring new ways to draw attention to performance art forms. I grew up doing ballet and it shapes the way I visually interpret performance. I was motivated to bridge my design and illustration skills between my identity as a performer. My chosen productions could include but are not limited to, Brothers Grimm (Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Swan Lake), Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Dracula, Don Quixote, the Nutcracker, Giselle (Heinrich Heine's De l'Allemagne & Victor Hugo's "Fantômes"), A Midsummer Night's Dream, Notre-Dame de Paris, Les Misérables, The Phantom of the Opera, Little Women, Ragtime, The Secret Garden, Animal Farm, Anna Karenina.

Mentor: Daniel Stovall, Ph.D.

Supported by Other, NIH/ NINDS R16NS14172

(BIOL371 - Stovall, Daniel)

The Effects of RYBP Overexpression on Glioblastoma Cell Invasion

Daniel B. Stovall, Norah Kay, Katelynn DiNicola

Glioblastoma is a devastating and aggressive cancer that dwells in the brain and spinal cord. Due to limited treatment options, survival rates are extremely low, and targeted therapies are required for greater efficacy. To that end, we aimed to clarify the cellular function of the RING1- and YY1-binding protein (RYBP) in glioblastoma cells, as RYBP is frequently downregulated in glioblastoma tumors and often plays tumor suppressive roles in other cancers. Our lab previously used lentivirus to generate U-87 and U-251 glioblastoma cell lines with either RYBP overexpression or a matched control. Following puromycin selection and the confirmation of RYBP expression, we used Matrigel-coated transwells to determine if RYBP overexpression decreased cell invasiveness in U-87 and U-251 cells. Based on preliminary data, there appears to be a trending reduction in cell invasion upon RYBP expression in both U-87 and U-251 cells. Additional experiments are needed to statistically confirm these results.

Mentor: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.

(PESH381 - Wojcik, Janet)

Increased Risk of Early-Onset Osteoarthritis in Patients Following Anterior Cruciate Ligament Injury

Monssi A. Avila Gutierrez

Osteoarthritis is known to be one of the leading causes of long-term disability and decreases the quality of life in individuals all over the world. Anterior cruciate ligament injuries are the most common injuries in young athletes and young active individuals. Most people that rupture their ACL undergo ACL reconstruction surgery develop knee osteoarthritis at a rate 3-5 times higher than individuals who do not injure their knee. With this being said, post-traumatic osteoarthritis can be seen as early as 5-10 years after surgery which can often affect people in their early 30s. Reconstructing the knee after surgery does not restore the normal bone health and joint biomechanics leading to an accelerated joint degeneration. Post-traumatic OA often comes from inflammatory responses, altered joint pattern, neuromuscular deficits, and concomitant injuries. Long term effects involve chronic pain in the knee, reduced physical activity and an increase in healthcare burden. Understanding early degenerative changes in the knee can help assess different rehabilitation strategies as a preventive measure.

Mentor: Malayka Klimchak, Ph.D.

Human Resource Internship Experience: Influencing Recruiting Operations & Boosting Team Moral

Matthew C. Wright

Internships provide students with valuable opportunities, which allows them to gain insight into business concepts and develop essential skills to succeed within the workforce. This poster presence the experience of a Human Resource Management/recruiting intern within the amusement park industry at Carowinds. The intern gained exposure to recruiting practices, sales development, training and development, and people-oriented leadership. Key responsibilities include, attending career fairs to recruit top talent, managing employee pipeline, creating job postings, supporting onboarding processes, and communicating with HR management to efficiently fill our positions. The intern also attended leadership meetings, facilitated communication between department managers, and training the HR département. Through this internship, the intern gained skills such as leadership, strategic decision making, management operations, and overall HR and recruiting practices necessary to support a successful business. This presentation will highlight the intern's key HR leadership experiences, challenges they overcame, and habits required to be successful within the amusement park industry.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

Recurrent

Autumn R. Pearson

Recurrent is a contemporary jazz dance that explores contrasting themes of blissful ignorance and pensive confinement in perpetual and cyclic routines, depicted through the lens of aquarium fish. The title refers both to the repetitive nature of life and to ocean currents which guide and sustain marine life with their continuous flow. My piece is inspired by the Greek myth of Sisyphus who, as a punishment for his hubris and cheating death, is forced to push a boulder up a hill for eternity. *Recurrent* explores two philosophical interpretations of this myth about the human struggle to find meaning. It begins with an exploration of Albert Camus' interpretation that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" because joy is found in the process not the result. Then throughout the piece, the dancers will encounter an invisible glass wall, pulling them from their blind bliss and into a reflection that the reality they live in is restricting. Thus, displaying that the struggle to a goal may not always be enough for the full human experience. My piece is intended to be an abstract mirror for current American working-life society that often paints the illusion of freedom while entrapping us within the cyclic. While experiencing *Recurrent*, I want to challenge audience members to consider finding satisfaction in our repetitive toils and to reflect on the desire for a greater purpose.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(BADM391 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

MLB Attendance Research

William R. Norby

In this paper I will attempt to display the relationship between post-season success and fan attendance for MLB games. Specifically, I will focus on highlighting the relationship between an MLB team's post-season success on that very next season's regular-season attendance record. The data that makes up this paper is sourced from Sean Lahman's, Baseball Database spanning 1970 to 2019. This data employs impart with ordinary least squares linear regression to better estimate the impact of success in a previous season as compared to the following season's attendance. My paper notes multiple control variables like win percentage, stadium capacity as it's relative to the city's population, did the team make it to the championship the previous season, and many others. My hypothesis is that previous post-season success will result in a positive β coefficient on regular-season attendance, meaning attendance numbers for the regularseason the following year will increase.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Nelson, Donna)

Psychological Rehabilitation and Risk Assessment Tools in Corrections: A Comprehensive York County Probation, Parole, and Pardon Internship Analysis

Sarah Gonzalez

Psychological theory is often assumed to be primarily applicable in therapeutic contexts for individuals who are socially constructed as deserving of services, underrecognizing its role in correctional rehabilitation and risk assessment. This analysis examines the use of rehabilitation and case management strategies alongside risk assessment tools utilized at the South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole, and Pardon in York County. The intern took part in observational and experimental learning under probation officers and supervisors, which involved adhering to research-backed practices designed to reduce recidivism and reintegrate offenders into the general population, separating themselves from their criminal record. Key responsibilities include collecting offenders from the court and administering LiveScans for intake; uploading sentencing sheets, indictments, and social history forms; preparing violation reports and booking sheets; mailing financial summons orders; and answering calls from offenders, their families, or other law enforcement departments. Additional responsibilities comprise of attending administrative hearings, general court sessions, and domestic violence group counseling sessions. These experiences highlighted the integration of psychological techniques in offender supervision through negative reinforcement, motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques, and risk assessment techniques. Furthermore, the internship underlines the crucial role of psychology frameworks in behavioral change of adult offenders and ensuring public safety. This poster outlines the intern's learning outcomes, challenges encountered, and the importance of integrating psychology into legal and correctional fields.

Mentor: Michael Sickels, Ph.D.

(SOCL519 - Sickels, Michael)

Online Student Evaluation Platforms and Their Effects on Faculty

Peyton K. Lowe, Jhane Robinson, Kayla Colen, Jeffrey Quinters

This study examines how faculty view student evaluations of faculty teaching with a specific focus on Rate My Professor (RMP). The Rate My Professor website is a digital platform where students can anonymously evaluate, and label professors based on their experiences, teaching styles, and level of difficulty in the class. This study examines how the use of RMP by students at a higher institution level contributes to the labeling of professors, and how these labels influence the experiences and behaviors of faculty within the institution. Specifically, this research asks, "How does the use of Rate My Professor by students at Winthrop University contribute to the labeling of professors, and how do these labels influence the experiences and behaviors of both students and faculty within the institution?" This study uses a qualitative research design to explore professors' experiences with the student evaluation platform RMP as well as broader student evaluation systems, including official university course evaluations. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with approximately 15 professors from Winthrop University across different departments and faculty ranks. The interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to perception, bias, and the effects of evaluations on professors' professional experiences. This research is important because evaluation platforms can shape how professors are perceived before students enter the classroom. Although data collection is still underway, the study expects to identify themes related to how professors interpret and respond to these evaluations.

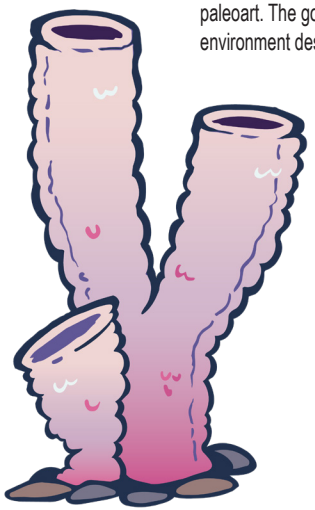
Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.

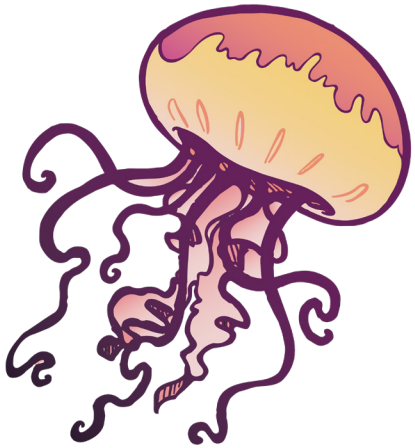
(VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason)

Ephemeral

Courtney Watson

My thesis project, "Ephemeral", is a collection of ten paleoart illustrations which display Mesozoic animals and environments in ephemeral moments. These illustrations show weather, atmosphere, and capture fleeting moments in time which are not often portrayed in mainstream paleoart. The goal of these illustrations is not to be strictly scientific, but to tell a story in their environment design, color, and use of subjects.





Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(ECON495 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

The Relationship Between Student Loan Debt and Early-Career Earnings Across U.S. College Programs

Jaime A. Perez Hernandez

This paper examines the relationship between student loan debt and early-career earnings across academic programs in U.S. postsecondary institutions. Using program-level data from the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard, the analysis includes academic programs across the United States with median earnings measured five years after completion and median cumulative federal student loan debt measured at the program level. The dataset contains over 36,000 program observations and includes variables describing program characteristics and institutional attributes. To estimate this relationship, the study employs an ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression in which median early-career earnings serve as the dependent variable and median student loan debt is the primary explanatory variable. I hypothesize that the coefficient on student loan debt will be positive, indicating that programs associated with higher levels of borrowing also tend to produce higher early-career earnings. The economic intuition is that programs requiring greater educational investment may correspond to fields with higher labor market returns, where students borrow more to finance their education but subsequently earn higher wages after graduation.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(ECON495 - Tsiukes, Alexander, ECON495 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

The Relationship Between U.S. Inflation and Bitcoin Network Activity

Damon A. Tucker

This paper investigates whether U.S. inflation is associated with changes in global Bitcoin network participation over the period 2009–2024. Using daily blockchain data from Coin Metrics aggregated to monthly frequency and Consumer Price Index (CPI) data from the Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED) database, the study examines how inflation relates to Bitcoin usage as measured by active addresses. The empirical approach employs ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression to estimate the relationship between monthly inflation and the log of active Bitcoin addresses, controlling for key macroeconomic and market variables. To reduce skewness the log of active addresses will be used to linearize the exponential growth of crypto usage. While empirical results are forthcoming, I hypothesize that higher inflation will be positively associated with Bitcoin network participation. The economic intuition is that rising inflation erodes the purchasing power of fiat currency, potentially increasing demand for alternative stores of value and encouraging greater participation in the growth of decentralized financial networks.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Nelson, Donna)

Internship Experience at Magnolia Memory Care Center: Enhancing Quality of Life for Dementia Patients and their Caregivers

Maria (Angie) D. Torres Bastidas

Millions of people around the world are affected by dementia and Alzheimer's disease. This creates demand for programs that could provide cognitive engagement for patients as well as support for caregivers. Magnolia Memory Care Center is a non-profit organization whose main mission is to improve the quality of life for patients and their families by providing education, caregiver support, resources, and community programs. The goal of this internship is to gain experience and knowledge by observing dementia care practices and working with individuals who are undergoing cognitive decline, while assisting in mentally stimulating exercises, and participating in social and physical activities to improve their overall well-being. My involvement in this internship has enriched my understanding of dementia and care strategies, my communication and empathy towards individuals suffering from memory loss, and my knowledge of resources for caregiver support. This internship highlights the importance of organizations such as Magnolia Memory Care Center to help address the growing need for meaningful cognitive, physical, and social engagement of individuals with cognitive decline and the support needed to alleviate challenges faced by their caregivers and their families.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

(IDVS490 - Williams, Virginia)

Framing Exploitation: Modernist Style and the Formal Consumption of the Parisian Female Subject

Payton Moore

The mid-nineteenth century in Paris witnessed an aesthetic revolution that fundamentally altered the relationship between the artist, the subject, and the viewer. This era is historically significant because it saw the birth of Modernist painting, a movement that rejected the polished, receding idealism of the Academy in favor of a raw, flattened representation of contemporary life. While often celebrated for its technical innovation, this shift in style was linked to the commodity culture of the city as the Modernist canvas became a specialized marketplace where the female body was the primary product. Understanding these representations is critical because it reveals how formal artistic breakthroughs, such as radical cropping, distorted perspectives, and the blunt application of paint, were not merely stylistic choices, but were the visual mechanisms used to codify the systemic exploitation and consumption of women in nineteenth-century France. My research is guided by the following question: How do Modernism artists depict women as objects of consumption within modern Parisian life, and what do these representations reveal about gendered power, labor, and exploitation in nineteenth-century France? This question seeks to move beyond traditional aesthetic appreciation to uncover the triple trap of exploitation, visual, legal, and spatial, that defined the lives of the women depicted on the Modernist canvas. To address the complexity of this systemic exploitation, this research utilizes a multidisciplinary approach, synthesizing the perspectives of Art History, Gender Studies, and Social History. This paper argues that the innovations of artists like Manet and Degas, specifically their use of flattened space and voyeuristic perspectives, mirrored and reinforced the legal subordination and economic displacement of women. I will demonstrate that the Modernist woman was caught in a structural trap as she was visually consumed by the artist's gaze, legally bound by the state, and economically exploited by the marketplace.

Mentors: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.; Evan Dewey, Ph.D.

Supported by Research Council Grant

Internship Experience with NIH Grant Writing: Supporting Winthrop University Biology Professor with Research Grant Development

Jillian R. Melander

Technical writing internships allow students to translate academic skills in writing, editing, and crafting content within professional, real-world contexts. This poster presents the experiences of a grant fellow intern at Winthrop University, where the student worked with a biology professor one-on-one to revise a competitive NIH grant for resubmission. The intern focused on restructuring information and improving clarity within a complex research plan and strategy, which is centered around homology-directed repair in genome editing with fruit flies. Key responsibilities included writing and editing proposal documents, ensuring compliance with FOA requirements, managing project deadlines, and participating in monthly brainstorming and workshop sessions. Through research, correspondence with faculty, and intensive writing and editing, the intern developed professional communication and deadline management skills; learned to manage long-term initiatives; and honed the skills needed to synthesize specialized research and project goals in concise, accessible language for diverse funders and audiences. This presentation showcases the intern's learning outcomes, challenges encountered, and the broader implications of genome editing in healthcare.

Mentor: Gihanee Senadheera, Ph.D.

Constructing Generalized Kumaraswamy Distributions Using the T–R{Y} Framework

Miguel T. Villano, Steven Stokes

This study investigates applications of the T–R{Y} framework, a method for constructing flexible probability distributions through generational inheritance of three distributions. Within this framework, each successive generation inherits parameters, bounds, and structural properties from its predecessor, resulting in a new generalized distribution with the power of the previous three. Particular attention is given to the Kumaraswamy distribution due to its well-known flexibility and its universal bounds when data is scaled to the unit interval. Parameter estimation is performed using Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE), supported by the optimization method, named L-BFGS-B algorithm. The resulting distributions are evaluated using New York air quality data, with model performance assessed through Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) scores. The findings demonstrate that the T–R{Y} framework consistently produces better model fits compared to several standard distributions.

Mentor: Alexander Tsiukes, Ph.D.

(ECON495 - Tsiukes, Alexander, ECON495 - Tsiukes, Alexander)

The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Drug Use Throughout the Lifecycle

Taylor Sommer

Drug use is widespread in the United States, and there is a question of what variables influence this use. This paper primarily studies the variables socioeconomic status (SES) and age, and their effect on substance use disorder (SUD). Using data from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, I will use income and poverty levels to indicate an individual's SES, a vector of ages to determine stage of life, and I will look at a variety of SUDs. The study will use ordinary least squares (OLS) linear probability model to estimate the change in SUD and will control for a number of demographic factors. The previous literature on this topic returned mixed results on whether or not SES had any effect on SUD and only observed a very limited number of substances – most notably alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana. I predict that there will be a positive relationship between both high and low SES and drug use, and that the specific type of drug that is consumed by each SES level will vary. The level of use is also predicted to change based upon the stage of an individual's life cycle, with younger individuals partaking more than those that are at a later stage of life.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Chris Doehling, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason)

Sub-Surface Concept Art Book

Sophia G. Heckman

My thesis project is a conceptual art book that showcases the development of a hypothetical animated TV series. It follows the story of a sea civilization in which water is not so different from the air we breathe, pulling inspiration from Middle Eastern cultures such as Egyptian, Greek, and Arabic. When researching these inspirations, I wanted to learn more about cultures I was less familiar with to have a more holistic perspective that would better inform my future visual development. Outside of my research, my findings will provide insight and experience toward working in multiple facets of the concept art industry. The narrative hopes to inform and entertain the audience by exploring themes such as societal imbalance, human impact on environmental change, and the preservation of humanity. The book will include the development of various worldbuilding aspects like characters, environment, and props, along with sequential panels to give the world life. The layout of the book's content starts from a generalized planet shot to the smaller details of individual characters and props relevant to the narrative. All of the sections will include visuals that are accompanied by short captions that provide the reader with further contextual information that would not be known due to the story and concept not being produced yet.

Mentor: Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.

(PSYC472 - Sleigh-Ritzer, Merry)

Type and Tone of Self-Talk Predicts Performance Anxiety

Darrah B. Nickens

We examined whether the type and tone of self-talk predicted performance anxiety, perfectionism, and perceptions of helpfulness. We hypothesized that adults who engaged in positive or motivational self-talk would report lower levels of performance anxiety and perfectionism pressure than adults who engaged in negative or technical self-talk. Participants were adults with a mean age of 39.78 (SD = 16.25); participants were primarily white (64%), women (78%), and heterosexual (86%). Participants responded to scales that measured motivational and technical self-talk, performance anxiety, and perfectionism. Contradicting our hypothesis, both types of self-talk (motivational and technical) predicted higher performance anxiety and perfectionism. Supporting our hypothesis, the more positive the self-talk: the lower the performance anxiety and the more adults reported it was beneficial to them. Compared to women, men reported higher levels of motivational and technical self-talk alongside lower performance anxiety. Compared to White adults, Black adults reported higher levels of motivational, technical, and positive self-talk alongside lower levels of perfectionism. Taken together, these findings suggest that White women appear to benefit the least from self-talk.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

Testimonium Spiritus Sancti [Testimony of the Holy Spirit]

Adelaide Sprawls

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" Romans 8:16. To bear witness to something means to serve as living evidence that it exists. In this work, the body becomes that evidence - a vessel that reveals the unseen, inner work of the soul. To have the Holy Spirit dwelling within a believer stands as proof of sanctification and a powerful testament to the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ. At the center of this piece is the exploration of the spirit: the unique, living individual within us. The spirit represents the aspect of humanity that operates in the spiritual realm; a dwelling place where divine presence meets human existence. The Holy Spirit unites with human spirit upon the acceptance of salvation, and something new is formed: a new life, a new body, a new creation. This newly begotten spirit that now lives in a believer becomes the promise of transformation and evidence of what that believer is: fully reborn into God's Kingdom. My piece unveils the care and cultivation of the spirit through God's provision: community, molding, shaping, refining, and guarding of the heart. The union between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit changes the life of a believer and my work will display that change through movement. This contemporary-modern fusion blends together the choreographic and theatrical execution of dance to portray the theological growth of a God-fearing human. This piece showcases my personal testimony as a witness to the Holy Spirit.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

Person versus Self

Sydney Burkhalter

Person versus Self tells the story of a protagonist who fights for control against her anxiety through a contemporary ballet performance. Since hiding parts of yourself is a significant theme in this dance work, it is set in a masquerade ball-inspired atmosphere. The protagonist hides behind a mask as a means of concealing her anxiety, and tries to keep her anxiety concealed behind a mask as well. In the beginning, the two characters waltz with seething disdain for one another. The movement erupts into an all-out brawl, and shifts into a solo performed by the dancer representing anxiety. This dancer removes her mask with a flourish, tired of being suppressed. When the protagonist returns to the stage, the two characters fight intensely with quick, forceful movements and moments of staccato. Shifting into a softer mood, the protagonist performs a solo in which she removes her mask and reflects on all that she has endured with her anxiety. The story ends with the two characters finally being on the same page. My research for this dance centers themes surrounding mental health and psychology. I specifically researched social anxiety disorder because it heavily inspired the choreography and story behind this piece. As someone who personally experiences this disorder, I have learned to understand and make peace with it rather than constantly fight a losing battle against it. My research focused on how social anxiety disorder informs other people's behaviors, and how it informs my own.

Mentor: Christian Grattan, Ph.D.

Supported by INBRE

Total Synthesis of Sphingosine Kinase Inhibitor 1 Derivatives for Cancer Treatments

T. Christian Grattan, Kalli Green

Targeted chemotherapy is a new and developing technique that has the ability to identify a specific molecule and pathway, increasing the efficiency by only affecting abnormal cancerous cells. The sphingomyelin pathway is important in cell regulation, signaling, and determining cellular fate. Inhibition of sphingosine kinase isoform 1 (SK1), within this pathway, leads to a buildup of sphingosine and ceramide, two molecules directly linked to cell apoptosis. It also decreases the intracellular concentration of sphingosine-1-phosphate (S1P), a molecule linked to cellular proliferation. Recently, an inhibitor, sphingosine kinase inhibitor 1, SKI-1) was identified which showed promising inhibitory ability of SK1. Due to the inhibitor's hydrophobic properties, it is incapable of metabolizing in the body. A set of compounds will be designed to assess the binding influence of the naphthalene by substituting pyridine rings into the template compound with the target enzyme in an attempt to obtain a compound with increased efficacy in *vivo*. These inhibitors were synthesized and evaluated using NMR. Microwave heating was used to synthesize modifications of the template inhibitor in an attempt to produce a more efficient candidate capable of at least maintaining the inhibition of SK1 *in vitro*, while also improving the bioavailability of the compound for *in vivo* studies. These novel derivatives will be submitted for assay testing to identify the best modifications throughout the structure separately and then combined to produce a promising drug candidate for the targeted therapy of cancerous cells.

Mentor: Sangwon Sohn, M.S.

(INDS357 - Sohn, Sangwon)

Crisis Housing Project: Housing Strategies for Khlong Toei, Bangkok

Chanel Mungin, Brionna Ramsey, Addison Jenkins

Khlong Toei, the largest informal settlement in Bangkok, Thailand, experiences significant environmental and social challenges due to high population density, informal housing, and limited infrastructure. Developed in the mid-20th century as migrant workers settled near the Bangkok port, the community now consists of densely packed homes often constructed from temporary materials such as wood and corrugated metal, increasing vulnerability to flooding, poor drainage, waste accumulation, and fire hazards. While previous research has examined the social and economic conditions of informal settlements, fewer studies focus on how culturally informed design strategies can improve housing safety and resilience. This study investigates how environmental risks and socioeconomic conditions influence housing vulnerability in Khlong Toei and explores design strategies that could improve living conditions. Using geographical analysis, cultural research, and architectural study, the research evaluates environmental hazards alongside social factors such as multigenerational households and limited sanitation access. The findings suggest that elevated housing structures, the use of locally available materials such as bamboo and teak, and community-oriented housing layouts can increase resilience while respecting Thai cultural traditions. These results demonstrate how interior and environmental design can contribute to adaptable and sustainable housing solutions for vulnerable communities.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

The Space Between Selves

Rachel M. Fuller

This dance work explores the evolving relationship between the present self and the remnants of the former self that continue to linger through memory, embarrassment, maybe even habit. As we as individuals grow and change, the person we once were becomes harder and harder to recognize, yet fragments of that past identity still emerge unexpectedly. Everyone has had a moment when an embarrassing memory of their old self creeps up and feels so overwhelming that we feel like we physically have to shake it out. This piece explores that tension. It is inspired by the common experience of recalling embarrassing or uncomfortable moments from the past memories that surface without warning and provoke a visceral urge to silence them or push them away. Through movement, the choreography embodies the tension between the rejection of these past selves and at the same time the triumph of the new self overcoming who they once were. The dancers physically represent the dialogue between the current identity and its earlier versions, using repetition, interruption, and moments of intrusion to mirror how memories suddenly reappear. Themes of identity, growth, memory, and self-reflection guide the structure of the work, illustrating how personal transformation is rarely linear and often involves confronting versions of ourselves we no longer recognize. As a form of research, this piece investigates psychological and social connections between memory, and personal development. By translating internal experiences into physical expression, the work explores how individuals confront their past selves each in a different way.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

(IDVS490 - Virginia Williams)

How Book Bans Affect K – 12 Students in The United States

Claire A. Meuret

My topic is how book bans in the United States affect student's critical thinking skills and their access to learning about other cultures. My research question currently is, how does banning books affect children's access to outside points of view and critical thinking skills? The thesis of the paper currently is, book bans negatively affect children's access to books, ways of learning, and learning more about different cultures. My research question is: How does banning books affect children's literacy rates and critical thinking skills? I chose the three disciplines: education, legal studies and library studies. Education is directly connected to this because book bans take place in classrooms and public libraries. Legal studies are connected to my topic because of the laws that are currently in place, and older laws dictate how books are banned and why. Library sciences have more opportunity to be vocal about the issues they come across when children aren't able to access content and are directly affected by book challenges.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Chris Doehling, M.F.A.

To a New Woods: a Book for New Members of The Herd

Melly Throckmorton

My thesis project is an illustrated children's book that tackles the ups and downs of a family moving to a new place. The plot follows Daisy, a young deerling, who lives a happy life in the forest with her parents and her best friend, Lulu. However, that happy life begins to crumble when Daisy learns that she has to move away. As Daisy moves far away from the life she used to know, she struggles with her emotions. With the help of her family and new friends, she learns that moving isn't just a bad thing, while acknowledging that it is all right to be sad about missing her old home. The book is thirty-four pages long and entirely illustrated digitally. Alongside the book, a small set of accompanying merchandise will also be created. This will include a set of bookmarks, a sticker sheet, a double-sided keychain and a small plush companion of Daisy. The book will be printed via Shutterfly and the merchandise items will be made both by hand and by an outside manufacturer. The intention of this book is to support the emotions of young children who are also facing the struggles of a move. The plot is written in such a way that will be relatable to a reader's potential feelings while also providing comforting advice. While being a comfort tool for children, the book also serves as a concept for future production and development in various forms, such as an animated special and more.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle, DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

Come Hell and High Waters: Hurricane Katrina

Miracle Parker

My choreographic work titled Come Hell and High Water is a contemporary/ jazz piece that explores the journey before and after Hurricane Katrina. Which took place in New Orleans in August 2005. I'm creating this research piece inspired by the 20th anniversary of the hurricane that passed. The piece begins by portraying everyday life, depicting joy and connection rooted in a sense of unity with the community, before the storm's devastation arrives. The work progresses in the atmosphere shifts as the dancers and body chaos, fear, and devastation caused by the hurricane. The choreography contrasts two emotional states that highlight the disruption that Hurricane Katrina caused in people's lives. Movement in the dancers' interactions portrays loss, confusion, and displacement while also showing the strength that emerges when people come together and support one another. The music transitions from a New Orleans club, bluesy, more upbeat tune to a darker, heavier sound to reflect the emotional and physical impact of the storm. This work connects to historical and social research on Hurricane Katrina, particularly in the New Orleans community, and examines how people relied on unity and resilience during and after the disaster.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

Spanish-language HIV Services Accessibility by Public Transit in Mecklenburg County, NC

Emberlynn McKinney

Mobile HIV services can help fill in gaps in accessibility of clinics, and this is especially the case for populations with barriers to service such as language. Several studies have mapped the prevalence of HIV in specific regions of the United States, comparing them to the accessibility of clinics that provide HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services (HIV services). Here we report on the accessibility of these HIV services to Spanish-speaking communities in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. We focus on accessibility of at-risk and high HIV prevalence communities where car ownership is low. To this end, we analyze the accessibility of the HIV services via the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), the public transportation system for Mecklenburg County. We look at pedestrian accessibility of the road and path network of the county to access CATS stops, and time of travel estimates for taking public transit to clinics offering HIV services that have Spanish speakers on staff. We compare this against HIV prevalence, language and ability to speak English, and means of transportation to work and poverty status by language for the adult population of Mecklenburg County. These results can help target mobile HIV services with Spanish language services to areas of greatest need.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

Ceramic Customs in the Colca Valley

Hugo Cradeur Buchanan

The Late Intermediate Period in the southern highlands of Peru from 1100-1450 CE was a period of social and political fragmentation, with smaller groups engaged in conflict and cooperation. While we know that these social groups are the foundation of the major ethnic groups that were later assimilated into the Inka empire, defining the boundaries of these groups and understanding their interactions from the archaeological record is tricky. It was a time when these communities lived in war and adapted to the limitations. Using ceramics recovered from hilltop fortresses, or *pukaras*, in the Colca Valley, this project seeks to analyze the distribution of key ceramic motifs to identify meaningful social groups and understand their interactions between thirty-three upper and central valley archaeological sites. By examining these ceramics in relation to different sites, we can discern trends and find a way of identifying groups. Data from archaeological surveys and from analyzed ceramics are integrated into a GIS (geographic information system) to model the distribution of ceramics and their relationship to other archaeological evidence. This project utilizes spatial data on the sites, digital elevation models, and ArcGIS Pro software to create a view of the sites, the ceramic distributions, and the environment. Using a set of ceramic attributes, we can examine the importance of certain designs, standards, and construction methods in the valley. Mapping and connecting these sites can fill gaps in research concerning ceramics and have implications for Andean ceramics from this time period and the individuals who inhabited the region.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

Rising Sea Levels and the Impacts on Oil Infrastructure in the Atchafalaya Basin, Louisiana

Olivia C. Watson

The Atchafalaya Basin is the nation's largest river-based swamp located in southern Louisiana. The basin is approximately one million acres of land, and houses notable species such as the bald cypress, American alligator, as well as hundreds of different migratory bird species. Oil and gas production is a major part of the economy of the areas surrounding the Atchafalaya river basin. Although oil and gas production is part of the major economy within the area, the ecosystems within the Atchafalaya river basin and surrounding estuaries are heavily impacted by production. With the proposed increases in sea-level rise, oil and gas production, transportation, storage, and processing within the Atchafalaya Basin has the potential to be impacted. This study uses data on projected sea-level rise to assess impacts to oil and gas infrastructure within the basin.

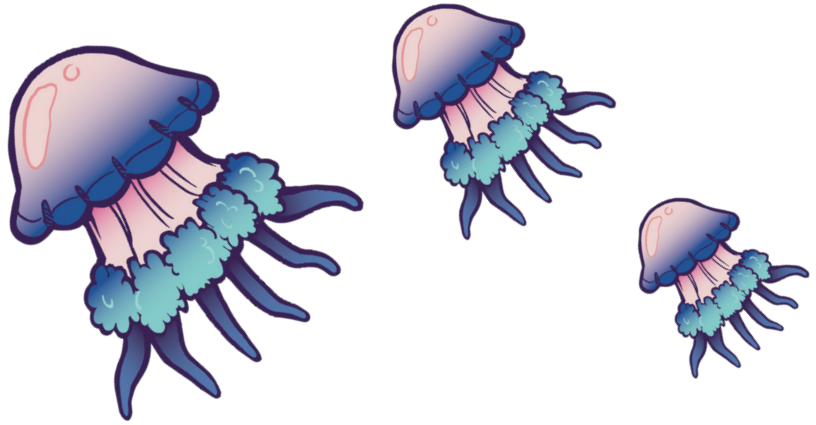
Mentor: Kori Bloomquist, Ph.D.

Supported by McNair Scholars Program

Hope for Higher Education: Exploring Former Foster Youths' College Experiences

Kayla Dorsey

Greater than 70% of foster youth aspire to attend college. However, fewer than 10% enroll in college and only about 2% go on to earn a degree. Research about factors that affect former foster youths' paths to and through college, from their perspective, is limited. This phenomenological study uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore lived experiences of former foster youth who attend or graduated college. Findings may support education and child welfare practices for foster youth and college students with foster care experience.



Mentors: John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.; Chris Doehling, M.F.A.; Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason, VCOM486 - Young, Bradley)

Cicada Season: An Introspective on Intergenerational Trauma

Sofia Gomez

The descendants of Latin-American immigrants face a difficult to navigate, multifaceted experience, unique to each individual and their conditions. The culture bears both connection and the inherited dysfunctions with it. The resulting psychological and emotional damage comes from a variety of intersecting factors, both biological and rooted in background, alongside lived experience. Within family dynamics, the subject often goes unmentioned, in spite of its lingering presence. Within human experience, repetition becomes patterns, which become distorted by familiarity and time. The distinctions between events blur. *Magicicada septendecim,* is a periodical cicada which emerges every 17 years after spending its entire life underground, only to die 4-6 weeks afterward. Trauma can inhibit people from a full life under the guise of perceived safety and control. The urgency to live, rather than just survive, may not come until push comes to shove, which can take a lifetime. With the sudden emergence that happens only once, for a brief, rapturous moment every 17 years, it may call back to a moment, simply through the association of contextualized visuals or sounds. This project is an exploration of the dynamics of intergenerational trauma in immigrant households, grief, and the acceptance of suffering. This project is a visual compendium that intends to draw parallels between different places, times, people, and experiences through the use of the cicada as visual and narrative metaphor for time and the cyclical nature of suffering. I hope to evoke the depth of a feeling and experience that is incommunicable through words alone.

Mentor: Kristen Wonderlich, D.S.W.

(MUST319 - Wonderlich, Kristen)

The Right Way to be Inclusive - How non-gendered language can help teach trans voices respectfully and without dysphoria

Joe Overton

The vocal education world is filled with gendered words. Some examples would be terminology such as falsetto and head voice only being for men and women respectively, or having bass and tenors referred to as “guys” when discussing voice parts or vocal repertoire. There is no guidebook or rules on how to interact with non-binary and gender nonconforming students that does not shove them into a gendered box. This forced attachment to a gender can lead to dysphoria for the student in which they feel intense distress resulting from a conflict between their assigned gender at birth and their identified gender. The purpose of this paper was to delve into previous research on vocal education and vocal anatomy to form a way forward that would be an inclusive and adaptive framework for vocal educators. In the end I found that there was not a collective idea in past research, so I joined a few separate ideas together as well as my own. The result was an instructional method based on the physical characteristics of the larynx, which has no physical distinction between genders beyond size, and a direct understanding of the notes a singer can sing, and which notes they feel comfortable singing, rather than a gendered arbitrary label that assigns them to a set of notes. These new methods will help teach students accurately and with more respect, kindness, and dignity. As a non-binary singer myself, I am extremely proud of the new ideas discussed in this paper.

Mentor: Elizabeth Ondula

Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning for Multi-Classroom Occupancy Control During an Epidemic

Lukas B. Andrews

Managing classroom attendance during an epidemic requires balancing educational continuity against infection risk, a challenge compounded when students move between classrooms and link occupancy decisions across rooms. To address this, we model multi-classroom occupancy control as a multi-agent Markov decision process and apply multi-agent reinforcement learning, where the movement of shared students creates coupling across agents. We investigated centralized control (PPO) and Centralized Training with Decentralized Execution (MAPPO) paradigms against Myopic, Random, and Dynamic Programming (DP) baselines using multiple health-education trade-off weights (omega). The results indicate that both RL models learn optimal policies, substantially outperforming random and myopic baselines at trade-off weights of omega in [0.3, 0.5]. Policy interpretability analysis confirmed that learned policies exhibit a monotonic structure with respect to infection risk, with models decreasing classroom capacity as infections increase. Scalability experiments reveal that centralized control (PPO) trains faster but scales poorly, while MAPPO requires more time but is more scalable across multiple classrooms. Notably, an anomaly at higher trade-off weights (omega = 0.6) showed that the Myopic baseline outperformed both RL models, indicating RL exploration limits compared to the DP upper bound's perfect foresight. These preliminary results suggest that while RL models offer a scalable framework for campus epidemic control, dealing with suboptimal policies at high trade-off weights remains an area for future tuning.

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

Supported by Other, Micro-Cert. Technical Writing

(WRIT431 - Listhartke, Heather)

Grant Fellows Internship – Working with Professor to Develop Proposal for Funding Peru Research

Anne Macklin

Internships allow students to take experience gained in Grant and Proposal writing and other writing classes and apply them in real world situations. This poster presents the work of a Grant Fellows Intern who worked alongside an Environmental Studies professor to develop a proposal for grants that will fund her research project in Peru. The intern worked to generate persuasive sections of the proposal and organize the draft documentation. Through this experience the intern developed their research, drafting, and editing skills. They also gained further experience utilizing faculty feedback to improve their drafts. This poster highlights the intern’s learning outcomes, obstacles faced, and the importance of quality grant proposals.

Mentor: Tony Hobert, Ph.D.

(PLSC501 - Hobert, Anthony)

Laboratories of Anti-Regulation: How State and Local Governments Reject Gun Reform

Evi Houston

The firearm regulatory landscape in the United States has taken on new forms since the Supreme Court's decision to expand Second Amendment protections as individual rights in its 2008 *Heller* decision and to incorporate this right to the states in its 2010 *McDonald* decision. This paper explores how gun regulations are especially contentious at the state level, due to state preemption statutes and "Second Amendment Sanctuaries." Preemption statutes, present in 43 states, prevent municipal governments from enacting any firearm related regulation which does not align with existing state laws. Second Amendment Sanctuaries, a phenomenon which has spread to over 700 counties across the country, claim their locality will not enforce any firearm regulations which they find contrary to the Second Amendment, addressing both state and federal law. I argue that these legal approaches couple together to make the traditional federalist approach, in which policies progress from the local and state level to the national level, nearly impossible. Preemption statutes and Second Amendment Sanctuaries represent larger attitudes among gun rights activists, wherein the right to bear arms holds a sacred connotation atypical of other constitutional rights. This right is viewed as all-encompassing and not open to interpretation by the judiciary or interference from outside legislatures, a perspective the Supreme Court has itself encouraged by limiting tests of constitutionality to historical tradition in its 2022 *Bruen* decision. Understanding state and local approaches to prevent firearm regulations is a critical first step in addressing gun violence in the United States.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr.

(VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason, VCOM486 - Tselentis, Jason, VCOM486 - Young, Bradley, VCOM486 - Tselentis, Jason)

Somnilocus Animated Trailer

Keller Rogers

For my entry to SOURCE I will be creating an animated trailer for a potential shortfilm/web series called Somnilocus. Somnilocus is a story that follows a man who wakes up in an alternate universe every time he falls asleep and chronicles his mission to get back home. It would explore several fantastical worlds and the main character's struggles navigating them. Throughout his journey he is guided by a sort of astral guide who visits him in his dreams between his travels. The trailer I will be submitting will be between one to three minutes long and it will show some of the hi-jinks the main character gets up to. This project is being created as my illustration senior thesis that I have been working on during the classes VCOM486 Senior Thesis I, with instructors Dr. Young and Professor Tselentis and VCOM487 Senior Thesis II, with instructor Professor Tselentis.

Mentor: Sara English, Ph.D.

(GRNT340C - English, Sara)

The Reflection Collection

Reagan J. Arxer

Reflection is a skill that can be utilized in many aspects of daily life, such as when we are making decisions or reviewing our day. When given the opportunity to reflect, individuals may experience levels of vulnerability, which varies from person to person. This reflection may create spaces of vulnerability, but it also creates opportunities for social connection, which enhances wellness for individuals and communities. This research explored how intentional reflection can support connection at different stages of development, exploring the question: Does engagement in reflection differ by age? This research compares observational data gathered at the place of my internship (Chandler Place Independent Living) and the place of my learning, the Department of Social Work at Winthrop University. Observations were made using simple *drive-by* narrative prompt stations, otherwise known as "Reflection Collection," where participants were prompted to pause, read the question, reflect, write, and then - possibly - read the answers of other persons. Responses were analyzed and compared for common themes, demonstrating how simple prompts can connect individuals through a process of simple, reflective prompts. Using this system allows the participants to be vulnerable (even if anonymously) and feel connected to themselves and others who have reflected. Having a tangible outlet for reflection may allow our daily connections to become more apparent. So, as we are looking through the lens of the entire lifespan, reflection doesn't seem to be any less important; so, will engagement differ?

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.; Maddie Foss

(VCOM486 - Young, Bradley, VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason)

EDEN: Designing a Girl Group

Luna Steedley

My thesis concept is to create and design a fictional girl group, called EDEN, and produce a physical album prototype showcasing four original member characters. I will be drawing reference from the South Korean idol industry, as well as Western girl groups and aesthetics from the 2000s, as inspiration for my album and character designs. I want to lean heavily into the nostalgia factor, as this is a popular cultural trend at the moment, and this time period is one that I know well and can connect with personally. The album will be a highly conceptual and meticulously designed product with many inclusions such as posters, photocards, a photobook, stickers, and other unique items like keychains, member information cards, and a custom CD. My end goal is to physically produce the album cover and packaging, as well as all inclusions and merchandise. My thesis will serve as a demonstration of the correlation between illustration and graphic design. I want to use this project to be able to explore an area of design that I find interesting, as well as to investigate the relationship between graphic design and illustration to find where my place could be in the between. I hope to accomplish this by focusing on the incorporation of physical mediums and illustrative aspects in my design work.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

How Industry in Pisgah Effects Timber Rattlesnake Habitat

Elena G. Dunlap

Timber Rattlesnakes (*Horridus crotalus*) are an elusive species native to the Appalachian region in the Eastern United States. Timber Rattlesnakes are sensitive to human movement and behaviors and will often change their habits to avoid them. Past studies have looked at both broad habitats and specific regions throughout their range, but few exist for Western North Carolina. To fill this gap, this study takes what is known about the species movements and compares it to the change in habitat from decade to decade in Pisgah National Forest of western North Carolina. Pisgah has a long history of industrial logging, dating back to the mid-1800s. Now, as a popular tourist location, the region sees constant use from industry and recreation alike. Key species such as the Timber Rattlesnake have been negatively impacted by these rapid changes. This project will utilize human activity and rapid land change to create a model for habitat preference of Timber Rattlesnakes. The results of this analysis will allow conservationists to know where their efforts are best focused to preserve this species.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301 - Spore, Gabrielle)

In My Mind

Mikayla S. Rainey

In My Mind explores one's inner reflection/journey searching and yearning for belonging. Moving through solo, group, and partner work. The dancers will navigate spaces where thoughts and emotions shape and mold relationships based off psychological and sociology research. The movement shows certain self-doubts and the desire to connect. Throughout the piece, the dancers will have encounters with one another that suggest the many ways communities can be built and maintained. Gradually, the dancers will understand that connections are not limited to one path. This work reveals that love may exist in many forms. Whether platonic or romantic, a friendship, or shared experience. That the true belonging we yearn for can come from embracing these diverse expressions of care.



Mentor: Sangwon Sohn, M.S.

(INDS357 - Sohn, Sangwon)

Palestinian War Refugee Temporary Housing

Madeline G. Molidor, Ferilma Gonzalez Santos, Kamea Tucker

The war in Palestine is a devastating event, with Israel invading the country Palestine and forcing the outside of their homes. Led by the Zionist movement, Israel has been forcing Palestinians out of their land and claiming it as their own. This has made the need for temporary crisis housing an extremely important movement. Lots of camps house over hundreds of thousands Palestinian refugees. Our goal for this project is to create a safe environment where these people can feel secure and live a better life. Currently a large majority of refugee camps are made up of thousands of tents, some even being housed within schools. Religion has a large impact within this design, a large majority of Palestinians being Muslim. Keeping this religion in mind, we will design single family spaces out of large shipping containers and use the natural resources and rubble from destruction to build supportive and necessary buildings. Analyzing how to be sustainable, utilize the land's resources, while also providing proper plumbing, electricity, and food sources, we will work to help the problem of overcrowding within the camps. Our specific camp is located in the Gaza Strip, currently deemed a 'Safe Zone' by Israel and is one of the most congested places of refugees. Despite the hot-arid climate, we strive to ensure a comfortable living environment with implementation of different ventilation systems and areas of shade. Built on community, our temporary housing plan will gather these people together and support them throughout this conflict.

Mentor: Janet Wojcik, Ph.D.

The 22nd Century Rural Health Clinic

Camden Davis

Despite increasing efforts, the presence of rural health options still leaves much to be desired. Major health indicators such as life expectancy, obesity, and infant mortality in South Carolina are generally considered poor versus national averages. Especially in South Carolina, rural access to doctors is sparse, with a significant number of counties having few if any options for primary care. Previous efforts at the state level to combat lack of care in these counties have included loan forgiveness for dedicated rural health physicians and financial assistance for the first few years of operation for new practices. The 22nd Century Rural Health Clinic is a conceptual design for the practical and financial side of medicine. It aims to bridge the gap between coverage and affordability, between equity and cost. If South Carolina is to solve its deep healthcare inequities, especially for historically underserved communities, a different vision may present an alternative way forward that emphasizes building a community around a clinic, and on setting a good example for health through unique incentives and clinic design.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

An Analysis of the Spatial Distribution of Environmental Injustice Among Texas Colonias as Compared to Suburban Areas

Will Tavernetti

The residents of colonias, communities that are likely the result of systematic racism, might be increasingly experiencing environmental racism due to global warming. Colonias can be broadly defined as unincorporated communities in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California with poor infrastructure that are primarily populated by Hispanic-identifying individuals. The quality of life within colonias has been compared to that of developing countries, with many lacking safe sewage systems, dependable potable water, electricity, roads, and access to health care services. As global warming increases drought in the Southwestern United States, it is plausible for colonias to face increased water scarcity and wildfire exposure. As a result of systemic racism, residents of colonias may be more likely to avoid the health ramifications of water scarcity and wildfires compared to people living outside of colonias. Therefore, the objective of this research project is to assess whether residents of colonias are more likely to experience poor health due to global warming than people in areas with better infrastructure. This research will be conducted using spatial analysis techniques within ArcGIS Pro on specific communities in El Paso County, Texas.

Mentor: Marzieh Joy Yousefian, M.S.W.

Cultural Bridges in Maternal Care: Empowering Diverse Families at Atrium Health's OBGYN Clinic

Shaniya E. Jeffcoat

Internships offer a transformative bridge between classroom theory and the profound realities of human experience. This poster explores the journey of a social work intern at Atrium Health's OBGYN Clinic in Charlotte, NC, serving a predominantly Hispanic immigrant population. The intern worked directly with pregnant women who were dealing with cultural adjustments and the U.S. healthcare system. Key responsibilities included providing holistic support by connecting families to valuable community resources, facilitating critical referrals, and utilizing active listening to acknowledge every woman's unique story and experiences. Beyond logistical assistance, the intern adopted a strengths-based approach by empowering clients to recognize their own resilience and agency as they strive for a better life for their families. Through this comprehensive experience, the intern developed a greater understanding of cultural humility, the social determinants of maternal health, and the critical role that social workers play in transforming a survival mindset into a thriving reality. This presentation focuses on the intern's clinical development, the structural challenges that immigrant families face, and the effectiveness of empowerment-based practice in fostering a sense of belonging and self-actualization.

Mentors: Brent Woodfill, Ph.D.(Sponsor); Georgee Jeffries (Curvaceous Behavior)

(SOCL340C - Woodfill, Brent)

A Night to Remember: Prom Dress Shopping Re-Imagined

Emilee Cornelius

The Prom Project internship at Curvaceous Behavior provides students with the experience to have hands-on event planning surrounding their annual Prom Project, which focuses on serving underprivileged girls with free prom dresses, and low-cost options for heels, hair, nails, and jewelry. This internship is dependent on creativity, and has allowed for the interns to participate in special events such as a prom dress drive with a local thrift store, multiple segments on local news stations, and networking opportunities with Charlotte pageant winners. Along with the Prom Project, this internship allows interns the opportunity to participate in Self-Care Sundays, which provide the surrounding communities with a place to take care of themselves, whether it be dance classes or sound healing. The main focus of Curvaceous Behavior is to empower young women to feel confident in their body and mind, no matter the situation.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

Sunscreen and Sea Turtles: Environmental and Human Impacts of Oxybenzone in South Carolina

Alisa M. Olive

The common ultraviolet filter oxybenzone found in non-reef safe sunscreens is harmful to oceanic organisms. Oxybenzone has many endocrine disrupting properties, which are amplified by bioaccumulation and biomagnification. The endangered loggerhead sea turtle is South Carolina's state reptile, and the species has long been the focus of local and national conservation efforts. The sea turtles nest along the South Carolina coast, which also sees millions of visitors annually. Nesting areas represent especially vulnerable areas as smaller, younger loggerhead turtles are more susceptible to bioaccumulation of oxybenzone. This study identifies hot-spots for oxybenzone release using data on tourism and examines proximity to nesting sites. Areas of high coastal tourism in South Carolina contribute to the negative health implications of oxybenzone in loggerhead sea turtles. Reducing the use of oxybenzone–containing sunscreens can be done though the banning non-reef safe sunscreens in high tourism areas near loggerhead nesting sites. Banning oxybenzone-containing [non-reef safe] sunscreens could benefit local town economies through the sale of reef-safe alternatives and will have long term ecological benefits while protecting South Carolina's most treasured reptile.

Mentor: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.

(DANT301H - Spore, Gabrielle, DANT301H - Spore, Gabrielle)

Better Days Ahead

Savion Chester

The world has always been a tough place, especially with government power, and we tend to do what supports us as humans, trying to get through life in basic income households. In the twenty-first century, we find ourselves struggling to find the common denominator behind what is dividing our country. Through discrimination and unequal opportunities, I found this part of my life especially important to put on stage. Although it is not affecting me now, it is especially important as a nation to always support those who are fighting to make the United States a better country . We as African Americans have found our way to be underneath the superior. This work implies that better days are ahead and it encourages humans to reflect on the key role they play in the United States.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Adolphus Belk, Ph.D.

(MCOM461 - Stuart, Bonnye)

Internship Experience at 730AM The Game: A Game Within The Game

Marcus A. Gonzalez

During my summer internship from May to August 2025 at 730AM The Game, I gained practical experience in sports broadcasting, digital media production, and professional communication within a fast-paced radio environment. A central part of my role involved writing weekly content for Program Director Mario Washington, which strengthened my ability to craft clear, engaging sports narratives tailored to the station's audience. I supported daily show preparation by researching current sports stories, gathering statistics, and identifying developing trends across local and national athletics. Throughout the internship, I contributed to live programming by assisting hosts during broadcasts, managing timing cues, and helping coordinate guest interviews. I also expanded my digital media skills by drafting social media posts, updating web content, and producing concise written summaries that aligned with the station's voice and engagement goals. In addition, I observed the full workflow of a professional radio station, including audio board operation, segment planning, and audience interaction strategies. This experience deepened my understanding of sports journalism, improved my ability to communicate effectively under time pressure, and strengthened my confidence in both collaborative and independent tasks. Overall, my internship at 730AM The Game provided meaningful insight into the demands of sports media and helped me refine the technical, analytical, and creative skills essential for a future career in broadcasting.

Mentor: Leonard Lewis, Ph.D.

(MUSA432 - Lewis, Leonard)

Pick Your Poison: An Original Musical

Saye Mayernik

My project, *Pick Your Poison,* is an original musical that explores themes of identity and purpose. In a kingdom ruled by an uncaring potentate, a young jester, Ferb, finds himself dreaming of a life beyond his means. His fantasy of freedom, art, and love is given a fighting chance when he is tasked by the king to complete an impossible duty in exchange for riches. The only thing standing in his way is his opponent. Adonis, an older man existing in the space between science and religion, is competing for the same prize. Perhaps it was Adonis all along that can push Ferb to be the man he's always wanted. In creating this piece, I researched other works within the musical theater genre and musical theater composition conventions. The intention of this work is for audiences to take away that society often puts us against the people we have the most to learn from, and that it's never too late for self-discovery.

Mentor: William Schulte, Ph.D.

(MCOM441 - Schulte, William)

Lock Out: Housing Barriers for Post-Incarcerated Individuals in South Carolina

Jaron M. Levi

In South Carolina, formerly incarcerated individuals have faced many obstacles to reentry into society, particularly African Americans. One major roadblock is criminal screenings to secure housing and employment, access to public benefits, etc. Furthermore, this can lead to reentry into the prison system. In addition, systemic racism in America serves as another barrier to those with a criminal history. Research on this topic comes from criminal reports from the South Carolina Department of Corrections and open public reports on homelessness. Additional sources include peer-reviewed journals on homelessness and housing insecurity among former inmates, and the impacts of structural racism on the release of homeless minorities. Recent findings have shown that in South Carolina, out of the White and Latino populations, in 2024, Black people made up the highest number of homeless individuals on one night. Furthermore, Homelessness in Black Americans is four times higher than in Whites and Latinos. In South Carolina, Blacks are 2.4 times more likely to be arrested, 2.0 times more likely to be on probation, and 3.7 times more likely to be in prison. This leads to unemployment, and Rent is 35% higher than their income. Housing insecurities encourage risks of mental health issues, resumption of substance abuse, and former inmates returning to prison. This issue continues to occur; employers and housing owners can reject applications of those trying to restart their lives. Along with these factors, the housing waitlists and increased housing costs make it difficult for released prisoners to transition from imprisonment to society.

Mentor: Silvia Wozniak, Ph.D.

(BIOL461 - Wozniak, Silvia)

Experiential Learning focusing on patient care: Clinical lessons from an Optometry Internship

Ariyanna P. Felder-Grooms

An internship in an optometry office provides students with hands-on exposure to clinical eye care and healthcare operations. While shadowing the optometrist, the intern observes comprehensive eye exams, including visual acuity testing, refraction, slit-lamp examinations, retinal evaluations, and contact lens fittings. The experience offers insight into patient communication, clinical decision-making, and the diagnosis and management of common conditions such as myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism, glaucoma, and dry eye disease. In addition to clinical observation, shadowing the office staff introduces the intern to the administrative and operational side of healthcare. This may include learning about patient scheduling, insurance verification, electronic health records, HIPAA compliance, billing processes, frame and lens selection, and coordination of care. The internship helps students understand how clinical care and office management work together to ensure efficient, ethical, and patient-centered service delivery. Overall, the experience supports professional development, strengthens communication skills, and provides valuable insight into the healthcare environment for students considering careers in optometry, medicine, or other health professions.

Mentor: Darren Ritzer, Ph.D.

(PSYC340C - Ritzer, Darren)

Observing School Psychologists in the Middle and High School Environments

Kasey Long

Experiential learning in school settings allows psychology students to better understand how psychological principles are applied to support student development and learning. This poster describes the experiences of a psychology intern working in the Fort Mill School District at Pleasant Knoll Middle School and Catawba Ridge High School. The internship provided opportunities to observe the role of school psychologists in addressing students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs across different grade levels. Throughout the internship, the student observed aspects of psychoeducational evaluations, classroom environments, and collaborative meetings between educators and support staff. Additional responsibilities included assisting with the preparation and organization of assessment materials and reviewing documentation related to student support and intervention planning. These experiences provided insight into how assessment data and behavioral observations contribute to informed decision -making in schools. Through this experience, the intern developed stronger observation, communication, and organizational skills while gaining a deeper understanding of the collaborative nature of school-based psychological services. This presentation highlights key learning outcomes from the internship and reflects on the role of school psychologists in promoting supportive learning environments that foster student success.

Mentor: Kyle Sweeney, Ph.D.

Illuminating the Unseen in Sacred Stone: Digital Humanities and the Virtual Rediscovery of Medieval Architecture

Will Broome

During the Middle Ages, cloisters were constructed that featured stories from the Bible illustrated with elaborate details. However, scholarship on these architectural works remains limited because they must be studied physically, and close examination is impossible without direct access to the cloister. With virtual reality and digital modeling, fabricating malleable images of these three-dimensional objects from visual culture has become possible, allowing iconography and Latin inscriptions that have yet to be deciphered to be illuminated, factoring in what a static photo cannot. In the sculpture located in Estella of Saint Andrew and the three Marys and the Empty Tomb, the use of digital models revealed key formal elements such as the figures and their placement within the scene. With this new body of evidence, art historians can develop a more nuanced understanding of the visual culture and ideological frameworks of medieval Christianity. Moreover, the use of digital models within virtual reality offers new and accessible methodological possibilities for illuminating and interpreting the humanities. Therefore, digitizing the humanities can generate new approaches to scholarship and open possibilities for further interpretation and analysis of works that are not readily accessible without detailed and close examination in situ.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

Assessing Food Insecurity Among Latinx Communities in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Aiden Lyndon

Food insecurity affects approximately 14 percent of people in the US and has broad, ranging impacts such as lowered academic performance, diminished children's physical and mental development, and increased risks of long-term illnesses. Latinx communities can be disproportionately impacted by food insecurity as they are more likely to face discrimination and language barriers which can further limit access to nutritious food. Latinx populations account for around 16 percent of Mecklenberg County's population and represent 30 percent of the area's overall growth. Food insecurity can cause disconnect between a Latinx person's culture and themselves when cultural or celebratory foods are forced to be replaced with cheaper, less nutritious foods. Using a geospatial methodology developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, I assess food insecurity amongst Latinx communities in Mecklenberg County. The approach uses neighborhood spatial data and mapping tools to measure limited access to food retailers, and then combines this with demographic data on income, car access, and ethnicity. Understanding whether Latinx communities experience food insecurity problems along with their unique set of challenges such as cultural, economic or language barriers could help the US inform decisions such as strengthening safety nets for food or creating tailored programs to high-risk populations.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

Tamarisk Beetle Expansion Patterns in Arizona

Susan R. Kirchhoff

Tamarisk is a flowering shrub native to Eurasia and Africa, that is an invasive species in the Western United States. It narrows streams, increasing erosion, using limited water resources, and outcompeting native riparian plants such as cottonwoods and willows. Tamarisk beetles were introduced as biocontrol for Tamarisk in 2001 by the USDA. The beetles and larvae feed on the leaves of tamarisk; reduces its ability to photosynthesize. Four species were introduced, *Diorhabda carnulata* from China and Kazakhstan, *D. carinata* from Uzebekistan, *D. elongata* from Greece, and *D. sublineata* from Tunisia. Using beetle population collected by RiversEdge West, I document the beetles' expansion in Arizona. I then correlate this data with environmental variables, such as temperature and precipitation, to predict future expansion of beetle populations.

Mentor: Matthew Hayes, Ph.D.

Southeastern Psychological Conference, March 2026

Research Achivement Award, March 2026, Provided by Dr. Nelson

(PSYC302 - Hayes, Matthew)

Attachment, mentalization, escapism: Links to problematic social media use & maladaptive daydreaming

Brianna Lambert & Anita Gridley

Social media use is a central part of daily life, raising concerns about its psychological impact. Problematic social media use (PSMU) is defined as compulsive engagement that disrupts well-being (Spada, 2014) and has been compared to behavioral addictions due to patterns like tolerance, withdrawal, and difficulty regulating emotions (Santoro et al., 2024). Research suggests people may use social media to cope with emotional vulnerabilities tied to attachment. According to attachment theory, early caregiving shapes emotional regulation and relationships. Individuals with anxious-ambivalent attachment may rely more on social media for validation, connection, or distraction, while securely attached individuals are less dependent on it (Mancinelli et al., 2024). Mentalization, or the ability to understand one's own and others' mental states, has been proposed as a factor linking attachment to PSMU and maladaptive daydreaming (MD). Lower mentalization may increase reliance on escapist behaviors like excessive social media use or immersive fantasy (Fioravanti et al., 2021). This study examined how attachment style and mentalization relate to PSMU and MD in 121 college students. Results showed no significant interaction or main effect for mentalization. However, attachment style significantly influenced both PSMU and MD. Anxious-ambivalent individuals reported higher levels of both behaviors compared to other groups. Detached-disorganized individuals showed lower PSMU than avoidant participants. These findings suggest attachment style, rather than mentalization, plays a stronger role in escapism behaviors. Higher PSMU among anxious-ambivalent individuals may reflect a need for reassurance or fear of missing out.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

Digital Interworkings of the Archeology Profession in the Colca Valley, Peru

Maya M. Flynn, Hugo C. Buchanan, Lauren E. Kohut

Archaeology has always been an incredibly physical and time consuming science. However more recently, data digitization and geospatial technologies have brought new levels of efficiency and analysis to the profession. Proyecto ALPACA is an archaeological project in the Colca Valley of Peru focusing on the agropastoral landscape of the Late Intermediate Period (1000 – 1450 CE), a period of climate change and warfare. The project uses a wide range of geospatial technologies through all stages of the research process to precisely document and analyze archaeological data and share those results with the broad public. In this poster, we demonstrate how digital geospatial technology can improve archaeological research. To do so, we provide an overview of how technologies such as drones, RTK precision GPS, GIS mapping, 3D modeling, and digital drafting support field-based data collection, analysis, and distribution. We show how digital recording methods uphold archaeological principles of ethical practice and ensure that findings can be archived and results can be published. These methods allow us, and future archaeologists, to make spatial connections within the environments and the people who inhabited them. More broadly, this work will allow future researchers across a variety of fields such as geology, geography and environmental science to understand and build off of our findings.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

(VCOM487 - Tselentis, Jason)

Sulfur

Christian A. Rogers

My project will be a two minute long animated trailer for a potential science fiction series or movie that touches on themes of corruption and oppression. The story takes place in 2130 where humanity has advanced to the point of inter-planetary colonisation. I intend to focus on a city of people that live deep beneath the icy crust of Jupiter's moon Europa, supported by their futuristic technology called the Guardian Angel Water Purification System or G.A.W.P.S. for short. This technology is exclusively controlled by the government who uses it to create a monopoly on water, leading to class inequality. The story will follow two characters as they investigate the corruption of city officials and fight, risking their lives, for the liberation of the city. This project will be my submission for my senior thesis project as well. I completed VCOM 486 Senior Thesis I with Professor Jason Tselentis and am currently enrolled in VCOM 487 Senior Thesis II also with Jason Tselentis, and I hope to submit my project to source along with my peers.

Mentor: Sangwon Sohn, M.S.

(INDS357 - Sohn, Sangwon)

Crisis Housing for Mt Etna Victims

Lauren Coghlan, Bella Leffler, Sharon Humphrey, Aniyah Darby

This research project focuses on providing emergency housing for the citizens of Catania, Sicily, who have experienced loss due to a volcanic eruption of Mount Etna. The initiative is to provide a secure environment for individuals who have had to evacuate their homes and vacate their businesses. This temporary refuge is a place where residents can feel safe and receive support to regain independence and stability. The proposed design is for a small housing village that will house about sixty families for short to moderate periods of time when they have to leave their homes. This housing village will support gathering areas that let people interact with each other while still letting families keep their independence. Private sleeping quarters will be provided for each family, while the kitchen and bathrooms are communal spaces.The design also directly addresses problems that volcanoes cause in the environment. The village will have cross-ventilation and passive cooling systems in place. These systems will help improve air quality if it is too polluted due to volcanic ash in the air. Materials sourced for this project need to be quickly accessible, cost effective, and durable. Lava stone, terracotta tile, concrete blocks, and more are produced within the region, making them easily and quickly accessible.

Mentors: John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.; Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.

Drawn From the Earth

Ibeth S. Vasquez Miranda

For my thesis, I'm creating a hand-drawn and handwritten medical journal inspired by traditional Ecuadorian healing practices. The goal was to design something that feels like an old guide that could have been passed down through generations, with botanical drawings, handwritten notes, and bilingual text in both English and Spanish. The journal will focus on the relationship between plants, rituals, and healing in Indigenous and traditional medicine. In many Andean traditions, health is connected to balance between the body, spirit, and the natural world. Because of this, healing often involves both herbal remedies and ritual practices guided by a healer, or "yachak". By presenting this information through a handmade journal format, the project explores how illustration and design can be used to share and preserve cultural knowledge. The work is both a creative piece and a reflection on the importance of respecting and remembering traditional healing practices.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

(IDVS490 - Virginia Williams, IDVS390 - Virginia Williams)

The Lessons of Bosnia and the Future of Peacekeeping

Kohl Huggins

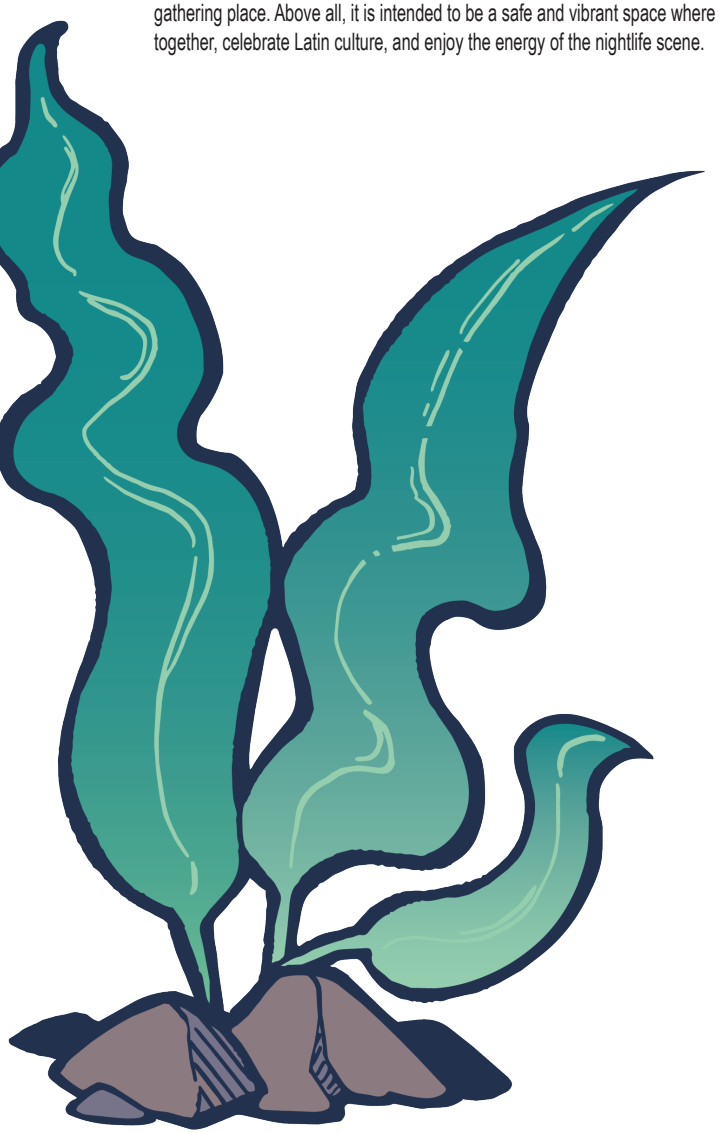
The topic of this paper is the peace effort in the Bosnian Civil War. This paper analyzes the international community's response to the war and the effects of the Dayton agreement. It also researches modern Bosnia's slow recovery effort to heal physically and emotionally. This paper's research question is, "What are the lessons future peacekeepers can learn from the case of Bosnia?" This research is important because of the world we live in. War is an inevitable reality, and as such, the leaders of the world need to be prepared to deal with it. Bosnia is the perfect case study to plan future interventions because of the wide range of points to study, such as the relationships between the different ethnic groups in the region before, during, and after the war, or the complex post-war government structure. Bosnia faced many problems in this process. Some of the problems were handled with great care, and the issues were solved, but others require improvement. The importance of Bosnia is that it has problems that relate to other regional conflicts that we see across the world. If this conflict is studied sufficiently, the United States and the other leaders of the world can more effectively preserve peace across the globe. The three disciplines used in this paper are History, Political Science, and Peace and Conflict Studies. The thesis of this paper is that the Bosnian peace coalition spearheaded by the United States is a perfect model for the future of peacekeeping.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; John Hairston Jr., M.F.A.

El Bar De Vida

Alberto M. Flores

I am creating a community centered bar space designed to bring together people embracing all Latin cultures. The food, drinks, music, and atmosphere will celebrate and highlight the traditions, flavors, and identities of diverse Latin communities, showcasing the richness of their heritage. This space is meant to foster connection and cultural pride while creating an environment where people can share experiences and learn from one another. Located near Charlotte, North Carolina, the goal is to build a strong sense of community by providing a welcoming and inclusive gathering place. Above all, it is intended to be a safe and vibrant space where everyone can come together, celebrate Latin culture, and enjoy the energy of the nightlife scene.



INTERNSHIPS

Inaugural Internship Poster Session

The Center for Career Development and Internships is proud to partner with SOURCE on its inaugural Internship Poster Session, which provides students an opportunity to showcase their internship and practicum experiences to the broader Winthrop community. Entries are welcomed from all colleges, majors, and programs, reflecting the diversity of our students' professional interests, talents, and career goals.

Internships serve as an important bridge between college and career, allowing students to connect classroom learning with professional practice. Through these experiences, students deepen their disciplinary knowledge, strengthen career readiness competencies, and make informed career decisions. The career center recognizes the faculty and employer partners who make these opportunities possible, while celebrating the students whose work impacts our local community and workforce.

A special thanks to this year's Internship Awards sponsor, York County Natural Gas Authority, for supporting this event. Your investment in our students helps light up their career paths and future possibilities.

Michael J. Szeman
Associate Director, Employer Engagement and Internships
Center for Career Development and Internships



Mentor: Kelly Ozust, M.F.A

Internship Experience at Jami Masters School of Dance: Insights into Dance Studio Operations and Administration

Alicia J. Littlejohn

Internships provide essential hands-on experience, connecting academic learning with professional practice. This poster presents the experiences of an intern at Jami Masters School of Dance, a large performing arts studio in Charlotte, NC. The intern gained exposure to multiple facets of studio operations, including costume management, retail inventory, office administration, client interaction, and social media marketing. Key responsibilities included assisting with preschool dance classes, managing costume orders and measurements, updating social media content, and performing daily office tasks. Through this experience, the intern developed skills in organization, time management, communication, and marketing within a performing arts setting. This presentation highlights the intern's learning outcomes, challenges encountered, and the broader understanding of the collaborative efforts required to maintain a successful dance studio.

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

(WRIT433 - Heather Listhartke)

Internship Experience in a Local Newsroom: Strengthening Skills in Writing, Research, and Communication

Julia O. Swygert

Internships provide students with an opportunity to develop their academic writing skills into professional, journalistic writing. This poster presents the experiences of a news intern at a local newspaper, where the intern collaborated with reporters and editors in a newsroom to deliver accurate, meaningful journalism to members of the local community. The intern contributed to story research, took photographs, conducted interviews, and wrote/contributed to multiple articles. Some key responsibilities of the intern included staying up to date on local events, attending community meetings such as city council meetings, conducting interviews with community members and leaders, researching and writing news articles, and editing content. Throughout this internship, the intern strengthened hard skills in journalistic writing, research, and interviewing, as well as soft skills like communication and collaboration with colleagues and community members. The intern learned about the practices and methods of journalism, gaining valuable knowledge to support a career in writing. This presentation highlights the intern's learning outcomes, challenges faced, and the role of local news in informing and engaging the community.

Mentor: Silvia Wozniak, Ph.D.

(BIOL463 - Silvia Wozniak)

Interning at CVS Pharmacy: Diving Deep into Pharmacy Practice and Patient Interaction

Rachel A. Leek

Interning at CVS Pharmacy as a certified pharmacy technician provides practical exposure to the daily operations of a retail pharmacy and to the care team's role in patient care. As a pharmacy technician, daily responsibilities include working with the pharmacist in processing prescriptions, organizing medications, interacting with customers, and managing inventory. With new exposure and daily challenges, this experience helps to strengthen important work and life skills, including communication, time management, teamwork, and problem-solving, as well as reinforces knowledge of pharmacology, patient safety, and pharmacy procedures. Overall, the pharmacy internship offers significant insight into the healthcare system and preparation for future careers in pharmacy and related medical fields.

Mentor: Jennifer Disney, Ph.D.

(PLSC473 - Jennifer Disney)

Internship Experiences Across Federal and State Government: Insights into Legislative Research and Constituent Engagement

Benjamin M. Byrd

Internships in government and public affairs provide students with valuable opportunities to observe how legislative institutions operate and how elected officials engage with constituents. This poster presents the experiences of an intern who worked in several legislative offices at both the federal and state levels, including the offices of Ralph Norman, Lindsey Graham, Tim Scott, and Kambrell Garvin. Through these internships, the student gained exposure to various aspects of the legislative process in both United States Congress and the South Carolina House of Representatives. Key responsibilities included conducting legislative research, drafting constituent correspondence, and assisting staff with policy briefs related to issues such as cybersecurity, foreign affairs, and federal budget discussions. The intern also communicated with constituents through phone and email, addressing inquiries related to federal programs and legislative actions. In addition, the student attended hearings, committee meetings, and public events, gaining insight into how policymakers evaluate legislation and respond to public concerns. These experiences allowed the intern to observe differences between federal and state legislative environments while developing skills in policy research, communication, and constituent services. This presentation highlights the learning outcomes of these internships and reflects on how hands-on legislative experience can deepen students' understanding of the policymaking process and representative government.

Mentors: Gabrielle Tull, M.F.A.; Kelly Ozust, M.F.A.

Cultivating Creativity: A Summer Internship with the STARTS Arts Program

Morgan K. Belton

Immersed in a dynamic environment of music, movement, and visual art, I spent two summers as a student assistant in the STARTS arts program, guiding middle school students in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts. Each day, I led creative activities, assisted with rehearsals, and mentored students as they prepared for a culminating performance. I also facilitated collaboration among students and supported instructors in managing the classroom. Through this experience, I strengthened leadership, communication, and organizational skills while gaining a deeper understanding of arts education and youth development. Working closely with students allowed me to witness the transformative impact of creativity on confidence, teamwork, and self-expression. The STARTS program inspired my growth as a dancer, educator, and mentor, and this abstract highlights my contributions, challenges, and personal and professional development fostered through immersive participation in the arts.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Donna Nelson)

Psychology Internship Experience: Supporting Advocacy and Trauma Support in a College Setting

Brooklyn Armstrong

Internships provide psychology students with opportunities focused on prevention, awareness, and translating theoretical knowledge into practice. This poster presents the experience of a psychology intern working in the Office of Student Advocacy and Trauma Support at Winthrop University, which provides confidential support, resource referrals, and advocacy for students experiencing crises or trauma. The intern contributed to campus resource fairs, outreach events, and awareness campaigns to promote student well-being and services.Key responsibilities included planning campus events and awareness campaigns, creating outreach materials such as flyers and social media content, and contributing to research on best practices in student advocacy and trauma-informed support services. For example, every week the intern assisted with creating a new portion of the training manual for the counselors at Winthrop University. The intern also collected and analyzed event feedback, and assisted in summary reports used to improve programming. Through this experience, the intern developed stronger communication, research and planning skills while gaining a deeper understanding of the advocacy process, trauma-informed practices, and the role of advocacy and counseling services in student success. This internship highlights how psychology training can contribute to prevention-focused campus initiatives and help connect college students with support resources.

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

Grant Writing Internship Experience: Assisting a Social Work Professor in Grant Proposal Development

Megan Rose Hewes

This internship provides English students with a valuable opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the full proposal writing process, as well as real-world applications to communication and working with a team of professionals in the applied field. Key responsibilities include assisting with researching acceptable RFP opportunities, developing project goals, objectives and timelines, budgeting, and time management. The intern observed team meetings, helped with the drafting process, answered grant-related questions, and assisted in the project development process. Through this experience, the intern developed stronger writing skills, grant proposal process knowledge, time management skills, communication skills, and organizational skills while gaining a deeper understanding of the entire grant writing process from start to finish, multidisciplinary collaboration, and the role of social work within the community or international scope. This presentation highlights the interns role, learning outcomes, challenges faced, professionalism, and the importance of the project within the community or international scope.

Mentor: Meredith Jones

(HDFS594 - Tenisha Powell, HDFS594 - Tenisha Powell)

An HDFS Internship Experience at Project Calm LLC

Kinsley A. Reed

This poster presents the experience of a Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) intern at Project Calm LLC in Rock Hill, SC. This organization serves people of all ages including children, adolescents, their caregivers, and adults by caring for their mental health and wellbeing. For example, through 1-on-1 counseling sessions, group sessions, and community outreach. This internship started January 2026, thus far the intern has built rapport with clients, helped with office documentation, observed counseling sessions, debriefed sessions, and continues to learn more about the program. In August 2026, the internship will continue and the intern will have an active role in co-facilitating individual and group sessions and co-collaborating on progress and case notes.The field of HDFS is guided by ten core Family Life Education (FLE) principles. The intern will gain experience in the following FLE content areas; Families and Individuals in Societal Context, Internal Dynamics of Families, Interpersonal Relationships, Parent Education and Guidance, and Professional Ethics and Practice. This internship has introduced the intern to new professional avenues in the field of HDFS.

The South Carolina IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (SC-INBRE) Program, Columbia, SC, February 2026

Supported by INBRE

(BIOL463 - Silvia Wozniak)

Exploring Synergistic Interactions Between *Acinetobacter baumanii* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*

Claire Gurrieri & Mindy Engevik, Ph.D.

Burn wounds are highly dynamic, nutrient-rich environments that can support complex polymicrobial communities and promote colonization by opportunistic pathogens. Despite growing appreciation for the microbiome in human health, the burn wound microbiome has been relatively understudied for ~50 years, largely due to reliance on culture-based diagnostics that detect only a fraction of microbes in clinical specimens and the clinical emphasis on isolating individual pathogens. As a result, the diversity of burn wound-associated communities and functional interactions between organisms remain poorly defined. We hypothesized that burn wounds harbor distinct microbial signatures and that microbial interactions contribute to inflammatory outcomes. We performed next-generation sequencing on burn wound samples and identified 65 unique bacterial species, with communities ranging from 2-15 organisms per wound site. Notably, *Acinetobacter baumannii* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* were frequently detected. To assess whether these organisms could coexist and exhibit cooperative behaviors, we established mono- and co-cultures and quantified growth across three media conditions using CFU enumeration and imaging. Both species grew robustly in co-culture, indicating stable coexistence without competitive exclusion. Conditioned media generated from mono- and co-cultures did not enhance proliferation of either organism, suggesting that secreted soluble factors were not sufficient to promote growth. Using Biolog Phenotypic Microarrays, we found evidence of niche partitioning, with *P. aeruginosa* preferentially utilizing arginine and lysine while *A. baumannii* consumed distinct amino acid substrates. Co-culture did not increase quorum sensing activity, and biofilm biomass in co-culture was comparable to *P. aeruginosa* mono-culture. Despite limited synergy in growth or biofilm formation, co-cultures exhibited significantly increased antibiotic resistance to kanamycin and tetracycline compared to mono-cultures. Finally, murine keratinocytes exposed to conditioned media from mono- or co-cultures demonstrated increased inflammatory cytokine production. This data shows that *A. baumannii* and *P. aeruginosa* can stably coexist and that community context enhances antibiotic tolerance and inflammatory signaling even without synergistic growth or biofilm phenotypes. This highlights the importance of polymicrobial dynamics in burn wound infections and therapeutic susceptibility.





Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Donna Nelson)

Understanding Drug Court Through a Psychological Lens

Samantha A. Schusterman

Internships allow students to take part in on-site training experiences where they can utilize the skills and techniques that they have adopted in the academic setting. This poster highlights an undergraduate internship at the Sixteenth Circuit Solicitor's Diversions Office in York County, where the intern worked with Adult Drug Court and Probation Adult Drug Court programs that support individuals in recovery from substance use disorders. The intern worked alongside social workers, licensed counselors, solicitors, public defenders, and judges in the endeavor of providing treatment and formulating recovery plans for those in the criminal justice system who struggle with addiction. Responsibilities included utilizing the prosecution program to generate requirements for Pre-Trial Intervention (PTI), Adult Drug Court, and Probation Adult Drug Court clients based on crime(s) committed. Additionally, the intern engaged in different Adult Drug Court group therapy sessions (i.e. confronting antisocial and criminal thinking, Moral Reconation Therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, substance use disorder treatment, etc.). The intern also had the valuable opportunity to participate in Adult Drug Court staffing for court hearings with the diversions' staff, the solicitor, the public defender, and the presiding judge to discover what was best for the participant based on the current stage of their recovery and their sanctions and incentives received. Overall, this internship demonstrates how psychological principles and evidence-based treatment approaches can be integrated within the criminal justice system to support recovery and behavioral change.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Bradley Young, Ph.D.

Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, April 2026

Crafty Crew: A Personal Toy Design Campaign

Malik Johnson

This senior thesis project focuses on the development and design of a personal toy campaign; Crafty Crew that will be accompanied by a comprehensive brand portfolio that reflects my creative vision, design expertise, and individual identity. Although the campaign highlights the marketing aspects of the toy brand, the project is not intended for commercial promotion or investment purposes; rather, its objective is to cultivate original toy concepts that resonates on a deeply aspirational and personal level. This thesis campaign is informed by my personality traits, motivational objectives, challenges and solutions, creative abilities, and the research conducted in relation to the toy characters. Collectively, these elements will contribute to the development of a brand that embodies personal purpose, significance, and potential legacy while also serving as a source of inspiration for others pursuing similar creative aspirations. Each deliverable component will be subjected to a rigorous design process encompassing research, sketches, references, color, logos, and other creative iterations. This systematic approach will ensure that each element progresses toward a finalized and polished campaign outcome. All materials will be consolidated into a comprehensive campaign guide, which will present the author's complete branded portfolio and document the developmental trajectory of the toy designs. I've contacted with my experts; Jason Tselentis and Bradley Young to receive many suggestions during both Senior Thesis I & II. The more I keep getting advice from my experts that would help my thesis on my toy campaign design, the expansion of the deliverables will curate within my senior year.

Mentor: Virginia Williams, Ph.D.

Supported by Other, College of Arts & Sciences Readiness Internship Award

Internship Experience at Carolina Immigrant Alliance: Insight into the Immigration Application Process

Jessica Garcia

Internships provide students with the necessary real-world experience in their desired field, helping them grow as professionals. This poster presents the experience of an individualized studies student focused on International Affairs who is working with the Carolina Immigrant Alliance. The intern works alongside accredited representatives and translators. The intern has gained exposure to the legal world and how the immigration process works. Key Responsibilities included working with clients and staff to complete intake questionnaires, collect and copy immigration documents to submit with applications, complete online applications, and assist with client signing conferences. The intern developed intake interviewing techniques and learned how to read immigration documents and extract information pertinent to each case. Throughout this experience, the intern translated documents and interpreted in client meetings. This experience included application completion, application preparation, and accompanying documentation for submission to USCIS. In addition, the intern has helped with a women's support group partnered with the Carolina Immigrant Alliance, which taught the intern new skills. The intern developed organizational skills, an understanding of workplace dynamics, stronger problem-solving, communication, and leadership skills through working at Carolina Immigrant Alliance. This presentation highlights the intern's achievements, the development of common immigration application forms, challenges faced, and learning outcomes

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

(WRIT433 - Listhartke, Heather)

Political Science Student Intern for State-Wide Newspaper Reports on Local Stories: Connecting Writing, Civic Engagement, and Career Readiness

Nicky Guernsey

This poster illustrates the work of an undergraduate news intern for the *Post and Courier*, combining the student's academic pursuits of political science and writing to produce meaningful articles. The *Post and Courier* focuses on in-depth, investigative journalism, covering local issues throughout South Carolina. Examples of articles written over the course of the internship describe the celebration of City Manager David Vehaun as the longest-serving in Rock Hill's history, as well as the local chapter of a silent book club, highlighting the impact that these subjects have on the local community and providing avenues for readers to get involved. Stories were thoroughly researched, then multiple subjects were interviewed for each story to provide the full scope of the narrative for the reader. Interviews were manually transcribed to ensure accuracy, and information was fact-checked before stories were written and edited to be fit for publishing. This experience provided the student with a real-world application of classroom skills, emphasizing the practice of writing feature articles based on the student's desire to increase competency in this area. All goals set by the student at the beginning of the semester were achieved, including taking photos for a story, shadowing a reporter on an assignment, assisting with layout for the paper's monthly print edition, and publishing at least three stories. This presentation will discuss the student's learning outcomes, development of post-graduate career readiness, and the importance of local press as a pathway for civic engagement.

Mentor: Silvia Wozniak, Ph.D.

Where patient care begins: reflections from a CNA internship

Corrine J. Richardson, X'Zayviyonna A. Reese

Our experience as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) interns has been one of the most meaningful steps in connecting our education to real patient care and strengthening our desire to become physicians. Working closely with patients allowed us to apply what we have learned in our coursework while developing practical skills such as taking vital signs, assisting with daily care, and communicating with healthcare professionals. More importantly, the experience helped us see the human side of medicine. We learned how important compassion, patience, and clear communication are when caring for patients who may be scared, in pain, or vulnerable. Observing physicians and nurses work together to diagnose and treat patients gave us a deeper appreciation for the knowledge, responsibility, and dedication required in medicine. These experiences not only improved our clinical skills but also confirmed that we want to dedicate our careers to helping people through healthcare. Our CNA internship has motivated us even more to continue our education and pursue our goals of becoming physicians who provide both skilled and compassionate care.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Nelson, Donna)

School Psychologist Internship; Exploring the Responsibilities, Challenges, and Impacts of Educational Professionals

Riley A. Brodie

This poster describes my undergraduate internship experience in school psychology and highlights the range of responsibilities school psychologists perform. During the internship, I observed and participated in multiple aspects of the evaluation and intervention process, including classroom observations, psychoeducational assessments, eligibility meetings, and crisis response planning. I also contributed to writing sections of psychoeducational reports and observed how assessment results inform educational decision-making for students. In addition to evaluation procedures, the internship provided exposure to school-based intervention systems such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Observing how school psychologists collaborate with teachers, administrators, and families helped illustrate how psychological principles are applied to support student learning and well-being. Through these experiences, I gained a deeper understanding of the practical roles school psychologists play in identifying student needs, supporting intervention planning, and participating in multidisciplinary teams. The internship also highlighted challenges schools face, including limited resources and gaps in programming available to support students' academic and psychological needs. Overall, this experience provided valuable insight into the daily work of school psychologists and strengthened my interest in pursuing a career in school psychology.

Mentor: Malayka Klimchak, Ph.D.

Human Resource Internship Experience: Influencing Recruiting Operations & Boosting Team Moral

Matthew C. Wright

Internships provide students with valuable opportunities, which allows them to gain insight into business concepts and develop essential skills to succeed within the workforce. This poster presence the experience of a Human Resource Management/recruiting intern within the amusement park industry at Carowinds. The intern gained exposure to recruiting practices, sales development, training and development, and people-oriented leadership. Key responsibilities include, attending career fairs to recruit top talent, managing employee pipeline, creating job postings, supporting onboarding processes, and communicating with HR management to efficiently fill our positions. The intern also attended leadership meetings, facilitated communication between department managers, and training the HR département. Through this internship, the intern gained skills such as leadership, strategic decision making, management operations, and overall HR and recruiting practices necessary to support a successful business. This presentation will highlight the intern's key HR leadership experiences, challenges they overcame, and habits required to be successful within the amusement park industry.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Nelson, Donna)

Internship Experience at Magnolia Memory Care Center: Enhancing Quality of Life for Dementia Patients and their Caregivers

Maria (Angie) D. Torres Bastidas

Millions of people around the world are affected by dementia and Alzheimer's disease. This creates demand for programs that could provide cognitive engagement for patients as well as support for caregivers. Magnolia Memory Care Center is a non-profit organization whose main mission is to improve the quality of life for patients and their families by providing education, caregiver support, resources, and community programs. The goal of this internship is to gain experience and knowledge by observing dementia care practices and working with individuals who are undergoing cognitive decline, while assisting in mentally stimulating exercises, and participating in social and physical activities to improve their overall well-being. My involvement in this internship has enriched my understanding of dementia and care strategies, my communication and empathy towards individuals suffering from memory loss, and my knowledge of resources for caregiver support. This internship highlights the importance of organizations such as Magnolia Memory Care Center to help address the growing need for meaningful cognitive, physical, and social engagement of individuals with cognitive decline and the support needed to alleviate challenges faced by their caregivers and their families.

Mentor: Donna Nelson, Ph.D.

(PSYC463 - Nelson, Donna)

Psychological Rehabilitation and Risk Assessment Tools in Corrections: A Comprehensive York County Probation, Parole, and Pardon Internship Analysis

Sarah Gonzalez

Psychological theory is often assumed to be primarily applicable in therapeutic contexts for individuals who are socially constructed as deserving of services, underrecognizing its role in correctional rehabilitation and risk assessment. This analysis examines the use of rehabilitation and case management strategies alongside risk assessment tools utilized at the South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole, and Pardon in York County. The intern took part in observational and experimental learning under probation officers and supervisors, which involved adhering to research-backed practices designed to reduce recidivism and reintegrate offenders into the general population, separating themselves from their criminal record. Key responsibilities include collecting offenders from the court and administering LiveScans for intake; uploading sentencing sheets, indictments, and social history forms; preparing violation reports and booking sheets; mailing financial summons orders; and answering calls from offenders, their families, or other law enforcement departments. Additional responsibilities comprise of attending administrative hearings, general court sessions, and domestic violence group counseling sessions. These experiences highlighted the integration of psychological techniques in offender supervision through negative reinforcement, motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques, and risk assessment techniques. Furthermore, the internship underlines the crucial role of psychology frameworks in behavioral change of adult offenders and ensuring public safety. This poster outlines the intern's learning outcomes, challenges encountered, and the importance of integrating psychology into legal and correctional fields.

Mentors: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.; Evan Dewey, Ph.D.

Supported by Research Council Grant

Internship Experience with NIH Grant Writing: Supporting Winthrop University Biology Professor with Research Grant Development

Jillian R. Melander

Technical writing internships allow students to translate academic skills in writing, editing, and crafting content within professional, real-world contexts. This poster presents the experiences of a grant fellow intern at Winthrop University, where the student worked with a biology professor one-on-one to revise a competitive NIH grant for resubmission. The intern focused on restructuring information and improving clarity within a complex research plan and strategy, which is centered around homology-directed repair in genome editing with fruit flies. Key responsibilities included writing and editing proposal documents, ensuring compliance with FOA requirements, managing project deadlines, and participating in monthly brainstorming and workshop sessions. Through research, correspondence with faculty, and intensive writing and editing, the intern developed professional communication and deadline management skills; learned to manage long-term initiatives; and honed the skills needed to synthesize specialized research and project goals in concise, accessible language for diverse funders and audiences. This presentation showcases the intern's learning outcomes, challenges encountered, and the broader implications of genome editing in healthcare.

Mentor: Lauren Kohut, Ph.D.

(GEOG330 - Kohut, Lauren)

Ceramic Customs in the Colca Valley

Hugo Cradeur Buchanan

The Late Intermediate Period in the southern highlands of Peru from 1100-1450 CE was a period of social and political fragmentation, with smaller groups engaged in conflict and cooperation. While we know that these social groups are the foundation of the major ethnic groups that were later assimilated into the Inka empire, defining the boundaries of these groups and understanding their interactions from the archaeological record is tricky. It was a time when these communities lived in war and adapted to the limitations. Using ceramics recovered from hilltop fortresses, or *pukaras*, in the Colca Valley, this project seeks to analyze the distribution of key ceramic motifs to identify meaningful social groups and understand their interactions between thirty-three upper and central valley archaeological sites. By examining these ceramics in relation to different sites, we can discern trends and find a way of identifying groups. Data from archaeological surveys and from analyzed ceramics are integrated into a GIS (geographic information system) to model the distribution of ceramics and their relationship to other archaeological evidence. This project utilizes spatial data on the sites, digital elevation models, and ArcGIS Pro software to create a view of the sites, the ceramic distributions, and the environment. Using a set of ceramic attributes, we can examine the importance of certain designs, standards, and construction methods in the valley. Mapping and connecting these sites can fill gaps in research concerning ceramics and have implications for Andean ceramics from this time period and the individuals who inhabited the region.

Mentor: Heather Listhartke, Ph.D.

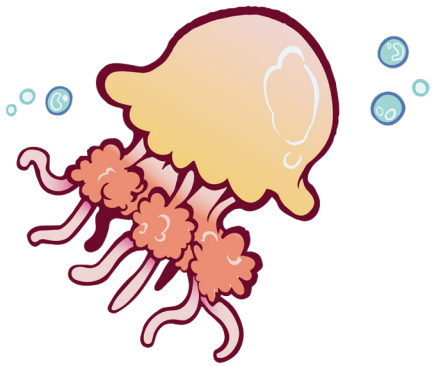
Supported by Other, Micro-Cert. Technical Writing

(WRIT431 - Listhartke, Heather)

Grant Fellows Internship – Working with Professor to Develop Proposal for Funding Peru Research

Anne Macklin

Internships allow students to take experience gained in Grant and Proposal writing and other writing classes and apply them in real world situations. This poster presents the work of a Grant Fellows Intern who worked alongside an Environmental Studies professor to develop a proposal for grants that will fund her research project in Peru. The intern worked to generate persuasive sections of the proposal and organize the draft documentation. Through this experience the intern developed their research, drafting, and editing skills. They also gained further experience utilizing faculty feedback to improve their drafts. This poster highlights the intern's learning outcomes, obstacles faced, and the importance of quality grant proposals.



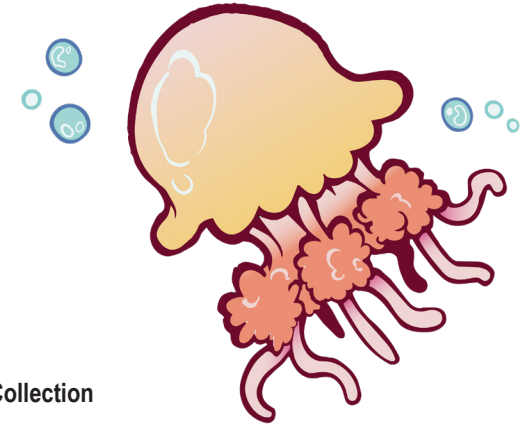
Mentor: Kori Bloomquist, Ph.D.

Supported by McNair Scholars Program

Hope for Higher Education: Exploring Former Foster Youths' College Experiences

Kayla Dorsey

Greater than 70% of foster youth aspire to attend college. However, fewer than 10% enroll in college and only about 2% go on to earn a degree. Research about factors that affect former foster youths' paths to and through college, from their perspective, is limited. This phenomenological study uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore lived experiences of former foster youth who attend or graduated college. Findings may support education and child welfare practices for foster youth and college students with foster care experience.



Mentor: Sara English, Ph.D.

(GRNT340C - English, Sara)

The Reflection Collection

Reagan J. Arxer

Reflection is a skill that can be utilized in many aspects of daily life, such as when we are making decisions or reviewing our day. When given the opportunity to reflect, individuals may experience levels of vulnerability, which varies from person to person. This reflection may create spaces of vulnerability, but it also creates opportunities for social connection, which enhances wellness for individuals and communities. This research explored how intentional reflection can support connection at different stages of development, exploring the question: Does engagement in reflection differ by age? This research compares observational data gathered at the place of my internship (Chandler Place Independent Living) and the place of my learning, the Department of Social Work at Winthrop University. Observations were made using simple *drive-by* narrative prompt stations, otherwise known as "Reflection Collection," where participants were prompted to pause, read the question, reflect, write, and then - possibly - read the answers of other persons. Responses were analyzed and compared for common themes, demonstrating how simple prompts can connect individuals through a process of simple, reflective prompts. Using this system allows the participants to be vulnerable (even if anonymously) and feel connected to themselves and others who have reflected. Having a tangible outlet for reflection may allow our daily connections to become more apparent. So, as we are looking through the lens of the entire lifespan, reflection doesn't seem to be any less important; so, will engagement differ?

Mentor: Marzieh Joy Yousefian, M.S.W.

Cultural Bridges in Maternal Care: Empowering Diverse Families at Atrium Health's OBGYN Clinic

Shaniya E. Jeffcoat

Internships offer a transformative bridge between classroom theory and the profound realities of human experience. This poster explores the journey of a social work intern at Atrium Health's OBGYN Clinic in Charlotte, NC, serving a predominantly Hispanic immigrant population. The intern worked directly with pregnant women who were dealing with cultural adjustments and the U.S. healthcare system. Key responsibilities included providing holistic support by connecting families to valuable community resources, facilitating critical referrals, and utilizing active listening to acknowledge every woman's unique story and experiences. Beyond logistical assistance, the intern adopted a strengths-based approach by empowering clients to recognize their own resilience and agency as they strive for a better life for their families. Through this comprehensive experience, the intern developed a greater understanding of cultural humility, the social determinants of maternal health, and the critical role that social workers play in transforming a survival mindset into a thriving reality. This presentation focuses on the intern's clinical development, the structural challenges that immigrant families face, and the effectiveness of empowerment-based practice in fostering a sense of belonging and self-actualization.

Mentors: Brent Woodfill, Ph.D.(Sponsor); Georgee Jeffries (Curvaceous Behavior)

(SOCL340C - Woodfill, Brent)

A Night to Remember: Prom Dress Shopping ReImagined

Emilee Cornelius

The Prom Project internship at Curvaceous Behavior provides students with the experience to have hands-on event planning surrounding their annual Prom Project, which focuses on serving underprivileged girls with free prom dresses, and low-cost options for heels, hair, nails, and jewelry. This internship is dependent on creativity, and has allowed for the interns to participate in special events such as a prom dress drive with a local thrift store, multiple segments on local news stations, and networking opportunities with Charlotte pageant winners. Along with the Prom Project, this internship allows interns the opportunity to participate in Self-Care Sundays, which provide the surrounding communities with a place to take care of themselves, whether it be dance classes or sound healing. The main focus of Curvaceous Behavior is to empower young women to feel confident in their body and mind, no matter the situation.

Mentors: Jason Tselentis, M.F.A.; Adolphus Belk, Ph.D.

(MCOM461 - Stuart, Bonnye)

Internship Experience at 730AM The Game: A Game Within The Game

Marcus A. Gonzalez

During my summer internship from May to August 2025 at 730AM The Game, I gained practical experience in sports broadcasting, digital media production, and professional communication within a fast-paced radio environment. A central part of my role involved writing weekly content for Program Director Mario Washington, which strengthened my ability to craft clear, engaging sports narratives tailored to the station's audience. I supported daily show preparation by researching current sports stories, gathering statistics, and identifying developing trends across local and national athletics. Throughout the internship, I contributed to live programming by assisting hosts during broadcasts, managing timing cues, and helping coordinate guest interviews. I also expanded my digital media skills by drafting social media posts, updating web content, and producing concise written summaries that aligned with the station's voice and engagement goals. In addition, I observed the full workflow of a professional radio station, including audio board operation, segment planning, and audience interaction strategies. This experience deepened my understanding of sports journalism, improved my ability to communicate effectively under time pressure, and strengthened my confidence in both collaborative and independent tasks. Overall, my internship at 730AM The Game provided meaningful insight into the demands of sports media and helped me refine the technical, analytical, and creative skills essential for a future career in broadcasting.

Mentor: Silvia Wozniak, Ph.D.

(BIOL461 - Wozniak, Silvia)

Experiential Learning focusing on patient care: Clinical lessons from an Optometry Internship

Ariyanna P. Felder-Grooms

An internship in an optometry office provides students with hands-on exposure to clinical eye care and healthcare operations. While shadowing the optometrist, the intern observes comprehensive eye exams, including visual acuity testing, refraction, slit-lamp examinations, retinal evaluations, and contact lens fittings. The experience offers insight into patient communication, clinical decision-making, and the diagnosis and management of common conditions such as myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism, glaucoma, and dry eye disease. In addition to clinical observation, shadowing the office staff introduces the intern to the administrative and operational side of healthcare. This may include learning about patient scheduling, insurance verification, electronic health records, HIPAA compliance, billing processes, frame and lens selection, and coordination of care. The internship helps students understand how clinical care and office management work together to ensure efficient, ethical, and patient-centered service delivery. Overall, the experience supports professional development, strengthens communication skills, and provides valuable insight into the healthcare environment for students considering careers in optometry, medicine, or other health professions.

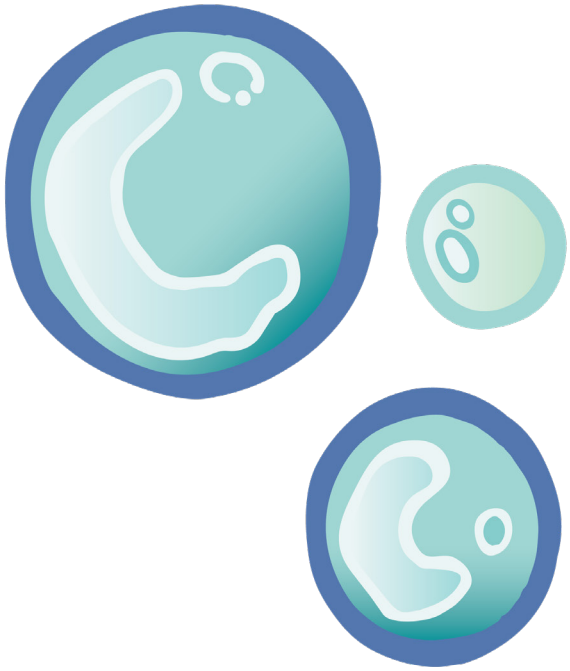
Mentor: Darren Ritzer, Ph.D.

(PSYC340C - Ritzer, Darren)

Observing School Psychologists in the Middle and High School Environments

Kasey Long

Experiential learning in school settings allows psychology students to better understand how psychological principles are applied to support student development and learning. This poster describes the experiences of a psychology intern working in the Fort Mill School District at Pleasant Knoll Middle School and Catawba Ridge High School. The internship provided opportunities to observe the role of school psychologists in addressing students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs across different grade levels. Throughout the internship, the student observed aspects of psychoeducational evaluations, classroom environments, and collaborative meetings between educators and support staff. Additional responsibilities included assisting with the preparation and organization of assessment materials and reviewing documentation related to student support and intervention planning. These experiences provided insight into how assessment data and behavioral observations contribute to informed decision -making in schools. Through this experience, the intern developed stronger observation, communication, and organizational skills while gaining a deeper understanding of the collaborative nature of school-based psychological services. This presentation highlights key learning outcomes from the internship and reflects on the role of school psychologists in promoting supportive learning environments that foster student success.





38TH ANNUAL UNDERGRADUATE JURIED EXHIBITION

The annual tradition of the gallery's Undergraduate Juried Exhibition continues into its 38th year. Students enrolled in a fine arts or design class qualify to submit their work to be reviewed by a guest Juror. If accepted, the students have the opportunity to display their work in Winthrop's premiere Rutledge Gallery and the chance to win monetary awards. In the 38th Undergraduate Juried Exhibition, students exhibited a variety of mediums such as painting, sculpture, fiber arts, performance, printmaking, photography, and videography. The juror for this year, Rebecca Henderson, earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sculpture from Virginia Commonwealth University and has experience in curatorial practices, brand management, marketing, and creative consulting.

Mike Gentry, Director of Winthrop University Galleries

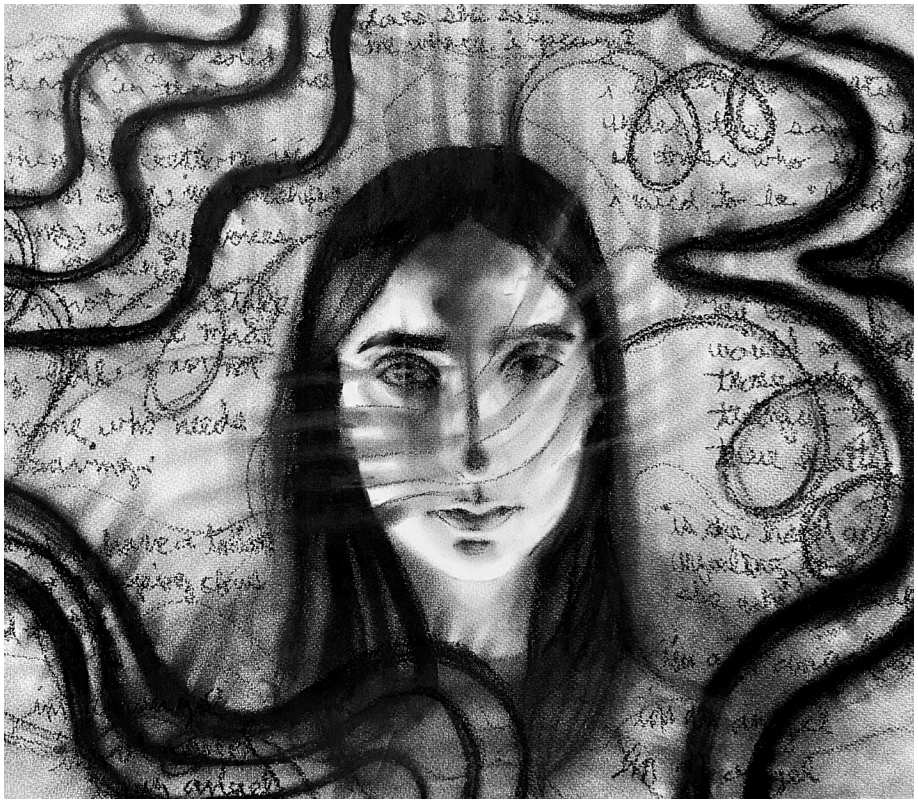


L. McKay

A. Walden - Calcium

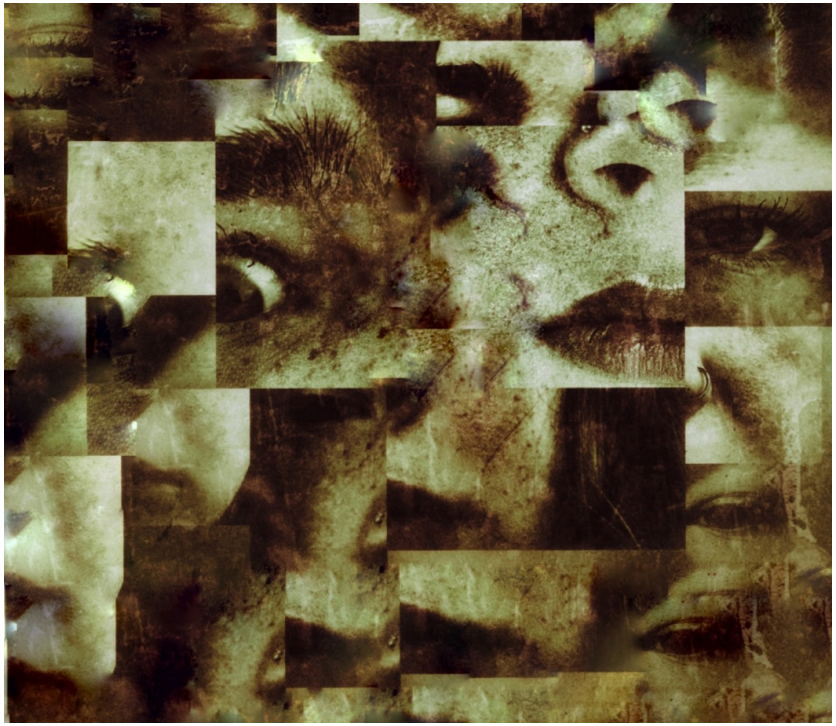


A. Milligan - I'm An Angel



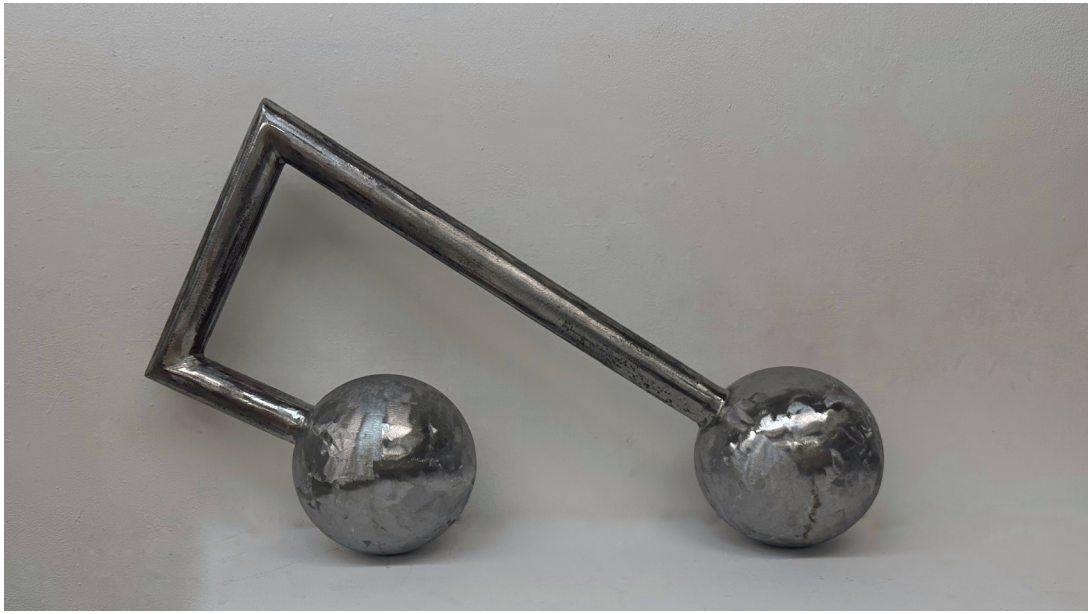
M. Petermann - Katamari Self Portrait





M. Spargo - Perception

E. Neal - Piercing #1



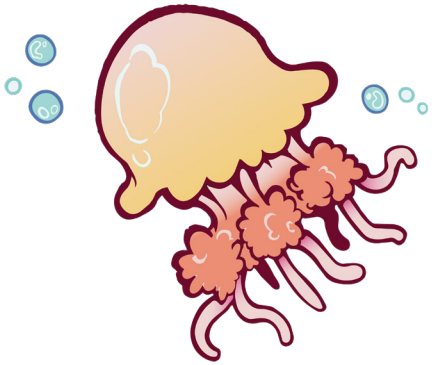


Rutledge Gallery





L. Blessing - 1 Corinthians 6:9-11





Rutledge Gallery





BFA CAPSTONE EXHIBITION

SONDER

Lived Experiences

Sonder: Lived Experiences compiles mixed media works by the graduating Bachelor of Fine Arts students at Winthrop University, as they critique the natural response to society as a communion of intimacy and the deep-seated roots of interaction between individual experiences. Sonder refers to the profound realization that every person is living a life that is as vivid, complex, and potentially chaotic as your own - complete with their own individual ambitions, demanding routines, and daily struggles. The expression of each unique reflection on this concept, and its diverse media forms, combine to manufacture a presentation of multifaceted landscapes, and the result is a celebration of community that invites contemplation and personalized reception. The works in this exhibition not only energize the senses with their scale, but also encourage the viewer to step inside the moment and walk a mile in another individual's life. This exhibition is a reflection of the idea that there is no community without individualism.

Statement: Karis Hall, Anaya Kpan, Emmy Pace

Faculty Coordinator: Claudia O'Steen

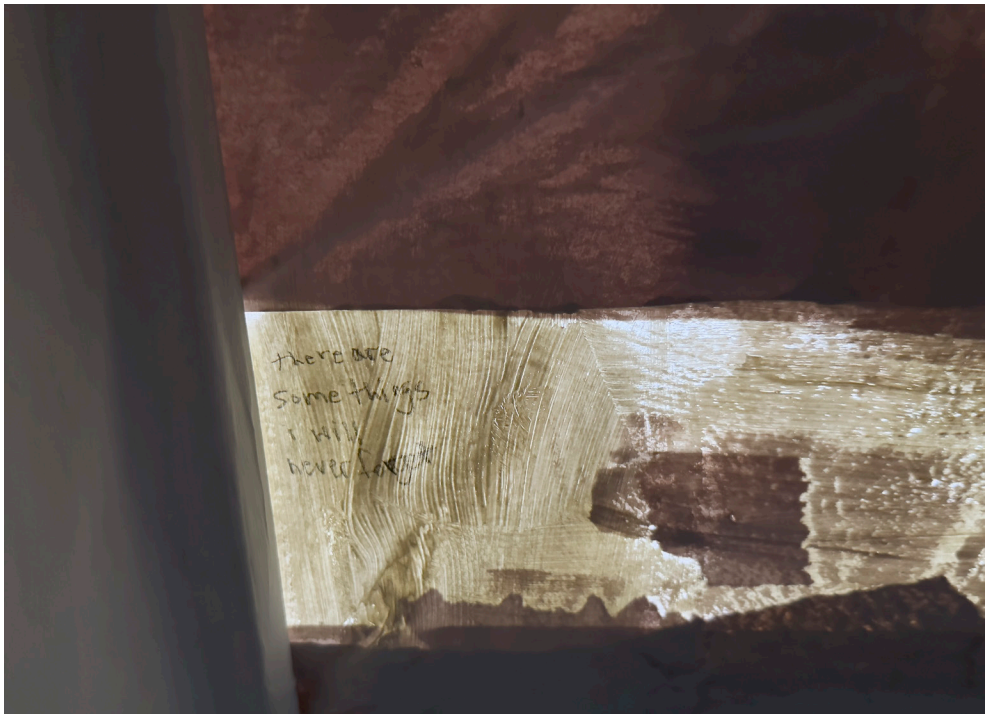
Alia Jade - The Frog Prince



Angellina Bosch - Me, Myself, and Yep Still Me



Emmy Neal - you can go back
(but no one will be there)

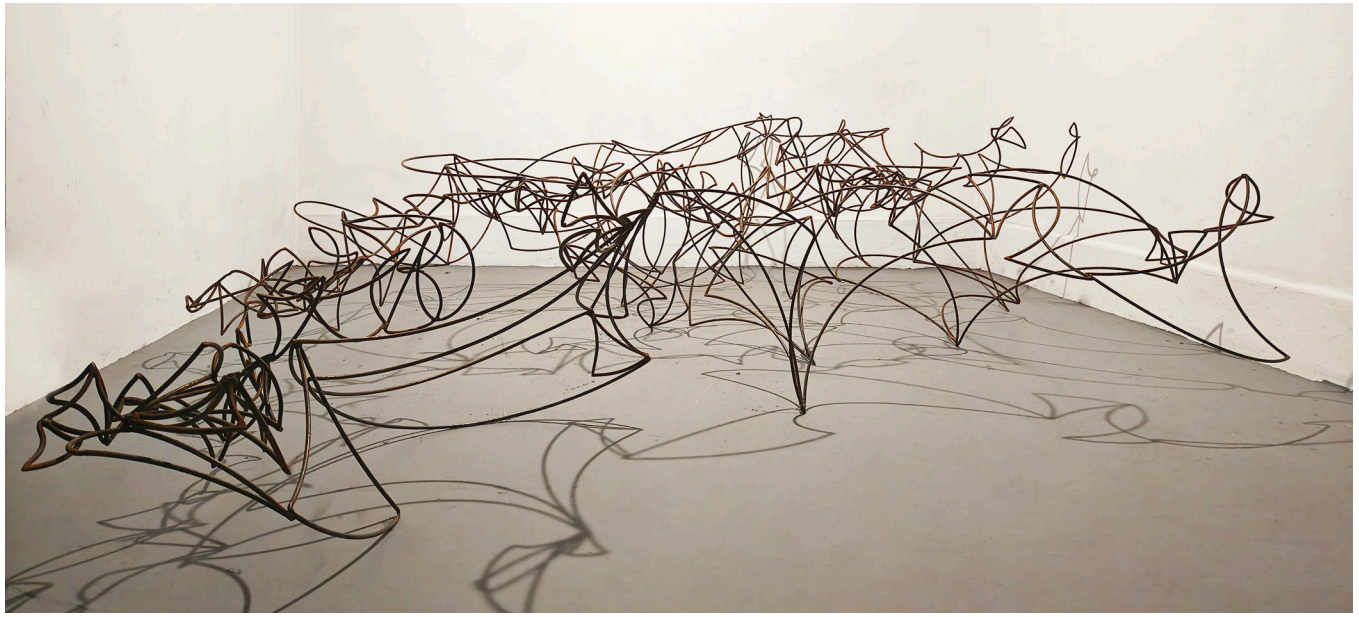


Brooke Trigg - Held in Murmuration



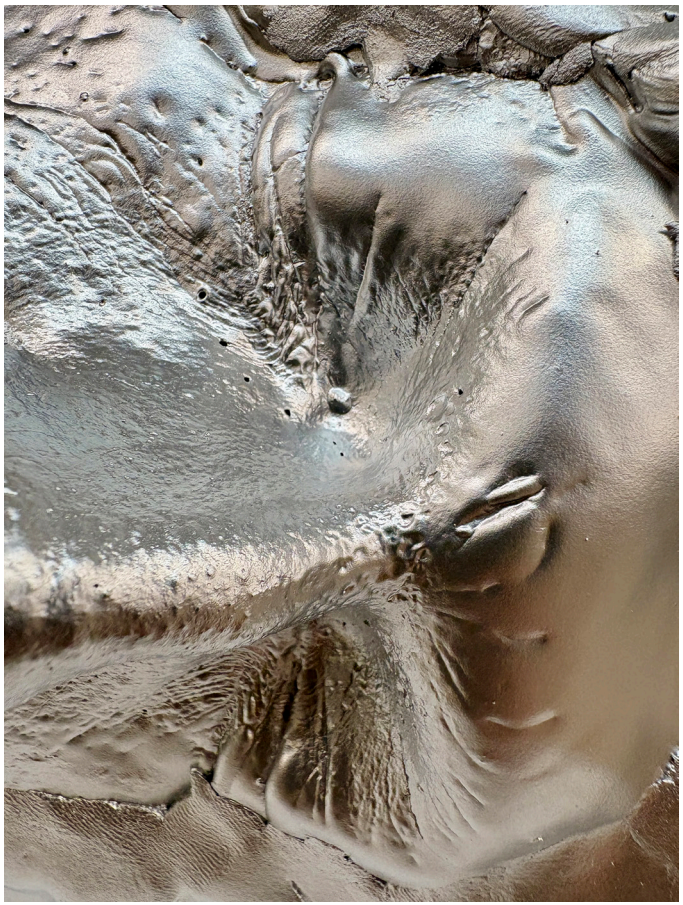


Justin Branch - Untitled



Corrina Leverett - Prompting

Mars Simpson Leibold - Hydrocarbon Wings



Issy Sutton - Vanity Altar



Kit Aldrich - Playing the Social Game





Forest Rain - Seeing Through All Eyes

Kierra Jenkins - Cycles, Unseen

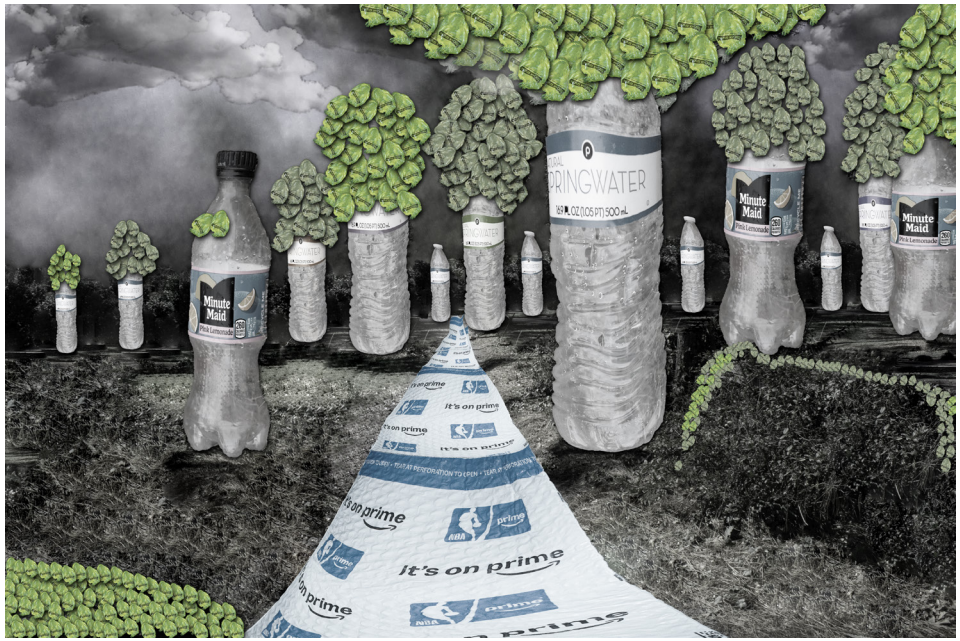




Micayla Massey - Why Fight This



Paxton Pliska - A Body Like Yours



Renee Cartledge - All the Time and Every Opportunity

Beyond the Clouds

Beyond the clouds I picture a beautiful freedom
A place you feel weightless
I imagine that's where Heaven, Paradise, Valhalla, and so many are
I dream about running into those clouds
Seeing behind them
In my head I know it's more clouds but in my heart there is so much more beyond the clouds



Saquoia Harris - Reverie

Sarah Anne Lanaghan - Congregation





Sydnie Bowens - Feminine Feline

Syriah Alcide - Reclaiming Space: The Color of Resilience



Taylor Mason - Unmade, What Remains





ADDITIONAL CATEGORIES

Department of Theater and Dance Festivals & Showcases

One-Act Festival, Fall 2025

Faculty Coordinator: Rachel Dawson

A Shiksa in Shul by Mikaela Simon	Director: Brooklyn Sommers
Gloaming by Karli Jean Lonnquist	Director: Skye Clark
Sure Thing by David Ives Sure	Director: Zach Dunlap
Hope Trapped Inside by Robin Berl	Director: Mattie Washburn
Dear John by Cam Eickmeyer	Director: David Daigle
The Last Dance by Clare Tattersall	Director: Mary Savanna Truett
Who's on Alpha by Mike McCafferty & Matt Thompson	Director: Ty Strickland
Thread of Fate by Samiyah Jeffery	Director: Samiyah Jeffery



Choreography Showcases, April 2026

Faculty Coordinators: Gabrielle Spore & Kelly Ozust

Still Moving	Choreographed by: Grayson Skidmore
Outside Conformity's Box	Choreographed by: Dakarai Vann
Cost of Perfection	Choreographed by: Remiya L. Jackson
Softness in the Open	Choreographed by: Lyric Clancy
Pieces Returning	Choreographed by: Natalie Palmo
Finding Beauty	Choreographed by: Kya Spurgeon
Recurrent	Choreographed by: Autumn R. Pearson
Testimonium Spiritus Sancti (Testimony of the Holy Spirit)	Choreographed by: Adelaide Sprawls
Person versus Self	Choreographed by: Sydney Burkhalter
The Space Between Selves	Choreographed by: Rachel M. Fuller
Come Hell and High Waters: Hurricane Katrina	Choreographed by: Miracle Parker
In My Mind	Choreographed by: Mikayla S. Rainey
Better Days Ahead	Choreographed by: Savion Chester

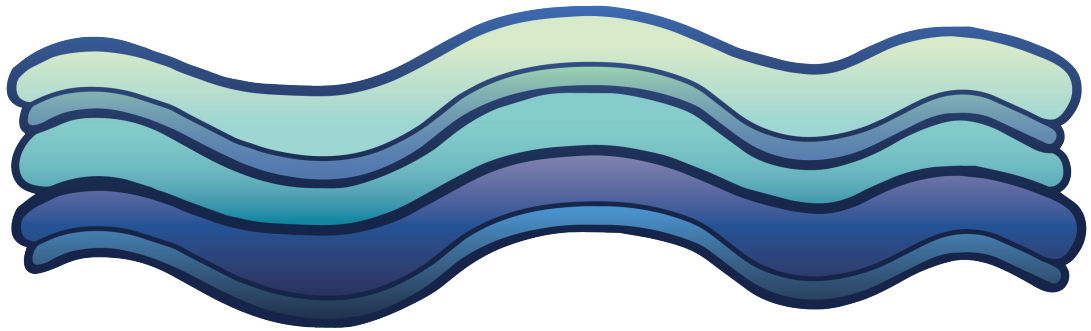


Eagle STEM Scholars Program

Winthrop University's Eagle STEM Scholars Program merges the campus's commitment to undergraduate research and promoting students' success in the sciences. Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Cyber Security, Data Science, Environmental Science, and Mathematics majors receive the academic support, professional development support, and research training needed to pursue graduate studies, professional programs, and STEM careers. Student support services are modeled after the nationally acclaimed Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and employ the nation's best practices in STEM training and student retention. Students attend an intensive six-week Summer Bridge experience, rigorous curricula in science and mathematics, academic monitoring, intramural and extramural research experiences, and career guidance. Since its inception, the program has served 274 Winthrop University students. Eagle STEM Scholars have successfully competed for top positions in summer research programs, graduate and medical programs, at universities such as Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Duke, Emory, Florida, Georgetown, Georgia, Harvard, Marshall, Maryland, Nebraska, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, South Carolina, Temple, Virginia Commonwealth, Virginia Tech, UCLA, UCSF, and the Medical University of South Carolina.

Eagle STEM Scholars are recruited to Winthrop based on their outstanding academic performance and potential to pursue graduate degrees, professional programs, and STEM careers. Each year, the Eagle STEM Advisory Board selects approximately 20 highly competitive scholars to be a part of the incoming freshman cohort. These incoming freshmen take full advantage of the program and later distinguish themselves as winners of national awards. To apply and learn more about the program, please visit http://www.winthrop.edu/eaglestem.

We are grateful for the support of the Advisory Board, the research mentorship by Winthrop faculty, and the ongoing support of the broader Winthrop community for this excellent program.



2025-2026 Eagle STEM Scholars Advisory Staff & Board:

Dr. Anita McCulloch
Director, Eagle STEM Scholars Program, Department of Chemistry, Physics, Geology, and the Environment; Adjunct Faculty, Biology

Dr. Jason Hurlbert
Assistant Director, Eagle STEM Scholars Program; Professor, Chemistry

Dr. Robin Lammi
Chair, Department of Chemistry, Physics, Geology, and the Environment; Professor, Chemistry

Advisory Board:

Dr. Victoria Frost
Associate Professor, Biology

Dr. Jennifer Schafer
Associate Professor, Biology

Dr. Dominique Itanze
Assistant Professor, Chemistry

Dr. Kathie Snyder
Assistant Professor, Chemistry

Dr. Marguerite Doman
Associate Professor, Computer Science

Dr. Scott Werts
Dalton Endowed Chair, Environmental Sciences and Studies; Professor, Geology

Dr. Thomas Polaski
Professor, Mathematics

Dr. Takita Sumter
Dean, College of Arts & Sciences; Professor, Chemistry

Eagle Scholars that submitted abstracts on their work for inclusion in this compilation:

2025 Cohort

Abstance, Kevin - CHEM
Andrews, Lukas - CSCI
Antigua, Francheska - BIOL
Beasley, Logan - BIOL/CSCI
Boyd, Jordan - CSCI
Brown, Daniel - CHEM
Burton, Wyatt - BIOL
Courtney, Ashlee - CHEM
Harry, Zamar - BIOL
Hasty, Addi - CHEM
Henley, Brooke - BIOL
Levell, Nariyha - CHEM
Loua, Nancy - CHEM
Martin, Kelsey - CHEM
Matthews, Elizabeth - BIOL
Merritt, Linnea - CHEM
Mlynarczyk, Ania (Demitre) - MATH
Moore, Myles - BIOL
Myers, Colin - CYBR
Needs, Kristy - BIOL
Nightingale, Emmie - BIOL
Pablo Trinidad, Guadalupe - CHEM
Pham, Nate - BIOL
Shockley, Olivia - CHEM
Silliman, Phoebe - BIOL
Thompson, Ari - BIOL
Thompson, Mia - CHEM
Uribe-Huizache, Karen - BIOL

2024 Cohort

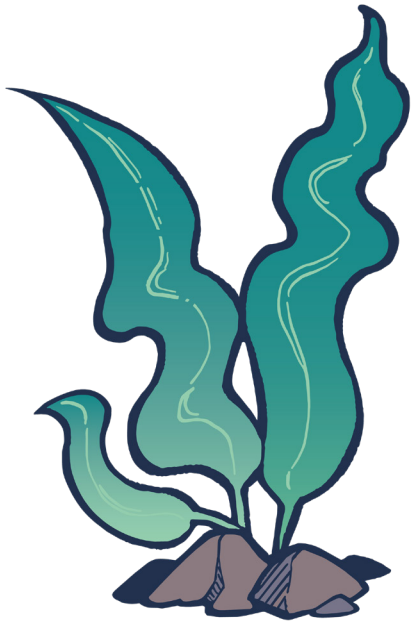
Adelstone, Madeline - CSCI
Allen, Bryce - CHEM
Barnette, Jenna - CSCI
Cherry, Simon - BIOL
Dawson, Timothy - CYBR
Hicks, Kierra - BIOL
Johnson, Ryland - ENVS/BIOL
McGriff, Robert - CSCI
Mehra, Saachi - BIOL
Mehra, Yash - CSCI
Olive, Alisa - ENVS
Reese, Wyatt - BIOL
Stewart, Skylar - BIOL
Vorontsov, Sasha - BIOL

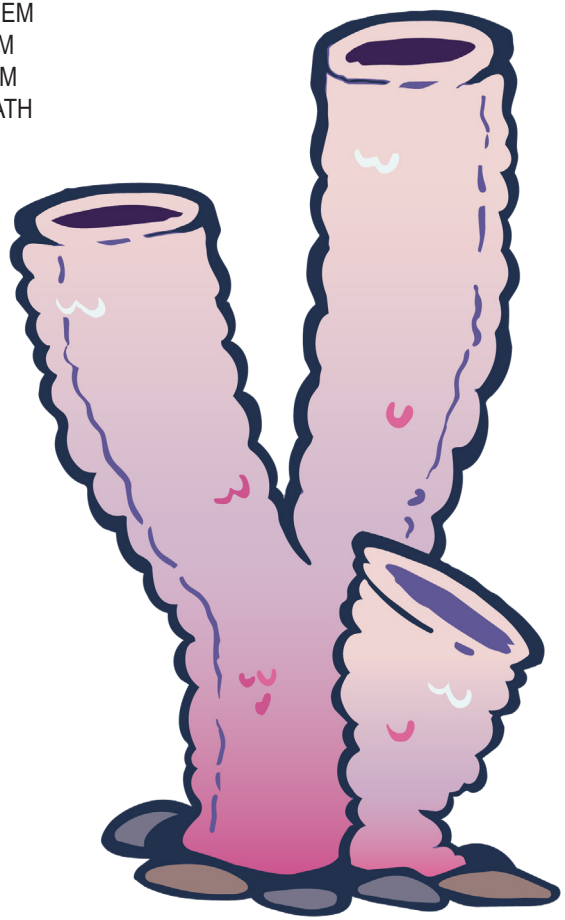
2023 Cohort

Baldwin, Payten - BIOL
Buchanan, Sarah - CHEM
Chisolm, Chastity - BIOL
Duncan, Hannah - BIOL
Green, Kalli - CHEM
Harper, Janiya - BIOL
Johnson, Amari - BIOL
Kopp, Alyssa- BIOL
Little, Giselle - BIOL
McKinney, Emberlynn - ENVS/CSCI
Nix, Garrett - MATH
Raudales, Kenneth - CHEM
Settles, Danica - CHEM
Tolbert, Breland - CHEM
Tomlin, Gwen - BIOL/MATH

2022 Cohort

Atkinson, Lexi - BIOL
Bowers, Abby - BIOL
De Castro, Juan - CSCI/CYBR
Ellis, Kamari - BIOL
Jones, Valana - CSCI
Kuehn, Be - CHEM
Monaghan, Kate - BIOL
Peralta, Lidia - BIOL
Phu, Julianne - BIOL/CHEM
Rodriguez, Jacob - CHEM
Ryerson, Betsy - CHEM





McNair Scholars Program

Winthrop University's Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program is funded by its fourth multi-year, renewable TRiO grant from the U.S. Department of Education. We prepare eligible undergraduates to be successful in research doctorate programs by providing high quality research experiences including a paid summer research internship, graduate admissions support, graduate funding assistance, travel to present research and explore graduate programs, and more. We recruit academically strong first generation and low-income college students from Winthrop and 22 other S.C. colleges. Rising juniors and seniors are encouraged to apply before November 1. All majors are welcome!

Being a McNair Scholar is a nationally recognized honor. Scholars are actively recruited by graduate schools across the country because of their intensive research experiences and preparation for doctoral study. So far, 40 Winthrop McNair alumni hold at least one research and/or professional doctorate. Alumni are currently completing PhDs at universities around the county including Case Western, Colorado State, Duke, Illinois, Memphis, Michigan, NYU, UGA, UNCG, and U Mass Amherst. Each year, the twelve-member Winthrop McNair Advisory Board selects new participants through a highly competitive application and interview process. Please visit http://www.winthrop.edu/mcnair to learn more.

In addition to the faculty mentors and director, the following McNair staff support the Scholars' research and graduate admissions efforts before, during, and after the summer research experience: Marian Moorer (Program Assistant), Stephanie Bartlett (Writing Coach), Dr. Matt Hayes (Statistics and Methods Coach), and Kenya Williams (Graduate Associate). Additionally, Morgan Baxter (McNair Ambassadors) and Savannah Stiltner and Jomariea Facine (Office Assistants) support program implementation.



2025-2026 Winthrop McNair Advisory Board

Amanda Cavin
McNair Alumnus – '15 & '17

Dr. Victoria Frost
Associate Professor, Biology

Rose Gray
Director - TRiO Achievers Program

Dr. Jason Hurlbert
Professor, Chemistry, Physics, & Geology, & the Environment

Dr. Joanna Jackson
Associate Professor, Management & Marketing

Dr. Willis Lewis
Professor, Economics

Dr. Heather Listhartke
Assistant Professor & Coordinator of Internships, English (McNair Alumna, Univ. of Tennessee Knoxville)

Dr. Nicholas Moellman
Assistant Professor, Economics (McNair Alumnus, University of Oklahoma)

Dr. Tenisha Powell
Professor, Early Childhood Education and Human Development and Family Studies Program Director (McNair Alumna from Dr. McNair's Undergraduate Alma Mater, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University)

Cierra Randolph
McNair Senior, Chemistry

Dr. Karen Stock
Professor, Fine Arts

Dr. Janet Wojcik
Professor and Exercise Science Program Director

Dr. Cheryl Fortner (ex-Officio, voting)
Director, McNair Scholars Program and Professor, Psychology

Dr. Leigh Poole (ex-Officio)
Assistant Provost for Student Success and Executive Director for the International Center

Several Scholars and alumni have submitted their work with their Mentors for publication over the past year including Grace Drolet whose work with Dr. Julie Orme was published in the 2025 volume of The McNair National Research Journal (https://maop14.wildapricot.org/National-McNair-Journal).

The following undergraduates completed the 2025 Winthrop McNair Summer Research Experience with the exceptional support of their faculty mentors. Each Scholar presented their findings at the Winthrop McNair Research Symposium in conjunction with SURE and at the national McNair/SSS Research Conference hosted by the Southeastern Association of Equal Educational Opportunity Program Personnel in Atlanta. Seven of these 14 Winthrop McNair Scholars were awarded 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place and a cash prize for their presentation category.

* Indicates a SAEOPP 2025 award winner. In addition, McNair Scholars Julianne Phu and Tim Speaks conducted research at UNCC and UNCC, respectively.

Payten Baldwin, Mentor: Dr. Jason Hurlbert
Expression and Purification of YopJ Novel Acetyl Transferases from *Xanthomonas vesicatoria*

Morgan Baxter*, Mentor: Dr. Donna Nelson
Understanding Child Outcomes in Black Families: The Influence of Parental ACEs, Racial Discrimination, and Parenting Stress and Behaviors

Israel Bellinger, Mentor: Dr. Daniel B. Stovall
Investigating the Role of miRNAs in RYBP Downregulation in Glioblastoma Cells

Kayla Dorsey, Mentor: Dr. Kori Bloomquist
Hope for Higher Education: Exploring Former Foster Youths' College Experiences

Morgan Dukes, Mentor: Dr. Christian Grattan
Synthesis of Zone 2 Modifications of Sphingosine Kinase Inhibitor 1 for Cancer Treatment

Mercedez Hernandez*, Mentor: Dr. Jennifer Disney
From Marianismo to Mestiza Consciousness: A Genealogy of Chicana Feminism

Ja'Niyah Heyward*, Mentor: Dr. Minnie Mize
Culturally Responsive Teaching and Student Outcomes in K-12 Classrooms: A Synthesis of Research-Based Practices

Be Kuehn*, Mentor: Dr. Jason Hurlbert
CAIN55 mycobacteriophage gene allosteric modulation of transcription termination factor NusA

Ariel Moscat, Mentor: Dr. Heather Listhartke
Women's Resistance, the Colonized Mind, and Bridging Multigenerational Experiences of Women in the Latin Caribbean

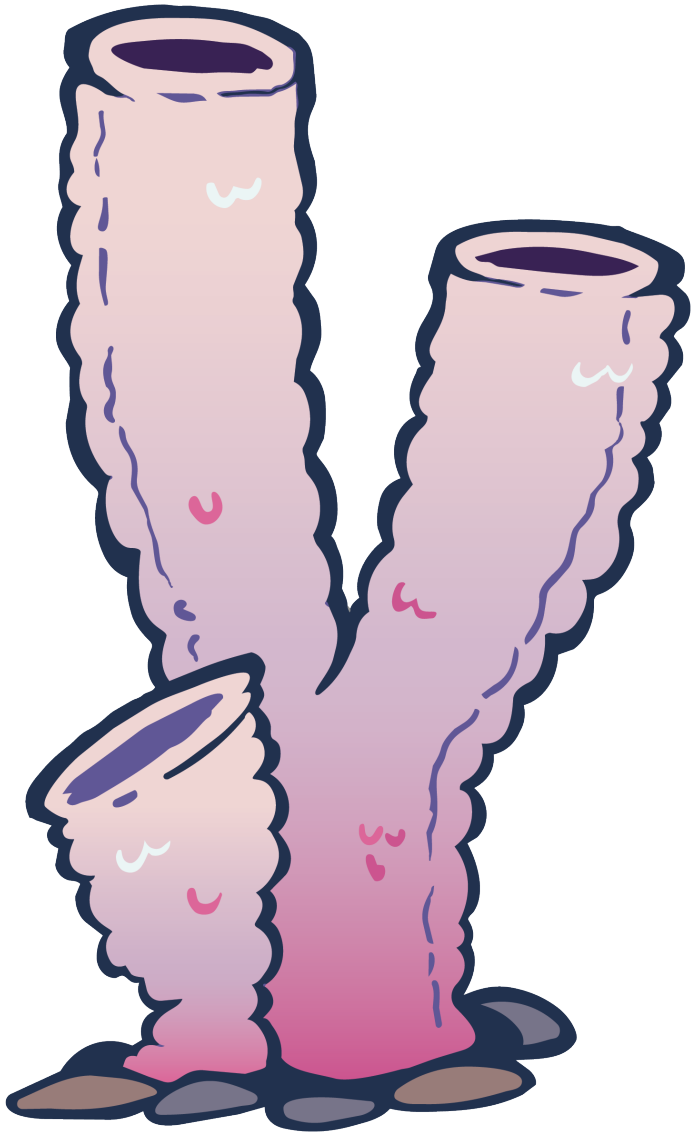
Ywomie Mota*, Mentor: Dr. Samsara Soto
Guided by Representation: The Impact of Mentorship on Latinx Students' Academic Self-Efficacy and College Persistence

Cierra Ari Randolph*, Mentor: Dr. Timea Gerczei Fernandez
Nucleic Acid Aptamer Gold/Silver Nanoparticle Conjugates as Trojan-Horse Drug Delivery Vehicles in the Fight Against Bacterial Infections

Evelyn Salinas, Mentor: Dr. Monique Constance-Huggins
Exploring Mental Health Preferences Among Latinx Immigrants

Angie Torres, Mentor: Dr. Donna Nelson
Mental Landscapes: How Imagined Environments Affect Emotional and Social Well-Being

Ne'Vaeh Walker*, Mentors: Erin Patel & Dr. Cara Peters
Authentic or Performative? Diversity in Advertising and Its Effects on Brand Financial Performance and Consumer Perceptions



Office of Nationally Competitive Awards (ONCA)

Winthrop University's Office of Nationally Competitive Awards (ONCA) identifies and supports highly-motivated and talented students in applying for nationally and internationally competitive awards, scholarships, fellowships, and unique opportunities—both at home and abroad. The ONCA supports students by gathering and sharing award information across the campus community and serves as a specialized resource for students, faculty, and staff throughout competitive award nomination and application processes. The office assists Winthrop University students during challenging and rewarding experiences when applying for some of the most prestigious scholarships in the nation and the world.

Regardless of award outcomes, the reflection and future orientation involved in completing an application for a competitive award can be transformative – promoting determination, growth, and enhanced self-awareness, qualities that serve students well in future experiences such as applying for and beginning new careers or degree programs. Scholars who apply for prestigious and competitive awards spend countless hours examining application requirements and prompts, writing and revising personal statements, preparing and organizing documentation, and identifying and communicating with recommenders.

We are proud of each Winthrop student who enters a competitive award process. The Office of Nationally
Competitive Awards and the Office for Student Success acknowledge and applaud your efforts and commitments. We have enjoyed and continue to relish opportunities to work with and support you. The ONCA relies upon many members of the Winthrop University community. Sincere appreciation is extended to those who promoted ONCA opportunities, shared award information, recommended a student to ONCA, hosted an ONCA presentation, or wrote a letter of support on behalf of an applicant. Competitive scholarship and fellowship applications often require that faculty, staff, and administrators spend significant time and attention to prepare thoughtful, detailed materials and recommendations. Your investment in our students is genuinely appreciated.

Award nominees and winners for 2025-26 will be posted at: https://www.winthrop.edu/onca/Award-Winners.aspx.

Dr. Kori R. Bloomquist
Director, Office of Nationally Competitive Awards

Award Nominees and Awardees, 2025-2026

Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship: The U.S. Department of State's Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program enables students of limited financial means to study or intern abroad, up to $5,000 per semester, providing them with skills critical to our national security and economic prosperity.

Winthrop University AWARDEE: Kaela Branham
Winthrop University AWARDEE: Amanda Jacques
Winthrop University Nominee: Remiya Jackson
Winthrop University Nominee: Sydney Meetze
Winthrop University Nominee: Tori Person
Winthrop University Nominee: Kayli Thorsen
Winthrop University Nominee: Jaime Barrera (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Margaret (Maggie) Beam (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Tatiana Goode (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Gracin Greene (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Kassidy Hawkins (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Niya Holley (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Lualani Macon (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Tabatha Pope (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Isabel Trapp (decision pending)

Benjamin A. Gilman Critical Need Language Award: Applicants who are studying a critical need language while abroad can apply for a supplemental award of up to $3,000, for a combined total of $8,000. The Critical Need Language Award is competitive and offered to a limited number of Gilman scholars each year.

Winthrop University AWARDEE: Levi Becht

Bridging Scholarship: The Association of Teachers of Japanese Bridging Project offers scholarships to American undergraduate students participating in study-abroad programs in Japan. Bridging Scholarship recipients receive a stipend of $2,500 for semester programs or $4,000 for academic year programs.

Winthrop University Nominee: Raiden Kolodji (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Benjamin McCann (decision pending)

Fund for Education Abroad Scholarship: (FEA) was established in 2010 to address the need for an independent study-abroad scholarship provider. FEA is expanding access to study abroad by raising awareness of its benefits to the individual and value to the collective, and by granting scholarships of up to $10,000.

Winthrop University AWARDEE: Isabel Trapp
Winthrop University Nominee: Cierra Randolf

Going Abroad Scholarship: This scholarship's mission is to help students travel and experience the world. Since 2017, they have helped young travelers get out there and get going. Twice a year, two outstanding students will win $1,500 scholarships towards their upcoming study abroad program.

Winthrop University Nominee: Raiden Kolodji

Phi Kappa Phi Graduate Fellowship: Every year, the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi awards 50 Fellowships of $8,500 each, six of $20,000 each, and two of $35,000 to members entering the first year of graduate or professional study. Each Phi Kappa Phi chapter may select one candidate from among its local applicants to compete for the Society-wide awards.

Winthrop University Nominee: Israel Bellinger (decision pending)
Winthrop University Nominee: Devin (decision pending)

Phi Kappa Phi Study Abroad Scholarship: Phi Kappa Phi Study Abroad Grants are designed to help support undergraduates as they seek knowledge and experience in their academic fields by studying abroad. One hundred twenty-five $1,000 grants are awarded each year.

Winthrop University Nominee: Tabatha Pope (decision pending)



Southeastern Psychological Association Conference Awards

Psi Chi Regional Research Award

Moral Injury as a Predictor of Coping Strategies and Social Support
Peyton Kidd Burgess, Charles Thornburgh & Merry Sleigh (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

Adults' Self-Talk Predicts Higher Performance Anxiety and Lower Resilience
Lindsey Dangelmaier, Darrah Nickens & Merry Sleigh (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

Mental Landscapes: How Imagined Environments Affect Emotional and Social Well-Being
Angie Torres & Donna Nelson (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

Presentation Format and Viewer Characteristics Influence Susceptibility to False Mental Health Information
Morgan Baxter, Shania Demeary, Megan Kissiah, Mackenzie Luschowski & Merry Sleigh (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

Social Media Judgments Impacted by Emotional Priming and Social Media Addiction
Hailey Mefford, Brooklyn Armstrong & Merry Sleigh (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

Committee for Equality of Professional Opportunity Award

FIRST PLACE WINNER: Revenge Bedtime Procrastination Predicts Need for Cognition and Poorer Sleep Quality
Micah Davis, Anna Grace O'Brien & Merry Sleigh (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

Parental ACEs Differentially Affect Child Outcomes in Black Families
Morgan Baxter & Donna Nelson (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

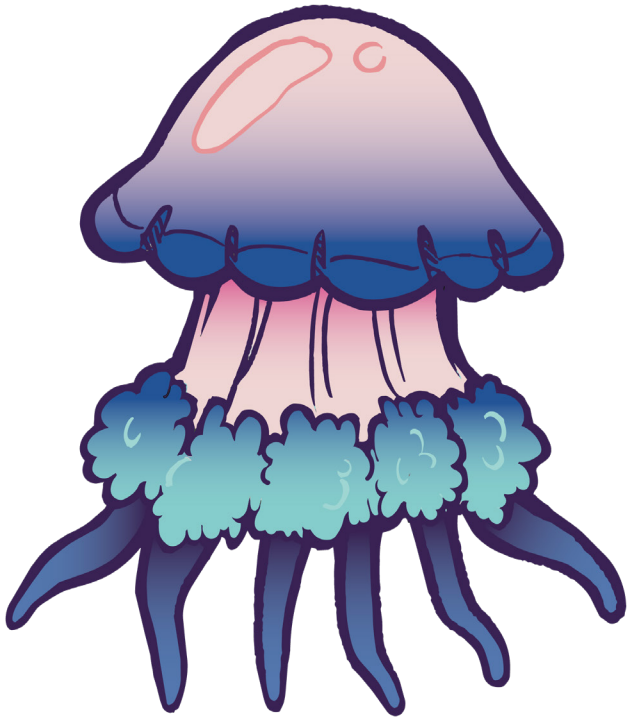
Attachment, Mentalization, Escapism
Brianna Lambert, Anita Grace Gridley & Matthew Hayes (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

PED-Related Media Use Predicts Male Exercisers' PED Use but Not Knowledge
Nicholas Sharp, Camden Davis, Collin Smith & Merry Sleigh (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

Parasocial Relationships, Social Media Addiction, Imposterism, and Social Support
Georgia Murrie, Autumn Christy, Noel Sikes & Merry Sleigh (Faculty Sponsor), Winthrop University

Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Award

FIRST PLACE WINNER: Child Outcomes in Black Families: Parental ACEs and Racial Stress
Morgan Baxter & Donna Nelson, Winthrop University



Winthrop University Department of English Awards

Awards

Annie Laurie Steppe Prize in Composition
Dalayna Hill, Winner
Joshua Chintapalli, Runner-Up

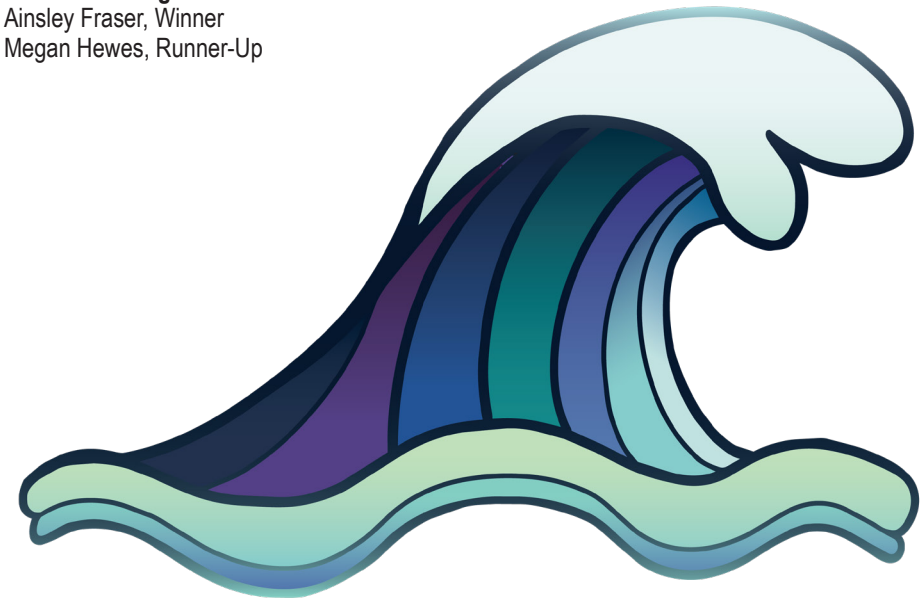
William A. Sullivan Undergraduate Writing Award
Gabriel Tristano, Winner

William A. Sullivan Graduate Writing Award:
Cody Byrdic, Winner
Keri Nicole Beatty, Runner-Up

CRTW/HXCT Writing Award
Simon Cherry, Winner

Creative Writing Award - Fiction
Davyn Osborne, Winner
Zachary Bell, Winner

Creative Writing Award - Creative Nonfiction
Ainsley Fraser, Winner
Megan Hewes, Runner-Up



Scholarships

Robert P. Lane Scholarship
Gabriela Griggs, Winner

J. Spratt and Sandra Hagler White Scholarship
Simon Cherry, Winner
Izzy LaBounty, Runner-Up
Emory Ivie, Runner-Up
Gabriela Griggs, Runner-Up

Micro-Certificate in Technical Writing Scholarship
Liam Floyd, Winner
Hayden Roach, Winner

1970 Johnsonian Staff Endowed Scholarship
Gabriela Griggs, Winner

Fellowship

Geraldine Trammel Hurley Fellowship
Sophia Moore, Winner

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