



EDUCATION CONNECTION

FLORIDA ATLANTIC COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

VOL. 6, ISSUE 1

A BIMONTHLY eNEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

Welcome New Faculty and Staff

Florida Atlantic University's College of Education welcomed three new tenure-earning faculty members, three new non-tenure track faculty, three new postdoctoral fellows and two new staff members during the COE Welcome Back event on Wednesday, Aug. 13, 2025 at the Live Oak Pavilion C & D on the Boca Raton Campus.

In addition, three new faculty and three staff, who joined A.D. Henderson University School/Florida Atlantic University High School, were recognized.

Dean's Office

Melissa Conrad
Coordinator of School Engagement

CE

Jennifer E. Rogers, Ph.D., LPC
Assistant Professor

Erin Beattie, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Fellow

Melissa Garcia, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Fellow

Carmen Larson, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Fellow

CI

Philomena Marinaccio, Ph.D.
Visiting Instructor

ELRM

Nicole Contreras Garcia, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Higher Education Leadership

John E. Critelli, Jr., Ph.D.

Clinical Instructor for the School Leaders Program (PROPEL)

SE

Kelly Brown Kearney, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor

Gregory Taylor, Ph.D.
Instructor

Robert Bush
ACI Job Coach

ADHUS & FAU High School

Sophia Goyette, B.A.E.
MS 6th Grade Science Teacher

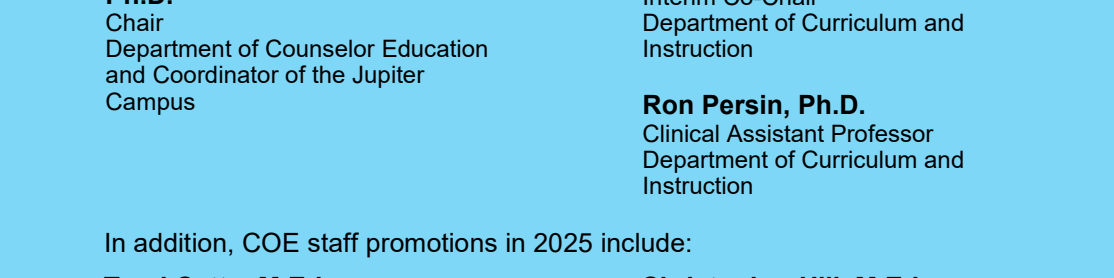
Aina Lopez, B.S.
Elementary Teacher

Sarah Murczek, M.Ed.
MS 8th Grade Science Teacher

Ivan (Ivica) Petrovic
Maintenance Assistant

Eric Watson
Maintenance Assistant

Burton Scott, B.A.
School Resource Officer (SRO)



New COE Appointments; Staff Promotions

Interim COE Dean Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Ph.D., named a new Interim Assistant Dean of Research, who will add this role to his present position for academic year, 2025-2026, beginning Aug. 18, 2025. He also announced new roles for an administrator and two faculty members as Chair of the Department of Counselor Education and overseeing the Dean's Office on the Jupiter Campus of the College of Education, and as Interim Co-Chairs of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, respectively, effective July 1, 2025. The CI Interim Co-Chairs also declared a new appointment, effective July 1, 2025, in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction:

Michael DeDonno, Ph.D.
Interim Assistant Dean of Research and Director
Center of Research Excellence (CoRE)

Sabrina Sembiente, Ph.D.
Interim Co-Chair
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Elizabeth Villares Sacks, Ph.D.
Chair
Department of Counselor Education and Coordinator of the Jupiter Campus

Michelle Vaughan-McGovern, Ed.D.
Interim Co-Chair
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Ron Persin, Ph.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In addition, COE staff promotions in 2025 include:

Traci Catto, M.Ed.
Executive Director
Office of School Engagement, Accreditation, Assessment & Analytics

Christopher Hill, M.Ed.,
Associate Director of Operations
Pine Jog Environmental Education Center

Isabella Niglio
Afterschool Office Assistant
Pine Jog Environmental Education Center

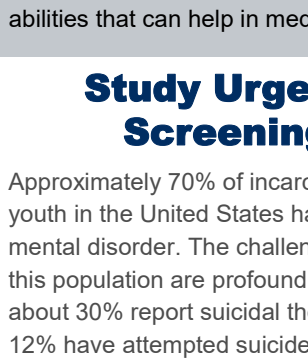
COE Faculty Tenure and/or Promotions

Maysaa Barakat, Ph.D.
Professor

Taka Mays, Ed.D.
Clinical Senior Instructor

Michelle Vaughan-McGovern, Ed.D.
Professor

Nanotechnology Via PBL Model Sparks Elementary Students' Curiosity in Science



As science achievement and engagement continue to decline among elementary students nationwide, researchers from [Florida Atlantic University's College of Education](#) offer a promising path forward. By introducing nanotechnology through a multimedia-rich, problem-based learning model (PBL), they are helping young learners connect classroom science with real-world challenges – sparking curiosity, building critical thinking skills, and strengthening science literacy from an early age.

The FAU researchers' approach, published in the [Proceedings of the European Academy of Sciences & Arts](#), is based on PBL with nanotechnology modules developed and field tested among elementary school students by [David Devraj Kumar](#), Ed.D., senior author, a professor of science education and founding director of the STEM Education Laboratory in the FAU College of Education, with funding from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. Kumar found that students who participated in the "Catching the Rays" module showed significant gains in science understanding, more positive attitudes toward science and a greater awareness of nanotechnology's societal impacts. These outcomes are consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating the benefits of PBL-based learning in enhancing students' conceptual understanding and decision-making skills, even at the elementary level.

"Carefully developed multimedia anchors give students an opportunity to explore complex ideas in ways that are intuitive and engaging," said co-author [Sabrina F. Sembiente](#), Ph.D., professor of TESOL and bilingual education and interim co-chair of the [Department of Curriculum and Instruction](#) within FAU's College of Education. "They also provide much-needed support for teachers, helping them design lessons that inspire curiosity and promote evidence-based reasoning in the classroom."

While the online platform supports accessibility and flexibility, the research underscores that effective teaching remains essential. Teachers need both scientific content knowledge and pedagogical strategies to fully engage students with topics like nanoscience, the study of tiny structures and molecules, and nanotechnology, which utilizes these materials at a nanometer scale to create devices with special abilities that can help in medicine, electronics and more. ...[Read more](#)

Study Urges Reform in Mental Health Screening for Incarcerated Youth

Approximately 70% of incarcerated youth in the United States have a mental disorder. The challenges in this population are profound – about 30% report suicidal thoughts, 12% have attempted suicide and 25% experience solitary confinement, a condition strongly associated with increased suicide risk. Depression is also widespread, affecting 10% to 25% of youth with moderate to severe symptoms.

Several screening tools are used to assess depression and suicide risk in incarcerated youth. While these tools generally show reliable and valid results, there's limited research on how well they work specifically for incarcerated youth who are adjudicated delinquent, especially across different ethnic groups.

Researchers from [Florida Atlantic University](#), and collaborators, examined the effectiveness of these commonly used screening

tools in detecting depression and suicidality among incarcerated youth. Results of the study, published in the journal [Behavioral Disorders](#), reveal troubling gaps in the accuracy and fairness of mental health screenings used with incarcerated youth who have been adjudicated delinquent.

"Our study highlights a critical issue in our juvenile justice system," said [Joseph Calvin Gagnon](#), Ph.D., senior author, chair and professor, [Department of Special Education](#) within FAU's [College of Education](#). "The core philosophy of juvenile corrections is that youth can and should be rehabilitated – and that promise begins with proper mental health screening at intake. We rely on these tools to guide decisions that affect a young person's safety, treatment and future. But our findings show that these screenings may not work similarly for all youth, particularly across different backgrounds." ...[Read more](#)



A.D. Henderson New Appointment

Joel D. Herbst, Ed.D., Assistant Dean, PK-12 Schools & Educational Programs and Superintendent, announced the appointment of the new Elementary Assistant Principal of A.D. Henderson University School, effective Sept. 16, 2024. ... [Read more](#)

Rebecca Kasten, M.Ed.
Elementary Assistant Principal

A.D. Henderson & FAU High School Faculty Promotions

Christopher Childs, M.Ed.
University School Associate Professor

Paul Lehman, B.A.
Univ. School Accomplished Instr.

Cherene Castillo, M.Ed.
Univ. School Assistant Professor

Jaclyn Magrisso, M.A.
Univ. School Accomplished Instr.

Cheri Celesti, B.A.
Univ. School Assistant Professor

Amy Miramontes, B.S.
Univ. School Accomplished Instr.

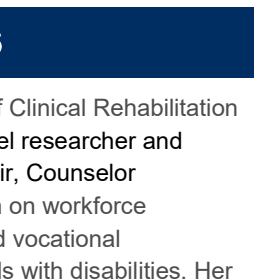
Amy Tift, Ph.D.
Univ. School Assistant Professor

Lindsey Wuest, M.S.Ed.
Univ. School Accomplished Instr.

Danielle Kline, B.A.
Univ. School Accomplished Instr.

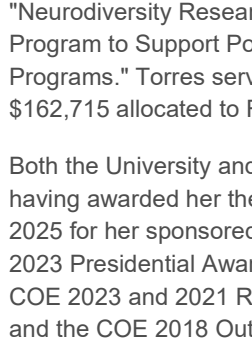
Superintendent of FAU Lab Schools Receives 2025 ICON in Education Design Award

Joel Herbst, Ed.D., Assistant Dean, PK-12 Schools & Educational Programs and Superintendent of FAU Lab Schools (Florida School District 72), has been named a recipient of the 2025 ICON in Education Design Award, a prestigious honor recognizing visionary leaders who transform education through innovation, design and passion.



Herbst was selected for his groundbreaking work in connecting corporations, universities and high schools to accelerate early STEM education, according to [Learning by Design Summer 2025 magazine](#). His holistic approach integrates research, collaboration and experiential learning to enrich the curriculum with vital human, material and financial resources...[Read more](#)

FAU Lab Schools Ranked #1 School District in Florida on the 2025 Statewide Assessments



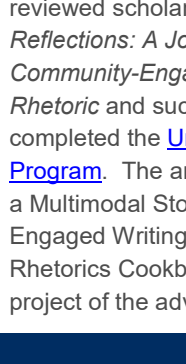
A.D. Henderson University School and FAU High School, developmental research schools on the Florida Atlantic University campus, proudly announced on July 1, 2025 their top rankings in the 2025 Florida statewide assessments, confirming their position as the highest-performing district in Florida. According to the Florida Department of Education's results from the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST), End-of-Course (EOC) assessments and the Statewide Science assessment, the district ranked #1 in the state in five categories.

These exceptional results demonstrate the school's ongoing commitment to academic excellence, data-driven instruction and student-centered learning. "This is a proud moment for our entire school community," said Lauren Robinson, Ed.D., Principal, ADHUS/FAUHS. "Ranking number one across so many key academic areas is a direct reflection of the dedication of our educators, the hard work of our students and the support of our families and university partners." ...[Read more](#)

ADHUS/FAUHS Faculty & Student Among 2025 OURI SURF Awardees

Tucker Hindle, M.S., GISP, Research Coordinator and Analytics Specialist, A.D. Henderson University School/FAU High School, and Ellen Vance, a dual-enrolled FAU High School student, participated in the Office of Undergraduate Research and Inquiry (OURI) Summer Student Showcase on Thursday, Aug. 14, 2025 in the Sean Stein Pavilion on the Boca Raton campus. Vance was among the 2025 Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) awardees based on her intended research, *Retrieval of Chlorophyll-a Concentration by Drone-Hyperspectral Imaging of St. Lucie River*. She will work under Hindle's mentorship. SURF projects are ten-week, intensive summer immersion research experiences for an FAU undergraduate student and faculty member.

FACULTY FOCUS



Ayse Torres, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling, Counselor Education, is a model researcher and scholar noted Elizabeth Villares Sacks, Chair, Counselor Education. Torres has focused her research on workforce development, employment interventions and vocational rehabilitation strategies to support individuals with disabilities. Her research record includes 25 refereed journal articles and 15 national and international presentations.

Currently, Dr. Torres is the Principal Investigator for the "ACCESS-Technology: Advancing Career Choices for Employment Success in Technology" grant, a \$10 million initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, running from October 2024 to 2029. She is also the Principal Investigator for the "XR-ENABLE: eXtended Reality to Empower Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for Employment" grant, funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) for \$600,000 from September 2024 to 2027.

Most recently, she is part of a collaborative team involving Palm Beach State College and the College of Engineering and Computer Science at Florida Atlantic University that secured a research grant from the National Science Foundation for the "Neurodiversity Research Innovation Experience (NEURODRIVE): Collaborative Program to Support Post-Secondary Students with Autism in STEM Degree Programs." Torres serves as a Co-Principal Investigator for this \$475,000 grant, with \$162,715 allocated to Florida Atlantic University, and is active from 2024 to 2028.

Both the University and the College of Education have recognized Torres' research, having awarded her the Researcher of the Year at the Associate Professor level in 2025 for her sponsored project-oriented activities. Other awards include the FAU 2023 Presidential Award for Project-Oriented Faculty, the College of Education, the COE 2023 and 2021 Researcher of the Year Award at the Assistant Professor level and the COE 2018 Outstanding Dissertation Award.

A Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) in Florida and a nationally Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), Torres holds a Ph.D. and M.Ed. in Counselor Education from Florida Atlantic and a B.S. in Counseling Psychology from Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENT PUBLISHES IN REFLECTIONS



Clara Lechowski, an English Education major at Florida Atlantic College of Education, published her first

article as first author in a peer-reviewed scholarly publication, *Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric* and successfully completed the [University Honors Program](#). The article, "Cookin' Up a Multimodal Story: Community-Engaged Writing and a Cultural Rhetorics Cookbook," stems from a project of the advanced exposition

class she took as an Honors Compact during the fall 2024 semester. Collaborating with Alexander Slotkin, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition in the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, Clara's zine-style cookbook blends storytelling, family, and culinary tradition, according to the Editor-in-Chief's description of the piece in the introduction to the issue. Her work effectively demonstrates creativity, academic excellence, and meaningful community engagement.

*COE English Education Student

Powers, J., Musgrove, A., Azhar, M., Milner, W. (2025). Pre-service teacher education in the age of AI: Exploring knowledge, attitudes, and classroom integration strategies. *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, 26(2), 2-21. https://literacyandtechnology.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/jlt_v26_2_powers_musgrove_azhar_milner.pdf

Powers, J. R., Brown, S. L., Musgrove, A. T., & Bogle, R. A. (2025). Self-directed learning and STEM outcomes in a STEM Girls program. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 22(1), 17-32. https://www.sdglobal.com/files/ugdl/b91da5_f01fca6d9bb4d1e8464dab0bc0fa736.pdf

Simmons, D., Bhagwanji, Y., Born, P., Drossman, H., Franzen, R., Mony, P. ... (2025). Environmental Educator Knowledge and Skills: Guidelines for Excellence. North American Association for Environmental Education.

FAU Lab Schools Research Newsletter: August 2025

Grants

Hashemi, J. & **Torres, A.** (2025). *Collaborative Research: Supporting Students with Autism in STEM Degree Programs*, National Science Foundation. Co-Principal Investigators (FAU). \$162,715.

Important Dates

Faculty
Sept. 5—Faculty Assembly

Research Symposiums
Oct. 30—[15th Annual Broward Student Research Symposium](#)

Students
Sept. 5—[Application for Degree](#) due for fall 2025
Sept. 15—[Spring Student Teaching Application](#) due
Sept. 19—COE Scholarship application deadline for 2025-26
Sept. 20—[Explore FAU](#)
Oct. 2—[Graduate College Open House](#)
Oct. 25—[Explore FAU](#)
Oct. 20—Fall Dissertation Defense deadline
Oct. 27—Fall Dissertation due in the Dean's Office
Oct. 27—Fall Thesis Defense deadline

Awards

Brown, V.S., Powers J.R. & Kumar, D.D. (2025). *2025 USDLA Distance Learning/Teaching Award—GOLD*. United States Distance Learning Association. ... [Read more](#)

Publications

Peer Reviewed Articles

Bousalis, R. (2025). The oral history for citizenship education. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 16(2), 296-315.

Emelianchik-Kay, K., Labarta, A., "Bossie, C., & Gill, C. (2025). Using photographs to explore self-compassion among mothers during COVID-19. *The Professional Counselor*. 15(2), 131-147.

Fields, A. M., Castle, M., Smith Hill, R. B., Perez, L. M., & Lewis, O. J. (2025). Access and barriers to mental health resources for college students in an inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) program: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities*. 18(3), 301-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19315864.2024.2424747>

Gagnon, J.C., Quan, J., Daley, M. D., Huggins-Manley, C., Houchins, D. E., Lane, H. B., McCray, E. D., & Lambert, R. G. (2025). Convergence, Divergence, and Predictive Validity in Depression and Suicidality Screening Tools with Adjudicated Youth Across Ethnicity. *Behavioral Disorders*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/01987429251349130>

Lechowski, C.* & Slotkin, A. (2025). Cookin' up a multimodal story: Community-engaged writing and a cultural rhetorics cookbook. *Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric*. 24(2), 275-287.

Powers, J., Musgrove, A., Azhar, M., Milner, W. (2025). Pre-service teacher education in the age of AI: Exploring knowledge, attitudes, and classroom integration strategies. *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, 26(2), 2-21. https://literacyandtechnology.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/jlt_v26_2_powers_musgrove_azhar_milner.pdf

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