FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Harriet L. Wilkes
Honors College

# Medallion Ceremony 2026


Friday, May 8, 2026
Florida Atlantic University | John D. MacArthur Campus

# Medallion Ceremony Program 2026 Order of Ceremony:

## Processional

**WELCOME ADDRESS:** Justin Perry, Ph.D., Dean

**UNIVERSITY AWARDS:** Justin Perry, Ph.D., Dean

**STUDENT RECOGNITION AWARDS:**
Daniel de Lill, Ph.D.

**GRADUATION ADDRESS:** Ryleigh Newman

**PRESENTATION OF MEDALLIONS:**
Justin Perry, Ph.D., Dean

**WILKES HONORS COLLEGE 2026 DISTINGUISHED ALUM:** Harrison Stubbs, DO, '14

**CLOSING REMARKS:** Justin Perry, Ph.D., Dean

## Recessional

# Harrison Stubbs, DO '14

Dr. Harrison Stubbs is a hospitalist at Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital, where he is recognized for his ability to connect with patients and families and bring clarity and reassurance during complex and often difficult moments in care. He serves on the hospital's Substance Use Task Force, helping to advance education, awareness, and coordinated approaches to substance use disorders within both the hospital and the community.

A graduate of Florida Atlantic University's Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, Dr. Stubbs earned his degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences with a concentration in Biological Chemistry. He credits his time at Wilkes for shaping not only his academic path, but also his sense of community—whether studying in the courtyard, playing frisbee on campus, taking summer courses, or completing an internship at Scripps.

Before pursuing medicine, Dr. Stubbs worked as a personal trainer, an experience that sparked his interest in long-term health and human performance. He went on to earn his Master of Science in Biomedical Sciences and Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Kansas City University, followed by an internal medicine residency at the UCF/HCA GME Consortium of Greater Orlando. During residency, he was inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society.

Dr. Stubbs has consistently taken on roles in leadership, advocacy, and education, serving on hospital committees, representing his peers at the state level as a delegate with the Florida Medical Association, and mentoring students at multiple stages of training. He remains deeply committed to supporting and developing future physicians.

# List of Graduates 2026

## Autumn Abbas

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Laura Vernon

**THESIS:** Menstruation, Mood, and Borderline Personality Disorder: Premenstrual Exacerbation, Treatment Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) affects up to 6.2% of women. Like many other disabilities, interaction of BPD with the menstrual cycle, called pre-menstrual exacerbation (PME) can occur. This paper seeks to distinguish between the characteristics of PME of BPD and those of other disorders and explore the effects that BPD can have during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle. Proposed methods of research to further explore this topic in a clinical setting are offered along with different options for treatment methods due to current incompatibilities between medications used to treat PME of BPD.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** All of the relationships I was able to form with my professors, faculty, and staff that I am sure to remember fondly in the future. :) CarnivOwl, too, LOL.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Future masters program in behavioral neuroscience along with continuing to work in ABA therapy.

# Enitan Adenigbagbe

**CONCENTRATION:** Cellular Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Julie Earles

**THESIS:** LTD Dynamics in NLGN One Mutant Mice Models, a Patch Clamp Study of NLGN1 Echo Domain Cleavage and Long-term Depression in Amygdalar Circuit

Using electrophysiology to focus on how mutations implied in autism alter emotional circuit functions in the brain.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Campus trip to Cocoa Beach with friends

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to pursue an M.D. degree attending med school with hopes of completing an M.D./Ph.D. to be a physician scientist.

# Serena Amro Gazze

**CONCENTRATION:** Data Science and Analytics

**ADVISORS:** Dr. Erik Duboué

**THESIS:** Investigating the Neuroanatomy of Adult *Astyanax mexicanus* Using Fully Segmented, Digital 3-Dimensional Brain Atlases

My honors thesis project generated fully segmented, three-dimensional brain atlases for adult surface fish and Pachón cavefish to investigate how environmental changes shape brain organization. Whole adult brains were imaged and then manually segmented to create the anatomically accurate brain atlases for each morph. Comparative volumetric analysis revealed reductions in visual-processing regions and enlargement of olfactory structures in cavefish. These findings demonstrate targeted remodeling of sensory systems associated with adaptation to dark cave environments. The resulting atlases also provide a quantitative framework for future studies of brain evolution and functional specialization.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Participating in the Siblings Interview alongside my sister for the FAU Wilkes Honors College 25th Anniversary Celebration.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending graduate school for an MS in Artificial Intelligence, with a concentration in AI and Biomedicine. I will be attending Columbia University for my graduate school.

# Daniel Angeles

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kelsie Bernot

**THESIS:** Microgravity Effects on the Immune System in Spaceflight

Using simulated microgravity conditions to test the innate and adaptive immune system responses, it was found that an inverse relationship exists between the two. Decreased adaptive changes and increased innate changes help explain the overall immune system weakening and increase susceptibility to viruses.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** All the memories with my friends that I will cherish forever.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Attending med school

# Ashley Arbesfeld

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Catherine Trivigno

**THESIS:** Molecular Features of EGFR-driven Endocrine Resistance in Breast Cancer

Endocrine therapies such as tamoxifen are used to treat over 70% of breast cancers with tumor cells that express Estrogen Receptor, alpha (ER), but only about 30% of such cases respond to endocrine therapy after metastasis. Genomic alterations that drive endocrine resistance include amplification of the Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor (EGFR) gene, but the underlying mechanisms are not completely clear. To further understand these mechanisms, we compared the effects of EGFR overexpression on activation of kinase cascades that promote cell survival, and the transcriptional and growth-inhibitory effects of tamoxifen in ER-positive breast cancer models, in vitro. We also evaluated the effects of EGFR overexpression on the localization, distribution, and post-translational modification of tamoxifen-bound ER in these cells using super-resolution microscopy and high-content imaging analysis. Our findings will define important molecular features and provide invaluable insights into the mechanisms underlying EGFR-driven endocrine resistance.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Going to Universal Studios with Program Board

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan on attending medical school. I will be taking a gap year working in the Nettles Lab at UF Scripps.

# Emily Arbesfeld

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Catherine Trivigno

**THESIS:** Functional Characterization of *Drosophila* Attractin in Insulin and Stress Signaling

The highly conserved Attractin (Atrn) transmembrane protein has been shown to regulate appetite in the hypothalamus via endolysosomal trafficking of melanocortin receptors. Its loss of function has been associated with type 2 diabetes, sleep disorders, neurodegeneration, and various other phenotypes that imply it also regulates other G-protein-coupled receptors in distinct tissues. We show that the *Drosophila* homolog Distracted (Dsd) is broadly expressed in the CNS as well as in sensory neurons, the midgut, insulin-producing cells, and other neurosecretory cells that coordinate systemic metabolic and stress responses. In addition, we provided evidence that expression of Atrn homologs are predominantly regulated post-transcriptionally by miRNAs implying that the dynamic expression of the protein is critical for its function to regulate behaviors in a context-dependent manner. Here, we compare null mutants, animals expressing Dsd lacking its endogenous 3□UTR, and control animals with respect to longevity under conditions that challenge insulin and stress signaling, including desiccation, starvation, and high-sugar diet exposure. The results imply that disruption of Dsd expression, either through loss-of-function or misregulated temporal expression, resulted in reduced lifespan and impaired physiological resilience to metabolic stress.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Program Board's trip to Cocoa Beach

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan on attending dental school. I will be taking a gap year to get more experience in the dental field.

# Adolfo Artigas

**CONCENTRATION:** Marine Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Tracy Mincer

**THESIS:** A Quantitative Analysis of Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*, *Caretta caretta*, *Lepidochelys kempii*) Suture Morphology

Carapacial sutures, tight joints between adjacent bones, connect modified ribs with collagenous fibers. Previous research on freshwater turtle shells suggest that sinuous sutures (highly convoluted) promote strength under compression. Limited research explored the form and functional significance of sutures in marine turtles. We found that as body size increases (with age), sinuosity and horizontal span (suture width) decreases. These results suggest that sutures may promote rigidity in juveniles (high sinuosity) and later allow greater flexibility in adults (low sinuosity).

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** PowerPoint Night and all the school events/parties

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to go to Divers Institute of Technology in Seattle, Washington. I will learn how to weld, fix oil pipes, and internet cables while being 1,000 feet underwater. Then, I will go to the Gulf of Mexico and work on an oil rig for 2 years, then work internationally.

# Aashni Atkinson

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Chitra Chandrasekhar

**THESIS:** Comparative Analysis of Circadian Rhythms in Humans and Other Mammals

My thesis explores how circadian rhythms are conserved across mammals and why humans experience greater circadian disruption, focusing on the role of behavioral, environmental, and medical factors in altering internal biological timing.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory is when my orientation peer, Danny Angeles, asked to sit with me at lunch, and since that moment we have been inseparable. I am so grateful to have made a lifelong best friend.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending Physician Assistant (PA) school.

# Ian Aviles

**CONCENTRATION:** Biological Chemistry

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Catherine Trivigno

**THESIS:** Identifying Factors Contributing to Rheumatoid Arthritis Development by High-Throughput Gene Expression Analysis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic autoimmune disease impacting almost 1% of the world population. The onset of RA pathogenesis in humans is unknown and may result from a combination of genetic and environmental factors. MMP-13 initially cleaves type II collagen (COL2) at the ¾ point, followed by progressive cleavage of resulting fragments. Anti-citrullinated protein antibodies (ACPAs) inhibit MMP-13 binding to collagen at various stages, leading to production of collagen fragments that differ from those found under normal physiological conditions. These abnormal COL2 fragments may influence immune response, potentially enhancing pathogenic or regulatory activity, and altering chondrocyte behavior, contributing to the onset of RA. This project aims to identify initiating factors that contribute to RA development by introducing abnormal collagen peptides into a healthy cartilage model to trigger pro-arthritogenic responses. Roughly 800 genes were analyzed using Nanostring technology to assess changes indicative of pro-arthritogenic or anti-inflammatory transformation in the cartilage.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Jupiter Program Board hosted our PaddlePalooza kayaking trip in april of 2025. It was the first attempt at an excursion-like event off campus at Riverbend Park. It was a nice success, and I enjoyed getting to take students to a scenic river teeming with wildlife and history, where everyone could move at their own pace. It paved the way for other events to happen, such as our trips to Cocoa Beach and St. Augustine.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I have applied for the animal care internship at Busch Wildlife Sanctuary. My time spent volunteering there has been wonderful, and I hope to make a living doing something similar.

# Keisha Bansal

**CONCENTRATION:** Biochemistry/Cellular Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Erik Duboué

**THESIS:** Brain-wide Mapping of Adaptive Feeding States in *Astyanax mexicanus*

Feeding behavior is regulated by interactions between peripheral metabolic signals and central neural circuits, yet how these systems evolve remains unclear. Using the Mexican cavefish (*Astyanax mexicanus*), this project investigates how feeding adaptations are shaped, revealing population-specific differences in hyperphagia across development. Whole-brain activity mapping highlights circuit-level changes underlying these behaviors and establishes a foundation for studying the evolution of feeding strategies.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Spending time with my friends at Spring Formal!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be matriculating into medical school this year to pursue a career in medicine.

## Kayla Baptiste

**CONCENTRATION:** Law and Society

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Mark Tunick

**THESIS:** Juvenile Justice

My thesis argues that juveniles must not be punished as adults in the justice system because juveniles lack the full moral agency and stable character presupposed by the law. Instead, Juvenile justice should focus on accountability and rehabilitation, recognizing their capacity for change.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Going to CarnivOwl for the first time freshmen year with my newfound friends. Experiencing that which would be my first college event.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** To go to Law School and become an immigration lawyer.

# Erin Bell

**CONCENTRATION:** Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Maureen Hahn

**THESIS:** Evaluation of Microglial Activation in Hippocampus of Mblac1 Knockout Mice

Recently, the gene Mblac1 was discovered to serve a novel role in the regulation of a copper reductase as well as a risk factor for the development of Alzheimer's Disease (AD). Here, we investigate microglial change within the dorsal hippocampus (dHPC) of Mblac1 knockout (KO) mice as well as effect of treatment with copper-chaperone drug elesclomol in rescuing perturbations using immunofluorescence staining (IF).

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Spending time with friends

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** PharmD

# Rachel Benbasat

**CONCENTRATION:** Environmental Studies

**ADVISOR:** Dr. William O'Brien

**THESIS:** Ecofeminist Entanglements

Explores the philosophical framework of Ecological Feminism and how the concept has changed, and where it is heading. Explores a different outlook on politics, spirituality, and societal relations regarding women and the environment.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Walks with friends

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Plan to find an internship/career in Environmental Sustainability.

# Shannon Bieniek

**CONCENTRATION:** Marine Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Andia Chaves Fonnegra

**THESIS:** Microhabitat Occupation Patterns of Cryptobenthic Reef Fish and Brittle Stars on the Sponge *Callyspongia aculeata*

Analysis of the location preferences and interactions of the brittle star, *Ophiothrix suensonii*, in the presence of each other and cryptobenthic reef fishes.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Semester By The Sea.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Will pursue a Master's degree in geosciences with a geographic information systems focus. I am currently an intern at the Gulf Archaeology Research Institute, and will be working as a research assistant for them after graduating.

# Kristina Boutros

**CONCENTRATION:** Cellular Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Erik Duboué

**THESIS:** Assessing the Long-term Neuronatomical Effects of Early Life Stress in Adult Zebrafish

This thesis examines the effects of early life stress (ELS) on adult zebrafish brain morphology, focusing on region-specific volumetric changes. Using whole-brain tissue clearing, imaging, and atlas registration, brain region volumes in stressed zebrafish were quantified. This offers insights into the long-term impact of ELS on brain anatomy and its relevance to neurological disorders.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Walking with my friends around campus when there is a sunset.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Planning to go to medical school

# Anna Briscoe

**CONCENTRATION:** Business

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Zachary Ferrara

**THESIS:** An Economic Analysis of Sustainability Efforts in the Personal Care and Cosmetics Industry

Sustainability has become a topic of interest in the personal care and cosmetic industry due to current climate crises and increased consumer awareness. While many definitions of sustainability exist, this paper focuses on sustainability from economic, environmental, and societal perspectives. In recent years, interest in understanding how sustainability efforts impact consumer's willingness to pay and a firm's long term success has grown. This research examines current sustainability efforts from top firms in the industry, changes in consumer behavior, and the potential economic long term benefits and drawbacks of these efforts.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory is being an Orientation and Peer Mentor, where I had the opportunity to develop lifelong professional connections and friendships.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I am planning on immediately pursuing a career as a commercial real estate agent.

## Spencer Brown

**CONCENTRATION:** Behavioral Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kevin Lanning

**THESIS:** Influence of ASD on Morality

An investigation into how autism changes moral decision making.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Attending the fighting game club and the DND club

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to attend graduate schooling for ABA therapy training.

# Claudia Buda

**CONCENTRATIONS:** Biological Chemistry

**ADVISORS:** Dr. Chitra Chandrasekhar

**THESIS:** Genetic Variation in SLC6A4 and Cytochrome P450 Enzymes: Implications for Personalized Antidepressant Treatment in Major Depressive Disorder

This thesis examines the impact of polymorphisms in SLC6A4 and CYP450 on SSRI pharmacodynamics and pharmacokinetics, explores their potential for guiding personalized antidepressant therapy, and discusses the ethical and practical considerations of implementing pharmacogenomic testing in clinical psychiatry.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** All the times spent in Dr. C's office. Either crying laughing or stressing out, she was always the light at the end of the tunnel.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Pharmacy School to acquire Pharm.D degree, while continuing to work in the pharmacy strengthening my skills.

# David Carmenate

**CONCENTRATION:** Philosophy and Economics

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Keith Jakee

**THESIS:** Truth Under Siege: The Systemic Suppression of Intellectual Freedom in Marxist Cuba

My thesis examines how the Cuban state's control over speech and information after 1959 reshaped intellectual life and constrained the production of knowledge. It analyzes key institutional mechanisms, including Castro's Palabras a los Intelectuales and the 1976 Constitution, and interprets them through the theoretical frameworks of Hayek and public choice scholars such as Buchanan, Mueller, and Tullock. The study argues that monopolizing truth through centralized authority suppresses dissent and ultimately leads to intellectual stagnation.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** The debates and conversations I've had throughout the years.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to attend law school after graduation and pursue a J.D. Before beginning that path, I will be taking a gap year to prepare thoroughly for the LSAT and strengthen my applications. During that time, I will also be working with an economics-focused nonprofit while continuing to develop several personal and professional ventures of my own. Overall, my post-graduation plan is to use this year both to prepare seriously for law school and to deepen my practical experience in policy, economics, and professional work.

# Crina Ciolacu

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Adam Iglesias

**THESIS:** Cultural Adaptations of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): A Case Study of Anxiety Treatment for Hispanic/Latino Youth

This thesis examines the efficacy of culturally adapted Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Hispanic and Latino youth with anxiety disorders through a review of existing literature and an applied case study.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** The crafting corner where we get to build stuffed animals is always fun, and I look forward to going with my roommates every year.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** After graduation, I plan to apply to Ph.D. programs in psychology to further my studies and pursue a career in clinical practice. In the interim, I am seeking a psychology-related position that will allow me to gain practical experience and continue developing my skills in the field.

# Kacian Clayton

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Tracy Mincer

**THESIS:** Modulating the Plastisphere: Inhibiting Biofilm Formation of *Vibrio* spp.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), approximately 19-23 million tons of plastic are released into the aquatic environment each year. *Vibrio* spp. are diverse gram-negative bacteria that inhabit these environments and can colonize and form biofilms on plastic surfaces. In an age when anthropogenic activity exerts an undeniable influence on ecosystems, elucidating a way to regulate the interactions between plastic and vibrios is essential.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory has been establishing the WHC Pre-Dental Society, which has allowed me to bring together like-minded individuals!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** The University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine

# Jadyn Cooper

**CONCENTRATION:** Law and Society and Economics

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Mark Tunick

**THESIS:** Corporate Personhood and the Scope of Constitutional Rights

I argue that for-profit corporations, as artificial entities, lack the capacities for personhood and moral agency, including the capacity to express speech or exercise religion, without the use of a human agent. Since corporations are not moral agents, they don't possess rights inherently and shouldn't be granted constitutional rights to freedom of speech or religion.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** The Spring Formal where the Final Four Game played! Go Owls!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending a J.D. program starting this upcoming fall.

# Cali Crossman

**CONCENTRATION:** Business

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Keith Jakee

**THESIS:** Invisible Power Through Digital Identification and Digital Commerce

As technology advances, new identification systems such as Real IDs in the United States and Digital IDs in the United Kingdom have emerged alongside the rise of digital commerce. While these systems offer efficiency, they have also raised concerns about privacy, security, and increasing government access to individuals' financial activity. The growing integration of digital identification and digital commerce highlights potential power imbalances between individuals and the state.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory was watching the sunrise at the beach the morning after I moved in Freshman year. This moment was filled with young, blissful hope for the future, a feeling I hope to carry with me always.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** After graduation, I will remain in the area and continue developing my career in my current managerial role. I will also be assisting in the start-up of a local growth equity firm that specializes in service-based businesses, where I hope to gain hands-on experience in business development and operations while contributing to its early growth.

# Nahila Davis

**CONCENTRATION:** Cellular Neuroscience and Spanish

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Casey Spencer and Dr. Carmen Cañete Quesada

**THESIS 1:** Glia Regulate Motor Circuit Excitability Through a Cell Subtype and Spatial-Specific Manner

A study of glial subtypes in the *Drosophila* ventral nerve cord and their roles in potassium buffering, specifically through the presence of inwardly rectifying potassium channels.

**THESIS 2:** Messages of suffering, injustice, and peace in the recreations of *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso

An investigation into recreations of the famous anti-war painting *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso and how said recreations reflect the messages of different times and cultures in light of their suffering.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Doing experiments in the lab

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Obtaining an MSH in Kinesiology and Lifestyle Medicine at the University of North Florida

# Sophia De Almeida Ferreira

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Nancy Aaron Jones

**THESIS:** Infant Salivary Cortisol and Internalizing Behaviors

Our study explores how maternal infant cortisol patterns relate to infant soothability in early development. We focus on whether infants with lower, more regulated cortisol patterns are rated as more soothable and show stronger alignment with maternal cortisol, which may help reduce the effects of maternal stress. By examining these relationships, the study aims to better understand early factors that support emotional regulation in infancy.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite WHC memory was the lab visits at the Baby BEAR lab, where I got to interact and play with the babies.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan on attending dental school, with the goal of specializing in pediatric dentistry.

# Kasmira Dean

**CONCENTRATION:** Medical Humanities

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Wairimū Njambi

**THESIS:** Institutionalizing Paternalism: American Maternal Mortality and the Subordination of Midwifery

This thesis argues that America's maternal healthcare crisis results from medical paternalism functioning as colonial legacy. Through historical analysis, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence, it demonstrates how European midwifery suppression, American medical racism, and professionalization campaigns created a system built on controlling women's bodies. While Europe reintegrated midwifery and achieved superior outcomes, the US has retained paternalistic and intervention-heavy medical models which don't address maternal mortality crisis properly.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Having elevated conversations with wonderful people.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be taking a gap year and then pursuing a Ph.D .

# Savannah Deutsch

**CONCENTRATION:** Marine Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Jon Moore

**THESIS:** Metamorphosis

Patterns of Predation: Examining Trends of Sea Turtle Egg Predators and Their Effects on Hatchling Success

Predators feeding on sea turtle eggs play a significant role in sea turtle abundance and genetic diversity. Patterns of egg predation have previously been studied; however, shifts in predator composition over time and quantified levels of predator impacts through direct take and the reduction of hatchling success remain unclear. This honors thesis analyzes the type and abundance of sea turtle egg predators in South Florida and determines which predators are most impactful to sea turtle nests. All predation events from 2007-2024 were recorded on a 9.5-mile stretch of beach in South Florida. Preliminary results show a significant shift in primary predator type from raccoons to canids. Raccoons and canids also result in the greatest reduction in hatchling success. This implies a shift in targeted mitigation techniques from raccoon to canid predation would benefit the continued restoration efforts of sea turtle populations.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Going on walks with people! The result was always learning something new about someone or a spontaneous adventure!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** After graduation I'll be working as a seasonal field research technician at Loggerhead Marinelife Center conducting sea turtle nesting surveys and excavations.

# Emily Dorairaj

**CONCENTRATION:** Cellular Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Catherine Trivigno

**THESIS:** Tree Shrew Visual Psychophysics: Trends and Limits of Object Length Discrimination

The ability to process visual information informs how we perceive the world and behave in response to environmental stimuli. Estimating object size serves an important function of vision and allows us to form a stable and coherent representation of the world as it changes and we move through it. Here we assess the validity of the tree shrew (a highly visual mammal closely related to primates) as a model to study this behavior, and ultimately correlate it with brain activity. We trained tree shrews in a Go/No-Go length discrimination task to evaluate their capacity to report differences in bar length. We found that animals can discriminate more precisely between smaller stimuli, and that this threshold scales with stimulus size. This finding mirrors what has been found in humans, and establishes the tree shrew as a suitable candidate for investigating the neural circuitry that mediates this behavior.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Last October, I helped lead a group of Honors College volunteers for a SAVI event named Chef for a Day, which was generously funded by Dean Perry. During the event, we prepared a meal for dozens of families who were staying at the local Quantum House while their children received long-term medical care. The cooking kept us constantly moving that morning, but as the lunch bell rang and we took a second to rest, it was incredibly meaningful to see the families enjoying the meal and feeling supported during a difficult time.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be pursuing my M.D. in the Mayo Clinic Alix School of Medicine.

# Jenna Duke

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kevin Lanning

**THESIS:** Giftedness and Psychopathology: A Review

This review looks at how giftedness is defined and whether gifted people have more mental health issues than others. While some studies show they face challenges like anxiety or perfectionism, the results are mixed and conflicting. Overall, most research today finds they are generally not more vulnerable than others, and that the relationship between giftedness and psychopathology depends on the situation.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory is going to Universal Studios with my friends.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be most likely taking a gap year and then applying for MA programs in Mental Health Counseling.

# Angelina Emerson

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology

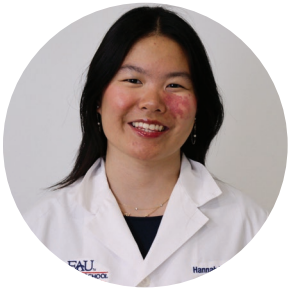
**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kevin Lanning

**THESIS:** From Sleep to Synucleinopathies: REM Sleep Behavior Disorder as an Indicator of Neurodegeneration

I propose that REM Sleep Behavior Disorder should be recognized as a clinical marker of developing neurodegeneration rather than an idiopathic condition. Focusing on REM Sleep Behavior Disorder refines our understanding of disease progression in Dementia with Lewy bodies and may enable targeted interventions before significant decline occurs.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Spending entire days in the library :)

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I have accepted a full-time lab research assitant position in the Blakley lab, right at FAU's SNBI! I plan to start as soon as I graduate. I intend to gain experience and mentorship to prepare me for applying to PhD programs in neuroscience, which I plan to pursue next year.



# Hannah Epstein

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology on the Pre-Medical Track

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Conrad Toepfer

**THESIS:** From Scan to Scale: Quantifying Maturity Effects and 3D Denticle Morphology in Bonnethead Sharks

My thesis investigates how dermal denticle morphology in bonnethead sharks varies with development and body region, using both 2D and 3D approaches through scanning electron microscopy and micro-CT scanning, respectively.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory was presenting my research for the first time!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to pursue a Master of Public Health following graduation. I am currently making my final decision between Columbia University and New York University. After completing my Master's, I intend to pursue medical school and a career in medicine.

# Seth Farber

**CONCENTRATION:** Chemistry

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Daniel T. de Lill

**THESIS:** Worldbuilding as an Engine for Discovery and Innovation

Using worldbuilding as a means to explore concepts in quantum mechanics and astrophysics to build a world for a story to exist in.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Being an organic chemistry lab teaching assistant

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Find a job and make money while making the world a more sustainable, welcoming place for everyone.

# India Fennell

**CONCENTRATION:** Philosophy

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Mark Tunick

**THESIS:** The Cultivation of Virtue in a Liberal Democracy

My thesis argues that the stability of a liberal democracy depends on the intellectual character of its citizens. It examines how the U.S. public education system prioritizes economic outcomes over the intellectual virtues necessary for democratic life. Drawing on classical and modern political philosophy, the project argues that integrating philosophy into public education can help cultivate virtues such as intellectual humility, open-mindedness, empathy, and reasonableness that sustain a flourishing democracy.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory has been the class discussions. Being able to openly debate ideas, question assumptions, and engage with complex philosophical arguments with other students has been the most meaningful part of my experience.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to study for my LSATs and attend law school fall of 2027.

# Gabriella Floyd

**CONCENTRATION:** Law and Society

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Keith Jakee

**THESIS:** Common Issues: A Coasian Analysis of Camping Bans

My thesis applies an economic analysis to camping bans to decide the most efficient allocation of the property rights. The analysis used is Ronald Coase's normative theory, which can be used to prescribe policy.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** CarnivOwl and kayaking at Cocoa Beach!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan on attending law school after graduation, but have not decided where yet. In the summer, I have an internship with the FBI lined up.

# Emma Flynn

**CONCENTRATION:** English Literature

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Michael Harrawood

**THESIS:** Beyond the Other: Feminist Subjectivity and the Remnants of Patriarchy in Jacqueline Harpman's *I Who Have Never Known Men*

This thesis examines how Jacqueline Harpman's *I Who Have Never Known Men* explores memory and female identity in the aftermath of catastrophe. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's idea of woman as "Other" and Judith Butler's work on gender as a learned and repeated construct, this thesis argues that Harpman reveals that patriarchal ways of thinking can survive even when the social institutions that once enforced them are gone. Ultimately, this thesis contends that Harpman challenges the idea that gender is either unavoidable or easily escaped, asking instead what forms of female selfhood can exist when the past no longer provides a stable framework for identity.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My study abroad in Madrid, Spain!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending an MA program after a gap year.

# Gavin Fuerte

**CONCENTRATION:** Biological/Physical Sciences

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Conrad Toepfer

**THESIS:** How Dementia Erodes Minds and Relationships

A paper and video game combo thesis. The paper provides a scientific and clinical understanding of what causes the diseases and disorders encompassed in the term "dementia" and how they affect the brain. The game provides a simulated experience of how the person with dementia deteriorates and how their relationships deteriorate as well.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memories are the times I have felt triumph. Every moment hard work has paid off and all the times that showing up to support my peers has been recognized and appreciated. All of the skills I've learned and honed during my time here and all of the knowledge I have amassed and will take with me.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to take a gap year and work at Jupiter Medical Center before I go to medical school.

# Aiden Geleta

**CONCENTRATION:** Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Casey Spencer

**THESIS:** C1q-Dependent Microglia Regulation by the Extracellular Matrix

Perineuronal nets (PNNs) are specialized extracellular matrix structures that ensheathe neurons and play a critical role in regulating synaptic stability and plasticity. My thesis investigates how PNNs interact with C1q, a complement protein that initiates microglia-mediated synaptic pruning and is implicated in neurodegenerative diseases.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** All of my favorite memories come from working as program board assistant for two years. I really enjoyed working collaboratively setting up spring formal, especially our struggle to set up the balloon arch last year.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Master's program in Neuroscience and Education at Teachers College of Columbia

# Amari Gelin

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Laura Vernon

**THESIS:** The Effects of Resiliency, Perceived Social Support, and Media Exposure on Mental Health in a Latino Population

My thesis looks at the constructs of resilience, perceived social support, media exposure and how each individually correlates with different mental illnesses. We are assessing these relationships in a primarily Hispanic population as the focus of research in the past about these concepts has focused on primarily American and Western European populations.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory was being able to participate in the study abroad program and visiting Spain for a month.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** My plans after graduation are to attend graduate school and eventually get my Ph.D. to become a clinical psychologist.

# Austin George

**CONCENTRATION:** Biological Science and Cellular Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Claire Rice

**THESIS:** Age-Dependent Neural Decline in Audition in a 3xTg Alzheimer's Mouse Model

In Alzheimer's disease, age-related changes in auditory processing are examined using prepulse inhibition (PPI) and startle response in a 3xTg mouse model, with analysis of NAD as a potential biomarker.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Having a great time at Cocoa Beach and later going bioluminescent kayaking.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I am applying this cycle to medical school and during my gap year I plan to work and continue doing research.

# Reese Gomez

**CONCENTRATION:** Mathematics

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Terje Hill

**THESIS:** Neural Networks: Mathematical Foundations and Perspectives of Analysis

An introduction to the mathematical foundations and operations of a neural networks, and an exploration of modes of analysis in very large networks. Includes an introduction to Fourier and dynamical systems analysis, which are applied to networks with width and depth approaching infinity.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Meeting my best friends

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I am planning on pursuing math teaching until I figure out what field I would like to do my graduate studies in.

# Shyla Grant

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Tracy Mincer

**THESIS:** Understanding Microbial Adhesion to Hydrophobic Surfaces

With the increase in marine plastics, there is a novel abiotic surface for bacterial biofilm formation. This study focuses on the Mannose-Sensitive Hemagglutinin (MSHA) operon, specifically the mshA gene, which encodes the fiber responsible for adhering to plastics. By integrating AI-generated protein structures with adhesion assays, phylogeny, and protein modeling, this project characterizes mshA sequences and evaluates AI-predicted amino acid sequences.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Getting to present with all of my peers at the Wilkes Symposium.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending dental school at Oregon Health and Science University.

# Isabella Hoge-Mills

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Conrad Toepfer

**THESIS:** Brain Versus Blood in Cases of Phenylketonuria

Phenylketonuria is a rare, inherited metabolic disorder where the human body is unable to properly metabolize the amino acid, phenylalanine, which causes it to build up to toxic levels in the brain. This leads to intellectual disability, seizures, and countless other issues if left untreated. Caused by a genetic change to the production of phenylalanine hydroxylase (PAH) that helps break down phenylalanine, this is a serious and lifelong condition that requires a strict, low-protein diet to prevent these severe symptoms. The future PKU research looks for personalized treatments, focused on gene therapy and gene editing to correct the underlying genetic defect.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Study Abroad Spain July 2024

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending graduate school at Charleston Southern University to earn my doctorate in physical therapy.

# Patton Horton

**CONCENTRATION:** Marine Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Jon Moore

**THESIS:** *Howellidae* of the Gulf of Mexico

A study on the morphological development of pelagic basslets with notes on vertical migration and rate extensions for two species.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Going to the Semester by The Sea program at Harbor Branch

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Working as a seasonal technician for salmon hatcheries in Alaska before looking at various master's degree programs in Marine Ecology.

# James Ireland

**CONCENTRATIONS:** English Literature

**ADVISORS:** Dr. Sondra Washington

**THESIS:** Zora Neale Hurston and Deconstructing the Licentious and Shiftless Portrayals of African American Women

In this paper, I will argue that Zora Neale Hurston, primarily through *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, and a few short stories, pushes back against the shiftless Mammy and the licentious Jezebel used to denigrate African American women. I will begin my paper by showing the origins of these stereotypes, from the physical torment of Black women during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, into the verbal and visual propaganda of the Jim Crow era and modern age. Then, I will formally introduce Hurston, her rural background, and her goals to illuminate Black people, focusing less on the hardships of Black women and more on their strengths and individuality. Finally, I will use her texts to validate my thesis that she challenges shiftless, licentious preconceptions of Black women through her numerous earnest depictions and challenges traditional gender roles that subjugated African American women. I will do so by highlighting her attempts to shift gender roles in "Their Eyes Were Watching God" and her unwavering support of spreading collective Black Joy among Black women across all her works.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Being involved with the Ultimate Frisbee Club

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** As of right now, I don't have specific schools in mind. However, I plan to enroll in law school in 2027 with the hope of earning my master's degree.

## Mai'Shuyn Jeffers

**CONCENTRATION:** International Studies

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Timothy Steigenga

**THESIS:** The Impact of Trauma in Guatemalan Transnational Families: A Policy Analysis and Critique

My thesis details how immigration among transnational Guatemalan families is fraught process from their home country and up to the United States due to the lack of institutions in place. Consequently, Guatemalan fail to fulfill their economic goals because of inaccessibility to socioeconomic growth due to U.S. immigration legislature and the lack of opportunities in Guatemala. I use interviews from Guatemalan migrants living in Jupiter to explain how the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection is a potential policy solution that offer Guatemalan transnational families the institution they need to reduce trauma and provide security for migration.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite memory at the Honors College is the competition to make stuff animals in the burrow and the late-night breakfast.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to attend graduate school while working a part time job.

# Ella Karakadze

**CONCENTRATION:** Marine Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Andia Chaves-Fonnegra

**THESIS:** Infauna Diversity in Sponges with Different Microbial Abundances and Microhabitat Interactions

This honors thesis evaluated the extent to which demosponges *Aplysina cauliformis* (HMA) and *Niphates erecta* (LMA) from Bocas del Toro, Panama, support infaunal reef biodiversity when solitary, interacting with other sponges or scleractinian corals. As coral cover declines and sponges increasingly dominate reefs, patterns suggest that sponge-associated infauna may alter ecosystem structure. Understanding these relationships provides insight into how reef biodiversity may reorganize under changing environmental conditions.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Semester by the Sea and getting to meet so many wonderful people!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan on attending FAU graduate school under the supervision of Dr. Andia Chaves-Fonnegra and complete my master's degree! I look forward to continue working with her as well as the rest of my amazing lab members.

# Jahchur Kim

**CONCENTRATION:** Behavioral Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Casey Spencer

**THESIS:** Transcriptional Response to Estrogen Receptor Ligands in Tamoxifen-Resistant Breast Cancer Cells

Breast cancer resistance mechanisms continue to pose challenges in the effective treatment of estrogen receptor (ER) positive tumors. ESR1 mutations such as Y537S promote ligand-independent transcriptional activity, driving endocrine resistance and reducing efficacy of conventional treatments like tamoxifen. To further understand underlying resistance mechanisms, we investigated transcriptional responses in MCF-7-CRISPR-ER-Y537S cells treated with novel synthetic adamantyl series ER antagonist compounds. Using RNA-seq and regression analyses, we were able to identify and correlate transcriptional responses with proliferative ability.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Attending CarnivOWL was the highlight of each year and remains as one of my favorite memories of the Honors College.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to pursue graduate studies in nursing.

# Carolann Lancaster

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Julie Earles

**THESIS:** Broken Beyond Mirrors: Reconstructing Identify, Agency, and Academic Success for College Students with Dyslexia Through Assistive Technology: A Literary Review of Psychological and Functional Outcomes in Higher Education

My thesis is a literary review of both psychological and functional outcomes of dyslexia in higher education.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite college memory was meeting the friends who made the experience unforgettable. The connections I made during that time mean more to me than any single event.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** After graduation, I plan to pursue a master's degree in psychology. I am currently exploring different programs, and my goal is to work as a therapist helping adults.

## James Lee

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISORS:** Dr. Casey Spencer

**THESIS:** An In-silico Investigation of Induced Target Neural Activity through Simulation-based Inference Informed Deep Brain Stimulation

Using a computer-based Hodgkin–Huxley model, we show that Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) in hippocampal CA1 mimics real experimental results, with stronger, faster depolarization at 140 Hz and slower buildup at 40 Hz, along with changes in firing rates. Using Simulation-Based Inference (SBI), we also identify which stimulation settings can reduce or stop neuron firing.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Playing ResFest and Frisbee with my friends

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Going to Medical School at UCF, MD Program

# Brianna Letterio

**CONCENTRATION:** Business

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kanybek Nur-tegin

**THESIS:** From Apps to Assets: How Social Media and Mobile Trading Fueled Volatility in GameStop and AMC

This thesis examines how mobile trading platforms and social media communities influenced retail investor behavior during the volatility events surrounding GameStop and AMC. Focusing on investors aged eighteen to twenty-five, the study analyzes how gamified app design, Reddit-driven herd behavior, and brokerage incentives contributed to rapid price surges and extreme short-term volatility. Using these two meme stocks as case studies, the paper argues that digital platforms amplified collective action and speculative risk-taking in ways that disrupted traditional market dynamics. The findings highlight broader implications for investor protection, market stability, and the regulation of app-based trading in the digital age.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** TV nights with Kasey!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be completing Boston University's Financial Planning program!

# Yvanna Lovera

**CONCENTRATION:** Political Science

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kevin Lanning

**THESIS:** Political Misinformation: Social Media & Its Impact on Democracy

My thesis focuses on political misinformation in social media and how it impacts trust in institutions and overall democracy.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Serving the student body through student government

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be pursuing my JD degree.

# Justin Macalusco

**CONCENTRATION:** History

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Christopher Strain

**THESIS:** Videogames as Valuable Media in the Arts, Literature, and Humanities

Some scholars have begun to investigate whether video games hold any value beyond just entertainment. By looking at the history of video game development, trends begin to show that developers have intentions beyond just entertainment when creating video games. Artistic expression, narrative storytelling, and scholarship have all become strong motivating factors for the creation of new video games. Video games, as a medium, have surpassed the common understanding that they are purely for entertainment, they have become strong storytelling devices that can represent different creative intentions. There are concerns, including that video games' depiction of violence could restrain any value, or that video games could have ill effects like anti-social behavior or reduce academic performance. These concerns are nullified by diversification of video game development and understanding of video games as a medium rather than just entertainment.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Meeting the many different, wonderful people throughout the years, both student and professors alike.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Job searching. I want to look for professional work using my degree, with hopes of saving money for graduate school and Ph.D. program in the future.

# Madison McAdoo

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kelsie Bernot and Tracy Mincer

**THESIS:** Fungal Communities Living Inside Gopher Tortoise Burrow Microhabitats

I conducted a study focused on the fungal communities in Gopher Tortoise burrows and how they differ at varying depths within the burrows. I collected soil samples from different depths and parts of multiple burrows, isolated DNA, amplified 18S rRNA genes, performed barcoding, conducted long-read metagenomic DNA sequencing, and performed phylogenetic analysis.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory is when I presented my thesis at Symposium.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will continue my education after graduation, earning the Pharmaceutical Technology Certificate at FAU Boca and applying to pharmacology schools to work toward my PharmD.

# Christina McCabe

**CONCENTRATION:** Transdisiplinary Visual Arts

**ADVISOR:** Annina Ruest, MFA

**THESIS:** Public Art as a Social Process

Public art is often understood as art placed in public places and made visible to everyone. This thesis argues that visibility alone does not make art public. Instead, public art should be understood as a process of social engagement, one that is shaped by participation, and community identity. This thesis has two parts: The first draws on the work of art historians and scholars, to discuss how public art has shifted away from monumental, state-controlled forms toward practices that invite dialogue and collective involvement. The second part includes interviews with individuals working within the public art space in Palm Beach County. These conversations explore how public art is experienced and negotiated in everyday practice. Together, theory and lived experience show that public art is not fixed or neutral, but relational, and tied to how communities see themselves in shared spaces.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I have plans to attend grad school at FAU for licensed clinical social work

# Emily McCurdy

**CONCENTRATION:** Behavioral Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kelsie Bernot

**THESIS:** Neurobiology of Motivation to Engage in Physical Exercise

I searched through various literature to find different brain circuits and systems involved with motivation to exercise. I focused on dopamine pathways, the ventral tegmental area, and nucleus accumbens. I also incorporated various behavioral and motivational theories to connect neurobiology to psychology. I concluded my thesis with a call to differentiate motivational interventions based on individual differences in biology and preferences.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Going to Universal with my dorm mates and having a great time on the rides.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan on going to the Neuroscience Ph.D. program at FAU in Boca. I plan on working or interning in a lab or psychological setting alongside my schooling.

# Ian McMillan

**CONCENTRATION:** Political Science

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Christopher Strain

**THESIS:** Repackaging Reform: Realities of the Department of Governmental Efficiency

Compares the objectives of the Department of Governmental Efficiency (DOGE) and the realities of what it actually accomplished.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Universal Trip 2025/2026

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Gap year and internships into JD.

# Daniela Metianu

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology and Mathematics

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Casey Spencer and Dr. Warren McGovern

**THESIS:** Comparative Analysis of Neural Network Disruption in Alzheimer's Disease, Lewy Body Dementia, and Parkinson's Disease

Neurodegenerative diseases are a progressive disruption of neural pathways that leads to cognitive, behavioral, and motor impairments. Alzheimer's disease (AD), Lewy body dementia (LBD), and Parkinson's disease (PD) share overlapping pathological features yet differ substantially in how they alter brain connectivity and deviate from normal neurological function. Despite extensive research on each disorder individually, there's not a known start to how these diseases impact neural networks. This thesis aims to compare AD, LBD, and PD with respect to their effects on neurological pathways, synaptic communication, and functional brain networks, while contrasting these changes with normal brain organization. Conducting a comprehensive review of current literature by, looking at clinical research papers, meta-analysis, and other published literature reviews to employ statistical analyses of neural decline. What causes neurodegenerative diseases is still unknown, however, by synthesizing the findings of the studies, there could be a common ground in supporting the development for more targeted future research.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Going to Spring Formal with my friends :)

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending graduate school at University of Miami. I got into their Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Master's program. After leaving the Honors College, I aspire to get into medical school and become a doctor.

# Camila Millán

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology and Spanish

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Carmen Cañete Quesada and Dr. Kevin Lanning

**THESIS:**

#1: A Psychobiographical Study of Horacio Quiroga: Suicide as a Protagonist in His Stories

#2: El suicidio como tema recurrente en la narrativa de Horacio Quiroga: Un estudio psicobiográfico

Horacio Quiroga is an Uruguayan writer widely known for his short stories, in which death is inevitable, as his characters often die tragically through suicide, illness, or natural causes. His life has fascinated many literary critics due to the many tragic deaths he experienced, leading them to identify parallels between his life and his work. However, critics disagree on how to interpret this relationship, with some viewing such readings as reductionist and others arguing that the parallels justify this approach. This thesis adopts a psychobiographical framework, using Roy Baumeister's theory of suicide as an escape from self and Thomas Joiner's interpersonal theory to analyze the psychological and behavioral patterns of both Quiroga and his characters. This approach ultimately demonstrates that his life and works reflect recurring themes of death and hopelessness.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Wandering aimlessly around campus at night with my friends.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I'm taking a gap year before applying to graduate school. During my gap year, I will be working at the Center for Child Counseling as a Program Specialist.

# Zahava Misshula

**CONCENTRATION:** Mathematics

**ADVISORS:** Dr. Warren McGovern

**THESIS:** A Mathematical Approach to Probability and Statistics

My thesis views probability and statistics from a mathematical perspective.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite memory from the Honors College was getting involved with Ultimate Frisbee Club.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be pursuing a Master of Science in Mathematics at College of Charleston.

# Lizbeth Moncada

**CONCENTRATION:** Biochemistry and Physics

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Yaouen Fily

**THESIS:** Selective Modulation of Function by Leveraged Allostery from the Glucocorticoid Receptor Solvent Channel

My thesis explores how small substitutions to the A-ring of glucocorticoids can influence selectivity in the glucocorticoid receptor (GR), particularly in comparison to the progesterone receptor (PR). Using molecular dynamics simulations, it identifies how ligand-induced conformational changes, especially in the solvent channel, drive allosteric effects and receptor behavior. These findings provide a mechanistic framework for designing selective glucocorticoid therapies with reduced side effects.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Theological discussions with the Catholic Club

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be pursuing an MA in Theology, then applying to medical school.

# Anna Murphy

**CONCENTRATION:** International Studies

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Christopher Ely

**THESIS:** Contemporary Famine as Strategy, not Tragedy: An Applied Analysis of Alex de Waal's Famine Framework

My thesis uses famine scholar Alex de Waal's frameworks of faminogenesis and famine intentionality combined with settler colonial theory to study the resurgence of famines as intentionally produced and inherently political. I apply this interdisciplinary approach to cases of weaponized starvation in ongoing global conflicts.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Meeting and getting to live with my best friends!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I hope to receive my Master's in Gastronomy from Boston University.

# Mallory Neal

**CONCENTRATION:** Marine Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Andia Chaves-Fonnegra

**THESIS:** Infauna Communities in *Aplysina insularis* and *Niphates erecta* Sponges Using eDNA

As thermal stress reduces coral populations, sponges are projected to fulfill the ecological roles formerly filled by stony corals. However, it remains unclear whether variation in sponge microbial abundance influences their contribution to reef biodiversity and ecosystem function. Previous research has documented structural and chemical differences between high microbial abundance (HMA) and low microbial abundance (LMA) sponges; however, few studies have examined whether these differences affect biodiversity support. This thesis examined whether an HMA sponge species, *Aplysina insularis*, and an LMA sponge species, *Niphates erecta*, from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, host distinct infaunal communities. Environmental DNA (eDNA) from water within the sponge aquiferous system was used to characterize infaunal community composition. It is expected that *N. erecta* will host higher infaunal diversity due to reduced chemical defenses. This analysis contributes to our understanding of the ecological roles sponges may fulfill in reefs where they increasingly succeed stony corals.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory is making stuffed animals at Crafting Corner with my roommates during freshman year.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be gaining professional experience before attending graduate school to obtain a master's degree in a field related to marine biology.

# Ryleigh Newman

**CONCENTRATION:** Biological Chemistry and Data Science and Analytics

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Conrad Toepfer and Dr. Terje Hill

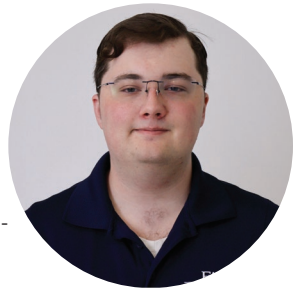
**THESIS:** Uncovering a Novel Neuromuscular Disorder: A Multigenerational Case Study

A three-generation family affected by a progressive hereditary neuropathy resembling Charcot-Marie-Tooth (CMT) disease presents a compelling case study of unresolved genetic etiology. Affected individuals exhibit hallmark features of hereditary motor and sensory neuropathy, including distal limb atrophy, progressive muscle weakness, and sensory involvement. However, despite more than twenty-five years of clinical evaluation and comprehensive genetic testing, no causative variant has been identified, suggesting a disease mechanism beyond the scope of current diagnostic panels. This study integrates detailed clinical phenotyping with whole genome sequencing data from five participants in the family, including three affected and two unaffected individuals. Through systematic computational filtering based on allele frequency and inheritance patterns, targeted with phenotype prediction, candidate variants were progressively refined to identify the most plausible pathogenic drivers. Together, this case-based genomic approach establishes a transparent and replicable framework for investigating genetically unresolved neuromuscular disorders and advancing rare disease discovery through scalable genomic methodologies.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Building close friendships with my professors, enjoying the events in downtown Abacoa, and growing as a person.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Launching a nonprofit healthcare technology startup focused on designing and manufacturing a range of equipment, including complex rehabilitation power wheelchairs, with the mission to improve accessibility innovation.

## Gryffyn Okoee



**CONCENTRATIONS:** History

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Christopher Ely

**THESIS:** Rise and Fall of the Afghan Warlord: Non-State Political Actors in Post-Soviet Afghanistan

The thesis examines the socio-economic-political conditions created by the Soviet-Afghan War and the subsequent failed state period in Afghanistan, and how this enabled the rise of Warlords, non-state-affiliated political actors with military capabilities that seized on the country's instability to acquire territory and power. The thesis examines the events of the Soviet-Afghan War, the conditions that it created that enabled the proliferation of Warlords, the activities of several Warlords during that time period, and the end of the Warlord era, brought about by the Taliban and subsequent United States military involvement.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Assisting people in my work as a Front Desk Staff Worker here at the Honors College.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I hopefully plan to enter the workforce, becoming a teacher in the Palm Beach County school system.

# Caroline Pardini Ribeiro

**CONCENTRATION:** Political Science

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Christopher Ely

**THESIS:** "Law, Memory, and Justice" - Lessons from Spain and Germany's democratic transitions

Spain and Germany are both examples of successful transitions from repressive and authoritarian regimes, into democratic states. Yet, they adopted fundamentally different approaches to constitutional design, memory preservation, and transitional justice. By comparing these cases, this project argues that democratic durability depends not only on political freedoms, but on how effectively states confront past injustices and institutionalize safeguards against authoritarian relapse. Crucially, it finds that international support during transitional periods enable states to peruse accountability without significantly compromising stability.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** March 24, 2026. My fellow classmates and I tabled in front of the dinning hall to let students know how to update their voter registration address and vote in the special election. It was an amazing show of civic engagement and enthusiasm.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will continue to work for newly elected State House Representative Emily Gregory, as she continues campaigning for the November election, and as she participates in the special legislative session for electoral redistricting. I will be applying for law school in the fall.

# Emily Parker

**CONCENTRATION:** Biological/Physical Sciences

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Catherine Trivigno

**THESIS:** The Role of MBLAC1 in Glioblastoma Invasion

Glioblastoma is the most common malignant primary brain tumor in adults and has only a 16-month expected survival. These tumors exhibit increased copper uptake and trafficking, which is utilized to support elevated metabolism for invasion. The gene MBLAC1 has emerged as a regulator of available copper levels, and higher expression is associated with poorer survival and prognosis. By using 3D spheroid co-culture systems, the effects that MBLAC1 and microglial subtypes have on invasion, and possible treatment options using copper chelators, were studied.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Sailing day during freshman year orientation is one of my favorite memories. I was extremely excited that day to try something new thrilling. I feel like it set the stage for the rest of my time at the honors college.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending a graduate master's program to become a Pathologist Assistant. I have not decided on a program yet, but I have applied to Rosalind Franklin, UTMB, Drexel, Old Dominion, Tulane, and West Virginia University.

# Megan Pinsker

**CONCENTRATION:** Marine Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. James K. Wetterer

**THESIS:** Distribution of the Invasive Hybrid Peanut Snail Cerion tridentatum costellata in Southeast Florida

I used iNaturalist to document the distribution of the invasive hybrid peanut snail *Cerion tridentatum costellata* and employed a belt-width transect methodology to compare snail density across three sites: Delray Beach, Boynton Beach, and Fort Pierce. With this data, I hope to help the scientific community better understand how peanut snail abundance differs between the three populations and is affected by dune foliage cover and type. Morphological analyses of individuals from each population will also be conducted.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory was from orientation week, when we all went sailing together up in Martin County.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to take a year off to gather more experience in the broad field of marine biology, both with research, education and outreach and conservation. I do plan to attend graduate school to work towards my M.S. in Biology, but I am still taking my time to look into different schools and programs to find one that best fits my needs.

# Katelyn Ramsahai

**CONCENTRATION:** Biochemistry

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Eugene Smith

**THESIS:** Utilizing the Glutamate Indicator syniGluSnFR to Probe Neuron Astrocyte Communication

Validation of the glutamate biosensor syniGluSnFR through probing neuron astrocyte communication.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Spending time with friends

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Deepen my research skills during a gap year then apply to Ph.D. programs.

# Samantha Reyes

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology and Women's Studies

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Shaina Rowell and Dr. Wairimũ Njambi

**THESIS 1:** Influences of Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Agreeableness on Memory Rehearsal and Fading Affect Bias

The purpose of this research is to assess the role of Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism in emotional regulation (as it relates to the FAB). Participants completed the Big-Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2) to measure their personality.;

**THESIS 2:** Generational Trauma: Tracing the Line from Colonization to Contemporary Trauma

This research investigates the systematic "Othering" most non-white people experienced, drawing a line between European colonization and the imposition of Western ideologies and normative behaviors on all non-Western people.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Meeting my friends

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Northeastern Counseling Psychology Master's Program

# Sheila Rios

**CONCENTRATION:** Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Shaina Rowell

**THESIS:** The Influence of Personality & Rehearsal on the Fading Affect Bias

The Fading Affect Bias is the phenomenon in which emotions linked to an autobiographical memory fade over time, with negative emotions fading more than positive emotions. Previous research has found that social rehearsal, which is done more from people high in extroversion, and private rehearsal, done more from people high in neuroticism, may mediate the fading affect bias. My research focuses on whether those who are higher in extroversion or neuroticism do experience a difference in negative affect fading.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** The times that my son has come to school with me and we play ping pong in the burrow.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** To apply for graduate schools in the summer.

# Delaney Rosenblatt

**CONCENTRATIONS:** Political Science

**ADVISORS:** Dr. Timothy Steigenga

**THESIS:** From Contras to Christian Nationalists: Strategic Mobilization of American Evangelicals for Reagan-Era Foreign Policy

When the Reagan administration couldn't get the Vatican on board with its Central America policy, it turned to American Evangelical networks instead. Officials worked through churches, religious broadcasters, and private fundraising channels to frame U.S. military involvement in Nicaragua as a fight for Christian values, effectively turning religious communities into political allies. This thesis argues that religion was deliberately used as a foreign policy tool, and that the ties forged during this period between evangelical Christianity and American politics continue to influence our world today.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Spending time with all of the brilliant, kind and creative people the Honors College has introduced me to. Whether in the Burrow playing Risk, at Howley's after a trip to the art museum, registering students to vote, or even just watching movies with my roomates, my experience here has been defined, above all, by the people.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** After graduation, I will be moving to Atlanta to be a middle school English teacher. In the distant future, I would like to pursue a PhD in either Political Science or Sociology, and do my part in helping the moral arc of the universe bend towards justice.

## Kattaryna Salzman

**CONCENTRATION:** Interdisciplinary Mathematics: Electrical Engineering

**ADVISOR:** Annina Ruest, MFA

**THESIS:** A Beginner Friendly Immersive Playspace For Tabletop Role-playing Games

The thesis discusses a beginner friendly portable digital playspace for tabletop roleplaying games like Dungeons and Dragons (DnD). The design consists of a software for a tablet and a box. The software displays a map with interactable features like sound effects and touchscreen map interaction. The box contains the tablet and other storables to add organization and portability. My desire was to create a simple tool that would add immersion to beginner play sessions without overcomplicating an already time intensive and detailed game.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite memories at the Honors College were the times I spend in engaging classes with great teachers. I loved my team-taught classes and any class I took with Dr. Hill, Professor Cassanetti, Dr. Njambi, and Dr. Fewkes.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I intend to get my Master's in Electrical Engineering. After that my plan to use the stability of the engineering industry to pursue my dream of becoming a fantasy author.

# Panteha Sartipi

**CONCENTRATION:** Cellular Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Casey Spencer

**THESIS:** Glia-Dependent Potassium Buffering Modulates Motor Circuit Function in *Drosophila*

Glial subtype-specific perturbations of Irk2 and Irk3 show that ALGs, EGs, and other glia require both channels to regulate circuit excitability. These subtypes help limit changes in potassium equilibrium potential, which is essential for proper motor circuit function.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Getting a facial and head massage during stress-less week.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be working as a phlebotomist and studying for the MCAT. Maybe continuing research.

# Anish Sathish

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Erik Duboué

**THESIS:** Activity-Dependent Cleavage of Neuroligin-1 as a Synaptic Mechanism Underlying Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Literature Review

My research and literature review focuses on the cleavage of Neuroligan-1, a protein that gets essentially cut or reshaped in response to brain activity. We discovered that when this "cutting" process goes wrong, it disrupts how neurons communicate, providing a critical new window into the biological origins of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and opening doors for future medical breakthroughs.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Staying up all night and walking to the McDonald's on Military Trail at 5 a.m.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending medical school after a gap year where I plan on working as a clinical research coordinator.

# Caitlyn Seal

**CONCENTRATION:** Art

**ADVISOR:** Annina Ruest, MFA

**THESIS:** *Insta*-ferno

An interdisciplinary artistic study on social media and phone addiction designed in parallel to Dante Alighieri's The Divine Comedy.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My study abroad in Madrid, Spain

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to move to Madrid, Spain and continue my education.

# Abigail Shepard

**CONCENTRATION:** Cellular Neuroscience and Interdisciplinary Mathematics

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Casey Spencer and Dr. Terje Hill

**THESIS:** Investigating Stimulus Orientation Selectivity and Size in the Visual Cortex: A Computational Approach

My thesis investigates orientation selectivity in the visual cortex of the tree shrew. Using a range of computational methods, the study analyzes neural responses to different stimulus orientations and evaluates the accuracy of these approaches in measuring orientation tuning. The findings aim to improve understanding of how visual information is processed and represented in the cortex.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Moving into the dorms

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Medical school - I haven't decided where, but have been accepted in two places.

## Isabelle Solages

**CONCENTRATION:** Medical Humanities and Cellular Neuroscience

**ADVISORS:** Dr. Yaouen Fily

**THESIS:** Reinforcement Learning Deficits in a Shank3 Autism Model due to Dopaminergic Dysfunction

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Spending time with my friends and getting to know the faculty!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Next year, I will be pursuing a masters in Medical Anthropology.

# Vincent Stafford


**CONCENTRATION:** Interdisciplinary Mathematical Sciences

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Jason Hedetniemi

**THESIS:** Algorithms for Domination in Graphs

The Domination Number is a graph theoretic invariant that has a wide range of applications, primarily in logistics. This invariant however, is difficult to calculate directly on general graphs. Furthermore, the problem of finding minimum dominating sets and their respective domination number is an NP-Complete problem, indicating that no efficient direct methods exist for this problem unless P=NP. We overview alternative approximate methods for finding minimum dominating set, from Linear Programming Relaxations to Baker's Method on Planar Graphs and review literature to find their theoretic complexity bounds.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory was the first ResFest I had as a Resident Assistant. I did not have enough players for volleyball, so I had to team up with another team and play with them on the field. Despite having never played vollyball, our team got second place, and more importantly, I made friends with the team members I had that day, and we are still acquaintances to this day.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Over the summer, I am working in collaboration with the United States Air Force at their Sensors Directorate Internship Program in Dayton, Ohio. After the conclusion of this internship program I will begin my Ph.D. in Mathematics. I have been accepted into three graduate schools so far (Clemson, USF, and UCF) and have yet to decide which program I will go to.

# Rebecca Stanley

**CONCENTRATION:** Creative Writing

**ADVISOR:** Nico Cassanetti, MFA

**THESIS:** You Are Here, Now, Breathing

The purpose of my thesis is to prove that growth and healing are intrinsically tied to the writing life by showcasing a portfolio of my work---a mixture of creative nonfiction, academic, and reflective craft essays---written and revised with the intention of actualizing some honest depiction of myself: my voice, my collected experiences, and my place in the larger world.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Whenever I got stressed, I'd lay down in the grass with a few good friends. We'd watch the clouds take shape above us, feel the wind move through our hair and up to the trees. Around us, the beetles and dragonflies hummed, wings glittering in the sun.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I plan to build a music-filled, trinket-covered home with the friends who encourage me most to get outside and make art. I will continue working as an Environmental Educator at Busch Wildlife Sanctuary, teaching others to care for and conserve Florida's native flora and fauna.

# Ethan Stark

**CONCENTRATION:** Business

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Keith Jakee

**THESIS:** A Critique of Using SSB Bans to Bring Health Equity Improvements

My thesis is a critique of microsimulation models that simulate bans on sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) within the SNAP program.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** The intramural volleyball league

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Firefighter/EMT school, pole vault coaching, and personal training.

## Kasey Steele

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Kelsie Bernot

**THESIS:** Balancing Innovation and Regulation: Legal Implications of Stem Cell Research

Human pluripotent stem cell research faces the challenge of balancing scientific innovation with legal and ethical regulations. With advances in stem cell biology, regulatory frameworks shape research practices and clinical applications. The findings suggest that while regulatory oversight promotes safety and ethical approaches, it can delay progress.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Meeting my best friend, Bri.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be attending law school.

# Michael Stouffer

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Shaina Rowell

**THESIS:** A Literature Review on Lev Vygotsky's Cognitive Development of Higher Mental Functions as Applied to Autism Spectrum Disorder

My thesis examines Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, in which cognition is socially molded and historically situated, with language functioning as the primary mediational tool in cognitive development. It then applies this framework to autism spectrum disorder, proposing that, given the variations in social experiences of autistic individuals, visual imagery may serve as an alternative mediational tool through which autistic individuals organize and develop cognition.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** It was late at night, and a group of us decided to go to Narnia.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I'm applying to psychology master's programs, and am also a paid lab assistant in the WAVES Lab.

# Erica Torres

**CONCENTRATION:** Environmental Studies

**ADVISOR:** Nicole Cassanetti, MFA

**THESIS:** Wisdom of the Wetlands: Emotional Entanglement with the Natural World & Creativity in Ecological Restoration

A series of creative nonfiction essays about my personal relationship with nature, its regenerative functions and impact on culture, and how we can learn from it to create more intuitive radical ecological restoration methods.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Probably the sleepless nights working on projects with my friends, as we deliriously complete our work during finals week, bond over the shared stress, and motivate each other to stay awake.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I will be taking a gap year to grow my skill set and acquire some experience in the field of environmental conservation. I plan to nurture my hobbies during this time as well, and produce a volume of art and written works. Afterwards, I will be happy to go back to school to acquire my masters degree in Environmental Science, and see where my career takes me.

# Dionisia Touzin

**CONCENTRATION:** Biology

**ADVISORS:** Dr. Kelsie Bernot

**THESIS:** Induced Senescence in HPASMCs: Implications for the Treatment of Pulmonary Vascular Disease

Human pulmonary arterial smooth muscle cells (HPASMCs) are highly implicated in the pathophysiology of pulmonary vascular disease (PVD), contributing to vascular remodeling, excessive proliferation, altered calcium dynamics, and resistance to cell death. Doxorubicin, an FDA-approved chemotherapeutic drug, is known to alter calcium handling and induce cellular senescence in cardiovascular cells, but its effects in pulmonary arterial cells remain poorly characterized. We hypothesized that Doxorubicin exposure would induce a senescent phenotype in HPASMCs. To test this, we used an in vitro approach comparing naïve vehicle-treated controls with HPASMCs treated with Doxorubicin at 0.1, 0.25, and 0.5 μM concentrations. Cellular senescence was assessed using senescence-associated □-galactosidase (SA-□-gal) staining, western blot, and was supported by morphological changes characteristic of senescence. These findings will reveal information about pulmonary arterial cells' susceptibility to senescence induction and may help inform future investigations aimed at modulating pathological cell proliferation and vascular remodeling in PVD.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite WHC memories involve my friends, roommates, and all our crazy endeavors: our late-night movies, all-nighter study sessions, and potluck wine-n-dines have all truly nourished me and helped me get through my time here at the Honors College.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** After graduation, I plan to pursue a career in healthcare, particularly in the realm of women's health and midwifery. I'm looking forward to attending graduate nursing programs that will expand my knowledge and prepare me for my dream job!

# Brycelyn Turner

**CONCENTRATION:** Writing

**ADVISORS:** Nicole Cassanetti, MFA

**THESIS:** Fleeing the Flock: Essays on Creation & Deconstructed Faith

"Fleeing the Flock" is a collection of creative nonfiction that explores grief, religion, familial dysfunction, and creation in tandem with meditations on queer identity, body modification, and Greta Gerwig's "Barbie". This portfolio serves as a testament to the power of writing and the ways storytelling shapes our lives.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** I am proud to have taken part in the longstanding tradition of student protest in my time at the Honors College, in the form of both student rallies on campus and dining hall conversations urging FAU President Adam Hasner to withdraw from executive actions such as the 287(g) agreement. It is imperative, now more than ever, that FAU students make enough noise to be heard; my favorite Honors College memories are times when my voice was a part of that roar.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** After graduation, I look forward to officially adopting my calico cat, Shane, and moving with her to the Pacific Northwest. My first novel--currently a collection of journal pages, crochet projects, and playlists that will one day be book-shaped--is coming soon to a bookstore near you.

# Mariam Uddin

**CONCENTRATION:** Cellular Neuroscience

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Robert Stackman

**THESIS:** Membrane Palimitoylated Protein 2 (MPP2) as a Target for Improving Memory in Young Adult and Aged Mice

Previous work has shown that the pharmacological blockade or genetic deletion of synaptic type 2 small conductance Ca2+-activated K+ (SK2) channels enhances hippocampal long-term potentiation (LTP) and memory, while pharmacological activation or genetic over expression of SK2 impairs LTP and memory. MPP2 is the scaffold protein that holds down the SK2 channel and our data suggests that knockdown of MPP2, leads to enhanced non-spatial memory in young adult and aged male and female mice.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** My favorite Honors College memory is playing volleyball during reading days at 2 am with my friends and then the ball getting stuck in the trees while it poured rain.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Applied to MS in integrated medicine at Nova Southeastern University and MS in pharmacology and physiology at UF.

## Saturn Vogeley

**CONCENTRATION:** Anthropology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Jacqueline H. Fewkes

**THESIS:** Rolling Together: Online Collaboration in Tabletop Role-Playing Game Communities

An ethnographic analysis of online TTRPG communities. How the TTRPG hobby has shifted in response to digital tools. How these communities increase accessibility and immersion in TTRPGs. And how online TTRPG communities function as informal peer-based learning environments.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Meeting my roommates freshman year. They are still my closest friends today.

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Work for 1-2 years then go to grad school.

# Karen Walker

**CONCENTRATIONS:** Law and Society

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Mark Tunick

**THESIS:** The Eroding Sixth Amendment: Florida's Rewriting of the Speedy Trial Rule

Florida's Rule 3.191 ensures that every person charged with a crime is brought to trial within a reasonable time frame. I argue that the Florida Supreme Court's 2025 revisions to this rule weaken the Sixth Amendment right to a speedy trial by favoring prosecutorial efficiency over defendants' rights to due process. The revisions strain public defenders' resources and will increase uncertainty for indigent defendants about when their cases will actually be heard, prolonging their incarceration and limiting their access to effective counsel, which will increase the likelihood that they accept guilty pleas regardless of their culpability. Florida's rule change reflects a broader trend in which a concern with efficiency and crime control erodes due process protections provided by the Constitution and diminishes public trust in the criminal justice system. Preserving due process requires reforms that balance efficiency with meaningful protection of defendants' rights.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** CarnivOwl

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** I intend to start law school in August 2027 and am currently preparing for that transition.

## Shelby Wingo

**CONCENTRATION:** Biological Anthropology

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Jacqueline Fewkes

**THESIS:** The Importance of Pedigree in Dog Sports

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** I loved my friends!! Thank you Brianna and Mackenzie for making it great!

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** No idea

## *Amber Wolf*

**CONCENTRATION:** Psychology and Law and Society

**ADVISOR:** Dr. Julie Earles

**THESIS:** Did Eye Really See That?: Eyewitness Testimony and Faulty Memory Recollection Within the Legal System

An investigation into the legal history of eyewitness testimony and the psychological impacts on memory for testimonies.

**FAVORITE HONORS COLLEGE MEMORY:** Hanging with friends

**AFTER GRADUATION PLANS:** Attending grad school for a JD

# Medallion Ceremony Awards 2026

## HARRIET L. WILKES HONORS COLLEGE AWARDS

**Samantha Reyes**
Outstanding Senior

**Joseph Yanan**
Outstanding Junior

**Olivier Mathias**
Outstanding Sophomore

**Guilherme Abeche de Almeida**
Outstanding First Year

**Vincent Stafford**
Outstanding Scholar

**Julianne Binto**
Distinguished Service Award

**Emily Dorairaj**
Distinguished Community Service

# 2026 Outstanding Thesis Awards

**Ashley Arbesfeld**
Advisor: Dr. Catherine Trivigno

**Emily Arbesfeld**
Advisor: Dr. Catherine Trivigno

**Aashni Atkinson**
Advisor: Dr. Chitra Chandrasekhar

**Ian Aviles**
Advisor: Dr. Catherine Trivigno

**Shannon Bieniek**
Advisor: Dr. Andia Chaves-Fonnegra

**David Carmenate**
Advisor: Dr. Benjamin Keoseyan

**Kacian Clayton**
Advisor: Dr. Tracy Mincer

**Lyan Darboys Guerrero**

**Kasmira Dean**
Dr. Wairimū Njambi

Savannah Deutsch
Advisor: Dr. Jon Moore

Emily Dorairaj
Advisor: Dr. Catherine Trivigno

Hannah Epstein
Advisor: Dr. Mark Tunick

Ana Garcia

Shyla Grant
Advisor: Dr. Tracy Mincer

Rebekah Jackson

Elle Karakadze
Advisor: Dr. Andia Chaves-Fonnegra

Brianna Letterio
Advisor: Dr. Kanybek Nur-tegin

Christina McCabe
Advisor: Annina Ruest, MFA

Camila Millán
Advisors: Dr. Carmen Cañete Quesada and Dr. Kevin Lanning

Mallory Neal
Advisor: Dr. Andia Chaves-Fonnegra

Ryleigh Newman
Advisors: Dr. Conrad Toepfer and Dr. Terje Hill

## Emily Parker
Advisor: Dr. Catherine Trivigno

## Samantha Reyes
Advisors: Dr. Shaina Rowell and Dr. Wairimũ Njambi

## Sheila Rios
Advisor: Dr. Shaina Rowell

## Kattaryna Salzman
Advisor: Annina Ruest, MFA

## Panteha Sartipi
Advisor: Dr. Casey Spencer

## Abigail Shepard
Advisors: Dr. Casey Spencer and Dr. Terje Hill

## Isabelle Solages
Advisor: Dr. Yaouen Fily

## Vincent Stafford
Advisor: Dr. Jason Hedetniemi

## Rebecca Stanley
Advisor: Nico Cassanetti, MFA

## Erica Torres
Advisor: Nico Cassanetti, MFA

## Brycelyn Turner
Advisor: Nico Cassanetti, MFA