



At one of the most exciting times in University history, it is my distinct honor to write to you for the first time as the eighth president of Florida Atlantic. While I am new to the role of University President, I am not new to Florida Atlantic or our community. Over the past two decades, my dedication to advancing the goals of this institution has taken shape in many forms — from leading the efforts to establish the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, serving for the past decade on the Dean's Advisory Board for the College of Business, and championing Florida Atlantic's ocean energy initiative which laid the foundation for Florida's Office of Ocean Economy housed on our campus. This deep connection is what inspires my vision for the University's future.



Florida Atlantic is at a pivotal moment and well positioned for bold, transformative growth. Harnessing this extraordinary opportunity to strengthen our student-success focus, fuel groundbreaking research, and accelerate our regional and national impact, I am thrilled to lead Florida Atlantic into its next chapter of excellence and innovation. Inside this issue, I invite you to learn more about the important work being done to help prepare our students for success in life and career.

One thing on which we can all agree: it is an exciting time to be an Owl. Defining our trajectory, this issue's cover story celebrates Florida Atlantic's achievement in earning the esteemed R1: Very High Research Spending and Doctorate Production University designation in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, industry partnerships, and an ambitious spirit of discovery dating back to our founding, our research enterprise has garnered national prestige while making a global impact. We are very proud of this incredible milestone, which creates a launching pad for Florida Atlantic to push the bounds of knowledge creation and real-world applications.

To ensure strong career outcomes for our students, a feature article about Florida Atlantic's Career Center reveals the key factors in closing the gap between graduation and gainful employment. Beyond addressing metrics, the Career Center's Vision 2030 aims to provide strong returns on investment for graduates while playing an active role in workforce development and industry alignment.

Highlighting a game-changing step forward for Florida Atlantic Athletics is a feature story about the historic \$22.5 million agreement with Flagler Credit Union, which secured the naming rights for the University's football stadium. With this partnership, Flagler Credit Union Stadium became the official home of the Owls, fortifying our ties with the local community and opening new doors for athletic excellence.

As thousands of Florida Atlantic graduates prepare to enter the workforce, many others are at the point of exiting it. A feature story about healthy aging shows how researchers from the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine are helping local seniors redefine their retirement years through innovation and engagement.

Throughout these pages, you will find even more dynamic and pioneering stories that reflect the energy, influence and limitless potential of Florida Atlantic. As we write the next chapter of the University's history, we will continue to create a powerful story of transformational student impact and generational change. I look forward to working together to make it a reality.

Go Owls!

Adam Hasner
President

SPRING

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FLORIDA ATLANTIC
UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

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HARNESSING OCEAN ENERGY

Grant Helps Test Power of the Gulf Stream Currents

Florida Atlantic University's Southeast National Marine Renewable Energy Center (SNMREC) secured an \$800,000 grant from the United States Department of Energy's Water Power Technologies Office. This funding aims to advance the readiness of ocean energy technologies, with a focus on harnessing the immense power of the Gulf Stream currents off the coast of Southeast Florida.

SNMREC's pioneering project will establish a feasibility study for an offshore ocean current test facility in Palm Beach County. The project's overarching goal is to enhance the nation's competitiveness in marine energy, boost domestic manufacturing, and create jobs while contributing to clean energy objectives.

SNMREC will collaborate with entities including Lake Worth Beach Electric Utility, 3U Technologies, IDOM Incorporated and the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) on this initiative, which will position Southeast Florida as a global leader in ocean current energy innovation.

"Our vision for a blue energy hub in Southeast Florida represents a significant leap forward in renewable energy technology," said Gregg Fields, Ph.D., vice president for research at Florida Atlantic.

Currently, no active ocean current test facilities exist globally. While some areas – like North Carolina – are potential locations, Southeast Florida offers unique advantages. The Florida Current, a segment of the Gulf Stream constrained by the Bahamian Shelf, flows near



major ports and population centers, making it an ideal candidate for energy generation.

Ocean energy – derived from currents, waves and gradients – is abundant, predictable and consistently available; key traits for utility-scale energy projects. However, developing efficient and cost-effective technologies to capture this energy remains a challenge. SNMREC's planned facility will address these challenges by testing and refining technologies in real-world conditions, reducing technical and financial risks.

Local utilities such as Florida Power & Light and Lake Worth Beach's municipal utility are integral to the project, providing critical grid connections and support. Additionally, the region's infrastructure, including major ports and a skilled workforce, positions it as a hub for marine energy development.

The project's feasibility study will evaluate a grid-connected offshore test facility's technical and economic viability. SNMREC will manage technical requirements, risks and costs, while partners like IDOM and EMEC will contribute expertise in facility design and operational strategies. Stakeholder engagement and a phased construction approach will ensure compatibility with marine energy technologies while minimizing costs and risks.

Since its inception in 2007, SNMREC has been a leader in marine renewable energy, receiving more than \$25 million in funding and achieving milestones such as securing the first U.S. offshore marine energy lease. Based at Florida Atlantic's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, the center is well-positioned to make Southeast Florida a blueprint for ocean current energy innovation.

This project aims to advance renewable energy and deepen understanding of coastal habitats and marine environments, paving the way for a sustainable energy future.





PRIORITIZING COLLABORATION AND TRANSPARENCY

New Dean Leans into Team-oriented Approach

Lewis S. Nelson, M.D., a longtime distinguished leader in academic medicine, was recently appointed the new dean of Florida Atlantic University's Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine. He previously served as chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and has extensive experience in medical education, clinical care, research and health care leadership.

In addition to clinical expertise, Nelson brings strategic business acumen to Florida Atlantic. After earning his M.D. degree from the State University of New York Health Science Center, he received an MBA from Brandeis University with a focus on health policy. His fellowship distinctions span multiple prestigious organizations including the American College of Emergency Physicians, the American College of Medical Toxicology and the American Society of Addiction Medicine. Throughout his career, Nelson has demonstrated a commitment to addressing critical public health challenges, including the opioid crisis.

"The Schmidt College of Medicine has built a strong foundation with its innovative curriculum and dedication to training future physicians," Nelson said. "I am eager to build upon its rich legacy of achievements by expanding research, clinical excellence and innovation to develop a top-tier academic health system."

Nelson's vision for the future includes transforming the college from a community-based school to an institution with broader academic impact, while enhancing community health through advanced research, clinical excellence and strong local partnerships.

His leadership philosophy prioritizes collaboration and transparency, reflected in his favorite saying: "It's the name on the front of the jersey that matters most, not the one on the back." He said this team-oriented approach aligns with his plans to foster innovation and excellence across all aspects of medical education and research.

Beyond his professional achievements, Nelson said he maintains a healthy lifestyle, dedicating each morning to exercise — a routine that helps him start his day with a sense of balance and accomplishment.

As the Schmidt College of Medicine enters its next chapter, Nelson's combination of academic excellence, clinical experience and strategic vision positions him to advance the institution's mission of training future physicians while improving health care outcomes in the region.

"I am thrilled to join forces with our exceptional students, faculty, staff, generous donors, and our community and hospital partners to help shape the future of



“I am thrilled to join forces with our exceptional students, faculty, staff, generous donors, and our community and hospital partners to help shape the future of health care in South Florida and beyond.”

— Lewis S. Nelson, M.D.

health care in South Florida and beyond," said Nelson. "Together, we will foster a collaborative environment that prioritizes compassion and patient-centered care while advancing innovative translational research aimed at enhancing quality of life for all."

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF NURSING

New Dean Dedicated to Student Success

Cameron G. Duncan, Ph.D., DNP, APRN, FAANP, joined Florida Atlantic University in January as the new Holli Rockwell Trubinsky Eminent Dean of the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing. He is the fourth dean in the college's 45-year history.

Duncan's interest in health care began when he was a child. He was inspired by his pediatrician and initially wanted to become a physician.

"He recognized my passion for patient care and suggested that nursing might be a better fit for my personality and goals. I took his advice to heart, and it has proven to be the right path," Duncan said. "I find immense fulfillment in being able to advocate for my patients, educate them about their health and make a positive impact in their lives."

Duncan comes to Florida Atlantic from his alma mater, the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), where he served in various roles since 2017, most recently as interim dean of the Orvis School of Nursing. During his deanship, Duncan was responsible for the academic progress of more than 500 graduate and undergraduate students, stewardship of a \$9.8 million budget, and development of the school's strategic plan to better align with the university's mission and research goals.

In 2016, he opened Duncan Family Healthcare in Reno, which was the first Advanced Practice Registered Nurse clinic in northern Nevada. The facility focuses on mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, mood disorders, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use.

Duncan was born and raised in Reno, "a beautiful city nestled in the Sierra Nevada mountains that enjoys all four seasons," he said. "But I have been enjoying more sunny days, time at the beach, and being in a place where I can play tennis year-round. I also really love cooking and enjoying good food, so I am looking forward to exploring South Florida's diverse food scene to strengthen my skills in the kitchen."

After graduating from UNR with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Duncan went on to earn

master's degrees from Grand Canyon University and the University of Arizona; a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from the University of Arizona; and a Ph.D. in nursing from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He is a certified nurse educator and was inducted as a Fellow of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners in 2023. He also is dually board certified as a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner and a family nurse practitioner.

A proud first-generation college graduate, Duncan understands the unique challenges first-generation students face. He credits his parents, teachers and mentors with providing the support that allowed him to pursue his dreams; and would like to offer mentorship programs, support networks, financial aid and mental health services to help first-generation students succeed in the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing.

His other priorities as dean include expanding the reach of the FAU/Northwest Community Health Alliance Community Health Centers to provide access to care for underserved populations in South Florida, strengthening existing programs, creating new partnerships within the community, and advancing nursing research with a focus on caring science.

"The Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing's strong reputation for caring science and for

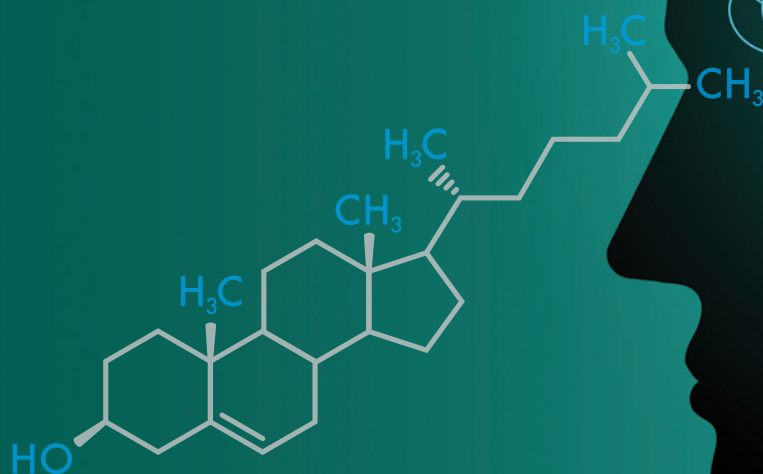


I find immense fulfillment in being able to advocate for my patients, educate them about their health and make a positive impact in their lives."

– Cameron G. Duncan, Ph.D.,
DNP, APRN, FAANP

producing quality research, and competent and compassionate working professionals, were among the reasons I was interested in joining Florida Atlantic," he said. "I also was impressed with the faculty and staff. Their passion for teaching and commitment to student success is inspiring, and I wanted to work alongside them. Who would not want to be part of a team doing all those great things?"





A STEP FORWARD IN ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH

Advanced Tools Increase Understanding of Cholesterol's Impact

The search for answers to Alzheimer's disease and other neurodegenerative disorders remains one of the most pressing goals in brain research. Maciej J. Stawikowski, Ph.D., an assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry in Florida Atlantic University's Charles E. Schmidt College of Science, believes the key may lie in understanding how cholesterol and other lipids move through cells and affect their communication.

"It's well known that lipids and Alzheimer's are linked," said Stawikowski, a member of the Florida Atlantic Stiles-Nicholson Brain Institute. "Lipid imbalance may lead to amyloid plaque formation – oversized protein clumps that disrupt cell function, a hallmark of Alzheimer's."

Stawikowski's team, including Qi Zhang, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry and a member of the Stiles-Nicholson Brain Institute, has focused on developing advanced tools to investigate the relationship between lipids and cellular function.

Cholesterol is a crucial component of cellular membranes, enabling hormone production, membrane stability and signaling. However, disruptions in cholesterol movement between cell compartments may play a role in Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. To study this, Stawikowski and his team developed innovative fluorescent probes to enhance understanding of how cholesterol imbalances contribute to Alzheimer's disease and other neurodegenerative disorders. This, in turn, could help researchers develop drugs to modulate lipid activity, potentially leading to new treatments or preventive strategies.



MACIEJ J. STAWIKOWSKI, PH.D.

The research team's fluorescent cholesterol probes offer applications beyond Alzheimer's, with potential uses in membrane biology, lipid dynamics and drug delivery. By combining experimental techniques with computer simulations, the Florida Atlantic team has laid the foundation for developing better tools that can be used to study a wide range of lipid-related disorders.

"Cholesterol is essential for brain function, but its dysregulation could be a key factor in disease progression," said Stawikowski. "Our new tools provide a window into how cholesterol impacts cellular processes and may help identify therapeutic targets for conditions like Alzheimer's."

WHERE CAREER **READINESS** IS ROOTED IN RELENTLESS **COMPASSION**



FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

College of Social Work
and Criminal Justice



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Change
Today



ADVANCING CAREER CHOICES

\$10M Grant Will Prepare People with Disabilities for Tech Jobs

Florida Atlantic University received a \$9.96 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to address a crucial issue: equipping individuals with disabilities for high-demand technology jobs. The initiative, called "Advancing Career Choices for Employment Success in Technology" (ACCESS-Technology), focuses on training youth and adults with disabilities in advanced tech skills, creating pathways to well-paying careers in fields such as cybersecurity, cloud computing and 3D printing.

The initiative leverages expertise from Florida Atlantic's College of Education and College of Engineering and Computer Science. This interdisciplinary approach is vital to developing innovative solutions tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities.

"ACCESS-Technology is a groundbreaking initiative that aims to transform the lives of people with disabilities by providing them with tailored training and certifications in high-demand technology fields," said Ayse Torres, Ph.D., the project's principal investigator and an associate professor in

the College of Education. "By bridging the gap between disability and technology careers, we are not only opening doors to competitive integrated employment but also fostering a more inclusive workforce that will drive innovation in the 21st century."

The program will provide career counseling, customized training and hands-on internships with leading technology companies. Participants will earn industry-recognized certificates that prepare them for high-quality jobs or further education.

"This exciting project is the keystone in a series of initiatives that the two colleges of engineering and computer science and education have jointly planned to make FAU a leader in technology-centered education and workforce development," said Javad Hashemi, Ph.D., co-principal investigator, inaugural chair and professor of the Department of Biomedical Engineering and associate dean for research in the College of Engineering and Computer Science. "Our goal is to use tech-driven education to enhance and complement learning in engineering fields among people with any form of disability."



From left: Ayse Torres, Ph.D.; Stella Batalama, Ph.D.; and Javad Hashemi, Ph.D.

The program's fully online training modules will integrate assistive technologies, accessible formats and flexible self-paced learning options. A comprehensive manual will outline standardized approaches to recruitment, training and certification, ensuring high-quality implementation nationwide.

"Because of its online nature, ACCESS-Technology will be inherently effective in a variety of settings," Torres said. "The project's inclusive design ensures that it can meet the needs of diverse learners across different environments."

The employment gap between individuals with and without disabilities remains

stark – 41.7% versus 77.7% as of May 2024. Programs like ACCESS-Technology aim to close this gap by providing participants with the skills and support necessary to thrive in the tech industry.

“This specialized training will help enhance economic opportunities, foster long-term professional growth, and provide the tools needed to excel in advanced technology fields,” Hashemi said.

Businesses are increasingly recognizing the value of disability inclusion. A 2023 Accenture study found that companies excelling in this area achieved 1.6 times more revenue, 2.6 times more net income, and double the economic profit compared to their peers. These organizations also outperformed their industry counterparts by 25% in productivity.

Florida Atlantic aims to recruit 240 participants, with 80% completing certification programs. Half will receive paid internships, and the University anticipates that 50% of graduates will secure employment in technology fields while 25% pursue further education.

“By partnering with leading technology companies to offer paid internships, we are providing both theoretical knowledge and invaluable real-world experience, which is crucial for success in the tech industry,” said Stella Batalama, Ph.D., co-principal investigator and dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science. “We envision this approach to be a hallmark of education at FAU.”

The program also includes establishing a stakeholder advisory committee, ensuring various perspectives to guide its development and implementation.

“This unique project exemplifies the power of interdisciplinary research, and I am incredibly proud of this collaborative effort,” said Stephen Silverman, Ed.D., dean of the College of Education. “By combining our expertise, we are not only creating innovative solutions for people with disabilities entering the workforce but also opening up exciting new avenues for our faculty to conduct pioneering research that addresses complex societal challenges.”



RESHAPING HEALTH CARE

\$6M Grant to Expand Marcus Institute of Integrative Health

Florida Atlantic University received a \$6 million grant for its Marcus Institute of Integrative Health from the late Bernie Marcus, founder of The Home Depot, and The Marcus Foundation. The gift will broaden the services, enhance educational programs and expand community wellness initiatives at the Marcus Institute, which is managed by the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine. The goal is to create a national model that demonstrates the effectiveness of comprehensive integrative health as the optimal approach for achieving overall well-being.

This latest grant from The Marcus Foundation, which was made prior to the passing of Marcus in November 2024, brings its total contributions to Florida Atlantic to more than \$10 million. Its support for advancing integrative health is significantly reshaping the landscape of health care, research and education in South Florida and beyond.

“Integrative health simply blends traditional medicine with common sense alternative solutions, and Bernie Marcus long believed it should be offered in today’s health care system,” said Jay Kaiman, president of The Marcus Foundation. “This expansion will help more people who are seeking innovative solutions to their overall health and well-being.”

The Marcus Institute of Integrative Health provides exceptional patient care, innovative educational programs, impactful community engagement, and advanced integrative medicine. Under the leadership of Branson J. Collins, M.D., the institute has made significant strides in advancing its programs, which

include integrative pain management and precision image-guided injection therapies for chronic pain, sports injuries and mental health.

The grant enables the Marcus Institute of Integrative Health to expand its operations to provide more services and conduct more research. The institute will implement a three-tier expansion plan that prioritizes high-quality, superior patient outcomes, and will include additional services such as diagnostic musculoskeletal ultrasounds, intravenous sedation, tai chi, a functional movement specialist, and a nutrition coach. Additionally, as a result of this grant, the institute is poised to create a center for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Community wellness programs will continue to thrive at the Marcus Institute for Integrative Health, offering more than 52 nutritional classes aimed at engaging 1,500 participants and 150 integrative health classes to reach 1,800 participants annually. The institute also plans to enroll 1,000 students and conduct 50 retreats for veterans.

“We are incredibly grateful for the unwavering support of The Marcus Foundation, which has been instrumental in advancing our mission,” said then-Interim FAU President Stacy Volnick. “This generous grant enhances the quality of care we can provide locally and allows us to contribute to the broader field of integrative health on a national scale. We are excited about the opportunities ahead and committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of the 3.2 million people in our service area.”



A GLOBAL HEALTH EMERGENCY

The Rising Tide of Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity has nearly doubled in prevalence since 1990, now impacting every continent. While the United States has the highest rate, the issue has reached epidemic levels globally, with devastating consequences for health and well-being.

Southern Europe — including Greece, Italy and Spain — reports obesity rates of 10 to 15% among children, while Eastern Europe is seeing rapid increases that could soon rival these numbers. Asia accounts for nearly half of all overweight children under the age of 5, and Africa holds one-quarter. In Latin America, 20% of children under age 20 are overweight. Many developing countries now grapple with the dual burden of childhood obesity and malnutrition.

“Pediatric overweight and obesity have reached epidemic levels in the U.S. and are becoming a pandemic globally,” said Charles H. Hennekens, M.D., first Sir Richard Doll Professor of Medicine

and Preventive Medicine and senior academic advisor in Florida Atlantic University’s Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine. “These conditions lead to high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and lipid disorders, which contribute to metabolic syndrome. In adults, these issues significantly increase the risks of heart attacks, stroke and certain cancers — many of which are now occurring at younger ages.”

The commentary, published in *The Maternal and Child Health Journal*, highlights the rising prevalence of high body mass index (BMI) in children. Overweight preschoolers in the U.S., defined as those with a BMI exceeding the 85th percentile, are significantly more likely to remain overweight into adolescence. This challenges the misconception that children “outgrow” weight issues.

Physical inactivity, poor diets and sedentary behaviors are driving this crisis.

Reduced physical education in schools and excessive screen time contribute to children failing to meet recommended activity levels.

“Encouraging organized, enjoyable activities rather than competitive ones can help children achieve necessary physical activity levels,” said Hennekens.

Diet is another critical factor. High sugar and ultra-processed food consumption are major contributors to the epidemic. In the U.S., ultra-processed foods make up nearly 70% of children’s diets.

“Consumption of ultra-processed foods among children under 24 months is rising worldwide, triggering not only the potential for developing obesity but also decreased immunological protection,” Hennekens said.

The authors stress the need for multifaceted approaches. Schools can play a significant role by enhancing lunch nutritional standards and promoting healthy eating. However, external influences like social media and advertising complicate these efforts. Despite World Health Organization recommendations to limit food marketing to children, few countries enforce such measures effectively.

Collaboration between health care providers, public health practitioners, policymakers and communities is essential to reverse these troubling trends.

“The ultimate goal is prevention, but we must also focus on stabilizing rates and mitigating health risks,” said Hennekens, adding that failing to act risks an unprecedented global epidemic of childhood obesity, with severe long-term health consequences. “Coordinated efforts are needed to ensure a healthier future for children worldwide.”

SBDC is a Team You Can Count On

\$680M+

Florida SBDC at Florida Atlantic University (since 2018), in collaboration with strategic partners, helped clients acquire \$680M through investments, loans, grants and government contracts.

In the News

- Florida APEX Accelerator at Florida Atlantic is part of the Division of Research technical assistance programs.
- Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) appoints a Florida Atlantic University representative to the National Committee for Economic and Community Engagement.

550+

Community members and 50+ organizations were supported between 2021 to 2024 by social innovation and grassroots programs.

12

Consulting and outreach locations with consultants and training services.

12K+

Number of businesses that received Florida SBDC at Florida Atlantic's direct business consulting since 2018.



The Florida SBDC at Florida Atlantic University is a member of the Florida SBDC Network, a statewide partnership program nationally accredited by the Association of America's SBDCs and funded in part by the U.S. Small Business Administration, Department of Defense, State of Florida, and other private and public partners, with the University of West Florida serving as the network's lead host institution. Florida SBDC services are extended to the public on a non-discriminatory basis. Language assistance services are available for limited English proficient individuals.



fau.edu/sbdc
Request for Consulting

NEW PARASITE THREATENS RECOVERY OF SAN MIGUEL ISLAND FOX

The San Miguel Island fox, a cherished species unique to California’s Channel Islands, faces a new threat after decades of conservation success. Although the fox rebounded from near extinction in the 1990s, its population plummeted by 30% between 2014 and 2018.

Researchers have linked this decline to the emergence of a newly identified parasite, commonly known as a thorny-headed worm. The worm was found in 69% of necropsied foxes on San Miguel Island, but not in fox populations on the other Channel Islands. The discovery emerged from a highly collaborative and comprehensive study led by a team that included Florida Atlantic University researchers.

The parasite’s impact on fox health is significant, causing issues such as intestinal damage, inflammation, weight loss, and in some cases, death. Nearly half of the infected foxes showed severe symptoms, with drought conditions exacerbating the effects.

“This parasite likely arrived via infected arthropods transported by humans,” said Ale Aleuy, DVM, Ph.D., assistant professor in Florida Atlantic’s Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. “This discovery raises concerns about the impact of human activity on isolated ecosystems.”

Using data from more than 4,000 fox captures spanning 16 years, researchers analyzed health trends before and after the parasite outbreak. Before the worm’s arrival, foxes exhibited low mortality and good overall health despite other parasites. Its introduction, combined with environmental stressors like

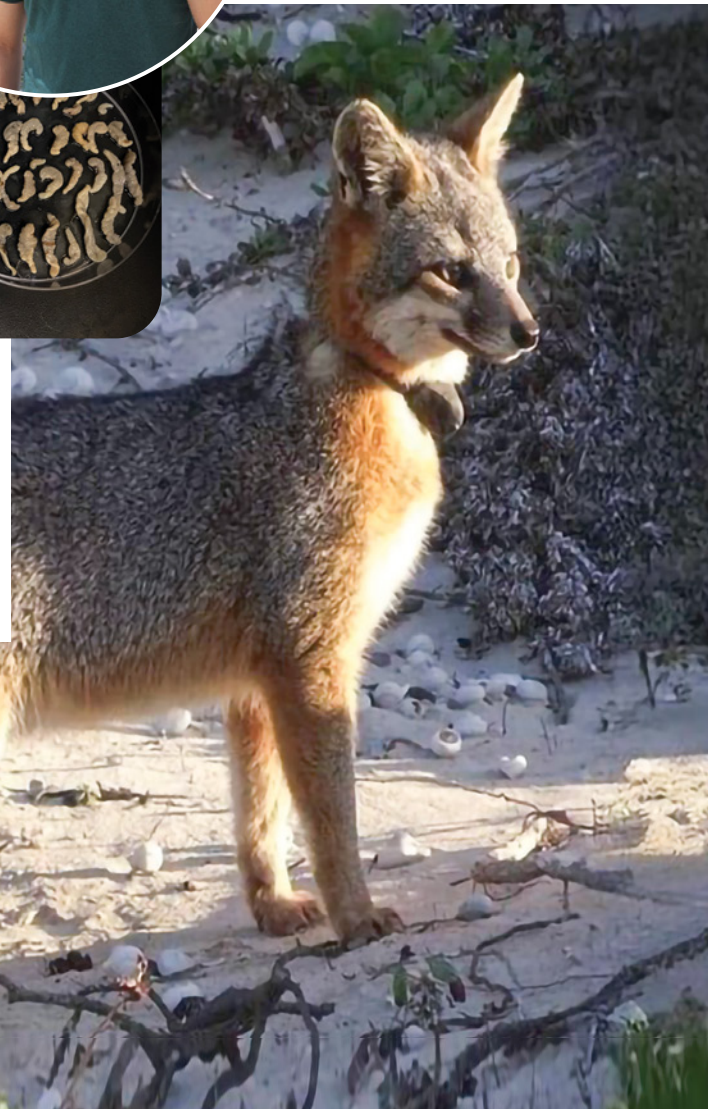
drought, drastically altered these dynamics. Fortunately, improved rainfall after 2018 appears to have helped the foxes recover partially.

“While their condition is still not back to pre-parasite levels, the overall health of the foxes is stabilizing, and they are showing signs of improvement,” said Aleuy. “This resilience gives us hope for their continued recovery.”

Preventing the parasite’s spread to other Channel Islands is now a top priority. Strategies like controlling non-native invertebrates and monitoring fox diets are critical for protecting this vulnerable species. The study underscores the need for rigorous biosecurity measures and ongoing research to ensure its long-term survival.



ALE ALEUY, DVM, PH.D.



BUILDING A BETTER SOLUTION

School of Architecture Addresses the Affordable Housing Crisis

Millions of Americans are considered rent-burdened, meaning they spend at least 30% of their income on rent, utilities and other housing-related costs. And half of all renters are challenged to find a place to rent that they can afford. In Florida, the statistics are particularly alarming as the National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that there are only 25 affordable rental homes available for every 100 low-income renters.

No single solution will solve these problems. But Florida Atlantic University's School of Architecture is hoping to address the shortage through a partnership with the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF)/Healthy Housing Foundation, the largest global HIV/AIDS organization and a longtime advocate for affordable housing. In collaboration with the award-winning Glavovic Studio, a Fort Lauderdale-based architecture firm, the partnership is the first of its kind, bringing together a leading academic institution, a global nonprofit organization, and a for-profit architecture studio to advance innovative solutions to the affordable housing problem. Approaching the crisis from different perspectives, the three partners are working to identify adaptive reuse opportunities and amplify the voices of the next generation in solving generational problems.

"As a school we embrace pragmatic constraints as poetic design opportunities, while we tackle the most challenging problems of our time," said Joseph

Choma, Ph.D., director of Florida Atlantic's School of Architecture. "In order to advance the built environment, our school believes that we need to blend innovative research-based methods with professional practice conventions. This unique collaboration directly aligns and resonates with our school's vision and ethos."

Jeffrey Huber, professor of architecture, was involved in the design studio and sponsored research partnership.

"The studio went ahead and challenged the students to think about how we think through existing structures. How do we think about the hardest challenges within our community right now? And that's affordable housing," Huber said. "The students looked at challenges of urban design, landscape architecture, architectural ideas, interiors, materiality and what kind of lifestyles and typologies can emerge on these design proposals."

Through the partnership, Florida Atlantic students have developed a guidebook to help identify which kinds of existing vacant properties may be most viable



for affordable housing projects, putting adaptive reuse into practice. The students also unveiled comprehensive architectural designs on specific sites in South Florida, taking advantage of the state's new Live Local Act that allows certain properties to be rezoned for housing. Over time, the Florida Atlantic student design proposals will become new models for adaptive reuse and sustainable living in Florida and beyond.

"This was an amazing experience for our students. Architecture students are often taught how to talk, but rarely are they taught how to listen. By having a real client, students learned how to ask questions and carefully listen," Choma said. "It is especially incredible to have a client, such as AHF, who genuinely wants to help the world by tackling affordable housing."

“It is especially incredible to have a client, such as AHF, who genuinely wants to help the world by tackling affordable housing.”

- Joseph Choma, Ph.D.





QIGONG, ANYONE?

Traditional Chinese Practice Provides Drug-free Relief for Back Pain

Chronic pain is widespread in the United States, particularly among military veterans, affecting 40 to 70% of this population and serving as a leading cause of disability. Researchers from Florida Atlantic University believe that the traditional Chinese practice of qigong may be a viable form of treatment.

Back pain, the most common form of chronic pain, not only affects physical health but also social and occupational functioning, often leading to job loss, financial stress and economic instability. Treating chronic low back pain is especially complicated among military veterans, as many have comorbid conditions linked to their military service, such as traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and behavioral disorders. Many also are at increased risk for opioid addiction and overdose, so nonpharmacological approaches are essential for effective pain management.

Florida Atlantic researchers conducted a pilot study to evaluate the efficacy of qigong (pronounced “chee-gong”) on veterans with chronic low back pain. Qigong, which is similar to tai chi, combines gentle movements, controlled breathing and meditation to cultivate and balance the body’s energy, often referred to as “qi” or “life force.” It is easy to learn, does not require specific sites or equipment, and can be practiced individually or collectively in a variety of styles, from slow, flowing exercises to still meditative postures.

“Stretching, loosening, strengthening and balancing techniques of qigong may release back tension, ease pain and improve



CHERYL KRAUSE-PARELLO, PH.D.

flexibility and alignment,” said Cheryl Krause-Parello, Ph.D., senior author, Florida Atlantic associate vice president for research and associate executive director and faculty fellow at Florida Atlantic’s Institute for Human Health and Disease Intervention (I-Health). “Qigong practice can strengthen the musculoskeletal system and improve joint flexibility, motor function and movement coordination. It can activate postural improvements and decrease pain. Importantly, it can improve physical conditions and psychosocial function such as depression and social isolation in veterans with chronic back pain.”

Researchers assessed how qigong impacted physical function, sleep disturbance, PTSD, depression, anxiety, positive affect, social roles and activities in a test group of military veterans. Results of the study, published in the journal *Pain Management Nursing*, indicate that pain decreased significantly among those who practiced qigong compared to those in the control group who did not. Sleep disturbance also was significantly improved in the qigong group.

“This holistic approach addresses the complex challenges faced by veterans with chronic low back pain without relying on medications,” said Krause-Parello. “Armed with this knowledge, health care providers, such as nurses and physical therapists, should actively consider incorporating nonpharmacological interventions like qigong into treatment plans to enhance the overall well-being of veterans dealing with chronic low back pain.”



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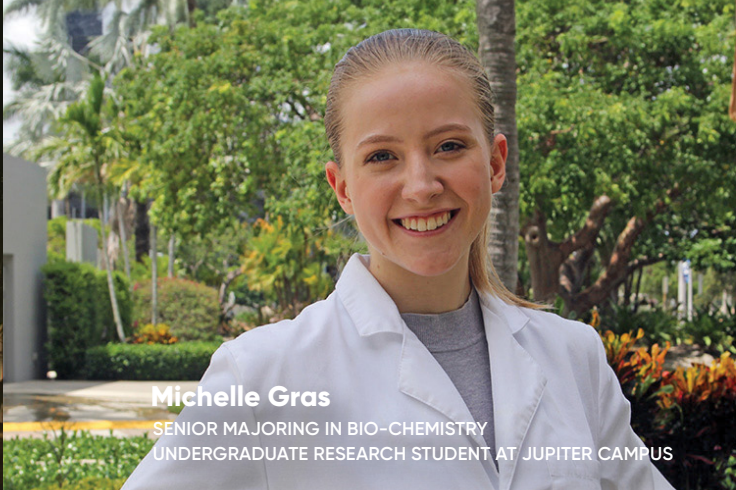
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Clara Tepohl
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FLORIDA ATLANTIC IN THE NEWS



The partisan split on climate in Florida appears to be growing, reversing the growing consensus we've observed in recent years. That said, when specific climate-related actions are discussed, such as increasing the share of solar in our electricity portfolios, voters are overwhelmingly supportive. Despite some climate policy progress in the face of polarization, we still need a 'humble climate politics' to advance to a stable trajectory of effective climate action."

Colin Polsky, Ph.D., associate vice president of Florida Atlantic's Broward campuses and professor of geosciences in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science, to **The Hill** discussing a Florida Atlantic poll showing that a majority of Floridians prefer political candidates who back action on climate change.

Our findings confirm the hypothesis that a wild bird's health is tied to its microbiome, and that the 'sexiness' of a male's ornaments can signal his health. Ultimately, our study and those that follow should move us closer to answering the overall question of whether a bird's gut microbiome can predict individual quality."

Rindy Anderson, Ph.D., associate professor of biological sciences in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science, to **Forbes** on a groundbreaking Florida Atlantic study that could have important implications for promoting healthier ecosystems and wildlife populations.





A clear pattern emerged. Whenever a child had behavior problems — and their mother disapproved of their friends — these peers, in turn, then disliked the child and the kid’s behavior got worse. That behavior problems are linked to rejection makes sense. The mystery is, why did mom’s intervention lead to more problems? And it’s because the classmates hate it. Kids hate parents intervening in peer relationships. Rejected kids tend to hang out with other excluded kids who themselves are likely to have behavior problems.”



Brett Laursen, Ph.D., professor of psychology in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science, to **Scientific American** on a Florida Atlantic study that revealed how parents labeling their child’s friend a bad influence can backfire.



About \$500 billion of CRE (commercial real estate) mortgages will mature in the next year and a significant portion of them are going to go into default. There are going to be fire sales. They’re going to put more downward pressure on commercial real estate prices across the board.”



Rebel Cole, Ph.D., Lynn Eminent Scholar Chaired Professor of Finance in the College of Business, to **The Business Times** on how office property meltdown is starting to surface at U.S. banks.



The Brain Coast is both a statement of what we are, and what we can be. The capacities for advanced brain research and education, and their translation to drive innovation and promote brain health are already significant, and they are growing.”



Randy Blakely, Ph.D., executive director of the Florida Atlantic Stiles-Nicholson Brain Institute, the David J.S. Nicholson Distinguished Professor in Neuroscience, and professor of biomedical science in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, to **The Palm**

Beach Post on how South Florida aims to become a capital of neurological research and treatment.



The totality of the evidence indicates that people who consume moderate to large amounts of alcohol have a markedly increased incidence of premature deaths and disability. We have a strong message for health care providers and their patients to try to do something about both these issues, alcohol consumption and overweight and obesity.”



Charles H. Hennekens, M.D., DrPH, the first Sir Richard Doll Professor of Medicine and Preventive Medicine, and senior academic advisor in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, to **The New York Times** on a Florida Atlantic study that shows the number of deaths caused by alcohol-related diseases

more than doubled among Americans between 1999 and 2020.

FLORIDA ATLANTIC IN THE NEWS

We definitely saw a noticeable increase [during Trump's first term], but this cycle has started off far further ahead, and far stronger. Retail is benefiting, auto rentals are benefiting, clubs are benefiting. Everything is benefiting."



Peter Ricci, Ed.D., professor and director of the hospitality and tourism management program in the College of Business, to **Travel Weekly** about how President Donald Trump's frequent visits to his Mar-a-Lago estate are contributing to a tourism boom in Palm Beach County.

There are patterns that have been more favorable toward the Republicans in Florida. Democrats are caught in an 'unwinnable situation' in Florida. The state is so large, in order to compete they would need to spend massive amounts of money, taking away resources from other key states."



Kevin Wagner, Ph.D., professor and associate dean of the Department of Political Science in the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, to **USA Today** on how America's largest swing state lost its swing and went from purple to red.

Most stingrays have short, muscular tails that they use to flex venomous barbs. But myliobatid rays possess very different backsides. When you pick it up, it's almost like a giant noodle, but in the water it's very rigid. Nobody really had a clue what these tails were being used for."



Matt Ajemian, Ph.D., associate research professor and director of the Fish Ecology and Conservation Lab at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, to **The New York Times** on a new study analyzing the tails of cownose rays using 3D micro-CT scans.

Loneliness is a normal feeling to have sometimes in life, but chronic loneliness may increase the risk of stroke based on someone's lifestyle decisions and behaviors. When feeling lonely, it is still important to make healthy choices and take steps to reduce risk of stroke, such as following a good diet and exercising, and taking appropriate prescribed medications."



Michael Dobbs, M.D., chair of the Clinical Neurosciences Department, associate dean of clinical affairs, professor of clinical neurosciences and the FairfaxWood Endowed Chair of Clinical Neurosciences in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, to the **United Press International** on a new study revealing that chronic loneliness may increase stroke in older adults.



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A WELCOMING SPACE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Florida Atlantic Cuts Ribbon on Renovated Counseling and Psychological Services Center

Colleges and universities nationwide are facing a mental health crisis. According to a recent U.S. News/Generation Lab report, 70% of students have struggled with mental health since starting college. At Florida Atlantic University, the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center provides students with mental health services to help improve and maintain their mental well-being. The CAPS Center saw more than 2,100 students for a total of 11,107 appointments during the 2023-24 academic year. During the 2024 fall semester alone, it hosted 19 therapy groups, serving 116 students.

To accommodate students' needs and provide a more inviting space, the University recently renovated the CAPS Center at the Boca Raton campus.

"Student success is at the heart of everything we do," said then-Interim FAU President Stacy Volnick. "Supporting our students' health and safety is a top priority, and these renovated spaces reflect our unwavering commitment to provide a positive campus environment where every student has the resources to thrive."

The renovation brought numerous enhancements to the center, including nine additional therapy offices; two rooms dedicated to teletherapy; a private waiting room; and a spa-like relaxation room, complete with virtual reality headsets, areas for meditation and yoga, and four state-of-the-art massage chairs. Since it opened in October, the relaxation space has welcomed more than 300 students in nearly 700 visits.

The center also integrated advanced technology into group therapy rooms, which expanded its clinical capacity, improved accessibility for students using telehealth services, and enhanced privacy to ensure students feel cared for and supported.

"Beyond functionality, the aesthetic transformation of the center is significant," said Laura DiPasquale, Ph.D., director of CAPS. "The design is warm and inviting, fostering a therapeutic environment that challenges the misconceptions some students have about therapy. Many come in expecting a cold, clinical atmosphere, feeling apprehensive about discussing personal struggles with a stranger. However, this welcoming space helps alleviate those anxieties, making it easier for students to open up and engage in the meaningful work necessary for success in school and in life."



“Many come in expecting a cold, clinical atmosphere ... this welcoming space helps alleviate those anxieties, making it easier for students to open up and engage in the meaningful work necessary for success in school and in life.”

- Laura DiPasquale, Ph.D., director of Counseling and Psychological Services at Florida Atlantic



BRYNNA FISHER

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

School Receives Gift for Future Environmental Stewards

Brynna Fisher recalls learning about dying coral reefs and other effects of climate change as a teen. It not only fostered her interest in environmental science, but led her to Florida Atlantic University from her home state of Massachusetts.

A junior majoring in biological sciences, Fisher is among the first recipients of scholarships made possible by a gift from Wayne and Lucretia Weiner to the School of Environmental, Coastal, and Ocean Sustainability (ECOS) in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science.

"This was life-changing for me," said Fisher, whose long-term goal is to become a research scientist focused on the environment. "This scholarship covered just about all of the student loans I had to take out for this year."

ECOS was established in 2023 by Valery Forbes, Ph.D., dean of the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science, as a partnership with Florida Atlantic's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute

to bolster the visibility and impact of the University's programs focused on the environment.

The gift established 22 scholarships, 20 paid internships, 10 research stipends, programmatic support for Harbor Branch's Semester by the Sea program, a Professor-in-Residence program, three faculty mentors and two staff advisor positions, all of which enhance ECOS and create opportunities for students dedicated to the environment and a more sustainable South Florida.

"The next generation of environmental scientists, leaders and problem solvers must come from a diverse range of disciplines to solve the complex issues of tomorrow, and the tremendous support provided by Lucretia and Wayne's gift reflects the cross-disciplinary ethos of ECOS," Forbes said. "This gift will greatly expand educational opportunities for students and advance our research and community engagement, creating tangible momentum for this important new school."



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From left: CrocTank moderator Michael Kupinski, of Noble Capital Markets; Daymond John, Robert Herjavec and Kevin O'Leary, investors from ABC's "Shark Tank."



HANNAH HERBST

SHARKS AT FLORIDA ATLANTIC

Four Local Entrepreneurs Pitch to Famous Investors

More than 100 aspiring entrepreneurs from Florida Atlantic University's business ecosystem submitted entries to the first-of-its-kind pitch competition at a university: the chance for 15 minutes in front of the sharks from the ABC hit show "Shark Tank" in the hopes of winning funding for their ventures.

Only seven went on to be semi-finalists before the final four were chosen to present to Kevin O'Leary, venture capitalist; Daymond John, founder of FUBU apparel; and Robert Herjavec, cyber-tech giant; as part of CrocTank, a partnership event between Florida Atlantic's College of Business Executive Education programs and Noble Capital Markets.

The final four contestants hailed from the Adams Center for Entrepreneurship, The Runway, formerly Tech Runway, and the Research Park at Florida Atlantic:

- Andria Beal, Ph.D., owner of EpiPaws, a genetic testing company that allows owners to learn the age of their animals
- Tim Sperry with Carbon Limit/CaptureCrete, a product added to concrete that reduces CO₂ pollution
- Kaustubh Kale with Hemotag, a non-invasive heart health monitor
- Hannah Herbst '20, alumna of the College of Business, with AutoTQ, an automated tourniquet to stop blood loss

"This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our entrepreneurs. This wasn't just them pitching to the Florida Atlantic University ecosystem," said Jessica Beaver, associate director of The Runway. "They were going before a nationally known organization that works extensively within the investment community."

RESULTS

In "Mr. Wonderful candor," O'Leary said that the competing companies exceeded his expectations, a moment that only further showcased the strength of the candidates. Beal walked away with an offer of \$250,000 from O'Leary for her venture, EpiPaws. Kale also landed a deal but declined the offer due to the terms.

CROCTANK CREATION

The CrocTank event was born out of the idea to provide a platform showcasing the talents of local entrepreneurs while connecting them with high-level investors who could either offer them funding or invaluable feedback and exposure.

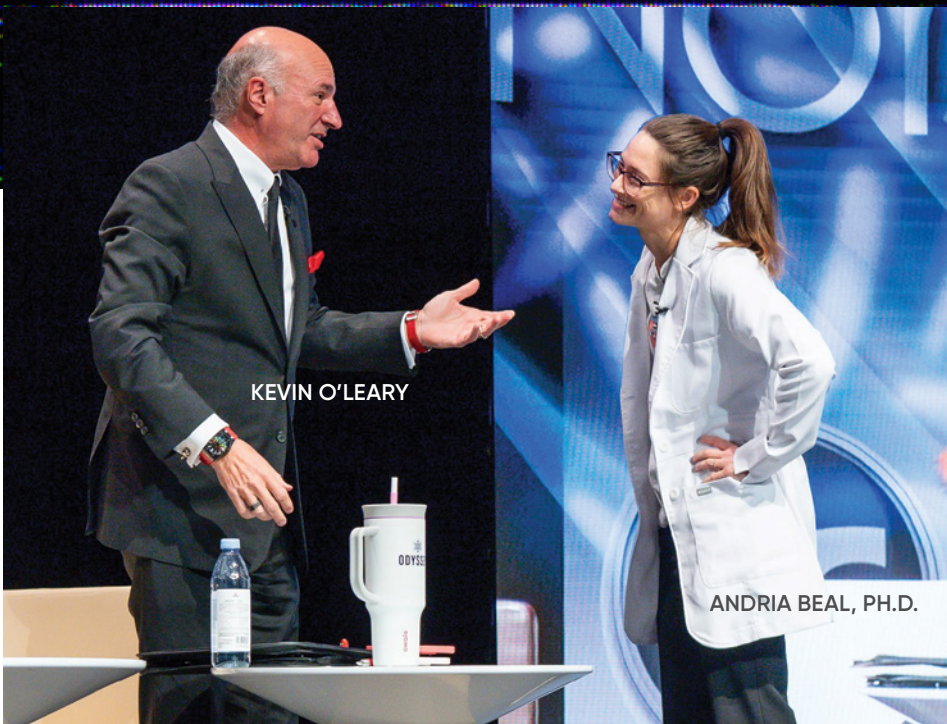
It started with finding high-quality startups in Florida Atlantic's community for the headline event for the 20th NobleCon, an investor conference hosted by Noble Capital Markets. The 2023 conference featured



KAUSTUBH KALE



TIM SPERRY



KEVIN O'LEARY

ANDRIA BEAL, PH.D.

to help launch their startups or expand existing businesses.

The Research Park, now in its 40th year, is a leader in technology-based economic development in South Florida, providing a landing pad for newly launched tech companies and research-based organizations.

"This first-of-its-kind business event was exceptional, and we are proud of the innovation demonstrated in our FAU community's pitches," said Daniel Gropper, Ph.D., dean of the College of Business. "It is a demonstration of the strength of our entrepreneurial ecosystem at Florida Atlantic, where we are all working to support our people in the pursuit of their individual versions of the American dream."

Those who didn't walk away with a deal still benefitted from the extensive one-on-one guidance they received for their businesses and fundraising efforts, according to Kevin Cox, Ph.D., director of the Adams Center.

"It was endless hours spent revising their pitches, their model and what they needed to do to attract investors," Cox said. "To run a successful program on the leading edge of supporting startups, we need to be innovative and entrepreneurial ourselves, continuing to evolve and improve. There's no better way to support our startups than to get them in front of some of the most notable investors in the world."

former U.S. President George W. Bush as the keynote speaker, setting a new standard for future impactful events.

Creating the next generation of leading entrepreneurs is a point of pride at Florida Atlantic. Students, faculty and the community find support and mentorship to realize their entrepreneurial dreams, complementing the continued explosion of start-up activity in South Florida.

The College of Business is ranked No. 10 in the world for entrepreneurship research in the Texas Christian University Global University Research Productivity report. Its faculty members teach future business owners in the classroom, while the Adams Center for Entrepreneurship engages students and the community

through student business pitch competitions, bootcamp programs (including one in Spanish and one for veterans), initiatives for family businesses, and a co-sponsored national podcast featuring interviews with local business leaders.

The Runway, a start-up incubator and accelerator program, is a next step in the journey for student entrepreneurs. Once graduated, they can apply to join other local and regional startups to participate in the Venture Class Program, now in its 15th cohort. With a legacy of more than 185 companies to date, Venture Class participants receive more than \$100,000 in resources and services, including introductions to sources of capital and mentorship

A DECADE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Runway at Florida Atlantic, formerly Tech Runway, recently hosted its 2024 Maverick Reception, celebrating its 10-year anniversary in the process.

The event recognized the innovative areas that have created pathways to success for entrepreneurs across all sectors, including the Office of Technology Development, the Wave program – designed for student entrepreneurs, and the Adams Center for Entrepreneurship within the College of Business, for their transformative impact in the creation of opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs throughout the region.

“We are proud to be the bridge between academic innovation and real-world application, ensuring our entrepreneurs are equipped to meet today’s market demands,” said Jessica Beaver, associate director of The Runway. “As it enters its second decade, The Runway continues to be a leader in startup incubation and acceleration, solidifying South Florida as a hub for technological innovation and entrepreneurial success.”



JESSICA BEAVER



The impressive statistics for the past decade include:

- **\$310+** million in revenue
- **\$168+** million in capital raised
- **\$750,000+** in seed funding awarded
- **1,000+** jobs and nearly **450** internships created
- Nearly **500** patents applied for and nearly **350** invention disclosures filed
- **5,600+** mentor meetings (spanning **40,000** hours) and **500** workshops and seminars hosted
- More than **110** investor introductions facilitated
- **2,000+** entrepreneurs and innovators empowered
- **1,500+** students and **400** veterans have participated in the various programs, and **185+** ventures have been supported.



Daniel Gropper, Ph.D., dean of the College of Business



UNCOVERING A NEW SUBSPECIES

Researcher Leads Groundbreaking Study of Freshwater Seals

Alaska's largest freshwater lake is home to a remarkable and genetically distinct population of harbor seals. Unlike their marine counterparts, these seals have adapted to live year-round in a freshwater habitat. A new study, led by Florida Atlantic University researchers in collaboration with Indigenous communities and other partners, has revealed that these seals are genetically isolated from nearby marine populations.

Published in *Biology Letters*, the research highlights that these seals are evolutionarily, reproductively and demographically separate from other Pacific harbor seal populations. Genetic analysis of samples, including scat collected from their habitat in Iliamna Lake, showed significant differences between the lake seals and marine populations across Alaska, Russia and California. These findings suggest the Iliamna Lake seals may represent a unique subspecies of harbor seals.

"Our findings are both striking and unexpected," said Greg O'Corry Crowe, Ph.D., senior author, program lead, and a research professor at Florida Atlantic's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute. "Indigenous knowledge and early Russian explorers' accounts suggest that the seals have been in Iliamna Lake for at least 200 years. However, it's still uncertain whether they have been there for a longer period or if the observed differences might indicate that the Iliamna seals represent a separate subspecies, similar to other freshwater seal populations."

Unlike most harbor seals, the Iliamna seals exhibit unique adaptations to freshwater living, a rare phenomenon among seals worldwide.

Despite their genetic isolation, the seals face increasing challenges. Mining exploration in the region raises concerns about potential impacts on Iliamna

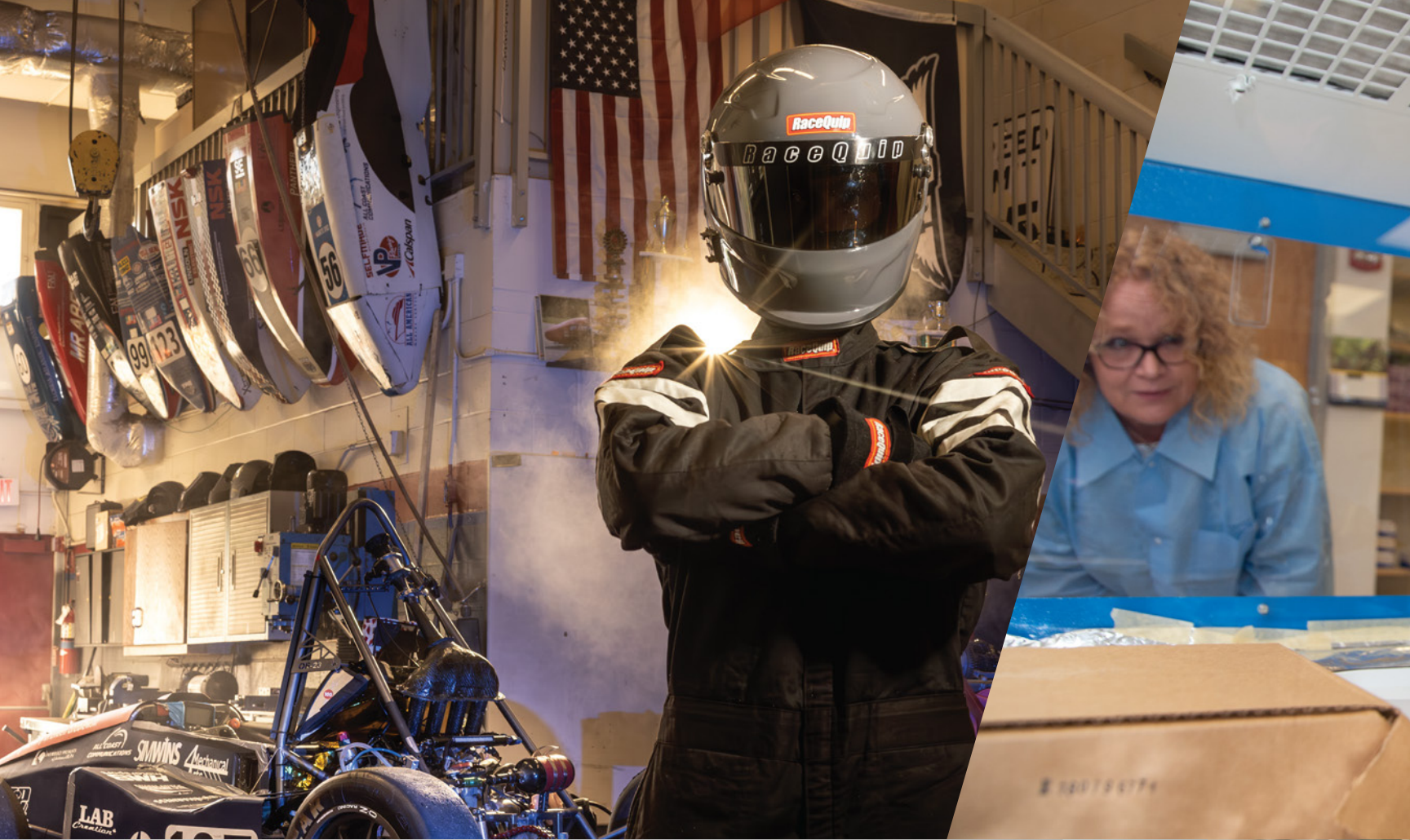


GREG O'CORRY CROWE, PH.D.

Lake's delicate ecosystem. The research team hopes their findings will guide conservation and co-management strategies to protect this population.

The team plans additional genomic studies to deepen insights into the seals' evolution and adaptability. Collaborating closely with local communities and NOAA, they aim to balance conservation efforts with sustainable management of the lake's resources.

As research continues, the Iliamna Lake seals stand as a testament to nature's resilience and adaptability in one of Alaska's most remote regions.





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The baccalaureate, master's and DNP programs at Florida Atlantic University's Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. It is the only university in the U.S. to have all its degree programs endorsed by the American Holistic Nursing Credentialing Center.





By using readily available waste materials like algal biomass, combined with lanthanum, an element known for its strong phosphorus-binding capabilities, we have developed an adsorbent that can effectively target and remove excess phosphorus from water."

– Masoud Jahandar Lashaki, Ph.D.

FROM HAZARD TO HELPER

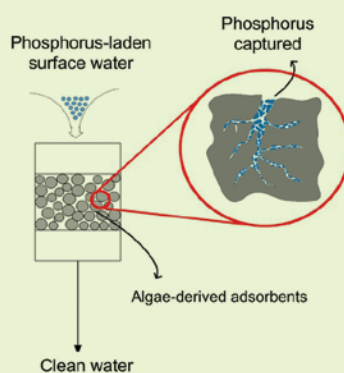
Florida Atlantic Engineers Turn Harmful Algae into Solution for Water Pollution

As harmful algal blooms (HABs) continue to spread across the globe, urgent research is needed to address this growing threat. Studies in Italy, China and the Atlantic basin have shown that many water bodies have high nitrogen-to-phosphorus ratios, making phosphorus a key factor that drives these blooms. This highlights the critical need for more effective phosphorus management strategies to curb the rise of HABs and protect our ecosystems.

Recently, there's been a growing interest in finding useful ways to repurpose troublesome algal biomass. Researchers have already explored using it to create materials that can help clean up things such as heavy metals, rare earth metals, dyes, and even capture CO₂ and harmful volatile organic compounds from the air. However, few studies have investigated how algal biomass, especially cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae, can be used to create materials that remove phosphate from water.

Now, researchers from the College of Engineering and Computer Science at Florida Atlantic University have filled that gap by transforming cyanobacterial biomass, which is typically a hazardous waste, into custom-made adsorbent materials that can pull harmful phosphorus out of water. Adsorbent materials – not to be confused with absorbent materials – are substances that can attract and hold molecules or particles such as gases, liquids or dissolved solids on their surface.

Researchers collected cyanobacterial biomass from Florida's Lake Okeechobee and processed it into adsorbent materials



for phosphate removal. To improve phosphate removal, researchers tested materials modified with lanthanum chloride or zinc chloride. Lanthanum is a relatively abundant metal that is part of the rare-earth element group. Both compounds are useful in a variety of fields including environmental cleanup, industrial processing and chemical manufacturing.

Results of the study, published in the journal *Algal Research*, show that materials treated with lanthanum chloride removed more than 99% of phosphorus. This suggests that lanthanum-modified algae-based adsorbents could be an effective solution for removing phosphorus and preventing harmful algal blooms on a larger scale.

"By using readily available waste materials like algal biomass, combined with lanthanum, an element known for its strong phosphorus-binding capabilities, we have developed an adsorbent that can effectively target and remove excess phosphorus from water," said Masoud Jahandar Lashaki, Ph.D., senior author, assistant professor and graduate program director/coordinator in Florida Atlantic's Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatics Engineering. "Phosphorus is a major contributor to the occurrence of harmful algal blooms, which can lead to toxic water conditions, loss of aquatic life, and significant economic impacts on industries like fishing and tourism."

Results of this study show the promise of this innovative approach in addressing one of the most pressing challenges in water quality management. With further refinement and scalability, this technique could become an essential tool for managing nutrient pollution and preserving aquatic ecosystems globally.

AMAZING ACCOLADES AND AWARDS

Florida Atlantic's faculty, staff and students go above and beyond in the workplace, community and around the world to make a difference. Their work does not go unnoticed. Here's a look at some of the prestigious accolades and awards earned across Florida Atlantic's campuses.



JEAN MARTIN CALDIERON, PH.D., associate professor in the School of Architecture in the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, was selected for the prestigious Fulbright Global Scholar Award for the 2024-25 academic year. Caldieron will conduct research at the Centre de Recherches Architecturales et Urbaines at the University Félix Houphouët-Boigny and teach at the Abidjan School of Architecture, in Cote d'Ivoire. His main research project is titled "Self-Improvement of Informal Settlements in Côte d'Ivoire: A Community Empowerment Project."



FREDERICK BLOETSCHER, PH.D., P.E., professor of civil engineering and associate dean for undergraduate studies and community outreach for the Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatics Engineering, received the George Warren Fuller Award from the Florida Section of the American Waterworks Association. The Fuller Award is one of the organization's most prestigious awards. It is presented to an individual who demonstrates constructive leadership, research and organizational skills in promoting the water profession.



JOSEPH MURRAY, associate dean for University Advising Services, received the Outstanding Advising Administrator certificate of merit award from NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. NACADA promotes and supports quality academic advising in institutions of higher education to enhance the educational development of students.



HARBOR BRANCH OCEANOGRAPHIC INSTITUTE'S Indian River Lagoon boat tour program was named "Best Eco Adventure" in Indian River Magazine's "Best of the Treasure Coast 2025" awards. The boat tours give participants of all ages the opportunity to explore the Indian River Lagoon and learn about the research taking place at Harbor Branch.



RANDY D. BLAKELY, PH.D., executive director of the Florida Atlantic Stiles-Nicholson Brain Institute, the David J.S. Nicholson Distinguished Professor in Neuroscience, and a professor of biomedical science in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, has been named a Fellow of the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET). ASPET is a professional scientific organization that focuses on advancing the field of pharmacology, which is the study of drugs, their effects and their interactions with living systems. Designation as an ASPET Fellow recognizes leaders in the field for their exceptional contributions to pharmacological research, education, mentorship and leadership.



Aishwarya S. Nair, Ph.D.



Amirkhosro Kazemi, Ph.D.



Oscar Curet, Ph.D.



Siddhartha Verma, Ph.D.

AISHWARYA S. NAIR, PH.D. '24, alumna of the College of Engineering and Computer Science; **AMIRKHOSRO KAZEMI, PH.D.**, postdoctoral research associate; **OSCAR CURET, PH.D.**, associate professor; and **SIDDHARTHA VERMA, PH.D.**, associate professor, all in the College of Engineering and Computer Science, received the Emerging Scholar Best Paper award from the Journal of Fluid Mechanics for their groundbreaking work on optimizing coastal protection systems inspired by mangrove roots. Their work emphasizes the potential of nature-inspired designs to reduce erosion, advance coastal defense systems, and contribute practical solutions to environmental challenges.



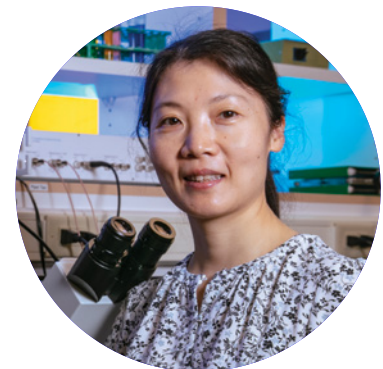
ROMEO ORIOGUN, assistant professor in the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, was a finalist for the 2025 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. The Tufts poetry awards are among the most prestigious prizes contemporary poets can receive, and they come with the world's largest monetary prize for a single collection of poetry. The awards are based at Claremont Graduate University and are given for poetry volumes published in the preceding year.



ROBERT REARDON, doctoral student in the College of Business, received the 2025 State of Florida Ph.D. Student Researcher of the Year award from the Jim Moran College of Entrepreneurship at Florida State University. Reardon was recognized for research demonstrating outstanding promise and contribution to the field of entrepreneurship. Recipients of the award model exceptional scholarship, creativity and potential future impact in entrepreneurship research.



KEVIN COX, PH.D., director of the Adams Center for Entrepreneurship and assistant professor in the College of Business, was the recipient of the 2025 State of Florida Entrepreneurship Educator of the Year award from the Jim Moran College of Entrepreneurship at Florida State University. The award honors a Florida educator who has significantly contributed to student learning, innovation in pedagogy, and the advancement of entrepreneurship education at their school and/or throughout the state.



E. (SARAH) DU, PH.D., associate professor in the College of Engineering and Computer Science, was selected as a Senior Member of the National Academy of Inventors for her significant contributions to innovation and invention. Her groundbreaking work in advancing medical technology aims to improve health care outcomes for patients suffering from conditions such as sickle cell disease and malaria.

AWARDS ROUNDUP

Don Neubaum, Ph.D.



Mark Packard, Ph.D.

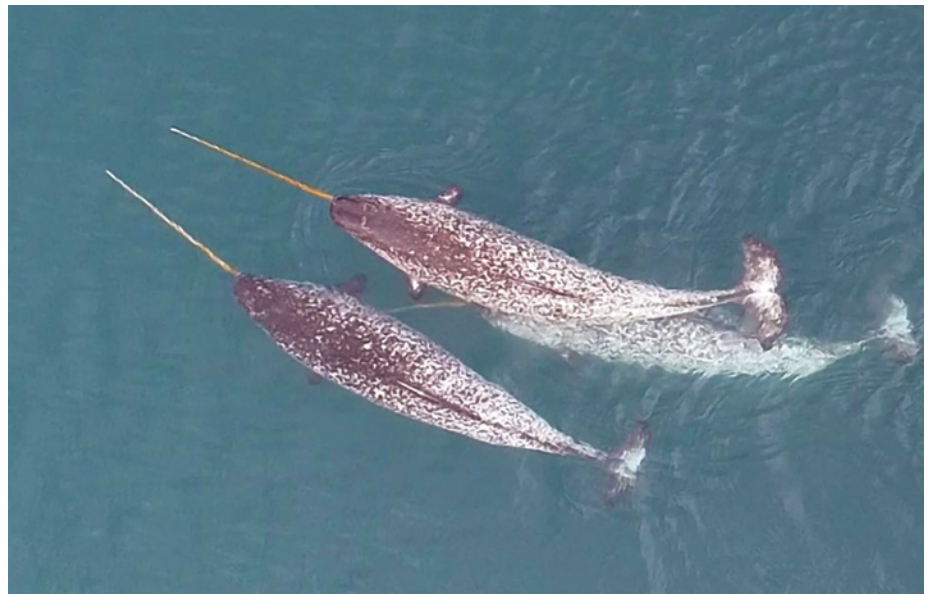


Siri Terjesen, Ph.D.

DON NEUBAUM, PH.D., associate dean of faculty and administrative affairs; **MARK PACKARD, PH.D.**, associate professor; and **SIRI TERJESEN, PH.D.**, associate dean of research; all of the College of Business, were recognized as authoring two of the top five State of Florida Entrepreneurship Papers of the Year by the Jim Moran College of Entrepreneurship at Florida State University. These research awards are based on excellence, relevance, impact in entrepreneurship scholarship as well as innovation and knowledge creation in the field.



ARMIEL SURIAGA, PH.D., assistant professor in the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing, received the 2025 Outstanding Alumni award for research, science and technology from West Visayas State University in the Philippines.

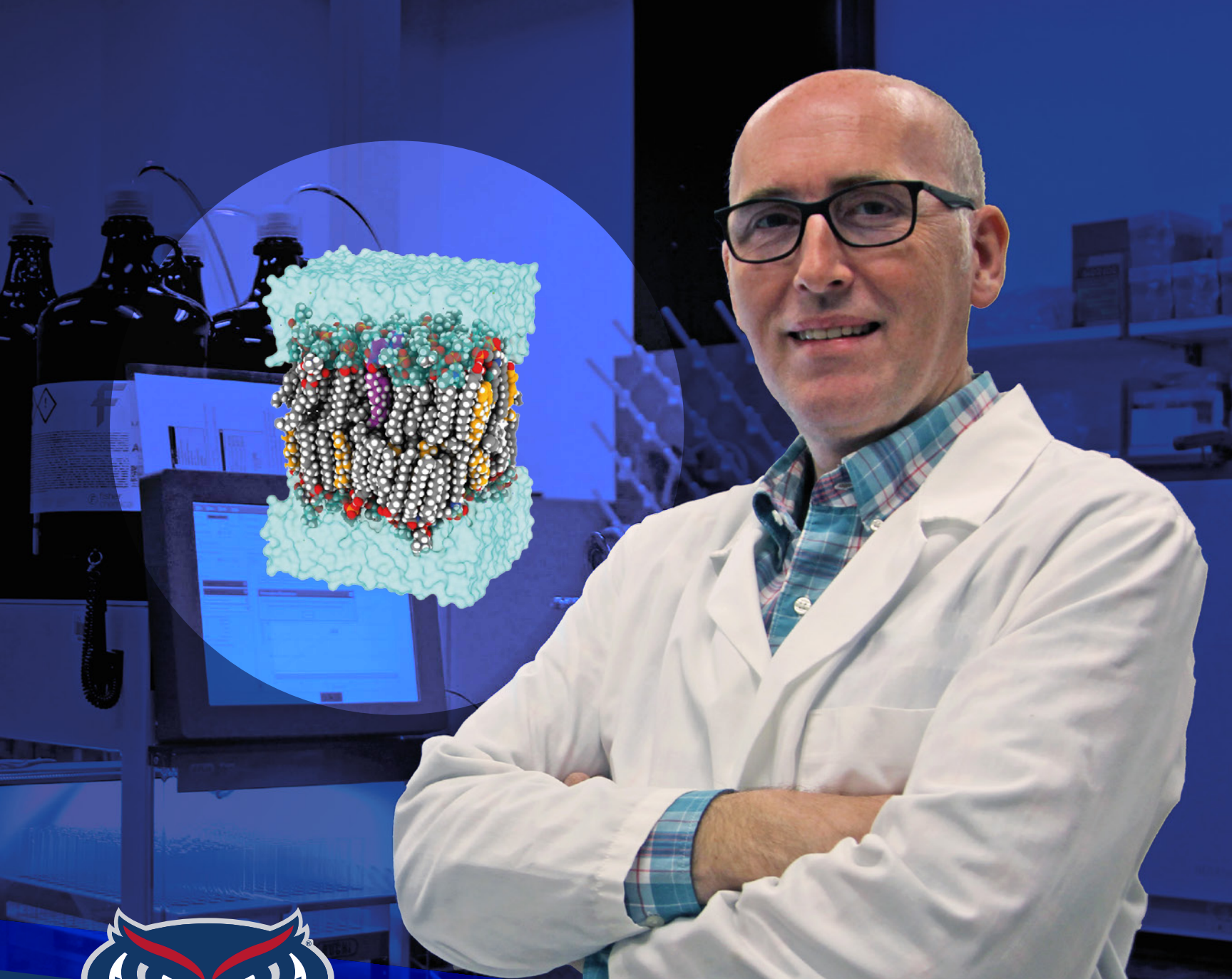
**MYSTERY SOLVED****Research Reveals the True Purpose of Narwhal Tusks**

The narwhal, an iconic whale of remote Arctic waters, is widely known for its long, spiral tusk, which is really an elongated tooth. The tusk, which is predominantly found in males and can grow up to 10 feet long, is one of the most fascinating traits in nature and is the inspiration for myths such as the unicorn. While it is believed to play a role in competition for mates, its function is still debated because few people have observed how these elusive animals use their tusks in the wild.

Using drones, researchers from Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, and Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in partnership with Inuit communities in Nunavut in Canada's High Arctic, provide the first evidence of narwhals using their tusks in the wild to investigate, manipulate and influence the behavior of Arctic char, including delivering enough force with their tusks to stun and possibly kill the fish. Researchers captured 17 distinct behaviors, which shed light on the dynamics between the narwhal, its prey and avian competitors.

Results of the study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Marine Science*, also reveal the first evidence of likely play in narwhals, as well as other fascinating insights into narwhal behavior, including social learning, and possibly social instruction and personality differences among individual narwhals. These novel findings further enrich our understanding of narwhals' complex behavior. Findings also provide the first reports of interactions between narwhal, fish and birds, including attempted kleptoparasitism, a "food thief" situation, among narwhals and glaucous gulls.

"Narwhals are known for their 'tusking' behavior, where two or more of them simultaneously raise their tusks almost vertically out of the water, crossing them in what may be a ritualistic behavior to assess a potential opponent's qualities or to display those qualities to potential mates," said Greg O'Corry-Crowe, Ph.D., senior author, research professor at FAU Harbor Branch and a National Geographic Explorer. "But now we know that narwhal tusks have other uses, some quite unexpected, including foraging, exploration and play."



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Maciej Stawikowski, Ph.D., licensed his advanced fluorescent cholesterol probes to industry so researchers around the world can study how lipid imbalances contribute to Alzheimer's disease and other neurodegenerative disorders, offering new insights into cellular processes and potential therapeutic targets.

Learn more at
www.fau.edu/research-admin/technology-development





SCOTT KELSO, PH.D.



FEET FIRST

How AI is Unlocking the Secrets of Infant Interaction

Advances in artificial intelligence and motion analysis are providing groundbreaking insights into how infants transition from random movements to intentional actions. Researchers at Florida Atlantic University used AI to analyze infant behavior, revealing new details about how babies learn to interact with their environment.

The study, published in *Scientific Reports*, builds on the classic baby-mobile experiment first introduced in the late 1960s. In this setup, a colorful mobile is tethered to an infant's foot. When the baby kicks, the mobile moves, teaching the infant that their actions can influence their surroundings. This simple yet powerful method offers a glimpse into how infants develop purposeful control over their movements.

Florida Atlantic researchers employed a Vicon 3D motion capture system to track infant movements during their experiment. By applying machine learning and deep learning techniques, they analyzed changes in movement patterns across different stages of the experiment, classifying five-second clips of motion data.

Deep learning demonstrated exceptional accuracy in detecting the nuances of infant behavior, especially in foot movements.

"This finding is significant because the AI systems were not told anything about the experiment or which part of the infant's body was connected to the mobile," said Scott Kelso, Ph.D., co-author and Glenwood and Martha Creech Eminent Scholar in Science at the Center for Complex Systems and Brain Sciences in Florida Atlantic's Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. "What this shows is that the feet – as end effectors – are the most affected by the interaction with the mobile. In other words, the way infants connect with their environment has the biggest impact at the points of contact with the world. Here, this was 'feet first.'"



The deep-learning model achieved 86% accuracy in analyzing foot movements, outperforming analysis of hands, knees or whole-body movements. Notably, foot movements displayed accuracy rates approximately 20% higher than other body parts, underscoring their critical role in early interactions.

The experiment revealed intriguing behavioral patterns. After the mobile was disconnected, infants displayed increased exploratory movements, suggesting an eagerness to reconnect with their environment.

"We found that infants explored more after being disconnected from the mobile than they did before they had the chance to control it," said Aliza Sloan, Ph.D., a postdoctoral research scientist in the Schmidt College of Science. "However, some infants showed movement patterns during this disconnected phase that contained hints of their earlier interactions with the mobile. This suggests that only certain infants understood their relationship with

AI can help researchers analyze subtle changes in infant movements, and even their stillness, to give us insights into how they think and learn, even before they can speak."

– Nancy Aaron Jones, Ph.D.

the mobile well enough to maintain those movement patterns, expecting that they would still produce a response from the mobile even after being disconnected."

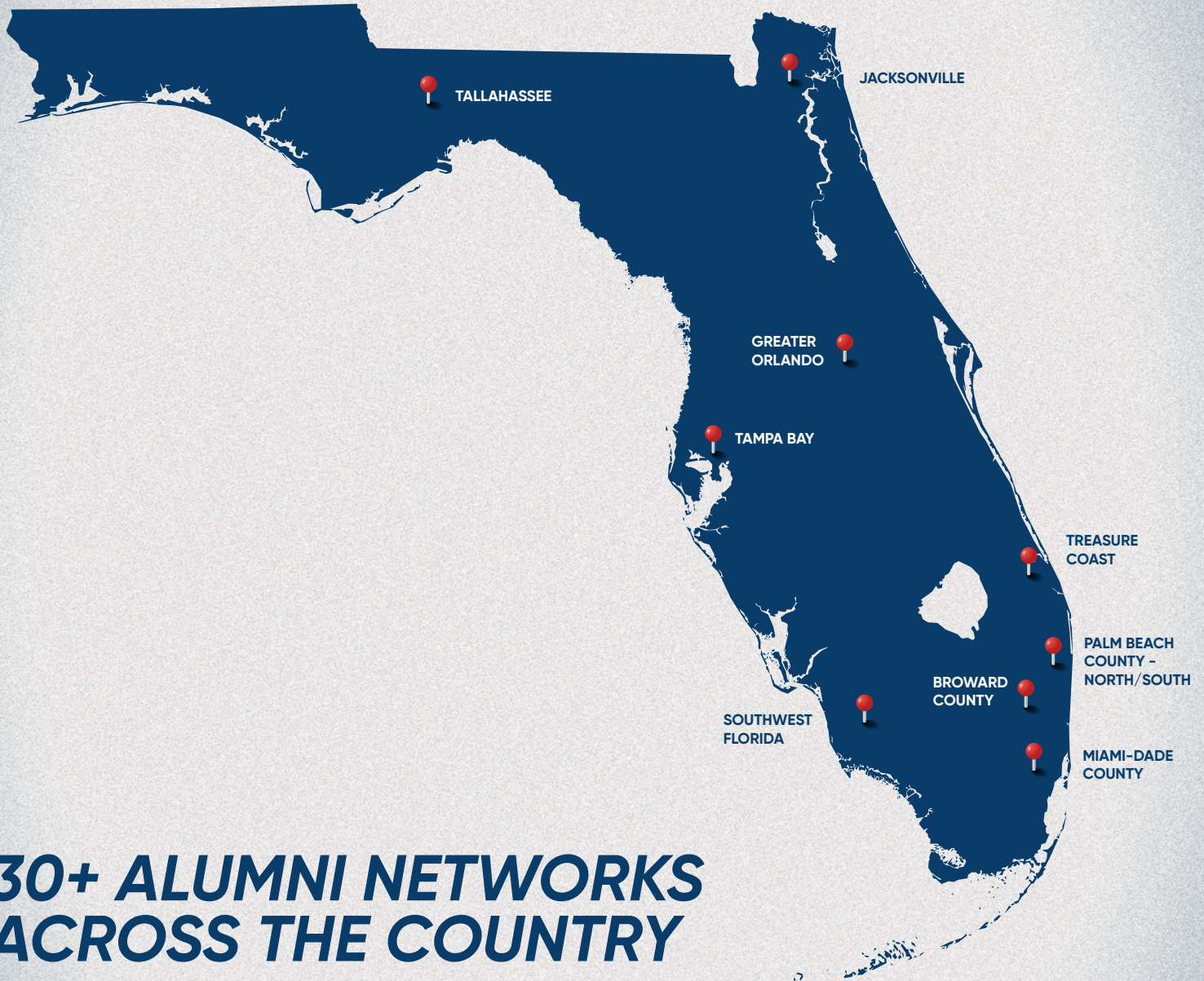
Researchers emphasized the challenge of studying infant behavior, as infants cannot communicate their experiences verbally.

"AI can help researchers analyze subtle changes in infant movements, and even their stillness, to give us insights into how they think and learn, even before they can speak," said Nancy Aaron Jones, Ph.D., co-author and professor in Florida Atlantic's Department of Psychology. "Their movements also can help us make sense of the vast degree of individual variation that occurs as infants develop."

This study marks a step forward in using AI to explore infant development. By leveraging the capabilities of AI, researchers are gaining deeper insights into the earliest stages of human interaction, opening doors to more effective approaches in developmental science and early interventions.

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Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute is proud to contribute to Florida Atlantic's rise to R1: Very High Research Spending and Doctorate Production status - the most prestigious research accolade in the country.

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Pinnacle of Research

Florida Atlantic Achieves Elite Status as an R1: Very High Research Spending and Doctorate Production University

BY GISELE GALOUSTIAN

Florida Atlantic University has officially established itself among the most prestigious colleges and universities in the United States for its notable accomplishments in research. Alongside Harvard University, Stanford University, the University of California, Berkeley and MIT, Florida Atlantic now holds the esteemed designation as an R1: Very High Research Spending and Doctorate Production University in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

Sixty years is considered young in the world of academic institutions, but Florida Atlantic has defied the limitations of that label. Now, soaring in its stature nationally and internationally, the University is ranked No. 103 among U.S. News & World Report's Top Public Schools. It also is ranked No. 32 in the nation in the "Social Mobility" category, due to its innovative programs and services that support low-income students.



Excellence

Florida Atlantic's Division I athletics program also continues to attract top student-athletes and national attention. With premier academic and athletic offerings firmly in place, exemplary research that merits R1 status is now the third sturdy leg supporting Florida Atlantic's burgeoning reputation.

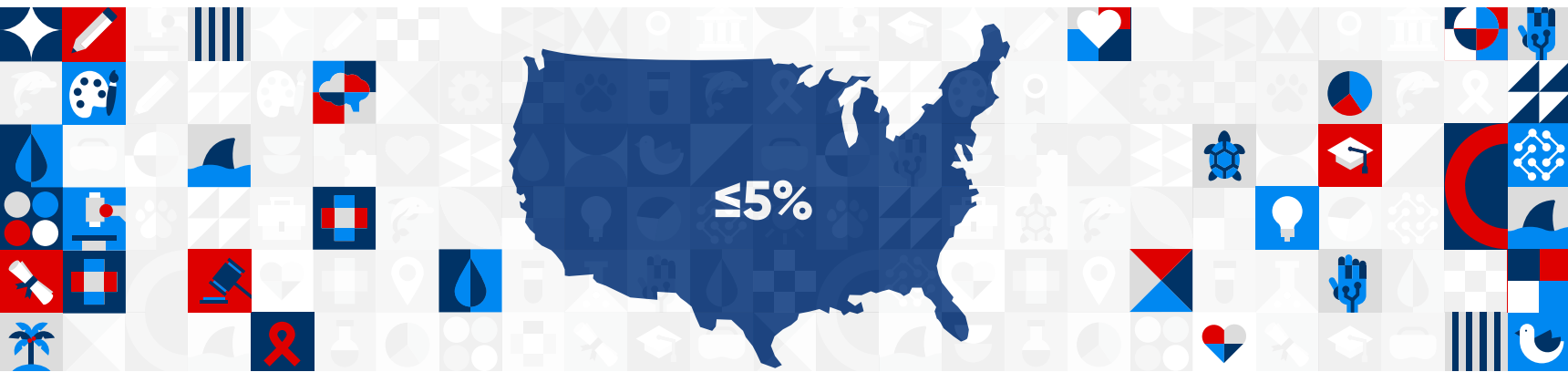
"The R1 designation is a highly coveted achievement in the collegiate world, symbolizing the pinnacle of research excellence," said then-Interim FAU President Stacy Volnick. "This designation is more than just a title; it serves as a powerful catalyst for transformation, opening doors to major donors and research grants that will elevate our institution's capabilities and reach."

In the competitive landscape of higher education, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education plays a pivotal role in determining a university's standing. To qualify for the highly

desired R1 status, institutions must spend at least \$50 million on research and development and produce at least 70 research doctorates annually.

Amidst a sea of nearly 4,000 higher education institutions, Florida Atlantic is one of only 187 R1 universities. Remarkably, Florida Atlantic also is one of only 30 R1 universities nationwide recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education, emphasizing its dedication to ensuring students from all backgrounds succeed.

"Florida Atlantic is now the sixth institution in the Florida State University System to hold R1 status," said Piero Bussani, chair of Florida Atlantic's Board of Trustees. "Since its inception, the University's efforts have been propelled by the state's steadfast commitment to advancing academic research, which is crucial to the United States' global competitiveness."



Less than 5% of the nation's nearly 4,000 universities and colleges have earned the R1 designation.

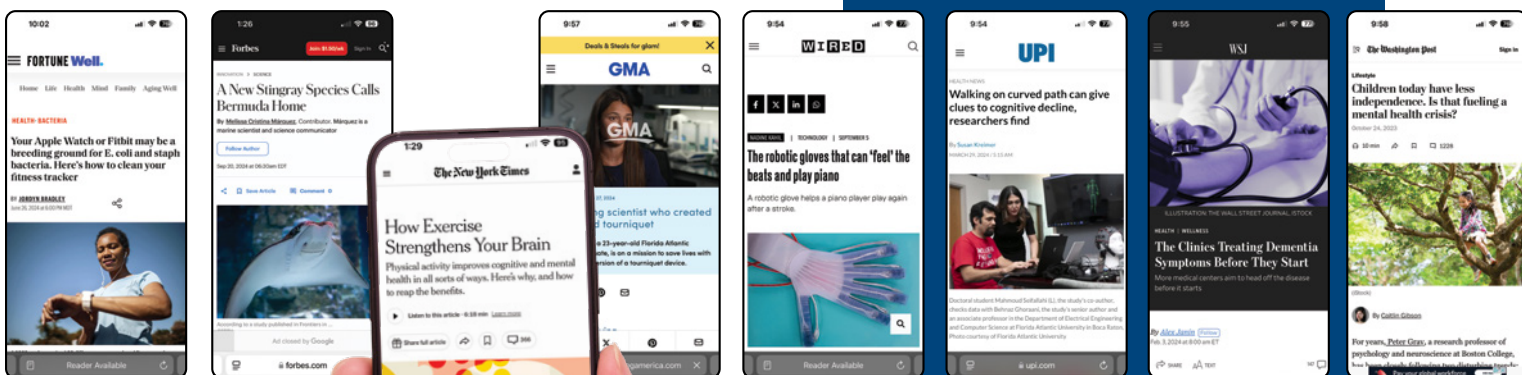
SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The prestige associated with R1 status acts like a magnet, drawing in world-class faculty and top-tier students eager to be part of an elite academic community. This influx of talent enhances the university's academic landscape and boosts its national prestige.

Florida Atlantic faculty members drive the University's rapidly expanding external funding portfolio through their scholarly work, including externally funded research projects, peer-reviewed publications, and initiatives in indexing and polling. This effort also results in news stories in media outlets worldwide and translates into millions of dollars in advertising value equivalency (AVE). For the 2022-23 fiscal year, Florida Atlantic's research-related news garnered more than 31,000 mentions in national and international media, resulting in an impressive AVE of \$371 million. The key takeaway? Florida Atlantic's expertise is making a global impact by educating and informing the public worldwide.

\$371 MILLION

Florida Atlantic faculty members' scholarly contributions drive the university's rapidly growing research portfolio – and the media coverage of their research garners millions of dollars in Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE). Florida Atlantic's FY22-23 research-related news generated more than 31k mentions in national and international media outlets, for an AVE of \$371M.



With the R1 recognition comes a wealth of new opportunities for collaboration, allowing faculty members and researchers to engage with their peers across the nation and beyond. Moreover, the R1 designation fosters increased engagement with industry and community partners, bridging the gap between academia and real-world applications. This accelerates innovation, entrepreneurship and knowledge creation, positioning Florida Atlantic as a hub of groundbreaking research and development.

Florida Atlantic's robust graduate programs also play a crucial role in supporting the research enterprise, cultivating a skilled workforce and nurturing the next generation of researchers. Students benefit immensely from unique research opportunities

and internships, immersing themselves in a rich academic environment that encourages exploration and discovery. Research laboratories benefit from talented graduate student assistance in the discovery process.

"Ultimately, the R1 designation empowers Florida Atlantic to address pressing societal issues head-on, contributing to advances in health, technology and policy," said Gregg Fields, Ph.D., vice president for research at Florida Atlantic. "This alignment with societal needs enhances the University's mission and reinforces its commitment to making a meaningful impact on the world. In this way, the R1 status is beyond an accolade; it's a vital tool for driving progress."





RESEARCH PIONEERS

Florida Atlantic’s ascent to the R1 designation reflects the vision and groundbreaking achievements of its pioneering researchers across diverse disciplines. Among the most notable is the late William “Bill” Glenn, Ph.D., whose revolutionary advancements in high-resolution imaging earned him 137 U.S. patents and an Emmy for the invention of the digital noise reducer.

The late Edwin Link, Ph.D., founder of Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, transformed ocean exploration with cutting-edge underwater technologies like submersibles and remotely operated vehicles, setting new standards in marine science. Shirley Pomponi, Ph.D., also played a pivotal role in advancing marine science and ocean exploration, serving on national advisory panels that influenced congressional funding for critical research.

Other Florida Atlantic Harbor Branch researchers, such as Brian Lapointe, Ph.D., and John Reed, Ph.D., have made significant contributions to marine science, from addressing nutrient pollution’s effects on coral reefs to spearheading coral restoration efforts.

In health care, Charles H. Hennekens, M.D., made monumental contributions to cardiovascular research, demonstrating the life-saving potential of aspirin in preventing heart attacks and strokes, a discovery credited with saving more than 1 million lives worldwide.

Anne Boykin, Ph.D., the inaugural dean of Florida Atlantic’s Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing, revolutionized nursing education through her holistic approach, emphasizing caring as a central tenet of the nursing profession.

In neuroscience, Randy Blakely, Ph.D., has been a leader in understanding brain function and earning recognition as a global neuroscience educator; and J. A. Scott Kelso, Ph.D., has made groundbreaking contributions on coordination dynamics that significantly advanced our understanding of complex systems.



Trailblazers such as Taghi Khoshgoftaar, Ph.D., director of Florida Atlantic's Data Mining and Machine Learning Lab, have cemented the University's reputation in artificial intelligence (AI), becoming one of the nation's most highly cited researchers in computer science. Leonard Berry, Ph.D., was instrumental in climate change advocacy, providing critical testimony on sea-level rise before the U.S. Senate.

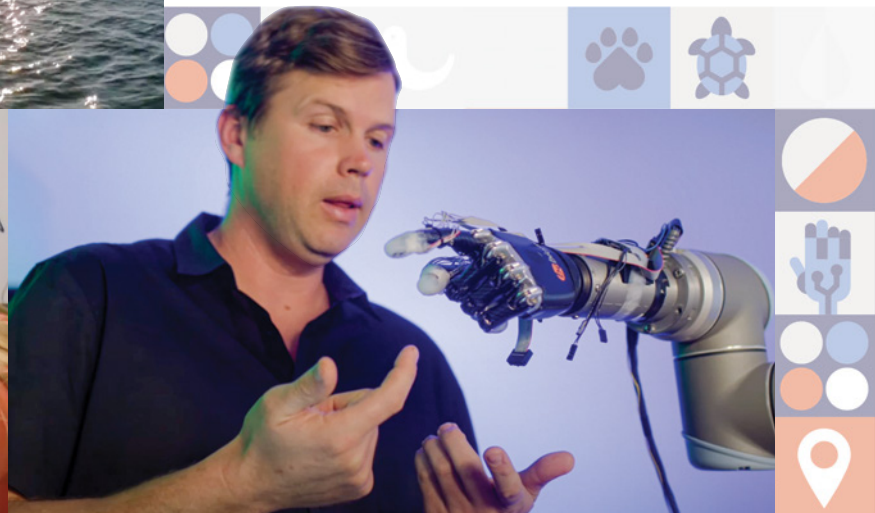
Additional luminaries include Isaac Elishakoff, Ph.D., an international authority in structural mechanics and composite materials, and Richard Shusterman, Ph.D., founder of the field of somaesthetics.

Through the extraordinary efforts of these visionaries and many others, Florida Atlantic has laid a strong foundation for excellence, propelling its rise to R1 status. Their collective impact continues to position it as a leader in research, innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration, addressing some of the world's most pressing challenges across science, health, technology and the humanities.



ULTIMATELY, THE R1 DESIGNATION EMPOWERS FLORIDA ATLANTIC TO ADDRESS PRESSING SOCIETAL ISSUES HEAD-ON, CONTRIBUTING TO ADVANCES IN HEALTH, TECHNOLOGY AND POLICY.”

- Gregg Fields, Ph.D.





HALL OF INNOVATION

Florida Atlantic has cultivated a legacy of distinguished alumni who have made remarkable contributions across a wide range of industries, shaping the future of science, technology, space exploration, health and beyond. Among these trailblazers is Steve Swanson, Ph.D., a NASA astronaut who flew on the Space Shuttle Atlantis in 2007 and Discovery in 2009, as well as the Russian Soyuz TMA-12M in 2014, representing the University's commitment to advancing space exploration and innovation.

Nicole Cummings exemplifies the University's influence in aerospace engineering, overseeing NASA's Artemis program, which aims to land the first woman and first person of color on the moon. Morgan Cable, Ph.D., a research scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, has played key roles in iconic missions like Cassini, Europa Clipper and Mars Perseverance. And Christopher McKay, Ph.D., a planetary scientist at NASA's Ames Research Center, has led pioneering studies on astrobiology and the potential for life on Mars — further cementing Florida Atlantic's impact on space exploration.

In the technology sector, Florida Atlantic alumni have driven innovation that shapes modern life. Jimmy Clidas, founder of Google's Data Center R&D teams, has revolutionized cloud computing infrastructure; while Mark Dean, Ph.D., an inventor of the IBM PC and holder of multiple revolutionary patents, transformed consumer computing forever.

In the realm of cybersecurity and digital communication, Phil Zimmermann, a Florida Atlantic computer science graduate, changed the way the world protects its data by creating Pretty Good Privacy, the most widely used email encryption software globally. His work laid the foundation for secure digital communication in an increasingly connected world.

In health and wellness, Florida Atlantic alumni have left an indelible mark. Richard DiMarchi, Ph.D., was honored with the American Association for the Advancement of Science's prestigious 2023 Mani L. Bhaumik Breakthrough of the Year Award for his transformative work in obesity treatment. Hannah Herbst, a Forbes 30 Under 30 honoree and America's Top Young Scientist, created an innovative automated tourniquet device to save lives during trauma emergencies, embodying the University's spirit of problem-solving and compassion. Maria Jasin, Ph.D., a renowned cancer researcher at Memorial Sloan Kettering and recipient of the Shaw Prize in Life Science and Medicine, has made groundbreaking contributions to the field of genetics and tumor suppressor genes.

Florida Atlantic alumni also have made strides in renewable energy and sustainability. Sue Skemp, a mechanical engineering leader, returned to her alma mater to develop ocean energy technologies, advancing the field of renewable, clean energy solutions. From space exploration and advanced technology to life-saving medical innovation and environmental sustainability,

alumni reflect the University's commitment to fostering leaders, researchers and entrepreneurs who drive meaningful change. Through their profound contributions, Florida Atlantic alumni continue to elevate the University's global reputation as a hub of excellence, innovation and societal impact.

EYE ON THE FUTURE

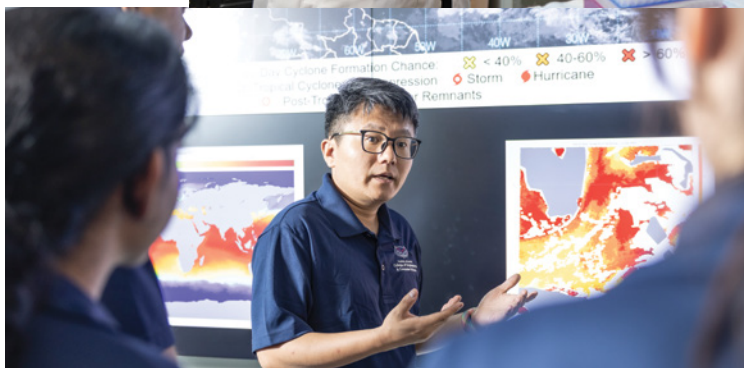
Looking toward the future, Florida Atlantic is focused on expanding its graduate programs in key areas such as biotechnology, AI, cybersecurity and marine sciences. The University is committed to fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, ensuring that students and faculty members work across departments to drive innovation. To support this growth, Florida Atlantic plans to enhance its research infrastructure, investing in state-of-the-art laboratories, specialized centers and

advanced technology to facilitate cutting-edge research in various fields such as life sciences, engineering and smart health.

Collaboration will remain a cornerstone of Florida Atlantic's development, with established partnerships like those with the Max Planck Florida Institute for Neuroscience, Memorial Healthcare, Florida Power & Light and many others — and is expected to grow even stronger. The University also is committed to expanding its global reach, building international research partnerships and providing students with opportunities for global engagement.

As it continues its growth, Florida Atlantic is positioned to become a key player in addressing critical challenges, such as climate change, health care and technological innovation, further solidifying its status as a leader in higher education and research.

“At Florida Atlantic, we are not just building a university — we are shaping a future where discovery knows no boundaries, collaboration drives innovation, and education transforms lives,” Fields said. “The challenges we face today demand bold solutions, and Florida Atlantic is prepared to lead the way.”



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**How the Florida Atlantic
Career Center is Preparing
Students for Success**

BY ALYSE COOKE

Years of Career





Services

Many American families view college as an investment in their children's future. But with so many variables in both higher education and the labor market, how can they navigate these risks to maximize their returns?

The answer at Florida Atlantic University is simple: university career services.

In a 2024 employment report by the Burning Glass Institute and Strada Institute for the Future of Work, a startling 52% of college graduates reported being underemployed one year after receiving their bachelor's degree. Underemployment – which refers to individuals working in jobs that do not utilize their education or training – also remains a challenge over time, as 45% of graduates reported being underemployed a decade after receiving their degree.

These findings underscore an increasing concern among students, parents, policymakers and higher education institutions alike: that a degree will not automatically lead to employment in a college-level job. For first-generation and low-income students especially, the combination of student debt and underemployment may come with a substantial financial burden.

On the bright side, the Future of Work data highlight a positive connection between college-level employment

and career services. Across majors, graduates who had at least one internship were 48.5% less likely to become underemployed. Additionally, 79% of graduates who began a college-level job upon receiving their degree remained so after five years, revealing the importance of career services in helping students secure immediate positions for lasting career outcomes.

"With the Career Center's guidance, I secured an internship that turned into a full-time role after graduation, and I'm still with that company nearly seven years later as a senior account director," said Casey Blomberg '19, who received a bachelor's degree in marketing from the College of Business. "It didn't just help me start my career – it helped shape my future."

At Florida Atlantic – where more than 30% of undergraduates are first-generation college students and nearly 40% are from low-income homes – student success is inseparable from career success, and 83% of low-income graduates move up at least one income bracket within a year of graduating.

"Through innovative, industry-aligned strategies, the Career Center has played a central role in Florida Atlantic's rise as a leader in social mobility and a driver of workforce readiness," said then-Interim FAU President Stacy Volnick. "The job market is constantly changing, and the Career Center continues to implement the best programs and platforms to prepare our students for life after college."



Did You Know?

The Florida Atlantic Career Center is recognized nationally for its excellence in preparing students for career success.

- Handshake: Career Spark Award (2023)
- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators: Silver Excellence Award (2022-23)
- National Career Development Association: Outstanding Practitioner of the Year Award (Brian Montalvo, 2021)
- Cooperative Education & Internship Association: Best Practice Award (2017)
- Florida Association of College & Employers: Brownlee Leadership Award (James Watson Jr., 2006)

Career Centric from the Start

When it opened in 1964, Florida Atlantic served only upperclassmen who transferred from junior colleges. Given this limited and critical time before graduation, the University emphasized the importance of preparing students for college-level employment.

This began in 1965, when the Placement Office was established to provide career assistance. The office helped students arrange on-campus interviews and access resources like an occupational directory. In 1967, the scope of its services widened to include career planning and a cooperative education program, allowing students to gain practical experience in supervised work environments.

As the student body grew, so did the demand for career services. In 1971, the Placement Office moved to a prime location in the University's Student Center, where its growth continued into the early 2000s. In 2015, the office was officially re-introduced as the Career Center, located in the Student Support Services building. Its name and location were updated to more accurately reflect the wide range of services designed to support student success.

Present Day Impact

Today, the Career Center serves more than 23,000 students each year across all six of Florida Atlantic's campuses. Students benefit from individual career coaching, resume writing, interview preparation spaces, headshots, a professional clothing closet and more.

Students also engage with the Career Center virtually. In fact, 97% of incoming students participate in its award-winning



“At Florida Atlantic, we are redefining the student experience by embedding career readiness into every facet of campus life. This transformative approach ensures that every student graduates equipped to lead, innovate and make meaningful contributions in a rapidly evolving world.”

– Brian Montalvo,
assistant vice president of career services

Canvas module, Kick Off Your Future. This program supports students at every step of their career journey, from analyzing the earning potential of each major to developing an individualized career action plan. Once students establish this early connection with the Career Center, more than 80% of undergraduates continue to engage via the virtual platform, workshops, career and internship fairs, or career coaching.

“At Florida Atlantic, we are redefining the student experience by embedding career readiness into every facet of campus life,” said Brian Montalvo, assistant vice president of career services. “This transformative approach ensures that every student graduates equipped to lead, innovate and make meaningful contributions in a rapidly evolving world.”

Much like its early days in facilitating job placements, the Career Center still assists with on-campus interviews, now bringing more than 1,000 companies to campus each academic year. It also hosts at least 15 career fairs annually and connects thousands of students and alumni with a network of more than 6,000 active employers.

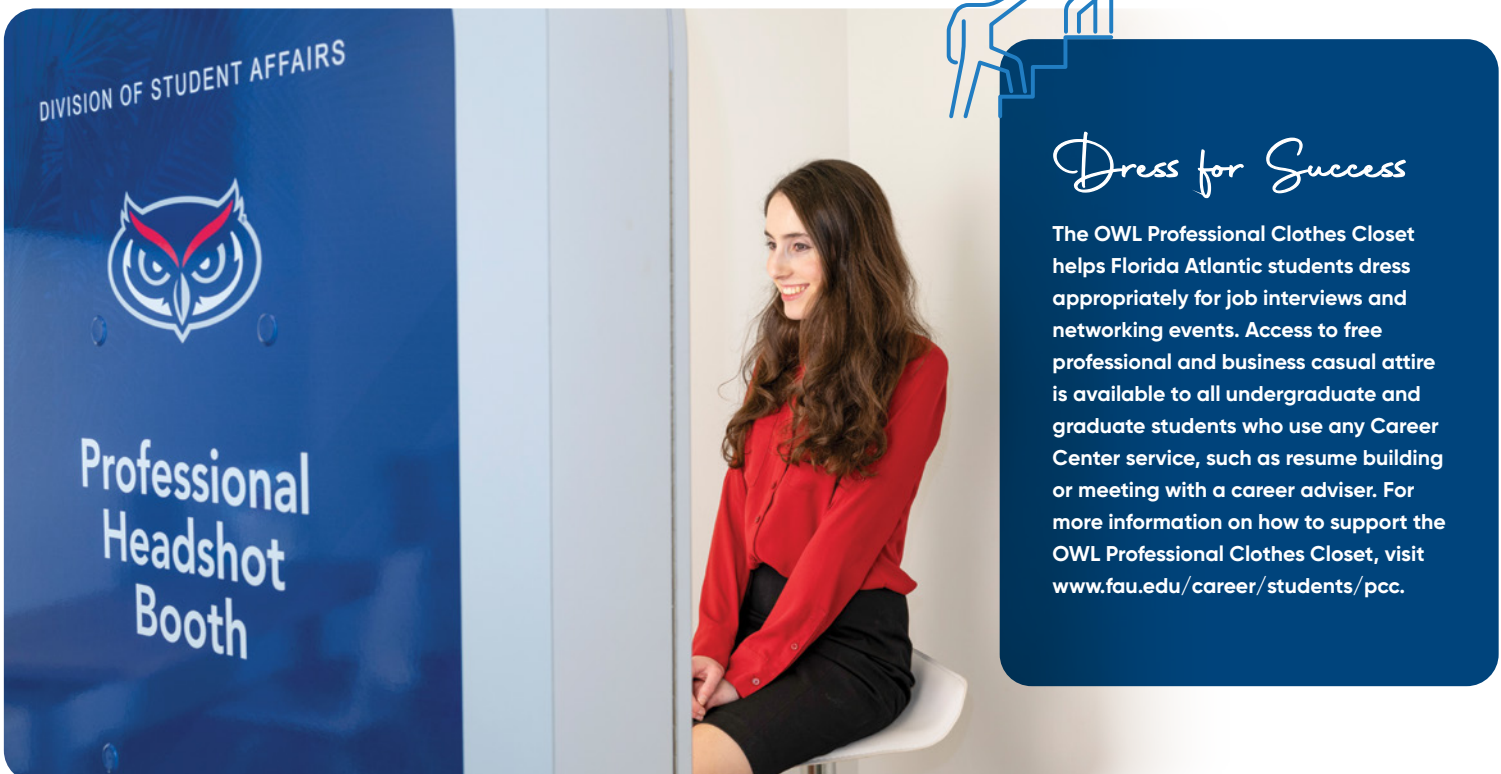
Recognizing the immense influence that internships have on shaping long-term career outcomes, the Career Center staff dedicates a significant amount of time and resources to providing these opportunities for students. Each year, the Career Center helps students attain about 10,000 internships that pave the way for longstanding success in their chosen fields. In 2017, the Career Center’s exceptional internship programs were recognized with a

Best Practice Award from the national Cooperative Education & Internship Association.

“With the help of my career advisor, I secured a medical assistant internship that kickstarted my career in the health care field,” said Liana Fleming ’24, who received a bachelor’s degree in general studies from the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. “This helped me grow into my current role as an urgent care office manager and has prepared me for greater opportunities in the future.”

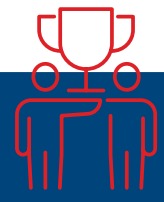
To enhance the awareness and impact of its offerings, the Career Center has developed strong collaborations with each of Florida Atlantic’s 10 colleges – and its network of more than 400 faculty members infuse career readiness into their curricula in various ways. These include listing the Career Center as a resource in syllabi, scheduling class presentations about career services, notifying students about upcoming career fairs, and assigning optional modules for practical career skills. As a result of these unified efforts, career readiness has become firmly integrated into the academic experience and students are more actively engaged with the University’s career resources.

To strengthen its bridge from academia to industry, the Career Center introduced the innovative Industry to Campus Lab in fall 2024, which provides a space for faculty members and industry professionals to exchange insights and foster meaningful partnerships.



Dress for Success

The OWL Professional Clothes Closet helps Florida Atlantic students dress appropriately for job interviews and networking events. Access to free professional and business casual attire is available to all undergraduate and graduate students who use any Career Center service, such as resume building or meeting with a career adviser. For more information on how to support the OWL Professional Clothes Closet, visit www.fau.edu/career/students/pcc.



Career Development

The Florida Atlantic Career Center is a trailblazer in innovative career development practices. Its pioneering strategies, methods and case studies have been recognized in more than 25 publications, and staff members have delivered hundreds of national, regional and local presentations as industry leaders in career readiness.

According to a 2024 workforce report by YouScience, 90% of employers believe stronger partnerships with postsecondary institutions would improve their long-term talent pipelines. Additionally, aligning educational outcomes with market needs was among their top recommendations for better preparing students to enter the workforce. The Industry to Campus Lab addresses both of these concerns.

The space is modeled after business think tanks, and faculty members use it to meet with industry representatives to learn about the skills they are seeking from new talent. In turn, Florida Atlantic ensures that the education and experiences students receive align with employer expectations. Ultimately, this mutually beneficial dynamic prepares students to enter college-level jobs upon graduation and provides employers with access to a highly qualified pool of candidates that have been trained to meet current industry requirements.

“Florida Atlantic’s reputation for increasing social mobility while producing career-ready students for a growing Florida economy requires us to be trendsetters in career education and readiness,” said Larry Faerman, Ph.D., vice president for student affairs. “We have the opportunity, but more meaningfully, the privilege of creating and maintaining a synergistic environment for students, faculty and industry to converge.”

To continue its impact at the University and across major industries, the Career Center plans to build on the Industry to Campus Lab’s momentum. Its growth will include additional opportunities for students, faculty members and industry professionals to co-create programs and curricula that will prepare students for the workforce of tomorrow.

Vision 2030: A New Era of Workforce Readiness

Looking ahead, the Career Center will pursue a bold strategic plan called Vision 2030, with the goal of making Florida Atlantic the most career-centric university in the nation. At the core of this vision is a straightforward principle that career readiness is not just a service, but a culture. To ensure all students are workforce ready, the Career Center is committed to expanding, enhancing and integrating its resources throughout the University. This cultural transformation will make career preparation an intrinsic part of the student experience.

“By leveraging innovation, collaboration and cutting-edge technology, we are not just preparing students for their first job – we are equipping them to thrive in a future where adaptability, purpose and impact define success,” Montalvo said.

In the rapidly changing world of business and technology, standing still is not an option. The Career Center staff understands this reality and is not only willing to adapt but is also prepared to lead the charge. As Vision 2030 takes shape, major renovations will be bolstered by the implementation

Mitchell Roshel, director of employer and community engagement at the Career Center





New Era



The Career Center will pursue a bold strategic plan called Vision 2030, with the goal of making Florida Atlantic the most career-centric university in the nation.

of cutting-edge technologies and digital tools that will scale and enhance students' career planning experiences. This includes the construction of a new Career Lab and a complementary Career 360 program.

The Career Lab will serve as the technological epicenter of Florida Atlantic's career readiness efforts, providing access to state-of-the-art tools and resources that will prepare students for an evolving workforce. As its name implies, Career 360 will provide a full scope of digital tools that cater to a student's entire career journey within one program. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) will further enhance their experiences while providing real-time insights and enabling alignment with the latest industry standards. Best of all, the tech-driven design of the Career Lab will increase career coaching stations by 150%, allowing the Career Center to serve an additional 168 students each day.

In its mission to address skills gaps and anticipate future workforce demands, Vision 2030 also aims to increase employer partnerships and strengthen industry collaborations. To that end, the Career Center renovation plans include dynamic, high-tech spaces to accommodate employer information sessions,

networking events, recruiting activities, workshops and other engagement opportunities. For global partners, remote and hybrid capabilities will enable flexible communication in a professional setting. Regularly scheduled events will bring together industry leaders and the university community to discuss workforce demands and create academic strategies related to emerging fields such as data science, AI, cybersecurity and sustainable technologies. Along with the institutional culture of career readiness, preparing students to thrive in these budding industries will position them for success in high-demand careers.

For the past 60 years, Florida Atlantic has not only supported the career readiness of its students, but it has actively addressed workforce demands. By adapting to industry trends and fostering strategic partnerships, the Career Center continues to position the University as a leader in preparing students for successful, lasting careers. As it moves forward with Vision 2030, Florida Atlantic will strengthen the bridge it has created between academia and industry, ensuring future generations are equipped to navigate an ever-changing global workforce – and that the value of their degree reflects a substantial return on their investment. 🍌



Meet the New Leader of Florida Atlantic

**Q&A with
President
Adam Hasner**

BY AMY HAYCOCK

Adam Hasner was appointed president of Florida Atlantic University unanimously by the Board of Trustees on Feb. 10. A longtime South Floridian, Hasner was raised in Palm Beach County and served in the Florida House of Representatives from 2002 to 2010. During that time, he championed many meaningful initiatives for his “hometown university,” including Florida Atlantic’s Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Engineering East building and a medical simulation center — both on the Boca Raton campus — and the Office of Ocean Economy.

Hasner began his tenure as Florida Atlantic’s eighth president on March 10 and quickly immersed himself in university life. During his first few weeks, he visited all six campuses, spoke at several events, and even threw out the first pitch at an Owls baseball game and a St. Louis Cardinals spring training game in Jupiter. Despite his busy schedule, he took a few minutes to answer some questions for Florida Atlantic magazine.



Q: Welcome, President Hasner! You are no stranger to Florida Atlantic – your support of the University spans more than two decades. What attracted you to the opportunity to become president?

A: I've always had a passion for public service, dating back to my time in the legislature, and I continue to look for ways to make a difference and serve my community. I realized that the honor of being president of Florida Atlantic — my hometown university — would give me an opportunity to make an impact on the lives of thousands of students and others who are part of the university community.

Q: What strengths do you bring to the role of president?

A: I have an unmatched level of energy, tenacity and determination to see this university succeed. Having grown up in Palm Beach County, I have decades of experience serving this community, as well as the relationships and knowledge that allowed me to hit the ground running on day one. It could easily take someone from outside this area years, if not longer, to be able to understand the talent and resources that comprise this region.

(continued)



Q: Speaking of growing up in Palm Beach County, where did you go to school and what activities were you involved in?

A: Both of my parents were public school teachers, so I have an appreciation for public schools myself. I went to Palm Beach Gardens High School, where I was involved in many activities, including baseball, basketball and football. From the age of 15, I knew I wanted to go into public service, so I decided to pursue a bachelor's degree at the University of Maryland – College Park, even though I didn't know anyone there. Because of its proximity to Washington, D.C., I was able to intern on Capitol Hill. After graduating, I returned to Florida to further my education and received a law degree from Florida State.

Q: What are your top three priorities in your first six months as president?

A: My No. 1 priority is to elevate the prestige of Florida Atlantic to match the prestige and dynamism of our community and region. Second, I want to learn as much as I can about every part of the university: the impact that each area is making, the challenges it faces, and the potential opportunities. And third, we're going to start the strategic planning process, which will involve getting everyone focused on where we want to be in the future — not just five years from now, but 25 years from now.

Q: Do you have any mentors who helped to shape your life or career?

A: Yes, my godfather, David. He's been my dad's best friend since college, and he has been like family to me for as far back as I can remember. He has provided me with a tremendous amount of advice and counsel, both personally and professionally, over the years. I am truly thankful that my dad sat next to him at orientation on his first day of college.

Q: What is the best life lesson or advice you've received?

A: When dealing with others, HALT if you feel Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. The first time I heard this advice was related to marriage, but it's a good idea regardless of who you're communicating with, to avoid negative interactions. 🍷



FUN FACTS

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A sports broadcaster

How do you like to spend your free time?

I love to travel with my wife, Jillian. I also enjoy playing golf and reading.

Who are your favorite authors?

Robert Caro, David McCullough, Candice Millar and Amity Shlaes

What is your favorite local restaurant?

Cuban Café in Boca – I've been going there for years.

What may people be surprised to learn about you?

I love country music!

Who is your favorite band/musician?

Rascal Flatts

What is your favorite non-Florida Atlantic sports team?

The Miami Marlins

Stay tuned for a full feature story about President Hasner in the fall 2025 issue of Florida Atlantic magazine.

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Partnership in Paradise

Florida Atlantic Football's Home is Now Flagler Credit Union Stadium

BY MICHAEL DEGEORGE

When the Florida Atlantic University football team takes the field this fall, it will be at Flagler Credit Union Stadium. Florida Atlantic Athletics and Flagler Credit Union have come together in a 15-year naming partnership for the former FAU Stadium.

“Since FAU Stadium opened in 2011, we have been looking for the right naming partner and I am very proud to share that we found that partner in Flagler Credit Union,” said then-Interim FAU President Stacy Volnick. “We have signed a 15-year naming rights deal, worth \$22.5 million, and FAU Stadium will now be named Flagler Credit Union Stadium.”

Flagler Credit Union is a division of Dort Financial Credit Union, headquartered in Grand Blanc, Michigan. Dort Financial began operating its Florida branches under the Flagler Credit Union name following its acquisition of Flagler Bank in December 2023. Founded in 1951, Dort Financial Credit Union serves more than 110,000 members and manages assets exceeding \$2 billion across 16 locations in Michigan and Florida. It offers a full range

of financial services designed to meet the diverse needs of its members. Flagler Credit Union has branch locations in Boca Raton, West Palm Beach, North Palm Beach and Lake Clarke Shores. Membership is open to individuals who live, work, worship, attend school or conduct business in Palm Beach, Martin, Hendry and Broward counties.

“We are excited and honored to formalize an incredible partnership with Flagler Credit Union,” said Brian White, vice president and director of athletics. “This is a historic agreement for Florida Atlantic. It not only speaks to the remarkable momentum of the university, but to the leadership at Flagler Credit Union. They have deep ties to our area and have been a trusted community partner for nearly 25 years. We welcome Flagler Credit Union, its employees and its members to the Owl family and look forward to the affiliation for many years to come.”

At the time of the signing, the term and value of the naming rights deal was the largest corporate sponsorship in the American Athletic Conference for a football stadium. It also is among the



Flagler Credit Union — Stadium —

largest in the Group of Five conferences, which includes the American, Conference USA, Mid-American, Mountain West and Sun Belt.

Florida Atlantic will continue to honor the late Howard Schnellenberger, who founded the football program and served as its inaugural head coach from 2001 to 2011, with the playing field remaining designated as Howard Schnellenberger Field.

“This is a transformational partnership, not only for Florida Atlantic Athletics, but for the entire university,” said Volnick. “The generosity of Flagler Credit Union will have a lasting impact on our student-athletes and athletics programs. We are incredibly thankful to Flagler Credit Union and its board of directors and leadership team for their belief in our vision and very excited to forge this long-term collaboration.”

In addition to football stadium naming rights, Flagler Credit Union will become the official credit union of Florida Atlantic Athletics and Florida Atlantic Alumni when the deal fully commences on July 1. The relationship also includes an extensive multimedia arrangement with Florida Atlantic Athletics. Additionally, Flagler Credit Union will participate in student and alumni engagement opportunities and have marketing activations with Florida Atlantic’s Career Center and business mentoring program.

“We are thrilled to partner with Florida Atlantic University on the naming rights for Flagler Credit Union Stadium. The partnership



From left: Brian White, vice president and director of athletics at Florida Atlantic; Brian Waldron, president and CEO of Dort Financial Credit Union; and then-Interim FAU President Stacy Volnick

underscores our commitment to supporting our community,” said Brian Waldron, president and CEO of Dort Financial Credit Union. “This stadium is more than just a venue — it’s a place where memories are made; where athletes, alumni and fans come together to celebrate teamwork, dedication and excellence. We are honored to partner with a university that shares our values of supporting community and enriching lives.”



The team from Flagler Credit Union on Howard Schnellenberger Field at Flagler Credit Union Stadium



Redefining the Golden Years in Paradise

Researcher Challenges Traditional Retirement Stereotypes

BY **OLESEA SVET**

Paradise takes on new meaning in Florida, where retirement transcends the traditional image of endless leisure.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 1 in 5 Floridians are now 65 or older, and they are changing what it means to age gracefully.

At Florida Atlantic University's Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, researchers like Richard D. Shih, M.D., are challenging traditional retirement stereotypes.

"Aging well extends beyond avoiding illness," Shih said. "It's about staying active, engaged and mentally sharp."

Gone are the days when retirement meant slowing down. Today's seniors are rewriting the aging playbook, embracing physical activity, social connection and preventive care to maintain independence and joy well into their later years.

Movement as Medicine

Regular physical activity remains the cornerstone of healthy aging, but it doesn't require marathon training. Even moderate activities like daily walks, gentle yoga or tai chi can significantly boost strength, balance and cognitive function. According to Shih, consistency matters more than intensity — small amounts of regular movement help combat age-related health challenges.

The key lies in finding activities that bring both health benefits and pleasure, he said. Whether it's swimming in community pools, joining dance classes, or tending community gardens, movement can be a source of joy rather than obligation.

Safety First: Preventing Falls

While Florida offers abundant opportunities for active living, home safety remains crucial. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 1 in 4 older adults falls annually. These incidents account for 95% of hip fractures in seniors.

"Your home should support your independence," Shih said.

Simple modifications — such as secured rugs, bathroom grab bars and enhanced lighting — can transform living spaces into safe sanctuaries. He urged seniors to discuss fall prevention with health care providers, making safety part of their wellness routine.



RICHARD D. SHIH, M.D.

The Social Connection

Physical wellness tells only half the story. Social engagement plays an equally crucial role in healthy aging. Whether through volunteering, pursuing hobbies or participating in community events, staying connected helps ward off depression and cognitive decline.

“Isolation can have serious consequences,” Shih said. “But maintaining relationships and community ties has incredible benefits for both mental and physical health.”

Social engagement can take many forms, from walking groups to book clubs to community events that foster meaningful connections. These activities do more than fill calendars — they create support networks that contribute to overall well-being.

Innovation Meets Aging

The Schmidt College of Medicine leads in innovative senior care, Shih said. Its Florida Geriatric Head Trauma CT Clinical Decision Rule helps doctors make smarter choices about diagnostic imaging after falls. Meanwhile, wearable technology is revolutionizing how seniors monitor their health, offering early warning signs of potential problems.

This blend of cutting-edge medical care and preventive strategies enables seniors to take charge of their health proactively. Technology

becomes a tool for independence, helping residents maintain their active lifestyles with confidence.

The path to healthy aging starts with small, intentional steps — a morning walk, a safer home environment, or reaching out to old friends. Florida’s seniors demonstrate that transformative aging is about creating a lifestyle where wellness, community and joy intersect to define a new version of retirement.

Shih wants his message about healthy aging to remain clear, as he believes the golden years are what people make of them — and it’s never too late to embrace a more active, connected lifestyle.

“In Florida, the golden years truly shimmer with purpose, connection and vitality,” he said. “The state’s growing senior population proves that retirement can be a time of growth and adventure, especially when supported by forward-thinking medical care and strong community bonds.”



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An Unconventional Path to Boca Raton

Zach Kittley Named Hagerty Family Head Football Coach

BY **BEN PAUL**

Zach Kittley, a rising star in the coaching profession and one of college football's sharpest offensive minds, was named Florida Atlantic University's Hagerty Family Head Football Coach in December 2024. His path to Boca Raton, and to the height of his career thus far, has been anything but conventional.

At just 33 years old, Kittley is the youngest head coach in Division I football. He didn't play college football, nor did he come from a football coaching family. He played basketball and was mentored by a track and field coach.

But he had an epiphany in middle school that kicked off his journey to football. It was in that moment he realized he could combine his love of football and admiration of competition with what he had learned from the role models in his family.

"Being around my dad and my two older brothers, who I watched play all sporting events as a kid ... I just fell in love with the aspect of it," Kittley said. "I remember mentioning to my dad that I wanted to be a coach someday."

Kittley's father, Wes, is one of the nation's premier collegiate track and field coaches. He has been at the helm of the Texas Tech program for more than two decades, where he has developed several national champions and multiple Olympians. He also proved to be his son's greatest coaching influence.

"My dad is the greatest coach that I have ever been around, and it's not just because he's a champion coach," Kittley said during his introductory press conference. "It is because he has always done it the right way. He's a man of integrity. He is the best human being that I've ever met."



Kittley's football coaching career began when he was a student assistant, and then graduate assistant, at Texas Tech under Kliff Kingsbury. He was tasked with helping to develop a unique quarterback named Patrick Mahomes, who went on to become a three-time Super Bowl MVP with the Kansas City Chiefs.

Kittley was then hired as the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Houston Christian University, formerly Houston Baptist, in 2018 at the age of 26. It was there that he experienced one of the most defining moments of his career: the 2020 season during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"That was a life-changing year for me. We decided to play a four-game schedule when most people in our conference decided to not play football at all. We got to play at Texas Tech, my

first time coming back home. Every [other] game had been canceled, and we were on ESPN that night. We went in as 40-point underdogs, and we ended up getting beat by two. My quarterback, Bailey Zappe, threw for right under 600 yards ... that was a surreal moment for me that set my career on the path that led me to where I am today."

Kittley was named offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Western Kentucky in 2021, just shy of his 30th birthday. His record-setting offense vaulted him back to Texas Tech the following year, where he was tasked with coordinating a Big 12 offense. He quickly led the team to success. In 2022, Texas Tech led the Big 12 and ranked ninth nationally in passing offense. The Red Raiders also were ranked in the top 25 nationally and second in the Big 12 for total offense.

“ Zach Kittley is a man of high integrity and character, with an incredible reputation in the profession for player development.”

– Brian White, vice president and director of athletics at Florida Atlantic

When Kittley was announced as Florida Atlantic's head coach, Texas Tech was ranked in the top 10 nationally in nearly every offensive metric, including 10th in total offense, eighth in scoring and ninth in passing.





important to me,” Kittley said. “He handles all of my day-to-day for me.”

In his personal life, Kittley’s family remains at the forefront. On the day he was officially introduced at Florida Atlantic, he was surrounded by wife, Emily; their three young sons, Knox, Ford and Rhoads; his mom, Linda; and his dad.

“It’s not easy to be a coach’s wife. We put in a lot of hours and are away a lot, but Emily has always been extremely supportive of every career move I have ever had to make,” Kittley said. “Moving from my hometown — with my parents, and my brother and his wife right next door — it was not easy to leave there. But I knew I had my wife’s blessing, and my kids would love it here.”

“Zach Kittley is a man of high integrity and character, with an incredible reputation in the profession for player development,” said Brian White, vice president and director of athletics at Florida Atlantic. “He is one of the most innovative offensive minds in the game, and I am confident in his ability to build a championship program with an exciting brand of football that can be a source of pride for our fans, our alumni and the FAU community.”

For Kittley, this latest step is his biggest and it is not lost on him.

“I was in charge of eight to 10 staff members, and now I’m in charge of 40 staff members. I was in charge of half of a unit of a football team and now I’m in charge of a whole football team,” he said.

Kittley said he believes the Owls will have success on the field with strong coaching, development and recruiting. But in an era in which turnover among college football rosters and staff is rampant, his foundation begins with setting a team culture off the field.

“This is going to be a relationship-based program, so we need to have great people who care about each other and who care about the student-athletes,” he said.

His philosophy, instilled in him from both his father and his high school coach, Don Black, emphasizes a focus on caring about the student-athletes — not just as numbers on the field but as human beings.

“That can go a long way into getting these guys to love you back and wanting to run through a wall for you,” Kittley said.

Kittley practices what he preaches about relationships in both his professional and personal life. When it comes to his job, he leans on his chief of staff, Harrison Hanna, who came with him from Texas Tech.

“If he wouldn’t have come with me, I probably wouldn’t have taken the job. He’s that

While challenges are sure to arise during his time as a head coach, Kittley believes success will follow if he remains focused on his “why,” which was inspired by the best advice he ever received: Take care of people and be a genuine human.

“There are a lot of people in this profession that go about this for the wrong reasons,” he said. “Be in this for relationships and to help people out and develop young men and women. That’s why I’m in it.”





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'Truly a Family'

Culture Powers Volleyball Team's Remarkable Season

BY JONATHAN CAUDLE

Florida Atlantic University volleyball is coming off one of its most successful seasons.

With 15+ wins for the second consecutive year, and 18+ wins for the 11th time, the Owls' incredible fall campaign culminated in their first American Athletic Conference (AAC) tournament appearance, and ultimately, their first championship berth since 2005.

It also marked one of the most successful seasons for the team under Head Coach Fernanda Nelson, who has been with the program since 2012.

"What I enjoyed the most about this season was the process," Nelson said. "I felt that this was a team that was able to get better every single day. It didn't matter if we were winning or losing, they really bought into the process of getting better and peaking at the right time."

After securing a pair of league sweeps over Charlotte and Memphis to open conference play, the Owls had a remarkable two-game stretch, knocking off the AAC's top two teams in Rice, 3-0, and South Florida, 3-1. These wins sparked a 6-4 finish to the regular season, as the Owls also earned a sweep over Temple, three four-set wins over



Katelynn Robine

Olivia Hart



“The culture made a big difference for our team this year, one of the best we have ever had.”

– **Fernanda Nelson, head coach**



Victoria Hensley

Madison Dyer



Charlotte and North Texas, and capped off the season with a Senior Day win over Tulane.

With a successful regular season under their belts, the Owls then set their sights on postseason play. They headed into the American Athletic Conference Tournament — the team’s first league tournament since 2019 — as the No. 6 seed.

The Owls squared off against No. 3-seed East Carolina in the quarterfinals, earning a five-set win over the Pirates to advance to the semifinals against No. 2-seed Rice. Florida Atlantic rallied in the semifinal matchup to reverse sweep the Rice Owls, punching its ticket to the AAC Championship finals. The Owls finished the season as the No. 2 team in the conference.

This impressive 2024 campaign resulted in multiple conference honors.

Victoria Hensley and Katelynn Robine were named to the AAC All-Conference Second Team, and Robine and Valeria Rosado were named AAC Championship All-Tournament Team selections. Robine and Rosado eclipsed 1,000 career kills and Hensley tallied her 3,000th career assist. Rosado also was recognized prior to the start of the season as one of just five unanimous AAC Preseason All-Conference honorees.

Nelson attributes much of the team’s success to its strong culture.

“The culture made a big difference for our team this year, one of the best we have ever had,” Nelson said. “They really enjoyed being around each other, they were fun to coach, and they brought in a lot of passion. We were truly a family. That was the goal we had from the beginning of the season. The Florida Atlantic volleyball family we created in 2024 will always be remembered.”



Head Coach Fernanda Nelson

Continuing the Climb

Men's Soccer Makes Waves as a Program on the Rise

BY SAM DEAN

It's been seven years since Florida Atlantic University was in the market for a new head men's soccer coach. The program was coming off its third consecutive down year in 2017, having won just seven games combined between 2014 and 2016. Enter Joey Worthen.

Worthen had been an assistant coach at South Carolina, his alma mater and a fellow member of Conference USA, since 2012.

"The state of the program in 2017 was not great, but when I considered the position, I felt like it was a place I could do better," Worthen said. "I wanted a chance to prove myself as a head coach, and it was an appealing position because I was familiar with the program, having coached against them at South Carolina. And I thought this was a place that had potential."

It took time for Worthen to see the results of his efforts, but the tide started to turn in 2019. The new regime's first full recruiting class was in place. Freshmen Tom Abrahamsson, Graeme Pratt and Nacho Alastuey joined sophomores Alonso Coello and Blake Dean and junior Ivan Mykhailenko. The Owls started the season with a big win over No. 17 James Madison. A victory over No. 15 Marshall later in the season clinched the program's first postseason berth since 2013.

"Those first two years were pretty dark. As a first-time head coach, you realize it won't turn around as quickly as you'd hoped," Worthen said. "But when we made that first conference tournament in 2019, we started to get some of that belief back."

Florida Atlantic men's soccer had momentum for the first time in nearly

a decade. After the COVID-19 pandemic derailed the 2020 season, the Owls played a shortened schedule in spring 2021. They finished 6-4-2 — over .500 for the first time since 2007.

A culture had been established, the key personnel members were in place, and Worthen's five-year vision came into focus in fall 2021. The Owls began the season with three straight wins; earned victories over in-state foes Florida Gulf Coast, Jacksonville and North Florida; and once again qualified for postseason play.

The 2021 Conference USA tournament took place in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Owls were set to face the tournament hosts, the Charlotte 49ers, in the quarterfinals — a daunting task. Charlotte had dominated the previous meeting 5-1. Undeterred, the Owls pulled off an upset after two overtimes and a penalty shootout. Abrahamsson, Alastuey and Coello were among the penalty kick goal scorers. In its ninth year as a member of C-USA, Florida Atlantic had its first postseason victory.

But the job was far from finished. Two days later, the Owls met No. 4 ranked Marshall — the defending national champion — in the semifinals. This time, it didn't take extra periods or a penalty shootout to pull off another upset. Abrahamsson scored early, and Mykhailenko salted the game away late to win 3-1 and advance to the championship.



Head Coach Joey Worthen



Graeme Pratt, 2021



Alonso Coello, 2021

Though the final upset bid against No. 15 Kentucky fell short in overtime, the foundation for a successful program was officially in place. Coello signed a professional Major League Soccer (MLS) contract the following spring. In 2023, he made history as the first Owl to start in an MLS match. Pratt, Abrahamsson and Dean returned as key pieces for the Owls' transition to the American Athletic Conference (AAC) in 2022.

Abrahamsson went on to set the program record for games played with Pratt and Dean, who also are among the Top 10.

"That 2021 run showed exactly what we're capable of. That was a big turning point. That set a new standard," Worthen said. "We're no longer looking just to make a conference tournament. We can now compete to win it."

Fast forward to 2024, the Owls' third year in the AAC. They led the league in nearly every offensive category, including goals, assists and shots. Mamadou Diarra was named AAC Offensive Player of the Year, and five other players earned all-conference honors.

For Worthen, everything came full circle on senior night in November 2024. With a postseason berth on the line and facing another powerhouse Charlotte team, which had allowed just six goals in the previous 14 games, the Owls matched that number in just 90 minutes. They throttled the 49ers by a score of 6-1 in front of a record-breaking home crowd at FAU Soccer Stadium.

In just seven years, Florida Atlantic has become a perennial contender in one of the country's toughest conferences. And with Worthen steering the ship, the future is bright for Soccer in Paradise.

"Getting here was a long road, but we did it together," Worthen said. "I'm proud of what we've accomplished." 🍌



Mamadou Diarra, 2024

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To Infinity and Beyond

**ALUMNA HELPS NASA SEND
ASTRONAUTS TO THE MOON**

BY **WELLS DUSENBURY**

The path to engineering for Nicole Cummings '03 began modestly.

As a student at Wellington High School, Cummings said she had not considered engineering until she was encouraged by one of her teachers to join an after-school program. The initial meetings provided a fun atmosphere where students would play music and build small-scale items like mouse traps and miniature bridges.

What began as a hobby soon turned into an engineering scholarship at Florida Atlantic University's College of Engineering and Computer Science.

Today, Cummings is part of the team that is building an engine to power NASA's Artemis II rocket, which will soon carry astronauts to the moon for the first time in more than 50 years. The Artemis program is slated to take the first woman and first person of color to the moon.

"The industry right now has so much excitement," Cummings said. "Standing in my shoes, you realize that you're actually at a part of history where you're





The industry right now has so much excitement. Standing in my shoes, you realize that you're actually at a part of history where you're going to have footprints and fingerprints on this mission."
 — Nicole Cummings '03

going to have footprints and fingerprints on this mission. It really is very exciting for me."

Cummings serves as program manager at Jupiter's Aerojet Rocketdyne, running the RL10 engine program. The RL10 rocket engine is a critical component to propelling the Orion spacecraft to the moon as part of the Artemis II mission. A 10-foot long, 508-pound engine, the RL10 will provide more than 24,000 pounds of thrust, helping push the spacecraft into lunar orbit.

The RL10 is expected to play an even larger role in Artemis IV, which will utilize four engines and carry the largest payload in history, allowing NASA to build the first lunar space station.

Florida Atlantic played a key part in Cummings' journey, she said, setting the stage for her flourishing career. Cummings had a natural instinct for engineering when she arrived on campus, but admitted the coursework could be challenging, and at times, she questioned whether she wanted to stay in the field. Any time she had doubts, she said the professors were always helpful and encouraging.

"It was their support that got me through," Cummings said. "There were many times that I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to continue. I felt like giving up, but it was support from others that always helped me.



It was a needed nudge when you just were getting tired."

Cummings powered through and is now an expert in the industry. Among her many achievements include being inducted into the Florida Atlantic Alumni Association Hall of Fame in 2023 and receiving the Women's Chamber of Palm Beach County's Giraffe Award, which recognizes women who have "stuck their neck out" for other women in the community.

Additionally, Cummings serves on the advisory board for Florida Atlantic's College of Engineering and Computer Science, paying it forward to students who are pursuing a similar path in engineering.

"If it wasn't for the support I received from Florida Atlantic, I wouldn't have [made it to where I am today]," Cummings said. "I realize how important it is to give that support back, and that's why I am on the board."

Stella Batalama, Ph.D., dean of Florida Atlantic's College of Engineering and Computer Science, said the college's faculty, staff and students are proud of Cummings, noting the pivotal role she's playing in shaping the future of space exploration.

"Nicole's leadership in building the RL10 rocket engine, a key component of NASA's Artemis II mission, is helping to pave the way for groundbreaking achievements," Batalama said. "Her contributions to this historic mission underscore her profound impact on advancing engineering innovation and expanding humanity's reach into space."

The Artemis II mission is slated to launch from Cape Canaveral in April 2026, according to NASA. Cummings said she wouldn't miss it for the world.

"I plan to be front and center, and see it take off," Cummings said. "We've been working hard on this, and our prize moment is getting to see Artemis II launch. We are excited, and the whole team plans to see it all the way through to the launch." 🍷



From Campus to Catching Critters

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ALUMNUS TACKLES FLORIDA'S IGUANA INVASION

BY AMBER BONEFONT

Florida Atlantic University alumnus Pierce Kennamer grew up in Cincinnati, but he spent summers visiting his grandparents in Fort Lauderdale. With each summer visit, he'd see more and more green iguanas, an invasive, non-native species in the Sunshine State.

By the time he started at Florida Atlantic in 2019, the area was overrun by iguanas

wreaking havoc on homes, businesses and power grids. They were an economic problem and an environmental one, he said.

After graduating from Florida Atlantic in May 2023 with a bachelor's degree in finance and a minor in cybersecurity, Kennamer, now 24, decided to invent a sustainable solution to gain control of the invasion — humanely.

"Many companies offer some solutions to help keep the lizards at bay. For many years, there wasn't a sustainable, humane solution on the market that could get the population under control in a timely fashion," Kennamer said. "For many larger properties, the only thing that existed was raccoon traps, where you could only obtain one at a time, and it might not trap the targeted

species. The market needed a company that could build something specifically tailored to capturing iguanas.”

It was then that the patented technology and his current company, IggyTrap, was born.

Trap Technology

IggyTraps for commercial use are 48 by 84 inches, while residential traps are 48 by 48 inches. Each trap has fresh fruit hanging inside. The smell attracts the iguanas, prompting them to walk through a one-way door. The door shuts behind them using just its weight, mimicking what iguanas feel as they push through a bush or pass through the branches of a tree. They slide in on their bellies and once in, they’re trapped.

IggyTraps are the only traps on the market that allow “non-target” animals to escape, while keeping the iguanas inside. This includes smaller rodents and native snakes and lizards. The door design, which took more than 1,000 hours to complete, also allows animals with more arm mobility, like raccoons, to escape.

IggyTrap can catch up to 25 iguanas at one time, setting it apart from many solutions on the market. IggyTraps are larger than most single animal traps and allow the iguanas to move around so they don’t feel as confined in the space. With food and water inside the traps, the animals are later removed to be humanely euthanized, under Florida state law.

IggyTrap’s Trajectory

Since its inception, IggyTrap has seen a growth and diversification in the customer base, including golf courses, homeowner associations, farms, residential properties, hotels and resorts, and utility and electricity providers.

“Our employees are seeing new challenges daily with the iguana population,” Kennamer said.



DID YOU KNOW?

Adult iguanas have few natural predators in Florida and generally live up to 15 years. They lay 10 to 70 eggs at a time and only take two to three months to reach full maturity.

As an invasive species, iguanas pose serious risks to homeowners, businesses and the ecological ecosystem in Florida; and many cities have spent millions of dollars to offset damage caused by them. For example, West Palm Beach spent \$2 million in January 2020 to repair damage to an aging dam caused by iguanas, and Lake Worth Beach attributed multiple power outages over the years to iguanas settling into the power grids.

One challenge he hopes IggyTrap will help solve is crop loss at fruit farms in the Miami area. According to Kennamer, iguanas have caused extensive crop damage, as many eat the tiny flowers that need to be pollinated to further fruit growth.

“The problem needed a solution that could capture as many as possible most efficiently while also being scalable to fit different properties and environments,” Kennamer said.

Two years after launching IggyTrap, Kennamer has secured the attention of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, opened a full-scale office in Deerfield Beach, and hired full- and part-time employees, many of them from the Florida Atlantic ecosystem.

Kennamer credits his classes at the College of Business with providing him with the tools to manage the company’s finances and take it to market, as well as with the overall support he still receives from the college’s community.

“It gave me a leg up in terms of getting the business started. Dean Gropper gave a tremendous amount of moral support when I shared with him what I was doing upon graduation,” Kennamer said. “Running a startup means doing everything from marketing, accounting and everything else that comes with balancing day-to-day operations. The College of Business and my professors helped prepare me immensely for all these different areas that come with running a business.”

Kennamer said the next step for IggyTrap is to roll out more products to help tackle invasive species. He also plans to open offices in Monroe County and outside of the United States to establish the company as the premier provider for invasive species technology worldwide.

“We are constantly pushing growth and are excited to see where we can take these products,” he said. 🍌



Hall of Fame

FLORIDA ATLANTIC'S 2025 AWARDEES

The Hall of Fame and Distinguished Alumni Ceremony connects Florida Atlantic University alumni to the larger university community, celebrating and recognizing their remarkable achievements across a wide range of industries.

The inaugural Hall of Fame honoree was named in 1985, while the Distinguished Alumni awards were established in 2004.

Hall of Fame inductees are highly accomplished leaders who have made significant impacts in their industries, demonstrating unparalleled expertise, influence and dedication on a global scale.

Distinguished alumni from each college are honored for their exceptional contributions, showcasing outstanding accomplishments and a steadfast commitment to excellence in their respective fields.

Here's a look at the 2025 awardees:

2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Luis Alberto Moreno '76
Former President, Inter-American Development Bank
College of Business



Cheryl Wilke '88
Partner, Lewis Brisbois
Dorothy F. Schmidt
College of Arts and Letters

2025 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

Anna Alexopoulos Farrar '07
Vice President of Strategic Communications and Policy, Space Florida
Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

Jan Bednar '14
Founder and CEO, ShipMonk
College of Business

Joseph W. Colucci '03
Vice President of Sales, Sophisticated Sand Spirits
Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College

Laureen M. Fleck, Ph.D., '00, '07, '11
Owner and Manager, Family Medicine of Boca Raton
Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing

Michael Kane, Ph.D., '15
Manager of the Behavioral and Mental Health Department, Palm Beach County School District
College of Education

Howard J. Lurie '91, '92
Sector Vice President & General Manager of Air Dominance, Northrop Grumman
College of Engineering and Computer Science

Mikki McComb-Kobza, Ph.D., '09
CEO and Chief Scientist, Ocean First Institute
Charles E. Schmidt College of Science

Katie Jerzewski Patel, M.D., '15
Clinical Skills Specialist, Hofstra University's Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine
Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine

Alan D. Siegel, Esq., '07
Co-Owner and Equity Partner, Demand the Limits Personal Injury
College of Social Work and Criminal Justice



Florida Atlantic University

Restoring Coral Habitats in Martin and Palm Beach Counties

Florida Atlantic University researchers are working to protect and restore coral reefs along the South Florida coastline and beyond. Coral reef habitats are complex ecosystems that sustain critical fisheries and protect our coastal communities. Since 2014, reefs along the Florida Reef Tract, which spans from the Florida Keys to Martin County, have experienced increased coral bleaching, disease, and harmful effects from human impacts, such as overfishing and pollution, resulting in up to 83% mortality in certain locations.

Using molecular techniques, Florida Atlantic researchers are investigating which species are most resilient to these impacts to inform restoration and conservation efforts.

Invest in Florida Atlantic University's environmental programs today to preserve Florida's vital coastal ecosystems for future generations.

► **For more information and to make your contribution, visit transcendtomorrow.fau.edu.**



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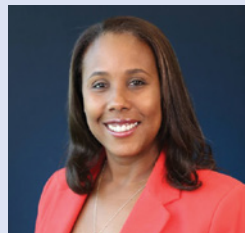
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CLASS NOTES

2000s

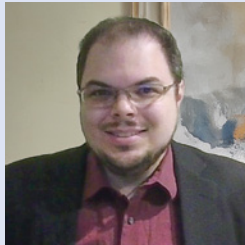
Sybil Alfred, bachelor's in business administration '03, MBA '14, joined the Holy Cross Health Board of Directors. She will serve on the Quality & Safety Committee. Alfred is director of executive education in Florida Atlantic's College of Business.



Patience Bryant, Ph.D., bachelor's in multimedia studies '05, is an inaugural recipient of the Raymond H. Goldstone ASCA Foundation's Legacy of Excellence award. ASCA is the Association for Student Conduct Administration. Its Legacy of Excellence award recognizes a select group of individuals who have left an enduring impact on higher education through significant contributions to the field of student conduct, scholarship and research, and/or leadership within ASCA and other organizations.

2010s

Adam Eric Berkowitz, bachelor's in music '11, master's in music history '15, is working toward a Ph.D. in communication and information sciences at the University of Alabama. He is studying the ethics and uses of artificial intelligence and its impact on society, especially music, and has published four articles on this topic. His work was recognized by the Coalition for Networked Information with the 2024 Paul Evan Peters Scholarship. As the recipient of a teaching assistantship from the University of Alabama's College of Communication & Information Sciences, he teaches graduate courses in the School of Library & Information Studies.

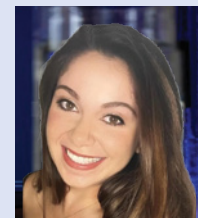


Tevin Ali, bachelor's in biological sciences '17, co-authored "Ambitious Archie: Building a Legacy Through Acts of the Heart," a children's book about life's joys and sorrows. It was the No. 1 best seller on Amazon in three categories: Children's Social Activism, Children's United States Biographies and Children's Books on Immigration.



Shelby (Grimm) Peden, bachelor's in psychology '18, married former Florida Atlantic baseball player Drew Peden (2016-18) in October 2023. She is a treatment coordinator for AM Orthodontics in Lake Nona. Drew is a firefighter/EMT for Orange County Fire Rescue Department in Orlando. The couple resides in Deltona with their dogs, Nala and Rylee, and cats, Dash and Chloe.

Chelsea Sanabia, bachelor's in multimedia studies '19, joined the Boynton Beach Police Department in January as the public safety public information officer for the police and fire departments. She previously worked for the City of Boynton Beach as public affairs coordinator.

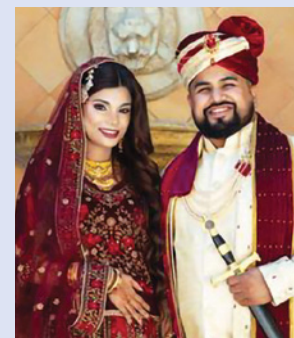


2020s



Jodi Smith, bachelor's in criminal justice '24, recently signed with Montreal Roses FC, one of six clubs participating in the inaugural season of Canada's professional women's soccer league. During her career at Florida Atlantic, Smith played in 77 games and started in 76. She was named to the All-Conference USA Freshman Team in 2021 and the American Athletic Conference Second Team in 2023.

Nihat Ahmed, doctorate in business administration '22, recently celebrated his wedding to Esrat Jahan. Ahmed is the founder of Florida Marketing Group and currently serves on the advisory board for the Florida Atlantic College of Business' marketing department.



Did you get married, have a baby, start a new job, receive an award, or experience some other big life moment or personal victory recently?

Send your news, including full name, graduation year, college or major, and high-resolution photo (at least 300 dpi) to FloridaAtlanticMag@fau.edu.

TIME MACHINE

A LOOK BACK



THE BREEZEWAY

The Breezeway on the Boca Raton campus has been “Main Street FAU” since 1964. The outdoor corridor stretching from north to south linked the four original buildings used by Florida Atlantic’s first students: the Library, the Learning Resources Building, the Sanson Science Building and General Classrooms South.

On any given day, it was the meeting place for sororities and fraternities to gather before heading into the cafeteria for lunch; to sign up to be a part of the wrestling club; or where inaugural head football coach Howard Schnellenberger would stand upon his legendary “stump” to recruit students to Florida Atlantic’s very first football games.

Students have continued to stage events, recruit members for clubs and organizations, or promote philanthropy for Greek life at The Breezeway. It’s a place to enjoy lunch with friends at its tables, simply stroll straight to class as a lecturer or an attendee, or grab coffee with fellow faculty members to discuss the important issues of the day.

Over the decades, it’s seen a lot of traffic from students, faculty, staff and campus visitors. And today, it connects the center of a campus that has tripled in size since 1964 but remains one of the most popular landmarks for the university.





From left: South Florida radio reporter Bob Krauser, Secret Service Agent Rufus Youngblood, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson, Florida Gov. Farris Bryant and FAU President Kenneth Williams walk down the Breezeway to the University's dedication ceremony on Oct. 25, 1964.

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