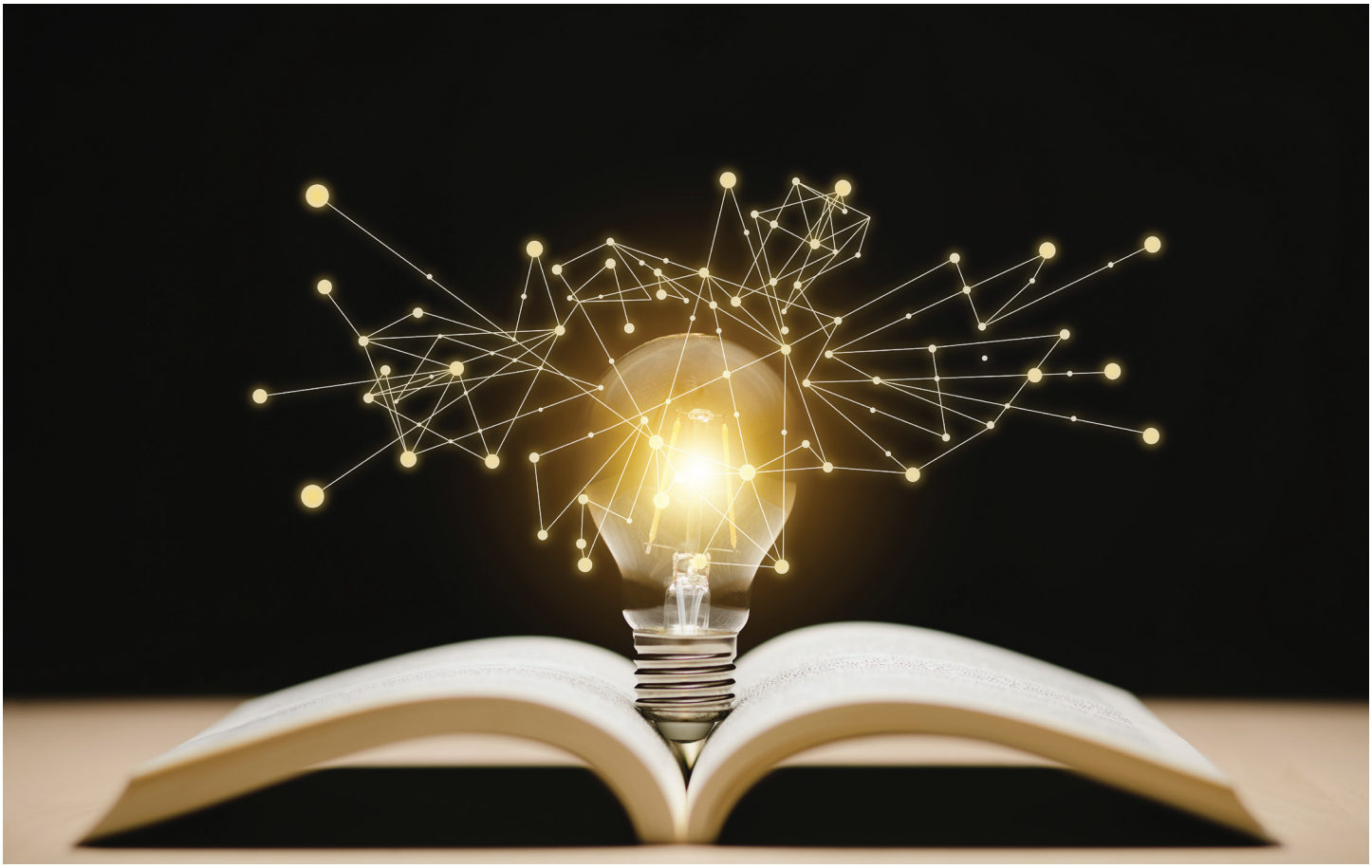

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

17TH ANNUAL

Graduate Student Research & Scholarship Symposium *and* Graduate Assistant *of the* Year

APRIL 11, 2025

3:00 – 4:00 PM
STUDENT UNION THEATER

4:00 – 6:00 PM
STUDENT UNION BALL ROOMS

Valdosta State University's Graduate School presents the Seventeenth Annual Graduate Student Research and Scholarship Symposium

April 10 & 11, 2025

Thursday, April 10th

Noon - 1:00PM • **Student Union Theater**
Oral Presentations

Friday, April 11th

3:00 - 4:00PM • **Student Union Ball Rooms**
3MT Presentations
GA of the Year Awards

4:00 - 6:00PM • **Student Union Ball Rooms**
Posters Presentations
Musical Performances
Presentation of Awards

Welcome & Opening Remarks • Dr. Becky da Cruz,
Associate Provost for Graduate Studies & Research

Please enjoy graduate student research and scholarship at its best!

GRADUATE SCHOOL
VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Musical Performances

College of the Arts

Music

Caprice No. 10 for Solo Violin "Salsa" from "24 Latin American Caprices"
Composed by: Arthur Barbosa
Performed by: Felipe Mathias Romagnoli

Dr. Kristin Pfeifer Yu, Faculty Mentor
Department of Music

Performance starts at 4:45PM

Posters

College of the Arts

Communication Arts

CO-CONSTRUCTING REALITY: THE INFLUENCE OF TIKTOK AND INSTAGRAM ON AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF LOVE ISLAND USA SEASON 6

Jai L. Williams

Dr. William Faux, Faculty Mentor
Department of Communication Arts

College of Business Administration

Accounting

USING AI TO EXPLORE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BOEING STAFF KNOWLEDGE AND AIRLINE CRASHES

Karly Williams

Drs. Casey Colson, Raymond J. Elson, & Candace Witherspoon, Faculty Mentors
Department of Accounting

This teaching case study explores the use of artificial intelligence (AI, such as ChatGPT) to analyze corporate governance structures and instances of potential misconduct within public companies. We explore the governance environment surrounding Boeing from 2017 to 2024. Specifically, we focus on 2018 and 2019 when fatal crashes of the Boeing 737 MAX occurred. Boeing left digital footprints that illustrate issues with their corporate governance structure. Utilizing ChatGPT, students assess email and phone transcripts, press releases, and internal chat logs. We aim to encourage students' responsible use of AI when researching. Furthermore, we illustrate how AI can assist students who are struggling to reach research-based conclusions, particularly when analyzing vast amounts of data. This case is suitable for undergraduate- and graduate-level auditing courses.

College of Education and Human Services

Communication Sciences & Disorders

CONSISTENCY AMONG COMPREHENSION MEASURES IN CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA

Jillian Blevins & Gabrielle Howell

Dr. Matthew Carter, Faculty Mentor
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Dyslexia is a learning disability that is characterized by struggles in reading comprehension, or the ability for individuals to learn and understand information in written format. Assessments like the Gray Oral Reading Test and the Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills are used to evaluate children with fluency disorders like dyslexia. The purpose of this study is to determine any overlap in criteria tested in different portions of the Gray Oral Reading Test and the Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills by comparing scores, to determine if there are any correlations between aspects of literacy and reading comprehension. Assessment results from both tests were collected from eight children diagnosed with dyslexia to compare scores. Strong correlations from sections of the GORT-5 and subtests from the TILLS were found after the comparisons. Correlations close to one were determined to test for the same criterion.

THE IMPACT OF VERBAL INSTRUCTION COMPREHENSION DEFICITS IN INDIVIDUALS WITH APHASIA

Loren Seabolt

Dr. Matthew Carter, Faculty Mentor
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Individuals with aphasia experience difficulty with some combination of producing and understanding language. Comprehension of language is a necessity of everyday life that individuals with aphasia often experiences difficulties to various degrees. Understanding and following instructions of importance to everyday life exemplify the significance of language comprehension. The purpose of the present study was to assess if individuals with aphasia are able to comprehend the verbal instructions that are provided as part of the Miranda Rights. After being read the Miranda Rights, five participants with an aphasia diagnosis were administered a questionnaire. The participants were asked if each questionnaire statement was true or false. The results indicated a total accuracy proportion of 80%. These findings further signify that individuals with aphasia may be at risk of not being protected under the Miranda Rights as well as not comprehending other vital verbal instructions.

THE IMPACT OF DANCE THERAPY ON MOTOR AND NON-MOTOR SYMPTOMS IN PARKINSON'S INDIVIDUALS

Ashley N. Beck & Bickley C. Reeves

Dr. Matthew Carter, Faculty Mentor
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Parkinson's disease affects both motor and non-motor skills. Common vocal problems include reduced vocal volume whereas common non-motoric symptoms affect cognition and emotion. This study focuses on how dance therapy may be an effective therapeutic option in improving these functions in Parkinson's patients. Measures of vocal volume as well as motor, cognitive, and emotional assessments were obtained from a small sample of four people from the SPEAK OUT! program at Valdosta State University. Participants attended weekly dance movement sessions for twenty minutes over three weeks. Vocal scores provided by SPEAK OUT! after each session showed an increase in participants' maximum vocal volume as well as cognitive and emotional improvements based on post-experimental survey results. Results did not meet the goal of a 10% increase; however, the evidence shows the potential for additional favorable results for Parkinson's patients who can incorporate movement therapy into their treatment program.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUSTAINED ATTENTION AND RAPID AUTOMATIZED NAMING TASKS

Taylor D. Fries

Dr. Matthew D. Carter, Faculty Mentor
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Rapid automatized naming tasks are potent predictors of reading abilities, but there is minimal evidence of what they specifically measure. Sustained attention is a critical component to cognitive processing and automaticity, factors which are crucial to reading ability. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between sustained attention and rapid automatized naming tasks, which was measured through administration of measures of word reading efficiency, phonological processing, sustained attention to response, and rapid automatized naming to 1st -3rd grade participants. Rapid automatized naming performance was predicted by phonological decoding and sustained attention to response performance. These results support the idea that sustained attention contributes to what RAN measures, identifying another factor in reading ability that can be targeted for testing and intervention.

THE EFFECT OF GU ENERGY ON VOCAL LOUDNESS AND PHONATION DURATION IN COLLEGE-AGED INDIVIDUALS

Jacee Waters Holton & Leah Kubiak

Dr. Matthew Carter, Faculty Mentor
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

The human voice produces a form of communication that expresses a multitude of emotions and intentions. When the human voice is impacted, social and vocational aspects of life can be negatively affected. People with Parkinson's disease face a high chance of developing voice disorders that can cause their voice to be breathy, harsh, strained, and decreased in volume. The purpose of this research project was to examine if GU Energy had an impact on vocal loudness and duration. Phonation Resistance Training Exercises were administered to four participants over two days with two participants receiving GU on day one, and the other two participants receiving GU on day two. Results of this study demonstrate an increase in duration after receiving GU energy, but there were no significant differences in loudness. Overall, a larger sample size and time frame for future research could provide beneficial information on this study.

Human Services

MUSIC ENJOYMENT FOR STRESS REDUCTION IN A MENTAL HEALTH WORKER

Johnathan R. Coody

Dr. Hanae Kanno, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Master of Social Work (MSW) Program

Workers in the field of mental health endure a degree of stress that can result in burnout and the inability to effectively perform their occupational roles. Methods of stress reduction are necessary to enable mental health workers to fulfill their potential in the helping process. This Single Subject Research Design (SSRD) studied the effects of regimented music listening sessions on reported stress levels in a mental health worker at a community day center assisting adults with severe and persistent mental illness. The results indicated that music listening sessions, as an intervention, were successful in reducing reported stress levels for the mental health worker.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL LEARNING INTERVENTION FOR AN AUTISTIC CHILD WITH MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIORS OF AGGRESSION, VOCAL OUTBURSTS (VO), CRYING, AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIOR (SIB)

Madeline N. LaRosa

Dr. Hanae Kanno, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Master of Social Work (MSW) Program

This Single Subject Research Design (SSRD) focuses on a six-year-old male with autism spectrum disorder at Great Strides Rehabilitation (GSR), which offers pediatric therapy to children with developmental issues. I worked as an intern at GSR, and this client was selected due to the behaviors he regularly exhibits. A social learning intervention was implemented to help the client decrease these behaviors and increase his ability to express his emotions. In addition to reducing behaviors, additional goals were set, such as promoting positive and appropriate interactions with peers and encouraging the use of healthy coping mechanisms. After a three-week intervention, the client's behaviors decreased, and positive coping skills were adopted.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF TALK THERAPY ON ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN A WOMAN AT A SUBSTANCE USE FACILITY

Ellie Arnold

Dr. Hanae Kanno, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Master of Social Work (MSW) Program

This Single Subject Research Design (SSRD) examines the impact of talk therapy on anxiety and depression symptoms in a middle-aged woman undergoing treatment at Turning Point Care Center, a substance use and mental health facility. The client, a long-term substance user with a significant trauma history, participated in three weeks of individual therapy sessions focused on strengthening coping skills, reducing flashbacks, and addressing underlying mental health concerns. Progress was measured using Zung's Anxiety Scale and a Likert Scale for self-reported depression symptoms. The results indicated a reduction in both anxiety and depression levels throughout the intervention. However, several external factors, including social support, medication adjustments, and environmental stability, may have also contributed to her improvement. This SSRD demonstrates the effectiveness of talk therapy in addiction recovery while recognizing the complexity of evaluating external factors in mental health progress.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING ON SOCIAL ANXIETY AND ISOLATION IN A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

Brantley Hollingsworth

Dr. Hanae Kanno, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Master of Social Work (MSW) Program

This Single Subject Research Design (SSRD) examines the effectiveness of motivational interviewing in addressing social anxiety and isolation in a 14-year-old African-American female student at McDonough High School in Georgia. The student had a history of chronic absenteeism due to social anxiety and exhibited avoidance behaviors, including isolation, reduced communication, and reluctance to complete schoolwork. The study aimed to evaluate whether motivational interviewing could decrease these avoidance behaviors and enhance the student's engagement with the school community. Baseline data were collected over three weeks using the Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) and the Isolation Calculation Scale (ICS). Following this phase, the student participated in three sessions of motivational interviewing designed to strengthen self-efficacy and encourage social connection. Results indicated a reduction in both social anxiety and isolation scores, suggesting that the intervention was effective.

MEASURING SUCCESS: OUTCOME-BASED SUPPORT COORDINATION FOR A YOUNG ADULT WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

Brandi McGee
Dr. Hanae Kanno, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Master of Social Work (MSW) Program

This Single Subject Research Design (SSRD) study evaluates the effectiveness of group cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in reducing physical aggression and increasing the use of an Alternative Communication Device (AAC) for a nonverbal client with an intellectual disability. Client L, an 18-year-old receiving services through North Florida Support Services (NFSS), exhibits self-injurious behaviors and disruptive vocalizations in social settings. The intervention aimed to enhance Client L's emotional regulation and communication skills. Data collection included a five-day baseline period followed by a four-week intervention phase. Physical aggression and outbursts were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, while AAC device usage was monitored during social interactions. Results indicated a reduction in aggressive behaviors and an increase in AAC device use, demonstrating the intervention's effectiveness. Despite limitations related to abstract thinking, this study underscores the potential of outcome-based support coordination in improving communication and behavioral outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLAY THERAPY TO DECREASE BEHAVIORAL ISSUES OF A YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Katelin Vickers

Dr. Hanae Kanno, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Master of Social Work (MSW) Program

This study examines the effectiveness of play therapy in reducing behavioral issues in a 7-year-old foster child, 'Sally,' who has been diagnosed with PTSD and ADHD. As a case manager at a therapeutic foster care agency, the author observed Sally's behaviors, including temper tantrums, sexualized actions, and emotional instability. The primary goal of the intervention was to decrease negative behaviors and promote positive emotions. The research utilized a Single-Subject Research Design, incorporating baseline measures of Sally's behaviors and emotions, followed by a play therapy intervention. Her negative behaviors and emotions were assessed through case notes from the author's bi-weekly visits and weekly reports from her foster parents, which included daily emotion charts. Results indicated that play therapy contributed to an increase in positive emotions but had limited success in reducing negative behaviors. The study highlights the challenges of working with trauma-affected children and the need for more extensive intervention periods.

SHAPING RELATIONSHIPS: NAVIGATING ROMANTIC PARTERNSHIP WHILE CARING FOR A NEURODIVERGENT CHILD

Griffin Reddick, Brandon Booker, Nikki Ray, & Tanisha Goldsboro

Dr. Jennifer Lambert-Shute, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Marriage and Family Therapy

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in neuro-divergent diagnoses. Thus, recently the mental health field has started to explore how having a neurodivergent child may impact romantic partnerships. This presentation will provide a literature review on the major findings which impact romantic partnership who have a neurodivergent child. The presenters will also highlight how these findings can inform interventions to help these couples strengthen their relationships.

THE MODERATING EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL TENURE ON FEEDBACK ORIENTATION AND JOB SATISFACTION

Jaden Banks, Ireina Hyde, & Destini M. Osby

Dr. Christopher Downing, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services – I/O Psychology

This study explores the relationship between feedback orientation and job satisfaction, with organizational tenure as a moderating factor. Observations at Valdosta State University revealed communication gaps between employees and supervisors, prompting an investigation into feedback orientation's impact. Research suggests individuals with high assessment orientation seek negative feedback, influencing job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2021). Tenure moderates work engagement and job satisfaction, with longer-tenured employees showing reduced interest in feedback (Ott & Cisneros, 2015). Data from faculty, staff, and student workers were collected via anonymized surveys assessing job satisfaction (Spector, 1994), feedback orientation (Katz et al., 2023), and tenure (Rice, 2009). Multiple regression analysis tested hypotheses regarding feedback orientation, tenure, and job satisfaction. Findings highlight how organizational dynamics shape satisfaction. Limitations include timeframe, sample size, and distribution methods. Future research should refine these insights to tailor job enhancement strategies for tenured versus new employees.

DOES LEARNING FORMAT HAVE AN EFFECT ON INDIVIDUAL'S ACADEMIC SATISFACTION AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE ACADEMIC BEHAVIOR?

Lauren Donohue, Camilla Crenshaw, Harriet Fowler, & Oumoukalcoum Seini Tahirou

Dr. Christopher Downing, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services – I/O Psychology

As universities increasingly adopt various learning formats (such as remote, hybrid, and in-person), it becomes critical to understanding their impact on students' academic experiences. These learning formats can significantly influence the satisfaction of students, which may affect their academic behaviors. Based on their satisfaction level, students may be more likely to exhibit counterproductive academic behaviors such as copying other students' work, cheating, or missing class. The present study seeks to explore the extent to which different learning formats influence these behaviors and identify whether any particular format is more likely to impact the satisfaction of students. By examining the relationship between learning formats and the satisfaction of students, institutions can make informed decisions about the best option for students, thereby enhancing the academic experience and overall satisfaction for students.

EXPLORING THE MODERATING ROLE OF PERSONALITY TRAITS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB SATISFACTION AND OCB

Aasha Vernon, Anja Bailey & Marie Reyes

Dr. Christopher Downing, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services – I/O Psychology

Job satisfaction is a critical predictor of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), the voluntary, prosocial actions that benefit an organization beyond formal job requirements. However, this relationship is likely to be influenced by personality traits. This study examines the moderating role of personality traits in the relationship between job satisfaction and OCB among students and employees at Valdosta State University (VSU). Using the survey, we assess how individual differences shape the extent to which job satisfaction translates into discretionary workplace behaviors. We hypothesize that job satisfaction is positively associated with OCB, and personality traits moderate this relationship. Traits like conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion are expected to strengthen the link, while neuroticism may weaken it. This study aims to deepen the understanding of personality influences on workplace engagement and behaviors. Findings will contribute to the literature on job attitudes, personality psychology, and organizational behavior, offering insights into workplace management and employee development.

THE MODERATING ROLE OF CONSCIENTIOUSNESS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB STRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION

Quentin Dorsey, Christopher Jones, Taylor Holifield, & Arlan Yount

Dr. Christopher Downing, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services

Job stress and job satisfaction are critical factors influencing workplace outcomes, yet their interaction with personality traits remains underexplored. This study examines the moderating effect of trait conscientiousness on the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction. Conscientiousness, characterized by organization, persistence, and motivation, has been linked to workplace adaptability and performance. Using a survey administered to employed students and employees at Valdosta State University, we assess job stress, satisfaction, and conscientiousness levels. The study applies the Situational Strength Theory to determine if conscientiousness buffers or exacerbates the effects of stress in a post-COVID-19 work environment. Findings will contribute to understanding how personality traits influence workplace well-being and inform organizational strategies for enhancing employee satisfaction. This research highlights the importance of tailored HR interventions and the potential of conscientiousness in moderating perceived workplace stress.

Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF NUCLEAR APPRENTICESHIP PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE IN THE NUCLEAR WORKFORCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA AND GEORGIA

Aherial L. Polite

Dr. Kathy Nobles and Dr. John Lairsey, Faculty Mentor
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development

Industries in the U.S. suffer from a labor and skills shortage resulting from Baby Boomer retirements (Krueger, 2017) and a lack of training programs to replace those vacancies (Christo-Baker et al., 2017; Lucas et al., 2018). The nuclear field is of concern because of new missions from the U.S. government. Employers partnered with colleges to develop apprenticeship programs to train and provide support as workers complete on-the-job and classroom training. Program graduates must feel confident to thrive and remain in the nuclear field to close the labor gap. This study aims to supply feedback about confidence-building factors to institutions and businesses as they create nuclear apprenticeship programs. Participants from Georgia and South Carolina will share their apprenticeship experiences in a comparative case study. Using qualitative methods, information about what benefited participants in their careers and improvements will be provided to stakeholders in the apprenticeship development process.

MLIS

RARE BOOK PRESERVATION IN ARCHIVES

Raya A. Schilke

Douglas Carlson, Faculty Mentor
Department, Library & Information Studies

Digital preservation is an increasingly important aspect of libraries and archives across the country. These processes are constantly evolving, with new equipment, standards, and workflows being introduced. This changes how library professionals approach utilizing online platforms and preserving historic materials. These developments are especially encouraging when it comes to increasing the availability and accessibility of all kinds of materials. Rare book collecting provides the perfect example of how digitization and preservation within libraries and archives is practiced and what new issues arise from providing opportunities for these materials to be preserved, maintained, and available for access.

College of Humanities & Social Sciences

History

CUISINE IN COMMUNIST POLAND: CHALLENGES AND NEW IDEAS

Wiktoria Choińska

Dr. Thomas Aiello, Faculty Mentor
Department of History - African American Studies Program

From 1944 to 1989, despites its claimed sovereignty, Poland remained under the domination of the USSR. During this period, the Polish country was called the “Republic of Poland” (until 1952), and then the “Polish People’s Republic”. Focusing on the 1970s and 1980s, the research depicts the political and economic situation in Poland and public opinion. It also discusses the problem of massive inflation during this period, which resulted in food rationing and empty shelves in stores. Polish families had to manage the shortage of products by inventing new, combined recipes.

Modern and Classical Languages

THE EFFECTS OF PERSONAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Brooklyn Van Deraa

Dr. Victoria Russell, Faculty Mentor
Department of Modern and Classical Languages

This poster examines the effects of second language (L2) identity on the language acquisition process. It defines L2 identity and explores the different types of identity that can impact L2 learning. Language educators must consider how learning a world language may affect students’ L2 identity and how specific teaching techniques can have a positive or negative impact on L2 identity. Five studies were reviewed that explored constructs such as personal and national identity, the L2 self, post-sojourn identity after studying abroad, and Vygotsky’s notion of perezhivanie. Implications of these studies for language teaching and learning are also presented.

THE ROLE OF TRANSLANGUAGING IN REDUCING LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORTS IN THE WORLD LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Beth Newbold

Dr. Victoria Russell, Faculty Mentor
Department of Modern and Classical Languages

This poster examines the role of using a students’ first language (L1) to facilitate their use and knowledge of the second language (L2), which is known as translanguaging. Some scholars suggest that translanguaging may reduce language anxiety while also providing psychological supports. Language anxiety is a specific type of anxiety that has three distinct components: (1) communication apprehension, (2) fear of negative evaluation, and (3) test anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). In the field of second language acquisition, it is widely recognized that language anxiety affects the academic, cognitive, and social aspects of L2 learning. The research studies examined on this poster explore how and when translanguaging may reduce students’ perceived levels of language anxiety while increasing their interactions in the L2 with their teacher and peers. The importance of finding an appropriate balance between use of the L1 and L2 in the world language classroom is also explored.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN THE ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Rachael Sable

Dr. Victoria Russell, Faculty Mentor
Department: Modern and Classical Languages

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) created ever emerging changes in the world language classroom, but has also created a global society that has been greatly affected by an increase in mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress symptoms and anxiety. Researchers and scholars have been studying foreign language anxiety (FLA) for decades, but recent research indicates that the pandemic has caused a sharp increase in students' perceived levels of both general anxiety and language anxiety. This poster explores the impact of language anxiety post-pandemic and to what extent the online environment may increase or decrease FLA compared to traditional, classroom-based learning. Also provided on this poster are implications for the teaching and learning of world languages and recommendations for helping language educators reduce their students' FLA.

"THRONES AND TRENCHES" TWO PERSPECTIVES ON REBELLION AND ITS LEADERS

Sandy Intriago

Dr. Grazyna Walczak, Faculty Mentor
Department of Modern and Classical Languages

This study examines the literary representation of social struggle in two key works from Latinoamerica: Los de abajo (1916) by Mariano Azuela, and El reino de este mundo (1949) by Alejo Carpentier. The comparison puts in evidence shockingly similar consequences of both, Mexican and Haitian revolutions and the impact on the people who experienced them in their respective countries. Additionally, it reveals how power transforms the ideals of their leaders. While Los de abajo portrays the transformation of its characters from hopeful peasants to soldiers worn down by war, El reino works explores the struggle of Black slaves in Haiti against the oppression of European colonizers. The juxtaposition provides different contexts and goals, yet with common elements: oppression, hope, and transformation of power. The comparison shows that when the oppressed people seek liberation, they have to confront not only colonizers or authoritarian regimes but also the internal dilemmas of their own revolutions.

THROUGH THE EYES OF A WOMAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COMING-OF-AGE JOURNEYS OF TWO POST-REVOLUTIONARY MEXICAN WOMEN PROTAGONISTS

Laura Black

Grazyna Walczak, Faculty Mentor
Department of Modern and Classical Languages

Como Agua Para Chocolate (1989) by Laura Esquivel and Arráncame la Vida (1986) by Ángeles Mastretta both explore the coming-of-age journeys of women navigating love, family, and societal expectations in post-revolutionary Mexico. The authors portray strong women characters who not only survive in a patriarchal world but overcome and succeed. Esquivel's protagonist, Tita, experiences personal growth through her struggles against family traditions and societal constraints, with food serving as a symbol of her emotions and defiance. In contrast, Mastretta's Catalina evolves from a naïve young woman into a self-aware individual as she confronts the complexities of love, power, and politics within her marriage. Esquivel and Mastretta give their early twentieth century protagonists a voice from a woman's perspective instead of having their perspective described from a male writer's point of view. Together, these works offer a nuanced portrayal of female empowerment, passion, and resilience in a transforming society.

THE ROLE OF INTERACTION IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Joshua Hermanstorfer

Dr. Victoria Russell, Faculty Mentor
Department: Modern and Classical Languages

This poster reviews the literature on the role of interaction in second language acquisition by examining key studies that explored this topic in classroom settings. In addition, the role of corrective feedback was also examined, in particular the corrections/interactions that occur between nonnative/nonnative and native/nonnative speaking peers in world language classrooms. Analyzing the impact of peer corrective feedback may help world language educators enact optimal strategies for creating lesson activities and using class time. The findings of the studies presented on this poster have practical implications for the teaching and learning of world languages. Along with brief summaries of the studies examined as part of this project are examples of visual aids, transcripts, key terms, and references for further research.

English

SOLIDARITY BETWEEN QUEERS: READING JORDAN BAKER AND NICK CARRAWAY IN A "LAVENDER MARRIAGE"

Kiley Amico Olchaskey

Dr. Ubaraj Katawal, Faculty Mentor
Department of English

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of the most analyzed novels in the 21st century. Many of these interpretations explore Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker as queer characters. This paper expands this interpretation by exploring Nick and Jordan's queerness through a 'lavender marriage'. Their relationship is a result of the characters struggling with the balance of Victorian and Post-Victorian standards in a rapidly changing 20th century. By performing heteronormativity, Nick and Jordan uphold the appearance of Victorian standards together ultimately granting each other substantial freedom and social mobility. Additionally, the paper examines the implications of Fitzgerald's own struggles with queerness, his marriage to Zelda, and his relationship with Ernest Hemingway and its importance to reading Nick and Jordan. In combination with Fitzgerald's life, subtextual phrasing will contextualize why Jordan and Nick's relationship as protection from public scrutiny, maintains cultural standards, and ensures their place in social favor.

Sociology

SOCIAL PREDICTORS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES TOWARD SPANKING

Juwan Douglas

Dr. Ellis Logan, Faculty Mentor
Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice

Spanking is quite controversial especially since there are alternative methods of discipline such as gentle parenting gaining such traction in the media recently. People have become more skeptical of using spanking as the primary source of discipling a child because it has been proven that it does not and will not always work. I have done research regarding it for a project and discovered that many people have practiced corporal punishment in excessive, negative ways. This method of punishment can clearly be risky especially when there are guardians that lack self-control. The dataset I will be using is a correlation of quantitative data from the GSS and compiled reddit forums regarding spanking to use as qualitative support for the numerical data gathered. This is to help interpret why the general public views spanking as good, bad or somewhere in the middle.

College of Science and Mathematics

Biology

THE POWER OF PHYTOHORMONES: SALICYLIC ACID SIGNALING AND REGULATION OF PROTEIN SYNTHESIS

Morgan Wynn

Dr. Ansul Lokdarshi, Faculty Mentor
Department of Biology

Salicylic acid (SA) is synthesized by plants during pathogen infection, acting as a signaling molecule for cellular resource management. Compared to transcriptional regulation, translational regulation is a rapid method of regulating protein synthesis. The GCN2 protein phosphorylates the alpha subunit of eukaryotic initiation factor 2 (eIF2) as a response to stress, halting global protein synthesis and initiating selective translation of mRNAs. We investigate the role of SA in activating this GCN2-eIF2a module in Arabidopsis thaliana. We found that SA treatment results in eIF2a phosphorylation, depending on GCN2, dosage, and photosynthesis. Wild-type and gcn2-1 knockout mutants under prolonged SA stress display similar phenotypes. These findings provide insights into the GCN2 protein and suggest alternate mechanisms may be responsible for mediating phenotypic responses to SA stress. Further research is needed to understand translation during SA stress, as well as the involvement of photosynthetic byproducts, such as ROS, in the activation of GCN2.

ASSESSMENT OF PHOTOSYNTHETIC EFFICIENCY AND REACTIVE OXYGEN SPECIES IN PEANUT IN RESPONSE TO NOTHOPASSALORA PERSONATA INFECTION.

Emmanuel Asiedu

Drs. Emily Cantonwine & Ansul Lokdarshi, Faculty Mentors
Department of Biology

Peanut (Arachis hypogaea) production is significantly impacted by fungal diseases, particularly late leaf spot (LLS) caused by Nothopassalora personata, leading to substantial economic losses. In response to pathogen invasion, plants often experience an over-accumulation of reactive oxygen species (ROS), which plays a crucial role in the plant's defense mechanisms by activating resistance genes and triggering a hypersensitive response, limiting the spread of the pathogen. This study examined the physiological and biochemical responses of two peanut genotypes, G-13M (susceptible) and CB-7 (resistant), under LLS infection. Photosynthetic efficiency was measured using a PAM fluorometer, while ROS levels were quantified spectrophotometrically. Results from this study revealed that CB-7 maintained higher photosynthetic efficiency and exhibited elevated ROS levels compared to G-13M, suggesting a key role of ROS in defense activation. These findings provide valuable insights into the interplay between photosynthesis and oxidative stress in disease resistance, contributing to breeding strategies for LLS-resistant peanut varieties.

SNAKES ON THE PLAIN: BIOGEOGRAPHIC PATTERNS IN BANDED WATERSNAKES (NERODIA FASCIATA) ACROSS THE SOUTHEASTERN COASTAL PLAIN

Ali J. Ashraf

Dr. John G. Phillips, Faculty Mentor
Department of Biology

Over geologic time, barriers to dispersal cause divergence. Identification of range boundaries between lineages can indicate the historic presence of biogeographic barriers. In North America, these patterns often arose when changing climate created barriers to gene flow by, for example, affecting sea levels. However, related taxa, even those with similar ecologies, do not always diverge at the same barriers. I tested for phylogeographic structure associated with biogeographic barriers in the banded watersnake (Nerodia fasciata). While this species is found throughout the southeastern coastal plain, research has been geographically limited. I sequenced two genes for phylogenetic analysis of snakes across their range. Biogeographic modeling was also used to investigate the most likely historic distributions of this group. Results indicate that this species diversified during the Miocene and was historically confined to Florida by high sea levels. This research will help understand how organisms respond to changes in geography across land masses.

CRIMSON CLOVER ATTRACTS BMSB PARASITOIDS IN PECAN AND IMPROVES PEST CONTROL

Emily Myers

Dr. Erin Grabarczyk, Faculty Mentor
Department of Biology

The invasive brown marmorated stink bug, (BMSB, Halyomorpha halys) is a significant insect pest in pecan orchards. Natural enemies, such as stink bug egg parasitoids, may help control BMSB outbreaks in pecan. The addition of floral resources, such as crimson clover, which attract parasitoids, may also increase rates of parasitism as well as parasitoid abundance. For my thesis, I tested whether parasitoid rate of attack and abundance differed with and without crimson clover in pecan tree canopies or on the ground next to trees. Overall, rate of attack was higher in orchards with crimson clover and higher in the canopy. Parasitoid abundance was similar whether crimson clover was present or not. Despite similar abundance, increased rates of attack suggest that crimson clover improves biological control of BMSB in pecan orchards. Importantly, planting crimson clover in pecan orchards is a simple, sustainable approach for growers to control BMSB.

STRESS TEST: TRAFFIC NOISE INCREASES SPIDER HEART RATE

Marianoelle Rivera

Dr. Erin Grabarczyk, Faculty Mentor
Department of Biology

Anthropogenic, or human-generated noise pollution can increase stress levels in wild animals. Prior exposure to high levels of noise pollution may result in habituation. While much research has focused on noise induced stress in vertebrates, much less is known regarding invertebrates. Here, we tested whether anthropogenic noise increases stress in golden silk orb-weaver spiders, Trichonephila clavipes that were captured from either quiet or noisy sites. To measure an increase in stress, we broadcast traffic noise at captive spiders and monitored their heart rate. We found that noise increased all spider heart rates, regardless of whether they lived in quiet or noisy areas. However, change in heart rate was greater for spiders that had, on average, a higher resting heart rate. Our research suggests that typical stress levels for an individual may be a better predictor of overall stress than where they live.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?
USING DNA METABARCODING TO REVEAL SPIDER DIETS

Beraca G. Cornely

Dr. Erin E. Grabarczyk, Faculty Mentor
Department of Biology

Understanding predator prey interactions is fundamental in ecology, yet traditional dietary methods have limitations in accuracy and resolution. DNA Metabarcoding offers a molecular approach to identifying prey, but the persistence of prey in predator guts remains uncertain. This study evaluates the reliability of metabarcoding by analyzing how long prey DNA can be detected in a predator's gut post-feeding. Using the Joro spider, Trichophilia clavata as a model species, spiders were fed a known prey item (southern green stink bug or cricket) and sacrificed in intervals (0-6 days). Gut content will be extracted, and prey DNA amplified using a two-step PCR approach before sequencing. Factors such as digestion rates and DNA breakdown could introduce inconsistencies, but findings will help refine metabarcoding as a tool for reconstruction foraging timelines and food webs to improve this approach for ecological research.

Oral Presentations

College of Humanities and Social Science

Modern & Classical Languages

PARIS BETWEEN THE WARS: A HOTHOUSE FOR WOMEN ARTISTS

Lauren I. Mariah

Dr. Kelly Davidson, Faculty Mentor
Department of Modern and Classical Languages

During the whirlwind period between the world wars, Paris blossomed culturally and artistically, enticing women artists of every genre to try their fortunes in this icon of culture. At this time, the mysterious, possibly Polish, artist, Tamara de Lempicka fled the Russian Revolution to Paris, where she made a name and living for herself at the forefront of the artistic set with her bold, modern portraits. At the same time, the African American opera singer Lillian Evanti arrived in Paris to pursue the opportunity-creating laurels of European training and success in major opera houses, which still evaded her in her segregated homeland. A close study of the lives of both women reveals the important role that Paris played in their careers by providing a place in this artistic hothouse, as well as proximity to an audience whose approval allowed de Lempicka and Evanti to support themselves and their children.

Sociology

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION OF ACE BIOMARKERS: A STORY OF PERPETUAL INEQUALITY

Sheena Martin

Dr. Ellis S. Logan, Faculty Mentor
Department, Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are early-life deviations from expected environments that contribute to adverse health, social, and behavioral outcomes. Fundamental cause theory and Marxist theory link these outcomes to structural inequality, while life course theory and cumulative disadvantage theory highlight compounded long-term disparities. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory integrates these perspectives across multiple levels and their relationships. Using 2021-2023 NHANES data, we grouped ACE proxies into SES, mental and household stress, family structure, substance abuse, and health. Assessing biological impact, we examined 5-methyltetrahydrofolate, a key factor in DNA methylation. After exploring a binary variable, we conducted an ordinal logistic regression, comparing critically low (1-9 nmol/L), severely low (10-19 nmol/L), moderately low (20-29 nmol/L), marginally low (30-39 nmol/L), and normal (40 nmol/L and above), suggesting robustness. The strongest predictors included self-rated health, Medicaid/CHIP/Medigap use, savings, depression, education, and income poverty ratio. Effects were nonlinear, with disparities widening at the tails, where low SES and poor health had a multiplicative effect. Future research will explore additional ACE proxies and biomarkers. Findings enhance our understanding of health disparities, support policy reforms, and could influence medical education, public health, and healthcare costs. Addressing ACEs in early life may foster a healthier, more equitable society.

LET'S TALK ALLERGIES: AN ANALYSIS OF AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF ALLERGY SUFFERERS

Trinity Williams

Faculty Mentor, Dr. Ellis S. Logan
Department, Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice

When most people think of allergies, they think of sneezes and runny noses during spring when all the pollen comes out to play. They don't typically think of life-threatening allergic reactions that cause anaphylactic shock and hives. "More than 50 million people in the United States have an allergic reaction each year," (Cleveland Clinic), and allergies are also "the sixth-leading cause of long-term illness in the United States," (Cleveland Clinic). There is no cure for allergies and they affect each person differently, leading to a lot of confusion surrounding the condition. With this confusion, allergy sufferers often look to online community-based forums for support. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the content of one of these online support groups to better understand the real issues these people face.

English

THE POISON TRICKLES DOWN: MATERNAL TRAUMA IN GILLIAN FLYNN'S SHARP OBJECTS

Georgia Wynn

Dr. Adam Wood, Faculty Mentor
Department of English

Medicine and poison can look the same, so can monsters and mothers. Gillian Flynn's contemporary thriller, Sharp Objects, explores female violence and the dual identity of woman as victim and abuser. The text highlights the ways societal assumptions surrounding motherhood and femininity, paired with privilege and class, act as a collective cloud of rose-colored glasses. In Sharp Objects, maternal abuse poisons and propagates within matrafemafilial relationships, relationships between mothers and female children, illuminating how society perpetuates trauma cycles through assumptions. Building off of transhistorical and intergenerational models of trauma theory, I aim to explore the ways societal assumptions and stereotyping promote trauma transmission within broader societal contexts and family systems. Through the lens of family systems theory, I will emphasize how maternal trauma transmits to the next generation in a cycle that eventually trickles poison out into the society where the abuse originated.

SOLIDARITY BETWEEN QUEERS: READING JORDAN BAKER AND NICK CARRAWAY IN A "LAVENDER MARRIAGE"

Kiley Amico Olchaskey

Dr. Ubaraj Katawal, Faculty Mentor
Department of English

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of the most analyzed novels in the 21st century. Many of these interpretations explore Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker as queer characters. This paper expands this interpretation by exploring Nick and Jordan's queerness through a 'lavender marriage'. Their relationship is a result of the characters struggling with the balance of Victorian and Post-Victorian standards in a rapidly changing 20th century. By performing heteronormativity, Nick and Jordan uphold the appearance of Victorian standards together ultimately granting each other substantial freedom and social mobility. Additionally, the paper examines the implications of Fitzgerald's own struggles with queerness, his marriage to Zelda, and his relationship with Ernest Hemingway and its importance to reading Nick and Jordan. In combination with Fitzgerald's life, subtextual phrasing will contextualize why Jordan and Nick's relationship as protection from public scrutiny, maintains cultural standards, and ensures their place in social favor.

3MT Presentations

College of the Arts

Music

JOHN C. HUXFORD: PRESERVING A COMPOSER'S MUSICAL LIFE

Daniel Marcos Rodriguez

Guy Frost, Faculty Mentor
Professor of Library Science/Catalog Librarian

Dr. John C. Huxford was a Professor of Music and Head of the Music Department at Valdosta State University from 1966 until his retirement in 1987. Upon his passing in 2008, his wife, Anne Huxford, donated a collection of papers to the Odum Library Archives, which included sheet music, letters, LPs, and, specifically, a wealth of his compositional manuscripts. As part of my directed study, I have been charged with handling and cataloging the holographs of Dr. Huxford's music composed for a variety of instruments and ensembles over the course of his long academic career. I will present my experiences in cataloging these manuscripts in an archival system, specifying their classifications for ease of searching, recording data, digitizing evidence, and navigating the challenges of preserving the musical legacy of a composer I never met in person.

College of Education and Human Services

Social Work

READINESS PROGRAMS IN TITLE 1 HIGH SCHOOLS: SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PREPAREDNESS AND ACCESS

Jamie L. Bush

Dr. Hanae Kanno, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Master of Social Work (MSW) Program

College and career readiness programs are critical for vulnerable and underserved student populations because these students have historically and consistently been identified as not college- and career-ready due to increased barriers. This qualitative exploratory study captured the perspectives of five high school counselors to understand the level of access students have to college and career readiness programs, students' holistic preparedness, and the barriers students face in the postsecondary transition. Through semi-structured interviews, the study found that fewer students are prepared for college; however, more are prepared for a career. Study participants reported specific barriers that impact holistic readiness, including program accessibility, academic rigor, and cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, while conveying the critical need for increased support from parents and school district leaders.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE INVESTIGATORS: EXPLORING THE BEST TRAINING MODELS AND PRACTICES

Brian Morgan
Dr. Hannae Kanno, Faculty Mentor
Department of Human Services - Master of Social Work (MSW) Program

The welfare and security of children are complex concepts influenced by many variables. Child Protective Investigators (CPIs) play a major role in ensuring the safety of our most vulnerable population by investigating allegations of abuse, neglect, and maltreatment against children. In Florida, seven sheriff's offices have taken on the responsibility of child protection and the training of CPIs. However, few studies examine how law enforcement agencies operating a child protection division train CPIs. To determine the effectiveness of the training processes provided specifically to CPIs employed by sheriff's offices, a series of focus group interviews were conducted. Results indicate improvements in employees' perceptions of child protection work and their understanding of job expectations. Additional findings reveal gaps in secondary data necessary to establish a link between the quality of child protection services provided by CPIs working at sheriff's offices.

College of Humanities & Social Sciences

Sociology

AGING WITH GRACE: ADDRESSING THE EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN RURAL ELDER POPULATIONS

Victoria Ahmadu

Dr. Anne Price, Faculty Mentor
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice

This study explores the use of in-depth interviews with low-income senior citizens to enhance their physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. As one of the most vulnerable and often overlooked populations, low-income seniors face numerous challenges, including limited access to healthcare, social isolation, and financial instability. This research seeks to understand their unique needs, struggles, and aspirations, providing valuable insights into the daily struggles they face in achieving overall wellness. By spreading awareness of their concerns, the study aims to inform policies, community programs, and support systems that address their comprehensive well-being. The findings will highlight ways to improve healthcare accessibility, promote social connections, support mental resilience, and nurture spiritual fulfillment among low-income elderly individuals. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the importance of personalized mediations and advocacy efforts to enhance the quality of life for these seniors, ensuring they receive the care and attention they deserve.

GA of the Year Recognition

Kiley Olchaskey

Supervisor: Anne Greenfield
Department: English

Kiley Amico Olchaskey is a Graduate Assistant for the English Department. Kiley is originally from Manchester, New Jersey before moving to Lawrenceville, GA during high school. Kiley attended Georgia Gwinnett College during her undergraduate studies, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in History in the Fall of 2023. Currently, she is pursuing her Master's in English (Concentration in Rhetoric and Composition) from VSU with the intention on becoming a college professor. During her time as a GA, Kiley has thoroughly enjoyed working with students at the Academic Support Center and helping professors, such as Dr. Ubaraj Katawal and Dr. Adam Wood, with research. In her free time, Kiley enjoys spending time with her girlfriend and writing creatively.

Erin Manning

Supervisor: Andrea Paige Krispin
Department: School of Nursing

Erin is originally from Valdosta, Georgia, and attended Valdosta State University during her undergraduate studies earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing with a minor in Spanish in Spring of 2022. She works full time as an Emergency and Trauma Nurse at SGMC. Currently, she is pursuing a Master of Science in Nursing with the Family Nurse Practitioner concentration. She hopes to become a Nurse Practitioner in acute care at a critical access hospital or critical care in a high acuity facility. During her time as a GA, Erin has thoroughly enjoyed teaching the new minds of nursing and working together with the compelling and driven women of the School of Nursing Executive Suite. Outside of the lab, Erin has assisted the School of Nursing in reviewing a variety of policies and aided in the organization of Health Professions Day. In her free time, she enjoys spending time doing home projects, playing pickle ball, and hiking.

Morgan Wynn

Supervisor: Dr. Ansul Lokdarshi
Department: Biology

Morgan is a Graduate Assistant for the Biology Department in the College of Science and Mathematics. Morgan is originally from Valdosta, Georgia, and attended Valdosta State University during her undergraduate studies earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Chemistry in the Spring of 2024. Currently, she is pursuing her Master's in Biology from VSU with the intention of attending medical school in the Fall of 2025. During her time as a GA, Morgan has thoroughly enjoyed participating in research projects, training undergraduate students in lab techniques, and teaching lab skills in upper level biology electives under the guidance of her supervisor, Dr. Ansul Lokdarshi. In her free time, she enjoys reading, watching movies, and spending time with friends and family.

Kennise Wilcox

Supervisor: Darli DeVane
Department: The Graduate School

Kennise Wilcox is a Graduate Assistant for the Graduate School. Kennise is from Tifton, Georgia and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a minor in Sociology in the Spring of 2023 from VSU. Currently, she is pursuing a Master's in Marriage and Family Therapy from VSU. Kennise has enjoyed her time as a Graduate Assistant for the Graduate School helping her supervisor complete many different tasks every semester. In her free time, she enjoys crocheting and reading.

Andrew King II

Supervisor: Jennifer Griffin
Department: Bursary

Andrew King II is a Graduate Assistant (GA) for the Valdosta State Bursary. Originally from Fitzgerald, Georgia, Andrew attended Valdosta State University during his undergraduate studies. He earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Management and a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Applied Economics in the Fall of 2023. Currently, he is pursuing his Master's in Business Administration. Upon graduation, he will commission into the United States Air Force as an Acquisition Manager. During his time as a GA, Andrew has thoroughly enjoyed exhibiting customer service skills while providing clarity on students' accounts to involved parties, assisting with reconciliations, and working on minor tasks to ease the stress on the full-time employees. In his free time, Andrew enjoys running, watching television, and hanging out with friends.

Katia Galvan

Supervisor: Lauren McCullough
Department: Student Success & Retention

Katia Galvan serves as a Graduate Assistant for the Office of Student Success and Retention and the Office of Orientation. Originally from Cottonwood, California, Katia completed her undergraduate studies at California State University, Chico, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in the Spring of 2022. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Marriage and Family Therapy at VSU, with the intention of opening her own private practice specializing in couple's therapy. In her role as a Graduate Assistant, Katia has greatly enjoyed delivering presentations to undergraduate students on a variety of topics, including time management, organization, schedule planning, and effective study habits. She has also collaborated with her supervisor, Mrs. Lauren McCullough, to address early alerts and connect students with campus resources to support their academic success. Outside of work, Katia enjoys expressing her creativity and spending time in nature with her partner and dog.

Karla Timbang

Supervisor: Debra Gresham
Department: Human Services

Karla Timbang is a graduate assistant for the Social Work Program in the Department of Human Services. Karla is originally from Clovis, California, and attended University of California, Davis during her undergraduate studies. She graduated in 2017 and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology alongside a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication. She decided to pursue her master's in social work in 2023, when she and her husband moved to Valdosta. Her goal is to obtain her licensure and specialize in working with children and adolescents affected by trauma. Her most significant accomplishments as a GA include planning and executing last summer's continuing education conference for the behavioral health community in collaboration with her supervisor, Dr. Gresham, as well as restructuring the social work program's website to enhance usability for both prospective and current students. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her husband and friends, trying out new recipes, or curling up on the couch with a good book.

Asia Brown

Supervisor: Crystal Marshall
Department: Office of Professional Education Services

Asia Brown currently serves as a Graduate Assistant in the Office of Professional Education Services within the College of Education and Human Services. A native of Valdosta, Georgia, Asia earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Anthropology, with a concentration in Sociology, from Valdosta State University in the spring of 2024. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Social Work at VSU, with a focus on supporting mothers experiencing Postpartum Depression and children who are victims of abuse and neglect. In her role as a Graduate Assistant, Asia has had the opportunity to advise students in the EDS School Counseling and MED Middle Grades Math and Science programs. She collaborates closely with her supervisor, Ms. Crystal Marshall, to provide guidance to students in various programs and to complete assigned tasks. Outside of her academic and professional commitments, Asia enjoys spending quality time with her son, exploring new adventures, and trying diverse cuisines.

Osama Qafaff
Supervisor: Irina McClellan
Department: International Programs

Osama(SAM) Tayseer Mustafa Qaffaf is originally from Amman, Jordan (in the Middle East) and attended (University of Jordan) during his undergraduate studies. He earned a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBS) degree in 2005 and completed training in General Surgery at the Ministry of Health in Jordan in 2015. Currently, he is pursuing his Master's in Business Administration (MBA) with Marketing Decision Making and Healthcare Administration (HCAD) certificates from VSU, with the intention of pursuing a career in Healthcare Administration in the future. During his time as a GA, SAM has thoroughly enjoyed advising international students, while working with the caring staff of the Center for International Programs to help international students' dreams come true. He has also worked with his supervisor, Mrs. Irina McClellan, on creating an environment in which these students can see CIP as their safe space away from home. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his family, Cooking, and Reading.

Jai Williams

Supervisor: Darius Anthony
Department: Career Opportunities

Jai Williams is a Graduate Assistant for the Office of Career Opportunities & Volunteer Services at Valdosta State University. Originally from Atlanta, Georgia, Jai earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Communication with an emphasis in Public Relations and a minor in Mass Media from VSU in the Spring of 2024. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Communication Arts, with aspirations of establishing herself as an entertainment public relation professional while also working towards becoming a licensed real estate agent and expanding her graphic design business, JWill Media. As a Graduate Assistant, Jai has enjoyed leading the marketing team for Career Opportunities & Volunteer Services while also overseeing Volunteer Services for the university. Her role allows her to connect students with meaningful career and service opportunities, a responsibility she takes great pride in. Outside of work and academics, Jai enjoys watching reality TV, building new LEGO sets, and traveling to new destinations.

Ireina Hyde

Supervisor: Wendy Byrd
Department: Employee Relations

Ireina is a Graduate Assistant in the HR and Employee & Organizational Development Office. While originally from Belmopan, Belize, she attended the University of South Florida in Tampa, FL, where she earned a Bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, focusing on Psychology and Sociology. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and aspires to work in the fields of employee experience and organizational development. In her current role as a Graduate Assistant, Ireina enjoys creating fun ways to encourage Blazer pride among VSU staff and faculty. Passionate about serving others, she helps provide opportunities for students to engage and connect, serving as Vice President of VSU's Society for Human Resource Management and as the Special Projects Coordinator for the Association of Graduate Students. In her free time, she enjoys going to church and spending time with her family and friends, crediting her success to their unwavering support with special acknowledgements to her manager Mrs. Wendy Byrd- a phenomenal person to work with.

Abby Beam

Supervisor: Brian Roberts
Department: Student Life

Abby Beam is a Graduate Assistant for Set-ups at the Student Union. Abby is originally from Peachtree City, Georgia, and attended Valdosta State University during her undergraduate studies. She earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Healthcare Administration with a minor in Human Resources Management in the Spring of 2024. Currently, she is pursuing her Master's in Business Administration from VSU with certificates in Healthcare Administration and Marketing Decision Making. During her time as a GA, Abby has thoroughly enjoyed working with student assistants of the Student Union, and being able to help facilitate events on campus. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her three dogs and staying active in Zeta Tau Alpha's local Alumni chapter.

Friend of the Graduate School

Dr. Michael Black

Dr. Black has dedicated his career to VSU for the past 23 years. In 2012, he was named VSU's first Director of Institutional Effectiveness in which he has led multiple successful Accreditation reaffirmations for the institution. He is being recognized as this years Friend of the Graduate School due to his contributions in teaching graduate courses in the MED of Higher Education Leadership program as well as for his service on the Graduate Faculty Membership Sub-committee of the Graduate Executive Council in which he was instrumental in developing several iterations of the graduate faculty membership application. He has also contributed to the Graduate School in running reports, identifying policies in need of updates and clarifications, and a willingness to serve on dissertation committees.

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GA of the Year Selection Committee:

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