# Abstract Booklet



## CIEL Fall Showcase

**November 6, 2026**

Center for Integrative and Experiential Learning
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



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# WHAT IS CIEL?

The Center for Integrative and Experiential Learning leads the University of South Carolina's comprehensive initiative to enhance undergraduate education and build a culture of integrative learning across the Columbia, Lancaster, Salkehatchie, Sumter, and Union campuses. CIEL promotes student opportunities to engage beyond the classroom and synthesize and apply learning across experiences. Graduation with Leadership Distinction is the Center's signature program and recognizes students for significant engagement and learning, including leadership through solution-oriented thinking.

# GLD PATHWAYS

Graduation with Leadership Distinction (GLD) is an official academic distinction that recognizes students' within- and beyond-the-classroom learning. It is noted on students' official transcripts and diplomas. Graduates also receive honor cords. Students can earn GLD in one of the four topical areas, called pathways: Community Engagement and Social Advocacy (CESA), Global Learning, Professional Engagement, and Research. Presenting one of their experiences is a requirement of GLD.






# LEARNING OUTCOMES

**As a result of earning GLD, students will:**

1. Provide examples of beyond the classroom experiences in which they have engaged and describe how one or more beyond the classroom experience has contributed to their learning.

2. Articulate examples of beyond the classroom experiences that illuminate concepts, theories, or frameworks presented in their coursework including a clear description of elements of the beyond the classroom experience that are consistent with or contradictory to the identified concept.

3. Thoughtfully connect examples, facts, and/or theories from more than one experience, field of study, and/or perspective such as describing the similarities and differences across experiences, fields of study, or perspectives.

4. Pose solutions to problems (i.e., make recommendations) that incorporate learning from both beyond the classroom and within the classroom experiences, and articulate how their decisions are supported by what they have learned through their experiences and content.

# Session 1



## 1:15-2:00pm

## Beyond the Behaviors: Understanding the Person Within

Working as a Mental Health Technician at Three Rivers Midlands gives me the opportunity to support children and adolescents in a residential, behavioral health setting. In this environment, everyday interactions are opportunities to understand how young people communicate their emotions and respond to challenges. My responsibilities include supporting daily routines, observing residents' behaviors, and documenting these observations. Through this role, I recognize the difference between observing a behavior and truly understanding it. Documentation can capture what a resident says or does, but that observation alone cannot fully explain what they are feeling or why they respond that way. I've learned to pay closer attention to what happened before a behavior occurs, the circumstances surrounding it, and how my own response could influence the interaction.

This experience deepened my understanding of patience and empathy. I see patience as managing my own reactions while giving others time and space to communicate. Empathy means acknowledging that I might not fully understand a resident's experience while still treating their feelings and needs as worthy of attention. I also learned to appreciate the significance of small moments of connection and the consistency required to build trust.

This experience matters because the way we interpret behavior can shape the care and understanding a person receives. Looking deeper into that moment requires careful observation, awareness of our assumptions, and willingness to listen. Moving forward, I plan to pursue a PhD in Clinical Psychology and build on my direct care and research experiences to better understand children's and adolescents' emotional and behavioral needs. I want to carry these lessons into my training by considering each young person's experiences and circumstances when learning to assess their needs and provide care.

# AMAYA BROWN | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## Beyond the Classroom: Bridging Public Health, Clinical Experience, and Community Advocacy

As a Public Health major at the University of South Carolina with aspirations of becoming a physician, I wanted to gain firsthand experience working with underserved populations and better understand the barriers that prevent individuals from receiving quality healthcare. My position as a Medical Assistant at the Community Medical Clinic of Kershaw County, a nonprofit organization providing healthcare services to uninsured individuals, has allowed me to connect the public health concepts I have learned in the classroom to the realities patients face every day.

In my role, I assist with patient intake, obtain vital signs, coordinate appointments, support clinical operations, and help patients navigate available healthcare resources. Working directly with patients has exposed me to the ways financial limitations, transportation challenges, health literacy, and other social determinants of health influence healthcare access and outcomes. One particularly meaningful interaction involved helping a patient obtain a free glucometer after learning they did not have the resources to monitor their blood sugar. Seeing the patient's relief reminded me that even small acts of advocacy can make a meaningful difference in someone's health.

This experience has challenged me to look beyond a patient's diagnosis and consider the circumstances that influence their ability to manage their health. I have strengthened my communication, problem-solving, and patient advocacy skills while developing a greater understanding of the relationship between clinical medicine and public health. Most importantly, I have learned that being an effective healthcare professional requires not only clinical knowledge but also empathy, resourcefulness, and a willingness to address barriers to care.

As I prepare for a future career in medicine and public health, this experience has reinforced my commitment to serving underserved communities and advocating for more equitable healthcare systems.

### The Work Behind the Diagnosis

During 2025, I had the opportunity to job shadow in a Surgical Pathology lab, as well as with a Medical Examiner to explore my professional interest in pathology. While learning more about pathology and the diagnostic process, I became interested in how the work that is conducted in the labs contributes to the care of patients outside of the lab. During my time with the Medical Examiner, I was able to observe autopsies, and how the Medical Examiner works first-hand with Pathologists' Assistants, autopsy technicians, and the coroner's office to examine, document, and preserve information and samples to keep on record about each patient. Later that year, I had the opportunity to shadow in a Surgical Pathology lab. There, I observed grossers, lab technicians, histologists, and Pathologist's Assistants working together to process and analyze patient samples. Having the opportunity to see all of these professionals contribute to the diagnostic process showed me that the final diagnosis depends on much more than one person or a singular examination. Careful observation, documentation, specimen preparation, collaboration, and attention to detail are all essential processes for developing an accurate understanding of what the patient may be experiencing, and their diagnosis. These experiences changed the way that I view patient care, by giving me a first-hand experience showing me the important contributions that happen behind the scenes.

## CAROLINE COCHRAN | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### Care Before the Cure: Comparing Pediatric Prevention Across Borders

During my semester abroad in the Netherlands, I completed a six-week independent research project comparing preventive pediatric healthcare in the Netherlands and the United States. Through a literature review and guidance from a mentor living in the Netherlands, I examined how each country approaches preventive care, access to healthcare services, health promotion, and early intervention. As a public health student passionate about working with children, I wanted to better understand how differences in healthcare systems influence children's health and development and what the United States could learn from other approaches to prevention.
This experience taught me that improving children's health involves much more than treating illnesses after they develop. Access to healthcare, early intervention, and preventive services all play important roles in supporting healthy development. Studying another country's healthcare system challenged me to look beyond what I was familiar with and recognize opportunities for improvement in the United States. This research strengthened my desire to pursue pediatric occupational therapy, where I hope to emphasize prevention, early intervention, and understanding the whole child. Ultimately, I want others to recognize that healthcare should not begin when someone becomes sick, but rather with providing children and families the support and resources they need to stay healthy.

## Seeing the Whole Person Through My Carolina Education

I came to the University of South Carolina with a lifetime of experiences and a desire to help others. Carolina gave me the framework to understand those experiences and the responsibility to use them thoughtfully. As a social work major pursuing Graduation with Leadership Distinction through the Community Engagement pathway, I discovered a defining insight: meaningful support requires seeing the whole person and understanding the conditions shaping their choices.

In SOWK 331 Diversity, I examined how identity, privilege, and oppression influence access to opportunities. SOWK 368 Trauma-Informed Practice taught me how experiences of trauma can affect trust and engagement. Together, these courses challenged me to examine my assumptions and approach people with curiosity. Person-in-environment and ecological systems theory helped me connect individual circumstances with relationships, organizations, and public policies.

My Carolina field education at Transitions Homeless Center brought this learning into focus. While helping a client complete permanent housing applications, I listened as she described surviving violence and rebuilding her life. I helped identify the documents needed for her next steps, respected what she chose to share, and kept our conversation centered on her goals. Her determination stayed with me. I saw how easily attention to paperwork could overshadow the person working so hard to move forward. This experience changed how I understand effective practice. I learned to slow down, recognize strengths, and consider how health, transportation, and housing availability influence progress. My education gave me a way to connect compassion with informed action while honoring each client's voice.

The significance reaches beyond one interaction: communities must address the conditions that limit people's choices alongside their immediate needs. I plan to pursue my MSW and serve veterans, active-duty service members, and military families affected by trauma, substance use, and homelessness. Carolina helped me clarify my purpose through my experiences. I move forward determined to become a Social Worker who listens carefully, challenges barriers, and works alongside people toward the lives they envision.

# CASSIDY GREEN

## Examining Causality Between Cultural Mindsets and Help-Seeking in Young Adults

Self-reliance refers to an individual's tendency to depend on their own judgment and coping skills when facing adversity (Meadley et al., 2024). Common in individualistic societies, self-reliance has been associated with reduced professional help-seeking, as those who prefer solving problems independently may be less likely to seek support (Ishikawa et al., 2021). Although individualism and self-reliance can promote benefits, maladaptive self-reliance has also been linked to reduced help-seeking and poorer mental health outcomes (Labouliere et al., 2015). In contrast, collectivistic orientations often emphasize group cohesion and mutual support (Kuo, 2012). However, research has relied on correlational designs, limiting conclusions about causality. This study addresses this gap by experimentally examining whether individualistic and collectivistic mindsets influence mental health help-seeking.

Participants (N = 128) are being recruited from the University of South Carolina Aiken psychology subject pool and randomly assigned to an individualism or collectivism prime condition. Data collection is ongoing. Cultural mindsets are activated using a pronoun-circling task, where participants read a narrative and circle singular pronouns (e.g., "I," "me," "my") or plural pronouns (e.g., "we," "us," "ours") to prime individualistic or collectivistic self-construal, respectively (Trafimow et al., 1991). After manipulation, participants complete measures of individualism versus collectivism orientation, self-reliance, and attitudes toward seeking professional help. Behavioral help-seeking is assessed through Qualtrics-recorded engagement with resource links, including the Counseling and Student Health Center.

One-way analyses of variance will examine differences in continuous variables across conditions, while a chi-square analysis will assess differences in resource-link engagement. We hypothesize that individualism priming will increase self-reliance and reduce favorable help-seeking attitudes, whereas collectivism priming will increase favorable help-seeking attitudes and resource engagement relative to the individualism condition. Findings may clarify how situationally activated cultural mindsets shape mental health help-seeking and inform future university interventions designed to promote support-seeking and reduce stigma among young adults.

### Three Units, One Purpose - Healthcare Across Generations

During the majority of my time as a student at University of South Carolina, I was a volunteer at Prisma Health Richland's Hospital for two years, volunteering within three units: geriatric, orthopedic, and pediatric. I started volunteering to have more healthcare experience while completing my degree, and to have a deeper understanding of patient care and a healthcare environment. Throughout these units, I provided non-clinical care to patients by refilling water and ice pitchers, collecting meal trays, and interacting with the patients and their families. Although these tasks may seem small, I learned that providing support, listening to others, and making patients feel seen and cared for are meaningful forms of service. I started out volunteering 1-3 days a week between the geriatric and orthopedic units during my fall and spring semester of my sophomore year in, and began volunteering within the pediatric unit from the summer of 2025 until this past summer of 2026. Working in different units exposed me to patients across various stages of life and helped me better understand the different needs individuals have when receiving healthcare. My experience in pediatrics was very meaningful because of my passion for working with children and my goal of becoming a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner. Volunteering in this unit strengthened my career goals, while allowing me to develop skills in communication, compassion, and patient-centered support. I learned so much by being a volunteer, and understanding more on how volunteers have a vital role in healthcare spaces, by supporting patients, families, and healthcare workers. This experience within the hospital has opened up many opportunities for me, providing me with a part-time job working with children and contributed to my acceptance into my top graduate school program at USC to pursue nursing. Most importantly, my time volunteering taught me that leadership and advocacy can begin through service, compassion, and being willing to support others. These lessons will continue to guide me as I pursue a career focused on caring for and advocating for children and their families.

## BENJAMIN JACKSON | RESEARCH

### A New Perspective on Healthcare and Myself

During my Maymester, I spent three weeks studying sports medicine in Australia through the University of South Carolina's Medicine Down Under program. I chose this experience to expand my understanding of healthcare, explore my professional interests, and challenge myself in an unfamiliar environment. Through interactions with healthcare professionals, sports scientists, physiotherapists, and clinicians, I learned about injury prevention, rehabilitation, strength and conditioning, and athlete wellness. Visits to professional sports teams and facilities allowed me to connect concepts from my coursework to their application in athlete care. Beyond these academic experiences, communicating with Australian professionals and collaborating with fellow students challenged me to listen actively, consider different perspectives, and adapt to unfamiliar terminology and approaches. Exploring Australian culture, wildlife, and the Great Barrier Reef also encouraged me to appreciate experiences beyond my usual surroundings. These opportunities helped me become more adaptable and more aware of how culture influences communication and healthcare. My time abroad reinforced my goal of applying to medical school while broadening my understanding of the skills needed to care for others. I returned with a stronger appreciation for cultural awareness, a broader perspective on healthcare, and greater confidence in my ability to learn and grow in unfamiliar situations.

### Inspired To Lead, Driven To Act

As a student senator who represented the Arnold School of Public Health, I was able to work with my peers, faculties and administrators. In my role as a senator, I advocated for improving students' health, well-being and accessibility across campus. I joined student government because I wanted to advocate for student needs and make a positive difference within the Gamecock community. I worked towards this goal by listening to students, collaborating with university departments, and developed legislation to address those concerns.

One of my major initiatives I worked on was improving restroom accessibility for women, where I advocated for the addition of a women's restroom in the basement of Jones Physical Center. I also worked to address other concerns such as including the center of health and well being of students at the main student orientation rather than at breakout groups, better access to menstrual products around campus by collaborating with no periods left behind, helping promote cancer prevention etc.

Through my experience as a senator I learnt that at first these concerns appear to be small but can still have a larger impact on students health and wellbeing. I was also able to learn that identifying a problem is important but it is more important to create an efficient plan to solve that problem. Advocacy requires not only voicing out your opinions but also being willing to listen to others, look from different perspectives and stay committed to make a change. Seeing my efforts as a student senator showed me how each person has the power to make a change within their community regardless of how big or small the issue is. As a future physician, I hope to carry these experiences to listen to my patients, recognizing concerns that sometimes may be overlooked and advocates for the needs of the people I serve.

## TYLER JOHNSON | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### The Heart Behind Healthcare

During my fall 2025 semester, I became a Certified Nursing Assistant. I began working as a Nurse Technician at Lexington Medical Center during the spring 2026 semester. I pursued this opportunity because I wanted to gain hands-on experience in healthcare in order to prepare for graduate nursing school and build a strong foundation for my future nursing career.

As a Nurse Technician, my responsibilities include taking patients' vital signs, assisting with activities of daily living, and collaborating with other members of the healthcare team to support patient care. Through this experience, I have gained a greater understanding of the important role each healthcare professional plays in ensuring patients receive safe, compassionate, and effective care.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned is the importance of communication, teamwork, and patient advocacy. Listening carefully to patients, communicating with families, and reporting important observations to nurses are essential to providing quality care. I have also learned that Nurse Technicians are often among the first to notice changes in a patient's condition, making it important to speak up and advocate for patients' needs. This experience has also taught me to see each patient as an individual with a unique story, rather than focusing solely on their medical condition.

Most importantly, working in healthcare has taught me to appreciate the small things in life and recognize how meaningful even the simplest acts of care can be. This experience has strengthened my commitment to nursing and helped shape the healthcare professional I hope to become. Through my presentation, I hope to share the importance of empathy, teamwork, communication, and advocacy in patient care and encourage others to recognize the impact they can make in the lives of others.

### Test-Retest Reliability of Metabolic and Neuromuscular Assessments Using NIRS and Force Plates

Athletic readiness depends on multiple physiological characteristics, including mitochondrial capacity, maximal force, explosive performance, and recovery. However, evaluating these characteristics often requires separate assessments, creating a need for an efficient testing protocol that integrates multiple domains of performance. The STRIDE study investigated whether a compact, field-ready assessment could reliably measure these characteristics within a single testing session and provide a more complete picture of physiological readiness. Following familiarization, thirty-seven recreationally active adults (26 women, 11 men; 21.1 ± 3.3 y; 167.8 ± 8.5 cm; 65.9 ± 10.0 kg; BMI 23.3 ± 2.6 kg/m²) completed two identical testing sessions separated by 48-96 hours. Near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) was used during the Mito6 protocol to assess skeletal muscle mitochondrial capacity and reoxygenation. Isometric mid-thigh pulls (IMTP) measured maximal force, while countermovement jumps (CMJ) assessed explosive performance. Primary outcomes included mitochondrial rate constant, IMTP peak force, CMJ height, and muscle reoxygenation following IMTP and between CMJs. This approach allowed metabolic, strength, power, and recovery characteristics to be evaluated within the same testing protocol. Results demonstrated strong reliability across most force-plate measures, including measures of maximal force, jump height, and power. NIRS outcomes showed greater variability, with some measures demonstrating strong reliability and others showing limited reproducibility. These findings highlight both the potential and limitations of combining metabolic and neuromuscular assessments when evaluating physiological performance. Establishing which measures can be consistently reproduced is essential before they can be confidently applied to athlete assessment. STRIDE may help refine practical testing methods used for athlete monitoring, recovery assessment, load management, and return-to-play decision-making.

## KYMOURI LEE | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ADVOCACY

### Community Engagement and Advocacy: Destigmatizing Mental Health Care in Clinical Settings

At the beginning of my sophomore year, I began working as a Testing Assistant at Lind Psychological Associates in Columbia, South Carolina, to gain foundational clinical, interpersonal, and professional skills for a career in mental health counseling. In my role, I was trained to administer and score psychological testing batteries to diverse clients assessed for conditions such as ADHD, traumatic brain injuries, dementia, and Parkinson's disease. Over time, I took on the Administrative Assistant role, managing daily office operations, as well as training and mentoring interns. This position has not only shown me the operational tasks that go into running a practice, but has also developed my ability to work and connect with others, whether it be through collaborative tasks with interns or the individuals that I test. I particularly enjoy getting to work with such a diverse group of clients and being able to support and encourage them throughout the testing process, as well as contribute towards getting them the help they need to improve their quality of life. My role has molded me into a professional, and has especially reinforced my decision to pursue the field of counseling. Many clients I serve manage disabilities, identify with ethnic or racial minority groups, come from rural areas, or carry histories of trauma. For many, this was their first exposure to mental health care, allowing me to see the stigma surrounding psychological services firsthand, leading to my interest in providing care to marginalized communities. Overall, my clinical experience working as a Testing Assistant connects directly to my Community Engagement and Social Advocacy pathway, as I observed how systemic barriers deter individuals from receiving mental health care. By making a frustrating process more comfortable through reassurance, encouragement, accommodation, and active listening, I worked to lessen that stigma in each individual I helped.

### Beyond the Emergency: What Working as an EMT Taught Me About Patient Care

When I first became an EMT, I thought being prepared for an emergency meant knowing how to assess a patient, recognize what was medically wrong, and provide the appropriate care. While my EMT training taught me the clinical skills needed to respond to emergencies, working with actual patients has taught me that providing good care requires much more than following the correct medical steps. As an EMT, I meet patients during some of their most vulnerable moments and often enter their lives outside of a traditional healthcare setting. This has allowed me to see not only their medical conditions, but also the environments they live in, the people they depend on, and circumstances that may influence their health. I have also learned that every patient requires a different approach. Factors such as fear, confusion, cognitive ability, language, and previous experiences with healthcare can affect how a patient communicates and responds to care. These experiences have taught me the importance of adapting my communication, showing empathy and compassion, and remembering that the emergency I am responding to is only one part of that person's life. Working as an EMT has changed the way I think about patient care by teaching me to look beyond a diagnosis or set of vital signs and consider the person experiencing the medical problem. As I continue toward a career in medicine, I hope to carry this perspective with me by combining the medical knowledge and skills I continue to develop with communication, empathy, and an understanding of each patient's individual circumstances.

## FAITH MOODY | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ADVOCACY

### Born Too Soon, Living Too Far: Rural Access and Premature Infant Care

Growing up in a rural South Carolina community, I have seen how distance and limited healthcare resources can create barriers for families seeking specialized care. My experience volunteering with the Eli Collins Foundation for Premature Babies allowed me to view these challenges through the lens of premature infants and their families. Through community outreach, preparing resources for families, and supporting events focused on mothers and babies, I gained understanding of the needs that can extend beyond a premature birth or NICU stay. This experience encouraged me to think more critically about how geography can affect access to maternal and infant healthcare. For families living in rural communities, receiving specialized care may require traveling outside of their community, creating additional challenges during an already difficult time. My service taught me that supporting families requires more than addressing medical needs. Access to resources, education, transportation, and community support can also influence a family's experience. Through this presentation, I will explore how my service with the Eli Collins Foundation shaped my understanding of rural maternal and infant health and strengthened my interest in health equity. This experience has also influenced my future goal of pursuing clinical and maternal health research, where I hope to contribute to research that improves access and outcomes for mothers, infants, and families in underserved communities.

### Promoting Inclusion for Children with Disabilities

Throughout the course of my university experience, during the summer months I had the opportunity to work as an Inclusion aide with the Western Dupage Special Recreation Association. As an inclusion aide, I worked one on one with kids that had disabilities. I worked specifically at summer camps where our main objective was to promote the inclusion of our participants into summer camp activities. We worked on creating healthy behaviors, learning daily life skills, and creating an environment where my participants felt they could engage comfortably with other kids. I have always enjoyed learning about how to create and promote an environment where everyone, no matter their capabilities, could feel seen and understood. Spending roughly three years with this organization I was able to witness growth across multiple participants. Watching them incorporate and adapt our practices on their own to the point where they no longer needed a support staff was incredibly rewarding. Even when some days felt like no progress was being made or if the participant was having a hard day, showing up everyday proved to be worthwhile. Spending weeks with participants of all backgrounds was an opportunity for growth and development. Experiencing behavioral challenges, communication barriers, and days where my participant was not able to regulate themselves, I was able to learn and grow as a person. Learning different forms of communication, noticing subtle behavior changes, and using tactics learned from work training I could approach each participant in a confident and empathetic way. From starting out unsure of my role on my first day to walking in knowing how I make a difference but using these skills was a large piece of growth for me. As a future Genetic Counselor, working with people of all backgrounds, often diagnosed with various developmental and genetic conditions, it is important to understand how to approach everyone without assumption and compassion. I can now approach future counseling sessions with a deeper understanding of how communication looks different for everyone through the knowledge and experience gained from this opportunity.

## KARLY PATTERSON | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ADVOCACY

### Building Leadership Skills with Service Saturday

Community service plays a major role in helping college students step outside the classroom, connect with local residents, and develop real-world leadership skills. Over the past three years at the University of South Carolina, serving as a Service Saturday leader has been one of the most meaningful parts of my college experience. Leading these projects gave me the opportunity to step up, guide groups of fellow students, and work directly with local organizations across Columbia.

My most significant contribution was leading student volunteers through hands-on service projects each month. Whether we were working on building a home with Habitat for Humanity or playing kickball with youth at the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice, every project brought a new set of challenges. I had to learn how to communicate clearly, solve problems on the spot, and keep my team motivated and focused. Working with students from different backgrounds taught me how to bring people together around a common goal.

Through these experiences, I realized that being a good leader is not just about giving directions. Community engagement and leadership is about building trust, listening to others, and making genuine connections with both your team and the people you are helping. Getting to know the local community while working to improve it has been both grounding and rewarding. My presentation will reflect on the leadership and communication skills I developed as a site leader, and how serving others has shaped the way I lead and connect with people.

### From Carolina to Columbia: Advocacy in the Columbia community

A typical college student's 'community' is usually limited to the campus. My junior year I learned that the Columbia community is so much more than just University of South Carolina. I served as the Director of the Local Advocacy Bureau (LAB) for University of South Carolina student government. The LAB serves as a bridge between the University of South Carolina and the City of Columbia, researching issues that affect our communities and working alongside local government to improve the experience not just for students, but for all who call Columbia home. My primary responsibility as Director of the LAB was overseeing the development and presentation of our annual report, which examined key issues including environmental equity, infrastructure, student and gameday safety, walkability, housing, food insecurity, and transportation as it relates to food accessibility. My passion for advocacy started within the classroom in WGST112 and RELG 205. I learned, through studying how gender, race, class, sexuality, and other aspects of identity shape people's experiences and perspectives, how to understand and articulate viewpoints that differ from mine. I brought these advocacy skills with me to my LAB position. My team and I met weekly for six months to develop a report that reflects the needs and priorities of the student body. After the publication of the report, I then had the opportunity to lead my team in a guided discussion with Mayor Rickenmann, turning research into real conversations around collaboration and actionable solutions. I was then invited to serve on to serve on Mayor Rickenmann's Collegiate Engagement Council as a representative for the University of South Carolina. I contributed input on new park developments, volunteered at Columbia's career fair, and helped exchange general ideas on how to better connect students with the city. These opportunities have taught me the importance of advocacy and the value of hearing different perspectives.

## ARIANNA SCHAEFER | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SCIAL ADVOCACY

### Beyond the Emergency: The Power of Patient Advocacy in Emergency Nursing

Patient advocacy is an essential component of emergency nursing, particularly when caring for vulnerable patients that may be experiencing fear, pain, confusion, or difficulty communicating their needs. The purpose of this project was to explore how patient advocacy influences safe, compassionate, and equitable care in the emergency department and how classroom learning can translate into clinical practice. I chose this topic because of my desire to work in the emergency department as a nurse post grad and my experiences as a nursing student at Prisma Health Richland Emergency Department and as a Student Nurse Assistant at UMass Milford Emergency Department.To develop my understanding, I connected concepts learned through nursing coursework, including patient-centered care, clinical judgment, prioritization, and communication, with my clinical and professional experiences. Through my experiences, I was able to observe how nurses advocate for patients by recognizing changes in condition, communicating concerns to the healthcare team, explaining procedures, and acknowledging patients' individual needs. I also was able to reflect on how the fast-paced emergency environment can make it easy to primarily focus on the medical diagnosis, causing patients to feel unheard. This makes it all the more important to ensure patients feel heard and supported.This project reinforced that patient advocacy goes beyond speaking up when something is wrong. It involves actively listening, recognizing barriers to understanding, respecting patient preferences, and communicating concerns before they become bigger issues. I learned that effective emergency nursing requires balancing the urgent clinical priorities with the emotional, physical, and individual needs of each patient. Ultimately, this insight strengthened my commitment to becoming an emergency nurse who has clinical competence while also valuing compassion and advocacy. By recognizing the needs of vulnerable patients and helping ensure their voices are heard, nurses can promote safer, more equitable, and patient-centered care within their communities.

### The Professional Voice and Its Most Productive Shape

During the fall semester, I had the privilege to join the Create-A-Thon event hosted by the School of Journalism and Mass Communications. A team of us were challenged to create websites, billboards, and mailing letters for the nonprofit, Richland County Public Education Partners. As a media arts major and at the time, a journalism minor, I figured this would be the perfect opportunity to connect with people and grow my work experience. However, through the theory of "first circle" learned in my THEA 240 course, this experience became key to applying the most effective and productive workplace behaviors. The "first circle" theory represents the act of practical engagement with an audience or to whom you are speaking. "First circle" yields the ability to not overpower a room, while also not shying away. In relation to Create-A-Thon, recognizing the "first circle" theory of speaking allowed me to initiate the projects by learning everyone's names, their strengths, and establish the framework for what had to be done. Due to this direct engagement, I was able to help lead this team to creating everything the nonprofit client needed and more. Overall, the theory of "first circle" and the experience of Create-A-Thon connect to my pathway of professional and civic engagement because it showed how and to what extent proper and direct communication between patrons, clients, and work partners affects work quality and the ability to be a strong, professional candidate. "First circle" has opened my eyes to what is accomplishable in my future plans, especially graduate school. I plan to extend this knowledge of "first circle" into interviews, research presentations, and conferences. "First circle" will continue to affect my future professional endeavors because it has already made an immensely positive difference in my workplace attitude and efficiency.

## ISABELLA SEPE | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### Understanding Media Beyond Borders

My fascination with other cultures began at a young age through an interest in history, people, and the ways culture evolves over time. As an advertising major at USC, I have come to understand that cultural awareness is not separate from strategy, but central to understanding audiences, developing insights, and creating meaningful campaigns. My experience abroad strengthened my ability to recognize how culture shapes the way people connect with media and brands. I have always been interested in how brands draw consumers in, but that interest expanded when I was selected to attend the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. Experiencing the festival firsthand allowed me to see global advertising beyond the classroom. I met professionals from agencies around the world and observed how brands adapted their campaigns to reflect different cultural values, trends, and norms. These experiences demonstrated how cultural context can influence every stage of a campaign, from the initial insight to its final execution, all the way to a consumer's opinion. Cannes also challenged me to reconsider how I define and pursue success. Pursuing personal happiness rather than another individual's expectations resonated with me as someone who is used to being in an environment centered almost entirely on post-graduation planning. Ultimately, this experience strengthened my global and cultural competency while reaffirming that advertising is a field where my interests and strengths naturally intersect. It has given me greater confidence in my path and a clearer understanding of the kind of professional I hope to become one day.

### Strategic Sourcing at Honeywell Technologies: Learning About Data and Better Business Decisions

During this past summer, I worked at Honeywell Technologies as an Indirect Sourcing HR Services Intern. I managed more than ten sourcing projects and analyzed supplier, spending, and cost data to identify trends, sourcing opportunities, and actionable recommendations. My work supported procurement decisions and contributed to initiatives and cost savings. The purpose of my internship was to help the sourcing team make more informed, strategic decisions. I was motivated by the opportunity to see how data could be used beyond comparing prices. By looking at spending and supplier information as a whole, I could identify patterns and opportunities that may not be visible when focusing on one purchase or supplier at a time. This experience showed me that sourcing decisions are not based on cost alone. International stakeholders across the company had different priorities, including quality, service, timing, supplier capabilities, and risk. I learned that strong sourcing requires balancing these perspectives while using data to support recommendations. Overall, Honeywell helped me understand how analytical work connects to real business decisions and strengthened my interest in strategic sourcing and supply chain management. This experience was significant because it changed how I view sourcing. Before Honeywell Technologies, I saw procurement mainly as purchasing goods or services at the best price. Through my internship, I learned that sourcing is a strategic function that can influence cost, supplier relationships, operational continuity, quality, and risk across an entire company. It also gave me real experience applying the analytical and problem-solving skills I have developed through my operations and supply chain coursework. The internship confirmed my interest in pursuing a career where I can use data and cross-functional collaboration with a global perspective to help organizations make stronger supply chain decisions.

## LORELEI SULLIVAN | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ADVOCACY

### Self Discovery Through Outdoors Leadership

My Presidency of Carolina MWW has taught me a significant amount about leadership, teamwork, problem solving, community, and confidence.  The most important experience through this role was my involvement in post Hurricane Helene recovery efforts in Appalachia.  The experience prompted growth.

### Choosing the Right Opportunity

When I came to UofSC, I knew I wanted to learn as much as possible, both in and beyond the classroom. I decided to approach every new opportunity like the theater game "yes, and." For those unfamiliar, in the game each person responds with "yes, and" to build on what the other says. This mindset was surprisingly easy to apply to my college life. Whenever someone approached me with an opportunity, I would say "yes, and." I would agree to try (that's the "yes") and to get as involved as possible whether in leadership roles, committees, or just attempting something new (that's the "and"). Of course, this didn't always work out for me. There were plenty of clubs that I joined and didn't enjoy. The point of "yes, and" is to try something new and if you don't like it, that's just as valuable a learning experience. In my presentation I will discuss my experience working at Dominion Energy and how although it was not exactly what I had hoped for, it still played a crucial part in my personal and professional development.

## CAMERON WALSH | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### From Wealth Management to Corporate Finance: Skills Built Through a Professional Internship

During my internship at Cola Wealth Advisors, a wealth management firm, I worked directly with a broker to gain firsthand experience in the business world and explore whether wealth management aligned with my long-term career goals. Cola Wealth Advisors provides personalized investment guidance and portfolio management for clients across varying levels of financial literacy, which allowed me to observe the intersection of finance and client communication in real time. I sought opportunities to take on larger responsibilities, including assisting with client meetings, preparing financial materials, and contributing to stock pitches. These experiences strengthened my analytical, organizational, and communication skills while teaching me how to present complex financial concepts to diverse audiences. Although I ultimately decided not to pursue wealth management as a career, the internship proved invaluable in shaping my professional development. It taught me resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving, skills that became instrumental in securing my full-time position with BAE Systems. Through daily exposure to client interactions and financial data, I learned how to communicate effectively with individuals at different levels of financial understanding and how to translate technical information into actionable insights. This experience was my first true immersion in the corporate world, broadening my understanding of finance beyond investments alone. It demonstrated that every professional opportunity, even one outside my chosen field, can contribute meaningfully to growth. The lessons I learned at Cola Wealth Advisors continue to guide my professional and civic engagement, and the skills I developed will be applied throughout my career, beginning with my upcoming role in BAE Systems' Financial Leadership Development Program.

# Session 2



## 2:30-3:15pm

## Dual-Isotope PET/CT Imaging of Skeletal Muscle Perfusion and Sympathetic Innervation in a Rabbit Model of Peripheral Artery Disease

Background: Peripheral artery disease (PAD) is associated with impaired lower-extremity perfusion, autonomic dysfunction, and increased limb amputation risk, particularly in patients with diabetes mellitus. This study investigates multimodal imaging to evaluate skeletal muscle perfusion and sympathetic innervation following hindlimb ischemia to better understand PAD progression.

Methods: Hindlimb ischemia was induced in n=6 rabbits by right femoral artery ligation, with endpoints at 2, 4, or 10 weeks (n=2 per timepoint). Initial perfusion defects were evaluated using $^{99m}$Tc-tetrofosmin SPECT/CT. Sympathetic innervation was assessed using $^{18}$F-LMI1195 PET/CT at terminal timepoints, with in vivo imaging at 2 and 4 weeks. Gastrocnemius and soleus muscles on the ischemic right leg were segmented (MIM software) to quantify standardized uptake values (SUVbw) and compared to the non-ischemic leg. Additional CT assessment of tissue density (HU) and muscle volume was compared between legs. Excised muscle tissue was assessed for all animals with gamma well counting for absolute tracer uptake and histological examination of muscle fiber type, catecholaminergic neurons, inflammation and fibrosis.

Results: Acutely following hindlimb ischemia, there was a marked reduction in $^{99m}$Tc-tetrofosmin uptake in ischemic compared with non-ischemic hindlimbs, indicating impaired skeletal muscle perfusion (Veriton, Spectrum Dynamics). In vivo imaging (NX, United Imaging) demonstrated a slight reduction in LMI uptake in the ischemic muscles compared to the non-ischemic leg where there was also some evidence of reduced muscle mass measured by CT volume. Ex vivo gamma counting demonstrated a time-dependent increase in $^{18}$F-LMI1195 uptake, with increased uptake observed in the ischemic soleus of the 10-week rabbits. Histological evaluation identified irregular muscle fibers and structural abnormalities in ischemic tissue.

Conclusions: Preliminary findings demonstrate the feasibility of multimodal imaging for detecting regional perfusion and tissue changes following hindlimb ischemia. Further studies with larger sample sizes and standardized imaging protocols are needed to establish stronger relationships between sympathetic denervation, vascular dysfunction, and PAD progression.

# JESSICA D'AGOSTA | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## Beyond Rehabilitation: My Experience as a PT Technician

Over the past two summers, I have gained over 300 hours of experience working as a Physical Therapy Aide at Riptide Physical Therapy, an outpatient orthopedic clinic in Barnegat, New Jersey. I initially pursued this job to gain clinical experience, learn more about the profession, and ultimately determine whether physical therapy was the right career path for me. On a day-to-day basis, my responsibilities included greeting patients of various ages and backgrounds, guiding them through their exercises while reinforcing correct form and safety, maintaining a clean and organized environment, and preparing heat and ice packs. Through this experience, I learned how modalities such as electrical stimulation, therapeutic ultrasound, heat, and ice are used in treatment. I also gained insight into what an insurance-based practice looks like and the benefits of direct access. Additionally, I learned about the importance of effective communication and building rapport with patients. Seeing patients two to three times a week over several months allowed me to build meaningful relationships, act as a source of support and motivation, and witness their progress firsthand. Working with patients of different ages, backgrounds, and medical conditions also taught me to adapt my communication style to meet individual needs and recognize the importance of empathy and patience. Through this experience, I learned that physical therapy extends far beyond physical rehabilitation, but also involves providing emotional support. Building a supportive and trusting relationship with each patient is just as important to their recovery as the exercises themselves. Overall, this experience transformed my initial interest into a passion, strengthening my clinical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and commitment to pursuing a career in physical therapy.

### Prevention is Essential to Treating the Whole Patient

In January 2026, I traveled with a group of peers to Heredia, Costa Rica to provide medical assistance to the communities there. I had a basic understanding of Public Health from class, but this trip strengthened it on a global and cultural level. My role was to collaborate with the on-site doctor and my peers to perform patient evaluations and advise the patient on next steps. I observed more poverty and fear compared to living in the US. The patient population consisted of mostly Costa Ricans and refugee Nicaraguans who lacked access to basic medical necessities. I evaluated a variety of patients who were sick, injured, or just wanted to make sure they were healthy. From this experience I now understand that many populations have barriers to healthcare, health education and safety. I found that this is a huge Public Health issue, as these factors contribute to one's overall health and well-being. I learned that health issues can mean more than just a diagnosis, and prevention and health education is essential to improving health outcomes.

## TYLER DUDLEY | GLOBAL LEARNING

### Sant Jordi's Day: Discovering Catalan Culture

While I was abroad in Barcelona, I attended the festivities of Sant Jordi's Day. It is a holiday celebrated in the Catalonia region in Spain on April 23 every year. It celebrates Sant Jordi, the patron saint of Barcelona, as well as literature and relationships. The closest holiday to a US holiday would be Valentine's Day with elements of American Independence Day. This comes from the tradition of all the men giving a rose to important women in their life, and all women giving a book to important men in their life. However, the holiday resembles the fourth of July because of the strong cultural and national ties to the region of Catalonia. Although I did not take part in some of these traditions, I was a spectator of the festivities. Before going to Spain, I had never heard of this holiday. I first heard of the holiday from my professors at ESADE. At first, I thought it was a simple local festival, similar to festivals and events that local governments and organizations hold here in the United States. However, many of my professors explained the importance of the holiday to the locals. After walking through Barcelona during Sant Jordi's Day, I realized how important local festivals and holidays are to the area. With the holiday occurring later during my time in Spain, I got to truly live like a local by adapting and experiencing Catalonian culture. I found it very interesting how much the holiday mattered to the locals and had never seen something like it in the United States. It has helped me better learn about cultures around the world. I think it is important to realize that other cultures are very different from my own and to learn to be open to them.

## More Than a Game: Creating Meaningful Connections Through Sports

During Summer 2026, I had the opportunity to work as a Community Relations and Youth Hockey Intern with the Boston Bruins. Throughout my internship, I supported various community initiatives, including nine Summer Reading Program library visits across New England. My responsibilities included preparing event materials, coordinating logistics, assisting with donation requests, and interacting directly with children and families. Each event brought different audiences and challenges, teaching me the importance of adaptability, communication, and understanding the communities we were serving.

As a Sport and Entertainment Management student at the University of South Carolina, I have always believed that sports have the ability to make a meaningful impact beyond the game itself. However, this internship helped me better understand what that looks like in practice. I learned that successful community engagement is about much more than organizing events or measuring attendance. It is about creating genuine connections and making people feel valued. This experience strengthened my professional skills while reinforcing my passion for community relations and youth sports development. Moving forward, I hope to continue using sports as a platform to give back and create positive experiences for the communities around me.

# TAYLOR EVANS | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOICAL ADVOCACY

## Race and Facial Recognition

This study examined the effects of monoracial and biracial faces on memory performance, using a recognition task to measure accuracy. Participants were first shown a grid of ten faces and asked to remember them, then shown a series of twenty faces individually. Then they were told to identify whether they had seen the face prior. Accuracy and reaction time were recorded to measure memory performance. Results showed that participants were significantly more accurate at remembering monoracial faces compared to biracial faces. A significant effect of memory states, old vs. new, was also identified. Reaction time showed a pattern that could suggest a difference in processing, but these effects were not significant. These findings suggest that face type influences recognition memory, monoracial faces being more easily remembered. This has implications for understanding how perceptual experience and social exposure play a role in the cognitive processing of faces.

## Building Human Connection in Healthcare

Introduction: I attended a medical mission trip with the Association of Pre-Physician Assistant Students (APPAS) on a trip organized through Global Community Health Volunteers. Our group consisted of students, both PA and non-PA tracks, all of whom share a common interest in healthcare. We spent half of the trip in Panajachel and the remaining half in Antigua.

Activity/Event Description: We set up field clinics in the villages of Godinez and Magdalena Milpas Altas and offered free health assessments and treatment to residents of the village.

Motivation or Purpose: I attended this trip as an aspiring pre-PA student to support my personal and professional growth. I believe an essential aspect of being a healthcare provider is the ability to understand patients and work with individuals from diverse backgrounds. I set out on this journey to broaden my perspectives and enhance my career skills through patient interactions.

Reflection: I learned that communication extends beyond spoken language; when language is a barrier, connection can still be built through smiles, active listening, eye contact, and an active presence.

Significance: This means that human connection is an essential component of being an effective healthcare provider and it can come in many different forms.

Future plans or Next Steps: In light of this learning I will continue to prioritize empathy, patience, and human connection in my future patient interactions. I will also seek out opportunities that expose me to diverse healthcare settings and cultural perspectives in order to become a more well-rounded and compassionate Physician Assistant.

# NORA FLORES | RESEARCH

## Studying Catalyst Distribution in Porous Subjects

Heterogeneous catalysts are frequently utilized in fuel and pharmaceutical industries as they are easily recyclable and reusable. These properties make heterogeneous catalysts more cost effective, sustainable, and promote environmentally conscious industries. Metal-organic frameworks (MOFs) are porous hosts made of metal nodes connected by organic linkers. They were utilized to study guest distribution of homogeneous molecular catalysts in host-guest catalyst systems. Prior to this study, there were limited techniques and research regarding catalyst distribution in MOFs and other porous materials. This distribution has a significant impact on the catalytic efficiency. This study utilized a spectroscopic technique, Resonance Energy Transfer (RET) to locate and map catalytic sites within solid-supported heterogeneous systems. Initially, Zirconium based MOFs with ranging pore sizes and integration methods were synthesized, and ruthenium-based homogeneous molecular catalyst were integrated into the pores to create the heterogeneous host-guest systems. To determine whether uniform or core-shell catalyst distribution occurred in the MOF, RET techniques were used and fluorescence microscopy imaging verified the findings. An additional silica-based MOF was analyzed using RET to observe the efficiency of this technique on a greater variety of pore sizes and porous materials. To conclude, this research found that RET is an effective mapping technique of catalyst sites in porous materials. This is beneficial in the development and design of future heterogeneous catalysts with optimal catalytic capabilities.

## Growing into my Professional Development in Sports

During the summer going into my senior year, I completed an internship in New York at Klutch Sports Group. Klutch is part of United Talent Agency and is one of the most respected talent agencies in the world. Led by Rich Paul, Klutch represents athletes including LeBron James, Myles Garrett, Anthony Davis, and Ronald Acuña Jr.

At Klutch, I was the finance intern, reporting to the Head of Finance. I supported FP&A initiatives, including reforecasting, budgeting, and revenue tracking across football, basketball, baseball, and properties & sales. Additionally, I built and maintained Excel master files for clients to improve financial recordkeeping and analysis. I also worked on marketing opportunities, designing and pitching collaborations and activations featuring professional athletes and leading brands to the NYC and LA offices.

Getting the internship was competitive, as Klutch selected only 8 students from over 20,000 applicants. Networking with past interns and employees helped me secure this opportunity. I was motivated to work at Klutch because of my aspirations to pursue a career in sports.

My biggest takeaway from the summer was realizing how much I enjoy working in sports and the lifestyle that comes with it. My experience allowed me to develop professionally, gain valuable industry knowledge, and establish meaningful connections.

Looking ahead, I am considering two paths: working in sports for the next two years or attending law school. I want to attend law school to better understand contracts, dealmaking, and mergers & acquisitions. I believe a legal education would help me achieve my long-term goal of leading a sports organization.

# GRACE GUSTAFSON | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## Every Floor Is Different: Adapting Leadership to Build First-Year Community

In the past three years, I have served as a Resident Assistant at the University of South Carolina, spending two years in Bates West and now at 650 Lincoln. Each year, I help 25-35 first-year residents. In this role, I support residents' academic, social, and personal well-being while helping create a welcoming community. I use meaningful interactions with my residents to boost hallway engagement, encourage event attendance, and foster one-on-one conversations that make their first experience the best one yet.

I chose this topic because being an RA has been the most meaningful and eye-opening experience of my entire college career. I never saw it as a job, but as an opportunity to support freshmen through one of the biggest transitions of their lives. I have helped residents manage stress, offered a shoulder to cry on, and sometimes simply handed out food when they needed it.

Across nearly 100 residents and two halls, I found that low-pressure, hands-on programs drew residents in the most. Events with food were always well attended. Slime and stress-ball-making nights brought some of my highest turnouts. I also learned that every floor has its own personality. My first community was very social, while later floors were quieter and less connected, so I put more energy into individual relationships instead of relying on events alone. One resident struggled to find her place early in the year. With consistent check-ins and support, she is now thriving in college.

This project shows that the RA role goes beyond enforcing policy and planning events. RAs are leaders, advocates, and role models whose everyday choices change how students experience college.

### Supporting Growth Through Individualized Support

During the summer, I worked as a school aide at Bridges, a school for children with disabilities that is connected to a clinic called The Therapy Place. The Therapy Place has occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech therapists, which has allowed me to observe and learn from different healthcare professionals. One experience that was significant to me was working with a student who struggled with sensory regulation and had difficulty participating in school activities. By collaborating with her occupational therapist, I learned how to implement a structured schedule and sensory strategies throughout her day to help her stay regulated and engaged. As I began using these strategies, I saw her become more regulated, engaged, and able to participate with her peers. Through this experience, I learned that helping a child participate is not about changing who they are, but understanding what their mind and body need to feel supported and safe in their environment. I also learned how important the simple things in life can be. We may not think twice about being able to talk to our peers or stay regulated throughout the day, but these simple moments can give us a sense of independence and connection with the people around us.

## ALYSSA LASSEN | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ADVOCACY

### The Roots of my Leadership

Leadership is not something we automatically know how to do. It develops through experience, reflection, and learning from others. Through my experience on the Executive board for Chi Omega (Personnel Chair), I have learned the importance of balancing accountability with compassion while supporting others through challenges. By connecting this experience with concepts of cognitive development from my psychology coursework, I will explore how understanding different perspectives has shaped my approach to leadership. Using the metaphor and visual of a growing tree, this presentation will illustrate how my experiences as a leader, including Personnel Chair and being a UNIV 101 peer leader, have influenced my personal growth and prepared me to become a more understanding and effective leader. I will also discuss how these lessons will carry into my future nursing career, where advocacy, communication, and compassionate care are essential to supporting others.

## Marketing with Purpose: Lessons from Senior Helpers

This presentation explores how my Marketing and Sales internship with Senior Helpers helped me develop confidence in applying marketing concepts and making decisions in a professional setting. During the internship, I supported marketing initiatives, maintained lead and pipeline information, analyzed territory data, updated marketing materials, and assisted with broker outreach. I pursued this experience to better understand how marketing teams turn information into materials that serve a specific audience and support business goals.

One significant project involved creating a one-sheet that brokers could use to introduce Senior Helpers franchise opportunities to prospective franchise owners. This required me to consider what potential owners would need to know and how to communicate that information clearly. Using company information, ideal candidate characteristics, and investment details, I selected the content to emphasize and organized it into a professional design. After receiving feedback from the marketing manager, I revised the layout and design elements to make the document clearer and more effective.

Through this project, I learned that effective marketing requires more than including accurate information or creating an attractive design. It also requires understanding the audience, deciding which details matter most, and being willing to revise an initial approach. Concepts I studied in Marketing 350 provided a foundation, while my internship gave me the opportunity to apply them through independent judgment and collaboration. As I begin my career, I will use this experience to communicate with purpose, respond thoughtfully to feedback, and adapt my approach to the needs of different audiences.

# ELISHEBA LEE | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## Understanding Intentionality: My Journey as a Project Management Intern

During Spring 2025, I acquired my first co-op internship at Sylvamo, a paper factory in Eastover, SC. During my 4-month term, my duties were to write capital summary reports that outlined project schedules, budgets, and timelines. I also learned about the paper machines, the paper making process, and the capital department during my time. I developed projects by learning about equipment issues from managers, conducting meetings, contacting suppliers and contractors for quotes and timelines, and building summary reports. During this time, I believed that I should be fully devoted to developing my projects and nothing else. As such, I worked on as many projects as possible (over 12 when most co-ops only worked on 7) and spent most days at my desk. I became depressed and maintained very little interaction with my coworkers. After this experience, I took a class in project management where I received helpful advice on how to utilize intentionality at work. Finally, I returned to Sylvamo for another internship term during Summer 2026, also in the project management department. With the helpful advice on my mind, I was able to implement balance during this 3-month term. When at work, I fully immersed myself in work, focusing on developing projects and interacting with coworkers. I worked on fewer projects, but I was more comfortable asking questions, learning from mistakes, and building professional connections with coworkers. Overall, from my internships, I learned how intentionality can help improve productivity and professional well-being. Currently, I have accepted a full-time position with Sylvamo and hope to continue developing my project management skills.

## Looking Beyond Our Own Lens

Throughout my time studying abroad in Europe, I found that forming meaningful connections and making a significant difference starts with taking a step back from my own perspective in order to see people through a different lens.

It can be easy to make assumptions about others based on what we hear and see around us. While studying in Paris, I took a Social Psychology course where I learned about how schemas and stereotypes can shape a person's assumptions and beliefs. Schemas are cognitive frameworks that help our brains process new information into categories. Stereotypes, on the other hand, are generalized beliefs about individuals or groups that are often derived from personal biases. Although these mental shortcuts help us process information quickly, they can also shape our perceptions before we take the time to understand others.

Before arriving in Paris, I believed that Parisians were rude and unfriendly based on things I had heard from others and things I had seen in the media. I had developed a certain negative expectation of Parisian culture before experiencing it firsthand. However, my Social Psychology coursework helped me recognize how these preconceived ideas could influence my interpretation of others' behavior. As I immersed myself in Parisian culture, I began to realize that some behaviors I initially thought to be rude were actually influenced by cultural differences I was not yet accustomed to.

Moving forward, I hope to use this lesson as a reminder to approach every situation with curiosity rather than judgment and to question my own assumptions rather than rely on the stereotypes and biases of others. As I begin my career in nursing, I hope to create an environment where patients feel seen, heard, and respected as individuals rather than being defined by a single impression that may overlook their unique background and experiences.

# GABRIELLA MANFRE | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## Guatemala Medical Mission Trip

Over spring break 2026, I served as a medical volunteer in Panajachel and Antigua, Guatemala, working in temporary field clinics providing care to underserved communities with limited access to healthcare. I became involved because I wanted to better understand global health, serve communities with limited healthcare resources, and gain experience providing patient care in a collaborative setting. Working alongside students, translators, and physicians, I assessed patients by asking questions, taking vital signs, and helping them feel supported. My responsibilities included collecting and recording patients' vital signs, including height, weight, blood pressure, pulse, respiration rate, and blood glucose levels. These assessments were essential in identifying health concerns and establishing a baseline for each patient. After gathering this information, my team collaborated to discuss possible diagnoses and determine next steps. We then presented our findings to one of the supervising physicians, who evaluated our clinical reasoning, confirmed or adjusted our assessments, and provided additional insight.

This experience highlighted how the social determinants of health can significantly shape a person's ability to receive and follow through with care. Many of the patients we served lived in rural areas, such as in the mountains, while the primary care clinics are in the city. Many patients traveled several miles to come to our clinic. Limited access to health care and limited health education were major barriers that affected our patients' overall well-being. By bringing primary care services directly to the community, our team helped bridge part of this gap, while also providing education patients could apply to their daily lives.

Through this experience, I learned the importance of listening to each patient's full background and considering their medical concerns within the context of their environment, resources, and life experiences. Working collaboratively with providers and translators allowed our team to assess patients more holistically and communicate health information in ways that could strengthen patients' confidence and self-efficacy in caring for themselves. This deepened my appreciation for equitable, compassionate care and reinforced my goal of becoming a physician assistant who advocates for patients, recognizes healthcare disparities, and works with others to meet patients' individual needs.

## More Than a Mentor: Lessons in Leadership Through University 101

The University of South Carolina is ranked number 1 for first year experience, this accolade can be accredited to many things; the charming campus, diverse student body, premier athletics, but one aspect is a known contributor, the iconic, freshman fall course, University 101. My involvement with University 101 began in Fall 2025 as a Peer Leader, continued in Spring 2026 as a Peer Leader Plus, and continues in Fall 2026 as a returning Peer Leader. Across these semesters, I have mentored 40 first-year students while developing my own leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills.

As a Peer Leader, I worked alongside a faculty member to support a class of 20 first-year students. My responsibilities included facilitating discussions and activities, sharing personal experiences, helping students navigate their transition to college, and serving as a resource for questions about academics, campus involvement, and university life. I also helped facilitate lessons on topics including AlcoholEdu, resume development, campus resources, and strategies for academic and personal success. I chose to continue with the program because building relationships with first-year students and helping them feel connected to the university was both meaningful and rewarding. At the end of the year I was honored to be named a finalist for the University 101 Peer Leader of the Year Award based on student nominations.

Through this experience, I found that effective leadership extends beyond providing information. Students are more likely to confidently engage when they feel comfortable asking questions, making mistakes, and expressing their needs. Working with students with different personalities, experiences, and levels of confidence strengthened my ability to adapt my communication style and practice active listening. I learned that leading through encouragement and relationship-building is more effective than relying on authority.
These lessons have shaped my understanding of leadership and connect directly to my GLD pathway in Research, where collaboration, communication, and understanding individual experiences are essential. Continuing as a Peer Leader has also prompted me to consider how structured peer mentorship may influence students' sense of belonging, confidence, and engagement with their university. Ultimately, University 101 has shown me that mentorship is not only a form of leadership, but also a way to create meaningful connections and stronger communities.

# KELSEY MCKNIGHT | GOBAL LEARNING

## Beyond My Comfort Zone: Developing a Global Perspective Through Study Abroad

During the Spring 2026 semester, I studied abroad in Florence, Italy. Living in Italy had been a goal of mine since high school, and studying abroad allowed me to immerse myself in a culture I had long admired while continuing my education in hospitality and tourism management. Prior to attending the University of South Carolina, I had never traveled internationally. I chose to study abroad to gain an international perspective, experience a different way of life, and better understand the global hospitality industry.

Throughout the semester, I learned through coursework, cultural immersion, independent travel, and interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. Living in Florence required me to navigate cultural differences and engage with new perspectives. I traveled throughout Italy and Europe and developed a deeper appreciation for the similarities and differences that shape cultures around the world.

The experience was personally significant because it required me to step beyond my comfort zone. Moving to a foreign country independently challenged me and pushed me to become more adaptable and open-minded. The most significant insight I gained was that meaningful growth happens when we actively embrace unfamiliar environments and perspectives. While classroom learning provided a foundation for understanding global hospitality, living abroad transformed those concepts into lived experiences.

This experience reshaped both my personal and professional outlook. It strengthened my commitment to pursuing opportunities that challenged me and reinforced my desire to build a career in the global hospitality industry. As I pursue a career in hospitality leadership and continue into the Master of International Hospitality and Tourism Management program, the lessons I learned abroad will continue to influence how I lead, communicate, and engage with people from different backgrounds. Studying abroad not only strengthened my global perspective but also helped me better understand my own capabilities and potential.

## CHLOE MIKE | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### Learning, Experiencing, and Reacting to Organizational Problems

The summer going into my senior year, I interned at First Citizens Bank as a mortgage operations intern. My major is finance and management, and I thought getting experience in the mortgage world would be applicable to many other areas of work in the future. I was able to see everything that went on behind a residential mortgage loan. I worked closely with the construction team and got to learn the added complexities of a mortgage when the home has yet to be built. The entire mortgage process is intricate and at times, confusing. It requires teams of people who specialize in one specific area of the process and over time become experts in their field. The process typically ran like a well-oiled machine. However, when a construction loan went through the typical path every loan takes, problems became increasingly apparent as the loan was passed from department to department. Documents required for the construction team to carry out their jobs were not sent, and information was communicated properly. After conversations with the construction team, shadowing different departments, and interviewing clients, the construction team and I determined that the rest of the mortgage department did not have the proper knowledge of what was needed for a mortgage loan. This revelation prompted my manager to task me with coming up a solution as my end of year intern project. Over the course of weeks, I developed a presentation that identified the issue, backed it up with evidence, and presented solutions. I presented this at the end of my internship to a room of executives who received my findings positively. This real-life experience paired with my prior classroom education on the study of effective management of people in organizations was full circle and an insightful comparison for me.

## CAMILA MONZON | RESEARCH

### The Neurocognitive Bases of Executive Functions and the Impacts of Individual and Environmental Factors

Executive functions (EF) are cognitive processes that enable people to regulate their behavior, focus their attention, retain information, and adapt to changing situations. These skills are an important aspect of daily decision making and are supported by neural processes that continue to develop throughout the lifespan. The study of brain activity and how it correlates with executive functioning may be a key for understanding why people are different regarding cognitive functioning. The Neurocognitive Bases of Executive Functions and the Impacts of Individual and Environmental Factors (CUBE) Study examines the neural mechanisms underlying EF and how individual and environmental factors may affect EF. The study included young adults (18 to 24 years) and analyzed how brain activity relates to executive functioning. Various tasks were used to assess cognitive functioning and functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) was employed to measure changes in oxygenated and deoxygenated hemoglobin as an indirect indicator of neural activity. The combination of these methods can help to understand the processes that underlie executive functioning in young adults and ultimately, serve as a foundation for future research on cognitive development.

### Readi-2-Work Student Nurse Program

Starting in January 2026, I began my externship as a Readi-2-Work Student at Prisma Health. In this role I was able to shadow a nurse and improve my clinical skills in a paid role! I got involved with the program because I wanted to build my nursing skills and be able to practice them in another clinical setting other than our traditional skills lab. In the role, I shadow a nurse and perform skills based on what I have learned so far. In addition to this, I receive a role promotion every semester so that way I can practice at a higher level. I interact with many of the nurses on the floor and am able to see patient situations and perform skills. A specific experience I was able to do was put my first IV in! My preceptor helped me feel comfortable and in turn I feel much more prepared for future practice! I learned that I loved the field of nursing and I am so excited to be a nurse in the future. I was able to deepen an understanding of skills and why they are performed. This understanding changed my experience of nursing school because I am more able to make connections between classroom learning and clinical skills. In my future career, I am sure that these skills will give me a solid foundation to lean on when I become a nurse. Due to the fact that I had the opportunity to practice skills that I may not get the opportunity to do so in traditional clinicals, I am certain that I will be more prepared to enter the job market as a knowledgeable new grad nurse.

## ANNA SMITH | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### When Words Fall Short: What a Classroom in Barcelona Taught Me about Communication

During Spring 2026, I studied abroad at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain, and volunteered through the SAI Programs International Service. Each week for three months, I taught English to third-grade students at Escola de les Aigües, completing more than 15 service hours. I had worked with children before, but never in a country where I was not fluent in the local language. My students spoke both Catalan and Spanish, so I had to learn to decipher two languages while teaching in a third. When we could not understand each other, we found a way through gestures, visual cues, patience, and common interests like sports and food. Living in Barcelona also made it possible to travel across 11 countries: Spain (Madrid and Blanes), Portugal (Lisbon), Ireland (Dublin), France (Paris), the United Kingdom (London), Denmark (Copenhagen), the Netherlands (Amsterdam), Germany (Munich), Switzerland (Geneva and Interlaken), Italy (Milan, Florence, Rome, and Venice), and Morocco (Marrakesh). Using a map of these places, I will show how navigating menus, directions, and conversations in unfamiliar languages built the adaptability I brought to my classroom. Being the person who did not speak the language fluently taught me how it feels to need someone else to meet me halfway, and that shaped how I taught my students. I will continue to use this experience for my future career in healthcare. Communicating with patients who speak other languages or come from different cultural backgrounds requires listening, adapting, patience, and making sure that people feel understood. Teaching in Barcelona gave me real experience doing exactly that, and it strengthened my commitment to meeting people where they need me.

## From the Classroom to the Bedside

During a 10-week nurse externship, I worked alongside registered nurses in both a medical intensive care unit and a medical telemetry unit. I chose this experience to strengthen my clinical knowledge and better understand how nursing concepts from the classroom are used in real patient-care settings. Working with patients who had different diagnoses, acuity levels, and needs allowed me to observe how nurses continuously assess patients, recognize changes in their condition, prioritize urgent concerns, and adjust care throughout the shift. I also attended three professional-development classes, a First Five Minutes of a Healthcare Provider course, and a basic arrhythmia course. These experiences helped me improve my ability to recognize urgent changes, communicate concerns, and think critically about the safest plan of care. My externship taught me that nursing is more than completing tasks; it requires ongoing assessment, prioritization, and evaluation based on each patient's individual needs. This experience made me feel more prepared to enter the nursing profession and reinforced my goal of providing safe, purposeful, and compassionate care. Moving forward, I will continue applying these skills during clinical and as a future nurse.

# Session 3



## 3:45-4:30pm

## Beyond the Design: My Internship in Transportation Maintenance

During the summer of 2026, I completed an internship with the South Carolina Department of Transportation or SCDOT, at the Lexington Maintenance office. I wanted to complete this internship because it was in the field and more hands-on, allowing me to be a future civil engineer who understands the needs of the maintenance teams and roadway crews who work with infrastructure after it is designed. During my maintenance internship, I gained experience in transportation maintenance, by observing unexpected roadway repairs, bridge construction, beaver dam removals and field calculations to determine grades and elevations. I also had the opportunity to participate in the statewide hurricane evacuation practice. These experiences and events taught me the responsibilities required to maintain reliable roads and infrastructure. Responsibilities can include planning, collaboration, and coordination, internally and with other government agencies. The most important lesson I took from this internship is how design decisions can affect the maintenance teams, as well as the long term reliability of roads and other infrastructure. As I prepare to finish my Bachelors of Science in Civil Engineering and enter the workforce, I hope to apply these lessons by creating designs that account for the needs of all groups and teams that are involved, including the maintenance engineers, while also contributing to the community through safer road designs.

# ADAM BRAZER | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## From Classroom to Career: Lessons in Real Estate Development

During the summer of 2026, I had the opportunity to work in Nashville as a Real Estate Development Co-Op with Merus. Over the course of three months, I gained hands-on exposure to the real estate development process, and supported projects at various stages, from initial planning and market research through construction and stabilization. Having developed an interest in real estate through my coursework and previous professional experiences, I pursued this opportunity to better understand what it takes to bring a development project to life.

Throughout my co-op, I worked alongside experienced development professionals, contractors, and many other stakeholders to support projects across the Southeast. My responsibilities included assisting with development budgets and schedules, reviewing change orders, conducting market research, and supporting financial evaluations. These responsibilities allowed me to apply classroom knowledge while developing a greater understanding of the coordination required to execute large-scale projects.

Three key lessons emerged from this experience. First, I gained an appreciation for the complexity of real estate development and the many interconnected factors influencing a project's success. Second, working with professionals who had significantly more industry experience taught me how to communicate confidently, ask thoughtful questions, and contribute meaningfully despite my limited experience. Finally, encountering unforeseen challenges taught me the importance of adaptability and creative problem-solving.

Ultimately, my co-op transformed my understanding of development from a primarily financial process into a dynamic profession requiring technical knowledge, effective communication, and the ability to navigate uncertainty. The experience strengthened my professional confidence and reinforced my ambition to pursue a career in commercial real estate development.

### From the Galápagos to the Classroom: Understanding Sustainable Tourism Beyond Environmental Protection

Before experiencing sustainable tourism and the practices involved in its design firsthand, my understanding of sustainable tourism was mostly limited to environmental protection. Participating in the University of South Carolina's Global USC in the Galápagos Maymester program broadened my perspective by showing me how tourism also affects local communities, economic opportunities, and the long-term well-being of a destination. This experience became the foundation for how I now approach sustainable tourism. During my time in the Galápagos, I explored how tourism can support local businesses while also creating challenges for the surrounding environment. Visiting Voluntad de Dios, an agritourism farm and restaurant, provided an example of how sustainable practices, including composting food waste, collecting rainwater, and using organic pest control, can be incorporated into business operations. The visit also highlighted how supporting local food producers connects tourism to the local economy and community. I continued exploring these ideas through my coursework at USC. In HTMT 388, Resort Development and Management, I worked with a team to develop a resort project that required us to consider the property's surroundings and the broader impacts of tourism development. Connecting this project to my experience abroad helped me recognize the importance of considering environmental and community impacts alongside guest expectations when planning tourism experiences. Together, these experiences demonstrate how my understanding of sustainable tourism has developed beyond environmental protection alone. They have helped me recognize the importance of balancing business goals, guest experiences, community needs, and environmental responsibility. This perspective shapes how I approach my future in the tourism and hospitality industry and the types of experiences I hope to help create.

## CODY COLEMAN

### Comparison of Tensor Decomposition Methods

Ever since my second semester at USC, I have worked extensively on studying tensor decompositions to better understand dimensionally-complex data sets, trends, and analyses. Hand-selected by Dr. Zhu Wang from a MATH 142 class, I have served as his research assistant and a Magellan Apprentice recipient. I first pursued background information of tensors by studying linear algebraic concepts. I then received tasks in using MATLAB code to analyze tensors through tensor decompositions. Typical research meetings would occur semi-monthly, lasting an hour each for discussion. I would present relevant questions to Dr. Wang, and he would provide information that would aid research progression. I have gained extensive knowledge of tensor decompositions and their sheer importance in everyday life. To start, data was initially stored in two-dimensional arrays called matrices. Tensors, or multi-dimensional arrays, were invented to handle larger data sets that matrices could not. Tensor decompositions were then formulated to analyze these larger data sets with unprecedented efficiency. Certain algorithms like CP Decomposition are iterative and display the most basic results, but are more expensive than conceptually complex methods like Higher-Order Singular Value Decomposition (HOSVD). The latter instantly displays key data trends, free of iteration. I have found through my research that tensor operations foster creativity in code and construction. For instance, the most intriguing reconstructions of tensorial data sets, within the boundaries of my project, involved the combination of HOSVD with CP Decomposition. Tensor decompositions are still being developed. Demands for data storage and analyses are rising by the day. Tensor decompositions suffice these needs essentially without limit. Whether through tensor processing units (TPUs) that power Google searches, to the machine learning that powers Waymo autonomous taxis, tensor decompositions are actively analyzing high-dimensional information that keeps our data-dependent world turning.

### More Than a Campus Tour: Communication, the Carolina Story, and Beyond

One conversation about what the Sandstorm tradition is, the hands-on learning opportunities within the Business school, and the genuine, welcoming sense of community, and I was completely sold. All the pieces I was looking for in a college home seemed neatly woven together through the opportunities at Carolina. It was all thanks to my tour guide, Caroline, who helped me see how those pieces could fit together.

The following fall, I had the opportunity to do the same when I joined the University Ambassador cohort. Within this position, I give weekly tours to prospective students and their families and help navigate each individual's desires and ambitions and how they fit into opportunities at USC. Extensive training in university history, campus resources, and academic programs gave me the knowledge to guide them, but storytelling helped make that information meaningful. By listening to each visitor and sharing relevant experiences, I could help them envision their own place in the Gamecock family.

My Principles of Professional Communication course (MGMT 250), taught by Professor Britt Terry in the Darla Moore School of Business, deepened this understanding. Through assignments involving layoffs, salary negotiations, and business proposals, I learned that effective communication requires understanding an audience's perspective and explaining why a message matters to them.Whether it's guiding a campus tour or developing a professional business proposal, communication becomes powerful when it connects someone's goals to a reason and opportunity to act.

Through these experiences, I learned how storytelling can turn personal connection into purposeful action.Stories can create belonging, clarify purpose, and inspire people to take their next step. I believe this insight is crucial as I think beyond my collegiate years and into my professional career ambitions. As an aspiring attorney, I want to carry along these traits to listen thoughtfully to my clients, understand their perspectives, and advocate effectively on their behalf. Helping others succeed alongside me gives me my greatest sense of purpose and fulfillment, and storytelling offers a way to translate that purpose into action through how I lead, serve, and build relationships beyond college.

## EMMA COUCH | RESEARCH

### Investigating the Presence and Distribution of Terrestrial Flatworms (Geoplanidae) in South Carolina, United States

Non-native terrestrial flatworms (Geoplanidae) have been increasingly documented across the southeastern United States, yet their occurrence and distribution remain understudied in South Carolina. Three flatworm specimens belonging to two genera (Bipalium spp. and Dolichoplana spp.) were collected in 2026 from the W. Gordon Belser Arboretum, University of South Carolina, documenting their on-campus presence. Here, we use occurrence data from Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) to evaluate Geoplanidae presence and distribution in South Carolina from 2015 to 2025. We found five previously reported taxa: B. kewense, B. vagum, Diversibipalium multilineatum, Caenoplana coerulea, and Microplana terrestris. Pending verification, the collected Dolichoplana spp. specimen may represent the first documented presence of this genus in South Carolina. To characterize regional trends, we used geometric growth models to compare Geoplanidae occurrence trends in South Carolina to those of neighboring southeastern states from 2015 - 2025, using GBIF occurrence data as a proxy for population size. All five states exhibited positive geometric growth ($\lambda > 1$) in Geoplanidae occurrences with South Carolina's finite growth rate higher than Florida's, lower than Georgia's and North Carolina's, and comparable to Tennessee's. Because GBIF occurrence data is largely citizen-sourced, observed growth patterns may reflect differences in species visibility and reporting effort rather than true population size or diversity. Our analyses contribute to baseline monitoring for non-native terrestrial flatworms in South Carolina. Our next steps include performing DNA barcoding to verify species identities for those collected on the University of South Carolina campus.

### Carolina C.A.R.E.S: Connecting Communities to Healthcare Resources

Having access to healthcare resources does not ensure that people know where to find them or how to use them. I created the Carolina CARES Initiative to put several community resources in Columbia, South Carolina in one convenient location. Through a QR code, individuals have access to information about free clinics, transportation, women's and OB services, shelters for kids, families, veterans and so much more. My goal is to help bridge the gap between active patient care during hospitalization and connecting them with resources needed for preventable admissions. I realize that being able to advocate for patients and vulnerable populations goes far beyond the four walls of the hospital, and I created this project as a first step in helping those in the community feel supported and equipped to seek help.

## RACHEL DESJARDINS | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### How to Assess Personal Needs Based on Psychological Traits

Beginning my freshman year at UofSC, I was hired as a part time educator at lululemon. From this I have had the opportunity to meet so many amazing people, and quickly learned that no two guest experiences are alike, and each situation must be handled differently based upon the needs of the guest. I took Survey of Personality (PSYC 440), and after taking this course I had gained a deeper understanding of why each guest is different, and why catering to their personality is even more important. Erikson's theory of Psychosocial Development was crucial in PSYC 440, and described how a certain scenario or experience in each phase of your life will be tested, and the results of this will affect how a specific area will be for the rest of your life. Building on this, certain guests who have come in may have experienced something specific during their first few years of life that led them to mistrust, as trust vs mistrust is what's tested during this point in life. Understanding why a guest is more closed off can help me appreciate any pieces of information that is given, as it could have been a challenge for them even to share a small piece of information with me. My passion for having the opportunity to engage with unique guests each day at work has only grown since learning about how Erikson's theory ties into my daily experiences at lululemon.

### Volunteering with Camp Adam Fisher (CAF)

When I was 6 years old, I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. Since my diagnosis, I have been going to Camp Adam Fisher, a diabetic camp located on Lake Marion, SC. I have been volunteering since I was 18, now 21 years old. The camp is in June and provides diabetic children with fun summer activities such as tubing, rock climbing, archery, etc. Another counselor and I spend the week helping make kids feel "normal" and give them the freedom they deserve to live and be kids. I volunteer at the camp because I want to be able to give back and give the kids the love and care that I received when I went to camp. Letting them know that they are not alone and that they can still have fun. This camp has shown me how to be a leader as well as insights on what I want to do with my career. It taught me to communicate information needed to be able to give proper care for the children. I want to continuously provide support for them throughout this rollercoaster journey that they are on. Volunteering at this camp means so much to me. The community and family it gave me will be in my life forever. This experience mattered because diabetes has no cure. It not only takes a toll on your mental but physical health. It is challenging, has its ups and downs, and overall controls your life. Knowing that this camp helps these children in so many ways, makes it worth it. In the future, I plan on being either a pediatric or endocrinology physician assistant. My goal with the camp is to end up being on their medical staff once I get my master's or continuing as a counselor.

## JORDAN GAINEY | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### Behind the Benefits: Putting People at the Center of HR Decisions to Care for People on Life's Journey

During summer 2026, I served as a Benefits Intern within American Airlines People Team at its Fort Worth headquarters. My primary project involved evaluating the benefits arrears management process, which addresses unpaid benefit premiums when payroll deductions are insufficient. Through analysis of large datasets and collaboration with an external benefits administrator, I identified process gaps and developed recommendations intended to improve administration and the team member experience.

### Caring for the Caregiver

I started working as an autotransfusionist at Keystone Perfusion Services in January of 2026. Most of my job consists of running the Cell Saver (a blood machine used in high bleed cases to restore the patient's own blood), but I also work in the organ recovery and transplant cases. These cases can be hard but has taught me about myself in ways I never knew. Sometimes I am in the OR till 2am watching a family lose a loved one, and a few hours later I am back in class like nothing ever happened. That is what people see on the outside, but on the inside I am experiencing so many emotions that I am learning to handle on my own.

For a while, I pushed through the emotions. I didn't really talk about it and I didn't reall think it was affecting me. Eventually I noticed I was tired all the time, irritable with friends and family, and having a hard time switching my brain to school mode. This is when I spoke up and learned about the burnout and compassion fatigue and realized how common it is for people in healthcare.

This job taught me that taking care of myself is part of doing my job well. I started talking to my coworkers after tough cases, protecting my sleep, and makign time for things that have nothing to do with the hospital. I branched out and made new friends, learned to enjoy running, and playing golf with people outside of my circles. I am still figuring it out, but I am a lot bette than I was. In my presentation, I will talk about what these cases are like, the signs of burnout I missed in myself, and what I have learned that could help other students going into healthcare.

## ASHLEY IRELAND | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ADVOCACY

### Bridging Data and Community Impact: A Data-Driven Approach to Understanding and Addressing Disparities in Black and Low-Income Communities

Addressing socioeconomic disparities in Black and low-income communities requires moving beyond broad national metrics to localized, data-driven insights. This research presents an integrated analytical framework utilizing R and Power BI to examine demographic, economic, and geographic indicators of inequality. By leveraging R for advanced statistical modeling and data transformation, this study uncovers critical correlations between systemic economic barriers and community outcomes. Furthermore, these analytical findings are translated into an interactive Power BI dashboard designed to empower local stakeholders, policymakers, and community organizations. The resulting insights provide a scalable blueprint for a targeted community action plan, optimizing resource allocation, supporting workforce initiatives, and fostering sustainable neighborhood development.

### Language Access Is Health Access: Lessons from Medical Mission Trips

During my time at the University of South Carolina, I participated in two medical mission trips, one to Peru and one to Belize, where I learned how language and cultural humility shape access to healthcare. On both trips, I assisted with patient intake, including vital signs and health histories, and shadowed physicians in several specialties. In Belize, I participated in home visits and worked in pharmacy operations, where many residents did not speak English.

I went on these trips to understand how limited access to healthcare affects underserved communities and how mobile clinics can help reduce those barriers. Peru showed me these barriers firsthand and motivated me to serve again in Belize. After Peru, I took Spanish 122, where I practiced medical vocabulary through simulated hospital conversations, and I used those skills with real patients in Belize. The trips also illustrated cultural humility, the practice of ongoing self-reflection and learning from communities rather than assuming expertise (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). At the first home we visited in Belize, an older woman who did not speak English seemed nervous at the start. After I spoke with her in Spanish and made sure her symptoms and history reached our team accurately, she opened up and was joking with us by the end. That moment showed me that being understood helps patients feel comfortable enough to take part in their own care.

These experiences taught me that genuine community involvement takes open communication, humility, and a dedication to understanding each community's needs. I intend to continue honing my medical Spanish in the future and implement this in my hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina, through a series of family health literacy workshops that are tailored to the needs of local families.

## TARA KERIMIAN | GLOBAL LEARNING

### Learning and Growing While Abroad

During Spring semester last year, I studied abroad at the University of Warwick in Coventry, England. I am an international business major. Within my major, I have learned about cultural distance, the opportunity of foreignness, which states that having a differing perspective from the local one can allow you to have unique and innovative ideas, as well as cross-cultural communication. Many of these lessons played out during my three months abroad. Additionally, I learned many valuable lessons, about independence and stepping outside my comfort zone. While I was in England, I learned many new systems, such as navigating public transport to and from school every day, as well as learning about Warwick's class system. I stepped out of my comfort zone by joining many societies, what we would call clubs, while I was there. I joined a tap-dancing society, as well as, joining the German society. It was their second term, so it was nerve-wracking, to join pre-established friend dynamics. Additionally, I was there with students from University of South Carolina I had never met. I had to put myself out there and introduce myself to students who already knew each other. I managed to successfully form a bond with them, and we travelled together almost every weekend and often had meals together during the school week in our respective flats. I wanted to go abroad to grow academically and personally. While abroad I not only gained more independence, but I also formed a strong network of individuals both from the University of Warwick, but also from the University of South Carolina, who I have maintained a connection with today. I am currently collaborating with the German society from England, as the current USC German club president, to do virtual pen pals for our respective members. I am planning to continue using the skills of communicating with people from different backgrounds, independence, and the ability to thrive outside my comfort zone to be the strongest business leader I can.

## The Power of Perspective: Finding Growth Through Storytelling, Leadership, and Learning

Throughout my time at the University of South Carolina, I have learned that some of my most meaningful growth has happened when I was able to take what I learned in the classroom and apply it to experiences outside of it. As a Visual Communications major with a concentration in Sports Media and a Criminal Justice minor, I have developed a stronger understanding of storytelling, communication, ethics, and the responsibility that comes with representing others. Through my experiences in sports photography and as a University 101 Peer Leader, I have been able to put these concepts into practice and better understand the kind of communicator and leader I want to be. Working in sports media taught me that photography is about more than capturing a good image. The choices I make through composition, framing, timing, and captioning can influence how an athlete, team, or moment is understood by an audience.

Applying concepts from my coursework while working in real sports environments challenged me to become more intentional, accurate, and ethical in the way I tell stories. My experience as a U101 Peer Leader taught me a similar lesson about communication from a different perspective. Leading first-year students showed me the importance of understanding my audience, adapting the way I communicate, and creating an environment where people feel comfortable participating and asking for help. Being recognized through Peer Leader nominations further showed me that the way I communicate and support others can have a meaningful impact.

Together, these experiences have taught me that effective communication requires more than technical skill. It requires intention, empathy, awareness, and responsibility. Connecting my classroom learning with my experiences in sports media and leadership has helped me become more confident in my own abilities while also making me more aware of how my work affects others. These lessons will continue to shape how I approach visual storytelling, leadership, and communication throughout my future career.

# AMANDA LEE | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## How important it is to see your culture represented in unsuspecting places.

Through my Global Learning experiences, I developed a deeper understanding of the importance of cultural representation and how it can shape a person's sense of belonging. In AFAM398: Understanding African Americans in 20th Century France, I explored the experiences of Black Americans, including Josephine Baker and James Baldwin, who found acceptance, community, and freedom in Paris. Studying their experiences helped me recognize that Black history and culture extend beyond the United States and are part of a larger global story. I was able to connect this classroom learning to my own life studying abroad in Paris through TRIO. Visiting historical sites, exploring the city's culture, and seeing places connected to Black American history allowed me to experience what I had previously learned academically from a new perspective. As a first-generation student, this opportunity also challenged my perception of studying abroad as something that might be inaccessible to me due to financial barriers. Through TRIO and the funding provided by CIEL, I was able to participate in an international experience that I might not have otherwise had. I learned that representation extends beyond seeing one's culture reflected in history. It also involves seeing people with similar backgrounds given opportunities to explore, learn, and experience the world. Connecting my coursework with my study abroad experience strengthened my appreciation for Black American history, helped me better my own cultural identity, and reinforced the importance of creating opportunities for students to see themselves represented in places they may never have imagined.

## From Classroom Concepts to Client Solutions: Combining Human Ingenuity, Creative Strategy, and AI

This fall semester, I had the opportunity to participate in a student AI Challenge presented by the College of Information and Communications. Following the day-long AI in Media, Advertising, and Public Relations conference, this student AI challenge gave me the opportunity to apply advertising concepts and my classroom knowledge to a real client's needs in a real-world setting. For this event, our client, the Sports Business Journal (SBJ) shared its client brief and presented its real-world communication challenge on the day of the event. Working in a randomly assigned team, industry coaches, and using AI tools Vurvey and Google Gemini, I helped create a solution to the Sport Business Journal's presented challenge of strengthening sponsor engagement, visibility, and building lasting connections beyond its events.

For this event, using my experience working in leadership positions, familiarity with the Social Media Insights Lab, internships, and other related industry knowledge, I carefully analyzed our client brief, conducted relevant audience and industry research, led discussion, evaluated ideas, helped to develop an effective strategy, assisted with the creation of our presentation, and then presented our proposal in front of a judging panel made up of industry leaders, higher administration, and a Sports Business Journal representative. Our solution was the 'SBJ Playmakeres Studio,' a sponsor experience involving exclusive networking, exec podcasts, and digital content that would extend sponsor engagement before, during, and after said events.

From this experience, not only did my team and I win first place and the cash prize, but it also brought together all that I've learned throughout my time as an advertising student. The strategic thinking and skills that I've developed through my coursework and my extracurricular involvement provided me with the practical tools that I needed to connect the client's needs with a relevant solution.

# JULIA MALONEY | RESEARCH

## Exploring Weaponized Incompetence Through Qualitative Research

As a psychology student at the University of South Carolina, my main interests have centered around examining interpersonal relationships and the harm they can cause. One way I explored this research was by joining the GOOD Lab at Baruch College as an undergraduate research assistant. Within the lab, I primarily studied weaponized (opportunistic) incompetence. This term refers to a behavior pattern where individuals avoid responsibilities by performing them poorly or pretending as if they are incapable, shifting the obligations onto others. In many cases, these intentional and manipulative actions negatively impact interpersonal relationships. The main focus of the present study is examining perpetrators' and victims' experiences with this behavior. In order to collect data, participants were given an open-ended survey asking a variety of questions regarding their perceptions of weaponized incompetence. My job was to look at the open-ended responses and categorize each one in order for the data to be quantifiable. This type of coding can provide a better understanding of how opportunistic incompetence is experienced, specifically whether it is repeated, manipulative, or has a lasting impact on the victim. This research experience primarily strengthened my research knowledge, specifically giving me insight into the process of qualitative coding and other research skills. Most importantly, I have also gained knowledge of various interpersonal manipulative strategies and how they impact others around them. Because I have taken Psych 301 Psychology of Marriage, I was able to enter the lab with prior knowledge about healthy relationship functioning. Altogether, this insight has guided my future research interests, for instance, inspiring my thesis examining intimate partner violence. Hence, my time in the GOOD Lab studying weaponized incompetence has helped me work towards my goal of pursuing a future career in clinical psychology and contributing to knowledge in the field.

## Leading Through Supplemental Instructing

After my first two years at the University of South Carolina, I recognized my academic strengths and decided to use them to help others succeed academically. During my junior year, I became a Supplemental Instructor through the Student Success Center, a program that provides free academic support to all students. Throughout my time as a Supplemental Instructor, I have worked about 275 hours supporting students enrolled in BIOL 101 and BIOL 102. My responsibilities in this role include attending class lectures and using the material to create study resources, structured session plans, and practice problems that help students understand challenging course concepts. I host three one-hour sessions each week that are open to all students, providing opportunities for collaborative learning, practice, and individualized support. I also attend biweekly staff meetings, where I collaborate with other Supplemental Instructors and discuss important weekly topics and strategies for supporting student success. Throughout the week, I maintain consistent communication with students and professors through in-class announcements, Blackboard messages, and CircleIn, where I share study resources and send session reminders. Through this role, I learned the importance of collaboration, adaptability, and problem-solving. I faced challenges that required me to adjust my teaching approach and explain difficult material in different ways to meet students' individual needs. This taught me to consider different perspectives and find effective solutions. This experience will influence how I approach challenging patient cases in my future career as a PA. When faced with an unfamiliar diagnosis or complex symptoms, I will use the problem-solving and adaptability I developed as a Supplemental Instructor to consider different perspectives and determine the best course of action. Most importantly, I will carry forward the principle of always giving my full effort, remaining patient, and advocating for the best possible care for every patient.

# BRYSON PETERSON | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## Connecting Technology and Leadership to Create Opportunities for Others

My experiences in fraternity leadership, student government, and an information technology internship taught me that effective leadership requires understanding people's needs and organizing the work necessary to support them. Through my Professional and Civic Engagement pathway, I connected these experiences to classroom learning in Program Design, Public Speaking, and Survey of Commercial Law. Serving as scholarship pageant chair helped me recognize parallels between event planning and full stack development: both depend on coordinated work behind the scenes to create a successful public experience. Applying audience awareness during an internship presentation about Microsoft 365 helped me become a more confident speaker while making technical information relevant to more than 100 end users. As a student senator and finance committee member, I connected the concept of agency to the responsibility of representing others, particularly when supporting funding that allowed an engineering club to attend a conference and present its work. Together, these experiences shaped my understanding of leadership as using knowledge, communication, and resources to expand opportunities. Building on this learning, I propose a six-month website accessibility pilot with one local nonprofit to improve access to event information and online registration for residents with disabilities. The pilot would combine technical improvements, participant feedback, and staff training to support lasting change. My presentation will explore how classroom learning and campus involvement prepared me to contribute to my community as an emerging information technology professional.

### Curiosity as a Catalyst

During summer 2026, I was a contact engineering intern at ExxonMobil in Baton Rouge, LA, a role I pursued to gain hands-on manufacturing experience in chemical engineering. Halfway through the summer, I received midterm feedback from my supervisor, which consisted of a discussion of my strengths and growth areas. The advice that stood out to me the most was to further tap into my technical curiosity by asking questions and getting involved in work outside of my assigned projects. By the end of the summer, I was able to present at the daily morning meetings, articulating technical concerns, operations, and process conditions to a group of engineers, managers, and operators. This taught me the importance of pursuing challenging tasks, even when they scare you, and the confidence to convey technical information. Through asking as many questions as I could, I found that engineers are not only willing to help, but excited to help. I was also able to build a connection to the theoretical concepts learned in the classroom, as I was in the field almost every day observing the process, equipment, and engineers. This experience has allowed me to secure a full-time position with ExxonMobil, where I will be returning in January 2027, to begin my career as a chemical engineer. Asking as many questions as possible and pursuing problems that interest you are some of the best ways to develop technical curiosity, an essential skill for professional growth in any industry.

## SHELLEY STEVENSON | PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

### Beyond the Physical: Dance, Recovery, and Holistic Healing

As a dual-degree student studying dance and biology, I have become increasingly interested in the relationship between physical recovery and mental health. While my coursework taught me that injury rehabilitation involves more than the physical body, my experiences outside the classroom helped me understand this connection. In 2025, I attended the International Association of Dance Medicine & Science (IADMS) conference in Las Vegas, to learn more about the connection between dance, medicine, and recovery. As someone who hopes to combine dance with a future career in healthcare, I wanted to understand how dance might support people experiencing illness or injury. One session, "Dance for Health," discussed dance's potential to promote physical and mental well-being for people with Parkinson's disease. In my Dancer's Body class, I researched how mental health can affect dancers' injury rehabilitation and at IADMS, I saw how dance can also contribute to someone's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Connecting with professionals who care for patients affected by injury physically, emotionally, and socially helped me recognize that recovery involves caring for the whole person, not just addressing physical health. I plan to continue researching how dance can be integrated into medical treatment and rehabilitation and as I pursue a career in healthcare, I want to apply this understanding to provide more holistic and individualized care.

## Learning from Experience: The Importance of Knowledge Transfer in Engineering

Throughout my undergraduate experience at the University of South Carolina, I have developed a strong technical foundation through coursework and hands-on projects. However, my summer 2026 internship with The Nuclear Company helped me recognize that becoming a successful engineer requires more than technical knowledge. As a Construction Intern supporting nuclear energy development at the V.C. Summer Nuclear Station in South Carolina, I gained a deeper appreciation for continuous learning, collaboration, and the importance of sharing experience across generations.

I pursued this internship to better understand how large-scale engineering and construction projects are planned and executed. Throughout the summer, I participated in project planning activities and developed a prototype application to organize project information, compare scenarios, and track progress. Equally valuable was the opportunity to work alongside professionals with decades of experience in the nuclear industry, including several who had worked at V.C. Summer before construction was halted. With construction activities on hold, I was able to spend more time asking questions and learning from their firsthand experiences. Conversations with coworkers also highlighted concerns about a generational gap in the nuclear workforce and the importance of preserving industry knowledge as experienced professionals approach retirement.

These conversations helped me recognize that some of the most valuable engineering lessons come from experience and that knowledge must be actively shared to benefit future generations. I have connected this realization to other parts of my undergraduate career. During Senior Design, acknowledging gaps in my understanding and seeking feedback have helped my team improve our designs. As an academic tutor, I have learned that understanding a technical concept is only part of the challenge. Communicating it clearly and adapting to others' needs is equally important. Together, these experiences have shaped my understanding of knowledge transfer as a continuous exchange of ideas, questions, and expertise. As I begin my engineering career, I hope to remain open to learning from others while developing the skills to eventually mentor the next generation of engineers.

# DAVID VILLA PALACIOS | GLOBAL LEARNING

## Robots and Muscles, Research across the pond.

In the fall of 2024, I was the lead researcher and group manager of an independent research group coordinated in Spain. As such, I was in charge of coordinating the project, procurement, and the organization of the students. We worked on developing a myoelectric computer interface, that is a way to control machines with your muscles naturally to control a robotic arm, with the aim of developing low-cost robotic prosthetics for returning mobility to disabled people. I got involved as I had the concept in my head for a while and I decided to make it a reality. My main takeaways from this experience were learning how to accommodate international supply chains and managing people and laws abroad. This has helped me even now as I have to manage the supply chain shocks caused by the various geopolitical conflicts ongoing in the world now. As a foreigner myself, managing a small business here in America, the flexibility to manage foreign cultures and the legal systems of a different country is key. What I would want others to take away from my presentation is that even if you're not planning to be an international researcher of business major, having an understanding/experience of working with the larger world gives you solutions to key issues you wouldn't have otherwise, allowing you to be more flexible in the face of adversity.

## Identity Reconnection Through Language Immersion

During the spring semester of 2025, I studied abroad in Montevideo, Uruguay. My biggest goal for this trip was to advance my Spanish-speaking skills by immersing myself in a Spanish-speaking country. As a Mexican-American who didn't grow up speaking Spanish, I wanted to deepen my connection to my Hispanic heritage by exposing myself to the language and culture. Going into this experience, I expected my Spanish to advance rapidly since I had taken many Spanish classes, but I realized it wasn't as simple as that. Uruguay had a different dialect and accent than the Spanish I had learned in the classroom. Conversations with locals felt much more difficult than I had expected, and I often found myself reverting back to English whenever possible.

I quickly realized that I wasn't getting out of my comfort zone enough to truly immerse myself. I began initiating conversations with locals, visiting neighborhood markets, attending weekly language exchanges, going to church services in Spanish, and switching to Spanish with my internship bosses. Through this experience, I learned that truly learning a language requires the determination to experience it in all aspects. By experiencing the language, I not only learned Spanish, but felt a deepened connection to Uruguay's culture and a confidence I had never felt before. Today, I feel a much stronger identification with my Hispanic roots and a greater confidence in communicating in Spanish. By strengthening my Spanish and exposing myself to new cultures, I feel more prepared and eager to pursue my goal of working internationally in nonprofit marketing.