2026 McKnight Annual Fellows' Meeting and Research & Writing Conference

February 13-14, 2026
Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore Hotel
2225 N. Lois Ave
Tampa, FL 33607

Pursuing Opportunities, Meeting Challenges, Shaping the Future

Lawrence Morehouse, Ph.D., President and Chief Executive Officer
Florida Education Fund
Presiding

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2026

1:00-7:00 p.m. ~ *Gasparilla Foyer*
REGISTRATION

2:10-3:30 p.m. ~ *Gasparilla 4*
WORKSHOP I: Strategies for Effective Writing
Numerous students, faculty members and researchers struggle to transfer the ideas in their heads onto paper or to a computer. Recognizing that many scholars have not been taught effective research-based writing techniques, we strive in this session to provide proven approaches to producing polished academic writing. In addition to presenting various writing models, the workshop includes methods for personalizing the traditional writing process and questions to answer to clarify ideas. The information is designed to equip participants with a systematic approach to composing coherent scholarly writing.

• *Dr. Vernetta Mosley,* Writing Coach, Editor, Consultant, Chrysalis Consulting LLC

CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS

3:45-5:15 p.m. ~ *Gasparilla 4*
WORKSHOP II: The Role of Comprehensive Examinations: Strategies for Success
By examining the role of comprehensive examinations, this session will present students with strategies to prepare for "comps" while completing their doctoral coursework. It also will help students establish confidence in their ability to prepare for the examinations and pass them on the first attempt.

• *Dr. Iraida V. Carrion,* Associate Professor Emerita, School of Social Work, University of South Florida (retired)
• *Dr. Sylvia Thomas,* Professor of Electrical Engineering, College of Engineering, University of South Florida

3:45-5:15 p.m. ~ *Tampa Bay Room*
WORKSHOP III: Best Practices for Writing the Prospectus and Dissertation
This workshop is divided into two parts:

Part I focuses on connections between coursework, research interests, and development of the dissertation proposal; selection of dissertation committee chair and other committee members; the structure and format of the dissertation proposal; and strategies for successful development of the dissertation proposal.
Part II offers innovative strategies for preparing to conduct dissertation research; structure, format, and development of dissertation chapters; and dissertation defense.

• *Dr. Marvin Dawkins,* Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Miami; Member, Board of UM Sports Hall of Fame and Museum

6:00-8:30 p.m. ~ *Gasparilla 1, 2, 3*
OPENING SESSION
- Dinner
- Welcome & Purpose: *Dr. Lawrence Morehouse,* FEF President & CEO
- President's Award: *Dr. Lawrence Morehouse*
- Dr. Israel Tribble Award for Outstanding Alumni Support: *Dr. Lawrence Morehouse*
- Russell V. Ewald Awards for Academic Excellence: *Lyra Logan, Esq.*, FEF Executive Vice President & General Counsel
- Dr. Carl Crawford Awards for Outstanding Pre-College Support: *Lyra Logan, Esq.*
- Introduction of the new McKnight Fellows
- Introduction of Exhibitors

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2026

8:00 a.m. ~ *Gasparilla Foyer*
CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST
Breakfast will be served from 8:00-9:00 a.m.

OPENING PLENARIES ~ *Gasparilla 1, 2, 3*

9:00-9:15 a.m.
• *Dr. Tony Barringer,* Senior Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Faculty Affairs, Florida Gulf Coast University

9:15-10:15 a.m.
Fireside Chat - Becoming a Researcher: Agency, Autonomy, and Academic Voice
Becoming a Researcher: Agency, Autonomy, and Academic Voice brings together four distinguished university professors for an engaging keynote conversation on how doctoral scholars develop the capacity to shape their own research paths. The conversation explores how agency and autonomy influence topic selection, methodological choices, publishing strategies, and the emergence of a confident academic voice. Panelists will discuss navigating structural constraints, strengthening advisor student partnerships, and addressing moments when autonomy feels limited. They will also examine the paradox of expertise, making decisions before feeling fully prepared, and offer practical insights for tolerating uncertainty and claiming ownership of one's work. Designed for students, advisors, and institutions, this session highlights how agency transforms doctoral training into a process of becoming an independent researcher.

• *Dr. Marvin Dawkins,* Moderator, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Miami; Member, Board of UM Sports Hall of Fame and Museum
• *Dr. John M. Davis,* Senior Associate Dean for Research and Associate Director, Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Florida
• *Dr. Anastasia Salter,* Professor of English and Director of Graduate Programs, University of Central Florida
• *Dr. Sylvia Thomas,* Professor of Electrical Engineering, College of Engineering, University of South Florida

10:25-11:15 a.m.
The Evolving Role of the Ph.D. in an AI-Enabled World
Rather than signaling the end of doctoral careers, artificial intelligence is reshaping what it means to be a Ph.D.—how scholars create knowledge, teach, collaborate, and contribute across sectors.

This panel reframes common anxieties about AI as an opportunity to examine how doctoral training is evolving in response to new tools, expectations, and professional pathways. As AI increasingly supports tasks such as data analysis, literature synthesis, and content generation, the distinctive value of Ph.D. training is shifting toward higher-order skills: problem formulation, theoretical insight, ethical judgment, interdisciplinary integration, and human-centered interpretation. Panelists will explore how these changes are influencing academic roles, research practices, and career trajectories both inside and outside the university. Rather than asking whether educators, researchers, or reviewers are becoming obsolete, the discussion focuses on how doctoral expertise is being repositioned and in many cases amplified by AI. Participants will leave with a clearer sense of how Ph.D.s can remain central contributors in an AI-enabled world, and how doctoral training continues to prepare graduates for leadership, innovation, and impact across a wide range of professional contexts.

10:25-11:15 a.m. ~ *Gasparilla 1, 2, 3*
The Evolving Role of the Ph.D. in an AI-Enabled World (Cont.)

• *Dr. Daphne Simmonds,* Moderator, Associate Professor, CIS and Business Analytics, College of Business, Metropolitan State University of Denver
• *Dr. Daniel Acheampong,* Assistant Professor, Department of Accounting, Florida Gulf Coast University
• *Dr. Anol Bhattacherjee,* Professor of Artificial Intelligence and Business Analytics, Exide Professor, and the Academic Director of the MS-AIBA Program, University of South Florida
• *Dr. Lina Bouayad,* AI Researcher, and CEO, Top Health AI
• *Dr. David Simmonds,* Assistant Professor, Management Information Systems, Auburn University

11:15-11:30 a.m.
EXHIBITOR BREAK

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 1*
Reading from *1989*, Winner of the CRAFT 2025 Novelette Print Prize, followed by book signing

• *Dr. Vincent Omni,* Author, Visiting Assistant Professor, Lake Forest College and Co-Founder of *SoulClap: A Black Joy Journal*

Gasparilla 4
Preparing your CV, Application and Interview Questions for Positions at Research Universities
Having interviewed many applicants for faculty positions over the years, presenter Dr. John Davis has landed on some core principles for McKnight Fellows, postdocs, and others to consider as they prepare their CVs, applications, and interview questions for open positions. In this workshop, Dr. Davis will provide practical tips on what to include in your CV and application for professional positions involving research, from the perspective of the hiring institution / college / department. In addition, he will provide guidance on types of questions to ask during the interview process, to whom those questions might be best directed, the appropriate timing of discussions, and practical tips for negotiating final details of the job offer. This workshop would be a glimpse "behind the curtain" into the interview process at a research university, intended to de-mystify the process for graduate students and postdocs as they navigate their respective career paths.

• *Dr. John M. Davis,* Senior Associate Dean for Research and Associate Director, Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Florida

In the following panel discussions, MDF Fellows will present their research on issues important to their disciplines and receive professional public critique from discussants familiar with the work.

11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 3, 4*

Research Panel 1 - Host-Pathogen & Molecular Mechanisms

These papers investigate how molecular-level processes influence infection, cellular behavior, and therapeutic potential. Although they focus on different biological systems, each examines how specific molecules or enzymes regulate critical interactions between cells and their environments. Together, the panel highlights how understanding fundamental molecular mechanisms can inform disease prevention, treatment, and biotechnological innovation.

• *Adriana Morales Rivera,* Panel Chair, UF (2021), Biological Sciences, *"Characterization of a Novel Cell Wall-Associated Nucleotidase of Enterococcus Faecalis that Degrades Extracellular c-di-AMP"*

Cyclic di-AMP is an essential signaling molecule for bacteria due to its impact on major physiological processes like osmotic adaptation. In addition, c-di-AMP is a potent stimulator of the host immune system that triggers protective responses. In previous work, we characterized the enzymes that synthesize and degrade intracellular c-di-AMP in Enterococcus faecalis, showing this molecule is vital for bacterial fitness and virulence. In this study, we characterize a unique cell wall-anchored enzyme, termed EecP (E. faecalis extracellular c-di-AMP phosphodiesterase). This enzyme features duplicated catalytic domains and specifically degrades c-di-AMP. Furthermore, while a eecP strain exhibits comparable growth to the parent strain in vitro, it displays increased susceptibility to killing by phagocytic cells. Using two murine infection models, we demonstrate that the impact of eecP deletion and extracellular c-di-AMP on E. faecalis pathogenesis might be site-specific. Our findings underscore the complexity of c-di-AMP in host-pathogen interactions, highlighting the critical role of extracellular c-di-AMP as an active immunomodulator during infection.

• *Krystal Baez,* UCF (2022), Chemistry, *"An Outer-Sphere Threonine Residue is Critical for NO-Dependent Tryptophan nitration by the Cytochrome P450, TxtE"*

Aromatic nitro compounds are crucial components in scaffolds for pharmaceuticals, agrochemicals, dyes, and explosives. Traditional aromatic nitration methods remain limited by hazardous reagents, highly exothermic conditions, and poor regioselectivity, which lead to extensive purification requirements and costs. Biocatalysis offers a promising alternative, enabling regioselective nitration under mild conditions. TxtE, a cytochrome P450, catalyzes the direct nitration of l-tryptophan to 4-nitro-l-tryptophan. While TxtE's mechanism is not fully understood, emerging evidence suggests that hydrogen bond networks play a key role in cytochrome P450 catalysis. To investigate the role of such networks in TxtE, site-directed mutagenesis was performed at residue Thr250, a position hypothesized to contribute to hydrogen bond stabilization. Mutants TxtET250A, TxtET250S, and TxtET250V were generated and characterized using stopped-flow spectrophotometry and electron paramagnetic resonance spectrometry to evaluate their effects on catalytic intermediates. Furthermore, nitration activity was assessed using liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry. The implications on structure-function relationships governing TxtE's catalysis, can contribute to the rational design of biocatalysts for sustainable aromatic nitration.

11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 3, 4*
Research Panel 1 - Host-Pathogen & Molecular Mechanisms (Cont.)

• *Natalie Ruiz-Ocana,* UM (2025), Biological Sciences, *"Elucidating the Role of Host Factors in Kaposi's Sarcoma Herpesvirus Replication"*

Kaposi's Sarcoma Herpesvirus (KSHV) is a human oncogenic virus and the causative agent of several diseases, including the AIDS-associated malignancy Kaposi Sarcoma (KS). Like other herpesviruses, KSHV establishes latent infection to evade immune surveillance, but cellular stress can trigger reactivation into the lytic phase. During infection, KSHV relies on the host cellular machinery for replication, however, the specific host mechanisms regulating viral reactivation remain poorly understood, limiting the development of curative therapies. Small GTPases, such as Rac1, play key roles in host cell signaling, proliferation, and protein translation. Given KSHV's dependance on host molecules, this study elucidated the role of Rac1 during KSHV replication. Rac1 was silenced in KSHV-infected 219 cells, and infectious virus production was measured over 72 hours. Our results demonstrated that silencing Rac1 significantly increases the production of infectious virions, suggesting that Rac1 functions as a regulator of KSHV lytic reactivation. These findings provide new insight into host-virus interactions involved in KSHV pathogenesis.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Christian McDonald,* Recent Doctoral Graduate, Microbiology and Immunology, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
- *Dr. Jorge Torres,* Associate Professor, Department of Bioengineering, Florida Gulf Coast University

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

Bayshore 5, 6
Research Panel 2 - Interpretable and Equitable Machine Learning for Dynamic Systems
These papers examine whether machine learning systems behave reliably and fairly when deployed in the real world. Hunter and Greenwood focus on making models interpretable and trustworthy for dynamic physical systems like robotics and wildfires. Coggins extends this concern to human-AI interaction, showing how language variation can expose reliability gaps in widely used models. Together, the panel emphasizes that model performance, interpretability, and equity are inseparable when machine learning is used in high-stakes settings.

• *Devin Hunter,* Panel Chair, UCF (2021), Electrical Engineering, *"Real-Time Performance Analysis of Multi-Fidelity Residual Physics-Informed Neural Process-Based State Estimation for Robotic Systems"*

Various neural network architectures are used in many of the state-of-the-art approaches for real-time nonlinear state estimation. With the ever-increasing incorporation of these data-driven models into the estimation domain, model predictions with reliable margins of error are a requirement, especially for safety-critical applications. This paper discusses the application of a novel real-time, data-driven estimation approach based on the multi-fidelity residual physics-informed neural process (MFR-PINP) toward the real-time state estimation of a robotic system. Specifically, we address the model-mismatch issue of selecting an accurate kinematic model by tasking the MFR-PINP to also learn the residuals between simple, low-fidelity predictions and complex, high-fidelity ground-truth dynamics. To account for model uncertainty present in a physical implementation, robust uncertainty guarantees from the split conformal (SC) prediction framework are modeled in the training and inference paradigms. We provide implementation details of our MFR-PINP-based estimator for a hybrid online learning setting to validate our model's usage in real-time applications and share experimental results of our approach's performance.

11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 5, 6*
Research Panel 2 - Interpretable and Equitable Machine Learning for Dynamic Systems (Cont.)

• *William Coggins,* UF (2023), Computer Science, *"That Ain't Right: Assessing LLM Performance on Question-Answer Pairs in African American and West African English Dialects"*

As Large Language Models (LLMs) gain mainstream public usage, understanding how users interact with them becomes increasingly important. This is particularly important when assessing consistent results across user groups. To explore this, we test several LLMs using functionally equivalent prompts expressed in different English dialects African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and West African Pidgin English (WAPE). We frame this analysis using Question-Answer (QA) pairs, which allow us to detect and evaluate appropriate and anomalous model behavior. We contribute a cross-LLM testing method and a new QA dataset translated into AAVE and WAPE variants. Results show a notable drop in accuracy for one dialect relative to the baseline of Standard American English (SAE) prompts.

• *Jhamieka Greenwood,* FSU (2022), Computational Science, *"Beyond Prediction: Sensitivity and Validation of Weak SINDy Models for Wildfire Dynamics"*

Wildfire behavior emerges from complex interactions among weather, topography, and fuel, yet many operational fire spread models rely on empirical formulations or black-box machine learning approaches that limit interpretability and generalizability. In prior work, we demonstrated the feasibility of using the weak Sparse Identification of Nonlinear Dynamical Systems (wSINDy) framework to learn interpretable governing equations for fire spread from noisy experimental data. In this talk, we extend that work by examining the robustness and physical consistency of wSINDy-discovered fire spread models through sensitivity analysis and direct comparison with simulated data. In parallel, we compare equations learned from controlled fire spread experiments with those learned from simulated fireline data, allowing us to assess whether wSINDy recovers consistent dynamical structure across experimental and synthetic settings. These findings offer a pathway toward validated, interpretable fire spread models that bridge experimental observations and simulation-based studies.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Charles W. Davis,* Associate Professor of Engineering, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
- *Dr. Fernando Gonzalez,* Professor and Chair, Department of Computing and Software Engineering, Florida Gulf Coast University
- *Dr. Micheal Uduebor,* Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Bio, Civil, and Environmental Engineering, Florida Gulf Coast University

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 2*

Research Panel 3 - Graduate Education & Academic Structures

Both papers examine how graduate-level academic structures shape teaching practices, learning experiences, and persistence. One focuses on preparing graduate instructors to teach inclusively, while the other explores how institutional expectations and support systems influence doctoral students' progress and well-being. Together, they highlight how academic environments can either support or hinder success in graduate education.

• *Dr. Kathleen Lugo Charriez,* Panel Chair, UCF (2020), Chemistry, *"Investigating Video-Based Graduate Teaching Assistant Professional Development to Support Universal Design for Learning in Undergraduate Chemistry Courses"*

STEM courses often present hidden barriers for students with disabilities, who comprise nearly 20% of postsecondary science and engineering populations. While access and inclusion have been widely studied in K–12, fewer efforts have addressed accessible undergraduate chemistry instruction or support for instructors. Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs),who play a central role in General and Organic Chemistry laboratories, are therefore critical to advancing equity in STEM. This dissertation investigates GTAs' knowledge, beliefs, and practices using a nationwide survey and interviews with a modified Inclusive Teaching Strategy Inventory (ITSI) and a scenario-based instrument, Instructors' Navigations of Chemistry Labs and Universal Design for Education (INCLUDE). Results show that GTAs strongly value inclusive teaching but report implementing strategies less consistently, with personal experience of disability linked to stronger commitments. Scenario responses further reveal implicit beliefs and contextual influences on pedagogy. Building on these findings, tailored professional development; featuring multilingual video modules, priming activities, and implementation guides was designed to promote Universal Design for Learning.

• *Eloise Findlay,* FAU (2023), Education, *"Procrastination in Doctoral Education: A Systematic Synthesis of Empirical Evidence"*

Academic procrastination is a persistent challenge for graduate students, yet its underlying causes and consequences remain only partially understood. Using the PRISMA 2020 framework, this systematic review synthesizes empirical studies on how procrastination is defined, measured, and addressed in higher education. Across the literature, definitions have shifted from behavioral descriptions to multidimensional perspectives emphasizing cognitive, motivational, emotional, and contextual influences (Boysan & Kiral, 2017; Shaked & Altarac, 2022). Research consistently shows that procrastination is a global problem that disproportionately affects doctoral students and is associated with delayed degree progress, reduced performance, and heightened psychological distress (Herut & Gorfu, 2024; Ma et al., 2022). Methodologically, studies increasingly utilize factor analysis, regression models, and mixed-method designs to capture the complexity of procrastination (Cao, 2012; Dunn et al., 2012; Herut & Gorfu, 2024). Findings underscore the need for graduate programs to adopt structured supports, strengthen mentorship, improve program transparency, and implement SRL-based interventions (Junior et al.,2024).

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Mr. James Hernandez,* MDF Fellow, FSU (2019), Education
- *Dr. Guerdiana Thelomar,* Postdoctoral Research Associate and Adjunct Faculty, University of Miami

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. ~ *Harbor Room*

Research Panel 4 - Physiological & Cognitive Health Across the Lifespan

This panel explores how physical and cognitive health interact across different stages of life. The papers examine physiological markers of health, the role of physical activity in cognitive aging, and real-time assessment of cognitive functioning in young adult cancer survivors. Together, they emphasize the dynamic relationship between body and mind across the lifespan.

• *Dr. Rio Tate,* Panel Chair, USF (2024), Gerontology, *"The Relationship between Physical Activity and Cognitive Performance in African American Older Adults"*

The number of older adults in the United States is expected to increase in the years to come. As we age, cognitive performance is noted to decline. It is known that physical activity is a modifiable risk factor for dementia. It is not known the extent to which physical activity engagement is related to cognitive performance in African American older adults, and which variables, if any, moderate this association. To answer this question, the authors examined the association between three intensities of physical activity and four domains of cognitive performance. Data was analyzed at five time points using ten years of data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS). Results indicated that greater engagement in physical activity was associated with greater cognitive performance across a variety of domains. Age, education, and gender moderated this association. This study indicates the effectiveness of engaging in a contextual factor of cognitive decline with regard to higher cognitive performance in minority older adults.

• *Christina Hersh,* USF (2023), Psychology, *"Capturing the Moment: Exploring Feasibility and Acceptability of Real-Time Assessment for Cancer-Related Cognitive Impairment in Young Adult Survivors"*

Cancer-related cognitive impairment (CRCI) affects quality of life in young adult (YA) survivors (ages 18–30) but remains poorly understood. As YA survivors undergo neurotoxic treatment during a critical period of brain development, this study piloted ecological momentary assessment (EMA) and Fitbit-based accelerometry to assess CRCI and related situational, behavioral, and contextual factors. In this mixed-methods pilot, participants completed a 2-day practice and 10-day assessment period, along with demographic, neuropsychological (CANTAB), and psychosocial measures. Feasibility benchmarks included 50% consent, 70% practice phase completion, and 80% EMA adherence. Of 20 screened, 10 consented and 9 completed all study elements. While only 40% met the EMA adherence goal, participants found EMA topics relevant—especially sleep—and offered suggestions (e.g., combining stress/anxiety items). The CANTAB was seen as both challenging and enjoyable; Fitbit feedback was positive. Participants noted that EMA engagement varied by time and context. Overall, findings support EMA and Fitbit use to explore CRCI in YAs and inform future protocol refinement.

• *Kworweinski Lafontant,* UCF (2023), Kinesiology, *"Cell Membrane Capacitance and Characteristic Frequency as Indicators of Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Body Composition: A Cross-Sectional Study"*

It is currently unclear how membrane capacitance (Cm) and characteristic frequency (fc) relate to cardiorespiratory fitness (estimated VO2max) and body composition (fat mass, fat-free mass [FFM]). We performed a secondary analysis of 1999–2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data, including youth (12–17 years) and adults (18–29 years). While fc and Cm were significantly associated with VO2max (fc, τ = -0.07 to -0.14; Cm, τ = 0.14 to 0.20) and all included body composition parameters ($p < 0.01$), the strongest associations were observed with phase angle (fc, τ = -0.50 to -0.53; Cm, τ = 0.59 to 0.61) and FFM (fc, τ = -0.47 to -0.50; Cm, τ = 0.70) among both youth and adults. VO2max may not have a large influence on cell membrane integrity throughout the body. Rather, the increased presence of FFM may align with increased Cm and decreased fc, indicating robustness to adiposity when used as indicators of cell membrane integrity.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. David Fukuda,* Professor and Division Chair, School of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Central Florida
- *Dr. Shelby Gilbert,* Associate Professor, Marieb College of Health and Human Services, Florida Gulf Coast University

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. ~ *Tampa Bay Room*

Research Panel 5 - Health Engagement, Stigma and Intervention Pathways

This panel examines how health needs are identified, understood, and addressed across different systems. The papers move from community-level resilience, to institutional screening and engagement, to emerging therapeutic pathways. Together, they show how health outcomes depend not only on individual experiences, but also on how systems recognize need and respond with appropriate tools and interventions.

• *Marissa Pazik,* Panel Chair, UF (2023), Sports Medicine, *"Inclusion of Mental Health Screening Instruments in Pre-Participation Physical Evaluations: A Cross-Sectional Study of Secondary School and Collegiate/University Athletic Trainers"*

This study examines the current practices of secondary school and collegiate/university athletic trainers regarding mental health screening during Pre-Participation Physical Evaluations (PPEs). A cross-sectional survey was developed by the study staff to assess certified athletic trainers' current mental health screening practices in collegiate/university and secondary school settings. The survey was distributed electronically between July 1 and September 30, 2025. A total of 110 subjects completed the survey. A little over half of the subjects (n=59, 53.6%) indicated that their PPE forms currently contain an assessment of mental health via a mental health screening instrument. Of the 51 subjects who indicated their PPEs did not include a screening instrument, 74.5% worked in a secondary school. Although more than 50% of our study population indicated that their PPE forms include a mental health screening instrument, a majority of secondary school-certified athletic trainers failed to indicate the use of a mental health screening instrument in their PPE.

• *Hillary Jean-Pierre,* UF (2024), Pharmaceutical Science, "*Utilizing Watermelon-Derived Extracellular Vesicles for Drug Delivery & Therapeutic Development"*

Plant-derived extracellular vesicles (PDEVs) have garnered considerable attention for treating various gastrointestinal diseases and promoting human well-being. However, the potential of PDEVs and characteristic properties remains underexplored due to ineffective purification methods and limited research outcomes. To assess PDEV isolation, we developed a robust methodology for isolating extracellular vesicles from Watermelon (Citrullus lanatus) *via* ultracentrifugation, subsequently characterizing the EVs through transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and nanoparticle tracking analysis (NTA). To explore the comparative drug delivery and therapeutic potential, we demonstrated cargo loading of GFP in WMEVs via microfluidics as well as cellular uptake of Watermelon-derived Extracellular vesicles (WMEVs) within MDA-MB-231 cells, laying the foundation for developing a novel and promising PDEVs therapy.

• *Paola Sullivan,* UF (2024), Psychology, *"Youth Narratives of Community Resilience: Exploring Adaptive Capacity in Emerging Adulthood"*

This study examined how emerging adults experienced and enacted community resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic and concurrent racialized stress, using a systems-based adaptive capacity framework. Researchers conducted semi-structured pre- and post-interviews with 15 emerging adults (ages 18–23) as part of a multi-state youth participatory action research initiative. Reflexive thematic analysis was guided by Norris et al.'s community resilience framework, examining economic development, social capital, information and communication, and community competence. Youth narratives revealed both strengths and vulnerabilities across all adaptive capacities. Participants described reliance on family safety nets, peer and culturally affiliated support networks, youth-led communication spaces, and civic engagement as key resilience resources. Simultaneously, institutional inflexibility, financial precarity, inconsistent communication, and diminished trust constrained adaptive capacity. Narratives frequently crossed capacity boundaries, highlighting the interconnected and relational nature of resilience. Findings position emerging adults as active contributors to community resilience rather than passive recipients. Integrating youth voice and justice-oriented structures may strengthen community adaptive capacity during prolonged societal disruption.

11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. ~ *Tampa Bay Room*
Research Panel 5 - Health Engagement, Stigma and Intervention Pathways (Cont.)

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Diane S. Allen-Gipson,* Associate Professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of South Florida
- *Dr. Ericka Horne,* Community Engagement Research Administrator, College of Medicine, Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, Florida State University

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

Meeting Foyer
Undergraduate Research Poster Session
This session highlights research conducted by Florida-Georgia Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (FGLSAMP) undergraduates and post-baccalaureates considering graduate studies. Participants will present their research projects through engaging posters, showcasing innovative ideas and methodologies. Explore their work and engage in meaningful discussions to support the following next generation scholars:

• *Ria Agrawal,* UM, Chemistry, *"Investigating Seasonal Variability of Dissolved Organic Phosphorus in Aerosol Deposition over the North Atlantic Ocean: Implications for Marine Productivity"*
• *Ah'Laya Birch,* BCU, Information Sciences, *"Whole-Body Control For Humanoid Robots"*
• *De'Karreon Brooks,* BCU, Chemistry, *"Environmental and Psychological Factors Influencing Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use Among College Students: Building Sustainable and Healthy Campus Communities"*
• *Shakira Brown,* BCU, Medical Sciences, *"The Decline of Syngnathid Densities in the Indian River Lagoon"*
• *Danielle Eniola,* FAMU, Chemistry, *"Imaging and Machine Learning Analysis of Aspirin Deposit Patterns"*
• *Monique Farquharson,* FAMU, Ecology, *"Susceptibility of the Small Hive Beetle, Aethina tumida (Coleoptera: Nitidulidae), to Conventional and New Generation Insecticides"*
• *Keanna Forbes,* BCU, Computer Science, *"Flood Mapping With Satellite Data Using UNET Network"*
• *Bevin Glanton,* ASU, Chemistry, *"Design, Synthesis and Characterization of Novel Imidazopyridines: Potential Antimicrobial Compounds"*
• *Reyna Hobson,* FAMU, Health Sciences, *"Assessing IFN-y Induced PD-L1 Expression in Breast Cancer Cells"*
• *Tyler Hutcherson,* ASU, Biology, *"What Are the Key Barriers and Facilitators Affecting Retention in HIV Care Among Individuals Living with HIV in Metropolitan Atlanta?"*
• *Jalea Johnson,* ASU, Biology, *"Uterine Tissue Remodeling Following Hysterotomy and Postpartum Involution"*
• *Cameron Johnson,* BCU, Biology, *"Examining Wildfire Survivorship and Post-Fire Metabolism of a Northern Hardwood Forest's Soil Microbiome"*
• *Tosin Jolaogun,* Moffitt, Biology, *"Reproducibility Practices in Oncology Research: Validating the LORIS Model Using Internal Clinical Datasets"*
• *Knyla Jones,* ASU, Biology, *"Isolation and Characterization of Antimicrobial-Producing Bacteria from Diverse Ecosystems"*
• *Dylan Lee,* UM, Health Sciences, *"Platelet-Amyloid Interactions and Microvascular Dysfunction in Mouse Models of Cerebral Amyloid Angiopathy"*
• *Devin Nobles,* FAMU, Engineering, *"Using SVMs in a Cyber-Physical Health System to Predict Maternal Risk"*
• *Kate Payen,* FSU, Computer Science, *"Sustainability: Assessing Ways to Reduce Energy Consumption in NMR/MRI Systems"*
• *Ernest Rhone,* BCU, Chemistry, *"Investigating Horizontal Gene Transfer and Water Quality in the Halifax Canal Watershed"*
• *Dontavious Scott,* ASU, Biology, *"Synthesis and Biological Evaluation of a Dual-Action Copper(II) Thiosemicarbazone Complex"*
• *Demar Williams,* BCU, Chemistry, *"Unraveling RNA Structural Switches in Hepatitis C Virus: Investigating Magnesium-Dependent Kissing Complexes"*

12:45-2:15 p.m. ~ *Gasparilla 1, 2, 3*
LUNCHEON & DIALOGUE WITH THE EXHIBITORS
♦ An Up Close and Personal Faculty Recruitment Experience

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

2:30-3:45 p.m. ~ *Gasparilla 4*
Navigating NASA's Data Systems to Discover Opportunities in the Earth, Planetary and Social Sciences
This session will explore NASA's upcoming funding priorities, with a specific focus on Earth Science, Planetary Science, and Human Research. You'll gain valuable insights into the agency's future direction and key areas of emphasis. In addition, we'll provide an in-depth look at NASA's programs that foster innovation, collaboration, and growth across research, education, and outreach. The session will focus on navigating NASA's data systems to access key opportunities.

• *Dr. Dawn Martin,* Former NASA Flight Structures Engineer and Flight Crew Equipment Subsystem Manager
• *Dr. Ali Shaykhian,* Data Systems Analyst, IT Service Integration Office, NASA

Bayshore 1
Careers in Extension: Opportunities for Ph.D. Graduates at Land Grant Universities
Land Grant Universities (LGUs) were established to make education accessible to all. With a statewide reach and a three-fold mission of teaching, research, and Extension, LGUs often serve as the front door of universities across the state. State and County Extension Faculty translate science into educational programs that provide solutions for people's lives. You are invited to attend Dean Karla Shelnutt's session, which will offer information on the mission of LGUs, and how to navigate the opportunities there, with a focus on Extension.

• *Dr. Karla P. Shelnutt,* Professor and Associate Dean for Extension Engagement, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida

In the following panel discussions, MDF Fellows will present their research on issues important to their disciplines and receive professional public critique from discussants familiar with the work.

Bayshore 5, 6
Research Panel 6 - Advanced Imaging & Spatial Modeling
Both papers focus on how advanced imaging and spatial modeling techniques can be used to better represent complex, real-world structures. Although one applies these tools to medical imaging and the other to geological deposits, both address common challenges of spatial distortion, dimensionality, and accurate reconstruction. Together, they highlight how computational approaches improve interpretation across scientific domains.

2:30-3:45 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 5, 6*
Research Panel 6 - Advanced Imaging & Spatial Modeling (Cont.)

• *Gianfranco Cortes,* Panel Chair, UF (2023), Computer Science, *"A Steerable Deep Network for Model-Free Diffusion MRI Registration"*

Nonrigid registration is vital to medical image analysis but remains challenging for diffusion MRI (dMRI) due to its high-dimensional, orientation-dependent nature. We present a novel, geometric deep learning framework for model-free, nonrigid registration of raw dMRI data that does not require explicit reorientation and a novel formulation of the dMRI registration problem as an equivariant diffeomorphism of position-and-orientation space. Central to our method is an SE(3)-equivariant UNet that generates velocity fields while preserving the geometric properties of a raw dMRI's domain. We introduce a new loss function based on the maximum mean discrepancy in Fourier space, implicitly matching ensemble average propagators across images. Experimental results on HCP and OASIS clinical-grade dMRI data demonstrate competitive performance compared to state-of-the-art approaches, with the added advantage of bypassing the overhead for estimating derived representations. This work establishes a foundation for data-driven, geometry-aware dMRI registration directly in the acquisition space.

• *Franco Villegas Garin,* USF (2023), Geosciences, *"Both Sides of the Wall: a New Stereological Approach for Estimating Coarse Grain Size Distributions in Geophysical Mass Flow Deposits"*

We present a novel method to capture the coarse grain size distribution (GSD) of geophysical mass flow deposits in situ. These flows, including landslides, debris flows, lahars, and pyroclastic density currents, among others, are destructive gravity-driven natural processes. Accurate characterization of their deposits is essential for lithofacies analysis, numerical modeling, and probabilistic hazard assessment, yet direct observations during emplacement are usually instrumentally constrained and spatiotemporally limited. A key parameter derived from deposits is the GSD, but laboratory analyses often underrepresent coarse fractions because centimeter-to-meter scale clasts are difficult to recover and measure from geological sampling. Existing in situ methods partly address this limitation, but they commonly employ 2D optical imagery analyses, which are distortion-prone and usually cannot resolve buried clast geometries. Our approach integrates structure-from-motion photogrammetry with stereological extrapolation to generate 3D clast models and estimate volumes across size fractions. This technique yields a more representative coarse GSD, thereby improving deposit characterization and subsequent modeling efforts to simulate their behavior.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Charles W. Davis,* Associate Professor of Engineering, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
- *Dr. Fernando Gonzalez,* Professor and Chair, Department of Computing and Software Engineering, Florida Gulf Coast University

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

2:30-3:45 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 2*

Research Panel 7 - Language, Learning & Belonging

Both papers examine language as a system that shapes who can participate fully in learning environments. Vazquez focuses on the cognitive foundations of literacy, how individuals store and use orthographic, phonological, and semantic knowledge, while Riera examines how academic and scientific language operates as a social gatekeeper that influences identity, credibility, and belonging. Together, the panel connects cognitive processes of language learning with the broader cultural and institutional consequences of how language is taught, valued, and enforced.

• *David Riera,* Panel Chair, FIU (2017), Education, *"Raciolinguistic Ideologies and (Lack of) Science Identity: Elitist Expectations Versus Lived Experiences"*

Across higher education and professional training, language is fundamental to communicating, learning, and working. Across disciplines, students acquire specialized forms of language through lectures, readings, discussions, writing, and project assemblages. This acquisition is often oriented toward survival of assessments and performance, rather than emergence, sustained fluency, or deeper linguistic belonging. However, existing discussions of language and equity rarely account for how language acquisition is conflictive, how maternal/social and technical/disciplinary languaging differ, or the racialized costs of movement within and between these linguistic domains. This omission is especially consequential for multilingual students, researchers, educators, and advocates learning and earning technical disciplinary fluency within English-dominant academic spaces. Drawing from this gap, this study explores science as language at the intersection of raciolinguistic ideologies and asymmetrical fluency. Specifically, this study examines a bilingual, minoritized research participant's development of maternal/social and technical/scientific language (response)-abilities through a deconstructive autoethnographic analysis traversing three archetypal temporal be-ings. In doing so, this study questions how we are educated, disrupts disciplinary separations, and invites reflection/diffraction rather than prescribing outcomes. By foregrounding raciolinguistic ideology at the intersection of researcher-participant positionalities, this work contributes to ongoing discussions of what counts as language, how technical and disciplinary language acquisition shapes lived experiences, and how language, learning, and teaching become uncoupled across linguistic and educational domains.

• *Cristian Vazquez,* FSU (2023), Psychology, *"Modeling the Influence of Item-Specific Orthographic, Phonological, and Semantic Knowledge on Item-Level Spelling Accuracy"*

Spelling performance is considered a strong indicator of stored lexical quality (Perfetti, 2017). Variation in spelling skills has been shown to differ as a function of an individual's skills and the word's characteristics; however, little is known regarding the effects of item-specific knowledge on item-level spelling. This study examines the influences of an individual's item-specific orthographic, phonological, and semantic knowledge along with person- and word-level attributes in predicting individual differences in item-level adult spelling skill. Crossed random effects models were used to explore the influence of person-level, word-level, item-specific, and various interactions as predictors of spelling accuracy in 72 undergraduate students across 60 words. Results showed significant variation in spelling errors across participants and words, suggesting a complex relationship between words and persons. Results suggest that item-specific orthographic and phonological knowledge and person-level decoding make significant contributions to item-level spelling skill.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Mr. James Hernandez,* MDF Fellow, FSU (2019), Education
- *Dr. Bertha (Bee) Ben Khallouq,* Recent Doctoral Graduate, Sociology, University of Central Florida

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

2:30-3:45 p.m. ~ *Tampa Bay Room*

Research Panel 8 - Trauma, Violence, and Family-Based Pathways to Healing

Both papers examine how trauma and violence shape family relationships and caregiving across generations. Rather than focusing only on individual harm, they highlight how families respond to adversity through co-parenting practices, mothering strategies, and intergenerational forms of protection and healing. Together, the panel emphasizes family systems as critical sites where the effects of trauma are both transmitted and actively addressed.

• *Angel Saint Louis,* Panel Chair, UF (2024), Family Sciences; and *Karen McGilvery*, UF (2025), Youth Development and Family Sciences, *"The Art of Resilience: an Intergenerational Transmission of Maternal Wisdom"*

Violence against women (VAW), whether office "micro" aggressions of sexual harassment or a fatal domestic partnership, affects approximately 840 million women, or 30% of women ages 15 and above (UN Women, 2024). A new generation of women and allies is standing against a complicit culture, continuing a legacy of feminist resilience. For example, movements like #MeToo, have brought formal, public scrutiny for crimes decades in the making. Thus, it is critical that we understand how America's culture of VAW affects mothering behaviors, fostering resilience against VAW experiences. Via Oral History and Arts-based Participatory research, we aim to document the motherhood practices of three generations of women in a family. Through group oral history interviews and creation of a visual family archive, we will explore changing conceptualizations and uses of motherhood in protecting or healing their children from VAW. Participants may also share their stories and motherhood archives at the Harn's annual Survivors of Violence Art Exhibit Reception in Gainesville, Florida.

• *Dylann Lowery,* FSU (2025), Marriage and Family Therapy, *"Co-Parenting in the Context of Adverse Childhood Experiences"*

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are prevalent and may disrupt co-parenting through trauma-related pathways, yet empirical evidence remains limited. Participants were adult parents actively engaged in co-parenting, recruited via social media, mental health referrals, and community outreach. ACEs were assessed using the Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire, trauma symptoms with the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5), and co-parenting quality with the Coparenting Relationship Scale (CRS). Demographic variables were used as controls. Structural equation modeling with mediation analyses was conducted in Mplus. Higher ACE scores significantly predicted greater trauma symptoms ($b = 3.06$, $p < .001$) and higher parenting competency ($b = 1.13$, $p < .001$). Trauma symptoms were not directly associated with co-parenting quality ($p = .52$); however, the interaction effect between trauma symptoms and parent competency was significant ($p < .01$). Co-parenting gender, educational attainment, and cohabitation status were all significant ($p < .01$).Findings inform trauma-informed family therapy, early ACE risk identification, and policies strengthening trauma-affected co-parenting.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Ericka Horne,* Community Engagement Research Administrator, College of Medicine, Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, Florida State University
- *Dr. Guerdiana Thelomar,* Postdoctoral Research Associate and Adjunct Faculty, University of Miami

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

2:30-3:45 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 3, 4*

Research Panel 9 - Institutions, Power and Governance Across Sectors

Both papers examine how power, relationships, and institutional design shape outcomes across different sectors. One focuses on governance and decision-making in corporate finance, while the other examines nonprofit and international aid systems operating in fragile contexts. Together, they show how informal networks, leadership dynamics, and institutional incentives influence accountability, trust, and performance across sectors.

• *Dr. Michael Hudson-Vassell,* Panel Chair, FAU (2020), Finance, *"Ties That Bind, Costs That Fall? CEO-Board Connections and the Cost of Debt"*

This study examines how CEO–board connections influence firms' cost of debt, drawing on competing governance perspectives regarding the role of board friendliness. To evaluate these perspectives, I combine a stacked difference-in-differences design with instrumental variable analyses exploiting exogenous, CEO turnover-driven shocks to CEO–board connections, and a Heckman two-step procedure to address potential sample selection bias. Results show that CEO–board connections are negatively associated with firms' bond spreads, consistent with the role conflict view. Establishing channel, I show that this relationship operates through reduced corporate risk-taking, measured by the volatility of returns and leverage. Moreover, the negative effect of CEO–board connections on debt costs is amplified when analyst coverage is high, forecast error is high, or both conditions jointly hold. Together, these findings demonstrate that interpersonal dynamics within the boardroom have material implications for debt pricing. The study contributes to the literature by clarifying the conditions under which friendly boards lower financing costs and identifying a novel governance channel.

• *Marie Denis-Luque,* FSU (2024), Public Administration, *"Haiti's Relationship with Voluntary Organizations: A View from Below"*

The voluntary sector in Haiti supports vulnerable populations and steps in where government safety nets are lacking. Despite its critical role in the country, research is limited. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, recruiting and interviewing 40 organization leaders and collecting their partner lists to examine how they address the challenges posed by increased disasters while navigating the conflicting roles and agendas of donor countries that may not align with Haiti's actual needs. Preliminary findings show that leaders use soft skills and practical strategies, such as integrating into communities, adapting their leadership to represent those they serve, sharing resources, and prioritizing collaboration over competition. The network analysis identified more than 300 organizations with international partnerships. Haiti's history of political crises and its reliance on the nonprofit sector highlight how the strategies identified in this research can strengthen nonprofit capacity to directly support vulnerable populations. Lessons from the Haitian context can inform nonprofit strategies in other unstable regions in the world.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Daniel Acheampong,* Assistant Professor, Department of Accounting, Florida Gulf Coast University
- *Dr. Tanya Benford,* Chair and Professor, Lutgert College of Business, Florida Gulf Coast University

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

3:45-4:00 p.m.

EXHIBITOR BREAK

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

4:00-5:15 p.m. ~ *Gasparilla 4*

Getting Into Graduate School

Learn how to prepare for graduate school in this workshop featuring:

> • Admissions Advice: Dr. Villiers, a member of the Florida Gulf Coast University Graduate Affairs Team that helps develop university-level policies concerning graduate academic programs, will share insider tips on crafting a compelling application, understanding the admissions process, and positioning yourself for success. A McKnight Doctoral Fellowship (MDF) alumnus, he also will offer suggestions for submitting a winning MDF application.
>
> • Student Insights: Current and recent McKnight Doctoral Fellows will provide an authentic look at life in graduate school, sharing their experiences, challenges, and advice on navigating this academic path.

Join us to gain valuable insights, ask your questions, and take the first steps toward shaping your future in graduate education.

• *Dr. Claude Villiers,* Moderator, Professor, Whitaker College of Engineering, Florida Gulf Coast University

MDF Panel:

- William Coggins, UF, Computer Science
- Dr. Girsea Martinez Rosas, USF, Sociology
- Matty Sey, FIU, Biomedical Engineering

Bayshore 5, 6

The Impact of Doctoral Education on the Mental Health of Ph.D. Students

Doctoral education is often described as a period of intellectual growth and professional opportunity. Yet behind these achievements, the Ph.D. journey can be marked by chronic stress and cumulative trauma. Prolonged workload demands, financial uncertainty, isolation, and disruptions to family and social support systems frequently strain emotional well-being and personal relationships. Anxiety, burnout, and family tensions can quietly erode even the strongest foundations as students strive to meet the rigorous expectations of academic life. This panel invites an honest conversation about the hidden emotional costs of doctoral education. Drawing on our lived experiences as McKnight alumni, clinicians, and Ph.D. scholars, we explore how academic environments, family pressures, and broader societal events intersect to shape mental health, persistence, and identity. We conceptualize these challenges not as individual deficits, but as predictable responses to prolonged stress exposure. Through open dialogue and shared reflection, we will highlight protective factors and practical strategies to help scholars not only endure the doctoral process but move through it with confidence, hope, and resilience. Our goal is to normalize help-seeking, reduce stigma, and equip scholars with tools to persist and thrive throughout the doctoral journey.

• *Dr. Cherelle Steele Carrington,* Associate Professor, Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry, Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute, West Virginia University
• *Dr. Guitele Rahill,* Associate Professor Emerita, School of Social Work, University of South Florida

In the following panel discussions, MDF Fellows will present their research on issues important to their disciplines and receive professional public critique from discussants familiar with the work.

4:00-5:15 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 1*

Research Panel 10 - Environmental Systems & Climate Stress

This panel examines how environmental systems respond to climate-related stressors across different ecosystems. One paper integrates social and ecological perspectives to assess reef resilience, while the other uses advanced chemical analysis to track climate-driven changes in Arctic coastal systems. Together, they highlight how climate stress operates across scales and why interdisciplinary approaches are essential for understanding and managing environmental change.

• *Brandon Sosa,* Panel Chair, FIU (2021), Ecology, *"How Valuable Are Marine Grazers? Social and Ecological Insights for Reef Resilience in the Florida Keys"*

Coral reefs buffer coasts from storms, yet their decline has reduced both ecological function and protection. One promising but underexplored intervention is stocking herbivorous grazers such as crabs and urchins to curb algae and enhance coral survival. To evaluate its feasibility, we conducted a statewide survey (approximate 800) using a discrete choice experiment to measure willingness-to-pay for improved reef outcomes and assess perceptions of large-scale grazer releases. Results reveal strong public support and significant investment potential, alongside insights into concerns and trade-offs. We propose linking these social preferences with ecological models of grazer impacts to create a management framework that projects both biological recovery and societal value. This integrated approach provides one of the first comprehensive evaluations of grazer stocking as a practical, publicly supported tool for reef resilience. Findings directly inform NOAA's Mission Iconic Reefs and highlight how combining social science with ecological modeling can guide future coastal adaptation.

• *Oriane Yvin,* FSU (2023), Oceanography, *"Tracing Organic Matter Dynamics Through Seasonal Freeze-Thaw Cycles in Arctic Coastal Systems Using Ultrahigh Resolution Mass Spectrometry"*

The Arctic is warming nearly four times faster than the global average, driving major changes in landscapes and coastal systems. Arctic coastal systems along Alaska's Beaufort Sea coast, which act as key transitions between rivers and the ocean, remain understudied in their role in land-ocean carbon cycling. We examined seasonal dynamics of dissolved organic matter (DOM) in Simpson Lagoon and Stefansson Sound during late-winter ice cover (April), spring ice breakup (June), and summer open water (August). Fourier-transform ion cyclotron resonance mass spectrometry (FT-ICR MS) revealed clear seasonal shifts: spring and summer DOM showed higher aromaticity associated with terrestrial inputs, while winter DOM was microbially processed and enriched in nitrogen and sulfur-containing compounds. Molecular formulae unique to winter and spring were identified, whereas summer showed none, reflecting DOM from multiple sources. Because seasonality structures Arctic DOM, warming-driven changes in seasonal timing and freshwater inputs may alter carbon cycling, and these molecular tracers provide tools to anticipate such changes.

Discussant (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Natalia López-Figueroa,* Gulf Science Policy Fellow, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

4:00-5:15 p.m. ~ *Tampa Bay Room*

Research Panel 11 - Health Equity, Structural Barriers, and Lived Experience

Both papers examine how health outcomes are shaped by structural conditions rather than individual choices alone. One focuses on how stigma and resilience influence long-term engagement in HIV care, while the other explores how food insecurity and socioeconomic stressors contribute to addictive behaviors among women. Together, the panel highlights how inequities in resources, social environments, and institutional support create persistent barriers to health and well-being, and why addressing lived experience is essential to advancing health equity.

• *Shayla Knighton-Black,* Panel Chair, FAMU (2022), Public Health, *"Linking Internalized Stigma, Resilience, and Care Engagement Among Adult Lifetime Survivors"*

Adults living with perinatally acquired HIV (Lifetime Survivors) represent an understudied and growing population that experiences lifelong exposure to HIV-related stigma and nuanced challenges to medication adherence and retention in care. This concept paper, underpinned by the Health Stigma and Discrimination Framework, resilience theory, and Social Cognitive Theory, examines how internalized HIV-related stigma can shape health behaviors among adult lifetime survivors. This paper utilizes a selective review of empirical and theoretical literature on HIV stigma, medication adherence, psychosocial development, and chronic illness across the life course, and proposes a conceptual framework linking internalized stigma, resilience processes, and engagement in care. The framework highlights important psychosocial mechanisms, including how identity formation, disclosure management, and social supports influence long-term treatment adherence. The paper concludes by identifying some implications for future research, including qualitative studies, culturally responsive intervention development, and policy insights that center the lived experiences of lifetime survivors.

• *Meghan Spencer,* FAMU (2023), Public Health, *"Breaking Cycles of Addiction and Food Scarcity: Exploring the Impact of Food Insecurity on Addictive Behaviors Associated with Legal Products of Agricultural Origin Amongst Adult Women Living in North Florida"*

Food security is defined as a state of meeting household food needs in a manner that encourages a healthy life (USDA, 2025), while substance use refers to the use of dependency-producing substances that are absorbed into the body (CDC, 2024). Food insecurity is a socioeconomic factor proven to negatively impact multiple components of health, and current research links food scarcity to an increased likelihood of participation in health-risk behaviors, including substance misuse. This research strives to fill gaps in the literature, particularly considering the dearth of a variety of legal, readily available substances and products, the insufficient incorporation of women in study populations (Harris et al., 2022), and the limited attention to their lived experiences, which often include caring for dependents across the lifespan. To address these gaps, this mixed-methods assessment will examine predictive factors related to addictive behaviors using social cognitive theory, which posits reciprocal interactions among multiple health behavior constructs (Bandura, 1991). These constructs will be explored through validated survey items and semi-structured interviews.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Karen Awura-Adjoa Ronke Coker,* Post-Doctoral Associate, Department of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota
- *Dr. Brandon Moton,* Associate Professor and Division Director of Health Science, School of Allied Health Sciences, Florida A&M University

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

4:00-5:15 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 3, 4*

Research Panel 12 - Food, Media & Cultural Health Influences

Both papers examine how cultural context and media environments shape food choices, health behaviors, and body perceptions. One focuses on social media as a powerful influence on dietary decision-making, while the other examines how acculturation and identity intersect with eating behavior and diet quality. Together, they highlight how health behaviors are shaped by culture, communication, and lived experience rather than individual choice alone.

• *Ariana Bolivar,* Panel Chair, FIU (2024), Nutrition Science, *"Exploring the Interrelationship of Diet Quality, Eating Behavior, Acculturation and Body Satisfaction in Hispanic Millennial and Gen X Women"*

Hispanic/Latina midlife women are understudied yet are at an increased risk for diet-related diseases, including obesity. Obesity in midlife Hispanic women may be attributed to a variety of factors, including dietary acculturation, self-regulation, emotional eating, and body dissatisfaction, which contribute to eating behaviors. This cross-sectional study aims to investigate the relationship between the variables of life stage, generation, acculturation, acculturative stress, eating behavior, body satisfaction, and diet quality using validated questionnaires. Participants consist of n=160 self-identified Hispanic/Latino(a/x) women born between the years 1965 and 1996. Descriptive statistics will be generated to obtain frequencies and percentages for categorical variables and structural equation modeling (SEM) will be performed using AMOS (Analysis of moment structures)/ IBM SPSS statistical software.

• *Francesca Wilkins,* UF, (2023), Public Health, *"Social Media and Food Content: A Qualitative Exploration of Black/African American Young Adult Women's Experiences"*

No previous research to our knowledge has examined how food content on social media influences the food choices of young adult (ages 18–25) Black/African American women. The objective of this study is to explore perspectives on food content, understand influences on choosing to cook foods encountered on social media, and gather feedback on potential interventions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom and explored participants' reactions to example social media food posts as well as their thoughts on proposed intervention strategies. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Participants (N = 14) had a mean age of 22.4 years and a mean BMI of 28.5 kg/m². They reported seeing food content primarily on TikTok (81.8%) and Instagram (63.6%). Five higher-order themes emerged. Participants shared that food content is most helpful when it is adaptable to their lifestyle and culturally diverse, and they expressed that the proposed intervention strategies were valuable. Overall, findings suggest that social media can influence food choices among young adult Black/African American women, and a social-media-based intervention was viewed as appealing. These insights will guide the development of a future intervention.

Discussants (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Tericka Cesar,* Recent Doctoral Graduate, Nursing, University of Miami
- *Ms. Inge Guerrero,* MDF Fellow, FSU (2023), Medical Sciences

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

4:00-5:15 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 2*

Research Panel 13 - Literature, Identity & Resistance

These papers examine how identity, resistance, and meaning are expressed through cultural and narrative forms. Although they focus on different media—poetry, rhetoric, and digital journalism—each explores how marginalized communities use storytelling, aesthetics, and discourse to resist erasure, assert agency, and sustain cultural knowledge. Together, the panel highlights literature and media as sites of both struggle and survival.

• *Yoán Moreno,* Panel Chair, UM (2021), Literature, *"Kin-ki-lak: Literal Rhythms in the Poetry of Adrian Castro"*

The musical concept of "rhythm" has been utilized as both a representational trope and a hermeneutic within Caribbean literature and theory, especially since the twentieth century, as evidenced by the works of afrocubanistas and négritude writers. The conceptualization of "rhythm" in these contexts, however, is not grounded in the percussive realm from which the term is drawn (i.e., on the drummers' perspectives), but is, instead, ubiquitously deployed as a trope for Blackness or Africanity which limits the reach of the interpretive application of "rhythm." By re-grounding "rhythm" in music through the question of a poem's literal playability, we can strengthen the tradition of "rhythm" as a literary hermeneutic. In my paper, I both critique the tropic use of "rhythm" in major Caribbean authors, and I tease out a literal application from the poetry of Adrian Castro to reveal that, beyond figurative uses, there are actually fragments of lexical poetry that are literally playable on the invoked drums.

• *Nikki Lyons,* UF (2022), Mass Communications, "*An Examination of Media Convergence in ESSENCE Magazine's 2025 Digital Covers"*

Print magazines are regarded as custodians of cultural knowledge and tools of heritage media. Digital versions of these magazines serve as sites of cultural preservation and remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). For a magazine in the digital space, the convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) framework provides a theoretical foundation for how a single editorial concept can span articles, videos, short clips, photographs, social media, and websites, each influencing the others in turn. This shift has created opportunities to explore how editors present content to contemporary audiences. In 2019, ESSENCE Magazine launched a content strategy designed to expand its offerings across multiple platforms. This visual analysis examines how ESSENCE's 2025 digital covers re-encode the Black Aesthetic for their audience by applying convergence and Hall's encoding/decoding model to the integration of various media elements in their digital covers. It also highlights the influence of additional media on how storytelling shifts across them.

• *Bridgette Sanders,* FSU (2024), English, *"How Do Black Women Heal in Academia?"*

Despite the intellectual achievements of Black women in academia, they face challenges such as racism, sexism, and the "outsider within," leaving them overwhelmed with pain and yearning for interconnectedness with other Black women who empathize with them (Perryman-Clark et al., 2022; Baker-Bell, 2017; Kynard, 2010). Drawing upon Ronisha Browdy and Esther Milu's (2022) framework that emphasizes communal healing to advance Global Black Rhetorics, this work examines the role of healing and need for sisterhood as a Black feminist rhetorical practice in Black women-centered spaces. Connecting to a sisterhood network is essential for Black women to affirm each other and demonstrate communal healing as people of the African Diaspora. Tamika L. Carey (2016) states that "the most prevalent logic undergirding rhetorics of healing is the need for collective survival" (p. 32). Thus, this presentation sheds light on what it means to heal when we find communality and strength in a (1) Sistah Friend, (2) Sistah Scholar, and (3) Sistah Mentor in academia.

4:00-5:15 p.m. ~ *Bayshore 2*
Research Panel 13 - Literature, Identity & Resistance (Cont.)

• *Aileen Vezeau,* UM (2023), Literature, *"Women Fighters for the Puerto Rican Nation in* Autopsy of a Fall (2021) *by Eric Morales-Franceschini"*

The chapbook *Autopsy of a Fall* (2021) by Eric Morales-Franceschini integrates a personal and collective history specific to Puerto Rico, tracing its colonial past under Spanish rule and its neocolonial relationship with the United States since the nineteenth century. The motifs of martyrdom and sacrifice recur throughout the chapbook, alluding to past martyrs of the nation. This theme continues in the poem "Dear Milagros," which laments the forced sterilizations on the island during the twentieth century; in my reading of the poem, the poetic voice assigns personhood to the unconceived, viewing them as martyr-like figures. Through engagement with "Memory and Sacrifice: An Embodied Theory" by Michaela DeSoucey et al. and the concept of biopolitics articulated by Michel Foucault, I propose that the poem calls for a future generation of revolutionary women figures that propel a "fall," or rupture with U.S. control that results in Puerto Rican independence in response to vestiges of colonization, imperialism, and widespread sterilizations that limit agency.

Discussant (15 minutes)

- *Dr. Vincent Omni,* Author, Visiting Assistant Professor, Lake Forest College; and Co-Founder of *SoulClap: A Black Joy Journal*

Audience – Q&A (10 Minutes)

5:15-5:30 p.m.
EXHIBITOR BREAK

6:00-9:00 p.m. ~ *Gasparilla 1, 2, 3*
DINNER & AWARDS AND JACKETING CEREMONY
- Dinner
- William R. Jones Most Valuable Mentor Awards
- New Graduates' Jacketing Ceremony
- Closing Remarks: *Dr. Lawrence Morehouse*