

MOVING FORWARD

AHS YEAR IN REVIEW 2024



PRACTICING WHAT WE TEACH

I

HOW AHS MODELS THE COLLEGE'S MISSION

ON THE COVER

Seen zooming across campus on his longboard decorated with Korean inscriptions, Speech and Hearing Science Associate Professor Brian Monson relies on his board as a “convenient and quick way to get around” to class and the lab. Although he drives to campus, longboarding offers Monson valuable time outdoors.

“It’s enjoyable recreation for me; I like cruising around on campus,” said Monson, a Utah native. “It gives me a chance to exercise a bit and move around.” The board, inspired by his time in Korea, transports him to his office, class or the Activities and Recreation Center, where he plays pickup basketball twice a week.

Monson made it clear that the credo of SHS and the college was a big factor in determining where he wanted to live, work and do his research.

“Applied Health Sciences was a natural home,” he said.

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A Message from the Dean

CHERYL HANLEY-MAXWELL

As we welcome 2025, I am reminded of the importance of aligning our actions with our values—of practicing what we teach. In the College of Applied Health Sciences, we strive to embody this principle in every aspect of our work. Whether through research, teaching or community engagement, we have the privilege and responsibility to lead by example.



This year, Moving Forward's theme is **Practicing What We Teach**—a call to action for all of us to demonstrate the principles we instill in our students and the broader community. It's a reminder that education is not just about sharing knowledge, but about embodying the values we advocate. Integrity, innovation, compassion and collaboration are not just words on paper; they are the backbone of the work we do daily.

Our faculty and staff are exemplars of this theme. Just as our scholars explore solutions to today's most pressing health challenges, they are also active participants in the communities they serve, translating theory into practice. Our students, too, are making a difference right now—not just through the degrees they will earn in the future, but by working with local communities, addressing health disparities and contributing to the well-being of those around them.

Each day presents us with the opportunity to turn knowledge into action, vision into reality and hope into change. Our research programs continue to push the boundaries of interdisciplinary scholarship, not only advancing academic theory but also creating tangible improvements in public health, disability services and quality of life for all people. From addressing chronic disease and aging to promoting access and equity, we are committed to immediate and lasting change.

As we embark upon this new year, I invite you to join us in practicing what we teach—to challenge yourself to live the values you promote and to support others in doing the same. The impact we make as a college stems not just from our words, but from our collective actions.

It is my hope that 2025 will be a year of positive transformation for each of you and for the communities we serve. On behalf of the College of Applied Health Sciences, I want to extend my deepest gratitude for your continued support. Together, we are making a difference, and I look forward to the journey ahead.

Cheryl

PRACTICING

By ETHAN SIMMONS

Inside any AHS academic building, there are dozens of faculty and staff committed to improving health and wellness across the lifespan, in and out of the classroom. And in their own lives, they're trying their best to practice what they teach.

Whether it's research exploring how exercise modifies our cells, how tourism can improve our psyches and the health of a community, or how protecting our hearing influences our long-term quality of life, the work at AHS centers around bettering the lives of our families, our neighbors and ourselves.

"How do we live the best life that we can physically and mentally because we've taken care of ourselves?" said Dean Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell, an inveterate walker. "We're about prevention. And if you do get a disease or a disability, we're about adjustment and then having a high quality of life.

"The work that we do here can impact your life today."

Of course, if adopting healthier habits were so easy, everyone would be doing it. The proportion of American adults regularly participating in beneficial physical activity is somewhere between 20% to 30%, but Health and Kinesiology Professor Steve Petruzzello said studies with accelerometers attached to participants have estimated that number could be as low as 5%.

Why is this number so low? The modern "built environment" is one of our chief impediments, Petruzzello said. He sees it in action when able-bodied students and staff opt for the elevator instead of the stairs to the second floor or hop on a electric-powered scooter instead of walking to class.

But there's a separate problem that's far more ingrained, Petruzzello said: powerful cultural attitudes toward which exercises are "appropriate" for us based on our identities, like race, age and gender. For example, as we age, the forms of physical activity we deem acceptable—running and lifting weights are examples—continue to shrink.

Even the word "exercise" comes with its own baggage. Petruzzello prefers the phrase "physical activity," since exercise often conjures images of the "no pain, no gain," drenched-in-sweat workouts that push our bodies to exhaustion.

"But exercise is seeing Cheryl walking the hallway around Huff Hall gym. It's seeing students walking to class. We're taking the stairs or doing pushups or body-weight squats—our bodies are the equipment we need," Petruzzello said.

PUSHING LIFE'S LIMITS

For many at AHS, work and personal pursuits intertwine. Suzanne Rinehart, the college's associate dean for administration, takes AHS' focus on human performance and runs with it. In addition to her day-to-day duties ensuring the college runs smoothly, Rinehart is a competitive endurance athlete. She has biked, swam and run in triathlons, marathons and Ironman races for the better part of 15 years.

A tragic loss spurred sudden changes in her own approach to health.

"My husband passed away from cancer in '99," Rinehart said. "I was like, 'I need to keep active for my own health.'"

Her focus on physical health is what initially drew her to the opening at AHS in 2019. Just before she took the job, Rinehart participated in a study led by Health and Kinesiology Associate Professor Nicholas Burd, examining the effectiveness of a potato puree as mid-race fuel for trained endurance athletes. (The savory high-carb alternative to sugary gels proved effective.)

"I wanted to be working in a college related to the stuff I'm interested in as well," Rinehart said.

"This is a college that supports its members. If you want to try something new and somebody else is doing it, they'll support you."

—Dean Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell

WHAT WE TEACH

FINDING PEACE IN NATURE

Recreation, Sport and Tourism Associate Professor Mariela Fernandez discovered a natural environment for her outlet.

Fernandez exemplifies how personal and professional experiences can intersect in unexpected ways. Following her father's death and her own cancer diagnosis, Fernandez found solace in nature—a focus of her research. Her journey underscores AHS' broader vision: that health encompasses both physical recovery and emotional resilience, with natural spaces playing a pivotal role in healing.

In spring 2024, two weeks after her father died, Fernandez had a unilateral mastectomy due to early breast cancer.

"The next few months consisted of grieving," she said. "I could not be happier with the support provided by colleagues, friends and family; they made the grieving journey easier. Yet, there were moments of grief that I needed to process individually."

She found solace in an unexpected place: her own research.

"During a hospital visit, I sat in the hospital's indoor greenery, and I felt surprisingly calmer," she said. "It dawned on me that my research was at play. I had just published an article on the effects of indoor greenery on stress so I shouldn't have been surprised. Then, when reading the book, 'It's Okay That You're Not Okay', the

author had many suggestions including "Go[ing] out to the woods and tell[ing] the trees." I have since discovered hiking groups for individuals experiencing grief and for cancer patients."

FINDING COMMUNITY THROUGH MOVEMENT

Every Monday, Health and Kinesiology Assistant Professor Otávio Leão and fellow Brazilian faculty and staff play soccer in the fields across from Memorial Stadium.

It's exactly what a doctor told him he would never be able to do again, after getting metal pins affixed to his femurs as a teenager due to a congenital condition. After a year of limited activity, Leão managed to get back to the sports he loved. He says he still can't make any sudden, intense moves but keeping his legs in constant motion has kept his lower body healthy.

Today, Leão is a physical activity researcher focused on the longitudinal effects of exercise in childhood development and across the lifespan.

"I chose my career because of what I like and enjoy and do in my free time, and I knew at that time that this choice in the future could help more people," Leão said.

Leão's story of defying medical odds to play soccer speaks to perseverance, while Speech and Hearing Science Associate



Associate Dean for Administration Suzanne Rinehart is a competitive endurance athlete. (Photo by Ethan Simmons)



Professor Brian Monson's longboard commutes highlight how small, consistent actions contribute to well-being.

Monson rides his longboard to class, his office or to the campus Activities and Recreation Center.

Monson, who came to Illinois in 2017, said the college's mission of supporting health and well-being across the lifespan was a big factor in why he decided to come to Urbana-Champaign.

"The mission of AHS was very much aligned with where I wanted to be, to be around others who focus on health and disability," he said. Monson said he was inspired to make exercise a priority by watching one faculty member give a talk about the benefits of physical exercise for brain functioning.

"Applied Health Sciences was a natural home," he said.

SITTING LESS, MOVING MORE

Health and Kinesiology Assistant Professor Dominika Pindus' commitment to investigating public health problems started early. Pindus spent a lot of her childhood traveling on the road with her parents as they sought new clients for their leather accessory company. She had a feeling that all the seated time in long car rides could have detrimental health effects.

"I recall telling my mum that when I grew up, I would prove that being sedentary for prolonged periods affected our health," Pindus said. "I am making good on that promise."

Before reading further to get a snapshot of physical (in)activity in the U.S., you may want to sit down (or not). Adults in the U.S. average 9.5 hours of sitting per day, and more than half are considered "physically inactive," achieving less than 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or less than 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week.

The picture may seem bleak, but that hasn't stopped Pindus from offering targeted advice to get people off their seats.

"I approach it with humility and recognize that we all live and work in a specific sociocultural context where productivity for so many people is equated to the number of hours spent in front of the computer," Pindus said. "I suggest small tricks that can nudge us to get up and walk."

TOP FIVE WAYS TO SIT LESS AT WORK

- ▷ Place the trash can outside of your office
- ▷ Centralize the printing
- ▷ Walk over to a colleague for a question instead of sending an email—or even better, schedule a walking meeting
- ▷ Set prompts on your computer screen to remind yourself to stand up or walk around
- ▷ Try a smaller water bottle to increase your number of trips to the water fountain

SETTING THE PACE

If you're planning to take a meeting with Dean Hanley-Maxwell, you had better be ready to keep up. The dean—who returned to Illinois in 2016, three decades after finishing her Ph.D. at her alma mater—might take you on one of her signature brisk walks through the hallways of Huff Hall, the college's home base. In Huff, eight laps around the building's first floor equals a mile, she said.

Before she came back to Illinois, 5 miles a day was her typical goal. Joining AHS solidified her habit for good.

"When I got here, the overall 'health feeling' of the college really reawakened a lot of those pieces for me," Hanley-Maxwell said. "It gave me reinforcement that I was doing the right things."

A strong routine helped Hanley-Maxwell through one of life's toughest challenges: cancer. Even while undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments, she stuck with walking as much as possible.

"[Walking] really did help me through chemo because it gave me purpose during that time," Hanley-Maxwell said. "There were days after a chemo infusion, toward the end, that I literally couldn't walk down the hall, so I'd have to wait. But it was really important for me."

Whenever her calendar's full and she can't get much more than a mile around Huff Hall, Hanley-Maxwell finds subtle ways to get some distance—perhaps ditching her parking pass and walking to meetings on the farthest edges of campus.

Walking isn't always enough, though. The dean has an external motivator and accountability partner in her personal trainer, whom she hired after COVID-19 pandemic and works with to this day.

But sometimes, listening to her colleagues around the college talk about their work is galvanizing enough.

"I listen to other people at AHS talk about what they do, and it is motivating all by itself—it really does provide a milieu that makes you think all the time about your health," she said.

Editor's Note: Sam Rink and Vince Lara-Cinisomo contributed to this story.



PROTECTING YOUR HEARING

As a working audiologist, **Speech and Hearing Science Clinical Assistant Professor Sadie Braun** is "hyper aware" of the relative risks of hearing damage. Whether it's a fireworks show or a concert, Braun is sure to bring hearing protection for her family at any loud event.

Here are a few more of Braun's practical tips for preserving your hearing in our noisy world.

- **BE AWARE:** Download apps to measure sound levels in your environment. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has a free sound level meter app for Android, and iPhones have sound monitoring built in.
- **PREPARE:** Buy a stash of cheap foam earplugs or other hearing protection to put in your purse or car for when you might need them.
- **CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN:** Try to move away from loud noise sources when you encounter them. For example, keep your distance from speakers at a concert or party.
- **TURN IT DOWN:** Keep the volume of your headphones and earbuds at 60% or less of the total volume. If someone 6 feet away from you can hear what music you're listening to, it's too loud.

The safe listening time for an 85 A weighted decibels sound level—roughly the volume of a food blender—is 8 hours.

"However, for every 3 dB increase, the safe listening time is cut in half," she added. "This means the safe listening time for an 88 dBA sound level is 4 hours. **The louder the sound, the less time you can safely be in it,**" Braun said.



MORSE-MORGAN PROFESSORSHIP

BOPPART CALLS HONOR A CAREER HIGHLIGHT

By VINCE LARA-CINISOMO

MARNI BOPPART'S TRAJECTORY to named professorship at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign began as a kid playing in the woods.

Boppart, a professor in the Department of Health and Kinesiology in the College of Applied Health Sciences, was named the Saul J. Morse and Anne B. Morgan Professor on Sept. 6.

"I would describe myself as a very active kid growing up," she said at the investiture. "All our recreational time was spent outdoors. I grew up in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, and the woods were our playground."

Boppart spent time in the Air Force as an aerospace physiologist, then decided to pursue a Ph.D. in applied anatomy and physiology at Boston University. Working with two "powerhouse investigators" in the field of exercise science—Roger Fielding at Boston University and Laurie Goodyear at Harvard Medical School—the trio documented observations of molecular changes occurring in muscle as a result of exercise.

"Like most researchers, I had more questions than answers at the end of my

doctoral program," she said. "How does exercise, or the process of contraction, stimulate molecular changes in muscle? What do these changes really mean for structure and function? And, going back to my original interest, what is released by muscle into the circulation that might influence whole body health?"

For Boppart, those questions led to what is now a 30-year career studying muscle. Using transgenic mice, Boppart and her lab partners were able to determine that the integrin complex not only controlled molecular signaling in muscle, but also contributed to skeletal muscle remodeling and growth in response to exercise.

"But then everything changed in 2013," she said.

That year, Boppart said, she and her lab mates were the first to report that exercise can result in the accumulation of perivascular stem cells in muscle.

"We found that these cells secrete beneficial factors that not only influence muscle remodeling and growth, but structures outside of muscle as well, including vessels and the brain. And so

we started to wonder ... could these stem cells be used to treat a disease or condition?"

Boppart's interest in healthy aging led to a study of whether stem cells could be used to address age-related disabilities. While she found that stem cells were not effective in slowing the progression of muscle loss or regrowing muscle after disuse, she did find if she isolated nanoparticles (or extracellular vesicles or exosomes) from the stem cells first and then injected them into the aged mice, they could successfully recover muscle growth. That discovery led to funding from NASA.

Boppart is energized about what's next.

"We would like to use our funding and this professorship to translate our EV therapy to humans," she said. "Not only because clinical trials with stem cell-derived EVs are already occurring in the U.S., but also because I have an amazing interdisciplinary research team to help make it possible."

Marni Boppart (second from right), with her family and Chancellor Robert Jones, has spent 30 years in the field of exercise science. (Photo by Darrell Hoemann)



STAYING CONNECTED

SYDNOR RETIRING BUT WON'T SLOW DOWN

By ETHAN SIMMONS

AS A WANDERING GRADUATE STUDENT, Synthia Sydnor used to take cross-country road trips while she worked on her Ph.D. at The Pennsylvania State University.

In 1986, an opportunity came calling from what was known as College of Applied Life Sciences at the University of Illinois: an opening for a faculty position to study and interpret sport and play. The role seemed a perfect match for Sydnor—a budding scholar in the cultural-historical analysis of sport—but this Midwestern setting seemed unappealing.

Driving through the “barren” winter landscape of Illinois, “We always said, ‘This is the last place on earth we will ever live,’” Sydnor said.

Two years later, the job was still open, so Sydnor applied to at least get some interview experience. To her surprise, Illinois hired her. Sydnor came to adore the university as well as Illinois’ prairies and skies, and she would retire from the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health in spring 2024, 36 years later. (The department was renamed Health and Kinesiology in August 2024.)

Sydnor has witnessed profound changes in her discipline and at the University of Illinois, from researching and writing in a basically pre-digital academic environment to teaching a 750-student online class before COVID-19 had even arrived. (Leading KIN 141: Contemporary Issues in Sport virtually felt like “running a corporation,” she said.)

With her unique scholarly background—she held appointments in the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory and Illinois

Global Institute—Sydnor has provided a humanities-trained perspective within the department for three decades.

“What is sport? Why do we attach all these invented things to it, like ‘masculinity,’ ‘teamwork,’ and lately, ‘peace’ and ‘development?’” Sydnor said. “I’ve tried with students and the research I’ve contributed to think of sport as a serious object of knowledge, not just frills and fun.”

In retirement, Sydnor is spending time with family while staying connected to her academic home, collaborating with several younger faculty across the department and mining her own discipline for new insights. Her humor, friendliness and mentorship of graduate students leave a distinct legacy.

“She was always willing to take on a student in need of help—she had a soft spot in her heart for graduate students,” said Kim Graber, head of the Department of Health and Kinesiology.

A CHANGING FIELD

Sydnor always took pride in teaching popular classes, which were often highly rated in student reviews. It’s especially rewarding when former students reach back out to discuss a class concept that clicked for them years later, she said.

She also taught experimental courses, like one focused on extreme sport, to lead students into important topics of culture and theory. The class used a book she co-edited with Robert Rinehart, “To the Extreme: Alternative Sports, Inside and Out”, as a basis for study.

“What I do doesn’t predict or control, it doesn’t necessarily ‘solve’ something,” she said.

“Instead, you converse. ‘What does it mean to be human in different times and places? In different bodies?’ I’ve tried to contribute that to my classes, my teaching, my research.”

Sydnor admires the developments of each of the three department heads she’s worked with—including Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko’s push to focus on healthy aging, and Graber’s empowerment of younger faculty.

“I’ve loved being part of Illinois because of those leaders who had forethought and courage to pioneer new ideas, and we’re on the cusp of that now with changing to Health and Kinesiology,” Sydnor said. “I love our department and how much it’s grown, and how much Kim Graber has let the new young professors lead us in research initiatives.”

In retirement, Sydnor will continue working with Health and Kinesiology Teaching Assistant Professors Caitlin Clarke and Jesse Couture to develop a student textbook, essentially a second edition of her 2021 book “Social Theory for Sport Lovers”.

“I feel so fortunate, I’ve just loved it here,” Sydnor said. “It enabled my creativity, it enabled collaboration with great thinkers across campus and hopefully helped students approach sport in a learned way in their professional and personal lives.”

For more on Sydnor’s journey, scan the QR code.





ILLINI SHINE

in Paris





By VINCE LARA-CINISOMO

If this really was Steve Serio's final Paralympic Games appearance, he went out in style.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign alumnus had 24 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists as Team USA won its record third straight Paralympic Games gold medal, holding off Great Britain 73–69 in Paris in the summer of 2024.

“This team has grown so much over the course of the last couple of years,” said Serio, the five-time Paralympian, team captain and graduate of the College of Applied Health Sciences. “We knew that Great Britain was going to be a great opponent, a really tough group of guys. We’re just excited that we won a basketball game and got to bring home another gold medal for our country.”

Serio and Jake Williams combined for 19 points in the first quarter for the U.S., including a late 3-pointer from Serio to put Team USA in the lead. Great Britain clawed back within three points with three minutes to go in the game, but timely buckets from Serio, Williams and Illinois alumnus Brian Bell as well as a few defensive stops put the game to bed. Team USA won its third consecutive gold medal—the first time that’s ever been accomplished—and its eighth all time.

Before the game, Serio said the Paris Games would be his last.

“This entire Games I’ve tried to be present,” Serio said. “Live in the moment more than I have in the past. You look at the game, you look at this experience a little bit differently when you know it’s going to be your last one. I can’t think of a better way to go out, I’m going to remember this for a really long time.”

The USA women’s wheelchair basketball team won a silver medal, falling short in its attempt at gold. The U.S. lost in the final to defending champ The Netherlands, 63–49. The women’s team, which included Illini athletes Kaitlyn Eaton, Ali Ibanez and Emily Oberst, has not won gold since 2016.

In track and field, Illinois alumna Susannah Scaroni took her fourth medal of the 2024 Games. Winning bronze in the women’s marathon T54 came after a battle with Australian Madison de Rozario and China’s Zhaoqian Zhou.

“There was a moment in the race where Madison and I were working so hard and going back and forth and honestly, I didn’t care what color the medal was, but I was hoping she and I could get silver and bronze,” Scaroni said. “That’s what happened and I’m so happy for her.”

Alumna Tatyana McFadden won her 21st Paralympic medal in Paris and became the most decorated U.S. Paralympic track and field athlete in history. As for other Illini athletes competing in Paris, two-time medalist Daniel Romanchuk was Team USA’s top men’s finisher in the marathon, taking fourth in the men’s T54 race with a time of 1:32.23. Romanchuk won the second Paralympic title of his career in Paris in the 5,000-meter T54 race on the track and also took bronze in the 400-meter.

Seven-time Paralympian Aaron Pike followed Romanchuk with a seventh-place finish in the marathon in 1:36.23. Two-time Paralympic medalist Brian Siemann and two-time Paralympian Jenna Fesemyer rounded out Team USA’s results in 11th and 13th place in the men’s and women’s races, respectively. Siemann, who in his fourth Paralympic Games won his first two medals in Paris, finished in 1:51.56 while Fesemyer clocked a time of 2:05.42

Previous page: Steve Serio hugs a Team USA teammate after clinching gold in Paris. (Getty Images)

This page: Brian Bell (bottom right) and Susannah Scaroni (top left) took home medals for the Illini and Team USA. (Getty Images)



Service to Study

Veterans gain valuable skills through Warrior-Scholar Project

By ETHAN SIMMONS

FOR CHEZ VETERANS CENTER Director of Operations Andy Bender, the function of the Warrior-Scholar Project is straightforward: offer military Veterans a two-week-long academic “boot camp” to reacquaint themselves with the classroom environment before heading to a college or university.

“One of the hardest things a service member is going to do is leave the service,” Bender said. “We really enjoy having the Warrior-Scholar Project here because it reflects what we want to be a part of: making that transition.”

In June 2024, the Chez Veterans Center, the hub for Veteran and military-connected students at the University of Illinois, hosted a cohort of higher-ed-bound Veterans for the third year in a row.

The Warrior-Scholar Project partners with American colleges and universities to host brief, intensive, no-cost college prep experiences for both enlisted Veterans and service members transitioning into civilian life.

The Chez Center brought in Warrior-Scholars for the first time in 2022, with a week of STEM-centered coursework taught by Illinois faculty. This year’s edition doubled the session’s length, adding a humanities track of classes for participants.

The cohort of 15 students and six fellows all hailed from outside of Illinois. Most hadn’t ever visited the Urbana-Champaign campus; though they may not choose Illinois for school, the experience still has a hand in their higher ed journeys.

The two-week schedule was filled with visits to various campus landmarks and labs, including the McKechnie Family LIFE Home and a robotics and automation demonstration at

the agricultural and bioengineering research farm. Humanities seminars focused on the United States’ founding principles and documents that the Veterans were sworn to defend.

One frequent class contributor was Cody Lepp, an eight-year Navy SEAL who decided to return to school while still serving in the military. After three years taking online classes through National University in San Diego, Lepp is heading into his senior year and he wanted to use WSP to see how an in-person classroom environment compared with distance learning.

“I came in with an open mindset, hopefully I can learn some new things,” Lepp said. “What I hope to get out of it is practice applying my skills, seeing where I stand against the majority of my fellows.”

Among Veterans’ challenges reintegrating after their service, higher education can be a “completely different animal,” Bender said.

“If you’re like some service members—if you’ve spent four, five, six years—how long has it been since you were in a classroom? You might have some of those creeping doubts come in. Can I make it? Am I going to fit in? Is this going to be successful?” he said.

“(WSP) is providing the confidence to these service members that we can do it. That there is a future beyond my service time. That there is a way to make it.”

For more on the Warrior-Scholar Project, scan the QR code.



Warrior-Scholar Project students chat on a visit to Hourglass Medical, a wearable technology company based in Research Park. (Photo by Ethan Simmons)



SOUNDS TERRIBLE!

DECODING MISOPHONIA

By ETHAN SIMMONS



FOOD-SLURPING, KNUCKLE-CRACKING, pen-tapping, nose-sniffing. All these noises can trigger strong emotional responses for people living with misophonia, or sensitivity to specific, often human-generated sounds.

Misophonia is a newly recognized hearing condition—the term was first coined in 2001—and its exact mechanics, and boundaries, remain mysterious.

To investigate the potential causes of misophonia, two University of Illinois researchers, Speech and Hearing Science Professor Fatima Husain from the College of Applied Health Sciences and Psychology Professor Howard Berenbaum from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, paired up to study misophonic triggers across three different locations.

“Are the ‘trigger sounds’ the same in the three countries?” Husain asked. “What is the psychological impact on the individual and their family across the different countries?”

With a near-\$500,000 award from the Misophonia Research Fund, the researchers are actively recruiting to conduct psychological and audiological assessments for 100 people diagnosed with misophonia in Seoul, South Korea; another 100 in São Paulo, Brazil; and 100 more within a 150-mile radius of Champaign, Illinois.

After the assessments, participants are exposed to a variety of pre-recorded sounds, and their reactions are recorded.

“We do say this may be triggering, but it’s a safe space. They are in a sound booth. There is no one else there actually eating or anything around them, and they can always stop at any time,” Husain said.

A GROWING COLLABORATION

Berenbaum and Husain have teamed up on misophonia research before. They surveyed and assessed misophonia occurrence in spring 2021 among a collegiate population, polling more than 12,000 University of Illinois undergraduate and graduate students for symptoms of various auditory disorders.

Their study, which ended in October 2023, found 20 percent of roughly 1,100 respondents showed strong evidence of misophonia-like traits, and many had comorbidities with other mental health conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Husain’s path to studying misophonia started with a separate sound-sensitivity condition: hyperacusis, a reduced tolerance to everyday sounds. In her recent research with Berenbaum, they found a high degree of overlap for those experiencing both tinnitus and hyperacusis with misophonia.

Misophonia seems similar on the surface, but it’s a distinct condition. The term describes an intense reaction to specific, usually human-generated sounds, which may pair with resentment toward the source of the noise, Husain said.

“One of the things with misophonia is the fact that it’s been primarily studied and also treated by psychiatrists and psychologists. It has rarely been within the audiology hearing perspective, and I was like, ‘Wait, this is a sound.’ The people who are saying they’re worrying about misophonia are saying ‘I don’t like these sounds,’” Husain said.

The psychological impact of misophonia is significant, Husain said, and important to treat—sometimes the sounds only trigger discomfort when they come from certain people, even loved ones like a child or a parent, she said.

“I was very, very interested in the hearing aspect and what is it about this sound—what will happen if someone else, say a stranger, produces the sound?” Husain said.

“What we’ll gain will benefit international research on misophonia and allow for greater and faster progress in understanding and treating it,” Berenbaum said.

Hall of Fame Tour

Holds Special Appeal

By SAM RINK

THE HALL OF FAME TOUR that serves as the essence of an experiential course in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism, RST 180, has been the subject of much discussion since it was introduced in 2016.

The 12-day excursion component of the course—led by RST Clinical Associate Professor Mike Raycraft—spans more than 2,000 miles and has drawn attention from local news channels, magazines and newspapers over the years. Students visit notable tourism sites including the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, the Baseball Hall of Fame and the Pro Football Hall of Fame as well as historic destinations in Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

But what makes the RST 180 course so beloved by its participants? Students who took the course and went on the spring 2024 trip along with a few RST professionals who lead tours on the trip weighed in.

For Axel Mueller, a sophomore studying sport management, getting to know other students was what made the course truly special.

“I was able to meet so many other people within the RST department and get a better understanding of the recreation and tourism side, because at school, I don’t ever see those people much.”

Mueller recalled one of the trip’s hiccups where the lift on their charter bus broke down during a rainy day in New York. The group had stopped for lunch at the famed Anchor Bar, the birthplace of Buffalo chicken wings. On the way out, the bus’ wheelchair lift broke, making it difficult for Kendall Speaks, an RST major and wheelchair basketball team member, to board the bus and leaving the group stuck in a parking lot for more than an hour.

“I had to squat down, have [Speaks] wrap her arms around my neck, pick her up and then carry her to her seat on the bus,” Mueller said. “Of course, Dr. Raycraft was able to arrange another bus that day.”



It was that type of attitude, from Mueller and others in the group, that turned what could have been a deeply frustrating situation into a humorous anecdote, and the tour continued without major issues after that point.

Another aspect of the course Mueller appreciated was getting the opportunity to talk to experts in his prospective field of sports management.

“It definitely opened my eyes a little bit—there’s so many things I can do with a sport management major,” he said. “I would say it broadened my perspective rather than narrowed it.”

Carter Blount, another sophomore in RST, put his perspective on the tour plainly:

“Professor Raycraft makes the trip,” he said. “He’s done this for so long. He knows all these people and has crazy connections, and he definitely makes it enjoyable.”

Blount went on Raycraft’s spring break study abroad course to London, and despite the exhausting overnight flight and packed schedule, he enjoyed it and was influenced to enroll in the RST 180 course for the second half of the semester. Blount wasn’t alone in this; he said roughly 20 students who went to London that spring also enrolled in RST 180 this year.

A few fond memories for Blount included cramming into one hotel room with everyone to watch the NBA playoffs, walking the Princeton University campus at night where he coincidentally met a student who had gone to the same high school as he had, and watching the sun set over the lake in Cooperstown, New York.

“I can’t think of a single night where I wasn’t in someone else’s room,” Blount said, referring to the close-knit evenings the group spent together after the day’s tours were done.

Blount spoke about the positive experiences the group had with their hosts. He also discussed how the class itself enhances the trip, saying, “you spent eight weeks studying the places you’re going to visit, so it’s cool to go see them all at the end.”

Todd Marshall, an RST graduate student at the University of Illinois, had a slightly different experience than the other students on the trip. As a graduate student working closely with Raycraft, he got an inside look at what it takes to organize and deliver experiential learning opportunities that will serve him well as he enters the field. Marshall was heartened by the large number of alumni they connected with at the locations they visited, taking the opportunity to learn from people not much older than him who successfully made it in the sport management industry.

“It reaffirms my perspective that there are Illinois people everywhere, but also in places you would never think of,” Marshall said. “It’s a reminder to just keep my eyes open and look for connections wherever I can find them.”

Chris Willis first met Raycraft in 2019 while he was doing research for his book on Red Grange, an Illinois alumnus who played for the Chicago Bears from 1929 to 1934 and is one of the most famous NFL players of the 20th century. When they met, Raycraft mentioned the tour, leading Willis to offer his expertise as head archivist at NFL Films in New Jersey.



Students in the RST 180 class visit the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts. (Photo provided)

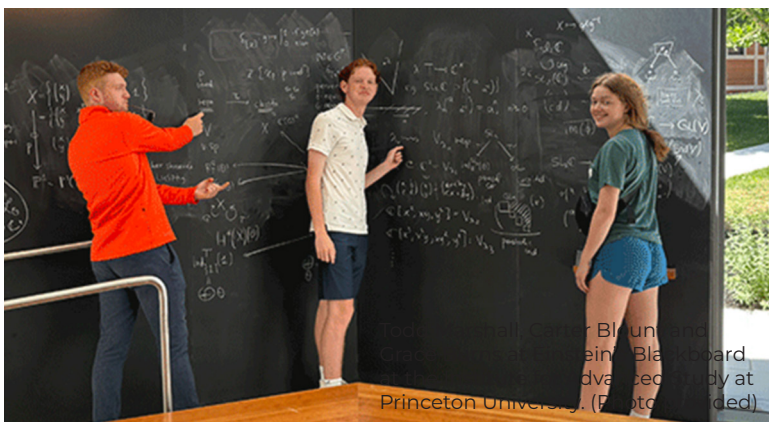
Mist boat tour that starts and ends on the American side of the park. Mark Thomas, retired western regional director of state parks in New York, said the students were curious and engaged with the tour, regarding both the history of the falls and the logistics behind managing them.

“They love the tourist experience—who wouldn’t, right? It’s a great experience, but they also embrace the learning aspect of the visit as well,” Thomas said. Grace Burns, a senior majoring in statistics and minoring in RST with hopes to go into sports analytics post-graduation, was excited by the prospect of the course but admitted to feeling anxious about going on a long trip with complete strangers. Her worries ended up being unfounded.

“Going into it not knowing anyone, I was definitely really nervous,” she said. “I was like ‘Oh my gosh, what did I get myself into?’ But I met so many people. I’m almost glad I didn’t go with my friends because it allowed me to branch out more.”

RST 180 exemplifies passion for educating, managing events and entertainment and accommodating all who travel, whether they are sports fans, history buffs or national park enthusiasts. The class and tour provide a unique experience for students that puts them on both sides of this transaction.

“I would encourage everyone to look into the class even if you’re not RST affiliated and even if you don’t know anyone,” Burns said. “It sounds clichéd, but it was really awesome, even if you’re not into sports.”



Carter Blount explaining Blackboard advanced study at Princeton University. (Photo provided)

“We provided an overview and general information about what NFL Films does, and the facility is a big part of that,” Willis said. “We have everything under one roof.”

Willis is no stranger to hosting tours at the facility, saying they have five or six per year, usually with friends or family of employees or groups of students like the ones from the RST. Willis confessed he enjoys leading student tours the most, saying he prefers “talking to a younger crowd.”

“Some of the subjects we study are between 50 and 100 years old, so it’s fun to interact with younger students or fans and show them what we do or talk to them about NFL history or the history of NFL Films,” he said.

The highlight of the tour was the studio, Willis said. Many students, sports fans themselves, recognized the location where many of the NFL’s talk shows are filmed and enjoyed seeing the back end of their favorite sports productions.

When the RST 180 students first arrived at Niagara Falls at night, the lights shined orange and blue to welcome the tour, an experience cited by many students who went on the trip. They saw the natural landscape and participated in the Maid of the



Carter Blount doing standup karaoke at the National Comedy Center in Jamestown, New York. (Photo provided)

AHS ABROAD

AHS students visited Australia, Brazil, England, Greece and the African continent on faculty-led and study abroad trips in 2024.

AUSTRALIA

Health and Kinesiology major Miranda Ludwig, who participated in an exchange program at the University of Melbourne in spring 2024, took time out for a skydiving excursion.



(Photos provided)

AFRICA

HK major Sam Adeoye visited Africa as part of HK Global Studies 298: Benin Study Abroad Economic Development in Africa.

GREECE

Led by faculty members Kristen DiFilippo and Beth Frasca, students in HK visited Greece in summer 2024 as part of IHLT 498: Interdisciplinary Health in Greece. Among their activities were using a traditional mortar and pestle to make a dip during a cooking class on the Ikarian diet and a group dinner in Halkidiki.

BRAZIL

HK students, led by faculty member Aline Lamas, were part of a program called Public Health in Brazil.

ENGLAND

Mike Raycraft led a group of students over the pond for RST 199: Discover London—the perfect opportunity to understand global interpretations of recreation, sport and tourism.





HONORING THE TRAILBLAZERS

For First-Generation Student Week Nov. 4–8, we highlighted stories from students at the College of Applied Health Sciences.



RIHANNA SHEGOG

Kinesiology first-year student Rihanna Shegog grew up between Bradley and Shawneetown, Illinois—essentially, at both ends of the state.

It wasn't until a college fair her senior year of high school that the University of Illinois first came on her radar: "Which is crazy, because it's such a big school," she said.

Shegog credits her time with I-LEAP—an AHS leadership program that supports first-generation college students—for helping her adjust to campus life.

"At first I felt a lot of pressure because I'm the first one in my family to go to college," Shegog said. "But they really just want me to be happy and successful."

AVA MONTAÑEZ

Freshman Ava Montañez searched for college programs that would help support a career in the sports industry. Illinois rose to the top of her list with its RST degree. And her family has helped her transition into college life. As the youngest of six siblings, Montañez leaned on her older twin sisters for advice in the application process. Together, they're part of the first generation in their family to pursue higher education.

"I went to a small elementary school and middle school; coming to a school like this was a big change because I'm so used to knowing everyone around," Montañez said. "But I had friends from my old school who came with me, and I have the I-LEAP program with staff I can go to."



VINCENT ANELLI

Vincent Anelli's decision to come to Illinois was "a pretty obvious" one, he said, when he factored in the realistic tuition with the university's top-notch speech and hearing science program. Now a sophomore, Anelli credits I-LEAP for teaching the basics of applying to research positions and internships early on.

"Being a first-gen scholar, there's a lot of pressure to it, especially because my parents worked really hard for me to be here," Anelli said. "It definitely helps me refocus, that I'm here for my academics. It's a little daunting at times, but it's a big motivator."

CLARISSA HARRINGTON

Clarissa Harrington was drawn to Illinois after a high school field trip to Champaign-Urbana, 90 minutes from her hometown of Springfield.

The sophomore initially wanted to join a pre-medicine track, but the focus of community health aligned best with her interests.

"After taking my first intro class and learning about community health and public health, I realized it was a better fit for me," Harrington said. "I stayed in because I think it does a great job of helping minority communities on a large scale."

The first-generation college student says she acclimated to campus "really fast," serving on the I-LEAP student advisory board to help shape the university experience for incoming students on her same path.

Rogers Creates Path for New Health Tech Direction

By VINCE LARA-CINISOMO

HEALTH AND KINESIOLOGY PROFESSOR WENDY ROGERS, the founding director of the Health Technology Education Program in 2017, stepped aside in summer 2024 and Shannon Mejía, an associate professor in HK, was named her successor.

Rogers had already had an illustrious academic career, primarily at Georgia Tech, before coming to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2017. Together with her husband, Dan Fisk—also a Ph.D. in the field of experimental psychology—Rogers created the Human Factors & Aging Laboratory in 2003 at Georgia Tech. After Fisk retired in 2013, Rogers relocated the lab to Illinois—where Fisk got his doctorate—four years later.

Rogers' arrival at Illinois coincided with an Investment for Growth proposal led by the College of Applied Health Sciences and the Grainger College of Engineering aimed at developing the Health Technology Education Program. HK Professor Jeff Woods, who spearheaded the IFG with Kesh Kesavadas, a professor of Industrial and Enterprise Systems Engineering, knew who he wanted to lead the Health Tech program.

"Jeff asked me if I would be willing to lead the educational component and I agreed," said Rogers, who is the Shahid & Ann Carlson Khan Professor of Applied Health Sciences.

"We hired Nicole Holtzclaw-Stone in January 2018 and the four of us (Jeff, Kesh, Nicole and Wendy) spent a lot of time together developing the Health Technology Education Program," Rogers said. "We shepherded our Master of Science in Health Technology through department and college educational policy committees, the Graduate College, the Faculty Senate, the Board of Trustees, and finally the Illinois Board of Higher Education. In December 2019, Nicole and I drove to Chicago for the Illinois Board of Higher Education meeting in case there were any questions but there were none and we were officially approved. We welcomed our first cohort in August of 2020," during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rogers said she always planned to get the Health Tech program established and build a strong foundation before passing it on.

"The time was right to transition to a new director, but we want to continue to build on the trajectory we are on," she said. "The mission is to advance health technology education for learners at all levels through our interdisciplinary undergraduate

certificate and minor (joint with Industrial & Enterprise Systems Engineering), our Master of Science in Health Technology (in collaboration with Grainger College of Engineering), and our Health Technology Professional Education Program."

Mejía praised her predecessor's vision.

"She led the development and implementation of an innovative education program that provides cross training in user needs, human factors and user experience methodologies, and engineering principles to develop leaders who can speak the language of both health care and engineering," Mejía said of Rogers. "To address the critical challenges facing health care today, it is essential to understand user needs and technological capabilities in order to assure that technological solutions truly support the well-being of individuals, families, organizations and communities. We train students to fulfill this essential role. This program is one of a kind in the nation. And it is my privilege to take the program to its next level."

Rogers said the move was eased by knowing Mejía was ready to step in.

"Dr. Mejía has been an active member of the Health Technology Education Program since its inception," Rogers said. "She is the right person at the right time to take the program to the next level. She has a lot of energy and creative ideas. Together, with Dr. Katelyn Talbott as the assistant director, I know the program will continue to be successful and to grow."



Wendy Rogers, center, has passed the torch for the Health Tech program leadership to Shannon Mejía, left, and Health Tech Assistant Director Katelyn Talbott. (Photo provided)

Within REACH

GRANT FOR SHS COVERS EDUCATION FUNDING AND RESOURCE GAPS

By ETHAN SIMMONS

BETWEEN STUTTERING, LANGUAGE DELAYS and articulation problems, Marjorie Campbell saw the gamut of communication disorders while shadowing a speech-language pathologist at Champaign's Edison Middle School.

She also witnessed “how drastically (students’) quality of life improved when they were given effective communication strategies,” said Campbell, who majored in psychology at Illinois.

“It was something I felt like a lot of kids from underrepresented backgrounds don’t have access to because of financial reasons. I felt like that was a need I wanted to fulfill,” she said.

This fall, Campbell is back on the Illinois campus, training to become an SLP equipped to address those same language needs

for school children. And her master’s degree at the Department of Speech and Hearing Science will be almost entirely paid for.

A team of College of Applied Health Sciences professors obtained a five-year, \$1.1 million grant from the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education to educate 10 SLPs: each trained to serve children with high-intensity communication needs, each coming from

underrepresented ethnic, economic or linguistic backgrounds.

The first five-student cohort is now settled and learning on campus—the next five will be accepted in two years’ time, when the current students complete the program.

The project is titled Recruitment, Education, and Advancement of Clinical SchOLars in SLP, or REACH-SLP, a master’s-level program co-directed by AHS faculty Mary Flaherty, the principal investigator and an assistant professor in SHS; and Wes Wilson, the co-PI and an assistant professor in the Department of Health and Kinesiology. Amy Strohman, a certified SLP and clinical instructor in SHS, also served as project co-director last year.

The grant essentially pays the students through school, covering every SLP-in-training’s tuition, fees and health insurance, while providing a stipend each year they’re enrolled.

“Schools are our goal. We want to flood the schools with [qualified SLPs].”



The first five-student cohort of the REACH-SLP program. From left: Raina Harpalani, Emily Tran, Marjorie Campbell, DJ Ellis, Marco Barcenas-Consuelo. (Photo by Ethan Simmons)

In return, each student commits to serving children with communication disorders for at least four years after graduation, in a U.S. school, clinic or medical setting of their choosing.

“Schools are our goal. We want to flood the schools with these people,” Flaherty said.

Three of the five students in the first cohort are fluently bilingual, and all of them come from diverse ethnic and educational backgrounds. The program is designed to fill two “huge needs,” Wilson added: the shortage of SLPs in school settings—especially those trained for co-occurring communication disorders—and the shortage of bilingual SLPs in general.

Wilson pursued a similar collaboration while at the University of Utah, obtaining a grant to train students in both adapted physical education and speech-language pathology. Shortly after accepting his offer to join Illinois faculty, he reached out to Flaherty—before ever meeting in person—to hit the ground running on a similar project.

The REACH-SLP project addresses Flaherty’s soft spot for diversifying the speech and hearing science field.

“We all have our own little niches,” she said. “I think it’s amazing how all those different issues can come together, and how we can all fill different gaps that need to be filled in speech-language pathology, and provide support for these children who really do need these individualized services.”

Ph.D. Candidate Dives into Water Safety Program

By SAM RINK

BLACK PEOPLE HAVE THE SECOND-HIGHEST DROWNING RATES of any race or ethnic group in the United States, according to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control, and the rate of drowning increased 28 percent in 2021 from 2019. A large part of this troubling trend is that many Black children and families have limited or no access to swim lessons that could prevent these deaths. Latashia Key, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and a swim instructor for more than 35 years, knows this well, and she aims to change it.

Latashia recently received a grant from the Illinois Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance to fund her research. Her study, “Making Waves to Design an Aquatic Program for African American Girls: A Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Swim Lesson and Water Safety Program,” seeks to design, analyze and reproduce what she refers to as “culturally responsive” swim lessons targeted toward young Black girls. Latashia says targeted, inclusive lessons are crucial in not only decreasing disproportionate drowning numbers but can also improve confidence and self-esteem through learning an essential lifelong skill.

One contributing factor to low rates of Black swimmers “is the generational trauma,” Latashia said. From segregated pools to communities that often didn’t have access to pools, many Black families passed fear of the water, or a general sense that “Black people don’t swim” to their children. Young swimmers often don’t see Black swimmers, lifeguards or instructors in their communities, she said.

Latashia completed the third iteration of her study in the summer of 2024 in Indianapolis where the Olympic swim trials were held, which was a perfect backdrop for her program and an opportunity to expose more Black girls to the sport. The program involved collaboration with different local organizations to recruit participants and instructors in the communities where the program was being held. This iteration was conducted over five weeks with the girls meeting two times a week for 45 to 60 minutes, and included lessons in and out of the water.

Latashia said some iterations had more involvement from parents but the participation of the children and hearing their reaction to the study was heart-warming.

“I think the biggest takeaway is a culturally responsive program like this is very needed, but also very well received, especially by the parents,” she said.



RST doctoral student Latashia Key has been a swim instructor for more than three decades. (Photo provided)

RST Associate Professor Toni Liechty, Latashia’s mentor and adviser, said working closely with the communities in which different iterations were held was crucial in the development of this study. Liechty emphasized how important this study is due to the lack of similar research.

“I was really shocked at how few studies have actually been done on the topic, especially when we know that there’s this big drowning gap,” Liechty said.

The history of Black people and swimming is long, beginning at the trans-Atlantic slave trade and continuing through 19th-century Jim Crow laws and into the 20th century with segregation. Black people were historically kept out of leisure spaces—such as public pools or beaches—reserved for white people, and this lack of access has bled into current times. It was only in 1973 that the Supreme Court ruled that private swim clubs weren’t allowed to deny membership to residents based on race, and stereotypes and a culture of fear still pervade conversations around Black people and swimming.

She spoke about how her undergraduate education at Morgan State University, a historically black university, made her feel empowered as a woman of color.

When it comes to the future of her research, Latashia and Liechty hope to be able to develop a strategy for culturally responsive swim lessons that can be translated to any community that wants to implement it. Latashia said some communities she worked with on the research have already expressed interest. Also, she was moved by the emotional response of the children who participated and watched their fear and anxiety about swimming dissipate.

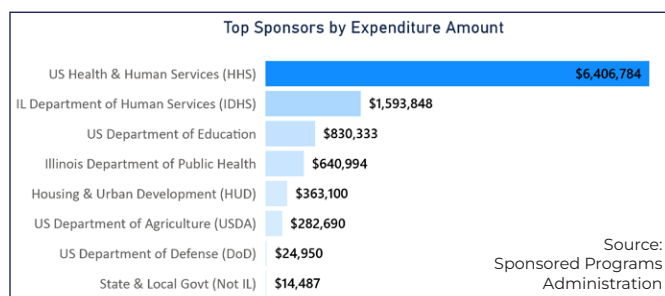
“The pool should be fun,” she said. “I think that’s the big thing.”

Granting Research Wishes

Editor's Note: As this edition goes to press in late January 2025, there is significant ambiguity regarding the future of federally funded research grants in higher education. As such, the college and university continue to monitor the status of our federally funded research projects.

By ANNA FLANAGAN

IN FISCAL YEAR 2024, the College of Applied Health Sciences spent more than \$11 million on research. It didn't shortchange student and outreach programs or facilities maintenance and enhancement to do so. Instead, the money that supports the college's scholarly activities comes predominantly in the form of research grants.



The lion's share of grant money—more than \$7 million in FY24—comes from federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. State agencies, such as the Illinois Department of Human Services, offer a variety of grants for research and accounted for \$2.5 million of FY24 funding. Research grants from state agencies are not to be confused with the annual budget the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign receives from the state of Illinois through the legislative process.

Private organizations and foundations, such as the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and Alzheimer's Association, also offer competitive research grants, awarding \$1 million to AHS scholars in FY24. Regardless of the source, research grants are typically competitive, with recipients being chosen from among scholars whose compelling project proposals are in line with the mission of the funding agency.

Friends and alumni of AHS may also support faculty research through financial donations, although there are significant differences between grant and donor funding (see sidebar, page 21).

THE COST OF DOING RESEARCH

"The Urbana-Champaign campus currently has more than 4,000 active awards, with nearly 2,000 investigators engaged in research, instruction or outreach activities that are supported by external grants," said Wendy Bartlo, associate director of research services, relations and strategic initiatives for the AHS Center on Health, Aging and Disability, also known as CHAD.

"AHS submits about 100 grant proposals annually, and about a third of them are successful," she said. "Almost all research in AHS has some sort of funding, either in the form of federal, state and private external grants or internal grants from the university or the college."

Jeff Woods, who is the director of CHAD and associate dean for research in AHS, says helping scholars to pursue critical research is not the only benefit of grant funding.

"Sponsored research enhances the reputation and visibility of the university, which also receives financial support from grants in the form of direct costs and overhead," he said. "Funded research projects often involve graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, who benefit not only from being paid for their work but also from getting valuable research experience." Ultimately, he said, the scientific community and society at large benefit from the dissemination of the results of the research.

Benefiting society at large is the driving force behind the research of Sharon Zou, assistant professor in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism. She recently was awarded almost \$650,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to investigate connections among consumers, small farmers and restaurant owners and chefs in the St. Louis metropolitan area, and to strengthen those connections to boost economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability. The project grew from her interest in the local food and farm-to-table movements that have become popular in many areas.

One of the biggest challenges in applying for grants, Zou believes, is finding opportunities where there is a good match between the mission and priorities of the funding agency and a scholar's research agenda. It is especially challenging for researchers in RST because of the lack of focus on these areas among funding agencies, especially those that provide large grants. Still, she enjoys putting in the time to write proposals because of the outside perspective she gains on her work.

"If the USDA funds your project, it's a strong indication that it has value," she said. "Getting feedback from funders about the perceived benefits of a project is really important to me because I believe that in the field of recreation, sport and tourism, your work needs to be impactful, to the field, to people's lives and to communities."

Zou's grant is from the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. She will use it to assess consumers' attitudes toward and awareness of

the local foods and farm-to-table movements through interviews and a national survey. She also will conduct a thorough investigation of the challenges and opportunities restaurant owners and chefs face in sourcing local foods and small farmers face in selling to restaurants. The end product will be a program based on a deep understanding of consumer behavior and attitudes that University of Missouri Extension specialists can use to help small farmers and restaurant owners sell and source local produce effectively.

The costs involved in such a research effort are substantial, Zou said.

“Data is neither easy nor cheap to collect,” she said. “The financial support makes possible a national consumer study of 1,500 people. I can pay research assistants who are able to conduct high-quality interviews, which need to be transcribed and proofread. University of Illinois Extension, my co-principal investigator at the University of Missouri and Missouri Extension, will help me set up focus groups of farmers, restaurant owners and chefs; and two Extension specialists, one from each university extension, will assist with development and administer the program that develops from this research. Part of the grant goes toward compensating them for their time.”

THE ROLE OF INTERNAL GRANTS

One of CHAD’s services is to provide AHS faculty, staff and students with critical help in drafting grant proposals. While researchers concentrate on the science of their proposals, CHAD staff focus on the “nuts and bolts,” Bartlo said, including the all-important budget for the proposed project. Even when a granting agency agrees to fund a project and provide the requested budget, there’s no guarantee that the researcher will receive the entire amount.

“A \$5 million, five-year grant doesn’t necessarily mean they get \$1 million a year,” Bartlo said. “It’s done on a reimbursement model. So money is spent, the college invoices the granting agency, and that agency disburses the funds. If the scholar only spends \$750,000 the first year, that’s how much the granting agency will reimburse that year.”

Woods adds that funding agencies also may decide after making an award to cut the budget.

“All the institutes of the National Institutes of Health have their own budgets, and they’re all competing for federal dollars for their area of interest, whether it be aging or heart disease or

cancer,” Woods said. “Budgets shift around and topics fall out of favor. Priorities change depending on the political environment and what’s going on in the world.”

While the multi-million dollar grants often awarded by federal agencies tend to grab the headlines, Woods said there really is no such thing as a small grant.

“The size of the grant is impacted by the scope of the work, not its quality or importance,” he said. “It’s difficult for junior faculty to compete for large grants right off the bat, and even senior scholars need to get a foot in the door when they are trying to launch new lines of research. Reviewers need to see preliminary data to convince them of the soundness of research proposals. Smaller grants are often stepping stones to larger grants.”

Because of that, CHAD has offered a pilot grant program to AHS scholars since its founding in 2009. Currently, scholars who successfully apply for CHAD pilot grants receive \$30,000 to collect data that enables them to refine and strengthen their hypotheses and methods. To date, every dollar CHAD awards for pilot grants has generated \$18 in external funding, an impressive return on investment.

When Brian Monson, associate professor of speech and hearing science, joined AHS from a faculty position at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, he brought questions from his research on how brain development in premature infants was affected by sound exposure in the neonatal intensive care unit.

“We didn’t have a good sense of the sound exposures pre-term infants received, nor a good understanding of the right dosage, if you will, of mother’s voice to play for the infant,” he said. “So I wanted to do a study that addressed those two gaps.”

Monson used the CHAD pilot grant to begin collecting data and perform preliminary analyses. He then used his results to develop hypotheses and strengthen the perceived feasibility of a study that he proposed to the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. He was awarded nearly a half-million dollars from the NIDCD.

One of the most challenging aspects of writing grant proposals, Monson believes, is limiting the scope of your project such that you can accomplish your goals within the time frame of the grant. Another is to formulate research questions that are not only interesting but also will have far-reaching benefits.

“Trying to convey complex ideas in a way that is understandable for those who have some expertise in your general research area but who may not have expertise in your

“I need to devote part of my brain to research, and part to business. I’m learning how I can be a good leader, giving concrete directions to research assistants in all three disciplines but always keeping the door open to questions.” —Health and Kinesiology Associate Professor Chung-Yi Chiu

specific research area is a difficult thing to do. It takes a lot of effort by a lot of people to put together something that you believe, and that you're able to convince others to believe, will have a significant impact for the scientific community and our society."

ACTING AS BOTH SCHOLAR AND ADMINISTRATOR

Equally challenging is incorporating research questions within a researcher's study that are outside their area of expertise. Scholars who welcome the opportunity to mount a multidisciplinary study can find the challenges well worth their time and effort. Take, for example, the experience of Chung-Yi Chiu, associate professor of health and kinesiology.

Chiu is the principal investigator on two studies of health care self-management for people with multiple sclerosis. One study was awarded nearly \$1.5 million from the National Institutes of Health; the other was awarded nearly \$600,000 from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research.

"We mostly take care of our own health," Chiu said. "However, clinicians don't typically know what we're doing on a daily basis."

People may want to be "good patients," she said, and comply with their physician's advice. With her expertise in rehabilitation psychology, Chiu knows that many factors can intervene between good intentions and actions. Fatigue, for example, can be a particularly vexing problem for people with MS. Chiu's goal is to develop a virtual assistant that acts as a trustworthy advisor with which users can communicate about their health. She envisions an app that imbues artificial intelligence with empathy and person-centered counseling skills to address users' health-related concerns through gentle suggestions of ways in which they can improve their health and well-being.

In order to realize her vision, Chiu reached out to ChengXiang Zhai, Donald Biggar Willett Professor in computer science, and Jessie Chin, professor of information sciences. They and their research assistants will bring much-needed expertise in AI and technology to the projects.

As the lead PI, Chiu is responsible for keeping the entire team working effectively toward the goal. She says she finds the journey ahead interesting, but humbling.

"I need to devote part of my brain to research, and part to business," she said. "I'm learning how I can be a good leader, giving concrete directions to research assistants in all three disciplines but always keeping the door open to questions. I have to make sure the various deliverables integrate. While I need to keep in the forefront of our thinking the vision we want to achieve, I also need to be open to new ideas in different disciplines."

One of her most important roles in the projects, she concluded, will be to "... listen, listen, listen, and think."



A ROLE FOR DONORS

While they may not provide the multimillion-dollar grants of a federal agency, donors play an important role in the research mission of the College of Applied Health Sciences. Unlike grants, which require scholars to comply with certain guidelines and to produce predetermined deliverables, donor support can be unrestricted.

It is possible to directly support research through contributions to the Center on Health, Aging and Disability. Jean Driscoll, assistant dean for advancement, says donor support is critical to CHAD's pilot grant program.

"Private dollars help to support investigations of new lines of research, when the topic might not be developed enough to pursue larger grants," she said. "This can be an important first step for our junior faculty, but it also allows senior faculty to pursue new lines of research."

However, donors can also support faculty research indirectly, by contributing toward graduate and undergraduate student scholarships. Faculty research could not be successful without the involvement of graduate and undergraduate research assistants. Donors help to support two important programs—Students Pursuing Applications, Research and Knowledge, or SPARK; and Student Aging Researchers in Training, or START—that nurture undergraduates' interest in research while enabling them to contribute to faculty research.

Finally, donations to the AHS Annual Fund provide flexible resources to meet pressing needs and maintain the excellence of the college's teaching, research and outreach missions. And, Driscoll said, there is no such thing as a small donation.

"Every gift matters," she said. "Always has, always will, every time, all the time."

PROMOTIONS AND



PROMOTIONS

In summer 2024, **SHANNON MEJÍA** (HK) and **IAN MERTES** (SHS) were both promoted from assistant professor to associate professor with tenure.

CLARION MENDES (SHS) was promoted from clinical assistant professor to clinical associate professor.

Congratulations to all!

NEW FACULTY

AHS brought on nine new tenure-track faculty in fall 2024

MARIANA MENDES BAHIA
Assistant Professor, SHS

Bahia's research focuses on aging changes in swallowing physiology and swallowing impairments (dysphagia) in adults with neurological disorders, such as in post-stroke individuals. Current projects investigate respiratory-swallow coordination, therapeutic strategies for swallowing rehabilitation using biofeedback modalities and cortical activity during swallowing using functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS).

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/bahia>

SAVANNA BRITTLEBANK
Assistant Professor, SHS

Brittlebank's research focuses on improving augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) interventions and system design for individuals with multiple disabilities. Her work aims to improve communication, language and literacy outcomes for these individuals. She also focuses on improving clinical education outcomes in the area of AAC.

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/brittlebank>

YUHEI INOUE
Professor, RST

Inoue's research focuses on the management of sport organizations, events and programs for positive social impacts, with a particular emphasis on health and well-being outcomes. Inoue earned his Ph.D. in Business Administration from Temple University, an M.A. in Sport and Exercise Management from The Ohio State University, and a B.A. in Sociology from the University of Tsukuba. Before beginning his academic career, he worked for NFL Japan—a subsidiary of the National Football League—and engaged in the promotion of the league and American football in Japan.

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/inoue>

JULIE SON
Associate Professor, RST

Son applies an array of theoretical and methodological approaches to investigate her focused line of research, including technology applications and implications. She has provided key research advancements on leisure facilitators to promote health across the lifespan with attention to policy initiatives and advocacy for diversity and inclusion. Son has an interdisciplinary educational background including a B.A. in Psychology from Whitman College (Summa Cum Laude); M.A. in Sociology with cognate in social psychology from University of Nevada, Reno; and Ph.D. in Recreation, Park and Tourism Management from Penn State with a minor in adult development and aging.

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/julie-son>

NEW FACULTY



CHARIS TUCKER

Assistant Professor, RST

Tucker's research interest broadly covers race and tourism, focusing on the historical and contemporary experiences of Black travelers. Her work on race intersections areas including, marketing, entrepreneurship and well-being. Using legitimacy theory, Tucker also investigates the development of social judgments of Black travelers within the aforementioned topics. Her work not only enriches academic discourse, but also offers actionable insights for creating equitable and culturally sensitive tourism practices.

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/tucker>

MIKE MULVANEY

Teaching Professor, RST

Mulvaney's teaching, research and outreach experiences have focused on human resource management functions in park and recreation agencies, management and organization of park and recreation agencies and planning processes in park and recreation agencies. He also has extensive experience in the development and testing of the effectiveness of various modes of instruction and their relationship to student learning of park and recreation concepts.

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/mulvaney>

GABRIELLE DILLON

Assistant Professor, HK

Dillon earned a B.S. in Health Sciences from Drake University and a Ph.D. in Kinesiology from Penn State. Dillon's research focuses on understanding the physiological mechanisms underlying cardiovascular disease. She has a particular interest in female health across the lifespan, including studying how menopause

impacts vascular health. The overall goal of her work is to identify and optimize targeted prevention and therapeutic strategies for cardiovascular disease, such as physical activity.

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/dillon>

MUDITA DAVE

Teaching Associate Professor, HK

Dave has more than 15 years of public health teaching experience. She has taught diverse public health courses at the graduate level, including but not limited to areas such as cultural competence in public health, global health, health behavior and holistic approaches to well-being. Dave received a doctorate in community health from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and master's degrees in communication studies and microbiology from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, India.

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/mudita-dave>

DON LOVASZ

Teaching Assistant Professor, HK

Lovasz's background includes hospital and clinic operations, national healthcare system administration, population management and healthcare consulting. He had the opportunity to work in rural and community hospitals, regional medical centers and national healthcare systems. He also led two national healthcare consulting firms. He received an undergraduate degree from the Olivet Nazarene University and a master's in business administration from University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

<https://ahs.illinois.edu/don-lovasz>

AHS Honors Three Distinguished Alumni

In 2024, the College of Applied Health Sciences chose three AHS graduates to receive our alumni awards. We proudly bestow these honors upon our exceptional alumni, whose accomplishments have left an indelible mark on their fields. These awards serve as a testament to the unwavering dedication and great contributions of our graduates, who have embraced the spirit of inquiry and the pursuit of fostering health and wellness.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

PETER HANCOCK, Ph.D. '83

Provost Distinguished Research Professor,
University of Central Florida

PETER HANCOCK is a provost distinguished research professor at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, where he directs the MIT2 Research Laboratories. He has held prior appointments at the University of Southern California and the University of Minnesota. His research spans human-machine interaction, response to high-stress conditions and trust in artificially intelligent systems.

Since 2012, he has been UCF's trustee chair, winning the UCF's College of Sciences Researcher of the Year in 2021. Named as the Lifetime Contribution to Modelling and Simulation medalist of the National Training and Simulation Association in 2019, he became a laureate of the Modelling and Simulation Hall of Fame. Recognized by the U.S. Army with its Civilian Service Achievement Medal, he currently sits on the Scientific Advisory Board of Aptima, Inc.

HAROLD SCHARPER AWARD

WILLIAM WALLER, B.S. '99, MHRIR '01

Senior Vice President, Human Resources,
Otis Elevator Co.

WILLIAM WALLER's life took a dramatic turn when he sustained a gunshot wound, resulting in a spinal cord injury and a future in a wheelchair. The news was devastating, plunging him into severe depression. However, Waller's disability journey and the sport of wheelchair basketball would reveal his potential and fuel a drive to pursue goals he once thought impossible.

Introduced to the sport of wheelchair basketball in 1994, two years after his injury, Waller's athletic career took off. After two stints in junior college in Chicago and Champaign, he was admitted to the University of Illinois in January 1996. While earning a bachelor's in psychology and a master's in human resources at Illinois, he led the Fighting Illini to two national championships as team captain. His athletic prowess earned him a place on two gold medal world championship teams (1998 and 2002) and the London 2012 and Sydney 2000 Paralympic teams, each resulting in a bronze medal.

Today, Waller is the senior vice president of human resources at Otis Elevator Co. in Cleveland.

YOUNG ALUMNI AWARD

AMY ZENGOTITA, M.S. '18

Parks and Recreation Director,
City of South Daytona

AMY ZENGOTITA serves as the parks and recreation director for the city of South Daytona and as the city's public information officer. Zengotita was born in Illinois, but was raised in Port Orange, Florida. She graduated from Flagler College in Saint Augustine, Florida, with a B.A. in History in 2009 and graduated from the University of Illinois with an M.S. in Recreation, Sport and Tourism in 2018.

That year, Zengotita was chosen as the outstanding online masters student for the University of Illinois, Recreation, Sport, and Tourism Division. During her career in South Daytona, Zengotita has managed several park renovation projects, along with overseeing youth athletics, community events and facility maintenance. Zengotita also oversaw the city's community information, which includes serving as the PIO for the city as a whole, as well as the police and fire departments.

Zengotita is currently a member of the Florida Recreation and Park Association Foundation Board of Trustees.

Left to right: Amy Zengotita, William Waller, Peter Hancock.
(Photo by Jerry Thompson)



Save the date

It'll be autumn again before you know it! We hope you can join us for Homecoming festivities this year—it's a perfect opportunity to chat with fellow alumni, current faculty and staff and maybe a few students, too. We're excited, as always, to celebrate with you, so mark your calendars—we'll be in touch with more information this summer.

HOMECOMING WEEKEND 2025

FRIDAY, SEPT. 26: AHS Alumni Awards Ceremony

**SATURDAY, SEPT. 27: AHS Tailgate and
Homecoming football game vs. USC**



HOW ARE YOU CHANGING YOUR WORLD?

We know that AHS alumni are out there making a difference in people's lives every day. We welcome updates from you and always appreciate hearing about what you're working on, whether it's on a local, national or international stage. Scan the QR code to get in touch!



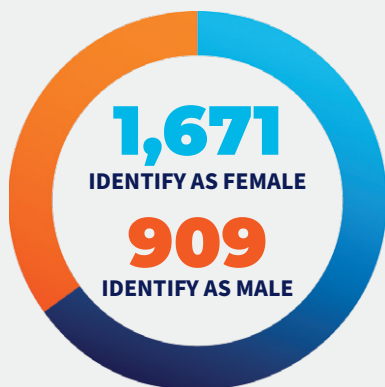
College of Applied Health Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

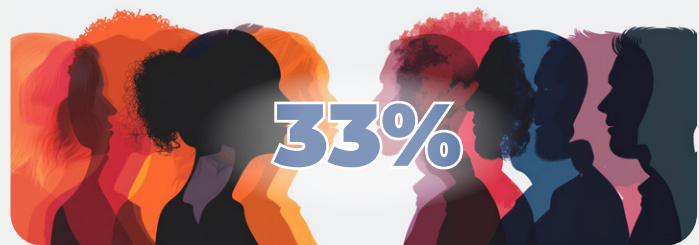
110 Huff Hall, 1206 South Fourth Street, Champaign, IL 61820
ahs.illinois.edu | 217-333-2131

AHS BY THE NUMBERS

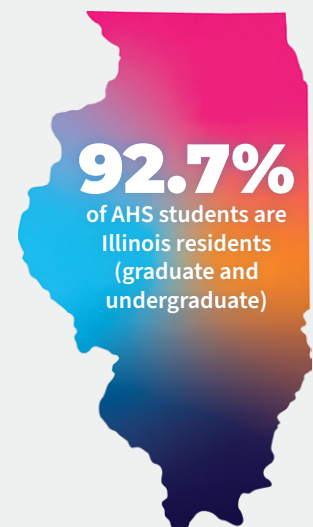
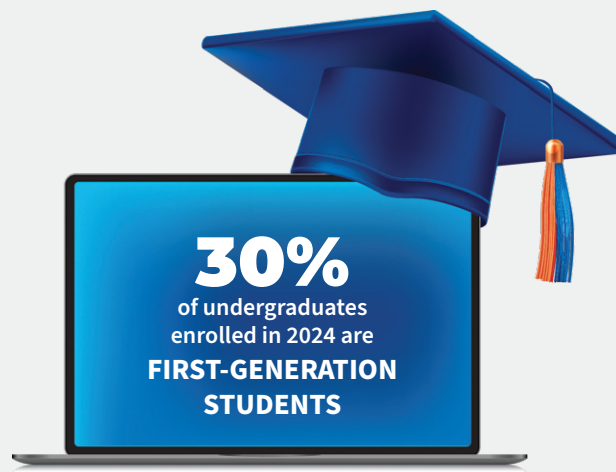
Source: Division of Management Information,
Education Data Warehouse, Fall 2024



(of those who reported a gender identity)



of AHS students are from underrepresented groups,
both graduate and undergraduate students



Making moves? Tell us about it!

We know you're out there making the world a better place. Keep the AHS connection strong by sharing your latest accomplishments, a new role or updated contact info. Scan the code to get in touch; we'd love to catch up and loop you into what's happening on campus.