



Graduation with Leadership Distinction

Abstract Booklet

FALL SHOWCASE 2024

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**Center for Integrative
and Experiential Learning**

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



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WHAT IS CIEL?

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

GLD PATHWAYS

Graduation with Leadership Distinction is an official academic distinction that students can earn that acknowledges their **within- and beyond-the-classroom learning**. It is recognized on students' official transcripts and diplomas. Graduates also receive honor cords. Students can earn GLD in one of the five topical areas, called pathways, listed below. Presenting one of their experiences is a requirement of GLD.



LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of earning GLD, students will:

- 1.** Provide examples of beyond the classroom experiences in which they have engaged and describe how one or more beyond the classroom experience has contributed to their learning.
- 2.** Articulate examples of beyond the classroom experiences that illuminate concepts, theories, or frameworks presented in their coursework including a clear description of elements of the beyond the classroom experience that are consistent with or contradictory to the identified concept.
- 3.** Thoughtfully connect examples, facts, and/or theories from more than one experience, field of study, and/or perspective such as describing the similarities and differences across experiences, fields of study, or perspectives.
- 4.** Pose solutions to problems (i.e., make recommendations) that incorporate learning from both beyond the classroom and within the classroom experiences, and articulate how their decisions are supported by what they have learned through their experiences and content.

Community Service





Community
Service

LUIS DARIO DIAZ

Breaking barriers: how personal stories inspire resilience



During my time on a Catholic retreat, I presented my testimony in front of over 100 students. I was asked to share my testimony and felt that my story could help change a life or at the very least motivate people to continue to push through whatever adversity came their way. I have seen how powerful testimonies can be on the lives of listeners and without hesitation, I knew this was something I wanted to do. I was introduced on stage to speak in front of all of the students and faculty on the retreat. What I was able to find was that many people could relate with a lot of what I had to say and many found inspiration through my story. Having the opportunity to share a testimony in front of such a large group of people was truly a blessing and the interactions I had with people afterwards telling me they had similar experiences and me sharing made them feel seen just made my experience that much more rewarding. I would want others to not feel scared about sharing personal experiences and it does not even have to be in the capacity of a testimony but even when people come to you for advice for things. Putting yourself in peoples shoes can help them trust you and give them motivation. This reminds me what a leader should be. Someone who is not afraid to step out of their comfort zone for the hope of changing another person's life. This is just one of the many experiences I have gone through in life that remind me how blessed and fortunate I am in this world and the potential I have to leave an impact in my community no matter how small or big it may be.



Community
Service

MADISON TIAGO

Giving back on a global scale

During my junior year of college I decided to embark on a new journey to explore a part of the world that was unbeknown to me. I joined a global community health trip as a medical volunteer to Panajachel and Antigua Guatemala to enhance my cultural competency and apply concepts of public health that I have learned through my undergraduate degree. As a public health major there are many opportunities to give back globally, and since global health and education is a passion of mine I immediately knew this was something I had to do. Through this experience I was able to provide free medical care with a team of doctors and translators to diagnose illnesses and treat them, as well as provide medication at no cost. I wanted to gain a different perspective than my normal everyday, a viewpoint that I might never be able to understand if I had not gone on this mission trip. I learned about Guatemala's health systems, infrastructure, sanitation, and overall environment and how this could all contribute to the positive or negative aspects of their health. Life in Guatemala is drastically different when compared to how we live in America. Giving back to a community who is less fortunate in their daily needs is a privilege, and it is a right as humans to have access and the chance to achieve a healthier lifestyle. Now that I have been able to visit Guatemala, I understand how to work with predominantly Spanish speakers, how their culture is compared to mine and how to embrace such an inclusive environment. Embracing a new culture, lifestyle and routine in a third-world country is something that I will forever cherish, as it has impacted my life and driven me towards taking my education and applying it around the world. With my background in public health, and my future career in speech language pathology with a focus on developmental disorders and bilingual learners, I can travel worldwide to help a greater population who might not have as great of access to medical services as we do in America.

Diversity and Social Advocacy





Diversity and
Social Advocacy

BRENNA CALANDRA

Cultural competency, communication and adapt- ability: the implications of studying abroad on my future career

During my Spring Break abroad in 2023 and semester abroad in 2024, I was given the opportunity to experience a myriad of languages, cultures, and perspectives. With my desired career as a clinical psychologist, studying abroad was crucial for me to gain unique skills and perspectives for my future career. Two of my biggest takeaways were cultural competency and communication. Exposure to different cultures allow clinical psychologists to better understand diverse perspectives, which is essential for effectively treating and communicating with clients from various backgrounds. This firsthand experience helps one be more sensitive to cultural nuances, avoid assumptions that may lead to misunderstandings in treatment, and navigate language barriers that leave room for misinterpretation. Studying abroad allowed me to communicate more effectively (relying on more than just verbal speaking to communicate) and empathetically, which is crucial for building strong client-therapist relationships. Furthermore, encountering new ways of thinking and different mental health practices inspires an open-minded approach. Exposure to global theories, standards, and alternative methods augmented my toolbox, allowing me to incorporate varied techniques into my future work. Living in a foreign place requires adaptability, problem-solving, patience, and resilience—qualities that are applicable in clinical work with unpredictable client behaviors and the individuality of each client's treatment. Finally, with the majority of the places I studied being Spanish-speaking countries, my Spanish significantly improved. Bilingual or multilingual psychologists are in heavy demand as they can work with a broader range of clients and provide more accessible, effective care for non-native speakers. Unfortunately, a large portion of the underrepresented communities in America that continuously struggle to find mental health resources are Spanish-speaking, therefore an entire population is being marginalized due to a lack of bilingual professionals. My presentation will discuss my experiences abroad and the implications of these on my future career.



Global Learning





Global
Learning

SYDNEY BURKE

Transforming passions: how education abroad expanded my view on global learning



Continuous learning has proven to be a passion of mine through academics and my personal life, however, my experiences at the University of South Carolina have taught me the importance of global learning as well. In summer 2023 I went abroad to enhance my academic and personal goals of speaking Spanish. Through conversation I found a program that allowed students to live in a homestay in Cádiz, Spain. Academically, this program challenged me to improve my Spanish language skills by taking classes at the University of Cádiz and communicating at home only in Spanish. It tested my regional vocabulary and helped me improve grammatical skills as I learned how the language is spoken outside the classroom. Personally this challenged me to have an open mind, trust my instincts, and learn how to thrive in a stressful environment. Through meeting my class group for the first time in Spain, peacefully living with many people in small quarters, and navigating a small historic city in my second language, confidence in myself increased daily. This experience helped me learn more about the language and culture and grew my want to continue traveling and discovering new places. The program pushed my love for being in the country and created more excitement around going to Madrid for a full semester the following year. Going to many cities in a small time period showed me how much learning is possible by traveling. We saw historic sites such as the Alhambra, the Rock of Gibraltar, and the Royal Alcázar of Sevilla. Having this experience influenced me to book many weekend trips and day trips to cities and countries during my full semester in Madrid. As this summer term finished my academic minor credits for Spanish, it pushed me to want to keep learning outside the classroom. Since then, I've worked to find organizations and opportunities to continue to practice and learn more Spanish. Through my time in Cádiz, I was able to see how my work inside the classroom helped me thrive outside of it, and this is an experience that heavily impacted my college experience.

Photo courtesy of Sydney Burke



Global
Learning

ANGELINA DONATELLI

Ma Vie En France

Throughout my academic journey, I have sought to enrich my studies in marketing with a deep understanding of language and culture, specifically through my passion for French. This journey began in the classroom and expanded through immersive experiences, allowing me to cultivate both linguistic and interpersonal skills. A pivotal part of this journey was completing Advanced Oral Communication (FREN310), a course designed to prepare students for real-world French conversations. This course emphasized current events and practical dialogue, equipping me with the tools to engage confidently with native speakers. Activities such as Talk-Abroad sessions, where I interacted with French speakers in complex discussions, challenged me to move beyond classroom learning, significantly improving my spoken French and adaptability in unscripted conversations.

This foundation was crucial during my study abroad experience in Nice, France, where I volunteered at Le Valdocco, a program dedicated to supporting underprivileged children. As the only non-native French speaker in the program, I was fully immersed in an environment that required quick adaptation and daily communication in French. Interacting with my peers and the children entirely in French pushed me to further develop my language skills in a real-world context, fostering resilience and a deeper understanding of cultural nuances. This experience highlighted the power of experiential learning and cultural exchange, reinforcing my belief in the importance of language fluency for personal and professional growth.

These experiences have not only expanded my linguistic abilities but also strengthened my cultural awareness and empathy, qualities that I believe are essential in today's interconnected world. As I move forward in my career, I am committed to leveraging these skills to foster meaningful connections across diverse communities, using language as a bridge for deeper understanding and collaboration.



Global
Learning

ROBERT LASKARZEWSKI

Immersion: engagement, experience, and efficacy

In 2023, I spent the year studying abroad at the ESSEC Business School in Cergy, France. My primary goal during this time was to solidify my understanding of French by proving my linguistic abilities in a practical setting. One of my most rewarding experiences during this time was my month-long immersion with Le Rocher, a volunteer organization in Toulon, France. This program was referred to as a “Field Experience” and is an integral piece in the ESSEC curriculum. As an international business major, I was excited to learn how to communicate across linguistic and cultural barriers in an environment that I was unfamiliar with. During this time, I lived in public housing with other volunteers and members of the community. Le Rocher focuses primarily on community outreach and as a supplemental educational resource. This meant that one day I could be organizing and supervising a field trip for a dozen students, and another day I was teaching English. This experience was incredibly rewarding and served to build my confidence as a leader, as a speaker of a foreign language, and understanding the needs of others.





Global
Learning



MADELEINE O'CONNOR

The importance of developing a global mindset

During the Spring of 2024, I studied abroad in Oslo, Norway, from January to May as part of my International Business undergraduate degree. The International Business program requires students to study abroad in their junior year, and although Oslo was my twelfth choice, I embraced the opportunity to explore a new country and culture. Being placed in a city with a small American population and students who primarily spoke English as a second language, I quickly realized the importance of applying the global mindset perspective I had learned in class.

My experience in Oslo challenged me to step outside my comfort zone and engage with language and cultural differences on a daily basis. For example, navigating grocery stores, transportation systems, and academic settings with people whose first language wasn't English required patience and adaptability. One particular challenge I faced was understanding local customs and social norms. To overcome this, I made a conscious effort to ask questions, learn from locals, and adapt my communication style, which helped me grow both personally and professionally.

Through this experience, I gained a deeper appreciation for the value of a global mindset. I learned that to thrive in diverse environments, it is essential to be open, adaptable, and genuinely interested in understanding others' perspectives. The cultural and communication differences I encountered in Oslo taught me to approach unfamiliar situations with curiosity rather than judgment, a lesson that is invaluable in today's interconnected world.

Since returning, I've become more empathetic and proactive in supporting international students in the MIB program. Understanding the challenges of adapting to a new culture and navigating language barriers firsthand, I now actively offer advice, share resources, and provide a welcoming environment for international peers. My experience abroad not only broadened my worldview but also deepened my commitment to fostering a more inclusive and supportive community for students navigating similar challenges.

Photo courtesy of Madeleine O'Connor



Global
Learning

SKYLAR PARK

Bridging cultures: teaching English in Spain

During the Spring semester, I studied abroad in Spain at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. As a political science major, I wanted to learn about other countries' political systems from a firsthand perspective. While there, I had the opportunity to teach English to elementary school students. I visited a school once a week as a guest speaker, assisting students with their assignments. Most days, I took them in small groups outside the classroom to engage in simple conversations about their interests. These activities gave me a better sense of what it's like to grow up in Spain. My time in the classroom reinforced the idea that, despite language barriers, we are not so different from each other. While certain cultural differences exist, I found that the students and I shared many similar life experiences and interests. My coursework at USC taught me about the United States' influence globally, and the children's extensive knowledge of American history and culture reinforced this. The experience also opened my eyes to the diversity present in other parts of the world compared to the United States. The students I taught were children of Middle Eastern immigrants who had moved to Spain seeking stability. Since their parents hadn't learned Spanish, they used English to communicate with their children. My initial surprise at the students' fluency was clarified by the fact that English served as their primary language at home. The multilingualism these children displayed not only impressed me but also reframed my ideas about cultural integration. Despite the United States' significant global influence, this made me realize how we can sometimes become insular within our own culture, especially when American norms can carry us through any interaction. The opportunities I had while studying abroad have been the most significant experiences of my college career, increasing my desire to learn more about other cultures. I learned that embracing new perspectives fosters a more holistic worldview.



Photo courtesy of Skylar Park



Global
Learning



ERIKA POLYI

The global mindset: a journey from classroom to culture

How can we keep up in a world that is in a rapid state of globalization? This is a question I have been navigating during my international business education at the University of South Carolina. After reading endless articles about global issues for my courses and traveling to 12 countries during my time abroad in Europe, it was made clear to me that no matter how many articles we read and no matter how many countries are visited, there will always be more to learn about the world. Although this can seem daunting, I took it as exciting... this realization deepened my commitment to studying international business and understanding diverse cultures. My study abroad experiences in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium and Tours, France were transformative. They led me to many opportunities that I would not have had in the United States. Engaging with international entrepreneurship events and speaking with entrepreneurs allowed me to explore different business practices and perspectives. With each interaction, I was challenged to relate these concepts back to the U.S., which further enhance my critical thinking skills. These experiences have fostered a more open-minded approach to learning. I've learned the importance of going into everything without a fixed mindset, recognizing that flexibility in perspective can lead to richer understanding and innovative solutions. Embracing diverse viewpoints is essential in today's interconnected world. As I move forward in my career, I aim to have lifelong learning through staying informed about global trends and engaging with the diverse networks I have created. I believe that having a global mindset and through leveraging the knowledge I gain, I can begin to navigate the complexities of international business. My journey has instilled in me an appreciation for cultural differences and adaptability and I am excited to continue this journey, embracing every opportunity to learn and grow.

Professional & Civic Engagement





Professional & Civic
Engagement

MALACHI ALEXANDER

Building community through intersectional solidarity: the community leaders conversation

In Fall 2023, my experience in AFAM 218: Convergence and Divergence in African American and Jewish Communities transformed my approach to intersectional solidarity and inspired the creation of the Community Leaders Conversation, held on March 22, 2024, at Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church in Lugoff, SC. This initiative brought together leaders from government, education, faith communities, and activism across Kershaw County to collaboratively address challenges impacting local youth, including systemic racism and inequality. Using insights gained from the course, I fostered unity among diverse stakeholders, emphasizing the power of collective action in pursuing lasting change. A key outcome of the event was the commitment by community organizations to expand mentorship and outreach for students—an initiative aimed to advance youth across the county.

This project highlighted my leadership in community organizing, specifically in creating a space where voices from varied backgrounds could join forces to confront complex social issues. The experience has been instrumental in shaping my understanding of inclusive leadership and collaborative problem-solving skills; and with this I am eager to carry forward these skills into Divinity School and a future in pastoral ministry. As I prepare for this path, these insights reinforce my dedication to guiding congregations in advocacy for justice and unity, demonstrating that ethical, inclusive ministry can be a powerful force for addressing systemic challenges and uplifting communities.





Professional & Civic
Engagement

KENNEDY ALLEN

Facing medical ethics

Over the summer, I shadowed physicians at Cooks Children's Hospital in the pediatric emergency department. Being on the pre-med track and looking to gain more clinical experience, the emergency department was certainly the place to be exposed to various difficult medical situations. The doctors and nurses were such willing teachers and gave me the opportunity to learn through the most interesting cases. I was able to put my classroom knowledge to the test and see what the words I see on paper look like in person. This was the first time patients I interacted with were children. I saw how doctors spoke to them in terms they could understand, how they got both the child's and the caretakers' version of the incident, the distraction methods they used to keep the child from crying, and the differences between treating adults. Near the end of one shift, I was met with a troubling case of an injured infant believed to be related to abuse. It was hard to separate my emotions from the job and even harder to continue my day like everything was fine once I stepped out of the hospital. While my medical ethics class lectured about incidences of abuse and regulations working with minors, physically being a part of the proceedings was something that could not be taught in a classroom. After witnessing such a heartbreaking case, I left the emergency department with more than a story to tell but a changed mindset about the reality of working in healthcare. Not only does a doctor impact a child's life, but the children impact the lives of the doctor. The troubling cases, the confusing cases, and the rewarding cases all push healthcare workers to do their best and serve as motivation to continue. I learned that healthcare is not black and white. It requires a team to figure out a plan of action and follow protocols that are set in place for a reason. Through this experience, my passion for medicine grew and gave me further inspiration to begin down the extensive path to one day become a doctor.



Professional & Civic
Engagement

TRINITY BARATA

Student leadership

During my time at the University of South Carolina, I have grown immensely as a student, individual, and leader. While I have always naturally gravitated toward being a leader in my communities, my experiences over the past three and a half years have greatly expanded my skill set. Most notable was my time spent as a sibling in Phi Alpha Delta, the first Pre-Law fraternity at the University of South Carolina and the largest globally. I was initiated in the fall of my freshman year and knew immediately I wanted to join the Executive Board. I followed my ambitions, and in my Junior Year, I was elected as the Vice President of the USC Chapter. Later in that same year, I would become the President. As a leader in the fraternity, I quickly learned how to best manage my time to keep up with my studies while keeping order throughout the chapter. Holding a great deal of responsibility, I was able to rise to the occasion and ensure every sibling was getting the most out of the brotherhood. Planning included regular chapter operations, professional development, and brotherhood events.

Additionally, in October of 2023, I was part of the fraternity's annual Pre-Law Conference in Washington, DC. We traveled as a smaller group of nine, and at the time I was Vice President. Working closely with the rest of the executive board, we were able to plan travel, lodging, and the trip's itinerary. Once we arrived in DC, we had 4-days that were packed with conferences, law fairs, and mini-classes. While I learned a lot from what Phi Alpha Delta offered, I learned more about myself as a leader. Being responsible for the safety and success of my siblings in the Nation's Capital required a lot of patience, forethought, planning, and communication. Being a leader isn't about being in charge, it's the opposite. It's crossing the street behind everyone else, finding compromises that make your group happy, and being a friend, but also an authority.





Professional & Civic
Engagement

JULIE CROUSE

Continuous improvement as a mindset in college and beyond

Continuous improvement is a principle taught to many supply chain and engineering students across the country as a way to improve processes. In courses we learn that the main goal of continuous improvement is for it to become a mindset and be ingrained in a person or culture of a company. Through my experiences this is not only applicable in the workplace but also to personal growth and other areas of life. Throughout my college career I have developed a continuous improvement mindset and used it to always keep moving and improving. I have utilized it in leadership positions in Women in Business where I introduced a social networking event to increase organizational engagement and personal connections, in work experiences for companies that have made continuous improvement a core part of their cultural DNA, in my personal organization and study skills that have helped me develop methods for self improvement, and in a capstone project that delivered actual results to a company. Through these experiences I have learned that nothing is ever truly a finished product and there is always something to reflect on and improve. In my pathway of Professional and Civic engagement, continuous improvement supports positive change in work environments. This concept and these experiences have been essential to my growth throughout my 4 years and have collectively shaped who I am today.





Professional & Civic
Engagement

CAROLINE ELLIOTT

Exploring new opportunities by welcoming challenges

During the summer of 2024, I worked at Trane Technologies as an Energy Engineering intern where I had the opportunity to explore my interests and broaden my skills. When I first spoke to employees from Trane Technologies at a career fair, I was interested in their sales engineering roles, specifically as an Energy Engineer. At my previous internship, I focused on software engineering and wanted to explore my interests in sales and data analytics. As a Computer Information Systems student at the University of South Carolina, many of my skills were beneficial in my position, even though most Energy Engineering interns were mechanical or electrical engineering majors. Although my major was not as closely aligned as others, it gave me the unique challenge to use my technical training to develop other skills engineers should have. This opportunity would not have been possible if I had stayed in the traditional software engineering positions I had worked in previously. As an Energy Engineer, I contributed to the company's Gigaton Challenge, a commitment to lower carbon emissions in HVAC systems by one billion metric tons of carbon by 2030. I helped design calculation tools for environmental and financial data, worked on construction projects worth millions of dollars, and identified opportunities to lessen our customer's damaging effects on the environment. My experience taught me more about what potential career paths I want to pursue. I enjoyed working in sales because of the personable environment and ability to form relationships with customers. I also enjoyed working with the carbon emission and financial data when we designed calculation tools. These learning experiences would not have been possible if I had not welcomed the challenge of this position and ventured out of my comfort zone. While my major did not directly align with the position, I was able to grow and develop the skills necessary to be successful. I realized that I learned a lot more from exploring these interests than simply sticking to the status quo.





Professional & Civic
Engagement

JENNA FALCONITE

Effective communication: the key to fostering student success

Upon starting my sophomore year at the University of South Carolina, I set a goal to become more involved on campus. My freshman year had been a major transition period, but I finally felt adjusted to college life and ready to make an impact on my campus community. I was given the opportunity to serve in a role that would allow me to do just that. Working as a Peer Consultant at the Student Success Center has been a transformative experience in my college career. In this position, I hold academic success consultations to guide students who are struggling and need additional support. In these sessions, I introduce them to important study skills, time-management techniques, campus resources, and help them plan their schedules. While the focus of this position was to foster student success, I didn't anticipate just how much this role would allow me to grow. As a Communications major, my courses have focused on effective communication within organizations and in leadership positions. In my Mass Communications Capstone course last spring, I learned the tools necessary to become an effective leader and communicate within professional settings. I have used these skills in my position to develop lasting relationships with students, faculty, and my fellow peer leaders. Together, we have cultivated a positive and supportive environment which allowed me to grow in confidence. In addition to working individually with students, I also worked the front desk at several of our satellite offices. This shift challenged my organization and planning skills, as I performed secretarial tasks, such as scheduling student appointments. I also made calls to students throughout each semester to check in and offer them support. Furthermore, this role challenged me to improve my own time-management and find balance between all of my responsibilities. Serving as a leader on campus has allowed me to make an impact on the lives of many students and has been an incredibly fulfilling experience. The skills and experience that I have gained will translate to my career after college as I apply to law school.



Professional & Civic
Engagement

CHASE FREEMAN

Ethical duties in trauma response: lessons from a shark attack

During my college summers, I worked as a lifeguard with Hilton Head's Beach Patrol, where I dedicated my days to safeguarding beachgoers both in and out of the water. This role allowed me to interact with a diverse range of individuals and cases daily, sharpening my skills as a pre-medical student through direct, hands-on experience. Maintaining the physical fitness necessary for the job—from running to swimming and lifting equipment—also allowed myself to stay healthy and in shape. Late in the summer season, my medical and emergency response skills were put to the test in a way I hadn't encountered before. A shark near the shore grazed a man's foot, resulting in significant blood loss. As a first responder, I worked with my team under high pressure to control the bleeding and perform a quick assessment that we relayed to EMS. Within minutes, we applied a tourniquet, stabilizing the patient as much as possible until further help arrived. This intense moment made me realize just how critical each step in emergency care can be in shaping patient outcomes. As the day progressed, I remained mindful of the ethical considerations at play—communicating the urgency of the situation without revealing unnecessary details about the patient. This experience strengthened my appreciation for the role of medical ethics in high-stress situations, underscoring the values of confidentiality, respect, and clear communication in patient care. Reflecting on this day, I recognized the impact I had on the patient's health outcome and gained valuable insight into my own response under high-stress conditions. This experience strengthened my interest in pursuing medicine and solidified the ethical foundation I aim to carry forward into my career. These summers on the beaches of Hilton Head have not only prepared me for future challenges but also ignited a deep passion for patient-centered, ethical healthcare.





Professional & Civic
Engagement

TAHIRAH GERALD

From student to mentor: insights from tutoring

During my time at the University of South Carolina, my role at the Student Success Center in the Thomas Cooper Library, through the GLD pathway of professional and civic engagement, profoundly shaped my future. I began as a Peer Tutor during my sophomore year, initially unaware of the personal growth and valuable lessons that awaited me. Over time, I developed a deeper understanding of interpersonal communication and learned to adapt my teaching methods to suit the diverse learning styles of my peers. These daily interactions with students and fellow tutors allowed me to refine essential skills for professional and civic engagement. In addition to tutoring, I naturally took on the role of mentor, not only providing academic support but also setting an example for others. A key takeaway from this experience was the importance of adaptability and maintaining a positive mindset, which helped me effectively navigate challenges. These lessons had a lasting impact on my personal development and career aspirations. Within a year, I pursued a leadership role as a Program Assistant Mentor, which came with increased responsibilities and more opportunities for growth. This position allowed me to further develop critical skills such as teamwork, organization, and creativity, all of which have been crucial in my professional and civic journey. As I approach the end of my time at the Student Success Center, I recognize the profound impact this experience has had on my future. It has equipped me with invaluable tools that will undoubtedly guide me in my career and enable me to make a meaningful impact in my community.





TIARA GLOVER

From hoop dreams to network streams: my journey into IT at the University of South Carolina

In Spring 2022, I made a pivotal decision to transfer to the University of South Carolina (USC), a step that carried both excitement and uncertainty. I had always dreamed of being part of USC, initially inspired by the prospect of playing basketball under Coach Dawn Staley. However, as my career interests evolved, I found a new calling in technology. USC still felt like home, a feeling solidified by the campus's community spirit and support. Excited to dive into Information Technology (IT), I declared a major in Integrated Information Technology and began my journey.

Fueled by curiosity and determination to find my ideal path within the vast field of IT, I applied for a role in USC's networking department, despite having no prior experience. Fortunately, my determination and curiosity paid off, and I was hired as an IT Technician under the guidance of Ms. May Lindler, a highly respected ex-military professional. In this role, I became responsible for troubleshooting and resolving network, telephony, and wiring issues across campus. My hands-on experience in the USC networking department not only affirmed my place at USC but also unlocked countless opportunities.

This experience taught me more than technical skills; it reshaped my understanding of teamwork, leadership, and adaptability in IT. Working under Ms. Lindler's guidance showed me that effective leaders don't just delegate—they work alongside their team and support each member's growth. I learned the importance of being adaptable and detail-oriented, essential skills in maintaining reliable campus connectivity.

Beyond professional skills, I found the value of sustained effort. Day after day, I showed up to troubleshoot and configure network setups, realizing that real success in IT comes from dedication and patience, not quick fixes. This project made me see how meaningful impact is built over time through consistent work.

I hope others understand that stepping into a new field, even without prior experience, is an opportunity to grow and discover new strengths. Embracing challenges in unfamiliar areas opens doors to unique insights and lasting career impact.



Professional & Civic
Engagement

TRISTAN JOHNSON

Spring 2024 WGST community service internship with the League of Women Voters of the Columbia Area VOTE411 Committee

In order to graduate as a Women's and Gender Studies major, students are required to enroll in WGST 499, a class that facilitates a community service internship. For my internship, I had the pleasure of working with the League of Women Voters of the Columbia Area's VOTE411 Committee. During this period, my supervisors assigned me a number of tasks that helped to grow my pathway skills of Professional and Civic Engagement. Among others, they arranged for me to visit the Hollings Special Collections Library within the Thomas Cooper Library in order to explore the state and local League archives. I took committee meeting minutes, made calls to candidates, and worked on graphic design for publicity materials. The biggest project I worked on during my internship was a Directory of Municipalities and School Boards for Richland and Lexington Counties. This task required research over several months, copious time spent on formatting, and many calls and emails made to verify information. Some of the most important takeaways from all of this were learning how grassroots organizations operate, growing professional skills, witnessing the power of a volunteer-based organization, and also seeing an additional emphasis placed on the importance of local government. During this experience, I learned that sometimes it can be difficult to achieve the level of participation in a volunteer-based organization that would make it run at full capacity. The solution to this is the perseverance and diligence of the hardworking individuals within the organization. It was incredibly powerful to witness just how much could be accomplished by a small group of individuals to really make substantive change in helping to inform voters. Truly it felt like we were making a difference, and it has led me to encourage anyone that wants to be a part of something important to become a part of a local volunteer-based organization. I was able to leave this internship feeling truly satisfied and proud of the work that I and my fellow League members had been able to accomplish in such a short amount of time.



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ZOE MCDONALD

Volunteering with Camp Rise Above

During the summers of 2022 and 2024, I served as a volunteer camp counselor with Camp Rise Above, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing transformative camp experiences for children and young adults with serious illnesses, life challenges, and disabilities. As a counselor, I worked directly with campers diagnosed with Autism, Down Syndrome, Sickle Cell anemia, and various neurological disorders, gaining hands-on experience in adaptive communication and specialized care techniques.

This immersive experience significantly enriched my understanding of Behavioral and Mental Disorders (PSYC 410) by allowing me to apply theoretical concepts from my Psychology major and Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior minor at the University of South Carolina to real-world scenarios. Over the course of two weeks, I supported approximately 50 campers, developing individualized strategies to enhance their camp experience and foster their independence.

My role at Camp Rise Above encompassed:

- Implementing adaptive activities for campers with diverse needs
- Collaborating with medical professionals to ensure camper safety and well-being
- Facilitating social interactions and building self-confidence among campers
- Providing emotional support to campers and their families

Participating in this experience not only reaffirmed my decision to pursue a career working with children with neurodevelopmental and physical disabilities but also honed my skills in patient care, empathy, and adaptability. These competencies are crucial for my aspirations to become a Physician Assistant, specializing in pediatric care for children with special needs. Through this experience I plan to apply to Physician Assistant Programs in May 2025, and volunteer again with Camp Rise Above. This continued involvement will further strengthen my application by demonstrating long-term commitment to serving diverse patient populations and expanding my practical experience in healthcare settings.

Photo courtesy of Zoe McDonald





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ELISABETH MILLER

University 101 peer leadership

Over the past two years, I have served the USC Community as a University 101 Peer Leader. The University 101 program has been a part of USC's curriculum since the 1990s and is one of the reasons USC continuously ranks #1 in the best first-year experience. I grew up in Montessori education, and I'm a believer in the Montessori method. Maria Montessori states in her book *From Childhood to Adolescence*, "A university student must first of all know how to achieve his own independence and moral equilibrium" (Montessori, pg. 92) The University U101 program works directly to help students achieve independence, responsibility, and moral equilibrium through its course work.

The role of U101 Peer Leader has been the most enriching aspect of my college career. My greatest strengths in this position have been my creativity, compassion, and teamwork abilities. My creativity helped me to create fun and engaging activities that catered to the needs of my students. My co-instructor, Michelle Foster, and I regularly survey our class to assess their stress levels and concerns surrounding college. We shape our class around best serving their needs and creating an environment that allows them to be free of the fear of judgment. My compassion played a huge part in my success as a peer leader. Being vulnerable with my students in sharing my experiences comforted them in knowing they weren't alone. This encouraged my students to be vulnerable with me, allowing me to better analyze what topics need to be addressed in class. My co-instructor and I are an amazing team. We communicate effectively and split up responsibilities equally. We incorporated the feedback we collected to make the class most valuable to the specifics of our students.

Being a peer leader reignited my spark for leadership. Moving to South Carolina, to such a bigger school, I got a little lost. Being a peer leader has strengthened my communication skills, my accountability, and my confidence in myself as a student and as a leader. I've had such an amazing time watching myself and my students grow and find their place at USC.

Photo courtesy of Elisabeth Miller



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MILTON NEWMAN

Learning a new perspective on healthcare

In May 2024, I studied abroad in Greece with the Arnold School of Public Health, participating in the class Greek Influence on Sport and Health. With 29 other students, we traveled to Greece for three weeks to learn about the relationship between Greece's rich ancient history and culture. We visited various cities to learn about the differences in healthcare and lifestyles compared to our lives in the United States. While visiting ancient ruins we were told about the history of the ancient Olympic Games, religious customs, and behavior of ancient Greeks. At other sites including hospitals, physical therapy clinics, farms, nursing homes, restaurants, and more we learned how those ancient customs shaped the healthy lifestyle and healthcare many Greek citizens experience today. One of the main topics was the relationship people had with food, which I had learned about in class just a few months prior. People ate more natural foods that contained more densely packed nutrients while taking their time to enjoy meals, unknowingly preventing many health risks we experience in the US. We learned how this and other lifestyle behaviors cemented in their lifestyle shape their healthcare system. Comparing this to the healthcare system in the United States has changed my mindset about how I hope to advise patients in the future as a Physician's Assistant. Even just conversing with people from the smaller towns revealed that they have a much more relaxed life and live long healthy lives. I realize many small changes to a diet and mindset can change physical health which I hope to teach others about.





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SEAN NOONAN

Impact of sexual health education

When considering involving myself on campus, I understood the importance of healthy decision-making and preventative care regarding our well-being, leading me to look for an organization such as Changing Carolina Peer Leaders (CCPL). CCPL is a student-led organization focusing on health promotion and education surrounding mental health, healthy relationships, sexual health, and holistic wellness. I have been part of the organization as a Certified Peer Educator since my first year at the University of South Carolina. My involvement included developing tabling events, presenting to University 101 classes, outreach and recruitment, and social media design. Throughout my active years as a peer, I primarily focused on sexual health and healthy relationships topics, including STI prevention, consent, birth control, and communicating effective boundaries. For many, these topics may be sensitive, awkward, and uncomfortable, even challenging someone's upbringing. These uncomfortable yet necessary conversations are required to prevent ill-informed viewpoints and decisions that have the potential to cause harm not only to an individual's well-being but also to those around them. While times have changed and more progressive views have become familiar and heard, it is evident through my outreach on the University of South Carolina campus that there is still a stigma surrounding sexual health. Many individuals come to college with little to no sexual knowledge, further emphasizing a need for proper sexual health education. As peer educators, we strive to give our community a baseline understanding of an easy and relevant way to safeguard their health. This level of health promotion is what I find so fulfilling about being a sexual health educator: I have the privilege of advocating for something I am passionate about while helping others live healthier lives by simply promoting well-informed decisions.





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KAYLA RUFF

Championing for achievement by empowering students for lifelong success and growth

During the Spring of my sophomore year, I applied to work as a Peer Consultant for the Student Success Center at the University of South Carolina. I had never been aware of the resources before, but after thorough investigation of the programs and opportunities they offered, I wanted to provide students with resources I also wasn't familiar with. In addition to being a resource, I wanted to grow as a better student and person making use of the professional development opportunities. During my tenure as a Peer Consultant, I've been able to incorporate both professional and civic engagement with fostering a positive, welcoming community. I have gained invaluable skills such as communication, empathy, leadership, and problem-solving. I've been able to serve as a mentor to students by supporting their individualistic goals and connecting them to experiences both academically and personally. Being a Peer Leader has allowed me to encourage civic-minded involvement while serving as a support system to students as they work their way through college. I have helped students create study schedules to support their specific learning. I have helped students identify things that motivate them and utilize that as a way to navigate tough courses. Lastly, I have provided students with academic and social resources that support professional and civic engagement while giving them a sense of community here at USC. In supporting and advocating for their success here, I have also experienced the joy of seeing students advocate for themselves which contribute to their journey through personal and professional development. Additionally, I have learned and grown through these experiences by learning how to be adaptable and personable in difficult situations. I have learned to communicate my perspective in a respectful manner and encourage diverse dialogue. Most importantly, I have learned that in helping others, you help yourself. I have gained so much knowledge working with students and watching them reach their goals. In turn, I have learned to appreciate the journey and use the advice I've learned from my time here to not only advocate for others, but for my success as well.



Photo courtesy of Kayla Ruff



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KAYLA SIMMONS

From crisis to cause: revealing hidden disparities in emergency medicine

The emergency room at MUSC operates in an intense and dynamic environment where split-second decisions often make the difference between life and death. The constant influx of patients with injuries from car accidents or medical emergencies like strokes or heart attacks creates a challenging yet profoundly rewarding space to work in. As an Emergency Room Technician, my tasks include taking and recording vital signs, assisting with patient triage, performing EKGs, starting IVs, and assisting with orthopedic splinting; allowing me to contribute directly to patient care. As an Emergency Room Technician, I have been an integral part of a talented team, which includes physicians, physician assistants, and nurses. Together, we ensure that all patients receive rapid, high-quality care. This hands-on experience has only deepened my passion for becoming a Physician Assistant, as I've witnessed how PAs increase access to care, as they can assess patients, perform procedures, and manage ongoing care. Their ability to provide critical care in high-pressure situations while offering patient-centered care reflects their essential role in expanding healthcare. By bridging the gap between physicians and nurses, PAs enhance the healthcare system, allowing more patients to receive timely and effective care.

However, behind the high paced action of emergency medicine, there is an underlying reality that reveals significant challenges faced before they even reach the ER. My time in the Emergency Room has allowed me to observe the real-world impact of the social determinants of health, one of the concepts I studied in my Sociology of Medicine and Health class (SOCY360). Many patients arrive in the ER because of delayed access to healthcare, which is often exacerbated by factors like lack of insurance or poverty. I've seen how marginalized populations suffer from preventable conditions that escalate to emergencies due to a lack of education or systemic inequalities in healthcare access. Working in the Emergency Room at MUSC has drastically changed my view of medicine. By having a firsthand view of patients in the most vulnerable states, I've learned the importance of providing compassionate care to all populations. This has ultimately reinforced my passion to become a physician assistant, where I can not only have a role in direct patient care but also play a pivotal role in preventative care and education to improve overall health outcomes.



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HARLEY SQUITTERI

Belief in horoscopes: the Barnum Effect at play

The allure of horoscopes lies in their ability to make the universe feel intimate and personal, tapping into a cognitive bias known as the Barnum Effect. This psychological phenomenon leads to individuals to identify with broad, general statements, believing they uniquely apply to them. There is a notable correlation between the Barnum Effect and horoscopes, as people will commonly relate and see themselves reflected in the ambiguous personality traits and predictions associated with their astrological signs. During my junior year at the University of South Carolina, my fascination with this intersectionality pushed me to conduct an independent study. The purpose was to examine if participants would identify more with general statements related to their astrological signs. My hypothesis proposed that participants would strongly identify with personalized but generalized horoscope statements due to the cognitive bias inherent in the Barnum Effect. To test this, I created a survey via Google Forms that was distributed to a diverse group, collecting data on demographics, horoscope identification, and responses to suggest ability-based statements using a Likert scale. The results were analyzed using a Pearson correlation analysis, independent-samples t-tests, and a one-way ANOVA through a statistical software, SPSS. These tests facilitated a deeper exploration of the strength of identification with horoscopes across gender, class year, and among those who are in a career field. Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no statistically significant difference in participants' responses, with the data showing little variation in how individuals identified with horoscope traits. This suggests that the Barnum Effect may not significantly influence horoscope beliefs as hypothesized.

Through this project, I developed critical research skills that I applied during my experience as a research assistant and comprehensive health educator assistant, further integrating both practical and theoretical methodologies. These findings contribute to ongoing discourse about cognitive biases and their role in pseudoscientific beliefs, with implications for future studies on personality feedback and the psychological impact of generalized statements. While not conclusive, the findings offer a foundation for further exploration and hopefully eventually, publication in the Caravel Undergraduate Research Journal to advance this field of research.



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CAITLIN WATKINS

Strengthening leadership through campus faith



Cru is an international Christian organization that aims to teach others about Christ, help individuals grow in their faith, and provide community for college students. I have been a member of Cru for two years and have served as the club president for the past year. As president, I lead event planning and organizing, initiate meetings with members, facilitate group discussions, and lead campus outreach initiatives. These experiences have taught me how to apply the leadership skills I learned in a Capstone Scholars Leadership Course while allowing me to maintain and grow my spiritual faith during college. Being involved in Cru had a significant impact on my undergraduate experience by teaching the application of leadership strategies and promoting personal spiritual growth. I feel more confident in my beliefs and ability to be an effective leader.



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SYDNEY WELCH

From notes to narratives: a personal account from a medical scribe

In January 2024 I had the opportunity to begin working as a medical scribe at Southern Urogynecology. This all-female medical practice is located in Columbia, SC and offers comprehensive women's health services. This opportunity ultimately arose through networking within my pre-health honors fraternity Alpha Epsilon Delta with other scribes currently working at this practice.

As a medical scribe, I am tasked with accurately documenting 25-30 patient encounters per day as well as medical histories in Epic. In addition, I have the ability to assume an active role in healthcare by rooming patients, obtaining their vitals, and recording the specific concerns they wish to address during their visit. I have had numerous unique healthcare experiences from this role including assisting with in-office procedures as well as observing surgeries such as a robotic-assisted laparoscopic hysterectomy and prolapse repair. I ultimately decided to pursue this experience in order to begin accumulating invaluable patient care experience while simultaneously enriching my understanding of the clinical workflow.

My experience scribing at Southern Urogynecology has provided me with the opportunity to solidify my desire to pursue a career in healthcare as well as fully understand the importance of accurate documentation. More specifically, working directly with a variety of healthcare providers has allowed me to gain insights into each provider's scope of practice which has reinforced my commitment to pursuing a career as a PA. Working as a medical scribe has equipped me with the skills and experience necessary to apply to PA programs with confidence. Throughout my time at the practice, I have developed an understanding of how to accurately create and document patient encounters and medical histories. Additionally, I have learned how to effectively establish rapport with patients in order to develop a trusting and empathetic relationship. Ultimately, my time as a medical scribe at Southern Urogynecology has helped me develop a deeper commitment to enhancing patient care as a PA.



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RYANN WILTSIE

From the gym to the courtroom

Becoming a Group X fitness instructor at the University of South Carolina has been transformative. When I auditioned in front of 10 strangers, I thought this experience would be a way to stay active and engaged on campus. However, instructing quickly became a life-changing experience, building my confidence, leadership, and public speaking skills. Leading classes of diverse participants with varying fitness levels has taught me to adapt my approach, communicate effectively, and foster a welcoming, motivating environment. Each session has been an opportunity to develop resilience, problem-solving abilities, and a sense of responsibility, all of which are essential in my future career.

Complementing this hands-on experience, my HRSM 301 Professional Development course has provided me with a valuable academic foundation, furthering my skills in communication and public speaking. HRSM 301 has offered strategies for crafting impactful, motivating messages—a skill that translates seamlessly into my work as an instructor. My confidence in speaking publicly has strengthened my effectiveness in leading workouts and enhanced my ability to connect with participants while maintaining a positive environment in the studio.

Together, my role as a fitness instructor and the professional insights from HRSM 301 have provided me with a comprehensive skill set that extends beyond fitness instruction. I am now able to approach challenges with adaptability, present myself professionally, and lead with both empathy and authority. These experiences have prepared me to excel in any field by equipping me with communication and leadership skills that will continue to grow. The integration of classroom knowledge with practical application has been invaluable in shaping my confidence and professional development. These experiences have given me a foundation that will support my ambitions and future growth.

Research





Research

LIANNA WILKES

Fostering individualized growth and development in the youth population

During my studies at the University of South Carolina, I have had the invaluable opportunity to work as a therapy aide in a special needs preschool, The Therapy Place. This position profoundly shaped my understanding of adolescent growth and development. Driven by a passion for supporting individuals with diverse needs, I engaged with children to promote their emotional and social development through customized therapeutic activities.

By employing observational techniques and providing hands-on support, I implemented strategies designed to enhance communication and interaction among the children, adapting my approaches to cater to each child's unique requirements. Witnessing their self-confidence and social skills flourish affirmed the effectiveness of individualized support in educational settings. I believe that early intervention for children with special needs can greatly improve their well-being as they continue to develop.

This experience has deepened my commitment to pursuing a career in counseling psychology, with a particular focus on adolescents. I aim to apply these insights to foster resilience and facilitate positive growth in young individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being and success.

Magellan Scholars





Magellan
Scholars

ALBERT HATTON

Parallel evolution: exploration through magenta flowers and biochemical pathways

Parallel evolution is the phenomenon of similar traits developing in separate lineages in response to similar environmental pressures. One key question is whether parallel evolution in traits involves similar underlying biochemical or genetic mechanisms. In this study, I examined the genetic and biochemical mechanisms for parallel flower color transitions in two lineages of *Penstemon* wildflowers. In *Penstemon*, the ancestral flower color is blue-purple which is associated with bee pollinators, and there have been repeated shifts to reddish magenta flowers attractive to hummingbirds in different lineages. I took advantage of two replicate hybrid zones, areas where different species can interbreed, resulting in a genetically and phenotypically variable population. The hybrid zones each involve the same blue-flowered, bee pollinated species (*Penstemon davidsonii*, “B”) that has hybridized with distinct magenta-flowered, hummingbird pollinated species (*P. newberryi* and *P. rupicola*, “H”). I used spectral reflectance data for flowers from multiple individuals of each hybrid zone to calculate values of brightness, chroma, and hue. Additionally, I collected anthocyanin data by extraction and TLC plate analysis, and I analyzed genotype data at a candidate anthocyanin pathway gene. In both hybrid zones, I found that floral hues were correlated with relative proportions of two anthocyanin pigments, with greater amounts of delphinidin pigment yielding bluer hues. In both hybrid zones, I observed the individuals with BB genotype markers had lower hues and chromas than HH or BH (heterozygous) individuals. Both hybrid zones also showed that the HH genotype did not produce any delphinidin. In other words, in both hybrid zones studied, genotype strongly predicts pigment type, and in turn pigment type strongly predicts the hue and chroma of the petal reflectance spectra. Overall, I conclude parallel shifts to magenta involve similar biochemical and genetic mechanisms.



NICHOLAS LIGER

Wireless IOT water height sensor

The South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SC DES) contracted with the Mechanical Engineering Department at USC to produce a wireless water height sensor to put on high hazard dams across the state in order to improve communication between dam owners and SC DES and to increase flood safety in the state. Commercially available packages are pricey, exceeding a thousand dollars, and SC DES was looking for a cheaper, open-source alternative it could work together with dam owners to build. Successful testing and development was done simultaneously on a cellular connected water height sensor and a Wifi-compatible version, building off of previous work. The water height sensor uses an Arduino Mega, an inexpensive and open-source programmable microcontroller, with a custom code to run the sensor package. Attachments to the Arduino provide Internet connectivity. Ultrasonic sensors measure the water height of the reservoir, and a micro SD card is used to record these readings for long-term data analysis. In addition, the information is sent over Internet connection to a third party, free-to-use data platform which displays the water height readings in real time and can be viewed on either a desktop or smartphone. The code as well as relevant hardware information is available on Github for public use. The cellular sensor has been successfully tested in the field and the next step is to partner with SC DES and a dam owner to test the Wifi version in the field.



SRAVYA SUNKARA

Racial differences in pain management for medicare patients diagnosed with rotator cuff injury

Pain is a widespread and debilitating condition that affects millions of Americans per year. In 2021, approximately 51.6 million Americans, or 20.9% of the population, experienced chronic pain, with 17.1 million (6.9%) suffering from high-severity chronic pain that severely impacts daily activities and well-being. Pain alone disproportionately impacts racial minority communities through disparities in diagnosis and treatment. In the past, disparities in pain management have highlighted how racial minorities, particularly Black patients, experience less optimal treatment, resulting in poorer health outcomes. Understanding these differences in treatment, especially among older adults, could inform equitable pain management practices amid the opioid epidemic. The study focuses on Medicare patients aged 65 and older diagnosed with rotator cuff injury tears in 2011 and 2017. It will analyze racial differences in the prescription of opioids, NSAIDs, and the use of physical therapy within 30 days post-diagnosis and over a one-year follow-up. Clinical and sociodemographic controls, such as age, sex, Charlson Comorbidity Index, Frailty Index, and economic status indicators, will be included. Univariate and bivariate analyses will be conducted using STATA 16.1 to quantify pain management differences and explore race-based treatment patterns. Preliminary analysis shows a pattern in which Black patients receive more opioids and are less frequently referred for physical therapy than their white counterparts. These initial findings suggest a need for further investigation into these disparities and their impact on treatment outcomes.

The observed trends in pain management raise concerns about the implications for pain-related morbidity and opioid-related risks among racial minorities. Differences in treatment approaches may reflect broader issues within healthcare accessibility and equity, especially for Black patients. By shedding light on racial disparities in pain management, this study aims to provide evidence that can inform equitable practices and policy recommendations, particularly for minority patients vulnerable to overtreatment in the context of the opioid crisis. Further studies are needed to assess the long-term implications of these disparities on morbidity and opioid-related risks in minority populations.

The CIEL Team Thanks You for your support of experiential learning!

CHARLES PIERCE

CIEL Faculty Executive Director

UNIQUA JACKSON

Business Manager

LAUREN EPPS

Associate Director

MATT CHILDS

CIEL Senior Faculty Associate

SARAH MATTHEWS

Program Advisor & Marketing Coordinator

ADDISON TURNAUER

Social and Digital Media Intern

GINA SPENCE

Program Advisor & Data Coordinator

SARA PIPA

Marketing Intern

JULIA BALLOU

Program Advisor & Outreach Coordinator

MOLLY KELLEHER

Student Grant Coordinator

EMILY BRENNAN

Grants Program Manager

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