

The HHP Experience

SPRING 2025

A newsletter for alumni and friends from the
College of Health and Human Performance



Students smile and take pictures during the ECU Excels celebration at the Main Campus Student Center.

HHP is focused on student success opportunities

Table of Contents

From the Dean	2
HHP Engagement.....	3
HHP Research.....	3
News and Notes	3
HHP Advising	4
Alumni Highlights.....	4
Unit Updates.....	5-9
Faculty/Staff News.....	10-11

From the Dean

Summer is just around the corner here in eastern North Carolina. The days are heating up, and like many of you, my family and I are looking forward to soaking up some sunshine and making the most of the season. We're especially excited for our first trip to Cape Lookout National Seashore, one of the many gems of this region. I hope you also have some fun and relaxing plans lined up!

With the close of my first academic year as Dean of HHP, I've found myself reflecting on the past several months—and what a year it's been. It's been an absolute pleasure getting to know our students, faculty and staff, and working alongside Mack Keenan as we connected with many of our donors and alumni. Those conversations have been a highlight of my year. Whether we were talking about future goals, sharing memories from campus, or celebrating milestones, every interaction has been special.

HHP is full of stories—stories of perseverance, impact and excellence. I've heard from students who've overcome financial barriers thanks to scholarship support, from faculty whose research and mentorship are changing lives, and from staff who go above and beyond to keep everything running smoothly. These are the quiet victories and bold achievements that define us. Some of our most inspiring student leaders, our HHP Ambassadors, have represented the college across campus and in the community. Each of them has a different story, but they share a strong pride in ECU and in HHP. Their passion and determination remind me of growing up in Appalachia, where people leaned on each other and found ways to thrive, even when things were tough. That spirit is alive and well in our halls and classrooms, and I've drawn strength from it throughout my first year here.

Some of our faculty were the first in their families to attend college and they now mentor students walking that same path. Together, we are driving projects and initiatives that stretch far beyond our campus, making real differences for communities across eastern North Carolina and the region.

This semester included some incredible celebrations, including our successful Pirate Nation Gives campaign and the annual HHP Philanthropy and Service event. Those moments of connection and generosity are only possible because of the support we receive from every corner of our community—students, alumni, friends and colleagues alike. Thank you for continuing to invest in our mission and for believing in what we're building together.

Before we close out the semester, we have a few important celebrations left. On May 9, we'll host three HHP graduation ceremonies following ECU's main commencement. And on May 10, we'll celebrate our ROTC commissioning, an especially meaningful tradition within our college. These milestones are unforgettable, so if you know a graduate or a newly commissioned second lieutenant, take a moment to congratulate them!

Thank you to every one of you for being part of HHP's story. Whether you're a student just starting your journey, a faculty or staff member shaping lives every day, a university colleague supporting our work, or one of our alumni or donors helping fuel our progress, we are grateful. We're proud of how far we've come and excited about what's ahead. And we can't wait to share more updates with you this fall.

Warmly,

Nicole

Dean, College of Health and Human Performance
East Carolina University



Dr. Nicole Bromfield delivers remarks during an ROTC Commissioning Ceremony earlier this year.

HHP ENGAGEMENT

We are extremely proud of our strong HHP alumni base and we love to hear from our alums. Visit <https://hhp.ecu.edu/alumni/> to update your contact info and explore different ways to remain connected and continue your Pirate pride and passion. A great way to do that is by joining the official HHP alumni [Facebook group](#) or [LinkedIn group](#).



People socialize at the 2025 HHP baseball tailgate. The Pirates won the game that day, defeating Tulane 15-5!

HHP thanks alumni and all friends who supported during Pirate Nation Gives 2025, which was instrumental again for HHP to promote student success and professional development. We also enjoyed connecting with alums and friends at our ECU baseball tailgate event April 26.

HHP RESEARCH

The College of Health and Human Performance plans to celebrate Annette Alligood on June 12 with a retirement reception. Alligood has 30-plus years of service to ECU and is retiring at the end of June. She has been instrumental to the research process in HHP the last 5 years, serving as university program specialist in HHP research administration and is the first point of contact often for researchers in areas such as effort reporting, grant budget revisions and projections, salary buyout and award closeout assistance.



Annette Alligood holds her plaque for the Excellence in Research Administration award

She was honored by ECU in March with a university Excellence in Research Administration Award. This honors research administrators for their vital role in advancing the university's research productivity. As noted in her award nomination, "Annette has always expressed sound judgement when working with complex problems. She accesses available resources to find solutions," and "Annette shares best practices with others and takes time to help others understand a process or a system."



HHP had many people involved and highlighted during ECU's Research and Creative Achievement Week. Here is mentor Dr. Amanda Muhammad with student Rachel Lee, who presented *Investigation of the psychological and social factors influencing students' knowledge of and access to professional clothing*.

The retirement celebration is scheduled for June 12 from 4-6 p.m. at Belk Annex.

Also, East Carolina University is now an R1 research institution awarded by the American Council on Education and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. This places ECU among the top 5% of institutions in the nation to hold R1 status, and HHP has a strong presence on the [ECU R1 website](#) with multiple videos highlighting our faculty members. This includes Dr. Joe Houmard's 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Research and Creative Activity, three years after Dr. Angela Lamson earned the same honor.

NEWS AND NOTES

Student Chloe Cannon emerged as [a leader on campus in public health](#) initiatives and aspires to be a professor or a health policy analyst.

As featured on this newsletter's cover, HHP was represented by numerous students, faculty members and staff at the [ECU Excels celebration](#) for freshmen and transfer students who achieved a 3.0 GPA in their first semester at ECU.

Students went to the National Retail Federation's annual event in New York City and provided insight about [the experience in their own words](#).



HDFS teaching instructor Alana Freeman, left, smiles with student Jadhah Kornegay at ECU Excels



From left, HHP dean Dr. Nicole Bromfield, Dr. Angela Lamson and ECU Chancellor Philip Rogers after Lamson won the 2024 Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr. Award for Excellence in Public Service.

Dr. Angela Lamson was awarded by the [UNC System for excellence in public service](#), rooted in her initiatives and implementation within community health, primary care, specialty care, schools and military contexts.

Dr. Joe Houmard received prestigious recognition by ECU with [the Lifetime Achievement Award](#) for Excellence in Research and Creative Activity.

The recreational therapy program [celebrated 50 years](#) with various celebrations during National Recreational Therapy Month and throughout the semester.

A \$280,000 Caswell Center Foundation gift to ECU [supports scholarships and internships](#) for students in social work, recreational therapy and music therapy.



Student Jordan Cianci, left, has been inspired during her internship at the Caswell Development Center in Kinston.

The ECU Army ROTC Pirate Battalion's Ranger Challenge Team [competed at the national Sandhurst Military Skills Competition](#).

HHP ADVISING

This spring, the HHP Advising Center has been actively engaged in university-wide recruitment and retention efforts. Our advisors have hit the road, participating in Let's Connect events across eastern North Carolina, visiting local high schools and community colleges to connect with future Pirates. We've also proudly represented the College of Health and Human Performance at Pirates Aboard, Open House and other campus events. In addition to group outreach, our team continues to meet one-on-one with prospective students and their families, helping them explore our programs and prepare for a successful transition to ECU. We also remain committed to supporting our current HHP students and the university's retention initiative through a holistic, student-centered advising approach. Our advisors meet students where they are—academically, personally, and professionally—to provide tailored guidance and meaningful connections throughout their college journey. Through intentional outreach, regular check-ins, and required advising meetings each semester, we aim to foster success, belonging, and persistence across all HHP majors.

GRADUATION NOTES

We are excited to celebrate the ECU Spring Class of 2025 on May 9 with commencement ceremonies. Our college ceremonies will be held at the Main Campus Student with the following schedule: 1 p.m. Interior Design and Merchandising, Social Work; 4 p.m. Kinesiology, Recreation Sciences; 7 p.m. Health Education and Promotion, Human Development and Family Science. In addition to outstanding graduate winners and all graduates to be recognized at these ceremonies, the [ecu.edu homepage](https://ecu.edu/homepage) and ECU social media accounts will feature recreational therapy major Deallaney Hudson for her ECU Communications selection for a spring 2025 graduate profile.

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS

Recreational therapy spring 2023 graduate and current grad student Lydia Pinto helped spread the impact of the Accessible Icon Pirate Challenge to a major city in the western part of the state.

Audrey Vines is a family and community services and Human Development and Family Science MS graduate. She and her family, representing the Glorified Vines Sisters, were recognized among [2025 North Carolina Heritage Award](#) recipients.

Kasey Shue holds a master's degree in recreational therapy and shared with ECU Health how she was [inspired to pursue her degree](#).

Social Work alumna, Nikki Teel, MA, MSW, LCSW-A, LCAS-A, a dedicated social work practitioner at ECU's School of Dental Medicine, presented on the integration of social work within ECU's School of Dental Medicine. During the research day poster session, she highlighted the collaborative efforts between the two disciplines. The article also featured contributions from Dr. Kelley Reinsmith-Jones and field office director LaTonya Gaskins with the School of Social Work.

The impact of Natalie McBryde's master's thesis, involving self-efficacy in children who received treatment for muscular deficits in their hands and arms, continues as highlighted [in an ECU News story](#). The story features feedback and insight from McBryde, an exercise physiology alum.

Chandler Nobles, 27, a graduate of the Department of Recreation Sciences, was [featured in Parks & Recreation](#), the official publication of NCRA, as a 30 under 30 winner.

Public health alum Emmanuel Bryant won a [2024 North Carolina Governor's Volunteer Service Award](#).



Natalie McBryde, a May 2024 graduate in exercise physiology, works in Raleigh as an exercise specialist in a rehabilitation clinic.

UNIT UPDATES

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION AND PROMOTION (HEP)

Chair - Dr. Michele Wallen

Administrative support associate - Wendy Allen

It has been an exciting year in the department, and we are thrilled to highlight several accomplishments. At the start of the new year, Rose Haddock was selected for the 2025 Leadership Development Academy, which is an intensive professional development experience throughout the spring semester. Haddock and other members of the 2025 cohort participated in bi-weekly meetings, training sessions, and an advanced curriculum provided by top-level administrative and academic leaders. Jamie Williams piloted an innovative strategy to share a new course with students through Bring a Friend to Class Day. This initiative allowed students to experience the interactive nature of HLTH courses, while also giving current students the chance to practice their facilitation skills. It was a remarkable opportunity for all involved, blending learning, professional practice, career exploration and student recruitment strategies in one event.

This summer, Dr. Leslie Cofie and Tina Marie Devlin will lead a study abroad trip to Ghana, providing students with a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in a different culture while exploring public health systems. Students will study at the Navrongo Health Research Center, the Tamale Teaching Hospital and the University of Ghana's School of Public Health. Additionally, Cofie and Haddock will lead another study abroad course in which students will visit Switzerland, France and England, exploring the World Health Organization, the United Nations European Headquarters, the International Headquarters of the Red Cross, International Headquarters of Doctors Without Borders and University of Geneva Hospitals. Through these experiences, faculty seek to broaden students' perspectives and inspire new approaches to public health. Cofie and Kelli Russell received a grant from the HHP C3BO Committee to expand the HEP P1rates Mentoring Program. This program supports first-generation student majors by creating meaningful connections and providing faculty mentorship to assist in their academic success and in preparation for their professional journeys.

Our PEP Squad made a significant impact this winter by delivering 75 blankets to Community Crossroads, warming the hearts and homes of our neighbors in need. This initiative was made possible through member dues, reflecting the power of community and this student organization's commitment to giving back. Also, we are proud Chloe Cannon was nominated and selected to attend the prestigious McDonald Conference for Leaders of Character at West Point earlier this spring. This marks a historic achievement as the first ECU student to attend this leadership development event and will have a lasting impact on her personal and professional growth.

Dr. Alice Richman was named as the Harold H. Bate Professorship. Her work in women's health, specifically cancer prevention, maternal, and child health, continues to address critical health disparities, especially in medically underserved and rural populations. This well-deserved honor acknowledges Richman's contributions and her vision

for advancing research and scholarship in the College of Health and Human Performance. Dr. Stephanie Richards and Dr. Sinan Sousan hosted four members of the General Assembly this spring to discuss their innovative wind tunnel technology that is under development. This technology is designed to expose mosquitoes to formulated insecticide products and explore of the far-reaching benefits for public health in North Carolina. They submitted a proposal to NC Innovation for funding with the intention of moving the wind tunnel toward commercialization in NC.

As we reflect on these achievements, we are also excited for the opportunities ahead. From upcoming study abroad trips to faculty advancements and community engagement, our department continues to thrive and make a difference. We look forward to building on these successes and as we plan for another year.



The Preconception Educating Pirates (PEP) Squad led a drive to deliver 75 blankets to the Community Crossroads Center to serve those at risk of homelessness.

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SCIENCE (HDFS)

Chair - Dr. Sharon Ballard

Administrative Support Associate - Latoya Purvis

Faculty in HDFS have had a fantastic year in the classroom. They each go above and beyond for their students and are continually incorporating innovative approaches to ensure student success. This will highlight just a few examples of HDFS teaching excellence and the high-impact teaching practices that benefit HDFS students every day. Many faculty include activities and assignments to help students apply the course content to their own lives as well as their work with children and families. For example, in HDFS 3215: Families as Consumers, Dr. Bernice Dodor incorporates a tracking and spending plan assignment in which students choose a budgeting app to track their expenses for a month, analyze their spending behaviors, create a personal budget and set SMART goals. This approach makes learning personal and impactful, empowering students to understand their finances and plan for their future. It's a transformative experience that equips them with the skills to navigate their financial journey with purpose and clarity.

Another great example of application of course material is in Dr. Andy Brimhall's HDFS 6411: Family Therapy Issues course. In this course, Brimhall teaches marriage and family therapy students to identify and analyze ethical dilemmas relevant to their future work as family therapists. This year, Brimhall mentored a team of three second year MFT students to submit an entry to the 2025 American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy Ethics Competition. This team of students – Annelise Billings, Caroline Tumulty-Ollemar & Jadalee Eyma – **won first place for their paper**. Faculty also

UNIT UPDATES

are integrating high-impact experiential learning activities within their courses, such as Dr. Chia Jung (Ruby) Yeh's courses. After completing the 2024 Intercultural Competence Summer Institute, Yeh integrated intercultural learning into her HDFS 3715: Global Perspectives on Early Childhood Education course. Student activities include self-assessment of their intercultural competence growth, interviews with early childhood professionals or parents from diverse cultural backgrounds and participating in International Virtual Exchange meetings, in which they connect with overseas peers to explore global teaching and parenting approaches. Through these activities, Yeh's students leave her course with enhanced cultural awareness, collaboration and global perspectives in early childhood education.

Another example of experiential learning is in Dr. Sandy Lookabaugh's HDFS 3022: Death, Dying, and Bereavement course in which students visited a local funeral home for a behind-the-scenes tour to learn about aspects of the funeral process. The class also visited five different cemeteries around Pitt County, including a private, public, primitive, former slave and the oldest cemetery in Greenville. As noted by a student, "The field trips to the cemeteries and funeral home provided real-life perspectives and the course was so important for normalizing death."

Internships are an important experiential learning activity that are integral to our programs, and we are thinking about new models for these internships. For example, Dr. Priti Desai worked to create and is piloting two new child life internships in which students split the required 600 hours of internship in a traditional hospital setting and in a community setting under CCLS supervision. This new model aligns with new

alum, Florence Lewis, who is doing military work in Italy. We appreciate when alumni take time to provide mentoring about professional development, networking, interviewing and career options to current students!

HDFS faculty engage in co-curricular activities with students through student organizations in addition to the classroom. Some of these activities, such as those implemented by Jocelyn Ruffin, adviser for the Early Childhood Student Organization, assist students in career progression. Specific to Birth-Kindergarten education students, Ruffin provided a Praxis Study Jam Session that was sponsored by ECSO. This session provided students with resources and strategies to successfully prepare for the Praxis Core exams, which are a requirement for becoming a licensed Birth-Kindergarten teacher. Ruffin also implemented an early childhood education career panel that included early childhood professionals in a variety of roles in North Carolina, including HDFS alumni Kailah Ellison and Felicia Anderson. ECSO members enjoyed the panel and reported that the panel was "insightful" and that they "gained important information" that will be beneficial as a new teacher.

HDFS is comprised of excellent faculty who excel in the classroom as well as in one-on-one mentoring of students through thesis, dissertations, research projects and independent studies and with co-curricular activities with student organizations.

DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR DESIGN AND MERCHANDISING (IDMR)

Chair - Dr. Amanda Muhammad

Administrative support associate - Nadia Thompson

IDMR has exciting updates and continues to expand, with a focus on enhancing student opportunities while increasing our national visibility. We are excited to welcome two new faculty members in Fall 2025: Istehar Swazan in merchandising and David Romeral in interior Design. They will bring fresh perspectives and expertise to our department. Additionally, the Professionally Purple Closet has continued to grow, providing students with hands-on learning experiences in branding, merchandising and retail operations. Two of our standout moments this semester were offering pop-up shops at the Black Student Success Summit and the Job and Internship Fair at the Greenville Convention Center. Through these events, we assisted students from nearly 30 majors, ranging from freshmen to graduate students and staff.

Our faculty continues to make a significant impact. Jesus Nieves' leadership in interior design has contributed to student success in competitions, and we look forward to sharing more of these achievements soon. We will also bid farewell to Charles Gustina, retiring after more than 15 years of dedicated service to the department. Our merchandising faculty presented research at the International Textile and Apparel Association Conference in California, and several faculty members presented at the American Collegiate Retail Association Conference in South Carolina. Dr. Tiffany Blanchflower received several recognitions for her teaching innovation. Dr. Runying Chen continues to impress us with her ability to reinvigorate the curriculum to meet the needs of both merchandising and interior design students in her Artifact History course. Dr. Marina Alexander continues



Thanks to ECU and community sport, the Nancy W. Darden Child Development Center's 2025 lemonade stand event resulted in 223 pounds of food collected for the Purple Pantry on campus.

child life internship guidelines, addresses the critical gap in internship access, and provides students with increased options for completing their internship while applying child life competencies in different settings. In one of these pilot programs, Desai has engaged ECU child life alumni for a mutually win-win collaboration. Dr. Jake Jensen also is engaging alumni! He exposed second-year MFT students to diverse career options through a virtual panel with alumni, including Jessica McCall who has a thriving group practice in Charlotte, Trinity Ash, who does private practice in Atlanta, Amanda Neff, who does agency work in Raleigh, and MedFT

UNIT UPDATES

her excellence in infusing the curriculum with experiential learning opportunities. IDMR is committed to student success through career development activities, field trips, study abroad programs, student organizations and our combined advisory board. Looking ahead, we are prioritizing TAPAC and CIDA accreditation, strategic visioning and strengthening our industry partnerships to elevate our program to national prominence. We are committed to making IDMR a beacon of excellence in interior design, merchandising and retailing. Thank you for your continued support. Stay tuned for more updates as we grow and innovate!

AIR FORCE ROTC (DET. 600)

Commander: Lt. Col. - William Dye

Administrative support associate - Cary Ann Reeves

ECU's Air Force ROTC Detachment 600 continues to [use Instagram](#) and other sources to routinely highlight the hard work and dedication demonstrated by its cadets. This includes a cadet of the month feature and recently when GMC cadets stepped up to lead an entire LLAB session, demonstrating their skills of planning, coordination and leadership. It was a powerful showcase of the depth of knowledge they've acquired through their training. AFROTC will commission 13 cadets as second lieutenants into the United States Air Force on May 10. We had 11 AS200 level cadets selected into the Professional Officer Course, which signifies selection into becoming an upperclassman in the ROTC program and contracting with the Air Force. They will be attending Field Training this summer at Maxwell Air Force Base.

Another highlight from the semester was when we hosted the commander and his leadership team from the AFROTC Southeast Region to ECU. This was an opportunity to visit various part of campus and showcase the ECU Air Force ROTC unit.

DEPARTMENT OF KINESIOLOGY (KINE)

Chair - Dr. Anthony Kulas

Administrative Support Associate - Elaine Hughes

Students in kinesiology's academic programs continue to thrive in high-impact experiences that allow them to expand upon their traditional classroom experiences. Late last fall, Jeff Pizzutilla took a group of BS physical education majors to the NC SHAPE conference in Winston-Salem, where several gave presentations and all networked with other physical educators from across the state. In February, a large group of students and faculty attended the Southeast American College of Sports Medicine conference. Our students presented 14 poster or oral research abstracts. In addition, three graduate students won awards for their research presentations, and our undergraduate team of Lydia Randall, Kensey Tarkington and Vivian Bryan (all BS exercise physiology students) took third place at the annual undergraduate quiz bowl! Kaitlyn Wojciechowski (MS kinesiology) served as their coach. Our students have also been recognized nationally with Tarkington being selected as this year's National Undergraduate Scholar Award Honorable Mention - Doctoral Institution from the American



Dr. Charles Gustina, third from right, talks with students and Chancellor Philip Rogers during the fall 2023 semester.

Kinesiology Association. Meagan Parrish's abstract titled "Young adult athletes' psychological distress differences by level and gender identity" was selected as the winner of the Outstanding Student Paper award in Sport and Exercise Psychology, and will be presented at the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity national convention this summer.

Department faculty members continue to be recognized for their research expertise, productivity and mentorship. Dr. Jihoun An and Dr. Joe Houmard each received an ECU Anchor Award. Dr. Linda May received ECU's Trendsetter Award in recognition of her influential research related to improving maternal and child health during and after pregnancy. Dr. Christine Habeeb was selected to win the Honors College Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award, which is the Honors College most prestigious award in recognition of her outstanding mentorship of our students in their research experiences. Lastly, after more than 30 years at ECU, \$16 Million in external research funding and 40 master's or PhD student mentorships, Dr. Joe Houmard was the recipient of ECU's Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Research & Creative Activity. While these research awards are rightfully earned by these faculty, all these recipients would also contend that these awards would not have been possible without the efforts from their research teams that include faculty colleagues and our students.

The Department of Kinesiology faculty and students also continue to have a positive impact on the ECU and surrounding communities. Exercise Is Medicine - On Campus is a program headed by kinesiology faculty - Dr. Katrina DuBose, Dr. Amber McEachern, Lisa Frederickson, and Anna



ECU kinesiology associate professor Dr. Bhikha Das was selected to speak at the ECU R1 celebration. (ECU News Services photo)

Gold, and students who work with Student Health Services and Campus Recreation and Wellness, to promote physical activity on campus. Activities this spring included the “Exercise for PeeDee’s Sake” and an HHP walking challenge. Kinesiology Major’s Club members volunteer to assist with EIM-OC, local 5k walk/run races and community outreach programs such as the adopt-a-highway street clean-up.

Looking forward to the fall, we are especially thrilled to announce that the Department of Kinesiology will be complementing its existing degree programs with the BS in sport performance science. This cutting-edge degree program will prepare its students to work as sport and performance professionals who optimize human performance through evidence-based training, testing and recovery strategies. With a strong foundation in exercise science, biomechanics, analytical skills and sport technology, graduates are equipped to work with athletes, military personnel and tactical individuals and teams to enhance performance, prevent injury and support long-term development across a variety of competitive and professional environments.

In closing, the Department of Kinesiology remains committed to offering high-quality educational programs with rich out-of-classroom experiences to our students.

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION SCIENCES (RCSC)

Chair – Dr. Clifton Watts

Administrative support associate – Kim Walters

It’s been a busy spring in the Department of Recreation Sciences, featuring special events, conferences and faculty honors.

On April 2, faculty members and students from recreational therapy, sport management and recreation and park management held the Special Olympics Peru Exchange Photo Exhibition. Students, faculty and visitors to campus had opportunities to speak with the faculty and students who participated in the Peru Exchange program, learn about some of the ongoing Design 4 Disability initiatives, and toured Pee Dee’s Sensory Trailer. The event was held in conjunction with World Autism Day. Faculty and students leading the event wore “Better Together” T-shirts to emphasize the importance of inclusive opportunities for people with disabilities.

The recreational therapy program celebrated its 50th anniversary on April 12. The occasion occurred in conjunction with the North Carolina Recreational Therapy Association’s Student-Professionals Issues Forum on the campus of ECU. Students, alumni and friends of the department were in attendance for the celebration at Pitt Street Brewery, where a slideshow featuring generations of former and current RT students ran in the background, while attendees mingled and took pictures in the photo booth to commemorate the occasion. Prior to the celebration, the Biofeedback Lab, Sailing Simulation Lab and PeeDee’s Sensory trailer were featured in a session at SPIF.

On March 4, **Dr. Edwin Gómez** was elected president of The Academy of Leisure Sciences and formally took on the role during the annual TALS Teaching and Research Conference. This is quite a distinction for Gómez as TALS is the premier international professional body for recreation and leisure scholars.

At the end of March, **Dr. Clifton Watts** delivered the Founder’s Forum speech at the National Environment and Recreation Research Symposium on the 35th anniversary of the conference. His speech highlighted NERR’s history, its focus on graduate student research, and the development of the next generation of researchers and professionals. He used the opportunity to advocate for translating research to all levels from policy to layperson to develop awareness of the importance of parks, tourism and recreation to communities and the environment.

On April 11, **Dr. David Loy** delivered the Keynote to the Cooke Recreational Therapy Workshop held at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania. Loy’s speech focused on the “passion of practice” in RT, which focused on meaningful connections in work and avoiding professional burnout.



A photo exhibition has been displayed on campus for people to learn more about experiences from the Peru Exchange Program.

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK (SOSW)

Interim Director – Dr. AJ An

Administrative support associate – Brittany Bates

The ECU School of Social Work had a busy and productive academic year filled with celebrations. Faculty remained research productive, publishing 19 journal articles, securing \$43,720 in new research grant and startup funding, and delivering 27 presentations at national, state and local conferences. In addition, Beth Osborne, teaching instructor, and Virginia Bunch, program specialist, each received the 2024 State Service and Treasured Pirate Award for 35 years of state service.

The ECU School of Social Work is one of the Innovation Zone for the Child Welfare Education Collaborative in the state of North Carolina. We received \$79,288 from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, to support seven CWEC scholars (six BSW students and one MSW student) in their education. Additionally, the Child Welfare Research Institute (Drs. Kevin White, Rong Ba and Reeve Kennedy) has recently awarded \$10,000 from the North Carolina Policy Collaboratory for the project titled “Understanding and Improving Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention in North Carolina: Phase .I”

The Office of Healthy Aging, directed by Dr. Abby Schwartz, sponsored its fourth lecture series this year. The Carolyn Freeze Baynes Lecture Series on Healthy Aging featured OHA affiliates engaged in aging research across the university. Guest speakers included Dr. Bhibha Das (kinesiology), Dr. Adrienne Steiner-Brett (music therapy), Dr. Jaehyun Kim (recreation sciences), Dr. Kathrin Rothermich (communication sciences & disorders), and Dr. Courtney Baker and Seth Jones (Faculty in psychology and psychology doctoral student, respectively). Talks ranged from music therapy and gentle movement interventions for caregivers (Das and Steiner-Brett) to technology-based interventions aimed at improving the health outcomes of older adults (Kim). OHA is grateful for its affiliates and the work they do to improve the lives and well-being of adults in eastern North Carolina. If you are interested in viewing the lecture series, [recordings are available](#) to access.

The Office of Field Education continued to offer professional lecture series virtually to support the learning of pre-service and in-service professionals on current issues in social work. Topics included Child Welfare 101; Substance Abuse in America, Mental Health and Wellness, Inclusive Policies, & Ethical Consideration. The OFE hosted three lecture series each semester, each presented by an esteemed practitioner or clinical social worker. Additionally, the OFE was named in honor of the Casewell Center Foundation's generous donation this year.

For student recognition, recipients of the SECU Public Service Fellows Internship included Charles Wroten, Wilson County Senior Center; Sanaa Everett, Aces for Autism; Payton Smith, Kelly Children's Home.

ARMY ROTC (Pirate Battalion)

Professor of Military Science: Lt. Col - Scott Nusom

Administrative support associate - Cary Ann Reeves

Spring is historically the busiest time of year for Army ROTC programs, and this semester proved no different. Even as our senior cadets began to focus on commissioning and our junior cadets prepared for summer training, the Pirate Battalion remained steadfast in its mission: to educate, train and commission leaders of character for all three components of the U.S. Army.

This spring, the Pirate Battalion continued to deepen its connection with the College of Health and Human Performance, reinforcing a shared commitment to innovation, wellness and leadership development. One of the semester's most exciting academic collaborations took place with the Department of Kinesiology. Together, we launched a research project exploring what it takes to build the Army's strongest and most confident teams. Cadets competed in a tug-of-war style challenge in teams of two and four, while outfitted with wearable sensors to track physical output. They also completed surveys assessing team confidence—bridging the gap between mental resilience and physical performance.

Further expanding on cadet development, we're proud to be working alongside ECU faculty to establish the Tactical Athlete Collaboration—a program led by cadets and designed to enhance performance and well-being in the areas of physical, mental and nutritional readiness. This initiative is a bold step toward preparing our future officers to meet the complex demands of Army service. Leadership development reached a new level in March when ECU Chancellor Philip Rogers joined our MS IV class for a powerful 75-minute discussion. Our fourth-year cadets engaged the chancellor in thoughtful conversation on leadership, purpose, and service—an unforgettable moment for everyone in the room.

The Pirate Battalion also recommitted itself this spring to reconnecting with our alumni. In early March, we launched our first-ever alumni newsletter, reaching 150 graduates with updates and news from the battalion. With the support of HHP, we're actively building a contact roster of our 600-plus alumni and laying the foundation for the ECU Army ROTC Alumni Association. Our goal is to create a network that thrives beyond cadre rotations and strengthens the Pirate legacy for years to come.

Training excellence remained front and center throughout the semester. In late March, we joined forces with Virginia State University ROTC for our annual Combined Field Training Exercise at Fort Bragg. The event brought together 104 cadets for a weekend of tactical challenges and leadership evaluation. Planned and executed entirely by our senior cadets, this experience gave our third-year cadets critical preparation for summer Advanced Camp, while our younger cadets got their first field experience. The Pirate Battalion proudly represented ECU at the prestigious Sandhurst Military Skills Competition hosted by the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Our Ranger Challenge Team competed against elite teams from across the globe—one of just 16 Army ROTC programs that earned the opportunity to compete. Competing at this level reflects our high standards, and we're committed to sustaining this excellence in the years ahead.

Finally, we ended the semester on a high note with our Spring Commissioning Ceremony, where we celebrated the commissioning of 21 outstanding new second lieutenants into the United States Army. The ceremony featured keynote remarks from COL Heather Reilly (ECU '01, a distinguished leader and proud Pirate who inspired our newest officers with her story and service. As we look ahead to summer training and the upcoming fall semester, the Pirate Battalion remains committed to shaping exceptional leaders and building strong, lasting partnerships across ECU.

FACULTY/STAFF NEWS

Dr. David Loy, professor of recreational therapy and an expert in the disciplines of recreation sciences and adaptive sport, was selected for the Jerry E. McGee Distinguished Professorship. [The McGee Professorship will support Loy's work](#) examining ways to increase athlete performance and access in adaptive sport and recreation. For example, he recently developed devices such as the patent-pending Rink Ramp, a device to help parahockey players with disabilities access ice rinks, and promoted others such as the Beep Kickball, a ball designed specifically to help children and adults with visual impairments play kickball.

[Dr. Alice Richman](#), professor of health education and promotion and a respected leader in the field of public health, was selected for the Harold H. Bate Professorship. Richman has generated more than \$6 million in external funding to support her research agenda at ECU, and her goal is that the Harold H. Bate Professorship will not only promote her research agenda, but also provide benefit for faculty, students and the communities that ECU serves.

In addition to his ECU Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Research and Creative Activity, **Dr. Joe Houmard** was named a recipient of a 2025 Citation Award from the American College of Sports Medicine. This is granted to an individual or group who has made [significant and important contributions to ACSM's mission](#). This award helps increase ECU's visibility in the field of exercise physiology, which is also one of the largest undergraduate majors at ECU.

Order of the Anchor Society is a new ECU recognition highlighting those with awards totaling \$1M or more in a single fiscal year. HHP representatives honored in February for this included Drs. Jihoun An, Leslie Cofie, Archana Hegde, Joe Houmard and Michele Wallen.



Dr. Leslie Cofie was one of the HHP representatives recognized in the Order of the Anchor Society in March.

The ECU Consortium for Trauma & Resiliency Research, which is led by Drs. Jennifer Matthews and Erin Roberts and research assistant Lindsey Poole, hosted its second trauma-informed researchers workshop in February. CTRR is comprised of researchers from multiple campus departments that are dedicated to building community capacity for resilience, employing programs to prevent adverse childhood experiences and trauma, and increasing the community's overall health. The focus of the most recent workshop hosted by CTRR was to boost collaboration among trauma-focused researchers to develop a network of interconnected projects that can serve the multiple needs of individuals and groups in eastern North Carolina.

Dr. Emily Yeager from recreation sciences, along with her team, were recognized for securing a certification trademark from the United States Patent and Trademark Office for the Blue Economy Corridor. The BEC fosters collaboration among local communities, businesses and policymakers to support the \$2.5 trillion blue economy. The certification trademark for the BEC helps identify and promote assets that drive sustainable economic growth in coastal regions.

Dr. Priti Desai was inducted as a Research Fellow by the Association of Child Life Professionals. [As a Research Fellow](#), she will serve as a subject matter expert, consult on research-related matters and promote research competency within the child life community through one-on-one mentorship and consultation to ACLP committees.

Dr. Jo Anne Balanay from health education and promotion and Dr. Sinan Sousan in public health were recognized with a U.S. Copyright for developing "Temper," a heat stress app based on wet bulb globe temperature, which was featured on the Weather Channel.

Dr. Olzhas Taniyev's proposal, Let's play pickleball: An intergenerational approach to promoting social connections and community engagement, was funded by the Engagement Scholarship Consortium's Research/Creative Activities Grants Program. Taniyev will be supported by co-investigators Drs. Stacy Warner (sport management) and Abby Schwartz (social work). The project, and subsequent research, will be a collaborative effort between the Sport & Community Development Lab and the Office of Healthy Aging.

Jacquelyn Mallette (HDFS) was recipient of an ECU Scholar-Teacher Award, which recognizes faculty who effectively integrate research and creativity with their teaching roles.

Dr. Kayla Fitzke (HDFS), colleague Kim Smith and GA Abby Keeler, a MS marriage and family therapy student, were invited to attend the annual DOD business meeting. They met with DOD partners in relation to their OneOp inter-university project goals and work with military family readiness.

Michael Daniels and **Drs. Kelley Reinsmith-Jones, Sarah Maness, Lindsey Oakes, Linda May, Bhibha Das** and **Avian White** were recognized for their projects with community partners as part of the Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy.

Dr. Zac Domire, associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Performance Optimization Lab director, was nominated as co-chair of the American College of Sports Medicine Biomechanics Interest Group.

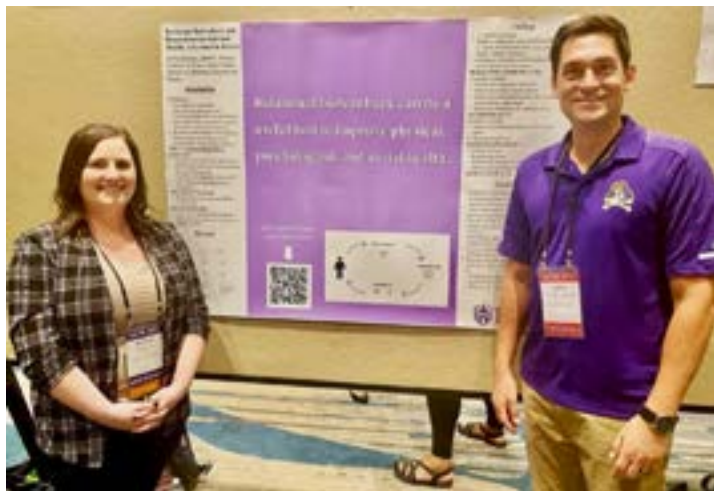
Dr. Tom Raedeke received an ECU Award for Achievement in International Research. Raedeke is a professor in the Department of Kinesiology who has received global recognition for research on athlete burnout assessment and its consequences.

Dr. Linda May was named an ECU Trendsetter Award winner in the eminent achievement category. Trendsetter Awards annually celebrate faculty leaders who not only excel in research and creative activities but also inspire their peers through knowledge-sharing, mentorship and campuswide initiatives.

Dr. Christine Habeeb with the Department of Kinesiology was an author for an article – “Team Efficacy Profiles: Congruence Predicts Objective Performance of Athlete Pairs” – that won the Excellence in Research Award that recognizes the most outstanding article in the 2024 annual volume of the Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology.

Drs. Tiffany Blanchflower (interior design and merchandising) and **Melanie Sartore-Baldwin** (recreation sciences) were honored as Treasured Pirates. Treasured Pirate award winners were presented a trophy during a university ceremony and \$500 for exemplary work and accomplishments that go beyond an employee’s job title or duties.

The ECU Graduate School named **Dr. Jake Jensen** for the 2025 ECU Distinguished Graduate Faculty Mentor Award



Dr. Jake Jensen stands with Adrian Knauss at a poster presentation.

in the Master’s category.

Dr. Deb Jordan (recreation sciences) was named as a [National Honor Award](#) winner by the American Camp Association, “to recognize meritorious service by an ACA member or former member for noteworthy contributions to the advancement of camp through leadership and industry.”

Dr. Ed Gomez, professor in the Department of Recreation Sciences, began in March as president of The Academy of Leisure Sciences.



Sparked by research and HHP collaboration opportunities and Sport and Community Development Lab events, pickleball has led to quality and fun faculty, staff and student interactions through sport.

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As Mack Keenan, HHP's director of outreach, and Ronnie Woodward, public communications specialist for HHP, lead our communications and outreach efforts, we encourage you to connect with them as they highlight and share what great news or updates you might have. They can be reached at cravenma21@ecu.edu and woodwardr21@ecu.edu.