



Mid-East Honors Association Conference

Learning Together, Leading Together

April 17-19, 2026

Indiana University South Bend

1700 E Mishawaka Ave

South Bend, IN 46615



INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTH BEND
HONORS PROGRAM



MEHA
Mid-East Honors Association



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Mid-East Honors Association (MEHA) Conference 2026

WELCOME TO SOUTH BEND, IN



Visitor's Guide South Bend/Mishawaka

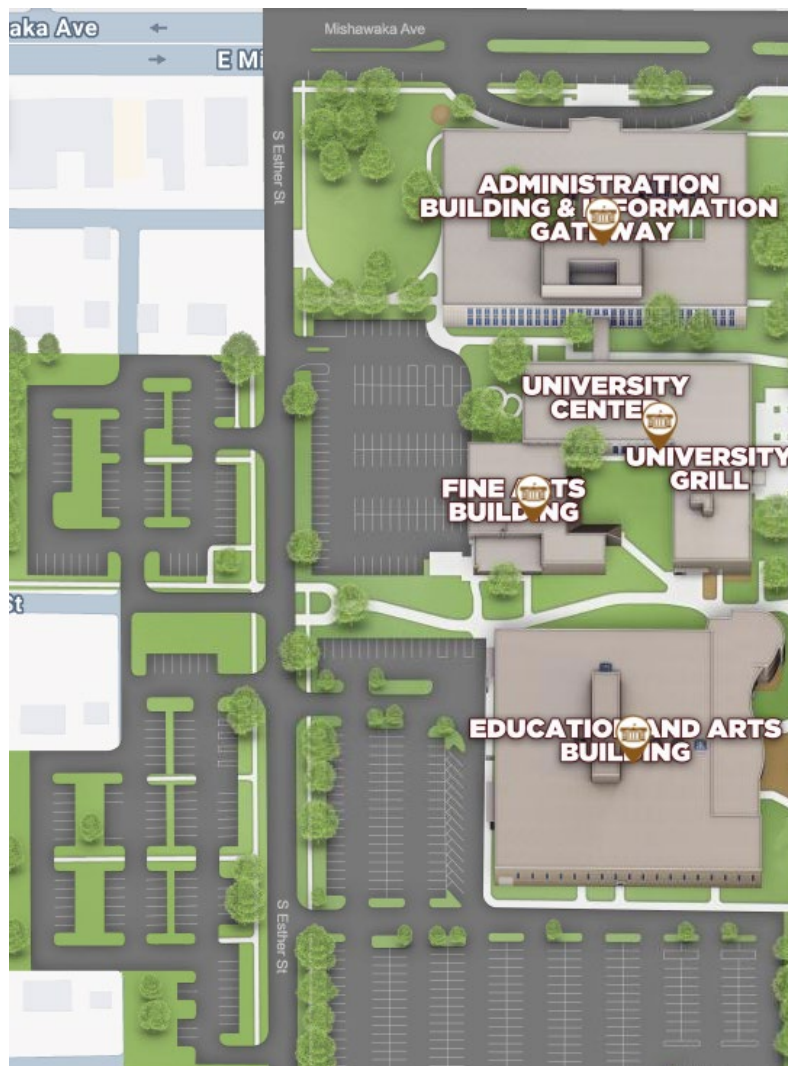


<https://go.iu.edu/2yvq1T>

Parking on Campus

Friday's registration, dinner, and welcome will be held in our Campus Grill, which is behind the IU South Bend Administration Building on the corner of Mishawaka Avenue and Esther Street. There is plenty of parking in the lots behind the Administration Building as well as across the street on Esther. Feel free to park anywhere that is convenient for you. Ticketing will not be enforced over the weekend. We will also have event parking signs posted to help you locate the lots.

Saturday's registration and Saturday and Sunday's sessions will primarily be held in our Education & Arts Building, which is right next to the Administration Building. There is additional parking available near Education & Arts, as can be seen on the map below.



Education & Arts 1st Floor Classroom Layout



About

The Mid-East Honors Association (MEHA) represents honors colleges and programs from institutions across the mid-east region through an annual conference, lunch and learns, email communication, and two open meetings, one in the spring at the annual conference and one held at the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) annual conference.

Our Mission

Through sharing information about honors programs/colleges and best honors practices region-wide, MEHA hopes to create an intellectual, programmatic, and administrative network of resources aimed at helping the region's honors programs/colleges grow and thrive.

MEHA is comprised of honors colleges and programs from the following regions:

- Eastern Illinois
- Indiana
- Northern Kentucky
- Southern Michigan
- Ohio
- West Virginia

Institutions that are close to these states, while not strictly within our designated region, are also welcome to join MEHA and attend our annual conference.

Our Hosts

MEHA 2026 is hosted by Indiana University South Bend.

Executive Committee

Karrie M. Jean, Indiana University South Bend, President

Vacant/Open, Vice President

Dr. Victor Piercey, Ferris State University, Treasurer

Dr. Nina Rytwinski, Walsh University, Secretary

Dr. Amy Scrima, Lake Michigan College, Professional Representative

Dr. Laci Fiala, Hiram College, Immediate Past President

Tayjaun Banner, Lakeland Community College, Student Representative

Jade Crabtree, Indiana University South Bend, Student Representative

Gabriel Mott, Ohio Northern University, Student Representative

Jordan Perkins (Keeley), Indiana University South Bend, Student Representative

Schools with Representative(s) in Attendance

Bowling Green State University
Central Michigan University
Cleveland State University
Cuyahoga Community College
Ferris State University
Grand Valley State University
Hiram College
Indiana University Kokomo
Indiana University South Bend
Indiana University Southeast
Lake Michigan College
Lakeland Community College
Millikin University
North Central State College
Ohio Northern University
Ohio University
Owens Community College
Purdue University Northwest
University of Indianapolis
University of Mount Union
University of Rio Grande
Walsh University
Wittenberg University
Xavier University

Schedule at a Glance

Friday, April 17th

- 4:00pm-6:00pm:** Conference Registration Open (University Grill)
- 6:30pm-9:30pm:** Opening Reception (University Grill)
Welcome, Dinner, Overview of Conference Schedule, Student Icebreaker Competition

Saturday, April 18th

- 8:00am-3:30pm:** Conference Registration Open (Education & Arts Atrium)
- 9:00am-9:50am: Session 1 (Education & Arts Building)
- 10:00am-10:50am: Session 2 (Education & Arts Building)
- 11:00am-11:50am: Session 3 (Education & Arts Building)
- 12pm-1:00pm:** Lunch (University Grill)
- 1:10pm-2:00pm: Session 4 (Education & Arts Building)
- 2:10pm-3:00pm:** Plenary Panel “Why MEHA Matters: Engagement, Belonging, and What’s Next”
- 3:00pm-5:00pm:** Potawatomi Zoo Visit
- 5:30pm-7:00pm:** Dinner & Keynote Speaker, Charlotte D. Pfeifer-Gillam (University Grill)
- 7:15pm-8:45pm: Student Service-Learning Project (Student Activities Center 221, 223, 225)
- 7:15pm-8:45pm: Faculty and Staff Happy Hour ([Ironhand Wine Bar](#)): 1025 Northside Blvd, South Bend, IN 46615 (self-funded)

Sunday, April 19th

- 9:15am-10:15am:** MEHA Annual Business Meeting (Education & Arts 1011)
- 10:30am-12:00pm: Poster Presentations (Education & Arts Atrium)

Conference Welcome



Dr. Jill Pearson

Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Indiana University South Bend

Dr. Jill Pearson serves as Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Indiana University South Bend, a role she has held since 2021. She brings broad experience in higher education leadership, with expertise in strategic planning, student success, academic program development, and faculty support.

Prior to joining IU South Bend, Dr. Pearson served as Interim Dean of the Crane School of Music and Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at the State University of New York at Potsdam, where she was also a professor.

Dr. Pearson holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in Voice Performance from the University of Michigan, along with graduate training in music theory pedagogy. She also earned master's degrees in music therapy and voice performance from Southern Methodist University and a bachelor's degree in music therapy from the University of Evansville.

Keynote Speaker

Charlotte D. Pfeifer-Gillam

“It is All About You: Lessons from a Delighted Aging Boomer”



Charlotte Pfeifer-Gillam is a longtime South Bend leader, educator, and advocate for diversity, equity, and community engagement. A resident of South Bend for more than 50 years, she earned her B.A. in History (1976) and Master of Public Affairs (1981) from Indiana University South Bend.

Pfeifer-Gillam began her career as the area’s first Black female adult probation officer and later became the first Black female director of Delos House, a residential substance abuse treatment facility. She subsequently founded a consulting firm specializing in diversity training, board development, and community outreach.

In 1995, she returned to IU South Bend to establish the Office of Campus Diversity, advancing access and success for underrepresented students, faculty, and staff. She also helped develop student organizations and campus-wide cultural programming and led initiatives such as Conversations on Race, a nationally recognized program commended by President Bill Clinton.

In addition to her university leadership, Pfeifer-Gillam served on the South Bend Common Council from 1995 to 2007, becoming its first Black president and serving three terms. Her work contributed to significant quality-of-life ordinances, including expanding the city’s Human Rights Ordinance to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Following her retirement in 2013, she continued teaching across multiple disciplines at IU South Bend. She remains active in the community through board service and civic engagement, including her work with the IU South Bend Civil Rights Heritage Center.

Pfeifer-Gillam has received numerous honors, including the SPEA Distinguished Alumni Award, the IU South Bend Distinguished Alumni Award, the NAACP Service Award, induction into the South Bend Hall of Fame, and the Roland Kelly Award for promoting diversity, love, and respect for all humanity.

Detailed Schedule

Saturday, April 18th

9:00am-9:50am

Faculty-Led Panel

Education & Arts Building - Room 1011

Moderator: Dr. Victor Piercey, Ferris State University

Dr. Mark Francek & Dr. Patty Williamson, Central Michigan University

Short-term, High-impact Honors Courses: Study Away as an Honors Curricular Staple

Central Michigan University's Honors Program closes out every academic year with a one-week trip to Beaver Island. From Sunday through Saturday, students, faculty and staff stay at the CMU Biological Station where three courses on varying subjects are offered. Students travel, attend class, eat, sleep and explore with their peers 24/7, creating a unique, high-impact learning environment. This session will discuss ways short-term study away opportunities can be highly impactful for students, leading to higher levels of honors program satisfaction, retention and completion rates.

Humanity & Community at Work and Play – Scholarly Presentations

Education & Arts Building - Room 1015

Moderator: Kylie Rhodes, Indiana University South Bend

Xondrais Marie, Indiana University Southeast

Same Cloth: Creatively Capturing the Experience of Community in Book Groups

Community is a broad term to capture how people share similar social identities, engage in similar activities, or exist in a common geographical location, but how is this essential component of social health formed? This project seeks to capture how people establish connections, engage with those they consider their community, and the effects community has on our behavior and mental wellbeing. The project incorporates a review of literature, qualitative interviews, and personal reflection to create an artistic representation of the role communities play in our lives. Preliminary findings indicate that community plays an important role in collective action and is a necessary aspect of both promoting behaviors such as pro-environmental practices, as well as influencing personal feelings like safety and belongingness.

Julia Toomey & Megan Van Orsdel, Grand Valley State University

Paul Lane, Grand Valley State University

Ryan Lafferty, Grand Valley State University

Puzzle Club: Unintended Consequences in the World of Technology

In these times of smartphones, AI, gaming, and social media, there is a noticeably timid freshman class. The Grand Valley State University Puzzle Club, established in 2024, seems to provide an antidote. The new club attracted large crowds in its first year, notably the first meeting of 2025 had 84 attendees, a testament to the appeal of old-fashioned puzzling even amid younger generations. The lead authors noticed the club becoming a social hotspot where people would create new relationships and gather to maintain existing ones. A survey administered at the end of the first puzzle club meeting of 2025 gathered data on the topic. Members report that they feel exceptionally comfortable socializing during club meetings. 50.8% of members feel strongly that working on the puzzles made conversation easier, 88.9% collaborated with at least 1 new person, and 58.7% did not use their phones at all throughout the meeting. The findings suggest that puzzle club being a social hotspot did not happen by chance, but certain factors combined to create a prospering club. In-person community interaction is lacking for many college students making it more important than ever to understand how to create effective social clubs.

Anh Hoang Tran, Indiana University South Bend

Self-Realization: Shaping The World Through Labor

The Marxist term alienation is a concept crucial in understanding the socioeconomic relationship a worker has with their place of labor. Employers are able to exploit their workers' surplus value through homo faber, a concept which argues humanity inherently desires to create and shape its environment. While much has been said about alienation and its effect on workers, little discussion revolves around the role of nonprofits or charitable organizations and how surplus value, the difference between what a worker is paid and how the money generated from their productivity, is extracted. In order to understand the relationship between homo faber and how nonprofit employers extract surplus value, I interviewed two former employees of a nonprofit in order to analyze factors driving these individuals to work. This paper argues that homo faber acts as a primary motivation for why the interviewees choose to work. Thus, the general observations of this study support the idea that individuals have an innate desire to change their surroundings. The desire of humanity to change its environment becomes the necessary pretext enabling nonprofits to extract surplus value from their employees.

Specialized Pathways in Higher Education – Scholarly Presentations

Education & Arts Building - Room 1019

Moderator: Dr. Nina Rytwinski, Walsh University

Olivia Huzyak, Walsh University

Caring Beyond the Body: Developing a Digital Educational Program to Enhance Spiritual Literacy in Nursing Education for Palliative Care

Spiritual literacy and cultural humility are increasingly recognized as essential competencies in nursing practice, particularly in palliative care, where patients' needs extend well beyond physical care. As attention to the role of spiritual care continues to grow, nursing education has emerged as a critical setting for the intentional cultivation of

these capacities. Through the integration of structured opportunities for reflection, role-play, and evidence-based learning activities, nursing programs can more effectively prepare students to deliver holistic care that honors both the physical and spiritual dimensions of patient experience.

Drawing on current research in spiritual care education and curriculum design, this project developed a structured instructional program to supplement existing nursing coursework. The program consists of modular units featuring applied exercises, reflection questions, summative assessments, and is designed for flexible integration across courses of varying lengths, formats, and instructional modalities. As the creative component of this thesis, a comprehensive Instructor Guide was also produced, offering evaluation rubrics, pacing frameworks, and practical strategies for implementation in-person, hybrid, and online learning environments.

This work demonstrates that thoughtfully designed curricular resources can strengthen nursing education by equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to practice spiritual literacy and cultural humility within palliative care.

Alaina Metzler, Bowling Green State University

Developing Distinction: A Historical Look at Honors Education

Honors Colleges and Programs recruit and help to cultivate some of the most academically talented students at a university. Yet, these students may be overlooked or under supported, and too often Honors educational offerings are not prioritized by an institution. It is pivotal to study the history of Honors education in order to understand the initial goals and intentions of Honors Programs and Colleges. This can help to inform practice and aid in understanding how to best provide for the dynamic needs of high-achieving students. By examining the evolution of Honors education, the logic and reasoning behind current practices also become more evident. In addition to detailing the general progression of Honors, this project features an in-depth comparative case study of an Honors Program at a small, private liberal arts university – the University of Mount Union in Alliance, OH – and an Honors College at a medium-sized, public research university – Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, OH. The development of each offering, current landscape, and related tensions were examined through archival materials and interviews with affiliated individuals.

Natural Sciences 1 – Scholarly Presentations

Education & Arts Building - Room 1025

Moderator: Ryleigh Jebson, Indiana University South Bend

Edwin Cortez Flores, Indiana University South Bend

Semar Almahdawi, Indiana University South Bend

Joseph Bradley, Indiana University South Bend

Liam Burke, Indiana University South Bend

Wesley Owens, Indiana University South Bend

Anjali Pant, Indiana University South Bend
Leen Younis, Indiana University South Bend
Dr. Shahir S. Rizk, Indiana University South Bend

Engineering a Fluorescent Biosensor to Detect Glutamine in Cancer Tissue

Glutamine is the most abundant free amino acid in the human body and serves as a critical fuel for cell growth, energy production, and immune function. Tumor cells exhibit a strong dependence on glutamine for rapid proliferation and survival. Due to this relationship between cancer metabolism and glutamine concentration, this project is aimed at engineering a biosensor to detect glutamine concentrations in cancer tissue samples. Glutamine-binding protein (QBP) from *E. coli* undergoes a conformational change upon binding to glutamine. Through cysteine mutations at different positions in the protein, fluorophores can be attached to monitor binding. Here, we introduced single cysteine mutations at strategic sites within QBP so that a thiol-reactive fluorophore can be attached. Several QBP mutant fluorophore conjugates showed a change in fluorescence when bound to glutamine. Specifically, the QBP-K87C-ROX Maleimide conjugate showed a 50% increase in fluorescence with a K_d of 277 μM . This is a suitable candidate for monitoring glutamine concentration in human cancer tissue cultures, as the K_d was nearest to the basal concentration of glutamine in human serum (550–750 μM). In developing this biosensor, we aim to detect and measure glutamine concentrations, which can be difficult using other methods.

Alexis Evans, Indiana University Southeast
Dr. Margaret Wallen, Indiana University Southeast

Not All Mutations are Equal: The Impact of p53 Variants in Lung Cancer Cells on Chemotherapy Sensitivity

In Indiana and across the United States, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths. While many new therapeutics have been developed to specifically target cancer mutations, less than 40% of patients who are eligible based on their genetic profile receive these therapies due to limited access and high cost. Of those who do, responsiveness varies greatly. Most lung cancer patients continue to receive standard-of-care chemotherapy, so understanding how a patient's tumor mutations affect how these drugs will work is critical. One gene of particular interest is p53, a tumor suppressor that helps control cell growth. Mutations in p53 are common in lung cancer, with many different variants found in patient tumors. While not currently considered a therapy target, it is considered an indicator of disease progression. Our research investigates how cells with different p53 mutations respond to various drugs like paclitaxel, cisplatin, and doxorubicin. Using laboratory cellular models engineered to carry specific p53 variants, we analyzed how these mutations influenced tumor cell growth and drug sensitivity. We found that distinct p53 mutations led to differences in treatment responsiveness and proliferation. These insights may help to guide development of more personalized cancer treatment.

Reagan Kelley, Indiana University Southeast

How is Reproductive History, Including Age at first Birth and Number of Pregnancies, Associated With Autoimmune Disease Risk in Individuals Assigned Female at Birth?

Autoimmune diseases disproportionately affect women, yet the influence of reproductive timing on long-term disease risk remains understudied. This research examines the relationship between age at first pregnancy and autoimmune disease development, focusing on how pregnancy-related immune modulation may contribute to later autoimmune vulnerability. The primary research question asks whether age at first pregnancy is associated with differences in autoimmune disease onset and symptom emergence across the lifespan. Preliminary findings from prior large-scale studies suggest that pregnancy may be associated with temporary changes in autoimmune risk, with long-term effects potentially influenced by the timing of first pregnancy. This project aims to clarify these relationships while addressing broader gaps in sex-specific autoimmune research.

Creative and Experiential Pathways to Well-Being and Engagement

Education & Arts Building - Room 1010

Moderator: Justin Neilson, Indiana University South Bend

Rosemary Jackson, Indiana University Southeast

Junk Journaling as a Method to Combat Academic Burnout: The Intersection of Self-Reflection and Crafting

Can junk journaling serve as a sustainable crafting method to help students with self-reflection? Academic burnout encompasses the feelings of exhaustion, cynicism in studies, and a lack of discipline in schoolwork. Self-regulation plays a significant role in combating academic burnout. The use of journaling provides the outlet to allow students to reflect on any animosity they feel towards school. An impediment of self-reflection is finding the right words to express emotions in traditional journaling. Junk journaling is the process of repurposing old paper, receipts, tags, labels, and fabric scraps to journal or create a scrapbook-like collage. Junk journaling provides a unique opportunity of using visualization to express emotions. The use of materials seen as “junk” is unique to the individual as they are customizing their “junk” to specific emotions. This workshop seeks to find alternative ways for students to self-reflect on their lives using normally discarded materials. This project also implements pedagogically sound methods of learning for better understanding emotions during self-reflection.

Diana Zebroski, Indiana University South Bend

Connecting Communities with Nature: Educational Programs at Saint Joseph County Parks

In a sustainability/sociology class with Professor Zachary Schrank, we explored how to craft compelling stories through visuals, interviews, and editing techniques that highlight important societal concepts, whether positive or negative, that impact our environment. Visual storytelling is a powerful way to share ideas, events, and perspectives, making important messages more accessible and engaging for everyone. Because of its visual nature, such storytelling can create meaningful connections by highlighting what might otherwise go unnoticed.

This project focuses on my internship at Saint Joseph County Parks and, more specifically, the interpretive services they provide to the public. Over several months, I shot B-roll footage during field trips, conducted interviews, and edited it into an ethnographic short film that highlights the importance of environmental education for children and their families, and how it connects us to the environment around us. During my presentation, I will provide background on my internship at St. Joseph County Parks, show my short film, and then answer any questions.

10:00am-10:50am

Faculty-Led Panel

Education & Arts Building - Room 1011

Moderator: Tayjaun Banner, Lakeland Community College

Dr. Amy Scrima, Bridget Anderson, Carol Brînzan, Samara Fernandes, Jadyn Haynes, & Jaden Robinson, Lake Michigan College

The Melting Pot 2026: Lake Michigan College Honors Program in Review

This presentation will highlight 5 student honors projects from 2026. Each project is unique and representative of different areas of interest and study. This approach allows each student to explore their interests and brings them together to share commonalities in creative ways.

Environmental Science & Ecology – Scholarly Presentations

Education & Arts Building - Room 1015

Moderator: Edwin Cortez Flores, Indiana University South Bend

Lanie Blood, Xavier University

The San Peoples of South Africa: A Case Study on Colonial Elitism and Indigenous Sustainability Implications

In our current environment, sustainability is a hot topic due to the rise in imminent climate threats. It is no secret that industrialization played a large role in the downfall of the earth's climate we see today, but how did we let it get so bad? Yes, industrialization is a huge factor in environmental degradation as well as other common denominators like unsustainable waste management, transportation, agriculture, energy use, and resource harvesting, but there is a large factor that often goes unspoken for: colonialism and its elitist notions of wealth. The exploitative nature of western economic development has led to the disruption of the long-term sustainability of modern countries by historically undermining the sustainable practices of Indigenous peoples in "undeveloped" countries. By examining the San peoples' case, this study will demonstrate how colonial elitism has shaped patterns of environmental mismanagement that continue to threaten global

sustainability under the disguise of modern ecological progression.

Reese Hoover, University of Indianapolis

Elijah Birtchman, University of Indianapolis

Joshua Campbell, University of Indianapolis

Marc Milne, University of Indianapolis

Effect of Fire and Creeping Juniper Loss on Spider Diversity

Spiders can be found all around the world, living in most habitats. They're found on every continent except Antarctica. Creeping juniper is a shrub located throughout much of the western United States. Creeping juniper plants are being studied for possible management because as it grows, it limits grass growth. One method of managing creeping juniper is by prescribed burns. Spiders commonly live in and around creeping juniper, so the management of creeping juniper affects spiders as well. In order to understand the relationship between prescribed fire and arthropod communities within creeping juniper habitats, spiders were collected from burned and unburned patches of creeping juniper in the Little Missouri Grasslands in North Dakota by ecologists at the United States Department of Agriculture: Agricultural Research Service. This project consists of identifying collected spiders to the species level from these collecting events in order to eventually determine the effect of fire on the abundance and diversity of spiders living in this habitat. Additionally, data will be used to analyze the effects of fire on these spiders when they are separated by guild. Spiders were identified using a dissecting microscope and a variety of taxonomic keys and guides dedicated to spider morphology and identification.

Cassara Randall, University of Indianapolis

Dr. Roger Sweets, University of Indianapolis

Investigating How Migration and Weather Affect Bird-Building Collisions and Bird Populations on The University of Indianapolis' Campus

In the United States, 365-988 million birds are estimated to die from collisions with buildings, specifically windows, each year (Riding et al., 2021; Van Doren et al., 2021). College campuses have been examined in the past as a source of research, but the University of Indianapolis has not yet been surveyed to determine its campus' impact on local and migratory bird populations. Anecdotal evidence from professors and peers suggests that bird-building collisions on campus are a significant problem that needs to be addressed. In order to address this knowledge gap, this project looks to identify the deadliest regions on campus for birds. Data on the species of birds that live on or visit campus and weather data will also be tracked to address additional goals of determining what birds use the University of Indianapolis campus as a breeding habitat or a stopover site and if weather plays any role in bird building collisions.

Politics and the Law, from Local to Global – Scholarly Presentations
Education & Arts Building - Room 1019

Moderator: Gabriel Mott, Ohio Northern University

Nika Anderson, Indiana University South Bend

Going Nuclear: Bridgman City's Tax Dispute with Nearby Power Plant

Quaint and unassuming, the close-knit beachside city of Bridgman, Michigan, is grappling with a problem that threatens to rift its harmonious community apart. In 2024, the Donald C. Cook Nuclear Plant won a settlement that reduced its taxable value, leaving local government, schools, and other public services short of the tax revenue that normally flowed into their coffers. This research examines the overarching problem of unfairly assessed property value in Michigan and suggests that closing the “dark store” tax loophole and similar machinations would discourage large enterprises from trying to lower their taxes. The presentation explores the legal and political climate that is preventing new bills from being passed to tackle this issue and how the inactivity of lawmakers is detrimental to smaller localities. Attention is dedicated to the case of Bridgman because of its long-standing and unique symbiotic relationship between the nuclear facility and the city’s public school district.

Grayson Arndt, Indiana University Kokomo

Narrativism: A Framework for Legalized Aggression and Lawfare

This research introduces Narrativism, a theoretical paradigm that reconceptualizes international relations as structured by strategic narratives through which institutions, states, and global actors construct legitimacy. Central to this paradigm is Legalized Aggression Narratives (LAN), a diagnostic sub-theory that identifies six mechanisms—legal legitimation, sovereignty framing, historical justification, security and protection rhetoric, institutional deflection, and rights suppression—used to normalize coercive behavior as lawful governance. LAN reveals how legal frameworks are repurposed to justify institutional aggression and sustain asymmetrical power. It functions as both a conceptual lens and an accountability tool, enabling scholars to decode how legality is weaponized to obscure violence and manufacture legitimacy. Case studies from Ukraine, Gaza, the Yugoslav Wars, and Indiana's HEA1001 law demonstrate LAN’s application across geopolitical contexts, and an application to domestic context, showing how institutions—from the United Nations to national governments and state governments—perform legitimacy. By synthesizing realism, constructivism, and institutionalism, the paper argues that lawfare constitutes a narrative architecture within global governance, challenging law’s neutrality and exposing its strategic function in power reproduction.

Sunny Lloyd, Ohio Northern University

Animals Deserve More Legal Rights

This presentation examines the historical development, philosophical foundations, and

future direction of animal rights in the United States. Beginning with the limited legal protections afforded to animals prior to the nineteenth century, it traces the progression to modern federal legislation such as the Animal Welfare Act. It then turns to contemporary litigation, focusing on the 2022 case concerning Happy the Elephant and the efforts of the Nonhuman Rights Project to secure her release. Although unsuccessful, the case illustrates both the limits and possibilities of current legal frameworks concerning animal rights. The paper evaluates three major approaches within animal ethics: Gary Francione’s abolitionist approach, Peter Singer’s animal welfare approach, and Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach. After defining each theory and applying it to Happy’s case, I present a substantive objection to each, arguing that no single framework is sufficient as a stand-alone strategy. In response to this paradox, I advocate for a unified and compromise-driven path forward. Using my proposed compromises, I argue that reforming state laws to classify animals as “sentient property” offers a realistic and impactful step toward expanding meaningful legal protections while laying the groundwork for broader future reform in favor of achieving the legal rights that animals deserve.

Systems of Justice and Belonging – Scholarly Presentations ***Education & Arts Building - Room 1025***

Moderator: Dr. Cathy Borshuk, Indiana University South Bend

Ayla Koslen, Cleveland State University

Our View of “Justice”: Punishing Crime and Preventing Recidivism

The criminal justice system claims to strive for fair treatment and the good of the people. But what is “justice” and what is the actual effect of the justice system? The justice system targets some groups more than others leaving already disadvantaged communities in worse situations. It punishes people for not having enough money to pay for things like bail, and necessary resources after release leaving individuals stripped of their rights and social support. Families are broken, impoverished people are even worse off, and unsupervised children are more at risk to become both future criminals and victims of a crime, failing to even prevent crime. Research has shown rehabilitation and harm reduction to be better at preventing crime than punishment. As I will explain in my presentation, this system is not justice, it's marginalization. The criminal justice system is not able to fully achieve justice due to having too many goals. It is impossible for the system to both maintain power while achieving fairness and preventing future crimes.

Morgann Lazrovitch, Indiana University Southeast

Fostering the Future: Providing Support for Foster Children Aging Out of the System

Foster youths leaving the foster care system are far more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, domestic abuse, and felony arrests. Many foster youths have expressed their desire for and the benefits of aftercare or support services when leaving the system. It is important to determine what support service will be most beneficial for foster youths leaving the system in Indiana to improve their outcomes and prepare them to enter society. Through secondary research, this study will analyze

common outcomes for foster youths after leaving foster services, the support services most sought after by those involved in foster services, and different support services currently offered in the United States. Through primary research, this study will compile data on experiences with foster care services in Indiana through an original survey and interviews and examine current support services in Indiana. This research finds that aftercare systems implemented in other states have drastically improved outcomes for foster youths after leaving the system. Indiana must follow in their footsteps to support youths entering society and improve communities across Indiana.

Anh Hoang Tran, Indiana University South Bend

Oral Histories of Work: The Dilemma of Being a Foreigner

Immigrants expect to succeed financially when moving abroad, and this leads to a dilemma in their work life balance. In the past century, work hours in western countries have been reduced dramatically as a result of the implementation of labor laws and various movements and organizations advocating for workers. In the context of the United States, the standard work week is 40 hours. Thus, the discussion of long work hours hinges on the consequences of overworking and the very reasons that lead immigrants to work long hours. One factor in the reduction of work hours has come from the inherent correlation between working longer hours and a negative impact on an individual's physical and mental health. Yet within the topic of motherhood, there is not enough discussion on the consequences of the conflict between domestic affairs and the workplace. This paper focuses on gender norms and the expectation among immigrants in the United States to succeed financially. The paper addresses the need for more research and attempts to understand how financial success becomes a major motivation in the long work hours immigrants endure. A case study of the author's mother dives deeper into the effects of long work hours and what this means for this contemporary mother. The study looks primarily at cultural and socioeconomic factors which lead individuals to work long hours. It measures symptoms of overworking and how overwork impacts an individual's physical and mental state as well as the effect on an individual's life outside of the workplace.

Creative Writing and World Building

Education & Arts Building - Room 1010

Moderator: Andrew W. Hanson, Indiana University South Bend

Sarah Farrough, Indiana University South Bend

The Writing Process of "Paranent World"

I will be reading excerpts from my newest story "Paranent World," which is about a girl named Ila whose planet is at war with the inhabitants of Norbant, its neighboring planet. Ila is reluctant at first to do anything but run, but when joined by Lana, an optimistic girl from the city of Parathenia, she goes on an adventure of a lifetime in order to save her world. I will be reading excerpts from the beginning, middle, and end of the story. I will begin by explaining how this book idea started. Then I will move on to how I overcame writer's block towards the end of the story. Finally, I will explain how I was unhappy with

the story and felt that my characters were flat and static and how I am now working to make the story better by adding depth to the characters.

Braxtyn Rapp, Ohio Northern University

Development and Incorporation of Invented Language into a Fictional Work

Over the course of a semester for my capstone project, I studied the development and invention of constructed languages (also called conlangs) into worldbuilding and plot development of stories with fantastical elements. Using this knowledge, I then created my own conlang and implemented it into the creation of a fantasy world and a chapbook that takes place within the world. This project focused on developing a conlang that mimicked real life languages in forms of structure, grammar, and phonics along with vocal variation of words depending on regional accents that are presented in the chapbook through the characters that all come from different backgrounds and ways of life. The conlang was constructed to be fully functional rather than existing only within the plot to move the story forward. Through workshops with peers, I was able to learn how to implement the new language into the story in a meaningful way that added to the plot rather than being distracting and taking away from the story and characters. Much of the worldbuilding grew from the language itself which gave the finished chapbook a polished and well-connected feel to conclude the capstone project.

11:00am-11:50am

Student-Led Panel

Education & Arts Building - Room 1011

Moderator: Anh Hoang Tran, Indiana University South Bend

Julian Arceo, Carlos Juarez, Sylvia Rotole, Casandra Vickers, & Zane Winders, Purdue University Northwest

The Power of Peer Mentoring in Honors Education - PNW Student Mentors

Peer mentoring has become an increasingly valuable tool within honors education, fostering academic success, leadership development, and a strong sense of community among students. This panel will explore how the peer mentoring program within the Purdue University Northwest (PNW) honors college supports student engagement, retention, and personal growth. Drawing from diverse experiences as mentors and mentees, the panelists will discuss best practices, challenges, and the measurable impact of peer mentoring on both academic performance and student well-being. The session will emphasize the reciprocal nature of peer mentoring, highlighting how mentors also develop leadership, communication, and professional skills. Panelists will share real-world examples of mentoring relationships, program structures, and strategies for creating inclusive, effective peer mentoring environments. This discussion will be valuable for students, faculty, and administrators interested in developing or strengthening peer mentoring initiatives within their honors program.

Faculty-Led Panel

Education & Arts Building - Room 1015

Moderator: Dr. Amy Scrima, Lake Michigan College

Dr. Jennifer Clevinger & Dr. Nina Rytwinski, Walsh University

Building Belonging: Strengthening the Honors Community

A strong sense of community is essential to fostering student growth, well-being, and retention within honors programs. In keeping with the conference theme of “Learning Together, Leading Together,” this session will allow attendees the opportunity to reflect on ways to enhance the sense of community within their honors programs. We will begin with an exploration of theories from the social sciences that are applicable to the development of community as well as practical challenges to community-building efforts. Participants will then apply the session material and share creative community building initiatives that have proven effective within their programs. This interactive session aims to create a collaborative space for exchanging ideas, inspiring new approaches, and enhancing the sense of belonging in honors education.

Rethinking Mental Health and Mental Illness – Scholarly Presentations

Education & Arts Building - Room 1019

Moderator: Nika Anderson, Indiana University South Bend

Andrew W. Hanson, Indiana University South Bend

The Intersection of Friedrich Nietzsche's Philosophical Concept of Nihilism and Our Understanding of Neurosis and Abnormal Psychological Traits: Implications for Contemporary Diagnostic Frameworks and AI-Assisted Mental Health Interventions

Friedrich Nietzsche argued that modern society faces a crisis of meaning following the collapse of traditional religious and moral frameworks, a condition he called nihilism. This project examines how Nietzsche’s ideas help explain many forms of modern psychological suffering, including anxiety, depression, and what clinicians historically described as neurosis. I argue that contemporary diagnostic systems, such as the DSM-5, often fail to capture the existential dimensions of psychological distress by reducing suffering to symptoms rather than meaning-making struggles. This presentation will explore how passive and active forms of nihilism relate to abnormal psychological traits, and how these ideas can improve our understanding of mental health. I will also discuss how emerging AI-based mental health tools risk reinforcing this reductionism if they ignore philosophical and existential dimensions of suffering. By integrating philosophy, psychology, and technology, this project suggests a more humane and meaningful approach to both diagnosis and treatment.

Kylie Rhodes, Indiana University South Bend

Hysterical Roots of Institutionalization: To the 1940s, World War II a Pivotal Point for Mental Health In Post-War America.

Psychology has dystopian roots that account for explanation of human behavior. Human nature is driven to understand the reason behind natural phenomena and giving reason to the natural world, as time has progress through history, the psychological field works give reason to human behavior and the various aspects of the very human mind. As theories and foundational aspects of psychology have developed throughout history, the very implementation of psychology has affected society as we know it to this very day. In early human history, sex and gender has been a discerning factor to group people into given characteristics, such characteristics have created differences and those differences have affected the treatment of humans rooted in the characteristics that have transpired through history. Such gender differences have created traumatic times and current-day practices that are inhumane and tortuous, as human nature has traveled through time, these gender differences correspond with female hysteria and later gave root to institutionalization practices as people who would be deemed “different,” would be taken to extreme actions such as the Holocaust coinciding with World War II. From early ancient human history to the 20th century, psychology has been utilized across all spectrums and applied to all ways of life to explain human behavior. As the 1940s was a pivotal decade for world history, it also showcases to be a pivotal point in psychological history with application of World War II propaganda, institutionalization rates increasing, and breaking the typical gender roles, the 1940s created a pivotal point in modern history for the approach to mental health and varying aspects of understanding human behavior.

Chloe Rucker, Indiana University South Bend

Beyond the Portrayal: Understanding Sociopathy through Patric Gagne’s Memoir

Sociopathy is commonly portrayed as a personality disorder mainly characterized by manipulation, emotional emptiness, and violence. Patric Gagne’s *Sociopath: A Memoir* shows us that it is more than that, and it can be resolved. In her memoir, she offers a first-person view of someone who lives with sociopathy. She explores sociopathic traits in a social and dimensional influenced condition rather than the criteria in the DSM-5. Through analysis, this paper highlights traits discussed by Gagne, which include emotional flatness, impulsivity, illegal activity, boundary-crossing, and manipulation. The highlight of the research is how Gagne learns to adapt to social expectations by mirroring emotions, managing her impulses through psychotherapy, and navigating relationships through manipulation and lack of empathy. I integrate scholarly resources on sociopathy and antisocial behavior which demonstrate how Gagne’s experiences regarding sociopathy are different from the traditional clinical views of society. Overall, the memoir shows how individuals with sociopathic traits can develop good habits that help challenge and control those emotions and non-emotions shown in societal norms.

Miscellaneous – Scholarly Presentations

Education & Arts Building - Room 1010

Moderator: Lilyan Siford, Indiana University South Bend

Liberty M. Guilmette, Central Michigan University

Cupcake, Honey, Sweetheart: A Literature Review Examining the Connection Between Sexist Ideologies and Use of Sexist Language

This literature review is the preliminary step in recreating Swim, Mallet and Stangor's 2004 study, "Understanding Subtle Sexism: Detection and Use of Sexist Language". The purpose of their study is to examine sexist micro-aggressions through language use, specifically the relationship between an individual's sexist ideologies and their likelihood of engaging in sexist micro-aggressions through language. In this paper, several different scholarly articles are synthesized to illustrate the need for an updated, more inclusive version of the 2004 study investigating how sexist ideologies are perpetuated through communication.

Madeleine Whitewolf, Ohio Northern University

Sustainable Additive Manufacturing: 3D Printing Filaments

3D Printing is an additive manufacturing technique that is used for precise prototyping and production of small-scale products. The most common type of 3D printing is material extrusion where thermoplastic filaments are melted at high temperatures and are extruded in layers to form objects that solidify when cooled. Depending on the application, different types of filaments are used to achieve the desired aesthetic qualities and mechanical properties for specific applications. However, many commercially available thermoplastics are not recyclable and are unsustainably sourced, affecting waste solutions and environmental decline. Increased research into bio-plastics and alternative sustainable thermoplastic solutions proves that similar, more sustainable filaments can be created with similar mechanical properties, sustainable material sourcing, and increased recycling abilities. This research paper focuses on the sustainability, printability, and durability of various commercially available material extrusion filaments—ABS, PLA, Recycled PLA, and Algae-reinforced PLA. These filaments were compared by completing a low-level life cycle analysis (LCA), qualitatively observing the printing and handling process, and performing tensile testing on printed samples. The results concluded that recycled PLA, made from 100% post consumer recycled (PCR) and post industrial recycled (PIR) PLA, is the most sustainable commercially available filament for at-home and industrial purposes.

1:10pm-2:00pm

Faculty/Student-Led Panel

Education & Arts Building - Room 1011

Moderator: Sarah Farrough, Indiana University South Bend

Dr. Rebekah Dement, Rosemary Jackson, Reagan Kelley, Xondrais Marie, Charles Nasby, Ashlynn Rife, and Veronica Zahn, Indiana University Southeast

From Blank Pages to Shared Vision: A Workshop in Reflective Community-Building

Could taking time to dream on paper foster a sense of community? How can reflective booklets serve as a data collection tool, as well as reinforce learning and visioning practices amongst students? Data collection and learning tools are commonly used across academic environments to gauge student responsiveness and comprehension of topics and concepts. Reflection is a common element in these tools, as is seen in essays, tests, and surveys. Reflective booklets are comprised of blank pages, each labelled with a different question regarding the topic of the booklet. By utilizing different pages and blank space, each question is given its own unique space to allow the student to express their answer through words, word mapping, drawings, or a combination of these methods. This allows for data collection to be more thorough, as students are able to fully express themselves. This interactive, primarily student-led panel discussion seeks to show how the use of physical reflective booklets can be implemented to help build community in an honors program by encouraging students to reflect and express their own ideas, what they have learned, and how they are contributing to a community in a way that isn't restricted to merely the written word.

Faculty-Led Panel

Education & Arts Building - Room 1015

Moderator: Chloe Rucker, Indiana University South Bend

Dr. Neovi Karakatsanis, Edwin Cortez Flores, Kylie Rhodes, and Anh Hoang Tran, Indiana University South Bend

Fostering Student Leadership on Your Campus

Student leadership is a crucial element in any educational institution and remains a cornerstone of an engaged and productive student body. While much discussion centers around educational leadership and its impact on students, less has been said about students being given any form of authority. This panel seeks to further contribute to the discourse around student leadership and the skills necessary in empowering students to engage with their peers. Leadership from students focuses primarily on authenticity and adaptability. While adult organizations often center around hierarchy and positions of power, student leadership focuses on a collaborative approach and building a sense of camaraderie with

others. One of the many arguments revolves around how individuals recognize others as leaders through their personality and presence rather than the position they hold in an organization. The ability to navigate any number of situations and maintain progressive thinking regardless of the challenges demonstrates strong leadership. By defining effective student leadership in this manner, the panel can continue the conversation around the role student leaders play at an institution. Knowing the characteristics of student leadership builds a framework for which individuals can strengthen their abilities and create stronger connections to those around them.

Digital Awareness & Security – Scholarly Presentations

Education & Arts Building - Room 1019

Moderator: Jordan Perkins, Indiana University South Bend

Andrew W. Hanson, Indiana University South Bend

From Models to Mindsets: Integrating DevOps, Formal Methods, and Ethics into Software Engineering Education

Modern software systems increasingly shape human lives, from healthcare and transportation to social media and artificial intelligence. Yet undergraduate software engineering education often separates technical development, system verification, and ethical reasoning into disconnected courses. This project proposes a new way of thinking about software engineering education called the Models to Mindsets framework. Rather than treating DevOps, formal methods, and ethics as separate topics, this framework integrates them into a unified way of teaching students how to think and act as responsible engineers. This presentation will explore how continuous integration, lightweight formal verification, and ethical reflection can be embedded directly into core software engineering courses. Drawing on research, industry standards, and curriculum guidelines from ACM and IEEE, I will show how students can be trained not only to build systems that work, but to reason about their safety, reliability, and social impact. The goal of this project is to move software education beyond technical compliance toward reflective and ethically grounded professional practice.

Holly Roeder, University of Mount Union

Everyone Needs a VPN

A brief introduction to the importance of protecting your privacy with a VPN online. The presentation will go over a history of Internet protocols, the concept of defense-in-depth, and how a VPN functions under the hood. It will discuss why VPN usage is critical when considering online safety, and how everybody will benefit from installing one. In addition, the presentation will go over different types of VPNs, and how to choose the best one depending on your lifestyle. Everybody needs internet security, so it is vital that we all take the proper precautions to protect ourselves - and our privacy - when we go online. This presentation is geared toward those who may not have technical knowledge on the subject.

Meklit Tofu, Walsh University

Cybersecurity Awareness Website for Young Adults

As digital technologies continue to expand and change, young adults from 18 to 30 years of age are becoming susceptible to various forms of cyberattacks. Despite the vulnerability, there is a lack of tools designed to address this issue. The goal of the research is to build a training website specifically designed for this demographic; CyberAware was developed using Python/Flask programming language, SQLite program, and HTML/CSS/JavaScript. CyberAware provides an interactive assessment tool of 25 pre-content questions covering four areas related to cybersecurity: Password Security, Privacy and Ai, Social Engineering, and Cybervictimization.

Upon finishing an assessment, CyberAware generates a personal risk profile through an algorithm based on a user's response, then creates a customized training program with appropriate educational resources from organizations such as the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and Khan Academy, relating to their risk profile and assessed risk based on the algorithm. Finally, following the educational program, a post-assessment will be given to determine if the person improved their cybersecurity knowledge or will need to continue practicing. CyberAware represents major progress in the development of cybersecurity education through its creation of a modern technological interface and interactivity across most types of digital devices.

Natural Sciences 2 – Scholarly Presentations

Education & Arts Building - Room 1025

Moderator: Dr. Nina Rytwinski, Walsh University

Brianna Birkle, Walsh University

Evaluating the Chemical Suitability of Digitally Printed Textiles with Objects of Cultural Heritage

The increasing popularity and availability of commercially-produced digitally printed textiles (DPTs) has incited textile conservators' curiosity as to their potential use in repairing and supporting historic fabrics. While previous studies have investigated physical properties, little is known about their off-gassing behavior. "Off-gassed" compounds may interact with sensitive surrounding materials to cause or accelerate degradation. As a result, this study examines the off-gassing of washed and unwashed DPTs to assess their chemical suitability for conservation-based treatments.

Custom pigment-printed DPTs ordered from Spoonflower and Contrado were subjected to accelerated aging through the Oddy test. Subsequently, they underwent iodide-iodate, Purpald, and sodium azide microchemical tests, followed by Attenuated-Total-Reflectance Fourier-Transform-Infrared-Spectroscopy (FTIR-ATR), Pyrolysis-Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (Py-GC/MS), and Headspace Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (HS-GC/MS). Corrosion on the Oddy test's metal coupons were analyzed

using an FTIR-microscope. Based on these results, the unwashed DPTs were classified as unsuitable for use with sensitive cultural heritage, due to severe corrosion on the Oddy test's metal coupons. After washing, Oddy test coupons lacked significant corrosion and no volatile compounds were identified in microchemical or analytical analyses, resulting in the categorization of washed DPTs as temporarily suitable for up to six months. This study emphasizes the need for thorough evaluation of DPTs.

Elizabeth Radis, Walsh University

Dissecting the Functional Attributes of SOX12

SRY-related high-motility box (SOX) genes are a family of 20 transcription factors that share a conserved High Mobility Group (HMG) box DNA binding domain. Group C of the SOX family (SOXC) is composed of SOX4, SOX11, and SOX12. Despite sharing a conserved HMG box and C-terminal region, the transcriptional strength of each SOXC member varies. SOX12 is believed to be the weakest transactivator, despite being ubiquitously expressed throughout the body. While SOX12 shares some functional redundancy with SOX4 and SOX11, the exact roles of SOX12 remain unknown. The purpose of this project is to evaluate the C-terminal region, that contains a transactivation motif, to determine if structural differences in this region alter the transcriptional output of SOX12. The transcriptional capability of SOX11 and SOX12 was assessed using dual luciferase assays. The hypothesis tested is that when the C-terminal regions of SOX11, possibly the most robust transactivator, and SOX12, are exchanged, the resulting chimeric SOX12/11 and SOX11/12 proteins will exhibit predictable differences in transcriptional potency. Structural modifications within the C-terminal transactivation domain of native and chimeric proteins will be illustrated by the expression of luciferase proteins. These expression levels directly correspond to the transcriptional strength of native and chimeric SOX12 proteins.

Lilyan Siford, Indiana University South Bend

Ethnographic Study on the Biochemistry Discourse Community

The question that this paper aims to answer is, what are the ways of thinking and knowing within biochemistry and how is knowledge and information interpreted and processed? While there is much research done over how students take in and interpret the information that they are taught, they do not see how it relates to the ways of thinking and knowing within their major. This phenomenon is important to study because it gives pivotal insight on how individuals, particularly students and professors, think within the major and how the discipline correlates to ways of interpreting information. To answer the above question, a biochemistry professor and a senior majoring in biochemistry were interviewed individually and were asked various questions regarding learning within the discipline, such as what is considered truth within the discipline and other questions. Finally, in addition to citing several research papers and a creative work, an in-class observation was taken on a Biochemistry lecture and class discussion, and the findings were recorded. The results of the interviews and observation were that a consensus exists within the biochemistry discipline that there is no way of knowing if something is certainly true and that this is something that students within the field are taught early on in their studies. The

results of the observation and the literature review show that the use of visual aids like presentations and classroom materials, such as articles, to teach students a certain topic helps them excel.

Exploring Music Across Disciplines: From Engineering Principles to Poetry
Education & Arts Building - Room 1010

Moderator: Diana Zebroski, Indiana University South Bend

Tanner Lebo, University of Mount Union
How Engineering Principles Shape Sound

Mallet percussion instruments like the marimba and vibraphone are known for their rich, resonant sound—but that sound doesn't happen by accident. It's shaped by physics and careful design. This project explores how vibration, resonance, and material choice influence the tone and sustain of these instruments. It looks at how marimba bars are undercut to tune overtones, how vibraphone resonator tubes amplify certain frequencies, and how the overall structure of the instrument affects its sound.

Rather than separating science from music, this presentation shows how closely the two are connected. Several short live demonstrations will show how striking position, mallet choice, and damping techniques change tonal color and resonance. Brief musical examples will let the audience hear these differences in real time. By combining explanation with performance, this project highlights how the engineering principles behind the instrument directly shapes musical expression.

Macilynn Shaffer, Central Michigan University
Forged in Gold

Forged in gold is a short poem about my experience as a musician, and how leaning on others has helped me to gain confidence through the community and support of my orchestra. Although the poem has no traditional formatting, it focuses on the process of creating music, comparing it to that of excavating minerals from the earth.

2:10pm-3:00pm

Plenary Panel: "Why MEHA Matters: Engagement, Belonging, and What's Next"
Education & Arts Building - Room 1011

Moderator: Dr. Cathy Borshuk, Indiana University South Bend

Panel Participants:

- Tayjaun Banner, MEHA Student Representative, Lakeland Community College
- Karrie M. Jean, Honors Program Assistant Director, Indiana University South Bend
- Gabriel Mott, MEHA Student Representative, Ohio Northern University

- Jordan Perkins, MEHA Student Representative, Indiana University South Bend
- Dr. Victor Piercey, Honors Program Director, Ferris State University
- Dr. Nina Rytwinski, Honors Program Co-Director, Walsh University
- Dr. Amy Scrima, Honors Program Director, Lake Michigan College

Sunday, April 19th

9:15am-10:15am

Annual Business Meeting (Education & Arts 1011)

Poster Presentations

10:30am-12:00pm

Shareen Awadallah, Walsh University

Mary Cook, DNP, MSN, RN, CNE, Walsh University

Tammie Davis, MSN, RN, CCRN, CPNP, Walsh University

The Impact of Awareness of Gender-Specific Differences in Women's Cardiovascular Health

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of mortality among women in the United States, yet gender specific differences in symptom presentation, risk factors, and disease progression remain widely underrecognized. This thesis examines the impact of awareness of gender specific differences in women's cardiovascular health, with a focus on public knowledge and understanding. An anonymous survey was administered to adult female participants to assess their awareness of cardiovascular disease risk factors, symptom recognition, and understanding of how cardiovascular disease may present differently in women compared to men. Survey findings reveal gaps in knowledge related to atypical symptoms, gender specific risk factors such as hormonal influences and pregnancy related conditions, and perceived personal risk. These gaps may contribute to delayed care seeking, misinterpretation of symptoms, and poor health outcomes. This project highlights the importance of public education and awareness initiatives aimed at improving women's recognition of cardiovascular disease and empowering them to advocate for their health. By identifying areas of limited awareness, this thesis underscores the need for targeted educational interventions to support early detection, prevention, and improved cardiovascular outcomes for women.

Hannah Blawas, Walsh University

Dr. Adam Underwood, Walsh University

Dr. Darlene Walro, Walsh University

The Functional Effectiveness of SOX7-A379V in Transcription

Protein variants can contribute to disease by disrupting a protein's biological activity. Therefore, defining the functional effects of protein variants is essential. Transcription factors are regulators of gene expression, and the SRY-box (SOX) related protein family

is required for cellular differentiation and organogenesis. SOX proteins contain a conserved high-mobility group (HMG)-box DNA-binding domain that mediates sequence-specific regulatory activity. While most studies focus on functional alterations due to changes in the HMG-box, our computational approaches have identified variants in regions outside this domain that may impact SOX function. One such variant is SOX7-A379V, which substitutes valine for alanine at residue 379 in conserved the C-terminal domain. This variant may potentially contribute to glaucoma and retinal degeneration in certain genotypes. This thesis tested the hypothesis that SOX7-A379V alters transcriptional activity relative to wild-type SOX7. To test this hypothesis, HeLa cells were transiently co-transfected with expression constructs encoding wild-type SOX7, SOX7-A379V, or empty vector, together with a normalization vector (pRL-null) and a luciferase reporter construct pGL3-AR600 containing a SOX-inducible promoter. Transcriptional activity was quantified with luciferase assays. SOX7-A379V produced a significant increase in reporter activity compared with wild-type SOX7, indicating enhanced SOX7-A379V transcriptional activity under these experimental conditions.

Courtney Cannon, Central Michigan University

Investigating Euro-American Settler Sites in Midland County, Michigan

This project investigates Euro-American settler sites in Midland County, Michigan, using a combination of archaeological site reports and firsthand field research. By synthesizing existing archaeological documentation with direct analysis of material culture, landscapes, and site histories, the project examines patterns of settlement, land use, and daily life from the nineteenth through early twentieth centuries. Particular attention is given to how settlers interacted with Indigenous landscapes, local resources, and evolving economic networks as Midland County developed. Archaeological evidence is contextualized alongside historical records to better understand continuity and change within these communities. This integrative approach highlights the value of archaeology in reconstructing local histories that are often absent from written sources alone. Ultimately, the project contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Midland County's settler past and demonstrates how archaeological data can inform public history and regional heritage interpretation.

Katherin Cotner, University of Indianapolis

Caring in Pieces: A Structural Diagnosis of Burnout

Many accounts of burnout focus on individual psychological states and individual-level interventions (Malesic, 2022). This individualistic way of thinking about burnout doesn't allow for a social-structural analysis of the factors outside of an individual that cause widespread burnout. Through an analysis of the evolution of work and structural changes to working conditions, I develop a new account of burnout that allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the primary causes of burnout. Specifically, I will use nursing as a case study to highlight how nursing burnout is caused by oppressive structures rather than the individual's state of mind. Nursing specialization, an individualistic attempt to combat burnout, has caused different types and levels of fragmentation (e.g. communication (Wisner et al., 2019), continuity of care (Joo, 2023), and care coordination

(Kern et al., 2024)). These fragmentations are windows into the structural causes of burnout; by tracking fragmentation through the healthcare system, I will outline the structural components causing burnout. My analysis of burnout as a structural issue rather than an issue of the individual will allow for targeted changes to the structural components causing burnout rather than relying on individual behavioral or attitudinal changes.

Amy Ferguson, Central Michigan University

Evaluating Autocorrelation in Single-Case Designs: A Methodological Application to Academic Engagement and Disruptive Behavior in ADHD Research

Single-case designs (SCDs) are widely used in school psychology to evaluate interventions for students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). However, the repeated-measures nature of SCDs often results in autocorrelation, which can distort effect-size estimates and misrepresent intervention effectiveness. This study examines the presence and strength of lag-1 autocorrelation in SCDs targeting academic engagement and disruptive behavior. Of the 469 articles, 117 studies met the inclusion criteria and were coded for study, case, and outcome-level variables. Using reproducible R scripts, we estimated autocorrelation for each time series and summarized the results using descriptive statistics. By quantifying autocorrelation across a large sample of SCDs, this project aims to strengthen the methodological foundation of ADHD intervention research and promote more accurate, evidence-based decision-making in educational practice.

Wren Ferguson, Kip Gilbert, Kendal Swatosh, & Dr. Mary Wendt, Central Michigan University

In Defense of Gossip

Traditionally, gossiping has negative connotations, but there are situations in which gossip can have a positive impact. Previous research has outlined the positive and negative effects of different types of gossip, especially on reputation and the formation of in-groups and out-groups. This study focused on how gossip impacts trust within relationships. We conducted a survey which asked how different instances of gossip would affect participants' trust of the gossiper and the person gossiped about, as well as in which relationships participants would engage in gossip. Our research found that participants were more likely to gossip within close relationships. Contrary to the belief that gossiping makes a person untrustworthy, when told gossip by a friend, the participants of our survey said this action generally increased their trust of the friend. Participants' responses implied that gossip can have both positive and negative impacts on one's trust with the person being gossiped about, depending on the intent of the person telling the gossip. From this, we concluded that gossip can have benefits within interpersonal relationships.

Aldo García Pájaro, Central Michigan University

Dr. Christopher C. Davoli, Central Michigan University

Typographical Presentation of Written Instructions on Creativity

U.S. students have increasing access to technology that impinges on traditional paper-and-

pencil methods of instruction, especially cursive. The Michigan Board of Education has recently declared its support for cursive based on abundant literature surrounding its cognitive benefits (State of Michigan, 2025). In terms of creativity as affected by font, prior research has focused on the color in which words are written rather than font type. The present study centers on assessing the effect of cursive on creative output. 22 Central Michigan University students participated in a between-groups experiment in which they completed both divergent and convergent thinking tasks presented in either cursive font or standard font. The current results indicated no significant difference between participants tested with cursive and those tested with standard. Anglophone classrooms must consider this null effect when deciding how to best bolster students' creative thinking. Future research should study the effects of other allographs on creativity.

Lucas Griffin, University of Indianapolis

Blarney?: The Irish Midwest

This paper examines how the 1981 Irish hunger strikes, especially the death of Bobby Sands, were interpreted across the American Midwest and how regional media shaped divergent Irish American political responses. While Sands' death generated unprecedented U.S. coverage and revived nationalist sentiment, reactions were neither ideologically uniform nor geographically consistent. Through comparative discourse analysis of three major Midwestern newspapers (the Chicago Tribune, Indianapolis Star, and Detroit Free Press) this study demonstrates that regional political cultures, partisan realignments, and local press traditions significantly influenced how Sands was framed and how communities mobilized in response. Findings show that, unlike the more militant or highly organized activism in the Northeast, Midwestern Irish American engagement was restrained, institutionally mediated, and often shaped by emerging Reagan-era political identities. By centering the Midwest, an understudied yet demographically critical region, this project challenges East Coast-centric narratives of Irish America and highlights how local media ecosystems refracted transnational events, producing distinct diasporic political imaginaries. Ultimately, the paper positions the hunger strikes as a pivotal moment in understanding regional variation within diaspora nationalism and the broader dynamics of American engagement with the Northern Ireland conflict.

Nathan Hawkins, Lakeland Community College

The Art of Tying Flies: Showcase of Northeast Ohio Aquatic Insects

Learning to fly fish is a skill that takes years to master, but tying flies is an art anybody can enjoy. Using simple materials to create life-like representations of insects or other aquatic organisms. Fly fishing itself has its origins in ancient Macedonia, where fishermen would use a 6ft rod and 6ft of line and a fly made of wool and feathers. While this technically is also the origin of tying flies, there is not much else on record about this. In the mid-1800s fly fishing became very popular in Europe, especially Britain. Because of this, specialized tools were created for tying flies, and much that is known about it comes from this time period and later. As European traditions and customs made their way to the Americas in the colonial period so did the sport of fly fishing. Which leads us to today where, thanks to the internet, fly fishing and especially fly tying are more popular in the United States than ever before. Leading to a new kind of fly tying artform where caricatures of pop culture figures are recreated using a hook and fly tying materials.

This showcase will include 4 of the most common aquatic insects found in Northeast Ohio as well as a handful of other miscellaneous creatures. All are hand tied to represent different their life stages. These different types of flies are used for specific times of the year when these insects go through their reproductive cycles.

Haruki Imanishi, Walsh University

David Good, MSc, Walsh University

Dr. Jaqueline Novak, Walsh University

Using Clustering and Decision-Tree Based Models to Find the Greatest Formula One Driver of All Time

The motorsports discipline of Formula One (F1) has long had a debate regarding who the greatest driver of all time is. The question has been analyzed using numerous methods, which include regression, econometric, and cluster models, but with varying results. Discrepancies include different drivers being ranked as the greatest and drivers who have not had substantial results being among the top-ranked drivers. One model which has never been used is the Decision-Tree model. This project proposes the use of Decision-Tree models in conjunction with cluster models to rank the greatest F1 drivers of all time. The F1DB GitHub page was used to source the comma separated value (csv) files that include comprehensive data regarding all F1 races. K-Means Clustering, Decision-Tree, and Random-Forest models were used in conjunction with each other using calculated metrics such as average points and gaps to winner for each driver to provide a definitive ranking of the greatest drivers. The findings demonstrate that the Decision-Tree models provide a strong basis for ranking drivers, with clustering enabling only the best drivers to be ranked, addressing the existing issue of drivers with unsubstantial results being among the top-ranked.

Ryleigh Jebson, Indiana University South Bend

Enhanced Embedded Systems for Wireless Environmental Datalogging Using Bluetooth Low Energy

The Tree Canopy Project is an effort to reduce dangerous urban heat islands in the city of South Bend by planting 100,000 trees over 10 years in the least green areas of the city. Requested by the city, the Physics Department is designing and fabricating 75 data logging systems to measure the effectiveness of reducing these dangerous hot spots. To accumulate this much environmental data for this time scale and encompassing area, it is critical to develop a method to do so in a cost-effective manner using widely available components and sensors. The project was conducted over the summer of 2025 and resulted in the development of a codebase and a circuit for the client that receives the data and the server dataloggers that transmit it. These dataloggers can communicate wirelessly with each other using Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) to avoid having to manually collect data from dozens of loggers in the field. By being able to gauge the effectiveness of tree planting efforts across South Bend, the city can focus on high-risk areas to not only protect public health but additionally to beautify the city with increased greenery.

Mariam Kalil, Cuyahoga Community College

From Plaque to Pulse: The Hidden Pathway Linking Oral and Heart Health

Maintaining oral hygiene has traditionally been associated with preventing cavities and tooth loss, keeping the gums healthy, and having fresh breath. However, recently, there has been significant scientific research that reveals that the oral health of an individual is linked to the health of their body. In particular, periodontal disease has been found to have a connection with increased levels of cardiovascular disease. Periodontal disease is more commonly known as gum disease. It is a chronic inflammatory condition that affects the gum and bone tissues around the teeth. It occurs when bacterial plaque is built up around the tooth leading to bleeding and swollen gums referred to as gingivitis, tartar buildup, and deep periodontal pockets that have serious consequences. Periodontal disease has been found to have effects on heart related risk factors including atherosclerosis, heart attacks, and stroke. According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR 2024), data results show periodontal disease affects around 47% of adults over the age of 30 and 70% of adults over the age of 65 in the United States (U.S.). Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. and research finds that there is clearly a link between these two diseases. This paper aims to highlight the importance of oral hygiene through its fundamental role in systemic health with a focus on the recent research evidence found linking periodontal disease and cardiovascular conditions.

Kyriana Layne, Indiana University Southeast

Real and Staged: Exploring Audience Reactions to Pain in Media

Is pain funny? Generally, pain is considered something to be avoided. Despite this, pain is interwoven closely with life. Whether you are a hunter, a medieval execution bystander, or a Tom and Jerry enthusiast, pain is seen within many contexts. This project seeks to explore how audiences respond to portrayals of physical pain in media. To understand this, the research includes a review of scholarly literature, a qualitative content analysis, and an original IRB-approved survey. Preliminary findings suggest that the forms of using pain for entertainment have changed over time. Recently, we now have more choice over what, when, and how we watch videos, which influences how people feel and interact with what they watch. This supported the creation of more niches and subcultures, which connects to how what a person is willing to watch impacts their feelings about what others watch and the stereotypes they may associate with them.

Riley Mason, Ohio Northern University

Victoria Kempton, Ohio Northern University

Edward Lansing, Ohio Northern University

Troy Welker, Ohio Northern University

The Effects of Interpersonal Relationship and Intensity of Punishment on Moral Choices on Morally Ambiguous Scenarios

Morality forms a large basis of human culture and society, with many decisions, principles, and laws being based upon it. However, there is a poor understanding of how interpersonal

relationships and punishment intensity affect perceived morality. The present study used 54 college-aged individuals from a small, rural, midwestern university to research this gap. A series of morally relevant scenarios were used and participants rated fairness and empathy scores for two people within the scenario. Additionally, it was identified that the interaction between interpersonal relationship and moral intensity requires further research. These have wide ranging implications which range from justice, education, and interpersonal relationships.

Morgan Mussehl, Central Michigan University

Building Belonging and Persistence in STEM: A Student-Driven Speaker and Panel Initiative within the InSciTE Program

Undergraduate STEM attrition is highest during the first year, when students face challenges related to learning strategies, identity development, and limited exposure to research and professional pathways. Cohort-based learning environments that foster relatedness and community have been shown to support student persistence. The Integration of Science, Technology, and Engineering (InSciTE) program at Central Michigan University (CMU) addresses these challenges through interdisciplinary, skills-based learning centered on collaboration and student engagement.

This poster presents a proposed InSciTE Speaker Series and Panel Initiative designed to connect early-career STEM students with professionals in academia, industry, and research. The initiative includes a once-per-semester professional panel and monthly academic talks, all open to College of Science and Engineering students. In keeping with InSciTE's student-driven model, students participate in speaker selection and event planning, fostering ownership and relevance.

By providing early exposure to diverse STEM careers and professional role models, this initiative aims to strengthen students' sense of belonging, increase motivation, and support persistence in STEM pathways.

Morgan Mussehl, Central Michigan University

Dr. Shasta Sabo, Central Michigan University

Impact of GluN2B Haploinsufficiency on CREB Activation and Expression of Postsynaptic Proteins during Cortical Development

GRIN2B disease is a gene mutation encoding GluN2B proteins associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Symptoms of this disease are intellectual disability, seizures, muscle tone abnormalities, and many other behavioral and physical conditions. It is unknown how the mutations are related to the symptoms. GluN2B is a protein that induces synaptic plasticity and activates a transcription factor, cAMP-response element binding protein (CREB) involved in plasticity. The goal of this study is to investigate the impact of GluN2B haploinsufficiency on the expression and activation of CREB. Western blot analysis will be performed on brain tissue samples from rats aged P18-P24. The hypothesis of this study is that wild type rats will have increased expression and activation of pCREB and CREB whereas GluN2B heterozygous knockout rats will have decreased expression

and activation of pCREB and CREB.

Tadiwanashe Mutasa, Central Michigan University

Effects of Accents on Communication

Being a foreigner in the United States with an accent can be challenging. This study investigates the effects of different accents on communication, emphasizing how Zimbabwean speakers encounter language difficulties in social and professional contexts in the United States. This research examines how accents influence perception, comprehension, and possible marginalization, which will contribute to larger conversations on language discrimination and cultural adaptability. The project will use surveys to evaluate American opinions of non-American English and qualitative interviews with Zimbabwean students. The expected results will emphasize the communication obstacles Zimbabweans encounter and offer solutions for enhancing intercultural comprehension. This research is important because it will support diversity and inclusion efforts, advance social language research on accent perception, and provide guidance for Zimbabweans or other foreigners with the same issue, adjusting to the language in the U.S. or any other country.

Justin Neilson, Indiana University South Bend

South Bend Waterways: Urban Infrastructure and Local Water Pollution

Historically, South Bend, Indiana, addressed water quality by eliminating direct industrial "point-source" dumping into the St. Joseph River. However, the river remains polluted due to non-point source urban runoff, primarily driven by the city's high concentration of impervious surfaces. Currently, 31.1% of South Bend is covered by impermeable materials like asphalt and roofing, generating over 224 million gallons of runoff for every inch of rainfall. These surfaces channel pollutants, including heavy metals, oils, and fertilizers, directly into the waterway while increasing the risk of extreme flooding events. This paper evaluates infrastructure-based solutions designed to capture and filter runoff at its source, specifically within commercial and industrial zones. Key recommendations include utilizing vegetation to filter and absorb water from large flat roofs and parking lots with bioswales and green roofs, converting abandoned lots into green spaces and using permeable pavement for walkways to restore soil infiltration with permeable infrastructure, and increasing South Bend's urban tree canopy from 25.9% toward the recommended 40% to intercept precipitation and enhance soil water storage. While barriers such as implementation costs and existing urban design remain, the paper argues that transitioning from "pavement-prioritized" land use to nature-based infrastructure is essential for the ecological restoration of the St. Joseph River.

Grace Osiri, Central Michigan University

Exploring Dietary Patterns and Predicting Prediabetes Status using Machine Learning Models on NHANES data

Prediabetes is a metabolic state in which blood glucose levels are elevated above normal but below the diabetic range. Affecting approximately 96 million U.S. adults, with over

80% remaining undiagnosed, prediabetes increases the risk of several health complications. While dietary patterns have been linked to diabetes risk, most existing research focuses on Type 2 diabetes and traditional statistical methods that may overlook complex dietary patterns. This study uses data from the 2017–2020 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) and deploys survey-weighted statistical methods and machine learning models, including logistic regression, principal component analysis, LASSO, random forest, and Extreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost). Model performance is evaluated using Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1 score, and AUC. Results identify key dietary, demographic, and anthropometric factors that lead to an increased risk of prediabetes and include predictive models for prediabetes risk. These outcomes could be utilized to develop interventions to address this growing health concern.

Olivia Perdue, University of Rio Grande

Evaluating Emergency Medical Response and Challenges in Rural Communities Within the United States

Emergency Medical Services are crucial for providing timely pre-hospital care, as rural communities face significant challenges that delay time-sensitive medical interventions. These delays put lives and long-term well-being at heightened risk. Geographic isolation, staffing shortages, and financial constraints contribute to extended response times and create barriers to the delivery of critical medical care. Together, these factors contribute negatively to patient outcomes. This research displays the current state of rural EMS across the United States and identifies barriers to proper care using a comprehensive literature review. Strengthening these areas is essential to reducing mortality and improving access to care in underserved rural communities. Policy reform is required to ensure appropriate changes are made for rural communities to see the lasting benefits in healthcare. Expediting appropriate care, increasing staffing capacity, and securing sustainable funding directly align with and address the specific barriers impacting rural EMS systems.

Sylvia Rotole & Zane Winders, Purdue University Northwest

Peer Mentor–Mentee Engagement: Perceived Benefits and Communication Factors

The Purdue University Northwest Honors College Peer Mentoring Program plays a critical role in supporting honors students' academic success, sense of belonging, and overall adjustment to college life. While the benefits of peer mentoring are well-documented, less attention has been given to mentor–mentee engagement, particularly the factors that influence responsiveness and communication consistency.

Engagement between mentors and mentees varies widely, and low response rates can limit the effectiveness of mentoring relationships. Understanding both the perceived benefits of peer mentoring and the communication barriers and facilitators that influence engagement can help our peer mentor program improve mentor training and structure.

This study aims to examine mentor–mentee engagement from the participants' (mentor/mentee) perspectives and identify practical strategies to improve communication outcomes.

Lizzie Sonntag, University of Mount Union

Kidney Mass in Relation to Body Mass and Class

Kidneys in different classes of animals can look and function extremely differently. Comparing attributes of the kidney, such as weight, across different classes can show how the kidney evolved over time. The kidney masses of five different classes of animals were measured and results were analyzed for patterns.

Joyce Tagne, Cuyahoga Community College

When Leaders Dance: Moving Together, Leading Together

As the concept of leadership continues to evolve, it is important to consider nontraditional approaches for fostering leadership. When asked about defining leadership, many people might cite qualities like discipline or charisma. What if I told you that you can develop these same qualities and even more through dance? This presentation is about teaching leadership through dance. I focus on how the lessons embedded in dance, from nonverbal communication to presence, can be a valuable tool used in leadership training.

Paige Weid, College of Health Professions, Central Michigan University

Preshit N. Ambade, Covenant HealthCare College of Medicine, Central Michigan University
Caleb N. Zimmerman, College of Business Administration, Central Michigan University
Christya N. Haddad, Covenant HealthCare College of Medicine, Central Michigan University
Neil J. MacKinnon, Covenant HealthCare College of Medicine, Central Michigan University
Spokane Regional Health District Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Assessment

This project was commissioned in response to the Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD)'s 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. An online survey comprising 22 questions on workplace mental health and well-being (WP-MH&WB) and additional items (referred to as the Augusta+ Scale) was distributed to SRHD employees in August and September 2025. A mixed-method approach was adopted to analyze the data. A total of 179 employees completed the entire survey. The average WPMH&WB score was 83.4 (SD $\pm$ 20.7) (on a scale ranging from a minimum score of 22 to a maximum score of 110), suggesting good WP-MH&WB. Sociodemographic characteristics were associated with differences in the WP-MH&WB mean score between those who reported feeling burned out and those who did not. Overall, 44.3% of respondents reported experiencing burnout, while 57.8% reported experiencing loneliness. A one-unit increase in the WP-MH&WB scale score was associated with an 8% decrease in odds of experiencing burnout (OR=0.92; 95% CI: 0.89-0.95; p-value<0.001). Most participants across divisions reported relationships, hobbies, health, and finances were substantial contributing factors to their personal and professional fulfillment. To address the issues identified, we recommend the SRHD establish workplace initiatives that empower employees in decision-making and utilize available resources to strengthen the organizational culture.

McKenzie Williams-Wray, University of Rio Grande

The Evolution of AI's Impact on Professional Communication (2015–2025)

This project explores how conversations about Artificial Intelligence (AI) in professional settings have changed over the past ten years. By looking at research studies from 2015 to 2025, it shows a clear shift: from early fears about AI replacing jobs to current ideas about using AI responsibly to support people's needs.

The review finds that while AI is great at processing data, it struggles with the "human touch" needed for real communication, especially when it comes to understanding things like culture, ethnicity, and mental health. By combining key studies, like those by Ranade & Saravia (2024) and Masters-Wheeler & Bay (2025), the project shows how AI's role has changed—highlighting its benefits (like improved efficiency), risks (such as ethical bias), and shifts in research approaches.

In the end, the research shows a trend toward "Collective Reading" and shared leadership, viewing AI not as a competitor but as a useful tool for thinking and learning. It emphasizes the need for human guidance to keep professional communication inclusive, ethical, and connected to human experiences.

Diana Woo, Central Michigan University

Attitudes about the Criminal Legal System: Perceptions of Individuals in Law Enforcement and Interrogation Tactics

As the political climate of the United States becomes increasingly polarized, so have attitudes towards the United States criminal legal system. Perceptions of individuals in law enforcement, as well as views on lying about evidence and the effects of the criminal legal system on perceptions of individuals in law enforcement, were studied across political ideologies and levels of religiousness. An online survey was used to collect these data, which was analyzed using correlational approaches. As participants became more liberal or less religious, they tended to have less favorable perceptions of individuals in law enforcement. When it came to lying as an interrogation tactic, participants generally did not favor this tactic. The current study contributes to previous research on perceptions of the criminal legal system by showing how political ideologies and levels of religiousness affect people's perceptions of individuals in law enforcement and lying as an interrogation tactic. Future research should investigate how different social identities perceive individuals in law enforcement and different interrogation tactics.

Veronica Zahn, Indiana University Southeast

The Iron Heartland: Investigating the Midwest's Manufacturing Industry

Are Midwestern manufacturing workers required to forfeit their skills for industry advancement? With goals set on higher efficiency and lower cost, industry leaders diminish an employee's autonomy and the diversity of their skill set. As a result, workers feel more like "cogs in a machine" than skilled laborers (Hartnell et al., 2022). The industry itself has benefited from changes brought by automation and globalization,

producing more output with fewer workers. Using semi-structured interviews and a review of selected scholarly literature, this study aims to understand the current state of the Midwest's manufacturing sector and its effects on its workers.

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