

# Graduate Student Research & Creative Activity Conference



**Monday | May 1, 2023**  
**Southern Connecticut State University**



It is our honor as members of the organizing committee to welcome you to the Annual Graduate Student Research and Creative Activity Conference, hosted by Southern Connecticut State University. This event is a celebration of scholarship and creativity in all forms, as well as a showcase for the leading minds of today's graduate community. As an educational institution, Southern seeks to promote interdisciplinary academic careers and both logic and creativity are key components in individual, economic, and societal success. The presentations highlighted in this conference demonstrate the diverse scope of subjects engaged by students from many disciplines as well as illustrating the parallels between them. This conference aims to not only encourage continued work as a community, but also to awaken individual curiosity and purpose. So it is with great pleasure that we present the scholarship and creative activity featured this year and invite you to join in what promises to be an unparalleled demonstration of graduate accomplishment.

**The Graduate Student Research and Creative Activity Conference is proudly sponsored by:**

The SCSU Foundation  
The Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs  
Division of Research and Innovation  
The Research and Scholarship Advisory Committee  
The Office of STEM Innovation and Leadership  
School of Graduate and Professional Studies/Graduate Student Affairs Committee

**Conference Committee**

Listed in alphabetical order:

Charles Baraw	Jeremy Chandler
Kelly Bordner	Heather Stearns
Christine Broadbridge	C. Michele Thompson
Siobhan Carter-David	Jonathan Wharton
	Bogdan Zamfir

# 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Research and Creativity Conference

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Monday, May 1, 2023 | 4:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Southern Connecticut State University

4:30 – 5:00 p.m.	Check in Poster and oral presentation set-up	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor Adanti Student Center
5:00 – 5:15 p.m.	Welcoming Remarks:	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor Ballroom
<b>Michele Thompson, Ph.D.</b>   <i>Prof. of Southeast Asian History &amp; Chair of the Research and Scholarship Advisory Committee</i>		
<b>Julia Irwin, Ph.D.</b>   <i>Interim Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies</i>		
<b>Robert Prezant, Ph.D.</b>   <i>Provost &amp; Vice President of Academic Affairs, Southern Connecticut State University</i>		
5:15 – 6:30 p.m.	Oral Presentation – Session 1A	ASC room 306
	Oral Presentation – Session 2A	ASC room 308
	Oral Presentation – Session 3A	ASC room 309
	Oral Presentation – Session 4A	ASC room 311
5:30 – 7:00 p.m.	Poster Presentation	ASC Ballroom
6:30 p.m.	Sandwich & Salad Buffet	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor Ballroom Reception Area
6:45 – 8:00 p.m.	Oral Presentation – Session 1B	ASC room 306
	Oral Presentation – Session 2B	ASC room 308
	Oral Presentation – Session 3B	ASC room 309
	Oral Presentation – Session 4B	ASC room 311

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## 5:15 – 6:30 p.m. | Oral Presentations – Session 1A

ASC Room 306

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### 1A. *Recreating Ourselves through Feminist Resistance: A Collaborative Autoethnography*

This panel addresses the ways that we as graduate students have reclaimed and reinvented ourselves throughout our academic journeys. We are a body of intergenerational, multiracial, multi-abled individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Our collective autoethnographies present a microcosm of those marginalized voices that the world seems intent on silencing. We actively resist those politicized forces that call for cultural homogenization through their “anti-woke” movements and attempts at erasing and re-writing history. We recognize that our stories matter, our histories matter, and that we matter. Our stories show that we will not be silenced, and only by accepting our past can we actively participate in our present, and strategically and intentionally direct our own future.

- O1A.1 **Author(s):** Mike Sanger – Moderator  
**Faculty Mentor:** Laura Bower-Phipps  
**Department:** Women & Gender Studies
- O1A.2 **Author(s):** Samantha Bonz  
**Faculty Mentor:** Laura Bower-Phipps  
**Department:** Women & Gender Studies
- O1A.3 **Author(s):** Toyin Animashaun  
**Faculty Mentor:** Laura Bower-Phipps  
**Department:** Women & Gender Studies
- O1A.4 **Author(s):** Sierra Nastasi & Cindy Cardozo  
**Faculty Mentor:** Laura Bower-Phipps  
**Department:** Women & Gender Studies
- O1A.5 **Author(s):** Le'Asia Gaskin  
**Faculty Mentor:** Laura Bower-Phipps  
**Department:** Women & Gender Studies
- O1A.5 **Author(s):** Cynthia Cardozo  
**Faculty Mentor:** Laura Bower-Phipps  
**Department:** Women & Gender Studies



**O2A.1** *Characterization of MWCNT/BIOCHAR-MnO<sub>2</sub> Nanocomposites for Supercapacitor Applications***Author(s):** Kaleb Roman**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Christine Broadbridge**Department:** Physics

**Abstract:** In the digital age of computers and smart devices, energy storage has been an increasingly important area of study. Devices are getting smaller, more accessible, and more powerful which is putting many electrical grids under critical strain. Demand for more energy storage technologies has accelerated the production of toxic materials that have a deleterious effect on the environment. In hopes of improving efficiency and minimizing environmental impact of renewable energy technologies, scientists have started looking into designing high performance supercapacitors. These capacitors combine physical and chemical energy storage using nanocomposite materials. Our project has focused primarily on creating supercapacitors using biochar, an environmentally friendly nanomaterial made from carbon that has a highly porous microstructure. This material can be combined with Manganese Dioxide (MnO<sub>2</sub>), a nontoxic compound, to form a composite capable of exhibiting both columbic and faradic charge storage. The composite can be pasted onto a nickel metal mesh and submerged in an electrolyte solution to form a supercapacitor cell. Optimization of the nanocomposite can be achieved by changing the quantity of materials added during synthesis which affects the ratio of chemical to physical charge storage. The focus of this study has been to test and optimize these supercapacitor cells using electrochemistry and characterization data on the component materials being implemented. Based on our studies, low concentration biochar-MnO<sub>2</sub> composites seem to be a promising alternative to other nanocomposites found in industrial batteries and supercapacitors while having a positive effect on the environment.

**O2A.2** *Alternative Education Programs in Stamford Public Schools***Author(s):** James Pruitt**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sousan Arafeh**Department:** EDD

**Abstract:** This presentation addresses common misconceptions about Alternative Education Programs(AEPs) and highlights the importance of clarity about who are appropriate students, the mission and focus of the AEP, and the resources allotted. AEPs should and do serve students who have struggled in traditional learning environments and may have academic, social, emotional, or behavioral needs. At the same time, students are often unsuccessful in their placement through the current referral and review process. Using data from Connecticut's Stamford Public School District, policy options to make AEPs more successful for students and districts are considered. Suggested policies would ensure that: a) the student referral and review process aligns each student's needs with the most appropriate learning environment b) student needs are explicitly targeted, c) each AEP created has a clear target population that it serves, and d) any resources allocated support the target population and align with the program's mission. If AEPs are supported in this way, Connecticut school districts could save a substantial portion of the funds spent on out-of-district placements for struggling students and use them to improve AEPs and their student successes.

**O2A.3** *Connecticut: Ripe for Regionalization – A Policy Primer***Author(s):** Dan Ostasiewski**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sousan Arafeh**Department:** Educational Leadership

**Abstract:** Regionalization of municipalities, or consolidation of municipal services, is occasionally discussed by policymakers, citizens, and other stakeholders as a potential effective strategy for achieving economic and ethical objectives in Connecticut. On an economic level, proponents claim that a regional approach should promote cost-savings by eliminating duplicate services and sharing services among municipal entities in a region. In terms of ethics, proponents of regionalization emphasize how longstanding patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation among Connecticut's citizens can be mitigated, particularly regarding education funding and housing policies. Opponents of regionalization argue it will not realistically result in the cost-savings proposed and will inhibit local control in ways detrimental to individual towns. This presentation will provide an overview of regionalization in Connecticut, historical and contemporary contexts, as well as economic, ethical, and sociocultural components. Policy options focused on the structural, economical, ethical, and sociocultural merits of a regional approach will be presented and critiqued. Multiple policy recommendations will then be provided with the purpose of informing and persuading Connecticut lawmakers to pursue regionalization.

**O2A.4** *Efficacy of Using Poverty Simulations to Prepare Students for Social Work Practice*

**Author(s):** Jennifer Perez

**Faculty Mentor:** Lorrie Gardella, JD, LMSW, ACSW

**Department:** Social Work

**Abstract:** Poverty simulations have been used as an experiential learning tool for undergraduate and graduate students, providing a format in which students can experience the difficulties and struggles that people living in poverty face. Past studies have shown that following poverty simulations, students have greater empathy towards individuals living in poverty. This program evaluation will determine the efficacy of the Missouri Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAN, n.d.) as adapted and implemented with Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) students at Southern Connecticut State University. The project assessed whether participation in the poverty simulation raises students' awareness and understanding of persons living in poverty and/or whether it promotes unconscious bias and stereotypes towards individuals living in poverty. The study included a focus group and individual interviews with participants from three distinct categories: students, faculty, and community volunteers. The results of the study will be presented as a program evaluation to the Department of Social Work at Southern Connecticut State University.

O2A.5 *LGBTQ+ Survivors of IPV's Experiences with Treatment: Barriers, Shortcomings, Successes, and Suggestions for Improvement*

**Author(s):** Sofia Sicignano

**Faculty Mentor:** Laura Albee

**Department:** Master of Social Work

**Abstract:** Individuals in the LGBTQ+ community have been disproportionately impacted by intimate partner violence (IPV). Moreover, these same individuals continue to face barriers when seeking trauma-informed treatment from the medical community and mental health professionals including being subjugated to ineffective treatment and services based on their gender identity and sexual orientation. Garnered from the primary accounts of LGBTQ+ IPV participants this investigative analysis explored the barriers to accessing treatment, their opinions about effective and ineffective treatment and service delivery and elicited their suggestions for improving treatment and services for LGBTQ+ IPV. Participants were asked to complete a modified version of the Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) Scales and were prompted to respond to nine open-ended questions that pertained to the aim of this study. The results of this study assert that LGBTQ+ survivors of IPV desire more connection with other LGBTQ+ survivors of IPV, and that awareness, education, and respect on the part of medical and clinical providers is essential for improving their overall treatment experiences.

O3A.1 *Electronic Waste Disparities in Ghana*

**Author(s):** Martin Agbalenyo, Taiwo Folake Ajibola

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Anuli Njoku

**Department:** Public Health

**Abstract:** This presentation examines disparate impacts of electronic waste (e-waste) in Ghana. E-waste refers to discarded electronic devices that are unwanted, not working, or have reached their end-of-life. In the year 2019 alone, the world generated 53.6 million metric tons of e-waste. Although Africa generates the least of these wastes, the continent has become the dumping ground for electronic waste from the developed world. The flow of hazardous wastes from the prosperous ‘Global North’ to the impoverished global south is termed “toxic colonization”. Agbogbloshie, an e-waste hub in Ghana where about 39% of e-wastes are treated, has been listed among the top 10 most polluted places in the world. In 2010, about 201,600 people in Ghana depended on e-waste as the source of their livelihood. Most of these workers use crude methods to burn and extract valuable metals from electronic wastes without personal protective equipment, subsequently having increased exposure to hazardous chemicals like lead and mercury. Globally, COVID-19 lockdowns have contributed to increased e-waste generation. We critically examine the existing literature to gather empirical information on e-waste and environmental injustice. Search terms include electronic waste, disparity, environmental injustice, toxic colonialism and Agbogbloshie. Despite the economic benefits of e-waste, many civilians (low-income earners, settlers, children, and people with minimal education) are exposed to its health effects due to poverty, lack of education and weak regulations. The impacts of electronic wastes on health and the environment are alarming. Comprehensive policies and regulations are needed to manage e-waste locally and globally.

O3A.2 *Is Education Fair?: Equitable Funding for School Choice*

**Author(s):** Mercedes Mckelvie

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sousan Arafeh

**Department:** Educational Leadership

**Abstract:** Connecticut is one of the most geographically racially segregated states in the nation. As a result, it also has one of the nation's largest achievement gaps based on disparities assessed by standardized test scores, dropout rates, and other performance measures. For example, African-American and Hispanic students scored (2017) 206 and 209, respectively, lower than their white peers, who achieved an average of 232 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment which assesses student performance in reading at grades 4, 8, and 12 in public and private schools nationwide. NAEP reading scores range from 0 to 500 for all grade levels. These disparities result from an inequitable funding system. Current policy mechanisms offer options for students to attend school outside their districts that are limited, poorly understood, and/or are not accessible. The research presented in this presentation critically outlines and analyzes these options. It asks: are these options adequate for families that want to access them, and are there ways for parents and students who seek quality education to get Connecticut to fully fund all schools and establish education conditions that ensure equity and excellence? A primary goal of this advocacy research is to provide information so parents and students can join the “conversation” and advocate how the achievement gap and limited access to school choice options affect their education. Research-based evidence is offered to help parents and students demonstrate their educational experiences and hold legislators accountable for providing them with the best education possible regardless of their zip code.

O3A.3 *What Works? Exploring the Experience of BIPOC Adults Receiving Trauma-informed Interventions from a Community Reentry Program in Connecticut*

**Author(s):** Joy Jegede

**Faculty Mentor:** Karen D'Angelo

**Department:** Social Work

**Abstract:** Criminal behavior is a worldwide, agelong and pervasive social problem which impacts different societies in profoundly negative ways. Stakeholders continue seeking means of identifying and managing criminogenic factors and models that promise effective deterrence. Incarceration as a form of deterrence under the punishment model has minimal effect on reincarceration rates. Community reentry and recidivism are phenomena that demand closer attention. Multiple models and programs have been created to ensure successful reentry, yet the rates are maintained and rising. It becomes necessary to evaluate these programs with the hopes of determining where, if any, gaps are present. This capstone project is an effort to engage with one program's participants utilizing community engaged methods to explore what is perceived as helpful or not for community reentry. Seventeen (17) individuals participated from the agency Second Chance Reentry Initiative Program (SCRIP), a not-for-profit located in Hartford, Connecticut.



SCRIP was created by a previously incarcerated person and provides trauma-informed cognitive-based therapy to previously incarcerated members from the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community. The data obtained via individual interviews and focus groups was thematically analyzed resulting in eight (8) themes which include "I consider it Connecticut's best kept secret", "I don't know...", Trauma knows no color, "His program don't have training wheels", "Elevate your mental", F.O.M.O. (Fear Of Missing Out), "The Miseducation", and "The Stripping". The research participants' suggestions for the agency's growth were also obtained.  
Keywords: Trauma, TI-CBT, Program evaluation, Reentry, Recidivism, BIPOC, Qualitative research.

O3A.4 *Dr. Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg: An Oral History*

**Author(s):** Sarianna Sabbarese

**Faculty Mentor:** Lorrie Gardella, JD, LMSW, ACSW

**Department:** Graduate Social Work - Community Practice

**Abstract:** Social work oral history, a methodology developed by Ruth Martin, allows us to preserve and pass on the crystallized practice wisdom of our social work forebears. Trudy Goldberg has been instrumental in advancing legislation that would effectively eradicate poverty in the United States through full employment, a long unrealized goal held by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This oral history centers Goldberg's story and voice.

O3A.5 *Barriers to Success in Substance Use Recovery*

**Author(s):** Emily Greco

**Faculty Mentor:** Patricia Nogelo

**Department:** Master of Social Work

**Abstract:** The prevalence of substance use has been continually increasing in the United States. In 2020, there were a reported 40.3 million people aged 12 or older (14.5%) who met the criteria for a substance use disorder in the past year (SAMSHA, 2020). This consisted of 28.3 million people with an identified alcohol use disorder, 18.4 million people with an illicit drug use disorder, and 6.5 million people with both an alcohol use disorder and an illicit drug use disorder (SAMSHA, 2020). The goal of this study was to assess the ways in which barriers to employment, transportation, housing, and insurance can impact the outcomes of people in substance use recovery. This study conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with licensed clinicians (LMSW, LCSW, LADC) who work in the field of substance use. Qualitative research explored clinical experiences when working with clients, and their perspectives as to the likelihood that there may be overlapping experiences and barriers impacting a client's ability to achieve sobriety and wellness which allows for a more holistic understanding of the factors impacting successful approaches to treatment, recovery, and lifelong wellness attainment.

O4A.1 *Tool Engineering Solutions LLC. – A Business Plan*

**Author(s):** Dmitry Vodonos

**Faculty Mentor:** Zheni Wang

**Department:** Business Administration

My business would simultaneously partner with local machine shop companies in the local areas for the fabrication portion of the deliverables my services would be overseeing the design and testing of. The mission of my venture is to provide a resource for organizations to utilize for addressing chronic process gaps and manufacturing equipment design oversights related to process effectiveness and efficiency that otherwise would interfere with the daily responsibilities of the hired staffing.

The general types of services would include:

- Root Cause Analysis
- Process Efficiency Analysis
- Engineering Study Planning and Execution
- Tooling Concept Design
- Manual Fixture Development
- Automated Fixture Development
- Tooling Quality Inspection
- Critical Spare Parts Inventory Strategy
- Preventive Maintenance Strategy
- Maintenance Effectiveness Strategy
- Troubleshooting Guide Development and Training

These types of services most often get neglected by organizations that experience exponential growth in a short period of time and in many cases get overlooked and never followed up on in a fast pace, hectic and output focused environments. I feel that there is a hidden market demand that exists for this type of new support entity and that demand will ensure the success of my venture

O4A.2 *Gender-based Barriers to the Leadership Positions in Higher Education*

**Author(s):** Jaimie Cornell

**Faculty Mentor:** Zheni Wang

**Department:** Business Administration

**Abstract:** Women continue to make less money than men in all job sectors, for the same job roles. Women are underrepresented in leadership roles throughout all industries, even in industries in which most workers are female, like healthcare and education. In higher education, women make up most of the student bodies, and earn more degrees than men, and also make up the vast majority of instructors and administrators. Nevertheless, only 30 percent of college and university presidents are women, and only five percent of which are women of color. Women face many barriers toward leadership or more senior roles in higher education. These include conscious and unconscious biases, time, caregiving responsibilities and maternity, a lack of mentors, role models, and assignments, and a lack of policies and legislation that support gender equity in the workplace. Gender disparity within leadership roles in higher education should be addressed because leadership should be representative of the institutions which are predominantly made up of female students and employees. Also, research shows that diversity is beneficial in achieving success.

In addition to researching literature regarding workplace gender disparities, and actionable ways to address them, which includes better support structures, childcare benefits/ legislation, and work flexibility. I specifically looked at Connecticut's employment and employee survey data using the U.S. Census Bureau. I also gathered information on leadership in Connecticut's public higher education by gender and compared employment and employee survey census data with those from the state of Vermont.

O4A.3 *Employee Loyalty and Career Development*

**Author(s):** Chikaodili Okeke

**Faculty Mentor:** Zheni Wang

**Department:** Business Administration

**Abstract:** Employee loyalty is a multi-dimensional concept, similar to organizational commitment, closely related to employee job satisfaction and organizational competitiveness. Job satisfaction, defined by Edwin Locke as “a

pleasurable or positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences," is a factor that is predicted by employee loyalty. Past research supports the positive correlation between employee job satisfaction and loyalty. This research aims to replicate such relationships and further to see how different group people, in terms of age and occupation, varies in terms of their loyalty to current employers. Interviews were conducted among participants from different occupations in the healthcare, business, and education industries. Questions about organizational loyalty, job satisfaction, and the connection they feel to their position were asked during the interviews. The sample size was 12 people aged 23 to 62, with most participants being millennials. Data analysis showed that age and employee loyalty was related in the way that the level of loyalty per person increased by age. Theoretical and practical implications of the research findings were discussed.

O4A.4 *Scaling-up with a Not-for-Profit Organization: Warrior Strong*

**Author(s):** Eric Pang

**Faculty Mentor:** Zheni Wang

**Department:** Business Administration

Returning to society after military service may be complex for some veterans. Many turn to alcohol, drugs, and lose their self-identity in life after the military. Alcohol is the most abused substance in the Veteran population since it is easily obtained and legal in the US (Sharp 2023). Giving the veterans another purpose, positive activity, and social networks can help them transition into civilian life. "Warrior Strong" aims to help veterans by giving them a purpose, a positive outlet, and a community. Technologies have been effectively leveraged to provide these resources nationwide. *Business Model Generation and Value Proposition Design* were used to compile the 9-building block framework for evaluations and recommendations of the scaling up of "Warrior Strong." Brief explanations of each building block in the business model canvas were followed by observations of Warrior Strong's current issues and recommendations to optimize the nonprofit.

O4A.5 *Transitioning to a Four-Day Work Week to Improve Work-life Balance*

**Author(s):** Noel Stewart

**Faculty Mentor:** Zheni Wang

**Department:** Business Administration

This study looks at the current 40-hour per week working schedule and suggests there is a need to transition to a shorter system. Through qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher makes the case that a 32-hour work week would be instrumental in creating a healthier work-life-balance for employees while providing immediate and long-term benefits to employers. The researcher also looks to explain what a reduced workweek is and what is needed to change the current 40-hour system.

The importance of the employee work-life-balance and its impact on the employee can be seen by looking at various aspects of the relationship between the employer and the employee. Some of those aspects include stress in the workplace, impact on absenteeism, employee engagement and commitment, and employee performance. Various studies show the positive impact a reduced work week has on employee's ability to manage home life and work, as well as how it can help employers in the short and long term. Non-profits organization have begun to partner with organizations and academic researchers from around the world and their studies have shown a positive correlation between work-life-balance and the longevity of employee productivity and its impact on those organization. These studies analyze data taken directly from employees and employers and present them in both qualitative and quantitative publication that can be used by other companies that are thinking about implementing a reduced work week.



P.1 *Making Connecticut a World Leader in Music Education*

**Author(s):** Mallory Legman

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sousan Arafeh, PhD

**Department:** Educational Leadership

**Abstract:** Music education is unique and necessary because it offers something different from what one learns in other subjects. In addition to aesthetic benefits, there are numerous other benefits that Pre-K through grade 12 students receive from music education. This poster shares advocacy research asserting that music education is essential for every child and drawing attention to Connecticut's lack of music education instructional requirements. This lack of strong policy results in music education access varying significantly within and between districts and communities. Because being able to offer music education is typically a function of funding, in most cases, children in districts with lower socioeconomic status tend to lose out. There are examples of states and countries with strong music education policies. Arkansas and Louisiana mandate a specified amount of weekly music instruction for all elementary school students. Internationally, Finland and Sweden have some of the best music education programs. Connecticut students would benefit from a music education system modeled after these strong programs, which would also ensure that all students have equitable access. It is recommended that elementary and middle school students receive weekly instruction of at least 90 minutes in music per week taught by a legally qualified instructor. It is also recommended that high school students earn a minimum of one fine arts credit in order to graduate. Strong music education policies would not only ensure all Connecticut students receive robust instruction in music, they could also move Connecticut toward being a national leader in music education.

P.2 *Assessing biodiversity impacts of the shellfish aquaculture industry using environmental DNA (eDNA) methods.*

**Author(s):** Miranda Holland

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Emma Cross

**Department:** Integrated Biological Diversity

**Abstract:** Multi-species ocean farming is an emerging aquaculture technique that produces sustainable food sources whilst providing potential benefits to the surrounding ecosystem, including but not limited to sequestering carbon dioxide, mitigating ocean acidification, and improving local biodiversity. The multi-tiered shellfish cages used in this aquaculture technique may provide habitat for other species, which would increase local biodiversity. The goal of this research is to evaluate potential benefits of multi-species ocean farming by documenting biodiversity changes associated with a commercial eastern oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) farm located off the coast of Martha's Vineyard, MA. Environmental DNA (eDNA) metabarcoding was used to quantify these biodiversity impacts. Seawater samples were collected monthly from December 2020 through October 2022 from the commercial shellfish farm as well as a reference site, which contained no aquaculture equipment and had no known history of aquaculture. These samples were filtered, the genomic DNA was extracted and then sequenced to determine both species presence and relative read abundance. This metabarcoding data was then analyzed using a combination of QiiMe2 (dada2), R, and SigmaPlot. The biodiversity of the relative read abundance was quantified using the Shannon-Wiener Diversity Index. Biodiversity was highest in early autumn and lowest in early spring, demonstrating a seasonal trend. The shellfish aquaculture farm also had consistently greater biodiversity than the reference site. This data indicates the increase of local biodiversity with the presence of shellfish farming equipment. The results of this study can be used to inform resource management and policy decisions surrounding the placement of shellfish farms.

P.3 *A Journey Outward and Inward: On Foot along the Chemin de Saint-Jacques*

**Author(s):** Alissa Bumstead

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Luke Eilderts

**Department:** Romance Languages- French

**Abstract:** This spring, I'm hiking about 126 miles along a portion of the Chemin de Saint Jacques in France, a major pilgrimage route since the Middle Ages which leads ultimately to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. Following my walk, I'll produce a written project as part of my Capstone Special Project in which I look at pilgrimage, the Chemin de Saint-Jacques, and the idea of a journey to and of the self.

For the Graduate Conference, I'll put together a poster about my plans and project work.

P.4 *Spatial Trends in Algal Mercury Concentrations Across Long Island Sound.*

**Author(s):** Abigail Lucas

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Vincent Breslin

**Department:** Integrative Biological Diversity

**Abstract:** Seasonal changes in growth impact the amount of nutrients and suspended materials absorbed by algae. Seaweeds are known to extract nutrients and metals in the water. There is cause for concern for the accumulation of metals in seaweeds grown, sold and consumed by the public. Mercury is a neurotoxin and is known to bioaccumulate in algae. The monitoring of mercury in marine environments throughout Long Island Sound is critical for informing commercial aquaculture farming. This study examined spatial variations in mercury accumulation in various seaweed species across Long Island Sound. Seaweed samples were collected from six locations across the Connecticut coastline in early and late summer of 2022. Seaweeds collected and tested include multiple species from green, red and brown phyla. Samples were analyzed for mercury using the DMA-80 direct mercury analyzer by thermal decomposition amalgamation and atomic absorption spectrophotometry. Results didn't show any obvious trends in seaweed mercury concentration from west to east in LIS. These results were similar to previous studies (Bhageloo, 2021). Early and late summer samples were similar to each other between species in chlorophyta and rhodophyta but higher in late summer in paeophyta. Chlorophyta (greens) had lower mercury concentration than rhodophyta (reds) which had less mercury concentration than paeophyta (browns). All seaweed mercury levels were below the FDA limit of 1 ppm (1000 µg/kg) showing that algae grown throughout Long Island Sound has safe levels of mercury for human consumption.

P.5 *Baseline aquatic biodiversity and water quality data from Seyðisfjörður, an east Iceland fjord, before the proposed installation of fish farms.*

**Author(s):** Abigail Lucas

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Emma Cross

**Department:** Integrative Biological Diversity

**Abstract:** To conserve ecosystems, biodiversity must be accurately monitored. Environmental DNA (eDNA) is a novel technique to precisely monitor biodiversity. Climate change is causing Arctic Sea ice to melt, opening new opportunities for humans to exploit aquatic environments. Aquaculture currently mainly occurs in western Iceland, however, conditions in eastern Iceland are now favorable for ocean farming. Introducing fish farms causes habitat alteration, chemical inputs, and introduction of pathogens from non-native species, impacting water quality and biodiversity. Biodiversity monitoring prior to disturbances such as installation of fish farms has not been widely explored but is important to investigate to fully understand the impacts. Baseline eDNA and water quality data were collected in two fjords in eastern Iceland in June and July 2022. Sampling took place at five proposed fish farm sites in Seyðisfjörður and one reference site in the neighboring fjord to the north, Loðmundarffjörður. At each site, water samples were collected at 2 m, 7 m, and 20 m as the typical depth that fish pens is 15 m. These samples were then filtered and the DNA extracted to be quantified and tested for DNA markers of a broad range of invertebrate taxa and fish. This preliminary data did not reveal differences between sample sites in water quality or total DNA concentrations. Due to the increased ability for humans to exploit the warming waters of the Arctic, environmental monitoring has never been more important. This long-term monitoring research will inform aquaculture management practices about the ever-expanding human exploitation activities.

P.6 *Owl Tips and Student Loans: A Look at Best Practices to Mitigate Financial Hardship on Southern Students*

**Author(s):** Roland Regos

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sousan Arafeh

**Department:** Educational Leadership

**Abstract:** Higher education is a vitally important vehicle for social and economic mobility in the United States. While this pursuit of knowledge represents opportunity for students, it can result in crippling financial burden for some, as evidenced by local and national statistics. For context, American families hold an extraordinary amount of outstanding federal and private student loan debt to the tune of \$1.76 trillion (Federal Reserve Bank of NY). About one in five U.S. adults has some varying amount of student loan debt (ranging from \$29k to \$40k between the ages 25-34) (Hahn, 2022). This issue is particularly pervasive in communities of color, who bear over 70% of the federal loan burden among adults who have completed their bachelor's degree (Hanson, 2022). Southern students are no exception, as they experience similar impacts of student loan debt that can limit their social mobility. This poster highlights current research on, and a critical analysis of, the current student debt crisis with a specific focus on the experiences of Southern students. Policy recommendations are provided that seek to empower students and higher education staff with financial literacy knowledge intended to help mitigate this crisis.

P.7 *The BMP Signaling Pathway: Dad's Involvement in the Accumulation of Mad*

**Author(s):** Jacqueline Davis

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sulkowski

**Department:** Biology

**Abstract:** Due to the frequency and severity of many neurological diseases such as Parkinson's disease, dementia, and stroke, the nervous system has become the focus of many research studies. Among these studies much focus can be placed on the neuromuscular junction since neurodegenerative disease is especially disabling. These synapses grow and mature during embryonic growth and will continue to mature through adolescence. One specific signaling pathway, the BMP pathway, plays an important role in the development and maintenance of the neuromuscular junction. However, many of the mechanisms regulating this pathway are still unknown, one specifically being how the I-smad Dad negatively regulates the pathway. With the use of *Drosophila* and the Gal4-UAS expression system we aim to better understand this pathway and build upon the knowledge of neuromuscular junction physiology, which can eventually provide a target for therapeutic interventions. We project that there will be an increase in the levels of the co-smad Mad due to a feedback loop in the receptor. This feedback loop is believed to be activated by an unknown mechanism in order to return the pathway to homeostasis.

P.8 *Hey, CMHC...Let's talk about sex, baby!*

**Author(s):** Brett Santo

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Laurie Bonjo

**Department:** Clinical Mental Health Counseling

**Abstract:** Sex is an integral part of the human experience, yet counselors are seldom prepared to discuss such important topics with their clients. Save for those who complete coursework to become Clinical Sexologists, developing professional counselors do not receive the educational experiences to prepare for these conversations. The American Counseling Association's (ACA) Code of Ethics mandates that counselors embrace a multicultural approach in support of client dignity yet fail to mention anything about sex-related training. The current standards from CACREP, the accrediting body for Counselor Education programs, fails to address sex and sexuality curricula as requirements for accredited institutions. These standards fall short of preparing future counselors to holistically support clients. Competencies around cultural humility must involve an understanding of how to successfully navigate conversations with clients regarding sex and related behaviors. Counselor education programs need to prepare counselors to effectively engage in discussions about sex and related topics. If ill-prepared, counselors risk unintentionally stigmatizing and "othering" their clients, in direct opposition to their ethical mandate of beneficence. Clinical mental health counselors need to learn how to normalize and destigmatize conversations around sex and sexuality. This presentation reveals the paucity of sex curricula offered through examination of the course requirements from every single CACREP-accredited Clinical Mental Health Counseling program in the United States. Combating the profession's reticence using a decolonization and liberation framework, the presenter will provide the case that Sex curriculum needs to become pervasive, if not required, throughout ACA's Code of Ethics and in CACREP-accredited Counselor Education programs.

P.9 *Exploring the link between supervisor mistreatment, PTSD, and perceptions of justice in the workplace*

**Author(s):** Robert Kinzler

**Faculty Mentor:** Christopher J. Budnick

**Department:** Clinical Mental Health Counseling

**Abstract:** PTSD impacts one in five adults. Understanding how PTSD affects the workplace is important. PTSD may alter interpretations of supervisor feedback. This online experimental vignette study manipulated supervisor treatment and measured PTSD to determine if their interaction influenced perceptions of justice.

A full time working U.S. representative Qualtrics panel (n = 201) completed PTSD, affective, and individual differences measures before random assignment to read a fair (n = 97) or unfair (n = 104) supervisor treatment vignette. Participants then reported distributive and procedural justice perceptions (DJP, PJP).

Individuals with PTSD treated fairly by their supervisor reported higher DJP (M = 22.13, SD = 6.40) compared to those that were treated unfairly (M = 17.74, SD = 8.62). Individuals without PTSD reported higher DJP when treated fairly (M = 23.72, SD = 6.31) compared to those who were treated unfairly (M = 14.94, SD = 7.18). PTSD and supervisor treatment significantly interacted on PJP (p < .001). PJP was lower for those without PTSD who were treated fairly (M = 12.20, SD = 5.12) compared to those with PTSD (M = 18.52, SD = 6.82). Under unfair treatment, those without PTSD (M = 22.74, SD = 8.27) reported lower PJP compared to those with PTSD (M = 28.46, SD = 6.41).

Fairness perceptions did not differ by PTSD status, but the interaction between PTSD and treatment type approached significance for DJP and was significant for PJP. Organizations may benefit from exploring how PTSD impacts employees' perceptions of justice following supervisor treatment.



- P.10 *The Relationship Between COVID-Anxiety and Fear of Death in Adults over 65*  
**Author(s):** Adara Holecz  
**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Walter Belsito  
**Department:** Social Work  
**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected the aging population. Increased susceptibility and exposure to death have been found to have impacted an older adult's feelings about death and COVID-19. It is hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between COVID anxiety and fear of death. Participants aged 65 years and older (N=30) completed the Coronavirus Anxiety Scale and Collette Lester Fear of Death Scales to test the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between COVID anxiety and fear of death. A Pearson Correlation was used to analyze the data. Results supported the hypothesis ( $p > .01$ ). Utilizing the research, interventions for caregivers and older individuals can be explored to minimize the consequences of adversity faced during the pandemic.
- P.11 *Feminism: Ideology or Social Movement?*  
**Author(s):** Kevin McGuire & Zoe Pringle  
**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Jessica Suckle-Nelson  
**Department:** Psychology MA  
**Abstract:** How one defines feminism varies according to many factors, including age and gender. Although it has been examined in various ways over the past few decades, the willingness to identify as a feminist—especially among men—still seems to be a statement fraught with stereotypes, whether it is a fear of being stigmatized or simply misinformation regarding feminism. This class project will explore the descriptions of feminism, particularly by college students, both graduate and undergraduate. The contribution of graduate students in this sample is unique as most studies on college students only examine undergraduates.
- P.12 *Hymn and Her: A Look into Feminism in Clergywomen*  
**Author(s):** Jonathan Elder, Gillian Murty & Phillip Roa  
**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Jessica Suckle-Nelson  
**Department:** Psychology  
**Abstract:** Clergywomen, today, can still be considered social activists, fighting for their right to follow a calling many believe to be from God. However, they still receive much resistance to their pastoral positions from sources both inside and outside of the church hierarchy (Suckle, 2005). The combination of religion and feminism is not a new idea; feminism is a topic often scrutinized. However, definitions can be ambiguous or distorted because of the changing role of women within many religions. This class project offered an opportunity to explore definitions of feminism from the perspective of Christian clergywomen. Thus, we were able to examine how both a feminist identity and a religious/spiritual identity may influence one's overall self-identity.
- P.13 *Feeling the Spirit: Definitions of Spirituality After a Course Exploration*  
**Author(s):** Jarett Talarczyk & Vanity Dennis  
**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Jessica Suckle-Nelson  
**Department:** Psychology  
**Abstract:** Much of the research on spirituality and its meanings involve participants who have not had any formal education on the topic of spirituality. Most of the studies uncovered that examined how people define spirituality were geared more toward spirituality in either the workplace or the medical field (e.g., spiritual needs of patients). However, literature on how college students define spirituality remains sparse. This class project examined the meanings of spirituality among college students who completed a class in the psychology of spirituality, where spirituality was examined in light of various factors that affect people psychologically throughout their lives.
- P.14 *Black Women with Trauma*  
**Author(s):** Kayla Kendall  
**Faculty Mentor:** Uchenna Nwachuku  
**Department:** Clinical Mental Health Counseling  
**Abstract:** Black women are often given the “The strong black woman” trope. This suppresses the emotions of black women by urging them to have an unreasonably painful perspective. This perspective is harmful as it perceives black women in survival mode because often the strong resilience of black women is a trauma response. Black women are suffering more than any other group regarding mental and physical health. The trauma being processed by black women leads to unhealthy coping mechanisms causing another step backwards for black women. Due to the intersecting identities of black women experiencing sexism and racism, this causes black women to experience

different types of trauma. In my proposal presentation, I will discuss the impact of trauma that black women face and the support that is needed.

P.15 *Gender Differences in High School versus College Participation*

**Author(s):** Parker Hunter

**Faculty Mentor:** Scott Jackson

**Department:** Psychology

**Abstract:** Recent trends have shown there is a growing gap in graduation rates for university between males and females. Retention rates are heavily influenced by participation in High-impact programs (i.e. assistantships, learning communities, and independent research). Other universities have fallen in a gap of females participating more than males in such areas, this research is set to examine areas surrounding this at SCSU.

To examine this data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) were used in a combined form (N=346), to see if there are differences in self-reported involvement and gender. The use of the BCSSE was also to see if there was a difference found in participation in like activities in high school.

A series of Crammer's V and Chi-Squared tests were used to show if there was a marked difference between male and female participation in a variety of areas and if these areas were significant ( $p < .05$ ). These areas were further examined to see which way they skewed which was female in all cases in such areas like internships, learning communities, and expected and current grades. There were not many differences found between genders and their participation in high school activities.

This research is essential for the Universities understanding of its students population, along with provides a backbone for further research as to why this gap is here and how to stop this widening. Limitations and discussions for future research will be discussed.

P.16 *PERSPECTIVES OF OLDER WOMEN: A P.O.W. Feminist Manifesto*

**Author(s):** Cynthia Cardozo

**Faculty Mentor:** Laura Bower-Phipps

**Department:** Women's & Gender Studies

**Abstract:** This presentation describes a feminist manifesto from the perspectives of women, aged 50 and beyond, who are navigating a world of sexism, racism, and ageism. As we live and work toward a vision of equity, diversity, and inclusion for all, we find ourselves having to release our expectations, embrace acceptance, and uplift our own voices in order to circumvent a society that tends to marginalize women our age. Through the responses to the question, "How do you feel about yourself now, compared to how you felt in your 20's?" several older women express their positive views of being older, moving from 'why me' to a collective 'we' as we strive live our fullest lives.

P.17 *Attendance Barriers Impacting Path to GED.*

**Author(s):** Whitney Bibens

**Faculty Mentor:** Jennifer Parzych

**Department:** School Counseling

**Abstract:** Many students at Stratford Continuing Education (SCE) have low attendance rates and thus are unable to graduate on time due to minimum hour requirements. As a school counseling intern with SCE, I wanted to learn what barriers impede student attendance rates, ultimately impacting their ability to earn their GED.

Needs assessments from the Connecticut State Department of Education were distributed to every student enrolled in Stratford Continuing Education over the course of the Spring 2023 semester. The survey included 65 questions regarding students' career, job training, education, transportation, childcare, health, housing, financial, legal, and state benefit needs. Survey results revealed the biggest challenges SCE students face are employment concerns, having a valid driver's license, and needing state benefits such as Food Stamps to help them survive.

Based on the data, three recommendations were made: 1) Strengthen the current college and career readiness program, including partnering with The WorkPlace in Bridgeport. 2) Collaborate with Stratford's The Next Street driving school, for workshops, information sessions, and help students with license and permit registration. 3) Provide community resource information, connecting low-income students to specific resources (i.e., food banks, housing, and public transportation schedules). Additional findings and implications will be shared.

- P.18 *School Counseling DATA Project*  
**Author(s):** Ricci Gold  
**Faculty Mentor:** Jennifer Parzych  
**Department:** School Counseling  
**Abstract:** The purpose of this action research was to evaluate the impact of a school counseling intervention designed to support achievement among ninth grade students in one local high school. The burning question is: does knowledge of study skills, learning styles, organization, goal setting, and time management impact students' grades, GPA and success? The intervention included a series of study skills lessons to one freshman advisory group, delivered by a school counselor intern in collaboration with her supervisor and the ninth grade advisory teacher for approximately 30 minutes. The lessons have been spread out over the course of the school year thus far. Preliminary findings from this action research will be shared, as well as challenges to implementation, implications, and recommendations.
- P.19 *Am I Really Food Insecure Enough: How Food Insecurity Impacts College Students' Experiences* [Withdrawn]
- P.20 *Gods, Higher Powers, and the Universe: Definitions of Spirituality Among Adults in New England*  
**Author(s):** Gabriel Teles, Keith Posner & Taylor Downs  
**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Jessica Suckle-Nelson  
**Department:** MA Psychology  
**Abstract:** Most studies on the meanings of spirituality among students focus on its influence on their morality, their personality, or are guided by concepts in either the medical/nursing field, business, or the workplace. Compared to religion, spirituality tends to be a more subjective construct and can be based on both non-religious and/or church-centered personal experiences that make life richer and more meaningful (James et al. 2012; Lockenhoff et al., 2009). However, the literature focusing specifically on definitions and meanings of spirituality for college students or those who are younger is sparse. Even one of the few recent studies on this topic still focused on the impact of spirituality, but not necessarily what spirituality actually was (Rockenbach et al., 2015). In addition, a lot of the literature connects spirituality to religiosity, thereby excluding atheists and agnostics. Because examining spirituality has resulted in various—and sometimes, incompatible—definitions and meanings, this study will serve to further clarify definitions of spirituality among students. This class project served to further explore and support the existing literature's descriptions of spirituality for college students.
- P.21 *Bridging the Gap Between Social Justice Initiatives and Student Experience: An Ongoing Process*  
**Author(s):** Krishna Soni  
**Faculty Mentor:** Scott Jackson  
**Department:** Curriculum and Instruction  
**Abstract:** In 2020, SCSU created a three-year plan to advance Southern towards a social justice and antiracist university. This reflective action exemplified contemporary intentions to support all students.
- This research examines five questions from the Southern Experience Survey (SES) related to experiencing negative attitudes, stigmas, stereotypes, discrimination, and feelings of belonging at Southern. First, student responses from 2018-2019 (N=1148) are compared to responses from 2021-2022 (N=796) to explore the impact of launching the social justice initiative (2020 data collection was interrupted by COVID). To explore where additional work is needed this research analyses differences across race/sex groups for the 2021-2022 data.
- A series of Independent-Sample Mann-Whitney U Tests comparing the SES items from 2018-19 to 2021-22 showed small improvements in student responses for nearly all items, but these changes were found to be non-significant.
- P.22 *U.S. Voter Disenfranchisement and a Proposal for Future Enfranchisement*  
**Author(s):** Tonishia Signore  
**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Lorrie Gardella  
**Department:** Master of Social Work  
**Abstract:** In America, the right to vote is an essential foundation for experiencing citizenship to its fullest. Historically, the implementation of the fundamental right to vote has been racist, sexist, and classist. Revoking the right to vote as a response to a criminal conviction in the United States has been ingrained in our laws since the beginning of the nation. Today, the revoking of the right to vote for individuals with felony convictions is called felony disenfranchisement. The attitudes towards felony disenfranchisement have evolved over time, and many advocates, affected populations, and professionals are fighting for the re-enfranchisement of people with felony convictions, as well as people who are currently incarcerated. A new understanding has become apparent: that disconnecting people with felony convictions from society, is likely contributing negatively to incarceration rates and recidivism in the U.S. The concept of fully engaging people with felony convictions civically, as a part of



rehabilitation and reintegration, is emerging. In 2021, Connecticut passed a law which stated that individuals on parole in the state would now be able to vote in elections. By working with a local non-profit organization called Full Citizens Coalition, this special project will develop a deliverable resource for individuals being released from prison in Connecticut. This resource will be designed to raise consciousness about the recent change in the law granting people on parole in Connecticut the right to vote, as well as provide insight, information, and resources to the affected population.

P.23 *Does PTSD Symptomology Moderate the Effects of Vagus Stimulation Music on Heart Rate Variability, Mood and Affect?*

**Author(s):** Nicole Santino & Karlos Mate Piovonetti

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Katherine Marsland

**Department:** Psychology

**Abstract:** The objective of this study is to examine the effects of vagus stimulation music on heart rate variability, mood, and affect to determine whether post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptomology moderates these effects. This study will employ a 2 (PTSD Symptoms, No PTSD Symptoms) X 3 (Vagus Stimulation Music, Non-Vagus Stimulation Music, Audio Control) between-group design. Participants will complete baseline measures of self-reported PTSD symptomology, mood, affect, and anxiety; their heart rate variability (HRV) will be recorded continuously. After undergoing a mild stress induction procedure, participants will complete a post-stress anxiety manipulation check and will then be randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: Vagus Stimulation Music, Non-Vagus Stimulation Music, or Audio Control. Participants will then complete post-experimental measures of mood and affect. Participants in the VSM condition are expected to have a larger increase in HRV from post-stress to post-listening condition than participants in the NVSM music and AC conditions. Additionally, participants in the VSM condition are expected to show larger improvements in self-reported mood and affect from post-stress to post-listening condition compared to participants in the NVSM and AC conditions. Further, participants with high PTSD symptomatology are expected to have a stronger HRV reaction to the anxiety manipulation than those with low PTSD symptomatology and to have higher levels of post-stress negative mood and negative affect. Data collection is in process, and I predict that participants with high PTSD symptomatology will show a more blunted response to the VSM than those who have low PTSD.

P.24 *Exploration of Achievement Scores & School Characteristics: Pre and Post Covid in the Same Title I School*

**Author(s):** Tiara Mae

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Cheryl Durwin

**Department:** Psychology

**Abstract:** This study looked at the differences in two Grade 1 cohorts within the same Title I school: 2019-2020 (pre-Covid) and 2022-2023 (post-Covid). We examined scores from standardized reading comprehension, vocabulary, word recognition, and decoding assessments that our lab administers at the beginning of first grade. First graders in Fall 2022 (who received hybrid schooling and masked literacy instruction as kindergarteners in 2021-2022) had substantially lower word recognition skill than those in Fall 2019 and somewhat lower reading comprehension and vocabulary. Examination of demographic factors from the two cohorts within the school indicated a substantial drop in teacher attendance in 2022 compared to 2019 and significant increases from 2019 to 2022 in student support services and paraprofessional staff, and chronic student absenteeism, especially for those receiving free/reduced lunch. Implications for educational policy practice will be discussed.

Keywords: comparison data, reading comprehension, vocabulary, word recognition, decoding, assessments, school.

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## 6:45 – 8:00 p.m. | Oral Presentations – Session 1B

ASC Room 306

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O1B.1 *Counter Cultural Politics in The Crying of Lot 49*

**Author(s):** Tim Casey

**Faculty Mentor:** Paul Petrie

**Department:** English

**Abstract:** Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is about the rise of parapolitics in mid-Century America and the futility of mass culture and the cultural turn of politics to respond to it. This thesis is reflected in the themes, references, and allegorical plot of the novel. If we read Pierce Inverarity's death as an allegory for the assassination of John F. Kennedy or another victim of mysterious "deep political" violence in the 60's, we can read Oedipa's misadventures and, ultimately, her found purpose as efforts to cope with the reality. Through this lens, her engagements with, and the novel's critique of, media, culture, the social, and the academic can be read as a comment on the rise of mass culture as anesthetizing and diversionary, and the cultural turn of the New Left as a futile response.

O1B.2 *The Mixing of Genre and Style and Alison Bechdel's Fun Home*

**Author(s):** Erik Russo

**Faculty Mentor:** Paul Petrie

**Department:** English

**Abstract:** Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, tells the story of Bechdel's relationship with her father, Bruce, as she explores her own sexuality in comparison to her father's. The mode of storytelling that Bechdel uses is nontraditional as the memoir is presented like that of a graphic novel, with text accompanied by images drawn by Bechdel herself. The use of these artistic depictions allows for Bechdel to tell major parts of her story in ways that may not have been easily captured had they been told through simple use of text. The core of the memoir is the focus between Bechdel and her father, and this focus is then enhanced, almost like being placed under a microscope, through the use of the graphic novel style. It's intriguing to consider what *Fun Home* would be like without the graphic novel format, but it's simultaneously difficult to imagine Bechdel's life told in any other way. I will explore the ways in which the graphic novel genre mixes with that of memoir while attempting to understand what is gained and what is lost by structuring the memoir in this unique format. What made Bechdel opt to use this style for her memoir and forgo the more traditional route of a purely text based novel and what does it accomplish?

O1B.3 *Mental Health in The Things We Carried*

**Author(s):** Emily Thomas

**Faculty Mentor:** Paul Petrie

**Department:** English

**Abstract:** *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien is a novel surrounding stories based off of O'Brien's real experiences in the Vietnam War. The novel does an excellent job at explaining the experiences and emotions that occurred throughout the Vietnam War, focusing specifically on PTSD, carrying shame after and during the war, fear, depression, suicide, etc. It is an introduction to the effects of war and how it truly changes and shapes a person. However, the novel does something different than most other works when discussing war and its aftermath; directly addresses the feelings and trauma war wages on a person.

I intend to argue that this novel not only properly and respectfully addresses the trauma of war on men, but it displays the facts that men refuse to experience, express, feel and voice their mental health issues unless in times of extreme distress such as war. *The Things They Carried* is an example that men only feel comfortable expressing their feelings somewhat safely in times of war, feeling okay to cry, be happy, horny, angry, etc. However, when they return home mental health is shut back down and is damaged more because of their silence. I want to discuss how this novel brings to light a very important topic, men's mental health and the stigmatization of it and how it says a lot about society considering the fact that they will not cry unless they are literally in constant danger.

O1B.4 *Man in the High Castle: Philip K. Dick, Playfulness and Faith in the Creative Process*

**Author(s):** Elisabeth Kennedy

**Faculty Mentor:** Paul Petrie

**Department:** MFA-Creative Writing

**Abstract:** Philip K. Dick's novel, *Man in the High Castle*, is a remarkable and complex work of literature that reflects the author's creative and philosophical values. It is well documented that Dick's novels are highly driven by his personal experiences and beliefs and as my paper will show, his work stays true to his expressed values of playfulness and faith in the creative process. Moreover, through the deliberately imposed artistic device of randomness, Philip K. Dick impressively and successfully constructs believable narratives that challenge readers to question their assumptions about the nature of reality itself. As an integral aspect of plot in *Man in the High Castle*, Dick employs the use of the I-Ching, essentially divination, entirely random forces, to instruct where and how the plot will shift. In this inquiry, I intend to examine his novel for representations of playfulness and faith to see what makes it an important part of the creative process.

O1B.5 *Control Societies in The Crying of Lot 49*

**Author(s):** Cesar Gonzalez

**Faculty Mentor:** Paul Petrie

**Department:** English

**Abstract:** In Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, protagonist Oedipa Maas travels into the city of San Narciso, which is described as "less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts—census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway" (Pynchon 13). What sort of reading

does this seemingly random comparison engender? Why make the parallel between the circuit board of a transistor and a subdivision of houses in Southern California? In this paper, I want to explore just what kind of interpretative mode of reading Pynchon sets the reader up for in including this comparison so early on in the book. One method in particular that I plan to spend time on sees *The Crying of Lot 49* as a commentary on the ongoing “flattening” of society—in which the structures of society are no longer from the top-down, but all-encompassing. Gilles Deleuze’s “Postscript on the Societies of Control” is a short essay exploring the possibility of societies that “initiate the organization of vast spaces of enclosure” in which “[t]he individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another” (Deleuze 3). I believe that this sort of theoretical analysis of modern societies is congruent with the previously mentioned mode of reading Pynchon seems to be positing, in which Oedipa moves constantly from one “space of enclosure” to the next, each resembling one another in certain ways, just as the layout of San Narciso mirrors the circuitry of the transistor.

O1B.6 *Crafting Representation: the discourse of representation*

**Author(s):** Sara Mowery

**Faculty Mentor:** Paul Petrie

**Department:** MFA, Fiction

**Abstract:** In her 1975 essay, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Helene Cixous insists, “woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing.” Judith Fetterly joined this conversation in 1978 writing, “American literature is male. To read the canon of what is currently considered American literature is perforce to identify as male”. Fetterly expands the discussion of representation and translation to include the inherent and obvious power struggle at play when half the population is silenced through exclusion. She argues, “power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else. To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one’s identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness--not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one’s experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male--to be universal, to be American--is to be not female” (137). As if in response to these Second Wave assertions, ENG569 syllabus is proof of woman’s forward movement in re-writing the canon, in empowerment through representation. Of the eight novels, half are crafted by women. My intention here is to follow this forward movement, from Petry in 1946 to Erdrich in 2008, as the women we’ve read this semester place themselves and the stories of women, onto the pages and into the discourse.

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**6:45 – 8:00 p.m. | Oral Presentations – Session 2B**

*ASC Room 308*

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O2B.1 *The 12 Step Program Recovery Experience of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Persons*

**Author(s):** Danielle Antolini

**Faculty Mentor:** Lorrie Gardella

**Department:** Social Work

**Abstract:** This is a study on the lived experience of TGNC persons who are in recovery from SUD. This study also highlights the recovery journey of TGNC persons and the strengths and barriers they face in the rooms or Narcotics Anonymous. The purpose of this study is to create more research around the queer community and their experience in NA so that there can be more inclusion in NA.

O2B.2 *Multilingual Learners in Connecticut High Schools: The “Equity Moves” That Matter*

**Author(s):** Kristin Bengtson Mendoza

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sousan Arafeh

**Department:** Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

**Abstract:** Nearly half of Connecticut's high school-aged Multilingual Learners (MLs) attend just 15 schools located in Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, New Haven, Norwalk, Stamford and Waterbury. This presentation will share research that looks closely at Connecticut's adolescent MLs in the context where so many of them are educated: comprehensive high schools in large urban districts. Effects of Connecticut's regressive system of school funding, reliance on uncertified tutors and emergency-certified teachers, and minimal teacher preparation on MLs' access to an equitable secondary education will be discussed. Five high-leverage policy recommendations ("equity moves") are recommended for decision-makers at the state level, in districts, and in schools.

O2B.3 *Health Care Providers' Stigma towards Homeless*

**Author(s):** Daisy Long

**Faculty Mentor:** Lordie Gardella

**Department:** Social Work

**Abstract:** Homelessness is an exceedingly critical crisis today, but it has been a burning issue for many years (Baum & Burnes, 1993). Across the rich nations, more women, youth, and families are becoming homeless. About 1.1 billion people live in inadequate housing in urban areas and at least one hundred million have no housing whatsoever (Homelessness, 2017). This number is expected to increase to 1.6 billion by 2025. As many as 3.5 million persons in the U.S. experience homelessness every year (Homelessness, 2017). The shelters are overflowing and the number of homeless individuals overpower the available shelter beds. With no available shelter space and no warming centers, homeless individuals utilize the emergency room for sleep and warmth during the cold season. This special project will explore attitudes of emergency room health care providers toward persons who are homeless and implications for their quality of care.

O2B.4 *Aging Out: How to Support Youth in the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood*

**Author(s):** Julia Galuppo

**Faculty Mentor:** Patricia Nogelo

**Department:** Master of Social Work

**Abstract:** Each year countless numbers of children are removed from their home for safety concerns and are placed in temporary custody of the foster care system. The primary goal of foster care is to protect each child until it is determined that that the child can be reunified with their primary caregiver, or if the parental rights should be terminated, thus making adoption an appropriate option for the betterment of the child. When a child enters the foster care system, they will either stay in a congregate care setting, or stay with extended family or kin.

To address the needs of youth in the Connecticut foster care system and best prepare them for their transition out of the foster care system, this special project will target resources and services for youth who are being maintained in the system so that they are better prepared to transition out. The primary population of focus for this special project will include youth who exit the foster care system without ever receiving a placement and need resources to begin their transition into adulthood, and moreover, into their community. The special project will entail two deliverables: a flyer and a website. These deliverables highlight the essential areas of need that youth transitioning into adulthood will require.

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## 6:45 – 8:00 p.m. | Oral Presentations – Session 3B

ASC Room 309

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### O3B.1 *Creative Connections: SWOT Analysis*

**Author(s):** Sarah Weynand

**Faculty Mentor:** Shelley Stoehr-McCarthy

**Department:** MFA in Creative Writing

**Abstract:** Creative Connections is an MFA-led initiative to bring the arts to our peers in the New Haven community. Our primary focus right now is facilitating creative writing workshops at shelters for youth experiencing homelessness. We are also aiming to develop these workshops into a class that operates similarly with the addition of earning college credit. I was invited to participate in this program in the form of a graduate research internship/assistantship this year and will continue it into my last semester of Fall 2023. I am presenting a SWOT, or a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threats, analysis for Creative Connections' progress this year. Strengths include our growing trust with clients, weaknesses include attendance inconsistency, opportunities include our inclusion of clients in Southern MFA events, and threats include funding challenges for future facilitators.

### O3B.2 *Gender-affirming Care is Life-saving care*

**Author(s):** Keith Smith

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sousan Arafeh

**Department:** Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

**Abstract:** The World Health Organization defines gender-affirming care as “social, psychological, behavioral, and medical interventions ‘designed to support and affirm an individual’s gender identity’ when it conflicts with the gender assigned at birth.” Gender-affirming care has been a hot-button issue in recent years and K-12 schools, as places where individuals are nurtured and grow, are a major site where tensions play out. At their best, schools attempt to balance diverse viewpoints with what is best for the students and families they serve. However, recent policy changes in Alabama, Tennessee, Texas, Florida and seventeen other states have restricted or removed gender-affirming care, in schools and/or in the medical arena, for anyone under eighteen. These sweeping policy changes do not consider the impact on trans youth and their family members. It is crucial to examine current policies, and consequences of those policies. Thus, this presentation will map the current policy landscape and consider extant and needed gender-affirming care policy options. As gender diversity increasingly emerges nationally, and internationally, special care should be given to ensure there are policies that support practices that do not marginalize the vulnerable. In school settings Identifying viable gender-affirming care can be a crucial first step in creating school communities that value the inclusion and contributions of all members.

### O3B.3 *Resources for the City of Stamford*

**Author(s):** Esteven Restrepo

**Faculty Mentor:** Lorrie Gardella

**Department:** MSW Concentration in Community Practice

**Abstract:** In 2018, HUD released a statement that in the United States there were more than one-half million homeless people. Those homeless included sheltered and unsheltered. Through this literature review, it has been discovered that language barriers, cultural bias, and prejudices and stigmas are factors that have acted as barriers to services for people who are homeless. Specifically addressing the language accessibility of services as a resource for Spanish-speaking persons who are homeless would help lower such barriers. This special project will assess the availability of Spanish language services for persons who are homeless in Norwalk, Connecticut, by learning from local service providers what they believe is the community and/or organizational need.

### O3B.4 *Keep It Simple: Plain Language in Higher Education Policy Writing*

**Author(s):** Shermaine Edmonds

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sousan Arafeh

**Department:** Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

**Abstract:** Connecticut will be consolidating its 12 community colleges into the CT State Community Colleges. As a result, a Program Variance Policy for Legacy Students has been crafted to ensure credits earned in the legacy programs apply for those majors that have been adjusted to fulfill the new cross-system requirements. This presentation will share research that examines this policy, referenced in the Academic Policy and Procedures on the website's digital catalog, which is very difficult to understand. Looking at the demographic of the students served by this system, adherence to the Plain Language Act of 2010 seems important. The Act requires all government

agencies to follow specific reading level guidelines when writing policies for the public. Keeping educational policy language simple would decrease the anxiety of the unknown or even eliminate panic about the important act of ensuring students are awarded credit for courses taken and programs to be completed.



**O4B.1** *Classroom Management- Skills and Techniques for Culturally Responsive Teaching***Author(s):** Krista Lencovich**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Andrew Smyth**Department:** MAT English 7-12

**Abstract:** For the Spring semester, I have had the opportunity to student teach at Joseph Melillo Middle School under the supervision of my mentor teacher, Mrs. Condosta. One of the areas that I have identified that needs improvement is my strategies for classroom management. For this panel, I will be discussing some of the techniques for classroom management used in my school to keep students engaged in the lessons. According to the article 'Classroom Management for Middle and Secondary Schools', "Students demonstrate culture, gender, social class, and developmental differences, all of which should be considered when implementing classroom management strategies" (Bucher 6). My students come from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures, and the strategies that I choose to implement into my lessons need to reflect these key differences. For example, my period one writing class responds well to movement breaks and movement cues such as the redirection strategy, "Raise your hand if you can hear me". While my period three class positively responds to group style discussion and questioning. The challenge as an instructor is exploring which techniques work best for the specific class of students and why. My research also explores why it is important to differentiate these strategies for both the individual students and by class period to be the most culturally responsive.

**O4B.2** *Empowering Students through Building Listening Skills in the Secondary English Classroom***Author(s):** Brendan Lewis**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Andrew Smyth**Department:** MAT - Secondary English

**Abstract:** Listening skills are an often-overlooked component of secondary English education, even though they feature so prominently in the activities which students and educators undertake in the classroom every day. Despite their inclusion in the Common Core State Standards for more than ten years, there has not been a sufficient investment in cultivating these skills in a meaningful way. The extent to which students receive direct instruction in active listening skills is highly variable, sometimes even non-existent. It is as though educators take for granted the ability of students to effectively engage in class discussion, and instead use it as a means of informal assessment for other skills, such as reading comprehension. Especially in high schools, it is rare that lessons feature listening activities as their central focus, perhaps due in part to the sway that exigent concerns about standardized test preparation hold over teachers' planning decisions, and perhaps also due to the inherent difficulties of assessing students' listening skills in an objective and non-biased way. This presentation will focus on the challenges of developing students' listening skills in the secondary English classroom as well as the benefits which developing these skills can yield for building community, in developing students' voices as writers and thinkers, and in disrupting power structures both within the classroom and in the broader world we all inhabit.

**O4B.3** *Motivation to Work***Author(s):** Morgan Hines**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Andrew Smyth**Department:** English (7-12)

**Abstract:** In this new world of teaching post-covid, getting students engaged has been a struggle. On-top of lack of engagement during class lessons, students are having difficulty turning in assignments. This study will be investigating why students are not turning work in and what educators can do to encourage students to complete assignments. To investigate possible solutions to this problem, this study will focus on interviews with professionals in the field of education to see what tools and strategies are being used in the classroom today. The goal is to see what tactics educators are using to get students motivated to turn in assignments. This study will also be investigating what factors put a stress on students, and what makes them unmotivated to complete work. Factors such as fear of failure, outside commitments, and mental health struggles will be considered when talking to educators. By investigating types of environments and assignments students are receptive to, conclusions can be made as to what steps should be taken in the future. This study will also be comparing student success prior to COVID, to see how much the environment of education has changed and whether or not this is a totally new phenomenon. Prior studies will also be considered to gain a better understanding of what others have found regarding this topic. Overall, the hope is to determine why this overall lack of motivation has occurred, and to find possible solutions that will motivate students to be successful in their work and assignments.

O4B.4 *“Who Cares?” Strategies for Working with Unmotivated Students*

**Author(s):** Tiffany Citroen

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Andrew Smyth

**Department:** Post-Bac Educator Preparation

**Abstract:** I have been student teaching English Language Arts to high school juniors at an urban high school in Connecticut. Though the school is not in a wealthy district, there is some socio-economic diversity as well as ethnic diversity and, by all other accounts, it is a typical American high school. Many students attend regularly, love junk food, play sports and follow the latest fashion and street wear trends. However, what is not typical is the number of students who are considered “unmotivated” or “underperforming.” When I started teaching one class of juniors with 27 students enrolled, 7 were considered underperforming. They were either failing English or barely passing with a grade of 60 per cent; this is what was documented on paper, i.e. the grade book. However, the more time I spent in that class, the more I realized that the true number of unmotivated students is much higher. Nearly a quarter of students in that class attend, but do no work when they are there. They don’t seem upset by anything; they simply refuse to work. All of the usual information on how to engage them, such as checking in with them more frequently, was not working.

This led me to research actual tips and strategies for working with these types of students. Instead of doing an analysis or lengthy intake of each student, I searched for actionable items, ones that read like a checklist, and that could be easily be implemented by any classroom teacher, anywhere.





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