Graduate Student
Research & Creative Activity
Conference

Monday | May 5, 2025
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
Research and Innovation
The Research and Scholarship Advisory Committee
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Conference Organizers
Listed in alphabetical order:

Charles Baraw	Jessica Jensen
Kelly Bordner	Frances Penny
Christine Broadbridge	Amitkumar Singh
Siobhan Carter-Davis	Heather Stearns
Jeremy Chandler	C. Michele Thompson
Qu Chen	Jonathan Weinbaum
Emma Cross	Jonathan Wharton
Peter Dimoulas	Bogdan Zamfir

8th Annual Graduate Research and Creativity Conference

Monday, May 5, 2025 | 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	3rd floor Adanti Student Center
5:00 – 5:20 p.m.	Welcoming Remarks:	3rd floor Ballroom

Michele Thompson, Ph.D. | *Prof. of Southeast Asian History; Chair of the Research and Scholarship Advisory Committee*
Julia Irwin, Ph.D. | *Interim Provost & Vice President of Academic Affairs, Southern Connecticut State University*
Rabia Hos, Ph.D. | *Dean, School of Graduate and Professional Studies*

5:30 – 6:40 p.m.	Poster Presentations – Session 1	ASC Ballroom
5:45 – 7:45 p.m.	Oral Panel – Social Work Capstone	ASC room 301
6:00 – 7:30 p.m.	Oral Presentations – Session 1	ASC room 308
	Oral Presentations – Session 2	ASC room 309
	Oral Presentations – Session 3	ASC room 311
6:50 – 8:00 p.m.	Poster Presentations – Session 2	ASC Ballroom

P1.1   *Examining the Impact of Healthcare Disparities: Mistreatment of LGBTQIA2S+ Individuals in Clinical Settings*
Author(s): Richard Casey
Faculty Mentor: Stephen Hoffler
Department: Doctor of Social Work (D.S.W.)
Abstract: This study examines the impact of healthcare provider communication styles, specifically the use of inclusive language and attitudes, on the perceived quality of healthcare services among
LGBTQIA2S+ individuals. Utilizing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, this research explores systemic challenges such as bias denial, cultural insensitivity, and stereotyping. Statistical analyses, including the Pearson correlation test, reveal a strong relationship between affirming provider communication and higher patient trust, satisfaction, and engagement. Findings underscore the urgent need for culturally sensitive training, intersectional approaches, and healthcare policy reforms to create more inclusive healthcare environments. This research contributes to ongoing efforts to dismantle systemic disparities and improve healthcare outcomes for LGBTQIA2S+ individuals.

P1.2   *The Impact: Exploring the Effects of BSW Course Content on Students' Attitudes Towards the Substance Use Population*
Author(s): Thea Ferdinand
Faculty Mentor: Joyce Taylor
Department: Doctor of Social Work (D.S.W.)
Abstract: Stigmatizing attitudes towards the substance use population contribute to poorer outcomes. Research shows that having substance use (SU) training/education predicts more positive attitudes towards the population. BSW students, having limited access to related educational/vocational opportunities, have been proven to hold negative beliefs about this community. The purpose of the current research is to explore how course content about SU stigma impact BSW students' attitudes towards the population. The sample of BSW students (n = 13) was predominantly aged 20-29 (77%), female (92%), and pursuing their first college degree (77%). Participants engaged in a pre-test, interactive presentation, and post-test. Individual participants' pre-/post-test surveys were compared to assess the intervention's impact. Then, shifts between pre-test and post-test were compared to the target responses to determine the type of impact: positive, no net impact, or negative. Findings indicated that 85% (n=11) of the participants showed improvement post intervention. The results indicate the intervention had the most positive impact on participants who: denied any experience (n=1) or endorsed only personal experience (n=8) with the population, were employed part-time (n=7) or full-time (n=1), and denied (n=3) or were unsure whether they had any prior SU education (n=2). The results of the current study resonate with existing research: training/education on SU yields more positive attitudes among BSW students. The intervention and measures should be refined to support replication with a larger, more diversified sample, then be adapted for other populations. The results have implications for academia as it underscores the benefits of SU education in social work.

P1.3   *The Neurological Effects of Marijuana on Teenagers Brains*
Author(s): Erna Clarke
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Dual MSW/M.A. in Women's and Gender Studies
Abstract: This project addresses the critical need within a crisis intervention service organization serving adolescents in Greater New Haven by examining the neurological effects of marijuana use on adolescent brain development. Adolescence is a vulnerable period when marijuana use can significantly impact cognitive functions, emotional regulation, memory, and learning, leading to increased risks of anxiety, depression, psychosis, and substance use disorders. The literature review highlights marijuana's detrimental effects on brain structures such as the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala, raising questions about how cultural perspectives and stigma influence usage patterns in marginalized communities. The deliverable, an educational video titled "The Effects of Weed on Teenage Brains," targets adolescents and families, emphasizing mental health resources and supportive interventions. This project's significance for social work includes enhancing culturally responsive practice, informing preventive strategies, and improving therapeutic interventions for adolescents struggling with marijuana use.

P1.4 *The Impact Work Environments Have on a Social Workers Ability to be Competent; Exploring the Influence of Educational Diversity in Management*

Author(s): Stephanie LaMacchia-Cruz
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Dual MSW/M.A. in Women's and Gender Studies
Abstract: Social workers often work in multidisciplinary teams where management and colleagues may not have formal social work training. These teams are made up of clinicians, interns and specialists who come from different educational backgrounds. While educational diversity brings unique perspectives, it can also create challenges. These challenges arise more so when leadership lacks an understanding of social work competencies, ethics, and best practices. This gap in knowledge can lead to ineffective policies, unrealistic expectations, and environments that hinder a social worker's ability to provide ethical and competent care. Therefore, there is an organizational need for better education and training among management and non-social work professionals to ensure social workers can function effectively in their roles. This capstone project will provide training and resources to help social workers navigate and uphold ethical practices when working under and alongside professionals from different educational backgrounds.

P1.5 *Adolescent Mental Health and Social Media*

Author(s): Elizabeth Feeley
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: This capstone project addressed the need for accessible, adolescent-centered psychoeducational tools that promote a healthier relationship and engagement level with social media. Adolescents were found to be among the most active users of social media and often experienced both the harmful outcomes and the positive benefits of online interactions. While existing research highlighted concerns such as cyberbullying and social comparison, it also identified social media's potential for connection, advocacy, and peer support. This project explored how social media could be used to support adolescent mental health and resulted in the creation of a Social Media Literacy & Mental Health Resource Booklet. The guide was designed for adolescents in need and to be distributed by providers in clinical, school, or community settings. It includes strategies, reflection prompts, and culturally responsive resources. The project contributed to social work knowledge by integrating online literacy into adolescent mental health support and responded to the growing need for strengths-based interventions that reflected the realities of youth in a digital age.

P1.6 *Education on Healthy Relationships for Young Adults with Complex Interpersonal Trauma*

Author(s): Faith Littleton
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: The psychosocial developmental challenge for young adults, age 18-25 years old, is to form and maintain close, committed relationships which can be extremely difficult for young adults with complex interpersonal trauma especially at the height of typical behavioral health symptomatology. It is imperative that this population is equipped with the best education needed to form close friendships and romantic relationships during this time period. A vast research base on working with traumatized individuals suggests the use of psychotherapy models can improve their mental health symptoms. Additionally, social support can enhance the ability to cope with difficulty. The psychotherapy context can teach skills that are essential to healthy relationships such as effective communication and emotion regulation. However, this does not specifically address education on building healthy relationships and many young adults in a digital age are used to and prefer incorporating technology into their learning. Through the use of a website, information on effective communication, emotion regulation, developing and maintaining healthy friendships and romantic relationships is blended into a creative therapy aid that is accessible to an outpatient therapy clinic. Clinicians could truly benefit from a quick and easily accessible resource to use during a time-limited therapy session. The clinician will be able to help clients consider this information and their own experiences in constructive ways. Moreover, clients may find learning more fun and interactive from a digital resource used in the therapy session.

P1.7 *Bridging the Gap: Addressing Mental Health Service Shortages in High Schools*

Author(s): Amanda McGeehan
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: This project addresses the critical shortage of mental health services in high schools and its impact on students' social-emotional wellbeing. The literature review explores how limited mental health service availability

correlates with student wellbeing, focusing on three themes: the impact of service shortages, barriers to accessing support, and best practices for expanding services. The research question examines the relationship between limited mental health services and students' social-emotional wellbeing. The project aims to develop a Response Manual Toolkit for schools to enhance their mental health services, incorporating evidence-based interventions, stigma reduction strategies, and recommendations for integrating resources. This toolkit will contribute to social work knowledge by identifying effective strategies for supporting adolescent mental health in educational settings, emphasizing a holistic, student-centered approach grounded in social work principles. The project's significance lies in its potential to address mental health disparities and serve as a model for future school-based initiatives.

P1.8   *Mental Health Support in West Haven Elementary Schools*
Author(s): Keegan Riccio
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: This project addresses the lack of mental health services in West Haven elementary schools by developing an accessible and culturally responsive infographic brochure. The infographic brochure includes local mental health resources, social-emotional learning activities for school staff, and coping strategies for students. The literature review highlights the critical need for early mental health interventions in schools, particularly for children from low-income and diverse backgrounds, who face significant barriers to accessing care. Key themes include the effectiveness of school-based mental health programs, the importance of culturally competent services, and the challenges of engaging families in mental health support. The deliverable aims to empower school staff, students, and parents by offering practical tools for promoting emotional well-being. This project contributes to social work knowledge and practice by advocating for school-based mental health support and culturally inclusive approaches, reinforcing the role of social workers in addressing community needs.

P1.9   *Effectiveness of DBT Methods for Adolescents with Problem Sexual Behaviors*
Author(s): Maya Kadel
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: The cycle of sexual abuse often begins with a victimized child who, without proper treatment, may perpetuate harmful behaviors. Adolescents with Problem Sexual Behavior (PSB) are frequently victims of sexual abuse, disrupting their emotional, social, and psychological development. This study addresses the effectiveness of Multisystemic Therapy for Problem Sexual Behavior (MST-PSB) and the need for culturally competent interventions for diverse ethnic groups. Previous research shows that while MST-PSB is an evidence-based intervention, its efficacy across cultural contexts remains under-explored, highlighting a critical gap in the literature. This research is timely due to the increasing recognition of cultural sensitivity in therapeutic practices, particularly as the adolescent PSB population continues to grow. A common challenge for survivors of sexual abuse is difficulty with emotional regulation, where trauma responses are triggered by seemingly minor situations. This leads to escalated crises that are difficult to de-escalate, a common issue for adolescents with PSB. To investigate this, a mixed-methods approach was employed with a population of adolescents with PSB who struggle to de-escalate. This combined quantitative assessments of emotional regulation outcomes with qualitative interviews from both clinicians and adolescents. Incorporating culturally competent, research-informed practices such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skills—particularly mindfulness and box breathing—can provide effective tools for self-regulation during emotional crises. This approach supports immediate coping strategies and promotes long-term healing, emphasizing the need for social workers to adopt a culturally competent framework in their intervention.

P1.10   *Compassion and Work Fatigue Among Mental Health Professionals*
Author(s): Brooke Martins
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Mental health professionals often face unique challenges in their roles, which often cause compassion fatigue. This compassion/work fatigue, burnout and even secondary traumatic stress is often caused by these unique challenges, emotional demands or high caseloads. In this literature review, we will be exploring the key factors that contribute to compassion fatigue along with evidence-based interventions that are effective to combat it. This review will also explore major themes such as the cause and effect of compassion fatigue, and best practices for prevention that exist within completed research on the topic. This review will also highlight key theoretical frameworks such as the Ecological Systems Theory and Maslach's Burnout Theory in order to fully understand the concern. In existing research, their findings suggest there are many interventions that can reduce compassion/work fatigue such as self-

care, organizational/agency support and mindfulness-based stress reduction which can be vital when trying to improve job satisfaction and reduce overall burnout.

P1.11 *Community Resource Guide*
Author(s): Heather Torpey
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: This capstone project focuses on addressing the housing barriers affecting individuals recovering from substance use disorders (SUD). The project, developed at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital's inpatient psychiatric unit and acute behavioral unit (ABU), aimed to enhance discharge planning by providing a resource pamphlet listing housing, food, and support services. The literature review explores the connection between stable housing and recovery outcomes, highlighting the Housing First model and the importance of trauma informed care. The project plan details the implementation process, including resources compilation, dissemination, and evaluation. Findings indicate that access to stable housing significantly improves recovery outcomes, yet systemic barriers persist. This project contributes to social work practice by advocating holistic, culturally responsive discharge planning that empowers individuals in their recovery journey.

P1.12 *Imani Ambassador Program*
Author(s): Kiron Bunch, Lorie Gardella
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: This project aims to address mental health disparities in Black communities through the Imani Ambassador Program, a culturally tailored, peer-driven support model designed to reduce stigma and improve engagement in mental health and substance use disorder treatment. The literature review explores how community-led programs can reduce stigma, emphasizing cultural competence, peer support, and lived experiences. Key themes include reducing stigma, cultural competence in mental health care, and the importance of peer support. The research question asks how community-led programs like the Imani Ambassador program can reduce stigma in Substance Use Disorder treatment. Further research is needed on sustainable funding options for community-led interventions. The project's deliverable is a comprehensive plan for implementing the Imani Ambassador Program, which will contribute to social work knowledge by providing real-world examples of how community-led interventions can reduce racial disparities in mental health care and improve treatment engagement within marginalized communities.

P1.13 *A Literature Review on Research and Therapeutic Treatments for African Americans*
Author(s): Nasiyra Clayton
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Not all people in the United States are experiencing equality and fairness. The U.S. has been trying to delete Black Americans' civil rights, possibilities, and wellbeing. Existing rights remain weak in actions. This research informs readers about unfairness in the Institutions that overlooks the rights of African Americans. The nation's moral obligation to rectifying historical injustices is eroding, impacting historically disenfranchised African Americans' mental health and stability. Racist attitudes and policies spread subliminal messages to "kick them while they are down". According to research, a need for effective therapeutic remedies addressing generational race-related trauma affecting African Americans. This qualitative research examines the effectiveness of evidence-based research and therapy for African Americans and emphasizes the need to study the mental health effects of racism on current and historical African Americans. It explores scholars that examined African Americans' experiences with racism, the lack of research-based therapies for race-related trauma, and the contributing factors that lead to low therapeutic treatment engagement. A thorough and objective assessment of how racism influences trauma exposure, the lack of mental health care, and race-related PTSD—despite it not being a diagnosis—led to a therapeutic framework. The culturally responsive framework encourages health care providers, social workers, and other helping providers to serve marginalized groups while learning more about their vocations. Surveying, visiting community development groups, and being open to new therapeutic ideas, and self-reflection benefits evidence-based researchers, social workers, and clinicians to grow in cultural responsiveness, competency, and research.

P1.14　　*Compassion Fatigue in Mental Health Services*
Author(s): Keannah Colon
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Compassion fatigue is a common and often overlooked issue among mental health providers, presenting a serious threat to their well-being and the quality of care they deliver (Cocker & Joss, 2016). Mental health professionals work relentlessly to support individuals dealing with trauma, loss, and emotional distress. As a result, they may experience emotional and physical exhaustion that affect their ability to empathize, connect, and effectively provide care. Addressing compassion fatigue is crucial not only for the well-being of mental health providers but also for ensuring that patients continue to receive the best possible care. This project aims to explore the impact of compassion fatigue on mental health professionals and develop a comprehensive approach to reduce its effects, resulting in a healthier and sustainable workforce in the mental health field. My research question is: How does compassion fatigue affect the personal well-being, work-life balance, and overall health of mental health providers? This research will dive into major themes, such as utilizing Trauma-Informed Care to address compassion fatigue and discuss the populations within mental health providers that normally get overlooked.

P1.15　　*Enhancing SUD Recovery for Veterans Through Farm-Based Group Therapy*
Author(s): Alanna Gilbert
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: This project explores the potential of farm-based therapy as an adjunctive treatment for veterans with substance use disorders (SUDs). Veterans face unique challenges related to mental health, trauma, and reintegration, including high rates of SUD and PTSD. While traditional treatments like Medically Assisted Treatment and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy are effective, they may not fully address veterans' holistic needs. Recent literature suggests that farm- and nature-based therapies can enhance recovery by promoting physical activity, a sense of connection, stress relief, and emotional healing. Theories like Ecopsychology and Self-Determination Theory support the effectiveness of farm-based therapy in addressing both SUD and co-occurring mental health disorders like PTSD. This capstone project provides a six-week farm-based therapy curriculum designed for veterans with SUDs, integrating exercise, mindfulness, community building, and skills-mastery to offer physical, psychological, and social benefits that can complement more traditional evidence-based therapies. Developed from existing research supporting horticultural and exercise-based therapy, the curriculum provides a flexible group therapy structure designed to accommodate veterans from diverse backgrounds, striving to enhance their emotional and physical well-being while increasing engagement with evidence-based interventions. The target stakeholder group includes social workers from SUD treatment programs within the VA as well as partner community organizations serving veterans. In order to disseminate the project, a VA social worker would act as a point person to hold and distribute the curriculum to other social workers throughout the organization, facilitating implementation and engagement.

P1.16　　*How does financial hardship effect early child development*
Author(s): William Hunter
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Financial hardship significantly impacts early childhood development, influencing cognitive, social, emotional, and physical well-being. Children in low-income households face barriers to essential resources, such as healthcare, early education, and adequate nutrition, which contribute to developmental disparities. Research indicates that poverty affects brain language acquisition, literacy and numeracy skills, often leading to delays in school readiness. Additionally, economic stress disrupts parent-child relationships, resulting in increased parental stress and reduced positive parenting practices, which can negatively affect children's emotional and social development. High-quality early education programs and access to community resources can mitigate some of these adverse effects, yet systemic barriers and lack of awareness often prevent families from utilizing available support. To address these challenges, this paper proposes the creation of a comprehensive resource guide to connect families with essential services, aiming to improve developmental outcomes and reduce the long-term consequences of childhood poverty.

P1.17　　*Therapeutic D&D*
Author(s): Patrick Kingston
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: This project introduces a structured approach for using the tabletop role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons to encourage social and emotional learning among young adults with autism. By blending imagination with

clear guidelines for communication and collaboration, D&D offers an engaging platform for practicing conversation, turn-taking, and problem-solving in a less intimidating setting than traditional social skills groups. The project's deliverable is a manual intended for social workers, mental health professionals, and Dungeon Masters. It outlines practical strategies for session planning, adapting rules and story elements, and creating a safe, inclusive atmosphere. It also emphasizes culturally responsive practices that acknowledge the diverse interests and identities of participants. The manual provides concrete tips, scripts, and printable resources to guide facilitators through every stage, from "Session Zero" introductions to ongoing debriefs and evaluations. The ultimate goal is to help participants reduce feelings of isolation, increase self-confidence, and develop lasting relationships with their peers. Through clear instruction and adaptability, the manual aims to empower professionals to create meaningful group experiences that blend the fun of role-playing with evidence-based methods for social development.

P1.18   *Empowerment in Practice: Support for those working with under-diagnosed or misdiagnosed youth*
Author(s): Allison Long
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Many youths are underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed with mental health disorders and the potential for childhood trauma is often overlooked. The literature suggests that children's environment plays a role in how they are presenting, as well as how are they impacted on a micro/macro level. Literature also states the importance of addressing the mental health issues for what they are, instead of addressing just the specific presenting problem. Youth who are under-diagnosed or misdiagnosed will often face difficulty receiving appropriate care, which in turn can impact their success in education, social interactions, emotional well-being etc.
To address this, I developed a 7-week course for social workers who work with children and families, who are seeking support and guidance for the best way to support their clients. The aim of this capstone project is to provide support and offer new ways to understand children and families' needs. The intended outcome is for social workers to be able to help youth and families grow and heal, but also to dismantle the negative stigma that comes with therapy and getting help. Social workers will be more equipped to recognize difficult and complex situations within youth and to structure appropriate care plans tailored to specific needs, which will ultimately improve the lives of children and families.

P1.19   *Treatment Barriers for Immigrants Struggling with Substance Use and Mental Health*
Author(s): Francheska Nieves
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Immigrants in the United States face distinctive and compounding barriers to accessing mental health and substance use treatment. In addition to general obstacles such as cost, stigma, and limited accessibility of services, immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented, face further challenges related to legal status, language, and cultural differences. This capstone project presents a literature review highlighting current research on structural, systemic, and socioeconomic barriers that deter treatment access for immigrant populations. This research is grounded on Critical Race Theory and Acculturation Theory to emphasize how systemic inequities and cultural adaptation practices shape immigrants' experiences in seeking care. The project also includes a community-based intervention and a culturally and linguistically responsive educational flyer in Spanish, which will be distributed via mobile outreach services in Stamford and Bridgeport. This deliverable aims to reduce language barriers, promote resource awareness, and enhance engagement with treatment services. The project contributes to social work practice by advocating for culturally competent and accessible care models for marginalized populations.

P1.20   *Impact of physical activity on mental health, particularly in early and middle adulthood*
Author(s): Andres Palacio
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Depression remains a widespread mental health concern, affecting millions globally (Harvey et al., 2010). As its prevalence increases, there is growing interest in effective, accessible treatments beyond traditional medication and psychotherapy. Physical activity has emerged as a promising intervention, with research linking regular exercise to reduced depressive symptoms, enhanced cognitive functioning, and improved overall well-being (Teychenne et al., 2008). Biologically, exercise supports mental health through improved neurotransmitter activity, increased neuroplasticity, and better stress regulation (Gourgouvelis et al., 2018). However, many individuals face barriers to engaging in physical activity, including lack of motivation, socioeconomic limitations, and restricted access to structured programs—factors that challenge the integration of exercise into mental health treatment (Harvey et al., 2018).

This literature review explores the impact of physical activity on mental health in early and middle adulthood, focusing on its effectiveness in individuals with depression. The central research question is: How does exercise influence mental health outcomes in adults with depression, and what barriers affect its implementation in clinical and community settings? The review is organized around three key themes: (1) the biological mechanisms behind exercise's mental health benefits, (2) its role as a clinical intervention—especially when integrated with treatments like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and (3) structural and environmental barriers limiting access to exercise-based interventions.

P1.21   *The Effect of Mental Health Resources for Teachers on Student Wellbeing*
Author(s): Emma Tavera
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: The purpose of this capstone project is to examine the impact of mental health resources for teachers on student well-being in the classroom. About half of the population is affected by some mental health diagnosis, which comes into play in the classroom. The deliverable being created is based on information collected from teachers in Hartford County Catholic Schools' elementary schools. This project aims to develop a resource that outlines the training required for teachers and provides links to access it at little to no cost.

P1.22   *["Closer" - Zine] Resources for Families and Clients in Extended Day Treatment (EDT) Programs Pre- and Post Graduation*
Author(s): Arjun Jackson
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Extended Day Treatment (EDT) programs are an intermediate-level service targeted to provide psychoeducation via multicomponent interventions for children and adolescents (5 to 17 years old) with significant emotional and behavioral disorders. EDT programs typically last 6 months in duration and take place after school hours; however, families may un-enroll their children from the program whenever they so choose. Typical interventions offered across EDT programs include: daily peer groups; family support; group, individual and family therapy; case management; medication management. Caregiver involvement in service, caregiver and client perceptions of program efficacy, and communication between families and EDT staff play pivotal parts in maintaining efficacy and a family's trust in the program. While resources and referrals provided to families are individually designed based on a client's treatment and discharge plan, there is little research detailing internal EDT-related resources provided to families upon the completion, or early un-enrollment. This Capstone aims to fulfill the gap in service of providing families group activity related materials that they can re-simulate or reference whenever needed. The deliverable for this capstone, a comprehensive Zine (or magazine) aims to present material covered in EDT group therapy with a collection of over 24 activities divided into 12 themes. This study contributes to the growing body of research of literature on post-extended day treatment, caregiver and child connectivity, and bridging a gap in resources that families can simulate and reference beyond the scope of EDT enrollment.

P1.23   *Breaking Barriers with Language-Inclusive Student Resource Guides for Immigrant Students in Community Colleges*
Author(s): Jennifer Vorel
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Access to higher education resources is crucial for student success; however, language barriers hinder many Arabic-speaking students and their families from fully utilizing essential college services. This gap in accessibility leads to disparities in educational attainment, retention, and the use of financial aid within Arabic-speaking communities. Building on existing research that identifies language and cultural barriers as significant obstacles for refugee students, this capstone project aims to address these challenges by translating vital college resources into Arabic. The project ensures equitable access to student support services, financial aid information, academic advising, and other institutional resources.

My project translated important institutional materials, enhancing clarity and connecting them with financial aid, academic support, and mental health services to ensure you have access to all the help you need.

Rooted in anti-racist and culturally responsive principles, this initiative emphasized language accessibility as a crucial component of educational equity. By collaborating with native Arabic speakers and community advocates, the translations were crafted to be linguistically accurate and culturally relevant. This approach not only addressed immediate accessibility issues but also fostered long-term systemic change, ensuring that refugee and immigrant

students receive the necessary support for academic success, personal development, and full integration within the community college environment.

P1.24   *Breaking Barriers to Attendance: Equipping Educators to Foster Student Belonging*
Author(s): Bryanna Bonner
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Chronic absenteeism is a pressing issue that affects student achievement, school engagement, and long-term success. This project addresses the need for intentional, research-based strategies to foster belonging in schools—a key factor in reducing absenteeism. Grounded in a literature review exploring the link between student engagement, social-emotional learning, and culturally responsive practices, the research examines how relationships, classroom climate, and school-wide initiatives can positively influence attendance rates. The project deliverable is a professional development (PD) binder designed to equip educators with practical tools, reflection prompts, and actionable strategies for building student connection and participation. By centering student voices and emphasizing small, daily interventions, this work contributes to the field of social work in education, reinforcing the power of proactive, relationship-driven approaches to combat absenteeism. Future research should explore long-term implementation and systemic policy changes to ensure sustained impact.

P1.25   *How Substance Use Influences Men's Perceptions and Approaches to Relationships Community or Organizational Need*
Author(s): Jaime Edwards
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: The purpose of this project is to address the critical need within community-based organizations to enhance the competence and ethical practice of social workers through improved workplace environments and informed management practices. A comprehensive literature review explored the impact of organizational climate and leadership education on social worker performance, satisfaction, and ethical decision-making. Key themes identified include the correlation between supportive management and enhanced worker effectiveness, the role of trauma-informed organizational culture, and strategies for fostering culturally responsive practices. Questions for further research highlighted gaps concerning the specific educational needs of management teams and effective interventions to bridge diverse educational backgrounds among human service professionals. The project's deliverable, a targeted training program, integrates anti-racist and trauma-informed principles to empower social workers and management personnel. This initiative significantly contributes to social work knowledge by offering practical tools to improve ethical integrity, cultural responsiveness, and overall organizational effectiveness in serving diverse populations.

P1.26   *Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness amongst Older Adults: A Manual for Social Workers Running Group*
Author(s): Joanna Fairweather
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: Loneliness and social isolation are growing concerns among older adults, often leading to negative impacts on mental, emotional, and physical well-being. This capstone project addresses these struggles through the implementation of a five- week peer support group curriculum, facilitated by a social worker at senior centers. This peer support group focused to meet the unmet needs for social engagement and emotional support among seniors. The peer support group is opened to every seniors with curriculum focused on weekly themes such as; welcome & building connections, sharing stories & finding common ground, managing loneliness & building emotional well-being, strengthening friendships & social support, and moving forward & staying connected. As trained facilitators, social workers played an important role in creating a safe, inclusive space where seniors or participants expressed themselves and support each other. Using the pre and post survey and group discussions, the project evaluated changes the perceptions of loneliness and social engagement. Result showed that the peer support group positively influenced seniors emotional wellbeing and reduced feelings of social isolation. This is important because emotional well-being influences an overall sense of well-being that can contribute to other factors in their lives. Finally, this peer support curriculum serves as an important model for senior centers and community organizations looking to strengthen social well-being among older adults.

P1.27   *Exploring Supervisory Practices for Women of Color in Social Work: A Critical Race Theory Perspective*
Author(s): Ingrid Aarons
Faculty Mentor: Isabel Logan
Department: Social Work

Abstract: Supervision is vital in organizational settings, providing essential support for professionals to enhance their skills and knowledge. This relationship is particularly important for marginalized groups, such as women of color (WOC) in social work, who strive to develop foundational abilities and ethical competencies. Despite evidence indicating that effective supervision positively impacts staff (Plummer, 2018), there is limited research on integrating social justice advocacy within supervisory practices. The intersection of race and gender complicates the supervisory experience for WOC. This research explores the impact of supervision on the professional growth of WOC in social work, focusing on how supervisors can acknowledge and integrate their identities into the supervisory relationship. Utilizing Critical Race Theory, the study examines historical practices that contribute to disparities faced by WOC and advocates for inclusive supervisory frameworks that promote diversity, equity, and empowerment. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, recruiting a purposive sample of WOC, with 121 participants contributing data (50 responses were excluded due to incomplete data). Findings revealed that gender significantly influenced supervisees' comfort with supervisors' vulnerability; over 54% of WOC felt more supported under female supervisors compared to male ones, who often created a more guarded environment. This indicates ongoing challenges for WOC in attaining leadership roles and highlights the necessity for organizational contexts that advocate for diversity and equity. The study underscores the urgent need for further research into supervisory practices within social work, particularly regarding WOC, to inform educational frameworks and practical approaches that enhance support and equity in the field.

P1.28   *Your Next Chapter Reentry Toolkit*
Author(s): Annalisa Arias
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work

Abstract: An extensive literature review highlights gaps in existing reentry services, including the lack of culturally responsive and strength-based approaches. While exploring best practices for addressing systemic barriers faced by marginalized populations disproportionately impacted by incarceration. This project plan outlines the creation of the Your Next Chapter Reentry Toolkit, a website designed to support formerly incarcerated individuals in Connecticut, addressing a critical gap in accessible, strength-based resources. The literature review examines challenges to successful reintegration, including systemic barriers, stigma, and mental health, while highlighting the potential of mentorship programs. Mass incarceration disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Furthermore, individuals face legal restrictions, employment discrimination, and limited access to housing. The initiative addresses the critical need for resources that empower individuals during their reintegration into society, shifting the focus from deficits to strengths. The project recognizes peer mentorships as a significantly underutilized resource, offering unique support and guidance through shared experiences. Grounded in social work principles, the toolkit emphasizes hope, resilience, and self-determination while providing practical tools for navigating reentry. This project also emphasizes cultural competence by tailoring resources to diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Furthermore, it advances social work knowledge by evaluating strength-based interventions and advocating for systemic change.

P1.29   *Addressing Mental Health Barriers: Culturally Responsive Care*
Author(s): Ariana Azarbad
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Social Work

Abstract: Disparities in the mental health care system pose a considerable challenge for Black and African American communities. This capstone project features culturally responsive training for mental health professionals, with an emphasis on its influence on therapeutic relationships, clinical effectiveness, and patient outcomes for Black and African American. Culturally responsive care emphasizes the recognition and integration of diverse cultural values, beliefs, and experiences into mental health treatment, thereby improving communication, fostering trust, and increasing patient engagement. This literature review examines into the historical evolution of cultural competence in mental health, its role in mitigating disparities, and its implementation in clinical and social work environments. The study is based on Culturally Responsive Theory and Trauma-Informed Theory, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, minimizing implicit biases, and improving client outcomes. The deliverable will include a training program aimed to improve the competencies of service providers, promote equitable access to mental health services, and assist diverse communities. Anticipated outcomes encompass increased awareness among providers, strengthened therapeutic relationships, and diminished disparities in access to mental health care. The document

concludes with a suggested curriculum framework intended to facilitate the incorporation of culturally responsive practices within mental health care clinics.

P1.30 *Enhancing DCF Support for Youth Transitioning to Independent Adulthood*
Author(s): Taleicia Barnhill
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Youth aging out of the foster care system face significant challenges in their transition to independent adulthood, including barriers to stable housing, education, employment, and access to mental health support. The Department of Children and Families is critical in facilitating this transition; existing policies and services often cannot ensure long-term stability and success for former foster youth. This study explores how the Department of Children and Families can enhance its support systems by identifying key gaps in current transitional programs and evaluating best practices in extended care, life skills training, financial assistance, and mentorship. Strengthening DCF's role in this transition is crucial to preventing homelessness, unemployment, and economic instability among former foster youth, ultimately promoting a more sustainable and successful path to independent adulthood.

P1.31 *Stress Management Intervention Workshop for Employee Well-Being*
Author(s): Maria Berrios
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: In today's fast-paced and demanding work environment, stress has become unmanageable. Understanding the causes of work stress and cultivating strategies for managing stress is imperative. Some causes of workplace stress are heavy workloads, poor work-life balance, unclear expectations, interpersonal conflicts and toxic work culture, and organizational changes. Excessive stress can have negative effects on individuals both physically and emotionally. Some negative effects are physical health problems like headaches, high blood pressure, and fatigue. Mental health issues like anxiety and depression can lead to a negative impact on personal life and relationships, decreased productivity and motivation, reduced job satisfaction, and increased absenteeism and turnover. Stress effects impact the employees and the organization. Some of these effects include lower employee performance, increased healthcare costs and insurance claims, high turnover rates and recruitment costs, deterioration of workplace culture. How does the integration of research-based stress management techniques influence employee well-being and productivity? The goal of stress management workshops is to equip employees with practical skills to deal with workplace stress in a sustainable way. Mental health issues related to stress are often stigmatized in the workplace. Designing a workshop can open discussion between employees and employers about stress and introduce coping mechanisms. By using research-based approaches to stress management, workshops can lead to improvements in employee mental health and burnout prevention.

P1.32 *Burnout in School Social Work*
Author(s): Ethan Boileau
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Burnout among school social workers is a critical issue that impacts both professionals and the students they serve. High caseloads, limited resources, and the emotionally demanding nature of the work contribute to stress, emotional exhaustion, and job dissatisfaction, ultimately affecting student outcomes. This project seeks to address burnout by developing and facilitating a virtual mutual aid group for school social workers, providing a dedicated space for peer support, resource-sharing, and collective problem-solving.
The mutual aid group will serve as a structured yet flexible environment where participants can discuss challenges, exchange coping strategies, and build a supportive professional network. Rooted in culturally responsive and anti-racist practices, the group will also explore systemic factors contributing to burnout, such as institutional inequities and policy barriers affecting marginalized students. The virtual format ensures accessibility for social workers in various educational settings, fostering connection across geographic regions. A pilot session will be implemented and evaluated through participant feedback, assessing the group's effectiveness, relevance, and feasibility for ongoing meetings. Expected outcomes include increased job satisfaction, reduced burnout symptoms, and improved ability to provide high-quality student support. By fostering connection and sustainability in school social work, this project offers a replicable model for addressing burnout in other helping professions. This presentation will explore the development, implementation, and preliminary evaluation of the mutual aid group, highlighting its potential as a long-term strategy for promoting resilience and well-being among school social workers.

P1.33   *Overcoming Performance Anxiety in Collegiate Athletes*
Author(s): Julianna Bonilla
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Performance anxiety is a significant challenge for collegiate athletes, impacting both mental well-being and athletic performance. This project explores individualized coping strategies to address performance anxiety and enhance mental health support within collegiate athletics. Through a comprehensive literature review, the research examines key themes such as the psychological factors influencing performance anxiety, the effectiveness of coping mechanisms, and the role of social support systems in athlete well-being. The study seeks to answer how tailored interventions can better support athletes based on factors such as gender, sport type, and cognitive orientation. The project deliverable includes a resource that provides evidence-based strategies for managing performance anxiety, offering practical applications for athletes, coaches, and mental health professionals. By contributing to the understanding of individualized coping mechanisms, this work has the potential to inform more effective mental health interventions, advancing social work practice in sports psychology and athlete support services.

P1.34   *Strength Beyond the Playing Field: Exploring Protective Factors for Mental Health in College Athletes*
Author(s): Susan Cardillo-Cunningham
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This poster presentation will illustrate the research findings addressing the pressing issue of mental health among collegiate student athletes. This research aimed to explore, from the student athlete's perspective, what factors promote or hinder student athletes from seeking support when faced with mental health challenges. Guided by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and supported by the data from the Perception of Stigmatization of Others for Seeking Help (PSOSH)(Vogel et al., 2009) and the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help scales (Vogel et al., 2006), this research analyzed responses from 392 collegiate student athletes to uncover key personal, social, institutional, and cultural facts that influence an athlete's decision in seeking help for mental health support. The results of this research provided valuable insights into the question of what factors facilitate or hinder student athletes from seeking support when dealing with a mental health issue. Most of the participants (n=342) were undergraduates who reported spending a significant amount of time and energy on their sport, aligning with existing literature on the multiple demands faced by student athletes compounding their stress levels (Galvan, 2021; Gray et al., 2023; Hamlin et al., 2019; Lopes DosSantos et al., 2020). This poster presentation will illustrate the study's implications for social work practice, education and interprofessional collaboration.

P1.35   *Wellness Experiences of Latine Undergraduate Students: A Systematic Review*
Author(s): Nicole Cepeda
Faculty Mentor: Isabel Logan
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Latine undergraduate students represent a growing demographic in higher education, yet their experiences of wellness and well-being remain underexplored. Utilizing a systematic review approach, this study examined the challenges and supports that influence the wellness experienced of Latine students, guided by the eight Dimensions of Wellness model. The key points illustrated by this systematic review shed light on alternative ways to consider wellness, wellness practices, and implementation of wellness programs on college campuses. The findings from this systematic review highlight the importance of considering the impact of racism on Latine students. Furthermore, it pivots ideas and practices of wellness to a more collectivistic framework. Lastly, it emphasizes the need to practice wellness across the dimensions as the benefits are intertwined and impact one's overall well-being. Implications for institutional policy, student support services, and future research are discussed.

P1.36   *How to Raise Awareness and Education For African American women with Major Depression*
Author(s): Carla Chappel
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This capstone project will raise awareness of the symptoms of major depression among African American women and resources for treatment. African American Women are less likely to seek mental health services than White women, and if they do they terminate early. African American women's experiences of racism, sexism, micro-aggressions and economic hardship may contribute to depression and distrust in the medical system. In addition, African American women are not getting their cultural needs met when they do seek help, which can result in their feeling unheard and unseen. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is an evidenced based practice for treating major depression, however cultural adaptions are needed to strengthen the therapeutic relationship between providers and

African American women. The deliverable for this research project will be a brochure on the symptoms of major depression and a QR code to give information on mental health treatment and services in the community. The brochure will include a QR code to give information on mental health treatment and services in the community. The brochure will be disseminated with the church bulletin in a Black church community.

P1.37 *The Effects of Social Worker Intervention on Activities of Daily Living Independence with Individuals with Dementia Diagnoses*
Author(s): Megan Arnold
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Social Work
Abstract: As the baby boomer generation continues to age, the need for care for the elderly has increased. Dementia depletes the cognition of those impacted by the disease, leading to loss of physical and mental abilities. This leads to a loss of abilities for activities of daily living, of ADLs. ADLs are characterized by bathing, brushing your teeth, using the bathroom, and cooking food. These activities are markers for one's independence, and when individuals lose their ability to do so independently, they require higher levels of care such as assisted living facilities and skilled nursing facilities (SNFs). The social workers who work with these individuals can have great influence on the populations they serve, running groups and individual sessions. Through research and experience via internship placement, this allowed for the cultivation of this resource guide for facilitating groups with the geriatric population impacted by dementia. Assessing the needs of this population at different levels of the disease allows for more accurate and targeted interventions to be performed, leading to sustained cognition for the affected individuals. This allows the individuals to maintain their autonomy for longer, leading to longer spans of life with independence. Social work interventions play a large role in the continuation of cognitive abilities for the individuals they serve.

P1.38 *Systematic Review of the Clinical and Contextual Needs of Children and Families Impacted by Homicide*
Author(s): Catherine Corto-Mergins
Faculty Mentor: Joyce Taylor
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The impact of homicide on children and adult family survivors is devastating and long lasting. Survivors are frequently left with traumatic grief and other mental health concerns both immediately following the homicide and potentially across the lifespan. In addition, the act of homicide often begins a myriad of unforeseen contextual and systemic demands on families, creating numerous ongoing adjustment issues related to the violent death. Black, Latine, and other marginalized and under-resourced communities experience elevated risks of homicide, polyvictimization, and differential impacts due to socioeconomic and environmental factors. There are interventions that have shown successful outcomes with trauma victims, but very few have been developed and utilized specifically for the trauma of homicide, and even less for specific ages and cultures who have experienced this trauma. There is a repeated paucity of research on both long- and short-term symptoms, as well as data on successful multidisciplinary treatment outcomes. This systematic review synthesized findings of both the clinical and contextual needs of intrafamilial homicide survivors. Results indicate that existing services are not designed to fully address these complex needs on an extended basis. Multidisciplinary teamwork and homicide specific, culturally congruent approaches are critical in supporting families through the bereavement process post homicide. This systematic review contributes to existing research informing recommendations for service design, delivery and coordination to improve outcomes for affected children and families.

P1.39 *Black Men: A Mental Health Pandemic*
Author(s): Mikyle DePina
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Cultural stigma significantly impacts help-seeking behaviors among Black men in the US by supporting the belief that seeking mental health support is a sign of weakness or inadequacy. This stigma can discourage individuals from accessing necessary services, leading to untreated mental health issues and exacerbating disparities in mental health care. Efforts to reduce stigma and promote culturally competent support are crucial for improving mental health outcomes in this community.

P1.40 *SEL Coloring Book for Children*
Author(s): Madison Dzwonkowski
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: For my capstone project, I developed a social-emotional learning (SEL) coloring book specifically designed for elementary-aged children in the Thomaston School District. The primary goal of this project was to help students recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions in a fun and engaging way. The coloring book was created to be used both in the classroom and at home, offering children a coping tool for managing "big" feelings and building emotional regulation skills. I included structured coloring worksheets that addressed various emotions and coping strategies, while also providing opportunities for students to design their own pages. This approach encouraged creativity and personal reflection, allowing students to connect more deeply with the material. By incorporating both guided activities and open-ended creative tasks, the project aimed to empower students to actively engage in their emotional development, fostering both self-awareness and self-regulation.

P1.41 *Integrating Religion and Social Work*
Author(s): Cade Buckheit
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rufoth
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The integration of religion into clinical social work practice has become a topic of increasing relevance as the field has come to recognize the centrality of clients' religious and spiritual beliefs. However, research indicates that while many social workers acknowledge the importance of religion and spirituality, they do not feel confident in their ability to address and integrate client spirituality and religion. This capstone project seeks to address this gap by developing and facilitating a professional development workshop to enhance social work students' and professionals' competency and confidence. Using an Intergroup Dialogue framework, this workshop will inspire discussions that increase participants' self-awareness, explore biases, and provide insight into practical applications and interventions.

P1.42 *Understanding Attachment Trauma: Supporting Pre-Teens at Polk Elementary School*
Author(s): Meadow Mancini
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This capstone project addresses the critical need at Polk Elementary School to understand and address behavioral and emotional issues in pre-teens stemming from early childhood trauma. The literature review explores the effects of trauma on infant mental health, focusing on attachment relationships and long-term consequences. Key themes include the impact of trauma on infant development, signs of attachment trauma, and potential interventions. Questions for further research involve successful recovery interventions, long-term mental health outcomes, and early intervention strategies. The project deliverable is an informative poster designed to educate Polk Elementary School staff about infant mental health and trauma. This project's significance lies in its ability to enhance trauma-informed care in the school setting, improve early identification of attachment-related issues, and develop culturally sensitive interventions for marginalized populations affected by trauma, ultimately contributing to better outcomes for children and families in the community.

P1.43 *Enhancing Adolescent Mental Health: Integrating Emotional Processing and Evidence-Based Therapies*
Author(s): Laura Welch
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by rapid emotional, psychological, and neurobiological changes. Mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety can significantly disrupt emotional processing and overall well-being during this stage. These disorders often lead to a negative bias in emotional valence, where neutral or ambiguous stimuli are perceived negatively, contributing to emotional dysregulation. The amygdala, a brain region central to emotional processing, plays a key role in these responses. Dysregulated amygdala activation has been linked to heightened anxiety and depression, exacerbating emotional distress and maladaptive coping strategies. Neuroimaging studies reveal distinct patterns of heightened amygdala activity in adolescents with these conditions, underscoring the neurobiological basis of altered emotional processing. Therapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) are widely recognized for their effectiveness in addressing depression, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation. CBT focuses on identifying and reshaping negative thought patterns, while DBT emphasizes emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and mindfulness skills. Both therapies have shown promise in regulating amygdala activation and improving emotional

valence. However, further research is needed to evaluate their efficacy in hospitalized adolescents and explore additional interventions tailored to this population's unique challenges. This special project examines the interplay between emotional processing, amygdala activation, therapeutic interventions, and clinical outcomes in adolescents with mental health concerns. By integrating neurobiological insights and evidence-based practices, it aims to enhance therapeutic approaches and improve outcomes for this vulnerable demographic.

P1.44 *Best Practice Models for Youth Advisory Boards (YABs)*
Author(s): Emily Ziemba
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) are organizations that are composed of and led by current and former foster youth designed to empower the members as they advocate for positive changes in the child welfare system while learning valuable leadership skills. YABs serve as great opportunities to engage individuals with current or previous foster involvement in the analysis and betterment of child welfare systems. YABs have been successfully organized and operated across the United States, but there is still a striking lack of literature detailing the internal processes of YAB development. There is a need for a more standardized approach to the organization of YABs, as well as the dissemination of their impacts on their local and broader communities to better inform the development of new YABs. This project aims to compile a best practice model inspired by local CT YABs to document successful methods being implemented in our local child welfare system. Preliminary research and community engagement has helped the student researcher guiding this project identify several key factors aiding in a successful YAB including but not limited to: contracting YAB supervisors from third party community agencies, centering youth voices, and focusing on policy change as a method of structural improvement. This research project is guided by the following question: "How do the organizational structures and implementation strategies of Youth Advisory Boards influence their impact on policy, service provision, and youth development in the foster care system?"

P1.45 *Addressing Post-COVID OCD in College Students*
Author(s): Abbey Halloran
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Abstract: This project presents a four-week training curriculum designed to address the rise in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) symptoms among college students in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Aimed at college counselors and student support staff, the program equips participants with the tools to effectively understand, assess, and intervene in OCD cases using evidence-based and culturally responsive strategies. Developed within the context of the Southern Connecticut State University counseling center, the curriculum emphasizes the unique mental health needs of first-generation and culturally diverse students, acknowledging how stigma, family expectations, and cultural narratives influence their experiences with OCD.

The curriculum focuses on three primary outcomes: increasing awareness and competency in identifying and understanding OCD, improving intervention strategies through techniques such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), and trauma-informed care, and enhancing campus-wide support systems for mental health. Each week targets specific learning objectives, including understanding post-COVID OCD, implementing culturally competent interventions, building supportive campus structures, and addressing co-occurring disorders.

Designed for flexible delivery (either in-person or online), the training includes testimonials, case studies, and practical applications. Formative evaluation methods involve expert review and pilot testing, ensuring the curriculum is both accurate and effective. Ultimately, the project promotes advocacy, reduces stigma, and supports long-term improvements in mental health services for college students. By combining research, practice, and cultural responsiveness, the program contributes to the development of more inclusive and effective mental health interventions in higher education settings.

P1.46 *Not the Followers You Want! Undergraduates' Perceptions of Stalking*
Author(s): Hanna Zebdi; Phillip Rao; Kevin McGuire; Michael Astram
Faculty Mentor: Jessica A. Suckle-Nelson
Department: Psychology
Abstract: The evolution of stalking—including the perceptions about such behaviors—has been fueled by the popularity of the internet, including social media. Although people claim to know what stalking is—or isn't—the concept, itself, seems to vary widely. That is, what some people may define as a "crush," others may define as "stalking." Fifty-six undergraduate students were asked open-ended questions about the concept of stalking: what it is, why people do it, when do "everyday behaviors" become stalking, and the difference between cyberstalking and

"offline" stalking. Preliminary analyses have indicated that defining the lines of what stalking encompasses is still nuanced. Some emerging categories appear to follow a dimension of active vs. passive. Active strategies appear to be those used to intentionally seek engagement with the victim. The more passive strategies appear to merely observe or seek indirect contact with the victim. There are several overarching concepts that appear to relate to multiple categories: consent, awareness, obsession, and the varying levels of harm that can result. These will likely become cross-categorical themes, the first three of which were present regardless of which question was being examined.

P1.47 *The Motivation Shift: How Remote and In-Office Work Impact Employee Drive*
Author(s): Kayla Colaccio
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology

Abstract: The shift to remote work has transformed the modern workplace, raising questions about its effect on employee motivation compared to traditional in-office environments. This study aims to compare motivation levels between remote and in-office employees, focusing on how workplace settings influence intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A quantitative survey will be used, with 110 participants completing the Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (WEIMS) (Tremblay et al., 2009) and additional measures assessing factors such as flexibility, social interaction, and accountability. Data will be collected anonymously via Qualtrics over a four- to six-week period, with participants recruited through professional networks and workplace organizations. A pilot study will refine the survey and attention-check questions will ensure data quality. The research will use non-probability convenience sampling while seeking diversity in demographics and industries. A cover story involving minimal deception will be used to mitigate bias in responses. Participants will receive an informed consent form and a debriefing statement, with the option to request a summary of findings. The results of this study will contribute to the growing body of research on workplace motivation, offering insights that can help organizations optimize employee engagement in both remote and in-office work settings.

P1.48 *An Exploration of Connecticut General Education Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences in Regard to Developmental Language Disorders*
Author(s): Harrison Clark
Faculty Mentor: Richard Zipoli
Department: Speech Language Pathology

Abstract: Connecticut general education teachers have variable knowledge of topics related to speech-language pathology, due to factors such as exposure to such topics during teacher preparation programs, continuing education and years of experience. Prior research has suggested that teachers may overestimate their knowledge regarding certain topics, as suggested by Spear-Swirling et al. (2005), which tested Connecticut teachers' knowledge of literacy, and Glasby et al. (2022), which suggested that teachers in Australia may overestimate their knowledge of developmental language disorder. In this study, a survey was sent out to multiple public-school districts throughout Connecticut, asking teachers to self-identify their level of education, as well as self-rate their perceived knowledge of topics related to speech-language pathology on a five-point Likert Scale, with an emphasis on developmental language disorder. Unlike previous studies, this study aimed to correlate teachers' prior education and years of experience with their assumed background knowledge, finding that teachers with the most amount of education and years of experience (e.g., Doctoral degrees and twenty or more years of experience) tend to view their knowledge as greatest, and teachers with higher levels of education and experience (e.g., Master's and ten to fifteen years of experience) tend to view their knowledge as the least. In addition, this study also allowed for teachers to express what topics related to speech-language pathology would be desired for continuing education coursework.

P1.49 *Promoting Graduate Event Attendance: Motivational Theories and Methods to Increase Student Attendance in Graduate Programming*
Author(s): Alexa Colwick
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology

Abstract: Graduate students are highly motivated individuals when it comes to academics. However that same passion is rarely seen in graduate programming attendance. Many factors act as barriers discouraging graduate students from attending programmed events, leading to a low desire to attend programming from a graduate student perspective. This class project seeks to increase graduate event attendance through the lens of motivational theories, gathering supportive data from the literature for methods that planning staff can engage in to increase turnout for various graduate programs. Through the review of research studies and literature, motivational theory-based methods such as offering functional or useful content to provide meaning, increasing a sense of competence, relatedness, and belonging in graduate students, as well as employing proper and appropriate incentives for attendance will be

discussed. Various motivational theories will be explored and presented such as operant, self-determination, and goal theory when providing suggestions relevant to increasing the motivation of graduate students to attend programmed events outside of their typical classroom hours.

P1.50 *Motivation and Work-Life Balance Impact on Job Performance*
Author(s): Tyler Forbes
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology
Abstract: Previous studies suggest proper work-life balance is a crucial component in understanding an individuals' work and life experience (Bahtti & Alnehabi, 2023). An individual having a positive work-life balance and work experience, will tend to have satisfactory job performance In this proposed thesis we will examine the relationship between individuals job demand type (physical, cognitive, and emotional), their motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation), and hobbies/destressors (physical, social, cognitive, spiritual, and environmental) on work life balance and job performance. The proposed study will examine whether an individual's motivation towards their work suggests a greater or lesser work-life balance, and whether based on the demands of their job if engaging in hobbies that are beneficial to cultivating a good work-life balance. Surveys will be distributed through emails to HR departments, social media, and flyers to reach individuals working full-time. The survey will be constructed using items from the Work Stress Scale (WSS), Perceived Stress Scale-Revised (PSS), State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), Work-Life Balance Scale (WLBS), Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (WEMIS), Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ), and Recovery Activity Characteristics Questionnaire (RACQ). It is important to look into this in order to help individuals find ways to improve their well being, and navigate through the stressors of work. The research is anticipated to begin in the fall of 2025.

P1.51 *The Role of Motivation Theories in Fueling Exercise Commitment*
Author(s): Jude Hasbani
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology
Abstract: Exercise is one of the most difficult tasks to initiate and sustain. There are numerous reasons individuals avoid the gym, including laziness, lack of time or discipline, or fear of judgement or failure. Conversely, common motivations for exercising include improving physical appearance, losing weight, enhancing health, and building strength. While finding motivation to start exercising can be difficult, maintaining it requires varying levels of effort. Many people actively seek strategies to stay consistent with their workout routines. There are many motivational theories that can be applied to sustain exercise. Self-determination theory suggests individuals are more likely to exercise if they choose their own routines, see progress, and engage in a fitness community. Goal theory emphasizes that setting small, incremental goals like bench-pressing five more pounds can bolster motivation. Expectancy-Value Theory explains that understanding the usefulness of exercise-such as health benefits-encourages commitment, while expecting strength improvement sustains effort. Attribution Theory states that attributing success (e.g., weight loss) to personal effort and attributing failure (e.g., missing a gym day) due to extenuating circumstances helps maintain motivation and consistency. This class project will explore various motivation theories and explain how each can be applied to encourage individuals to start and maintain physical activity. The goal is that these methods will advance long-term motivation, eventually turning exercise into a habit and eliminating the struggle to stay committed.

P1.52 *The Influence of Personality and Motivation on Commitment in Collegiate Cross-Country/Track and Field Athletes*
Author(s): Cassie Nemec
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology
Abstract: The proposed study will examine how two of the Big Five personality factors (conscientiousness and extraversion) and intrinsic motivation influence the commitment of collegiate cross-country/track and field athletes to continue participating in their sport. Many studies have investigated athlete personality and motivation. However, little research, if any, has examined the relationship between specific personality traits and levels of intrinsic motivation on commitment levels in athletes. Research has indicated that individual sport athletes, such as track and field, generally report high levels of conscientiousness and lower levels of extraversion when compared to team sport athletes, suggesting that participation in certain sports may be related to different personality traits (Steca et al., 2017) but it is not yet known which of these factors is most influential on commitment. This research will investigate the relationship between specific domains of personality and intrinsic motivation and the influence they have on commitment in runners. It is hypothesized that cross-country/track and field athletes who report higher levels of conscientiousness and intrinsic motivation and lower levels of extraversion will be more likely to commit to continue participation in their sport.

P1.53   *Long-term Retention of Dialogic Reading Strategies in Elementary School Students*
Author(s): Cassie Nemec, Xochitl Sanchez
Faculty Mentor: Dina Moore
Department: Psychology
Abstract: We examine the long-term retention of EMPOWERED strategies in a sixth grade sample the school year after they were taught these strategies and used them as part of the Dialogic Reading with Integrated Vocabulary Enrichment (DRIVE) approach in a cross-age intervention. DRIVE is a shared book reading approach in which an older student reads orally and stops frequently to discuss the story using EMPOWERED strategies with a younger student to improve oral language skills and reading comprehension. Strategies include: Encourage vocabulary (E), Make it fun (M), Prompt frequently (P), Open-ended questions (O), Wh-questions (W), Evaluate the child's responses (E), Encourage repetition (R), Expand the child's responses (E), and Distancing prompts (D). Participants were 7 sixth grade students who had learned and used these strategies as fifth graders during the 2023-2024 school year. Retention assessment involved two phases: Phase 1, where students were presented with the EMPOWERED acronym and asked to recall what each letter meant to the best of their ability; and Phase 2, where sixth graders practiced using the strategies while reading with the researchers who recorded whether strategies were used spontaneously or prompted. Results will be discussed in relation to the efficacy of the DRIVE intervention as a feasible cross-age intervention.

P1.54   *The relationship between Perception of animals use, empathy and how this may reflect upon lifestyles.*
Author(s): Xochitl Sanchez
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology
Abstract: The proposed graduate thesis research will investigate the relationship between perception of animal use and maltreatment, one's empathy, and lifestyle choices regarding the use of animal products. In the past, research has examined the relationship between empathy and perceptions of animal maltreatment, as well as the correlation to delinquent behaviors. The previous finding has shed light on differences between male and female perception of the scale of animal maltreatment and what is acceptable, as well as looking at patterns in antisocial behaviors and how those may be indicators of animal abuse. However, the focus of this study is not only to survey the views on animal abuse but also how this may reflect upon everyday life habits and choices. The proposed study will be survey-based, using widely established scales regarding animal abuse, animal use, and to what extent certain behaviors towards animals are acceptable, as well as an empathy scale and researcher-developed demographic survey of lifestyle habits and choices. It is hypothesized that there will be a negative relationship between empathy for animal cruelty and lifestyle choices such that the more comfortable individuals are with incorporating animal products into their everyday lives, the less empathy with be exhibited toward animal maltreatment.

P1.55   *Reading Attitude Changes Following a Cross-age Dialogic Reading Intervention*
Author(s): Xochitl Sanchez Guerrero, Cassie Nemec
Faculty Mentor: Dina Moore
Department: Psychology
Abstract: This study examines students' changes in attitudes toward reading following a cross-age reading intervention using an approach called Dialogic Reading with Integrated Vocabulary Enrichment (DRIVE), where older students (Big Buddies) read to younger students (Little Buddies) and create a dialogue while reading to improve reading comprehension and oral skills. Participants were 7 sixth-grade students who had learned and used the DRIVE approach with first graders when they were fifth graders during the 2023-2024 school year. In this follow-up study, students were assessed on their memory of the dialogic reading strategies used in the DRIVE cross-age intervention in the previous school year, and they were evaluated as they used the approach with current first graders. The focus of this presentation is on attitudes toward reading, which were assessed before and after the follow-up intervention. The "Reading and Me" survey was used, which was designed to assess students' enjoyment of reading, their self-perceptions of reading skills, and their overall reading attitude. Reading attitudes before and after the sixth-grade follow-up were also compared to survey responses collected from Big Buddies as fifth graders at the end of the intervention in 2023-2024. Preliminary results indicate higher reading enjoyment levels during students' second year engaging in the intervention as sixth graders.

P1.56   *The Effects of Gendered AI Instruction on Information Retention and Student Perception of Instructor*
Author(s): Julia Sullivan
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology

Abstract: Artificial intelligence has become a pervasive entity throughout society. The use of virtual learning and AI instruction has steadily risen in recent years. Gendered AI in instruction is a particular area which has yet to be fully explored within the field of psychology. My aim is to examine whether the gender of an AI instructor affects students' perception of the instructor's competence, clarity, and ability to keep students engaged as well as information retained from AI instructor. I additionally will examine whether student gender will affect these measures. Therefore, the proposed research design will be an experimental 2x2 between-subjects design in which students will be randomly assigned to either a male or female AI instructor and watch a lecture on a topic in history. Then after a period of engaging in a separate activity, they will be tested on the information they retained from the lecture as well as their perception of the AI instructor. Based on prior research done with human instructors, I hypothesize that there will be a significant interaction of AI instructor gender and participant gender on perception, with female participants rating female AI higher. In addition, I expect similar results in terms of information retained, with female students retaining more information from female AI. No specific predictions are made regarding instructor perception or retention of information for male students.

P1.57   *Social Behavior in Online Gaming*
Author(s): Catherine Whearty
Faculty Mentor: Kelly Stiver
Department: Psychology

Abstract: We conducted a survey examining the in-game behaviors of gamers who play competitive Super Smash Brothers Melee. Participants provided qualitative statements on their perception of several in-game behaviors as pro- or anti-social. Our findings reveal variability in how certain in-game behaviors were categorized, with some actions being perceived as pro- and anti-social depending on the participants' perspective. We will analyze the consistency of the ratings across gamers, considering the influence of the context-specific nature of the ambiguous behaviors that manifest as pro- and anti-social.

P1.58   *Assessing Academic Burnout In Undergraduate Upperclassmen Using The Big Five Personality Traits*
Author(s): Catherine Whearty
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology

Abstract: The proposed study will investigate the risk of academic burnout among upperclassmen undergraduate students, focusing on the Big Five personality traits. While many studies have explored the Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism) in relation to academic performance and success, there has been limited research on how these traits may influence academic burnout, a relatively new concept. The idea of burnout originated in workplace settings, specifically in healthcare, but academic burnout applied its concepts of cynicism, extreme exhaustion, and reduced sense of achievement in an educational setting. This study seeks to understand how personality traits, as outlined in the Big Five factor model, may contribute to the likelihood of experiencing academic burnout in upperclassmen. Since these students have already navigated university life and its associated expectations, they may be at a higher risk for burnout. The proposed study evaluates two hypotheses. First, it is hypothesized that students who score high in conscientiousness will experience less academic burnout compared to those who score low in conscientiousness after controlling for self-reported GPA as a measure of academic achievement. Second, it is hypothesized that students who score high in neuroticism will experience more academic burnout than those who score low in neuroticism, after controlling for GPA. These findings could offer insight to university administrators or counselors that could help them develop plans for improving the mental health of students.

P1.59   *How Reliable Web Sources and Social Media Influence ADHD Symptom Reporting*
Author(s): Jude Hasbani
Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Durwin
Department: Psychology

Abstract: The proposed study will examine how web sources and social media impact an individual's knowledge of ADHD, while also exploring how different groups report this information honestly or dishonestly. Participants will be divided into three groups, one of which is pre-formed: those with existing attention problems. The other two groups consist of individuals without ADHD. One group will be instructed to truthfully report what they learned, while the other group will be instructed to fabricate their responses. All participants will be given 10 minutes to

explore online media regarding ADHD, including websites and social media platforms. Afterward, they will report what sources they used and summarize what they learned. The study will evaluate three hypotheses. First, individuals without ADHD who are instructed to truthfully report their findings will have more accurate responses than those in the lying condition. Second, those who are instructed to be truthful will cite more factual and clinically relevant information compared to the dishonest group's stereotypical or exaggerated descriptions of ADHD information. Third, participants with attention problems will have the most reliable reports of ADHD symptoms due to their lived experiences. This research aims to help practitioners better understand the strategies individuals may use to feign ADHD, identify similarities in symptom reporting, and develop methods to detect these strategies.

P1.60 *From Classroom to Community: How Being a Graduate Assistant Brought Lesson Plans to Life*
Author(s): Tyanna Stewart, Marian Evans
Faculty Mentor: Marian Evans
Department: Public Health
Abstract: The Graduate Research Assistant role under the guidance of Dr. Marian Evans, MD, MPH, CRA presents the opportunity contribute to a range of community and women's health initiatives. This role has involves collaborating with faculty, staff, and community partners to execute health events and support departmental projects through research and planning. The experience provides a deeper understanding of health promotion, a popular MPH concentration. A variety of research and programmatic techniques, including program planning and implementation, health promotion strategies, coalition building, and grant seeking are exercised regularly in this role. Developing annotated bibliographies and reviewing relevant literature have been key processes in advancing academic efforts. Excel is used for data organization and analysis, while Canva and Eventbrite support marketing and outreach. This assistantship has produced a successful Community Health Day for Bridgeport residents, which included on-site mammograms; a framework for a Reproductive Epidemiology course and a proposed Maternal and Child Health MPH concentration; Continuing Education Unit (CEU) opportunities for Black Maternal Health Summit attendees; and a community walk in support of Black maternal health. These activities provided practical opportunities to engage with and apply public health theories. This assistantship enhances technical, organizational, and analytical skills. It connects academic learning to real-world practice, specifically in advancing maternal and child health. The practical experience of the Graduate Research Assistant role equips students with the necessary skills to contribute to the betterment of public health.

P1.62 *Seizure Safe Schools Professional Development Training*
Author(s): Taylor Logan
Faculty Mentor: Yan Wei
Department: Special Education
Abstract: In 2023, Governor Ned Lamont signed into law the Seizure Safe Schools law requiring school staff to be able to provide the physician-directed care and for school nurses to administer anti-seizure medications. It also required schools to provide in-service training on seizure recognition, seizure first aid and seizure action plans. The problem is that not all schools use the same training and even though the Epilepsy Foundation offers training to schools, not all schools use it and their training cannot cover everything. The training I developed would cover everything that could affect a child and/or staff member with Epilepsy and/or someone who works with a child and/or staff member with Epilepsy whether that be during regular school hours or after school (ex: tutoring, extra-curricular activities, field trips, etc). The training I developed for Professor Brahm-Gleesson's class includes a PowerPoint to go over with school staff, a handbook with important info for staff to keep with them throughout the school year and posters for schools to hang up. My poster at the research fair will highlight important aspects from the training and why it is important for schools to have this training

5:45 – 7:45 p.m. | Organized Panel – Social Work Capstone
ASC Room 301

OP.1   *Stress Management Intervention Workshop for Employee Well-Being*
Author(s): Maria Berrios
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Workplace stress has become a significant challenge for both employees and organizations, contributing to various negative outcomes such as reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and increased turnover rates. The literature review explores the effectiveness of research-based stress management interventions in improving employee well-being and productivity. The review includes studies on various stress management techniques, including mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral therapy, green exercise, and web-based interventions. Findings highlight the effectiveness of mindfulness, education, and psychological therapies in reducing stress and preventing burnout. Additionally, workplace interventions that focus on cognitive restructuring, relaxation, and time management are shown to be particularly beneficial. Despite their proven effectiveness, these interventions are often underutilized due to resource constraints and organizational challenges. Building on these research findings, this project proposes the creation of a workplace stress management workshop designed to incorporate evidence-based techniques for stress reduction and well-being enhancement. The workshop will utilize practices such as mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral strategies, and relaxation exercises, providing employees with practical tools to manage stress in a sustainable way. Culturally responsive approaches will also be integrated, ensuring that the workshop meets the diverse needs of employees from various backgrounds. Additionally, theoretical frameworks like social exchange theory and systems theory will guide the development of the workshop, ensuring that both individual employee needs and organizational structures are addressed.
Keywords: Workplace stress, Employee well-being, Stress management interventions

OP.2   *Enhancing Cultural Competence: Engaging Latino Men Undergoing Cancer Treatment*
Author(s): Esteban Mercado
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Greenhouse Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The community need that my project addresses is the need of implementing culturally competent practices when engaging with Latino man undergoing oncology treatment. Latino males may face disparities in access to healthcare. Cultural factors, socioeconomic status, and language barriers affect health outcomes. The review of literature suggests an overwhelming support for using culturally competent social work practices in healthcare. However, there is limited research on the implementation of culturally competent practices while engaging with Latino males undergoing oncology treatment. When providers are culturally competent, they are more likely to build trust with their patients, especially those from marginalized or minority groups. This workshop can be a vehicle to influence practitioners and help them address the needs of this population and community.
The main objectives of this workshop focus on: (1) reviewing the key cultural competence skills used by social workers, clinicians, and health care providers and (2) building knowledge and practical capacity in the implementation of cultural competence skills when engaging with Latino men undergoing oncology treatment. The contents of this workshop also aim to influence and guide mental and healthcare institutions as they draft organizational policy related to the impact of implementing cultural competence skills when addressing the physical and mental health needs of Latino males undergoing oncology treatment. This workshop is anchored on: (1) the Cultural Competence Model (Sue & Sue, 1990) (2) the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner); and (3) The National Association of Social Workers (NASW)' Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work.

OP.3   *Building Climate Resilience: A Digital Resource for Black Communities*
Author(s): Micayla Minnis
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Climate change is a social issue that disproportionately affects Black communities due to historical and systemic factors such as redlining, environmental racism, and long-term disinvestment. Exposure to climate hazards including air pollution, heat waves, hurricanes, and flooding poses significant physical and mental health risks which include respiratory illnesses, heat-related conditions, and increased psychological distress. Despite efforts to address these disparities, systemic barriers continue to limit access to resources, emergency preparedness, and policy-driven solutions. The deliverable for my project is a resource website tailored for Black communities in Connecticut, providing emergency preparedness information, access to climate resilience resources, and resources for community

advocacy to address these gaps. By centering Black voices and their needs, this website aims to empower communities to combat climate risks and advocate for systemic change.

OP.4 *Family Involvement in Substance Use Treatment*
Author(s): Allyson Quinn
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Addiction is a family disease. The family system is burdened with mental, emotional, physical, and financial impacts when a loved one struggles with substance use. It is best practice to address not only the individuals needs but to also assess the individual in context of their environment. This research seeks to prove that increased family involvement improves outcomes in recovery for individuals struggling with a substance use disorder. While conducting this literature review, three major themes emerged. The first is that having the support and engagement of a family network can improve outcomes of recovery in people with substance use disorders. Without proper support, families may struggle to provide meaningful assistance, potentially hindering recovery. The second theme that emerged in my research is the lack of solution guiding family-based approaches. Third, much of my resource sources discussed the impacts that addiction has on the family and the role supports can play, but how the family can support appeared to lack. Funding is often the greatest barrier to incorporating the family and family programs into inpatient treatment. With the development of a family toolkit, families will have a low-cost resource to help navigate the complexities of their loved one's addiction and early recovery.
Keywords: Substance use, addiction, family systems, social supports, treatment, recovery

OP.5 *Behavioral Therapy for Chronic Headaches*
Author(s): Cassandra Roos
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This capstone project created an informational brochure that describes behavioral health services provided by Rushford to persons experiencing chronic headache pain. Chronic pain is defined as lasting for over three to six months impacting well-being and functioning. Different aspects of a person's ability to function are affected by chronic pain including social and physical factors. Referring providers needed more information about behavioral health services and the types of services provided, such as psychoeducation, goal setting, cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness, sleep hygiene, and pleasurable activity planning. This capstone project provided information needed to increase awareness about non-medical interventions available at Rushford for those experiencing chronic headache pain.

OP.6 *"Looking Beyond Thank You for Your Service"*
Author(s): Jocelyn Scallion
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This project addresses the need for enhanced support for student veterans at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), particularly those from historically underserved populations. The research question explores how SCSU can support these student veterans to achieve successful graduation. A literature review reveals key themes: the intersection of race, gender, and mental health in veterans' experiences; challenges in transitioning to academic life; and the impact of systemic inequities. The project's deliverable is a "wingman" wallet card, providing quick access to tailored resources for student veterans. This culturally responsive tool aims to improve graduation rates and overall well-being by addressing unique challenges faced by female veterans and veterans of color. The project's significance lies in its potential to create a more inclusive campus environment and inform social work practice in supporting diverse veteran populations in higher education settings.
Keywords: (Student Veterans, Mental Health, Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Equity/Systemic Inequities.).

OP.7 *Overmedication in Children's Mental Health*
Author(s): Courtney Maddox
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: With an emphasis on the long-term consequences of excessive reliance on psychotropic medication, this study explores the overmedication of children with mental health disorders, particularly those from marginalized communities, foster care, and low-income households. This literature review examines how systemic inequities contribute to the disproportionate prescribing of medication to manage behavioral and emotional symptoms such as aggression, hyperactivity, and mood swings—often without addressing underlying trauma and environmental stressors. Drawing on theories such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the study emphasizes the need to consider a child's broader social and environmental context when developing treatment plans. In order to promote

more holistic and trauma-informed care, the research will explore alternative interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), family-based supports, and community resources. Using a qualitative methodology and purposive sampling, the project will include interviews with social workers, therapists, and mental health professionals to better understand the impact of medication overuse and advocate for ethical, culturally responsive, and anti-racist treatment strategies. A resource guide developed for residential staff, therapists, and social workers will also support implementation of alternative approaches, with dissemination through staff training and educational materials. Key words: Medication, Children,Trauma-informed Approach

OP.8   *Disconnected: How COVID-19 Reshaped Youth Development*
Author(s): Danielle Bousquet
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons-Porter
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the developmental trajectory of children and adolescents, contributing to rising mental health symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral challenges. This project explored how social isolation, increased screen time, and changing family dynamics influenced youth mental health during and after the pandemic. Key findings reveal how disrupted routines, excessive screen use, and the presence or absence of engaged family support contributed to emotional and behavioral challenges in children and adolescents. Special attention was given to how marginalized communities experienced the consequences of COVID-19 and faced disparities in access to mental health care and resources. Findings emphasize the urgent need for culturally responsive, evidence-informed interventions within PHP/IOP levels of care. This work informs best practices for mental health professionals supporting adolescents post-pandemic. It also calls for continued research on screen time, demographic influences, and long-term outcomes to better support youth through the escalating mental health crisis and address growing inequities in access and care.

OP.9   *Facilitating Parental Involvement to Foster Student Success in Middle School Students with Special Needs*
Author(s): Deborah Colbert
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This capstone project addresses the role parental engagement plays in student success of middle school special education students. The research question "What Role Does Parental Engagement Play in Student Success with Middle School Students in Special Education Programs?" was considered, and various research on this topic was reviewed. These findings revealed that when parents are involved with their special education student's learning, their students are more likely to excel academically, have improved emotional regulation, increased self-esteem, and improved social skills. These findings suggest an overall improvement in well-being and a more positive academic experience for these students when parents are involved. They also suggest that when educators make efforts to increase the collaboration and support with these families, they can see a remarkable improvement in students' academic, behavioral, and emotional well-being. Overall, these findings suggest a broad impact on students, families, schools, communities, and social work practice. This project was guided by several key theories, including Fan and Chen (2001), Epstein et al. (2009) and Jeynes (2010) who all identified key dimensions of parental involvement that positively contribute to student's success in schools. This project highlighted the need for educators to receive training on these findings, leading to the creation of a self-guided PowerPoint presentation for them to view. The presentation serves as a self-guided tool for educators, providing strategies to facilitate parental involvement and support student success. Further research could explore the effectiveness of the training and whether educators successfully implemented the suggested strategies.

OP.10   *How Do Cultural Values About Food Insecurity Impact Older Adults?*
Author(s): Grace Ford
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: My project addressed the cultural values and stigma related to food insecurity among older adults. Society divides poverty into the worthy and unworthy poor. The worthy poor are considered as those who cannot work due to disability and age, and the unworthy poor are those who are able to work but still struggle financially and cannot afford basic needs (Solas, 2018). According to these social values, the worthy poor deserve goods and services such as food pantries, housing assistance, and cash benefits. However, those who are unworthy poor should not have services because they should earn their benefits. Older adults may feel internalized and externalized stigma surrounding being food insecure. They may feel they are considered both worthy and unworthy poor. A sense of stigma may hinder older adults from asking for help and reaching out for resources such as a food pantry and food programs at their local senior centers. This project aimed to make social services at Cheshire Senior Center such as the food pantry and food program less stigmatizing for older adults in the community and to show that the senior

center offers many activities and services people may not know about. The project involved senior center members in creating a video to raise awareness of their experiences at the and to highlight programs and services available. This oral presentation will show the video and how it can impact the local community in the future.

OP.11 *Access to Mental Health Resources and Academic Performance of College Students*
Author(s): Moise Francillon
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This project addresses the relationship between participation in mental health resources and academic performance of college students. Studies show that the onset of mental health challenges begin in young adulthood. As freshman, college students are entering a period in life where they may experience higher levels of stress and anxiety due to the process of adjusting to a new environment. Many students report that they did not anticipate the academic rigor of college and begin to withdraw physically and emotionally. When measuring grade point average and mental health, grade point average was lowest among students who rated mental health as poor and highest among those rating mental health as good or better. Even though institutions may have mental health resources available they are utilized disproportionately in terms of race. At the University of Connecticut's Stamford Regional Campus, the student body has a significant number of students of color yet on average they do not seek out mental health services. This study will serve as a tool for institutions to place a higher importance and allocate funding for their mental health resources in order to meet their student's needs as well as thinking creatively on ways to improve minority participation.
Key Words: Mental Health Resources, Academic Performance, College Students, Access, Race, Minorities

OP.12 *Impact of loneliness on the well-being of seniors.*
Author(s): Jeffery-Zion Glazier
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Loneliness among the senior citizen population in nursing homes is a prominent issue with significant implications that can affect the individuals in a plethora of ways. This literature review examined previously existing research on the effects of loneliness amongst this population, as well determined three main areas of impact. These areas included mental health, physical health, and social health. When the area of mental health was explored, it was found that higher levels of depression are found due to loneliness. In regard to physical health, the literature review discovered loneliness can cause various weight fluctuations, as well as present increased severe conditions. In a review of social health, it was found that loneliness can occur even when surrounded by others, which is the feeling of isolation. This project further explored theoretical frameworks, such as the ecological systems theory and Erikson's stages of development, to provide further insight into the causes and consequences of loneliness within this population. This work concluded with a proposition for an intervention aimed at nursing home staff to combat loneliness amongst the seniors and improve the well-being of older adults in these facilities. The deliverable was an educational presentation to educate the staff on the subject and promote the implementation of stronger support systems and inclusivity. The end goal for this project was to improve the overall quality of life for seniors living in nursing homes in the United States.
Keywords: Senior citizens, loneliness, mental health, physical health, social health.

OP.12 *What Types of Evidence-Based Strategies can Youth and Adolescent Coaches use to create a more Positive and Supportive Environment for their athlete's Mental health and Wellbeing?*
Author(s): Michael Keating
Faculty Mentor: Professor Belsito
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The increase in mental health concerns for youth and adolescent athletes has brought attention to how we can address this. The purpose of this capstone project is to provide evidence-based strategies for coaches that they can implement to create a more positive and supportive environment for their athlete's mental health and wellbeing. The literature review highlights three major themes on how coaches can achieve this: 1) through dialogue/verbiage, 2) through setting the proper expectations and then helping them deal with loss, and 3) helping to eliminate the mental health stigma. The deliverable will be a psychoeducational video for coaches to view that highlight these three major themes in detail and how to implement them into their coaching style. This project is significant to social work practice because it's important as mental health professionals to provide psychoeducation on mental health training for groups looking to increase their knowledge in this area.

OP.14 *Reducing Methadone Myths*

Author(s): Brian Kennedy
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Social Work

Abstract: Methadone is one of the most effective treatments for opioid use disorder and has been safely administered for decades. Methadone treatment is often met with negative stigmas and misunderstandings that can be a barrier to effective treatment for people with opioid use disorder. Studies have shown that lowering the negative impression and educating those the client interacts with increases the positive outcomes of methadone replacement therapy. Using facts about opioid use, the drug Methadone, and effective treatment, this project intends to educate patients, their families, and other providers of services to clients diagnosed with Opioid use disorder. The presentation is also intended to be posted online as a video available free for providers, families, and clinicians in their holistic treatment of opioid use disorder.
Keywords: Methadone Stigma, Methadone Education, Methadone myths, Methadone Facts, Methadone treatment reality

OP.15 *Survivors of Suicide Loss and Equine Assisted Therapy*

Author(s): Rebecca Mangs
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work

Abstract: Soul Friends of Wallingford, CT obtained funding in 2024 from the CJK Foundation to create a group curriculum for individuals and families that have experienced suicide loss, leading to the development of a six week group curriculum for survivors, titled "Horse's Inspire: Suicide Loss Group." Soul Friends has a history of providing group curriculums for families that have experienced grief and loss, but the curriculums did not align with specific material connected to suicide loss. Individuals that have experienced suicide loss are more likely to have intense grief and mourning in comparison to death of natural or accidental causes. Survivors of suicide are often challenged by symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and complicated grief while navigating external adversities that accompany sudden death. Symptoms of PTSD and complicated grief that remain themes in prior research include numbness, nightmares, suicidal ideation, disconnection, heightened anxiety and intense anger, disruption of worldview, changes in family dynamics, and isolation from valuable resources. For this capstone project, I developed the curriculum for an equine-assisted mutual aid group. The group is intended to be led by mental health practitioners and equine specialists for participants that have experienced a suicide loss with the desire to connect with equine partners. The group curriculum is a presentation that includes opening activities, closing activities, weekly activities designed to enhance somatic processing, build relationships with peers, and connect with equine partners. The group curriculum combines attachment and somatic theoretical perspectives while providing psychoeducation about grief, suicide loss, and horse behaviors.

Navigating the Modern Classroom:
Approaches to Inclusion, Student Behavior, and Technology

O1.1   *Paper or Glass? Striking a Balance Between Technology and Agency in the Classroom*
Author(s): Tyler Evon
Faculty Mentor: Andrew Smyth
Department: English
Abstract: Technology is an unavoidable aspect of all facets of modern society. Of all the areas that it impacts, education is among the most critical in terms of how it can negatively impact the learning of our students. This is most commonly demonstrated through the students' mandated use of Chromebooks to complete their assignments. While undeniably more convenient than the traditional method, Chromebooks tend more towards being vehicles for distraction rather than a 1:1 substitute for paper and pencil. There are many teachers out there who still believe that paper and pencil is the best medium for student work, and in many cases, they would be right. However, as 21st century educators, we cannot ignore the fact that tech literacy is virtually mandatory for success in modern society. Therefore, this presentation will not argue that Chromebooks should be ousted from the classroom, but rather we should aim to create a more balanced environment where we give students the opportunity to use technology as needed while also preserving their agency away from the computer screen.

O1.2   *Challenges to Incorporating Queer Texts In A High School English Classroom*
Author(s): Patrick Kearney
Faculty Mentor: Andrew Smyth
Department: English
Abstract: My presentation stems from an immediate issue I have come across in my educational career, especially in my current position as a secondary English student teacher. Though often neglected, the presence of queer texts in the average high school English classroom is a huge boon for encouraging empathy and understanding in young people. My research will look to tackle the question of why queer texts are frequently neglected or retired from use, as all too often they come under attack from parents and other organized groups. Having personally worked with many queer students, the ability to be "seen" in what they are reading in the classroom is life changing. The censorship of queer texts is therefore incredibly damaging, and I will seek to engage with the perceived "political" nature of these texts to uncover what is stopping educators from using them in their classrooms. I will also seek to dedicate considerable attention, too, to the vast amount of queer texts that can, in fact, be incorporated into popular curricula.
The goal of my presentation is to ultimately convey the value of utilizing diverse texts such as these, but also to provide educators with access to a wide array of resources that better enable them to incorporate gender and sexual diversity into the literature they teach.

O1.3   *Using Positive Reinforcement to Reduce Disruptive Behavior*
Author(s): Hannah Landry
Faculty Mentor: Andrew Smyth
Department: English
Abstract: My proposed presentation will examine the effects of using positive reinforcement as a way to reduce consistent disruptive behavior in the classroom. Typically when a student is being extremely disruptive in multiple ways in the school building it is common to take away activities or rewards in hopes of motivating the student to behave appropriately. However, when everything has been taken away and the student has nothing left to lose it can only enhance these unwanted behaviors. I plan to illustrate how using positive reinforcement and making mandatory participation in multiple school activities in these circumstances can work as a way to allow these students to have a positive role within the school and feel the need to maintain that role. Rather than letting a consistently disruptive student feel helpless over lost privileges where they resort to continuous disruptive behavior, having mandatory participation in areas like clubs, events, and rewards could lead to a new sense of belonging and importance. Taking a different approach to disciplining these students could aid their motivation and willingness to act appropriately in class rather than leaving them feeling singled out, incapable, and powerless.

O1.4   *Cultivating Belonging in Dangerous Times: A Cooperative Inquiry of Educators*
Author(s): Andre Chonnay Wallace & Joshua Chlebowski, Taylor Hurley & Michelle Stephens

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Jessica Powell
Department: MAT - Secondary Social Studies; Curriculum & Instruction, Equity and Justice in Education Concentration
Abstract: Using the methodology of cooperative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1995), seven public school educators convened for a series of meetings to explore their experiences around co-constructing belonging in the classroom. The educators met regularly throughout the 2024-2025 school year. Six of the educators teach in public K-12 classrooms and one is a teacher educator at a public university. Throughout these meetings, we wrestled with what it means to cultivate a classroom space where everyone feels like they belong in the context of this political moment where children's identities, and our own, are under attack. The shifting political landscape following the 2024 presidential election greatly shaped the questions that drove our inquiry.

O1.5 *My Authentography*
Author(s): Tamika Toney
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Laura Bower
Department: Curriculum & Instruction
Abstract: This work is an autoethnography, a narrative that intertwines personal experiences with broader cultural and professional contexts. Through this reflective exploration, I examine my lifelong passion for teaching, the societal and familial pressures that shaped my career decisions, and my journey toward embracing my true calling as an educator. My story highlights the challenges of representation, the impact of mentorship, and my aspirations for leadership in education.

An Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that connects personal experiences with cultural contexts, allowing individuals to analyze their lived experiences within a larger social framework (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). By blending storytelling with scholarly inquiry, autoethnography provides a lens through which we can critically engage with identity, power, and systemic structures in education.

The following sections present key moments from my journey, interwoven with theoretical insights, to illustrate the complex interplay between personal narratives and broader educational discourses.

O2.1   *Let's Talk Trash: Motivating Eco-Friendly Behavior in Small Communities*
Author(s): Kevin McGuire
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Cheryl C. Durwin
Department: Psychology

Abstract: Despite the increases in recycling and composting behavior in the USA, the majority of waste still ends up in landfills (EPA, 2018) which highlights a mismatch between behavior and environmentally friendly attitudes. Compared to Europe, environmentally conscious behavior in the USA lacks in favor of materialism and economic growth (Bartolini & Sarracino, 2017; Peycheva et al., 2014). Promoting recycling and composting behavior across the nation is not feasible, but focusing on small communities may be the beginning of a solution. This proposal outlines an intervention to motivate individuals in homeowner's associations (HOAs) to engage in sustainability practices based on theories of motivation such as Self-Determination Theory, Situated Expectancy-Value Theory and behavioral theories of rewards/praise. There are four phases to the intervention: (1) offer short-term monetary incentives to participate in a neighborhood-level recycling and composting program; (2) switch to performance-contingent rewards along with process praise and informational feedback to foster mastery and internalization; (3) transition out of external rewards towards reinforcing need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness through effort praise and highlighting positive social norms; (4) invite highly intrinsically motivated individuals to aid in expanding the program to other HOAs and take a leadership role in refining the program. The goal of the intervention is to foster long-term autonomous motivation for environmentally conscious behavior and promote a culture of sustainability in small-scale communities. Future work could be comparing communal differences in motivation, behavior, and implementation of the program.

O2.2   *Tuberculosis Disparities Research, Annotated Bibliography*
Author(s): Amparo Gargano
Faculty Mentor: Njoku Anuli
Department: Public Health

Abstract: Background: Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by the Mycobacterium tuberculosis bacteria and a pathogen that has been present for many decades. Despite effective treatment and low incidence rates of tuberculosis in the United States, tuberculosis is still a significant cause of death worldwide, affecting disproportionately low socio-economic communities. In the USA, Black/African Americans, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders are groups with higher TB incidence rates.
Methods: An annotated bibliography was developed to list scientific sources, outline key findings, and identify gaps in knowledge that are necessary to implement successful treatments.
Discussion: Research studies suggest that only 10 percent of the population develop active tuberculosis; 5 % of those individuals are immunocompromised or have any other risk factor; the cause of active tuberculosis in the remaining 5 % of healthy individuals is still unclear. Epidemiological investigations suggest a genetic and environmental component based on individual and social factors and the complex interaction between the host, agent, and environment. Notably, recent research revealed that genomic data varies depending on geographic distribution, virulence, drug-resistant factors, and migration patterns in the United States. The cultural and individual diversity leads to a different level of complexity, impacting result interpretation and generating new research questions.
Purpose: This presentation aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, identify gaps in knowledge, generate discussion, and establish new hypotheses, highlighting areas for new research and improvement. Empirical findings are necessary to determine trends and implement effective strategies to eliminate tuberculosis.
KEY WORDS: Tuberculosis, genome, culture, migration, epidemiology, surveillance

O2.3   *Analyzing the Impact of Stressors on Mental Health and Substance Use Among High School Students: A YRBSS Study Before, During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic.*
Author(s): Sharaban Tohura & Dr. Christine Unson
Faculty Mentor: Dr. John T Nwangwu
Department: Public Health

Abstract: Adolescence, a crucial developmental stage, often marks the initiation of risky behaviors, including alcohol and substance use. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced numerous stressors that may have influenced these behaviors. This study takes a comprehensive approach, ensuring the reliability of our findings, by analyzing trends in substance use among high school students before, during and after the pandemic using data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. We focus on mental health indicators such as feelings of sadness or hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts, as well as substance use behaviors including current alcohol, marijuana, and smokeless tobacco

use. Additionally, we examine engagement in physical fights, difficulty concentrating, sexual activity, and binge drinking. Furthermore, we investigate the pandemic's broader impact on overall mental health and substance use behaviors. Our study aims to provide insights into students' psychological and behavioral responses during, before and after the pandemic through a mixed-methods approach, including behavioral assessments by using the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) questionnaire. The findings aim to inform evidence-based interventions and policies to support high school students' well-being during future public health crises by identifying risk and protective factors.

O2.4   *Empathy, Education, And Diversity: Understanding Implicit Bias Across The Socio-Economic Levels And Reforming Medical Systems To Improve Health Outcomes*
Author(s): Taryn Pierce
Faculty Mentor: Anuli Njoku
Department: Public Health
Abstract: Despite numerous technological and scientific advancements in healthcare, African American mothers face disproportionately high maternal mortality rates. Research highlights that African American women are 2.5 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications compared to White women, with 60% of these deaths deemed preventable. These disparities are intensified by implicit biases, unconscious attitudes or stereotypes held by healthcare providers, that negatively influence clinical decision-making, patient interactions, and treatment outcomes.

Implicit bias operates across multiple socio-economic levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, and societal. At the intrapersonal level, biases are expressed in shorter patient interaction times and lower empathy for minority patients. Interpersonally, medical students often internalize biases from senior colleagues, thus displaying discriminatory practices. Organizationally, systemic inequities in medical education funding and biased institutional policies reinforce disparities. Societal-level factors such as historical racism and the dehumanization of minorities further worsen the distrust in healthcare systems, thus creating barriers to care and exacerbating the impact of implicit bias.

Addressing implicit bias requires numerous interventions, including anti-racism training for healthcare providers, diversifying leadership roles, reforming medical curriculum to emphasize cultural competence, and addressing systemic inequities in healthcare funding and policy. These strategies aim to reduce racial health disparities and improve outcomes for marginalized and underserved communities. This presentation explores the urgent need for reform of medical facilities and organizations that unknowingly promote implicit bias and offers practical solutions to address healthcare disparities at each socio-economic level.

O2.5   *Period Poverty and Racial Disparities: The Plight of Minority Girls within the USA*
Author(s): Mousa Al-Hassan & Sharaban Tohura
Faculty Mentor: Anuli Njoku
Department: Public Health
Abstract: Menstruation (Period) which is the monthly shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus is a natural biological process in females and therefore should not lead to unwanted burdens. Period poverty, a phenomenon resulting from scarcity in access to menstrual hygiene products, education and sanitation facilities during this vulnerable period, adversely impact the education, physical and mental health of young women. In the U.S period poverty is estimated to account for 1 in 5 girls missing school. This presentation would analyze associations between race and socioeconomic status as it relates to period poverty, highlighting the unique challenges faced by minority girls. Recent data indicates on average females spend $120 to $180 on menstrual products annually. Evidence suggests that poor access to healthcare, poverty and racial discrimination exacerbate the difficulties in obtaining menstrual products further highlighting the impact of systemic inequities within society. Period poverty disproportionately impacts Black girls in the US, leading to educational disruptions, health complications, and psychological distress. Additionally, the stigma surrounding menstruation creates feelings of shame and isolation, worsening the experience for many affected individuals.

This presentation advocates for comprehensive policy changes, increased awareness, and community support initiatives aimed at addressing period poverty, emphasizing the need for equitable access to menstrual products and education to empower minority girls and promote their dignity and health. By addressing these disparities, society can help ensure that all girls can manage their menstrual health with confidence and without hindrance to their education or quality of life.

O2.6   *Indigenous, Latinx, & AfroFuturism: Past, Present & Beyond*

Author(s): Danielle Campbell
Faculty Mentor: Souksavanh Keovorabouth
Department: Women's & Gender Studies

Abstract: In higher education, it has been normalized to speak of Communities of Color in a deficit model. Due to this, the classroom is often a place of trauma, and students of Color suffer when those teaching them are ignorant of the culture and history of BIPOC peoples i.e. the high dropout rates for Native American students. With notion of the deficit model in mind, I decided to start creating courses that look at the positives and joys of Indigenous, Latinx, and Black Peoples. Not only does this shift the focus and add possibility to the stories of trauma, but it helps all people learn the major contributions of BIPOC Peoples, especially in the United States, including a future without oppression for BIPOC People.

In this course, students will learn the history, present, and possible futures of Indigenous, Latinx, and AfroFuturisms focusing primarily on how these movements create a pathway for BIPOC Peoples to see themselves in the future. The concept of a future which includes Indigenous, Latinx, and Black peoples is often difficult for these marginalized groups to visualize, especially in the classroom. The ways of knowing that these communities have lost will be the guiding "pedagogy" for this course.

This work is included in the movement to reintroduce BIPOC Peoples to their cultural pedagogies as frameworks for education. Using meditations, writing exercises, and media as information and inspiration, this reclamation practice as pedagogy will also help make the ideas of a future authentic and expansive.

O3.1   *"An 'Other' Tongue: The Use of Nadsat in A Clockwork Orange"*
Author(s): Ian Hugo
Faculty Mentor: Prof. Andrew Smyth
Department: English
Abstract: In this essay, I explore how "Nadsat" is used in Anthony Burgess's 1962 novella A Clockwork Orange. "Nadsat" is a constructed language that suffuses English vernacular with words and phrases of Russian origin, and it can often prove a significant obstacle to reader comprehension of the overall narrative. I argue that Nadsat serves a functional purpose in the text, drawing on research from a variety of fields including literary studies, psychology, philosophy, and linguistics. I begin by showing how Nadsat excludes those who do not "speak" it or attempt to learn it, drawing on M.A.K. Halliday's study of the "anti-language" in "anti-society." Nadsat also obfuscates violence in the book by veiling it in obscure language that diminishes shock factor, and here I explore how euphemism can be used in unethical ways, drawing from real world examples that show how language can be used to make actions appear murky, thus shielding both the speaker/narrator and listener/reader, as is the case with Alex in A Clockwork Orange. Finally, I look at how A Clockwork Orange, a book that is "about" brainwashing, "brainwashes" the reader. This "brainwashing" first makes the reader learn "minimal Russian" by reading the text and coming to understand (in a way) Nadsat, then by making readers see the world through Alex's eyes and sympathize with him. Once readers see a world of "ultra-violence," they begin to see Alex not as a juvenile delinquent but as one of their "droogs" (friends), making them complicit in his crimes.

O3.2   *Black Elk's Religion: An Analysis of Family Conflict Over A Contradictory Legacy*
Author(s): Alexander Dedam
Faculty Mentor: Michele Thompson
Department: History
Abstract: Black Elk's early religious life revolved around his role as a Lakota holy man. After the death of Crazy Horse and the Wounded Knee Massacre, a series of events led Black Elk to convert to Catholicism. John G. Neihardt "Black Elk Speaks" was composed during Black Elk's time as a Catholic catechist. This marked a contradictory period around Black Elk's religious life and identity, as practicing Catholic, but open to discussion about his time as a traditional holy man. Although briefly mentioned in scholarly works is the implied ideological, cultural, and religious conflict between two of his children. Ben Black Elk (his son and former Carlisle Industrial Indian School student) helped compose "Black Elk Speaks". While Lucy Looks Twice (his daughter) found issues with the book. She believed the book misrepresented her father's image as a holy man, not as a Christian. This presentation will discuss the complicated religious identity of Black Elk, the conflict between his children, the influences of Western religion/education, and the effects the Ghost Dance Movement, death of Crazy Horse, and the wars between the Lakota and the United States military had on Black Elk. Black Elk made concessions with Catholics to gain access to food, medicine, and education for their children, in exchange for their conversion to Christianity, but maintain certain components of his traditional beliefs. Black Elk's Christian identity was the byproduct of pragmatic/spiritual reasons along with Lakota syncretist tendencies to preserve life and traditional Lakota culture under the guise of Christianity.

O3.3   *Exploring the Relationship Between Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Efforts and Academic Library Staff Experiences*
Author(s): Kelly King & Saira Soroya, PhD
Faculty Mentor: Saira Soroya
Department: Library and Information Science
Abstract: The study, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Academic Libraries: Employee Experiences and Perceptions IRB#1267, investigates academic library employees' perceptions and experiences regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives within member libraries of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) Library Consortium. Addressing a gap in existing library research, which primarily focuses on four-year institutions and often overlooks community colleges and non-librarian staff, this study surveys the library employees at four state universities and twelve community college campuses. This research aims to understand employee perspectives on DEI, including individual experiences, perceptions of administrative responsiveness, and the perceived role of libraries in promoting DEI. Data analysis will shed light on employee perceptions of DEI efforts within academic libraries, staff experiences with discrimination and bias within the academic library, staff views on library and institution responsiveness to DEI concerns and will explore the relationships among these topics. This presentation will discuss the correlations discovered through data analysis. Ethical considerations, including participant anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality will be prioritized. This study contributes to the discourse on DEI in academic libraries, offering insights for administrators and clarifying areas for future research.

O3.4   *A Better Brand for Bernie*
Author(s): Gabriel Greenstein
Faculty Mentor: Minnie Hoang
Department: MPA
Abstract: This is a study of branding related to the social safety net. First survey research and a literature review were conducted to identify the challenges with current social safety net brands. A content analysis then examined the political discourse utilized by Democratic candidates for the U.S. Senate who both won and lost swing state elections in 2024, comparing the language and discourse they used. New ideas for brand concepts of social policies are then suggested based on the cumulative research from this project.

O3.5   *My Journey as a Special Education Teacher*
Author(s): Matthew Mainieri
Faculty Mentor: Laura Bower-Phipps
Department: Special Education
Abstract: My paper is an autoethnography surrounding my story thus far as a special education teacher at the high school level. For context, an autoethnography can best be described as a research paper in which personal narratives and experiences are connected to broader social, cultural, and political contexts (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As a current resource room special education teacher at the high school level, I often reminisce on the events that molded me into the educator I am today. I like to believe that I am a teacher who tries his best to create a classroom environment that fosters creativity and allows everyone to feel like their voice matters regardless of the topic. I pride myself on allowing my students to experiment and attempt to find their place within a vast range of settings and communities. Simply, I want my students to feel heard and safe. I want my students to know what would be best for their needs, and what to advocate for in order to not feel ostracized within a certain setting. My feelings and things I try to incorporate in my class stem from the deep, ingrained memories from my childhood.
In this paper, I will be discussing: My Upbringing; My Sister's Challenges; Me as an Educator; Devotion to Communication and Outreach; Emergence of a Teacher Leader; My Connection to Effective Teaching Standards and My Professional Learning Goals

O3.6   *In Their Own Words: Exploring How University Professors Define, and Create Community with Students in Higher Education*
Author(s): Kelly Curtis
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Meredith Sinclair
Department: Women's & Gender Studies
Abstract: The role of a professor goes far beyond conducting research and teaching material to students within the walls of a classroom. In the format of a grant proposal, this project designs a program which would explore how college professors understand, define, and create community with their students. The project seeks to understand how professors individually define what community is, how they create it in their teaching choices, and in their student interactions outside of the classroom. The project utilizes indigenous research methodology to include the participants by creating group definitions and assisting with the coding process so that research is produced with community, in addition to exploring it as a concept. The proposal seeks to understand if community is a goal among professors, how colleagues wrestle with the concept of community in a higher education inside and outside of the classroom, and what is the modern role of a professor in the student experience and broader university context.

6:50 – 8:00 p.m. | Poster Presentations – Session 2
ASC Ballroom

P2.1   *Self-Care Approaches for Domestic Violence Victims*
Author(s): Emma Fain
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This paper explores the integration of art therapy in inpatient behavioral health settings, focusing on its impact on patient engagement, therapeutic relationships, and treatment outcomes. Art therapy, a non-verbal, creative approach to emotional healing, has been shown to enhance communication, foster emotional expression, and improve mental health outcomes. This literature review examines the historical development of art therapy, its effectiveness in treating mental health issues, substance abuse, and neurocognitive disorders, and its application within social work practices. Key theoretical frameworks—such as psychodynamic, humanistic, and cognitive-behavioral theories—are discussed in relation to art therapy's role in facilitating self-expression, symptom reduction, and personal growth. The paper also highlights the challenges of incorporating art therapy into inpatient behavioral health units, emphasizing the need for increased awareness and integration of creative therapies into treatment models. The accompanying project plan advocates for the formal inclusion of art therapy, aiming to improve patient well-being, enhance holistic care, and support culturally responsive practices. Expected outcomes include increased knowledge of art therapy's benefits, improved patient emotional regulation, and greater organizational support for creative therapeutic interventions. The paper concludes with a policy proposal and an informational handout to promote art therapy's incorporation into inpatient treatment plans.

P2.2   *The Role of a Social Worker In Trauma- Informed Practices in Schools*
Author(s): Alexandrea, Feaster
Faculty Mentor: Christine L. Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Trauma significantly impacts a child's ability to learn, regulate emotions, and form healthy relationships. Schools serve as a critical environment for addressing trauma, and social workers play a vital role in implementing trauma-informed practices. This presentation explores how school social workers support students affected by trauma, providing direct interventions, training staff, and advocating for systemic change. This presentation outlines key principles such as safety, trust, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness using a trauma-informed framework. It examines social workers' barriers, including resource limitations, high caseloads, and institutional resistance to change. Additionally, it highlights best practices such as multi-tiered support systems, staff collaboration, and policy advocacy to create inclusive and supportive school environments. This presentation also emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive and anti-racist approaches in trauma-informed care. Marginalized communities often experience trauma at higher rates, necessitating interventions that are equitable and culturally competent. By amplifying the voices of diverse students and families, schools can create policies that address the specific needs of their populations. Attendees will gain practical strategies for integrating trauma-informed approaches in schools, enhancing their ability to support students' emotional and academic success. Through a combination of research findings, case studies, and policy recommendations, this presentation aims to empower educators, social workers, and policymakers to foster resilience and well-being in school communities.

P2.3   *Effectiveness of DBT Track within YNHH Adolescent IOP*
Author(s): Bridget Fehon
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Upon intake at YNHH IOP, both patients and families complete various assessments regarding suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, interpersonal relationships, etc. Upon discharge, these questionnaires are administered for a second time in order to reflect on treatment progress. However, this data has never been analyzed in order to determine the effectiveness of intervention and the program itself. By examining PROMIS measure data throughout the course of treatment, we can determine if the DBT IOP is improving patient outcomes (reduced emotional dysregulation, improved distress tolerance). In addition, this will allow clinicians and administrators to refine interventions based on measurable results. Lastly, this data will provide concrete evidence of program success, which can be used as a promotion for DBT tracks to be implemented in YNHH's other IOP locations.

P2.4 *Suicide Prevention in Individuals 18 and Under*
Author(s): Jill Fleming
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Social Work

Abstract: Suicidal ideation amongst youth and adolescents in the state of Connecticut is a problem that healthcare workes have been looking for a solution to for years. Between the years 2017 and 2021, there were 2,001 deaths due to suicide in the state (Suicide and self inflicted injury prevention program, 2025). Youths ages 18 and under are in crucial developmental stages and are susceptible to outside forces impacting their thought process and decision making. This capstone project will explore suicide prevention in individuals 18 and younger. Suicide is the second leading cause of mortality among teenagers in the United States (Godshall et al., 2024). I hope to create a deliverable that will reduce the rates of suicidality for teens and adolescents in New Haven County. The question posed is, "To what extent do mental health resources reduce suicidal ideations in youths and adolescents?" I will be able to engage with the population of this project through my internship at Clifford Beers in their mobile crisis program. I am interning as a mobile crisis clinician and connect weekly with clients experiencing suicidal ideations. This project will reflect the perspectives of diverse or marginalized populations because suicidality can be present in anyone, regardless of the social groups that they are a part of. Suicide affects so many people and does not discriminate. At Clifford Beers, we serve families all across New Haven County and work with people of all social groups.

P2.5 *Identifying the Most Effective Evidence-Based Interventions for Clinicians Working with Children with ADHD*
Author(s): Amanda Fleurancy
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Social Work

Abstract: Children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a common neurodevelopmental disease, have trouble focusing, controlling their impulses, and participating in social and academic activities. Diagnoses and treatments continue to differ, especially for African American and Hispanic children and for identifying ADHD symptoms in girls. This project aims to create an informational pamphlet to provide clinicians and caregivers with evidence-based guidance on ADHD symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment options. While using culturally sensitive techniques, the pamphlet will highlight behavioral therapy, pharmaceutical treatments, and multimodal approaches. By removing stigma and false information, the pamphlet will encourage people to make well-informed decisions about managing ADHD. It will be provided to medical offices, therapeutic centers, schools, and internet platforms to assure accessibility. This effort aims to enhance ADHD results and promote children's academic, social, and emotional success. It is assessed through focus groups and expert evaluations.

P2.6 *Recognizing Factors that Affect People with Mental Illness: Practical Strategies for Reducing Discrimination and Stigma*
Author(s): Winston Grant
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social work

Abstract: This project explores the impact of mental health stigma on adults' access to housing, employment, and social inclusion. It addresses a critical community need by highlighting the barriers individuals with mental illness face. The research examines existing literature on stigma, its psychological and social consequences, and practical strategies for reducing discrimination. Key themes include internalized stigma, systemic challenges, and interventions that promote inclusion. This capstone project seeks to answer how stigma affects daily life and what measures can foster greater societal acceptance. As a practical deliverable, an informational handbook was developed to help individuals, caregivers, and professionals recognize the signs of mental health struggles and understand the factors influencing well-being. This resource aims to improve awareness, reduce stigma, and enhance support systems. By contributing to social work knowledge and practice, this project reinforces the importance of advocacy, education, and inclusive policies in addressing mental health disparities.

P2.7 *MI, CBT, DBT Powerpoint for career development*
Author(s): Brahm Guerrera
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Hunnicut
Department: Social Work

Abstract: This project aims to enhance clinical competency for employees of residential treatment centers for substance use and mental health by implementing a training resource focused on evidence-based interventions: Motivational Interviewing (MI), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). This will be a PowerPoint addressing the need for improved staff training, the comprehensive PPT resource will equip clinicians and support staff with the skills necessary to effectively implement these therapeutic approaches,

thereby enhancing treatment outcomes for clients facing co-occurring mental health and substance use issues. Key objectives include increasing clinician and staff competency, strengthening client engagement, and promoting culturally competent care tailored to the unique experiences of diverse populations. The PPT presentation will serve as an onboarding tool for new hires and a continuous education resource for existing staff. Effectiveness will be evaluated through pre- and post-training assessments and supervisor feedback to ensure clients receive quality, uniform, client-centered care in a supportive environment. These evidence-based interventions are standardized approaches that aim to improve client engagement, retention, and overall treatment outcomes by creating a structured understanding among staff. The PPT resource will equip new hires with essential competencies, including OARS techniques and Thought Restructuring, to promote a consistent application of therapeutic strategies across diverse treatment teams. This project highlights the importance of training in evidence-based practices to optimize treatment efficacy and support clinicians in addressing the complex needs of their clients.

P2.8   *How can individuals with addiction and mental health issues effectively talk to their children about their struggles in ways that promote understanding, reduce stigma, and support the children's emotional health and development?*

Author(s): Lauren Hajjar
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Social Work

Abstract: This capstone solves the problem of how parents that are struggling with addiction and mental illness can have open, honest communication with their children in a way that minimizes stigma and promotes emotional wellness. Far too many of these parents are having trouble having such conversations with their children because they fear being judged, misjudged, or harming their child's mental state. This research will fill that gap by giving parents tools that enable them to address their problems in age-appropriate, empathetic, and in a positive manner. This project will include a booklet and an attractive poster, that incorporates evidence-based approaches and insights from multiple individuals. The manual will also address communication skills and have useful examples on how to approach challenging conversations in a way that reduces guilt or ambiguity. The poster will be an at-a-glance quick reference, highlighting the key topics and approaches. By providing parents with the language and skills they require, the aim is not only to empower them to build healthier, more open relationships with their children, but also to decrease the stigma of addiction and mental illness. The purpose of this project is to provide the foundation parents so they can communicate healthily with their children and in a way that promotes children's emotional growth and well-being.

P2.9   *The Community Guide: Understanding Harm Reduction & Reducing Stigma*

Author(s): Kaylene Henault
Faculty Mentor: Christie M. Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work

Abstract: Harm reduction has emerged as a vital public health strategy in the U.S. for addressing substance use disorders, with evidence-based interventions such as methadone, buprenorphine, syringe exchange programs, and supervised injection sites demonstrating effectiveness. Despite these successes, harm reduction efforts have faced persistent federal opposition and societal stigma, often due to misconceptions that they enable rather than mitigate drug use. Originating in the 1980s as a grassroots response to the HIV/AIDS crisis, harm reduction has grown into a broader public health and social justice framework. This community project, The Community Guide: Understanding Harm Reduction & Reducing Stigma, seeks to educate individuals on harm reduction policies and reduce stigma through public education and policy engagement. Drawing from research on harm reduction, advocacy, and stigma reduction strategies, the guide integrates myth-debunking, data-driven messaging, advocacy strategies, and mental health campaign tactics to foster community support. This pamphlet will educate the public, inform healthcare professionals, and equip policymakers with practical, research-based strategies. Ultimately, the project aims to empower communities and professionals alike to support harm reduction through inclusive education, informed advocacy, and stigma reduction.

P2.10   *Trauma Informed Care*

Author(s): Thomas Hennessey
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Social Work

Abstract: Psychological trauma, at its foundation, is an experience or set of experiences that cause marked changes in a human's limbic system neurobiology, conscious and unconscious thought patterns, and social behavior. With this definition, it is useful to think of psychological trauma as a significant harm caused to the brain's alarm system, causing it to malfunction to the detriment of the conscious organism. Current conceptions of trauma are too narrow, limiting the explanatory power that trauma theory could bring to the clinical 'table.' With an expanded and logically

sound conception of trauma, the clinician can gain a much deeper understanding of mental afflictions and their psychopathological origins.

P2.11 *Trauma informed parenting education for domestic violence survivors*
Author(s): Donte'a Highsmith
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Domestic violence can have long-lasting effects on both survivors and their children, often disrupting their sense of stability, safety, and emotional well-being. Additionally, parenting becomes a challenge for survivors as they struggle to heal from their trauma while also trying to provide security and emotional support for their children. Research shows that children who are impacted by trauma need secure, consistent, and nurturing relationships to thrive. This project explores how trauma-informed parenting education can help rebuild the parent-child relationship and promote emotional healing. To address this community's need, I developed a trauma-informed resource for parents in domestic violence shelters. This resource will not only make trauma-informed education more easily accessible, but it will empower survivors by providing them with practical tools to support their own child's healing while also caring for themselves.

P2.12 *Social emotional learning classes impact on mental health*
Author(s): Valentina Hines
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This paper and project focus on addressing the unmet need for social-emotional learning (SEL) resources for adolescents with disabilities, a group that faces unique challenges in emotional and social development. Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress are increasingly prevalent among students, with bullying exacerbating these concerns. Research has shown that SEL programs are effective in reducing bullying, improving emotional regulation, promoting empathy, and fostering overall well-being, particularly for marginalized groups like students with disabilities (Green et al., 2021). The importance of cultural responsiveness in SEL programming is emphasized, as it ensures these programs are effective across diverse student populations. Guided by the Family Systems Theory and Ecological Systems Theory, this project developed an inclusive, adaptable SEL curriculum aimed at supporting students' emotional and social development. The deliverable targets students with disabilities, school teachers, social workers, and other school staff, with a dissemination plan involving collaboration with school staff and making the curriculum available online for broader access. This curriculum responds directly to the need for tailored mental health support and SEL resources by promoting emotional self-awareness and enhancing social connections within an inclusive school environment. Furthermore, this project advocates for the continued implementation of SEL programs in schools and the need for further research to improve mental health outcomes and foster positive school climates for all students.

P2.13 *Lessening the Stigma Against Schizophrenia: An Anti-Stigma Awareness Training*
Author(s): Stephanie Tingley
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This study and deliverable will focus on the question of whether an anti-stigma awareness training for mental health and medical professionals would be effective in reducing stigmatized behaviors towards those who are diagnosed with Schizophrenia. Academic research discusses the need for more education/training for all those within the mental health field (regular staff, doctors, nurses, etc.) as this disorder is one of the most stigmatized disorders within our society and as a result, it has created a great deal of stress for those diagnosed with this illness. Findings from this review suggest that after offering mental health/medical professionals training sessions, it has significantly lessened the stigma towards those with Schizophrenia. The focus of this project is to educate those in the mental health field and reframe some of the misconceptions that some may have by breaking down the diagnosis, explaining what race is affected by stigma within this diagnosis, exploring the prevalence of stigma within mental health settings, exploring questions for further research, and emphasizing how our society can make a change to help those affected by this stigma.

P2.14   *Qualitative Analysis on Alcohol Craving*
Author(s): Sarah Johnson
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Varsha Dubose
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This is a qualitative analysis being conducted on learning about Black individuals' experiences with alcohol and how they think treatment could be changed to better meet their needs based on their lived experiences, including racism and drinking culture.

P2.15   *Self-Care Approaches for Domestic Violence Victims*
Author(s): Angelique Jones
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This aims to explore the intersection of domestic violence, self-care, and self-esteem. The idea is to empower victims by allowing acess to self-care strategies they may not be aware of or may not know about. Domestic violence affects both men and women each year, with a variation of abuse. The review provides existing research on how domestic violence affects self-esteem along with providing coping mechanisms to help promote healing within victims. Self-care is used throughout to help restore the self-esteem within victims and allow them to gain back their power and control. The review also highlights frameworks like systems theory and feminist thepry to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and abuse. There are also gaps within the literature, being research on male victims, along with other psyscholgical effects domestic violene has on victims. Building on this, the project seeks to address self-care needs in domestic violence victims. The proposed deliverable, a printable self-care pamphlet, will help provide resources, techniques, and tips for victims to gain back their power and control of their life. The pamphlet is designed to be inclusive with language, culturally responsive, images reflecting diverse backgrounds, genders, races, and identities. The overall goal is to increase empowerment for victims, provide emotional support, and gain access to resources. The pamphlet will be accessible at The Center For Empowerment and Education, the Danbury Courthosue, and the Danbury Police station, and Western Conneticut State Univeristy Victim Advocate Office, allowing for it to reach a diverse audience

P2.16   *How did alcohol use patterns differ between adults and adolescents in poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic?*
Author(s): Dieudonne Jules
Faculty Mentor: Denise S. Dawson
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This paper shows how alcohol use before, during and after Covid-19 in young adults and adolescents affects their health, poverty status, and emotional wellbeing. My study question is How did alcohol use patterns differ between adults and adolescents in poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic? Prior studies have shown that there has been a trend toward increased consumption of alcohol and other substances in impoverished individuals during the pandemic. Isolation from lockdowns resulted in mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. It is imperative that people understand why individuals of this demographic consumed unusual amounts of alcohol during this time. The research in this study was done by reviewing research literature. Due to Covid- 19, adolescents and adults are experiencing poverty and economic instability. Many people in the community struggle financially, which restricts their access to essential services including social support, healthcare, and education. Stress, substance abuse, and mental health problems are frequently caused by poverty. This paper promotes progress within the population. Alcoholism is prevalent among communities facing poverty and creating a solution can help them with self-motivation. Integration, benefits, and accessibility of the resources will be discussed to promote education and knowledge of the resources. The study emphasizes that it is difficult to cope with emotional regulation, and individuals use substances as a coping mechanism against depression and anxiety. There is more research to be done into COVID-19. When completing this project, substance use disorder among adolescents and adults will decrease in the community.

P2.17   *Empowering Engagement: Culturally Responsive, Strength-Based Tools for Enhancing Mental Health Treatment in Community Settings*
Author(s): Victoria Wallace
Faculty Mentor: Dawson, Denise S
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This project aims to address the lack of culturally responsive, strength-based tools for improving engagement in mental health treatment for adults in community-based settings. Many community mental health programs struggle to effectively engage clients, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalized populations. The literature review explores the impact of strength-based interventions on treatment engagement,

highlighting best practices such as co-design and the Family Strength Wheel, as well as the need for more culturally tailored approaches. Key themes include the importance of cultural responsiveness, the effectiveness of strength-based tools in fostering client empowerment, and the gaps in research regarding long-term impact and systemic barriers. The project's deliverables include the Strengths Board, an interactive tool promoting self-awareness and empowerment, and a Strength-Based Booklet for staff to guide culturally responsive practices. This project contributes to social work knowledge by offering practical, culturally relevant strategies for improving client engagement and supporting long-term recovery in community-based mental health settings.

P2.18   *Increasing Access to Evidence-Based Care for Cult Recovery in Connecticut*
Author(s): Kristina Kelly
Faculty Mentor: Christine Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Cult recovery therapy remains a niche specialization despite the ever-increasing problem of traumatic cultic abuse which means survivors seeking specialized cult recovery therapy in Connecticut may be limited in their options. Due to wait lists, insurance coverage, and geographic location, survivors may seek general mental health care instead of specialized care. This research will explore what the potential outcomes for survivors of cult abuse if they do not receive specialized, evidence-based care. The resulting deliverable will be a resource guide for therapists by providing the basics of cult-recovery therapy and listing comparisons between cult recovery therapy and more commonly understood psychopathologies and situations such as substance use disorders and domestic violence.

P2.19   *Building Relationship Skills Through Group Practice with Adolescents*
Author(s): Emily Kline
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This capstone project addressed the development of healthy relationship skills among high school students with emotional disturbance at ACES Whitney High School North. Some students face significant challenges in social-emotional development, making it crucial to provide targeted interventions that foster communication, boundary-setting, and relationship-building skills. I developed a curriculum for a "Healthy Relationships" socio-educational group, and piloted two groups of ten students that met weekly for six weeks. Grounded in trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices, this project integrated evidence-based social-emotional learning approaches and culturally relevant conflict resolution strategies. Activities addressed structural inequities affecting relationships, incorporated student voice through participatory methods, and provided alternative conflict resolution models tailored to diverse backgrounds. I created a facilitation guide for school social workers with guidance for best practices in relationship-building groups. The guide equips school social workers with structured activities, discussion prompts, and reflection exercises to support students in recognizing and practicing healthy relationship behaviors. The deliverable was disseminated through printed and digital formats, allowing flexibility for social workers and educators to implement activities in various settings. To evaluate effectiveness, the project incorporated student reflections and feedback from ACES social workers. By providing a sustainable and adaptable resource, this project aimed to enhance students' interpersonal skills, support social-emotional learning, and contribute to their successful transition into adulthood.

P2.20   *How the Misdiagnosis and Underdiagnosis of ADHD Impacts Women*
Author(s): Madalena LeClair
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Women are disproportionately diagnosed with ADHD, due to the internal nature of their symptoms. The consensus of the literature suggests that girls are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD - inattentive as they tend to experience forgetfulness, distraction, and disorganization. Boys are more likely to experience external symptoms such as aggression, impulsivity, and hyperactivity that are much more noticeable therefore making the diagnosis process easier. My workbook, "Women Can Have ADHD Too," targets adult women of all ages who are either questioning their symptoms or believe that they have adult ADHD and have not received a diagnosis. My workbook will include pages that provide information on symptoms, prompt readers to reflect on their thoughts and feelings, describe the impact on diverse populations, and provide knowledge on comorbid disorders. Highlighting women's struggles and experiences is extremely important and validating as this community often feels unheard, causing them to internalize their feelings and blame themselves for their shortcomings.

P2.21 *Assessing the Preparedness for MSW Students to Work with and Alongside People of Color*
Author(s): Britt Lewis
Faculty Mentor: Isabel Logan
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The discipline of social work has always embodied the mission of uplifting individuals and attending to the traumas they endure. To affectively recognize, acknowledge, and assess trauma(s), social workers must understand the various events and situations that can contribute to trauma. One critical area of focus is the impact of race and racism on people of color, which can lead to trauma and other mental health challenges.
This capstone project explored whether Master of Social Work (MW) students at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), in their final practicum year, felt adequately prepared to work with and support people of color based on their coursework. The motivation for this research stemmed from firsthand experiences within the discipline, where some social workers inadvertently caused harm rather than providing meaningful support to the communities they serve. Findings from the study revealed that students felt more prepared to work effectively with people of color when they were exposed to diverse coursework, instructed by diverse faculty, and engaged with a curricula that incorporated a broad range of perspectives.

P2.22 *Coping Skills for Children with Parents with Substance Use Disorders*
Author(s): Emma Lockwood
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The purpose of this project was to create an 8-week coping skills curriculum for children with parents who have a substance use disorder, addressing a critical gap in structured coping skills education. Children in this population are at greater risk of emotional dysregulation and maladaptive coping due to increased environmental stressors that are associated with parental substance use. The curriculum aims to enhance children's emotional regulation and awareness while also fostering a sense of belonging in the group setting. A review of existing literature highlights the benefits of coping skills education in improving emotional and behavioral outcomes in children, emphasizing the importance of group-based interventions to build peer support. The research question guiding this project was: What is the impact of group coping skills training on children with parents with substance use disorders? Key themes include the impact of parental substance use on child emotional development and effectiveness of group coping skills training. The deliverable, consisting of weekly lesson plans, activities, and discussion guides, was designed for use by social workers at New Horizon Living Centers and similar agencies.

P2.23 *Police culture analysis and strength-focused approach to mental wellness*
Author(s): Daymary Lopez
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This poster provides insights on police culture from a cultural competency lens and analyzes key values that may increase law enforcement buy-in. The poster identifies trauma hierarchies, limited mental health literacy, and negative social and career consequences as barriers that reinforce mental health stigma in law enforcement culture. A list of resources tailored to law enforcement is included through a QR code. The resource list includes service information geared toward first responders, including law enforcement.

P2.24 *Addressing TGNC Issues in Social Work Curriculum*
Author(s): Jenny Malcein
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) individuals experience significant physical and mental/behavioral health disparities due to violence, stigma, and discrimination in many settings, including healthcare and mental health agencies. Research shows that TGNC social work students often experience microaggressions and blatant discrimination from peers and professors and note a lack of transgender affirming coursework and classroom discussions. The Council on Social Work Education conducted their own study which identified a lack of TGNC affirming curriculum within social work education and recommended that this be remedied within social work education programs. However, in recent informal focus groups some social work students have noted a gap in Southern Connecticut State University's social work curriculum addressing TGNC related topics. This project employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the factors shaping social work educators' competency and comfort with integrating transgender and gender nonconforming issues into the curriculum and will include potential recommendations and resources to support ongoing professional development within social work education.

P2.25 *How exercise benefits mental health outcomes*
Author(s): Gabriella Martinez
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Young adults struggle with mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Exercise might be helpful for young adults to alleviate mental health symptoms. Different exercises and time lengths will be studied to see if it helps alleviate mental health symptoms. Previous research has found that exercise can help eliminate mental health symptoms. Researchers have found that walking, running, gym, swimming, cycling, and other sports activities are some of the helpful ways that can help mental health problems. Exercise can in fact help reduce mental health symptoms in young adults. We found that exercising four to five times a week, for forty-five minutes to an hour can be affective to help reduce mental health symptoms.

P2.26 *Natural Disasters and War: The Effects of Post-Disaster Trauma on Childhood Development*
Author(s): Erik Masocco
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Natural disasters and armed conflicts have far-reaching and profound impacts on child development, encompassing physical, psychological, and socioeconomic dimensions. Research highlights that children exposed to these events may face immediate physical health challenges, including malnutrition, dehydration, injury, and disruptions to education and social stability. Studies have also shown that these events can cause long-term consequences, including developmental delays, reduced educational achievement, and the development of mental health disorders such as PTSD and depression. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these impacts by examining the connection between a child's environment and development. Additionally, the severity of these outcomes can often depend on pre-existing factors such as socioeconomic and geographic vulnerabilities, as well as poverty and the ability to access resources, which can make efforts to bounce back from disasters more difficult. This capstone project delivered a resource binder that will inform the families of Shepherd Glen Elementary School in Hamden, CT, of potential resources that can provide them with aid in the event of a disastrous event. These resources can offer medical care, housing assistance, food, and any other areas of support that families may need post-disaster.

P2.27 *Introducing Fitness and Movement Therapy to The Legacy Foundation of Hartford*
Author(s): Lily McCarthy
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Social Work
Abstract: This capstone project seeks to address health disparities within low socioeconomic racial minority groups, specifically among adolescents. This project will work directly with students enrolled in The Legacy Foundation of Hartford, participants aged 13-18, to begin to introduce exercise as a means of longevity and health management. The students of this program reside in the greater Hartford area, and many face systemic barriers including limited educational resources pertaining to physical health; limited access to safe recreational spaces; and inconsistent and / or inadequate healthcare. The expectation is that these students will experience a shift in attitudes toward physical activity – adopting a mindset that both prioritizes fitness in daily life as well as an understanding of the long-term importance of exercise for the health benefits that it provides. In this project, The Legacy Foundation of Hartford will partner with Revive of The USA, a nonprofit organization that provides movement therapy in addition to psycho-education regarding the benefits of exercise. The deliverable includes movement sessions where students will work with Revive coaches to partake in stretching, mobility, and strength exercises. In addition to the physical sessions, students will receive psycho-educational materials regarding their participation in physical activity to further reinforce their lessons. The effectiveness of this project will be measured by pre- and post- surveys to identify any shifts in attitudes and engagement. The project is founded upon and hopes to reinforce culturally responsive practices, acknowledging and hoping to instill the importance of physical activity with regard to mental and physical well-being.

P2.28 *Bridging the Gap: Addressing the Bilingual Educator Shortage and Supporting ELL Students and Families in Meriden, Connecticut*
Author(s): Brittany McCormick
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The nationwide shortage of certified bilingual educators presents a significant challenge for public schools, especially in communities like Meriden, Connecticut, where the population of English Language Learners (ELL) has

been rapidly increasing. Without bilingual educators, ELL students face challenges in bridging the gap between their native language and English. This project explores peer-reviewed research related to the growing demand for bilingual educators, the barriers ELL students face in academically and socially, and the potential for long-term effects of educational underachievement. To address these challenges, a website is being piloted in both English and Spanish and is developed to serve as a centralized platform with the aims to alleviate the impact of the bilingual educator shortage by enhancing academic and social outcomes for ELL students while strengthening school-community connections. This initiative is significant for social work knowledge and practice as it emphasizes the importance of cultural competence and community-based solutions to address the systemic challenges ELL students face.

Keywords: English Language Learner (ELL), bilingual educators, academic performance, social integration, community resources

P2.29 *A Culturally Responsive Harm Reduction Guide for Social Work Professionals at a Clinical Mental Health Agency*
Author(s): Melanie Meyers
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Harm reduction strategies are crucial for preventing opioid overdose among individuals with opioid use disorder. However, there is a notable lack of professionals implementing these life-saving techniques. For this capstone project, I developed a comprehensive harm reduction guide designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of social work professionals at a clinical mental health agency. Recent research indicates that professionals with greater harm reduction knowledge view it more favorably as an intervention, while those advocating for abstinence tend to hold negative views (Javadi et al., 2022). It is imperative that professionals receive education about harm reduction to increase its adoption as a treatment approach. The guide features evidence-based interventions derived from research on diverse populations, addressing gaps in service delivery and knowledge. It highlights alternative interventions, such as safe injection hotlines and mobile apps for people who inject drugs, which have shown promise in reducing overdose risk across various at-risk populations (Riback et al., 2022). This guide is grounded in principles of antiracist and culturally responsive practices, drawing on data from diverse perspectives, including those with lived experience. By providing well-crafted, clear guidance on harm reduction techniques, this resource aims to equip professionals with the tools necessary to implement effective, culturally sensitive interventions for clients with opioid use disorder.

P2.30 *A Proposed Study on The Impacts of Dysarthria on Mental Health Treatment Access and Outcomes*
Author(s): Alfred Mingrone
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Dysarthria is a neuromotor speech disorder associated with various psychosocial and mental health issues, including stigmatization and social isolation. The purpose of the proposed study is to evaluate mental health access and outcomes for individuals with dysarthria using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data will be collected by surveys, utilizing the CAHPS Outpatient Mental Health Survey. Qualitative data will be gathered via semi-structured interviews with participants with dysarthria informed by the CPIB short form. The present study seeks to identify unique barriers to adequate mental health access and outcomes, as well as identify other challenges this population faces.

P2.31 *Informational Brochure Regarding Special Education*
Author(s): Ana Moreno
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The purpose of creating an informational brochure is to bring awareness to parents and families about special education in public schools. With my experience of internship placements, I have noticed that many parents are not aware of the services that their child can receive in school. Many parents in marginalized communities may lack understanding or access to information about special education resources and eligibility. The point of the informational brochure project is to help students who are facing challenges in school at a young age, therefore they do not start falling between the cracks. An outcome of this deliverable is increased awareness and understanding of disabilities. It will also dismantle the stigma around disabilities. With this deliverable, parents and families will learn more about special education qualifications, availability, and specific resources for disabilities in both Spanish and English. The project will contribute to professional knowledge by serving as a model to show parents and families about the resources that can be available and how advocacy can play a huge role in inclusivity.

P2.32 *The Social Media Guide!*
Author(s): Kayleigh Morgan
Faculty Mentor: Lorrie Gardella
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Parents and students may not understand the dangers that coincide with social media use. They may not be aware of how to effectively protect children on social media. They may not be informed of the guidelines that can be put on social media accounts. They may not be prepared to have tough conversations on social media. The goal of this project is to inform parents, staff, and students about the risks that come with social media and how to protect young minds from social media's influence on mental health. The information gathered was formulated as a pamphlet that was made in collaboration with students at a middle school in New Haven CT. The pamphlet was distributed to families across the school in hopes of creating open dialogue within their household. This project was inspired by the ongoing issues that I see with social media and media use in middle schoolers. In middle school we have been seeing many fights, conflict, mental health disorders, and self-esteem issues related to overusing media. The purpose of this pamphlet was to provide information to parents, staff, and students so that they can use the resources, talk about the consequences of being online, and discuss social media in general. 7th and 8th graders helped developed the pamphlet by providing powerful messages and language that will be accessible to their peers.

P2.33 *How do self care resources affect burnout for social workers in CT?*
Author(s): Christina Petry
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Social work
Abstract: This capstone project addresses the issue of burnout among social workers, which is exacerbated by heavy caseloads, long hours, emotional strain, and lack of recognition. Burnout negatively impacts social workers' mental health and the quality of care they provide. The project proposes that incorporating mindfulness practices into social workers' daily routines reduce stress, emotional exhaustion, and increase self-compassion. Research shows that mindfulness practices also lead to improved emotional regulation and well-being. A pamphlet will be created to provide social workers with accessible, practical tools to manage stress and enhance self-care. The pamphlet will be culturally responsive, offering techniques that can be adapted to diverse backgrounds and experiences. By providing social workers with a simple, effective resource for mindfulness, this project aims to improve their well-being, job satisfaction, and the overall quality of care they deliver to clients.

P2.34 *Supportive Spaces for Neurodiverse Students 3 Part Series*
Author(s): Angela Pierce
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Neurodiverse students face unique challenges in the academic environment, and there is a pressing need to develop tailored support systems that foster inclusion and success at the University of Connecticut regional campus sites. The aim of this research is to investigate how other universities have implemented programs and spaces for neurodiverse students and to assess whether UConn has similar offerings. Through a collaborative approach with UConn's Student Health and Wellness, the Center for Students with Disabilities, and Student Services, the project will gather data to inform the creation of specialized programming. Key topics to be examined include ethical considerations for faculty and students, a strength-based approach to service provision, practical strategies for modifying the environment for neurodiverse students, and psychoeducation tailored to this group. The project will involve outreach to neurodiverse students through surveys and events to collect feedback on their needs and preferences for campus programming. The research findings will help shape recommendations for developing inclusive spaces and services that promote connection, well-being, and academic success for neurodiverse students at UConn.

P2.35 *Addressing Systemic Barriers for Formerly Incarcerated Black Men*
Author(s): Ty Poole
Faculty Mentor: Christine Limone
Department: Social Work
Abstract: After serving time in jail, Black men encounter numerous financial obstacles upon their release, such as restricted access to vocational training and steady work. Through the provision of employment possibilities, skill development courses, and occupational certification pathways, this project seeks to increase their financial security. This program focuses on long-term professional development in an effort to lower recidivism and encourage financial independence. Research indicates that by giving people organized job options, employment-focused reintegration programs significantly reduce reoffending rates. With the help of this resource, returning citizens will be able to

access critical workforce development services and be prepared to find steady employment. Social service providers, workforce development specialists, reentry support organizations, and Black men who have served time in prison are among the target audience. In addition to improving economic mobility, this project gives people the tools they need to create sustainable futures by connecting returning residents with qualified occupations. This program encourages successful reintegration and long-term workforce engagement by working with training providers, employment agencies, and community organizations.

P2.36   *Supporting Group Therapists: Creating An Integrated Treatment Toolkit for Young Adults*
Author(s): Alexandrya Pope
Faculty Mentor: Christie Hunnicutt
Department: Social Work
Abstract: Group therapy is an effective treatment modality for young adults (18-25) experiencing mental health challenges, providing a space for social connection, skill-building, and emotional support. However, facilitating group therapy presents unique challenges, including gaps in standardized training, barriers to session planning, and therapist confidence. This paper explores how facilitators can be better supported in delivering effective group therapy for young adults by examining four key themes: (1) training for group therapists, (2) treatment needs of young adults, (3) challenges faced by group therapists, and (4) support needs for planning group therapy sessions. Based on these findings, this paper introduces the Integrated Treatment Toolkit for Young Adults, a structured resource designed to address training deficiencies, improve session planning, and enhance therapist confidence. Grounded in evidence-based interventions and theoretical frameworks such as person-centered therapy and the strengths-based approach, the toolkit provides practical strategies, structured session templates, and culturally responsive practices to foster therapist competency and group engagement. By equipping facilitators with accessible, evidence-informed resources, the toolkit aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of group therapy for young adults.
Keywords: group therapy, young adults, therapist training, integrated treatment toolkit, mental health, session planning, facilitator support

P2.37   *Thriving Through Transition*
Author(s): Christina Prevot
Faculty Mentor: Denise Dawson
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The prevalence of mental health problems in youth have been widely researched but little information is acknowledged about mental health challenges among immigrant youth. This study examines the impact of trauma experienced on immigrant youth's mental health outcomes and transition into adulthood in the United States. Examining their journey from pre-migration to post-migration provides a personal perspective on how trauma has developed over time. Using qualitative data, including interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups emphasizes the significance of trauma-informed care and culturally competent practices. The findings highlight the need for specialized interventions to support immigrant youth and their families, minimizing the long-term impacts on their quality of life.

P2.38   *BEYOND LANGUAGE: DEVELOPING A COMPETENT BILINGUAL MENTAL HEALTH WORKFORCE*
Author(s): Diana Pugliese Trochez
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work
Abstract: The Latinx and Spanish-speaking population in the U.S. continues to face significant barriers to culturally competent mental health care, including language barriers that contribute to misdiagnoses, inadequate treatment, and disparities in outcomes. A critical gap exists in specialized clinical training, particularly in Spanish-language proficiency and culturally responsive psychiatric care. Research highlights systemic challenges, such as limited certification programs, lack of formal training, and clinician burnout due to increased responsibilities. Applying Community Cultural Wealth, Cultural Competence and Humility, and Systems Theory, this study examines ways to enhance bilingual clinical training. Expanding certification programs, integrating cultural humility, and advocating for policy reform are essential for bridging linguistic gaps in care. To support this, the special project includes a pamphlet outlining certification programs and continuing education opportunities for bilingual clinicians. By equipping professionals with linguistic and cultural competencies, this initiative strengthens social work's commitment to equitable, effective mental health care for Spanish-speaking communities.

P2.39   *Police Social Work Resource Guide*

Author(s): Sydney Santoemma
Faculty Mentor: Todd Rofuth
Department: Social Work

Abstract: The practice issue is the need for enhanced resources for police mental health crisis response teams, specifically within the Milford Police Department. This issue was identified during the author's field placement at the department. The review highlights best practices in crisis intervention, including Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT), de-escalation techniques, and comprehensive resource guides. It emphasizes the importance of cultural responsiveness and addressing diverse needs. Theoretical frameworks include Person-in-Environment and Crisis Intervention theories. A digital and printed resource guide for Milford Police Department social workers, containing local agencies' information, de-escalation techniques, and culturally responsive practices. Intended outcomes include improved crisis response and increased access to mental health services. The guide will be disseminated directly to the department's social work unit. This project enhances collaboration between law enforcement and social work, improving outcomes for individuals in mental health crises and contributing to the author's professional development in police social work.

P2.40   *Housing Resources and Information for Patients in Inpatient at Hospital of Central Connecticut: The Effect of Lack of Resources on Unhoused Patients with Psychiatric Disorders at Discharge*

Author(s): Olivia Sarasin
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work

Abstract: The purpose of the study is to examine the effect of lack of resources on unhoused patients with psychiatric disorders at discharge. Homelessness is a prevalent issue, so the research question is "What effect does the lack of information about housing resources have on the housing status of patients in the inpatient psychiatric unit at The Hospital for Central Connecticut?". There is a lack of information and accessibility regarding housing resources for patients at inpatient psychiatric units. The literature review provided an overview regarding the following topics: the importance of housing and resources for people with mental health disorders, reasons for homelessness, barriers that prevent housing and access to information, lack of accessibility for housing information, socioeconomic inequities, benefits of housing programs, cultural considerations, best practices to approach providing services, unanswered questions, a postmodernism paradigm related to housing, and how the ecological systems theory was used to explain the lack of housing and accessibility to information. There is still a gap in research regarding the lack of research for housing information. Instead, questions, such as "Why is it difficult for unhoused people to finding information?" should be studied. The deliverable is a housing resource guide that will be given to patients at discharge. This product is important for social work as patients with psychiatric disorders are a vulnerable population who need housing resources to be more readily available and provides patients with resources regardless of housing status.

P2.41   *Chronic Stress and Mental Health Outcomes Among Women of Color*

Author(s): Cynthia Sarpong
Faculty Mentor: Igrind Aarons
Department: Social Work

Abstract: This project investigates the impact of chronic stress on the mental health outcomes of women of color within the community. Chronic stress poses significant physical and mental health challenges, contributing to conditions such as anxiety and depression. Addressing these issues is crucial for preventing further harm. The core research question is, "How does chronic stress affect mental health outcomes across different racial groups?" By examining the interplay of race, gender, and stress, this study aims to uncover how long-term stress uniquely affects the mental health of women from various ethnic backgrounds. The research highlights disparities in mental health among people of color, focusing on the specific challenges faced by these women that hinder their overall functioning. The findings will provide insights into their unique stressors and propose practical strategies to enhance their mental health. This project seeks to improve the well-being of women from diverse ethnic groups by exploring the intricate relationship between race, gender, and chronic stress. By acknowledging the intersectionality of these factors, the study underscores the necessity for systemic change and the importance of cultural competence in social work. Ultimately, the research aims to equip social workers with the tools required to support the mental health of women of color effectively and compassionately. The outcomes of this project will contribute to shaping social work and community practice, advocating for social justice, increasing access to mental health services, and promoting the overall well-being of women of color.
Keywords: chronic stress, women of color, mental health, racial/ethnic groups.

P2.42 *Schizophrenia and Incarceration Among Black Men in American*

Author(s): Orlando Smith
Faculty Mentor: Ingrid Aarons
Department: Social Work

Abstract: This capstone explores the mental health disparities faced by incarcerated Black men with schizophrenia, with a focus on the role of racial biases and the lack of culturally competent care. Black men in the criminal justice system often face higher rates of misdiagnosis, underdiagnosis, and inadequate treatment for schizophrenia compared to their white counterparts. These disparities result in worsened health outcomes, more severe symptoms, and reliance on ineffective treatments. The main goal of this capstone is to advocate for the implementation of culturally responsive mental health interventions that better reflect the cultural identities and lived experiences of Black men with schizophrenia. By emphasizing the need for tailored care, the capstone highlights the importance of culturally competent practices to improve mental health outcomes for this marginalized group. The capstone draws on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Cultural Competence Framework to argue for systemic reforms within correctional settings, ensuring that mental health care is equitable and responsive to the specific needs of incarcerated Black men. Additionally, the capstone calls for further research to examine the long-term effects of culturally responsive interventions, particularly in reducing recidivism and supporting the successful reintegration of these individuals into society. Ultimately, this capstone aims to promote a more inclusive, effective approach to mental health care that can improve the well-being of Black men with schizophrenia in the criminal justice system.
Keywords: Schizophrenia, Mental Health Disparities, Incarcerated black men, culturally competent care, Systemic Reforms, Critical Race Theory.

P2.43 *Real-Time Immersive Molecular Simulation and Exploration in Virtual Reality*

Author(s): Vanessa Adamski
Faculty Mentor: Christine Broadbridge
Department: Applied Physics

Abstract: This study aims to develop a Virtual Reality (VR) application for real-time modeling and interaction with molecular structures, crystal lattices, to produce input for subsequent Density Functional Theory (DFT) simulations. Targeted at computational chemistry, molecular biology, and materials science, the application will provide immersive 3D visualization and interactive manipulation of molecular and crystalline structures, with integrated DFT calculations to visualize electron density, molecular orbitals, and energy states. Built using VR engines such as Unity or Unreal Engine, and integrating DFT software like Quantum ESPRESSO or VASP, the platform will enable dynamic simulation, real-time analysis, and visualization of computational results, facilitating advanced research and educational applications. During this presentation, the objectives, design, and capabilities of the VR application, focusing on its integration to enhance molecular and crystal lattice modeling will be displayed.

P2.44 *Research-Inspired Educational Modules for Secondary and Early College Physics and Engineering*

Author(s): Andrew Mansfield
Faculty Mentor: Christine Broadbridge
Department: Applied Physics

Abstract: STEM occupations are expected to grow by 10.5% over the next decade—three times the rate of non-STEM fields—yet current graduation rates fail to meet industry demands. To bridge this gap, innovative strategies are needed to attract, support, and graduate more students in physics and engineering. While advanced topics such as quantum mechanics, nanotechnology, and astrophysics often ignite initial interest, many students become discouraged by abstract theory and complex mathematics before fully grasping their broader significance. Research-inspired curricula offer a promising solution by reversing the traditional instructional approach—introducing advanced topics early to contextualize fundamental physics principles and highlight their real-world applications. Thus, this study is looking to create an educational module based on real world research on Solid-Oxide Fuel Cells (SOFC) to introduce fundamental concepts in material science and engineering with topics including structure-property relationships, imperfections and diffusion in solid materials. By integrating these concepts within the context of SOFC technology, students can not only develop deeper understanding of material science but also advocates for sustainable energy solutions.

P2.45 *Focused Ion Beam: Enabling High-Resolution Electron Microscopy*

Author(s): Jeremy Turpin
Faculty Mentor: Christine C. Broadbridge
Department: Applied Physics

Abstract: Characterizing materials at the atomic scale is fundamental to understanding structure-property relationships in materials science and engineering. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) provides high

resolution for imaging atomic structures, but obtaining high-quality, electron-transparent specimens is a critical prerequisite. TEM sample preparation has been revolutionized by the application of the Focused Ion Beam (FIB) by enabling precise, site-specific thinning of materials to the nanometer scale. Utilizing a finely focused beam of ions, typically gallium (Ga+), FIB allows for targeted sputtering, cross-sectioning, and lift out techniques to ensure the preservation of regions of interest while optimizing electron transparency. In addition to sample preparation, FIB enables micro- and nanofabrication applications, including circuit modification and 3D nanostructuring. This study highlights the role of FIB in advancing electron microscopy, discussing its principles, key capabilities, and its role in modern materials characterization.

P2.46 *Sargassum filipendula: The Upcoming Dominant Canopy of Southern New England*
Author(s): Kaleb Boudreaux
Faculty Mentor: Sean Grace
Department: Biology

Abstract: Climate change has directly affected the various species of macroalgae in Southern New England via marine heatwaves. Saccharina latissima and Sargassum filipendula are canopy forming species. Here, we observed each species at two sites in southern New England and compared their frequency and canopy height while analyzing the biodiversity, light, and temperature at each site. Furthermore, we looked at different morphologies of S. filipendula at both sites. Video analysis showed that Kings Beach has a higher biodiversity than Fort Wetherill while the beta diversity suggested a difference of species inhabitants at both sites. Analysis showed that the canopy of S. filipendula is bigger than S. latissima. Transects revealed that S. filipendula has been increasing in frequency since 2017 while also having different morphologies at each site. Additionally, S. latissima was not found in Kings Beach suggesting a shift in canopy structure in southern New England. In lab analysis showed that S. filipendula in Kings Beach has a bushy morphology with more blades, heavier weight, and higher number of pneumatocysts than the string morphology at Fort Wetherill. These results suggest that climate change is impacting the marine ecology of southern New England with the notable the absence of the historically dominant kelp, a change of biodiversity at each site, and the increased frequency of S. filipendula observed in the field.

P2.47 *Assessing Phytosaur Diversity in the Upper Sonsela Member (Chinle Formation)*
Author(s): Danielle Hill
Faculty Mentor: Jonathan Weinbaum
Department: Biology

Abstract: Phytosaurs are extinct, archosauriform reptiles that superficially resemble crocodiles found within Upper Triassic (~230-208 ma.) strata. Individual phytosaur species are constrained to distinct spans of geological time, making them useful biological indicators. Jeffers Ranch in northeastern Arizona (Chinle Formation: Sonsela Member), preserves a segment of this time (~213 ma.). Numerous Late Triassic fossils have been collected, including ten disarticulated phytosaur squamosal bones and several partial skulls with intact squamosals, which are now housed in SCSU's Paleontology Lab. Squamosal bones differ morphologically between basal and derived phytosaurs and preserve characters potentially diagnosable to the species level. A variety of squamosal morphotypes are present, leading to questions about phytosaur diversity at the site. Our research aims to describe, analyze, and interpret morphological disparity within SCSU's phytosaurs. First, forensic analyses were performed to evaluate the effects of weathering on the bones' preservation level in order to distinguish anatomical variation from preservational biases. Anatomical comparisons were made to published mystriosuchinine squamosals to diagnose the taxonomic identities of the collection's bones. Three-dimensional digital models were created in preparation for further morphological analyses. Three squamosal morphotypes are present in SCSU's collection typified by SCSU P121, SCSU P75, and SCSU P62. These are distinguished by the depth and width of the squamosal fossa and shape of the posterior process. Our results suggest that more work is needed to understand the extent of phytosaur diversity at the Jeffers Ranch site. Continued analyses of SCSU's phytosaur collection will contribute to our knowledge of phytosaur diversity, paleoecology, and evolutionary history.

P2.48 *A within-site comparison of intertidal and subtidal populations of Astrangia poculata*
Author(s): Danielle Moloney, Sean Grace
Faculty Mentor: Sean Grace
Department: Biology

Abstract: Ocean temperatures are expected to rise 1-3°C by the year 2100, and this warrants a greater understanding of marine life resilience. High temperatures have been implicated in global declines of multiple marine populations, including corals. Historically, most marine research on corals has focused on tropical species that tend to exist within narrow conditions, with little variation in the abiotic environment. However, not all corals live under these precise conditions. This research project focuses on the temperate scleractinian coral Astrangia poculata (Northern Star

coral). A. poculata provides an interesting candidate for research due to its facultative symbiosis (ability to live with low levels of symbionts), its ability to live in both the intertidal and subtidal zones, and its winter quiescence (dormancy) period. We comparatively analyzed intertidal and subtidal populations of A. poculata at a field site in Rhode Island. Aposymbiotic intertidal and subtidal colonies were thermally challenged at 5 temperatures (5°C, 14°C, 18°C (control), 22°C, and 27°C) based on historic averages in the region. Metabolic parameters including feeding response, dissolved oxygen use, and photosynthetic efficiency were measured. Based on periodic exposure of intertidal individuals to extreme environmental variation, we hypothesized that intertidal A. poculata would have higher thermal tolerance at all experimental temperatures than subtidal A. poculata. Preliminary results indicate that there is little difference between intertidal and subtidal physiological performances in laboratory tests. However, both intertidal and subtidal corals in the 5°C group entered quiescence, allowing for measurements on dormant A. poculata in the lab for the first time.

P2.49 *Literature Review on the Use of Bite Block Covers for Tongue Strength Measurement in Young Adults*
Author(s): Xinyi Gao
Faculty Mentor: Julian Smith
Department: Communication Disorder
Abstract: Accurate and hygienic tongue strength measurement plays a critical role in the assessment and management of dysphagia (swallowing difficulties) in both clinical and research settings. The Iowa Oral Performance Instrument (IOPI) is widely used to evaluate lingual pressure through tasks such as isometric tongue presses and effortful swallows. However, concerns regarding hygiene, bulb slippage, and patient comfort level have prompted investigation into potential modifications towards the IOPI measuring bulbs, including the use of disposable bite block covers, which is commonly employed in dental settings for infection control. This poster presents a comprehensive literature review synthesizing current evidence surrounding the use of protective barriers, with attention to their feasibility, accuracy, and clinical utility. While existing studies have explored the effects of device modifications on lingual pressure measurements, most focus on older adult populations or address bulb texture and placement. Limited research has examined the impact of bite block covers specifically, and even fewer have targeted younger adult populations, where age-related confounds are minimized. Reviewed studies highlight factors influencing pressure readings, such as task type, bulb positioning, and participant effort level, as well as the potential for modifications to affect comfort and measurement consistency. By aligning insights from both dental hygiene and speech-language pathology domains, this literature review identifies the gaps in current evidence and emphasizes the need for standardized, hygienic, and reliable practices in tongue strength assessment. The findings support further investigation into the integration of disposable bite block covers to enhance both infection control and usability in dysphagia evaluation protocols.

P2.50 *Analyzing Communication Dynamics Between Adolescents with Hearing Loss and their Hearing Peers*
Author(s): Riley Pettit, Eunice Kim
Faculty Mentor: Zara DeLuca
Department: Communication Disorders
Abstract: Friendships are crucial for adolescent development, fostering emotional well-being, social competence, and belonging (Lambez et al., 2020; Manchanda et al., 2023). For deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) adolescents, friendships with hearing peers present unique challenges and opportunities influenced by communication access, social perceptions, and environmental factors (Terlektsi et al., 2020). However, research on these friendships remains limited, particularly regarding the impact of communication strategies on relationship quality.
This mixed methods study explored friendships between five DHH-hearing adolescent friend pairs (ages 8–15, mean = 10.8) using qualitative interviews and the Friendship Qualities Questionnaire (FQQ; Bukowski et al., 1994). Results highlight five key themes—companionship, help, conflict, security, and closeness—along with emergent subthemes capturing relationship complexities. A central focus is how communication strategies foster connection, resolve conflict, and maintain closeness.
Grounded in the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), this study shifts attention from individual deficits to environmental and social influences on friendships. Findings reveal both challenges, such as communication breakdowns and social exclusion, and strengths, including creative communication, mutual support, and strong emotional bonds. Observations provide insight into how DHH-hearing friends adapt and navigate social interactions. This study offers implications for speech-language pathologists, educators, and caregivers. Identifying key factors in successful friendships can inform strategies to support social communication and promote inclusive peer interactions. Findings emphasize the need for greater awareness of accessibility in social settings and suggest practical approaches to fostering meaningful friendships for DHH adolescents.

P2.51   *The Role of Inclusive and Representative Materials in Language Sampling Methods and Analysis*
Author(s): Eunice Kim, Riley Pettit
Faculty Mentor: Zara DeLuca
Department: Communication Disorders - Speech-Language Pathology
Abstract: Standardized speech and language assessments often fail to account for cultural and linguistic diversity, since they are typically norm-referenced, single-word assessments based on mainstream populations, preventing clinicians from recognizing cultural differences in language use (McLeod & Verdon, 2014). To ensure culturally sensitive best practices, incorporating language sampling, which captures spontaneous and naturalistic language use, can provide more accurate diagnoses in all populations. For young children, language sampling typically includes child-led, clinician supported facilitated play with age-appropriate toys. Language samples, typically audio-recorded and transcribed, are analyzed using formal protocols such as Sampling Utterances and Grammatical Analysis Revised (SUGAR) method (Pavelko & Owens, 2022) and/or with clinician calculations of semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic development, such as Mean Length of Utterance (MLU). This study examined whether toys representing diversity (e.g., dolls with different skin tones, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, cochlear implants, and mobility aids) influenced language sample quality across seven measures in eight typically developing preschoolers, with a mean age of 4;5 years. While quantitative analysis found no significant differences in language complexity, qualitative findings revealed that children displayed curiosity and engagement, particularly with toys that depicted disability aids. This suggests that although diverse toys may not directly impact language output, they can foster meaningful conversations about representation and inclusion (Ezmeci et al., 2022). These results underscore the importance of incorporating diverse materials into speech-language therapy, as they support self-recognition and social connection in naturalistic assessment (Long, 2024).

P2.52   *Preventative Intervention through the Addition of Mental Health Personnel in Schools*
Author(s): Arianna Rivera
Faculty Mentor: Walter Belsito
Department: Community Practice
Abstract: Concerns pertaining to mental health are arising early for the youth in our education systems. The emphasis of this crisis emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic, however, effective long-term efforts have still yet to occur pertaining to addressing this issue. Mental health services being made available to youth that are K-8 could be a life altering benefit for this population. The incorporation of mental health personnel into the school day would allow children, faculty, and families to benefit. Research has found that adolescents themselves have identified a need for preventative intervention during childhood. Incorporating mental health personnel during school can help to break mental health stigmas among families and even entire communities.

Trauma that occurs during childhood can have lifelong negative impacts for youth mental health. Having mental health personnel available in schools can aid in increasing education and techniques among school faculty so that they can better understand and aid their students with mental health concerns. This deliverable will emphasize that there is a call to action in regards to how we as social workers are addressing mental health and provide networking opportunities for like minded individuals to bring about change. It should inspire my peers to come together so we can try to minimize the mental health crisis that is going on through the use of preventative intervention for our youth. The goal is to treat trauma early, preventing lifelong mental health issues and thus aid in lessening the imbalance of adult client to provider ratio currently being experienced.

P2.53   *Enhancing Research Efficiency through Custom Project Management Solutions*
Author(s): Richard Mingione
Faculty Mentor: Hrvoje Podnar
Department: Computer Science
Abstract: The Timekeeper project at the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) Center for Nanotechnology (CNT) is designed to streamline project management and administrative tasks with a customized application tailored to CNT's unique needs. Unlike off-the-shelf Microsoft tools, Timekeeper offers greater flexibility and adaptability with a custom application solution. The project is currently in the quality assurance phase where students are actively testing the system, identifying improvements, and refining features to ensure a seamless user experience. Our goal is to roll out the application by Fall 2025, providing a centralized platform for task management, activity tracking, and project coordination for the CNT. Looking ahead, future updates will introduce advanced reporting, data analytics, and deeper workflow integration. By enhancing efficiency and collaboration, the Timekeeper project aims to become a lasting and essential tool for the CSCU Center for Nanotechnology. During this presentation, I will demonstrate the Timekeeper MVP application from both a student user and project lead perspective, highlighting its key features, usability, and impact on project management within the CNT.

P2.54 *Breaking Barriers: The hidden struggles of moms raising kids with disabilities*
Author(s): Yslande Vilsaint
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Foss-Kelly
Department: Counselor Education and Supervision
Abstract: Topic: Living in a World Not Built for People with Disabilities: The Social Isolation of Mothers Raising School-age Children with Physical Disabilities and Its Impact on Their Mental Health and Sense of Identity.
Abstract- This study examines the social isolation experienced by mothers raising school-age children with physical disabilities and its effects on their mental health and sense of identity. While much research has focused on the challenges faced by children with disabilities, this study shifts the focus to the emotional and psychological burden on their primary caregivers.
This research will utilize a qualitative design, employing a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of mothers. Through semi-structured interviews with approximately 10 to 12 mothers, the research aims to identify key factors contributing to social isolation and its effects on mental health, including anxiety, depression, and stress. Additionally, it will explore how caregiving influences mothers' self-concept and identity.
The findings will provide valuable insights for developing better support systems and interventions to reduce isolation and enhance the well-being of mothers caring for children with disabilities. The study aims to improve understanding in the area of caregiving and disability by specifically focusing on mothers of school-age children with physical disabilities. It intends to highlight the challenges they encounter, particularly regarding social isolation and mental health issues. The results will offer significant insights for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and support organizations, helping them create targeted programs to reduce isolation and improve the overall well-being of mothers of children with disabilities.

P2.55 *In the Wake of Restrictions, Interventions Implemented with Urgency: Social Studies as a Harbor for Gender-Based Violence Prevention Programming*
Author(s): Joshua Chlebowski
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Laura Bower-Phipps
Department: Curriculum & Instruction, Equity and Justice in Education Concentration
Abstract: With the phrase "gender-based violence" under scrutiny, and "manosphere" gaining attention in news media, it is vital that work pertaining to the eventual elimination of GBV in society continues, though this present pursuit necessitates careful resistance (Yourish et al., 2025). The social studies curricula provides a space for gender-based violence (GBV) prevention (Vanner, 2022), a harbor for intervention that may prove essential in the wake of restrictions on funding and verbiage (Kiff et al., 2023; Yourish et al., 2025).
Recent studies demonstrate that preventative GBV programming is effective (Garzón Segura & Cardedo González, 2020; Orr et al., 2022) and can be aligned to the educational programming present in schools (Vanner, 2022), raising the importance for further research and analysis on refining available curricular resources to implement them with urgency.
This literature review, utilizing an intersectional framework, aims to imagine the next phase of programming when the nuanced issues of funding (Kiff et al., 2023) and educator hesitation (da Costa & de Oliveira Martins, 2023; Vanner, 2022), in addition to federal pressures (Yourish et al., 2025), stand to impede the opportunity for essential progress presented by this content area to the field of GBV prevention. In providing an examination into the ways that school districts can create a "cover" for such programming, this synthesis of existing research also calls for further exploration on specific curricular opportunities aligned with GBV prevention.

P2.56 *Creative Connections*
Author(s): Carly Weber, Veronica DaSilva
Faculty Mentor: Shelley Stoehr-McCarthy
Department: English, Creative Writing
Abstract: Creative Connections is a collaborative program entering its fourth year of operation, in which MA and MFA students from Southern Connecticut State University's English department work with young New Haven writers experiencing homelessness, aged 18-24, residing at a local crisis shelter. Youth participants and graduate facilitators share their stories and experiences in a variety of written forms, from poetry and fiction to songs and podcasts. We believe that creativity and writing have the power to connect people who might not otherwise have crossed paths. Our goal is to facilitate an inclusive and empathetic writing community where everyone's voices are heard and valued.
Our mission is to connect graduate students from Southern Connecticut State University's English department with local youth experiencing homelessness. By reading and writing literature together in a college writing workshop format, SCSU student facilitators and youth shelter clients learn how to process their life experiences through

creativity and writing and jointly discover ways that art can be a mechanism for social justice. Veronica and I's poster presentation would include the teaching philosophies we've learned through Creative Connections and examples of our prompts and client work.

P2.57 *Decentering the Anthropocene in "Time Passes"*
Author(s): Carly Weber
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Vara Neverow
Department: English
Abstract: The middle chapter of Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse is stylistically and conceptually unlike the first and third. The largely prosodic "Time Passes" is dedicated to long, detailed musings regarding the passage of time and essence of the living world as opposed to "The Window" and "The Lighthouse," which are largely focused on the inner machinations of the Ramsay family and their guests. Important events pertaining to the characters in "Time Passes" take place within square brackets and are surrounded by nature dominated prose. Alternatively, "Time Passes," a chapter dedicated to the environment itself, is bracketed conceptually by "The Window" and "The Lighthouse," chapters that focus almost exclusively on the lives and relationships of the human characters. This established stylistic trope is only inverted in the final bracketed lines in "The Lighthouse" concerning the mackerel cruelly butchered and thrown back to sea, thus creating a visual metaphor for the novel's organizational structure. Woolf manipulates square brackets to decenter the human perspective, and by extension, the anthropocene, in To The Lighthouse, where "anthropocene" refers to the geological epoch in which human activity has the greatest influence on Earth's climate and cycles. Woof's deliberate structuring of her novel places her within the greater conversation of ecocriticism in modernist literary fiction. To the Lighthouse becomes both a critique of the present and a call to acknowledge the natural forces that will outlast human constructs.

P2.58 *A Determination of Mercury Contamination in Dam Impoundment Sediment*
Author(s): Jam Hayton
Faculty Mentor: Vincent Breslin
Department: IBD
Abstract: The considerable number of small dams in Connecticut pose risks for sediment contamination, notably toxic and heavy metal accumulation, which can have cascading effects through aquatic food webs. This study, conducted in collaboration with Save the Sound, the Werth Center for Coastal and Marine Studies, and Southern Connecticut State University, investigated contamination in sediment collected from the dam impoundment at Spring Lot Brook dam in Westbrook, CT. We utilized atomic spectroscopy techniques to measure sediment mercury, zinc, copper, and iron concentrations. Sediment grain-size and organic matter (loss on ignition) were also determined. Our approach provided a comprehensive profile of sediment quality. The results show that surface sediments exhibit elevated levels of mercury and zinc, exceeding the established Threshold Effects Levels. In contrast, deeper sediment layers approach natural background concentrations. The co-variation between mercury and organic matter underscores the significant role of sediment composition in influencing metal speciation and bioaccumulation. These findings emphasize the importance of employing precise analytical techniques in environmental assessments, particularly in the context of dam removal projects aimed at restoring riverine connectivity and sediment transport. This study offers key insights on risk assessment, mitigation strategies, and ecological restoration efforts in freshwater ecosystems.

P2.59 *Biodiversity and water quality impacts of seaweed aquaculture at a sugar kelp farm in Guilford, CT*
Author(s): Katie Wagner, Dr. Emma Cross
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Emma Cross
Department: Integrative Biological Diversity
Abstract: The U.S. seaweed market is currently worth around $300 million and is one of the fastest growing blue economy industries in New England. Sugar kelp is the dominant seaweed species currently being farmed commercially in New England. As a photosynthetic organism, seaweed removes carbon dioxide and increases oxygen in surrounding waters. The blade structure of sugar kelp also provides structure near the surface to provide a potential habitat for organisms. Therefore, seaweed aquaculture could increase local biodiversity and improve water quality. In collaboration with aquaculture industry partners New England Sea Farms, this project is quantifying water quality and biodiversity at a sugar kelp farm in Guilford, CT. Water quality parameters that are being measured are seawater temperature (C), dissolved oxygen (mg/L), pH, specific conductivity (S/cm), salinity (ppt) and turbidity (NTU) using unattended continuously logging Eureka multi-probes. Monthly water samples are also being collected for total alkalinity measurements to determine carbonate chemistry and nutrient analysis to determine nutrient extraction. Biodiversity is being quantified using environmental DNA (eDNA) metabarcoding of monthly seawater samples and

complemented with traditional visual surveys including video analysis from GoPros and plankton tows. These findings will be essential for aiding with sustainably expanding the seaweed aquaculture in CT.

P2.60   *Mobile Hotspot and Laptop Lending in Connecticut Public Libraries*
Author(s): Mia Romano
Faculty Mentor: Saira Soroya
Department: Library and Information Science
Abstract: My research concerns the state of mobile hotspot and laptop lending in Connecticut public libraries. As of the 2023-24 CT State Library Annual Report, there are only 41 of 173 public libraries in CT that loan laptops and 69 that loan hotspots. My research, a survey and a collection of publicly available data, is an expansion on the quantitative data points from the state report. The survey reports data about how and why libraries began their lending programs, how they manage borrowing, how to mitigate borrowing issues, and why libraries may choose not to lend neither mobile hotspots nor laptops. Much of the data, whose collection is currently ongoing, appears to support existing literature about lending programs.

P2.61   *Machine Politics in the Park City: Analyzing Bridgeport, Connecticut's Politics and Public Participation*
Author(s): Ashley Aguilera
Faculty Mentor: Jonathan Wharton
Department: Master of Public Administration
Abstract: The objective of this paper is to create a clear definition of a political machine and measure the extent to which Bridgeport, Connecticut serves as one. Bridgeport is Connecticut's largest city and serves as a case study in discussing political machines and how they affect public participation in the city. Bridgeport also has a history of absentee ballot abuse and fraud during election season, resulting in a lawsuit that challenged the election results in 2023, which gained national attention in recent months. Machine-oriented politics is a continuing issue in Bridgeport and creates lower voter turnout and creates distrust among the voting population.
The methodology employed in this paper uses a qualitative analysis of election results, interviews, city records, and general observations of the democratic town committee and the local government to determine the strength of the political machine in Bridgeport. It is concluded that the city employs political machine tactics to emphasize its political strength in elections and policymaking decisions.
Bridgeport's municipal election results were disputed in 2023 due to allegations of absentee ballot abuse by political operatives, with a special mayoral election in 2024. The court ruling from the civil lawsuit received national attention and established a precedent for the use of absentee ballots, strengthening the policy against abuse. The findings of this research serve as a case study for state legislators and the state's Democratic Party looking to reform and strengthen voting rights in a city where voter turnout is anemic due to the ongoing political machine.

P2.62   *Cybersickness Related to the Use of Extended Reality in Nursing Education: A Case Study*
Author(s): Sara Horniak
Faculty Mentor: Ashlee Mattutini
Department: MSN- Nurse educator
Abstract: This is a constructed case study for the following scenario: You are an academic nurse educator (ANE) working in a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) undergraduate program. The program has recently begun incorporating extended reality (XR), specifically virtual reality (VR), throughout the curriculum to improve clinical decision making. You note that several students are complaining of disorientation, nausea, and headaches while participating in the XR simulation.
This case study will be evaluated from the perspective of an academic nurse educator, including the significance of the problem and the role of the nurse educator in managing cybersickness. The importance of established competencies and standards, including the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education, the National League for Nursing (NLN) Core Competencies for Nurse Educators, and the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) Competencies for Graduate Students are explored. The Theory of Planned Behavior is applied to guide prevention and management strategies, and recommendations for handling this real-world scenario are discussed.

P2.63 *HHMI SEA-GENES Project: Molecular Cloning of Uncharacterized ABCat Bacteriophage Genome to Elucidate Gene Function*
Author(s): Sydney Smith-Romanski, Julia Grant
Faculty Mentor: Nicholas Edgington
Department: Non-Degree Graduate Student, Biology

Abstract: Bacteriophages are viruses that infect bacteria and use different molecular strategies to pilfer cellular resources. These bacteriophages present unique research targets for overcoming antibiotic resistance and modifying genomes of different organisms. During the HHMI SEA-PHAGES project, students isolated novel bacteriophages from soil samples at Southern Connecticut State University and used bioinformatics techniques to sequence their genomes. Within these genomes, there are genes which encode proteins whose role in viral replication is unknown. Here in the HHMI SEA-GENES project, we used molecular cloning techniques to isolate five of these previously uncharacterized genes from one of the bacteriophages, named ABCat, which was discovered in SEA-PHAGES. In our experiments, we isolated DNA fragments containing our genes and inserted these fragments into larger bacterial DNA strands, called pExTra plasmids. We transformed E. coli by inserting pExTra, which had been modified with ABCat genes, into E. coli bacterial cells and allowing the genetically modified bacteria to propagate. We were able to extract and purify the pExTra plasmids carrying ABCat genes out of the E. coli cells and verified that the plasmids were constructed correctly. Our results will allow for cytotoxic, defense, and protein-protein interaction assays to be performed on these novel ABCat genes. These functional assays can elucidate gene function and viral pathways used by bacteriophages. Functional characterization of these gene products can add to our collective molecular knowledge and be applied to molecular biology, genomics research, genome engineering, and human health.

P2.64 *Academic Misconduct: A Case Study on Cheating in Nursing Education*
Author(s): Elizabeth Feest
Faculty Mentor: Ashlee Mattutini
Department: Nursing

Abstract: The following clinical vignette will be evaluated through the perspective of an academic nurse educator: You are an Academic Nurse Educator (ANE) working in a Bachelor of Nursing Science (BSN) undergraduate program teaching an adult health course. You note that a young undergraduate nursing student, who has performed poorly on previous exams, frequently looks around the room and then down into her lap. It appears that the student has access to an outside resource while completing the exam.
This evaluation will address competencies defined by The American Association of Colleges of Nursing Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education (The Essentials) as well as the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN). Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory will serve as a guiding theory during the evaluation of this clinical vignette. Lastly, recommendations for handling real-world scenarios involving academic dishonesty will be discussed.

P2.65 *Language Accommodations for Nursing Students: A Case Study*
Author(s): Megan Durbak
Faculty Mentor: Ashlee Mattutini
Department: Nursing Education

Clinical Vignette: An undergraduate nursing student at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) is enrolled in his first fall semester of the nursing program. He is older than the average undergrad, English is not his first language and has a family. After his first couple of exams of the semester he is struggling to maintain a passing average. He scheduled a meeting with his advisor and expressed frustration. He reports that he spends hours doing the assigned readings and is finding it difficult to complete the exams in the allotted timeframe. When his advisor inquired about how other aspects of school were going, such as lab, interactions with his fellow students or clinicals, the student reported that he was going to lab but not really talking to his peers and finds himself avoiding situations in which he has to demonstrate the skills he is learning and has not made any friends at school. The student is debating if he should continue in the nursing program.
The constructed case study will be evaluated from the perspective of an academic nurse educator. Topics discussed are significance and prevalence, applicable competencies such as safety and promoting learning and socialization, guidelines that apply to the situation, and how constructivist teaching theory applies to the study. Recommendations for handling a real-world scenario are discussed.

P2.66   *Focused Intervention for Phonological Awareness Skill Development with Kindergarten Children in a Suburban Public School*

Author(s): Valeria Sotomayor-Rodriguez
Faculty Mentor: Richard Zipoli
Department: Speech-Language Pathology

Abstract: Findings are presented on the impact of a combination of classroom and targeted small-group instruction designed to increase phonological awareness skills for kindergarten students showing signs of risk in the development of their phonological awareness skills. Speech-language pathology graduate students measured their phonological awareness skills pre- and post- intervention utilizing classroom instruction, small group intervention with the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Curriculum (HPAC). Students learned skills pertaining to phonological awareness and practiced generalization of skills in the classroom.

P2.67   *Unpacking Burnout and Compassion Fatigue in Toxic Social Work Environments: The Role of Knowledge, Motivation, and Self Care Training.*

Author(s): Ebonee Little
Faculty Mentor: Joyce Taylor
Department: Social Work

Abstract: This study evaluated the impact of a 60-minute self-care training program on social workers' motivation, well-being, and job effectiveness in the context of burnout and compassion fatigue within toxic work environments. The research examined both individual practices and systemic factors affecting social workers' well-being. Using a pre-test/post-test design, the study collected data from 18 participants (94.4% female, African American (55.6%), followed by White/Caucasian (27.8%), Hispanic or Latino (5.6%), and 11.1% who preferred not to disclose their ethnicity.) The age distribution varied among respondents, with 33.3% aged 55-64, 22.2% aged 35-44, 22.2% in the 65+ category, 11.1% aged 45-54, and 5.6% in the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups. A majority (88.9%) of respondents held a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, while 11.1% had a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), 72.2% of respondents were licensed social workers, while 27.8% were not. The research explored how knowledge of burnout and self-care practices influences social workers' abilities, what motivational factors contribute to self-care engagement, effective strategies to mitigate toxic work environments, and how such environments affect compassion fatigue and burnout. Data analysis revealed significant improvements in participants' understanding of self-care concepts after training, with mean scores increasing from 76.77 to 87.41 and decreased standard deviation indicating more consistent comprehension. Interestingly, greater awareness of workplace issues correlated negatively with self-care engagement, suggesting knowledge alone may not translate to practice. The research identified key strategies for maintaining work-life balance, with participants showing strong agreement on the importance of self-care principles. The findings underline the effectiveness of brief training interventions in improving social workers' knowledge while acknowledging the complex relationship between awareness and implementation. This study contributes to understanding how individual self-care practices interact with broader organizational contexts, emphasizing the need for comprehensive approaches that address both personal strategies and systemic workplace factors. Recommendations for systemic interventions include prioritizing supportive work environments and addressing structural barriers that impede self-care practices, ultimately aiming to improve the quality of life and job effectiveness for social workers in high-stress settings.

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