

HONORS COLLOQUIUM

Spring 2026



PROGRAM OF ABSTRACTS

for Honors Thesis Projects submitted by undergraduate students completing the USD Honors Program in May 2026.

Thesis projects will be presented to the public during short oral presentations on May 2, 2026 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Learning Commons on the University of San Diego campus.



















SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

- 9:00 a.m.** *Refreshments & Welcome*
- 9:15 a.m.** Student Presentations (Block A)
- 10:15 a.m.** *Break*
- 10:30 a.m.** Student Presentations (Block B)
- 11:30 a.m.** *Lunch*
- 12:30 p.m.** Student Presentations (Block C)
- 1:30 p.m.** *Break*
- 1:45 p.m.** Student Presentations (Block D)

Table of Contents

Student Presentation Schedule	Pg 6
Abstracts (alphabetically by academic discipline)	
ACCOUNTING	Pg 7
Kaitlyn Hradnansky ↗	
ANTHROPOLOGY	Pg 7
Betsy Ploudre ↗	
Madeleine Turco ↗	
ARCHITECTURE	Pg 8
Josie Balish ↗	
BIOCHEMISTRY	Pg 9
Jonathan Martin ↗	
Nicolas Narloch ↗	
Claire Szniewajs ↗	
Katrina Zhang ↗	
BIOMEDICAL ETHICS	Pg 11
Julia Robinson ↗	
BIOLOGY	Pg 11
Victoria Garcia ↗	
Josiah Lee ↗	
Sarah McCormack ↗	
Ruby Stinson ↗	
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION	Pg 13
Chrystalyn Alvidrez-Lee ↗	
Cataleen Flores ↗	
Caitlin Horvath ↗	
Grace Morgan ↗	
Amanda Seitz ↗	

BUSINESS ANALYTICS	Pg 16
Preston Dorand ↗	
CHEMISTRY	Pg 16
Aubrie Ackland ↗	
Fiona Allen ↗	
Moriah McLellan ↗	
JD Mouri ↗	
COMMUNICATION	Pg 18
Sarah Boland ↗	
Kristiana Krasteva ↗	
DIGITAL HUMANITIES	Pg 19
Gianna Eaton ↗	
ENGLISH	Pg 20
Lara Dominique Solante ↗	
Shea Salamack ↗	
ECONOMICS	Pg 21
Maryann Michlovich ↗	
Elena Williams ↗	
ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCEAN SCIENCES	Pg 22
Sofia Aguayo ↗	
Kevin Curran ↗	
Maya Merchant ↗	
FINANCE	Pg 23
Macy Cherneff ↗	
Devon Eder ↗	
Nick George ↗	
Meghan Ryan ↗	
INTEGRATED ENGINEERING	Pg 25
Logan Scottlind ↗	
Caley Tamondong ↗	

Danielle Thompson 	
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS	Pg 27
Emma Alvarez 	
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	Pg 27
Ashley Perri 	
LIBERAL STUDIES	Pg 28
Leila Francisco 	
MARKETING	Pg 28
Maren Bronson 	
Lauren Carpeneti 	
Alexandra Milshtein 	
MATHEMATICS	Pg 30
Madison Gambon 	
MUSIC and COMPUTER SCIENCE	Pg 30
Kian Drees 	
NEUROSCIENCE	Pg 31
Kate Buehrig 	
Avery Ehrlich 	
Gianna Figueroa 	
Karla Saldana 	
Sophia Skubic 	
Mackensey Speirs 	
PHILOSOPHY	Pg 34
Ava Azucenas 	
PHYSICS	Pg 34
Lila Fowler 	
Albert Ogradski 	

POLITICAL SCIENCE

Pg 35

Tanner Blackington 

Maeve Egger 

Salome Medina 

Drew Pollard 

Camille Van Bruaene 

PSYCHOLOGY

Pg 38

Spoorthi Aedma 


Allison Branch 

Faith Gideon 

Grace LaKose 

Irianna Morales 

Ava Ribando 

Clara Smith 

Mae Vanderslice 

Umi Sharif Ali 

SOCIOLOGY

Pg 42

Maribel Acevedo 

SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

Pg 43

Lillian Demman 

Schedule of Thesis Presentations

	Learning Commons, Room 103	Learning Commons, Room 104	Learning Commons, Room 105	Learning Commons, Room 202	Learning Commons, Room 204	Learning Commons, Room 206
Block A 9:15 AM	Kian Drees (MUSC/Adler) Kate Buehrig (NEUR/Hales) Meghan Ryan (FINA/Raczkowski)	Lauren Carpeneti (MKTG/Nusrat) Maribel Acevedo (SOCI/Martinez) Katrina Zhang (BIOC/Bell)	Danielle Thompson (GENG/Lord) Gianna Figueroa (NEUR/Bonds) Lara Dominique Solante (CRWR/Perin-Coombs)	Devon Eder (FINA/Ceballos) Maya Merchant (EOSC/Taddeo) Maeve Egger (POLS/Tirrell)	Macy Cherneff (FINA/Svetina) Kristiana Krasteva (COMM/Chung) Albert Ogrodski (PHYS/Dezen)	Ava Azucenas (PHIL/Jones) Allison Branch (PSYC/Forster) Ruby Stinson (BIOL/Fleming-Davies)
Break - 10:15 AM						
Block B 10:30 PM	Leila Francisco (LIBS/McClain) Avery Ehrlich (NEUR/Hales) Lily Demman (SCM/Brown)	Claire Sznewajs (BIOC/Bell) Tanner Blackington (POLS/Stepnitz) Mae Vanderslice (PSYC/Galvan)	Ava Ribando (PSYC/Wanic) Caley Tamondong (GENG/Lord) Kaitlyn Hradnansky (ACCT/Smith)	Kevin Curran (EOSC/Taddeo) Salome Medina (POLS/McCarty) Chrystalyn Alvidrez-Lee (BUSN/Barkacs)	Lila Fowler (PHYS/Kishimoto) Nick George (FINA/Roccatto) Grace LaKose (PSYC/Getz)	Grace Morgan (BUSN/Demas) Julia Robinson (BIOE/Tillman) Fiona Allen (CHEM/Daley)
Lunch - 11:30 AM						
Block C 12:30 PM	Sophia Skubic (NEUR/Hales) Caitlin Horvath (BUSN/Brown) Betsy Ploudre (ANTH/Syring)	Jonathan Martin (BIOC/Bell) Camille Van Bruaene (POLS/Statler) Karla Saldana (NEUR/Walcott)	Faith Gideon (PSYC/Wanic) Josiah Lee (BIOL/John Bell) Emma Alvarez (ISBN/Daspro)	Madison Gambon (MATH/Parker) Irianna Morales (PSYC/Berkley) Shea Salamack (CRWR/Duraj)	Sarah McCormack (BIOL/Tran) Alexandra Milshtein (MKTG/Flynn) Sarah Boland (COMM/Stern)	Logan Scottlind (GENG/Chen) Josie Balish (ARCH/Lopez-Perez) Maryann Michlovich (ECON/Vamosiu)
Break - 1:30 PM						
Block D 1:45 PM	Aubrie Ackland (CHEM/De Haan) Madeleine Tureo (ANTH/Parkinson) Cataleen Flores (BUSN/Brown)	Preston Dorand (BUAN/Xiao) Victoria Garcia (BIOL/Haberman) Mackensy Speirs (NEUR/Walcott)	Drew Pollard (POLS/Crawford) Nicolas Narloch (BIOC/Jessica Bell) Clara Smith (PSYC/Wanic)	Elena Williams (ECON/Campbell) JD Mouri (CHEM/Gillette) Spoorthi Aedma (PSYC/Berkley)	Sofia Aguayo (EOSC/Avila) Uni Sharif Ali (PSYC/Rosas) Maren Bronson (MKTG/Nahavandi)	Ashley Perri (IREL/Willoughby) Amanda Seitz (BUSN/Salinas) Gianna Eaton (HUMN/Tallie)
End - 2:45 PM						

Learning Commons 204	
April 27 4:30 PM	Moriah McLellan (CHEM/Schellinger)

ABSTRACTS

(listed alphabetically by academic disciplines)

ACCOUNTING

KAITLYN HRADNANSKY

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jim Smith, Accounting

How AI Model Collapse and Capacity for Critical Analysis Affects its Ability to Detect Financial Misstatement

This paper examines whether AI should be used to implement internal controls and conduct audits, or whether it simply creates new practical and ethical pitfalls. Due to large-scale fraud in the early 2000s and the ensuing financial crisis, lawmakers made changes in requirements for companies' internal controls and auditing. However, flaws remain in both the implementation of internal controls and the audit process. Not only are auditors and internal controls expected to expose and, in the latter case, prevent fraud, but they also ensure financial statements are an accurate representation of financial events. By assessing and potentially implementing new technologies, these challenges may be addressed. AI is being implemented in many industries, including accounting. In addition to its current uses, it could fill the holes that currently exist in internal controls and audit. However, AI has its own challenges and may create new gaps.

ANTHROPOLOGY

BETSY PLOUDRE

Thesis Advisor: Dr. David Syring, Anthropology

Stories after Sundown

Darkness provides a unique backdrop for stories to unfold. When we travel away from light pollution and look up at the night sky, we are primed to gaze at the stars and tell stories. It is uniquely human to spend time contemplating things beyond our understanding. While we don't know when or why humans first began using the stars for storytelling and meaning-making, the practice has endured. For us, the night sky is an opportunity to reflect. People often fall into the trap of believing the stories they've heard are the only ones. It can be an eye-opening experience to discover the vast variety of narratives that exist. Because the night sky already inspires a sense of wonder and awe, it leaves us primed to question our existing beliefs. As such, it is a uniquely powerful time to encourage people to decolonize their mindsets. There are as many stories out there as there are stars in the sky. No one owns the heavens, and everyone has their own story to tell.

MADELEINE TURCO

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jennifer Parkinson, Anthropology

A Shared Sentence: How Ape Sign Language Informs Our Understanding of Human Language and its Origins

Early linguists, like Rene Descartes, believed humans alone were born with an innate propensity for language, validated by the failed attempts to teach apes to speak. However, as the gestural origins theory of human language gained momentum, researchers began teaching apes to use American Sign Language (ASL), coming to opposing conclusions. While some argued ape signing showed they are capable of language, others believed it was mere mimicry to gain a food reward. This literature review contends that the success of these projects hinged on the method of sign instruction. By evaluating the pedagogical techniques used, I determined that apes introduced to signing as an approach to social communication signed more frequently than apes taught to sign through repetitive, rewards-based instruction. For both, apes were not able to reach the complexity of human language, but their capabilities shattered the Cartesian wall and challenged anthropocentric views of language and cognition.

ARCHITECTURE

JOSIE BALISH

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Daniel López-Pérez, Architecture

Second Life: Revitalizing Portland's Industrial Architecture

In Portland, Oregon, early twentieth-century industrial buildings have been increasingly repurposed through adaptive reuse, these projects prioritizing sustainability, economic efficiency and speed. In the Northeast Broadway district, the former OK Jeffery Aircraft Factory, later turned Gordon's Fireplace Shop and now abandoned, offers a special opportunity to utilize architecture as a preserver of local identity, ethical responsibility, and material care. Through analysis of the building's material composition, existing condition, and degradation patterns, this project explores what it means to reuse decaying industrial spaces beyond tools of profit or aesthetic. This investigation explores architecture as a tool of empathy and historical grounding which reinvigorates spaces and communities.

Architectural adaptive reuse functions as an ethical practice that builds relationships between communities across generations. Through the production of material inventories, salvage maps, and reuse plans, this project reveals how architectural preservation design is the key in transforming industrial heritage in rapidly developing urban spaces.

BIOCHEMISTRY

JONATHAN MARTIN

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Anthony Bell, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Inhibition of Aminoacyl-tRNA Synthetases by Truncated tRNAs

Aminoacyl-tRNA synthetases (aaRSs) are essential for maintaining translational fidelity by charging tRNAs with their cognate amino acids. Alanine-tRNA synthetase (AlaRS) specifically charges tRNA-Ala with alanine. This project establishes a controlled system to examine how perturbations in AlaRS-dependent aminoacylation influence protein translation and cellular Viability. Despite their specificity, some aaRSs, including AlaRS, can recognize shorter substrates such as tRNA minihelices. tRNA minihelices are truncated tRNAs that retain key identity elements for synthetase recognition but lack structural features required for ribosomal translation. Because of this, they can act as decoys that engage AlaRS and divert activity away from full-length tRNA-Ala, to disrupt normal translation elongation. To establish control conditions to challenge AlaRS expression with tRNA minihelices. Preliminary observations show fewer AlaRS colonies are based on growth/expansion time. These conditions will be selected to challenge tRNA-Ala minihelices. We expect a minimal number of clones will be generated in the presence of minihelices. Resulting clones will be expressed, purified to determine the presence of full-length or truncated proteins. This system provides a platform to study how disrupting tRNA charging impacts translation and may inform strategies for targeting aminoacyl-tRNA synthetases.

NICOLAS NARLOCH

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jessica Bell, Chemistry and Biochemistry

The Adsorption Enigma: Deciphering How Surface Binding Determines the Fate of Salivary Cystatin Function

Within the realm of dentistry, one of the foremost ways to avoid costly treatment is through preventative health measures. In our mouth, there is a saliva protein that acts as a natural defense called Cystatin SA. Cystatin breaks down damaging thiol proteases produced by bad bacteria which cause cavities. Prior research suggests that Cystatin SA can interact with hydroxyapatite (HA), the primary component of tooth enamel. An unanswered question in this field is how the Cystatin SA:HA interaction influences this protein's function. The purpose of my study is twofold: to quantitate the binding affinity between Cystatin SA and an HA surface, and determine how this interaction impacts cystatin's function. This research provides the groundwork for the fabrication of an enhanced Cystatin SA protein that can be used as an additive to toothpaste to help prevent the myriad of health problems that spawn out of oral diseases.

CLAIRE SZNEWAJS

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Anthony Bell, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Characterization of single-strand DNA substrates of the DNA-binding proinflammatory cytokine, HMGB1

High mobility group box protein 1 (HMGB1) is a non-histone nuclear protein with DNA-binding activity. Although primarily localized to the nucleus, HMGB1 is also present in the cytoplasm and extracellular space, where it contributes to immune activation. In the cytoplasm, HMGB1 binds immunogenic single-stranded CpG oligodeoxynucleotides (CpG ODNs), promoting inflammatory signaling. This interaction has been exploited therapeutically to sequester HMGB1 and limit its binding to extracellular immune receptors, thereby reducing pro-inflammatory effects. However, the structural basis underlying HMGB1–CpG ODN binding remains poorly understood. In this study, computational modeling and circular dichroism were used to investigate the structural features of CpG ODNs involved in HMGB1 binding. CpG ODN sequences reported in prior therapeutic studies were modeled and docked using AutoDock Vina and AlphaFold. Although computational results were inconclusive, circular dichroism revealed various structural insights into CpG ODN-HMGB1 interaction.

KATRINA ZHANG

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Anthony Bell, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Screening flavanone/chalcone derivatives against DNA-binding cytokine, High Mobility Group B1

Several studies have determined the uncontrolled release of HMGB1, an abundant conserved non-histone nuclear protein, can result in a variety of harmful effects, such as amplifying proinflammatory signaling that worsens autoimmune diseases including rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus, and sepsis. Scientists believe that blocking harmful HMGB1 activity could mitigate inflammation to remedy these diseases. A prior study showed that a small flavanone molecule could inhibit HMGB1 inflammatory signaling. The study, however, did not indicate a specific binding mechanism of the small molecules toward HMGB1. Therefore we utilized a combination of fluorescence thermal shift assays (FTS) and circular dichroism (CD) to determine the inhibitory effectiveness and characterize the binding mechanism of various small flavanones and chalcones molecules. The long-term objective is to identify flavanones and chalcones that could be developed as therapeutic inhibitors of HMGB1 in cell-based studies.

BIOMEDICAL ETHICS

JULIA ROBINSON

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jennifer Tillman, Philosophy

Molecular Vulnerability and moral responsibility: the ethical and public health consequences of inadequate post-operative follow-up care for border fall patients

This honors thesis examines the biochemical, ethical, and public health consequences of insufficient post-operative follow-up care for undocumented immigrants injured in border falls. Discussing pathways of inflammation resolution, wound healing, and bone remodeling, this thesis argues that recovery depends on tightly regulated molecular and cellular processes that are highly vulnerable to disruption without continued monitoring and rehabilitation. When follow-up care is absent, these processes can be predicted to derail, leading to infection, impaired healing, and permanent disability. Framed through principles of biomedical and public health ethics including justice and equity, this thesis contends that current care practices constitute an ethically significant omission rather than a neutral resource limitation. Inadequate continuity produces foreseeable, preventable harm, widens health disparities, and increases long-term healthcare costs through avoidable complications and rehospitalization. Improving follow-up care is therefore both a moral obligation independent of citizenship status and a biologically substantiated public health intervention.

BIOLOGY

VICTORIA GARCIA

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Adam Haberman, Biology

Effects of Amyloid Beta on Rhodopsin Accumulation in Endolysosomal Systems of Aging Drosophila Melanogaster

Alzheimer's Disease (AD) affects over 6.9 million older Americans and is characterized by the neurotoxic accumulation of amyloid-beta (A β) plaques. The endolysosomal system is a vital network of membrane-bound vesicles responsible for the sorting and degrading of protein waste. Dysregulation of this system prevents the degradation of A β , which triggers accelerated neural cell death. This study utilizes *Drosophila Melanogaster* to examine endolysosomal degradation by analyzing how amyloid induces rhodopsin accumulation within endosomes and lysosomes. Focusing on light-sensitive defects allows us to target a single element of the complex Alzheimer's pathology. Understanding these mechanisms in a streamlined model provides a critical framework for identifying localized cellular targets for future drug development and therapies.

JOSIAH LEE

Thesis Advisor: Dr. John E. Bell, Biology

Sugar-Coated Sabotage: Re-engineering a Sweet Protein to Shut Down Thiol Proteases in the Mouth

Around 22% of the population suffer from Dry-Mouth disease leading to higher amounts of dental decay and gum disease. Low saliva production from this disease also significantly stunts production of salivary cystatin, thiol protease inhibitors, that protect your teeth from bacteria that use thiol proteases to colonize your tooth enamel. Current studies in this field aim to salivary cystatin, with the end goal of synthesizing a cheap topical application for your teeth. Through these studies, it has been understood how extensive the family of cystatins are, with hundreds of structural variants existing across most eukaryotic organisms. We have found a protein structurally similar to Cystatin which is a plant sweetener called Monellin. Through computational modeling we have identified regions of monellin that could be mutated to include the inhibitory sequence of Salivary Cystatin SA, giving the potential outcome of creating a fully functional sweet thiol protease inhibitor.

SARAH MCCORMACK

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Cawa Tran, Biology

*The Gut-Brain Connection in a Cnidarian Model: Microbiome Rehabilitation and Neural Function in Sea Anemone *Exaiptasia diaphana**

Essential to health, but incredibly complex, the connection between the gastrointestinal tract and the brain ignites curiosity in the outcome of manipulating the gut to influence the central nervous system. The sea anemone, Aiptasia, shares a distant common ancestor with humans and is one of the first animals to develop a primitive nervous system. Aiptasia can model gut-microbiome depletion and rehabilitation, providing insight into the origins of the gut-brain axis. Antibiotics were administered to Aiptasia, while control-group anemones received sterile seawater. Then, Aiptasia were homogenized and plated on marine agar to evaluate bacterial growth. Activity of the neuropeptide FMRFamide was also assessed with antibody staining and fluorescence microscopy. Following depletion, the gut microbiome was rehabilitated with the beneficial bacterium, *Tritonibacter mobilis*. Depletion of the gut microbiome in Aiptasia affects neuropeptide functioning within the nervous system, but beneficial bacteria offer an opportunity to recover and improve host health.

RUBY STINSON

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Fleming-Davies, Biology

Genetic variation in a butterfly virus across varying precipitation patterns in the U.S.

The Gulf Fritillary butterfly, *Dione (Agraulis) vanillae*, is found in the southern states of the US where their larvae consume passion flower (*Passiflora*) plants. *A. vanillae* larvae are commonly infected with AgvaNPV, a virus that infects the larva's midgut when it consumes viral occlusion bodies (OBs) which adhere to *Passiflora* leaves. Climate change has caused substantial global shifts in precipitation, with cascading effects on ecological dynamics such as disease. Considering that rainfall can wash OBs from the leaves of *Passiflora*, I asked whether AgvaNPV's genetic variation allows its OBs to adhere to *Passiflora* and infect larvae even in high rainfall climates. In summer 2025, 603 *D. vanillae* larvae were collected across Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas; higher infection rates were observed in the higher-precipitation southeast compared to the west. We then sequenced whole genomes for a subset of virus isolates and compared them in search of adaptive variations.

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

CHRYSALYN ALVIDREZ-LEE

Thesis Advisor: Professor Linda Barkacs, Business Law

Arbitration: A Hidden Villain to Justice and Accountability or A Necessary Evil?

The use of mandatory arbitration clauses in contracts has been on the rise, possibly impacting consumers' access to justice, transparency, and corporate accountability. These types of clauses have become increasingly common in consumer contracts, waiving consumers' rights to dispute their conflicts through litigation. Consumers are faced with decisions that are final, binding, and confidential, crossing the line of infringing on what was intended as our original constitutional rights to a fair, public, and speedy trial. My thesis analyzed the legal foundations of the trends in arbitration, the barriers it creates for consumers, and how it limits public oversight. Using a meta-analysis of research, I evaluate whether mandatory arbitration sacrifices fairness and accountability of corporations for the "benefit" of efficiency. I raise questions about the effectiveness of recent policy developments and reform efforts in addressing these concerns. Overall, is arbitration a hidden villain to justice, or is it a necessary evil?

CATALEEN FLORES

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jacquelyn Brown, Management and Law and Ethics

Business with Purpose: Exploring the Financial and Social Benefits of Corporate Social Responsibility Regarding Community Relations and DEIB Initiatives

Previously, businesses held a sole focus on producing profit for shareholders without concern for other stakeholders. However, over the past decades, more corporations have slowly recognized the societal benefit and financial incentive from social impact initiatives, leading to further implementation in their organizational structure. This literature review explores the financial and social benefits of the people side of corporate social responsibility, specifically philanthropy, with a focus on Community Relations and ethical labor practices, when focusing on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB).

Within the two distinctions, there is a deeper discovery of the detailed benefits and barriers to overcome when integrating. Finally, this review provides suggestions to add or expand on previously established methods, from simple volunteering events to fully transitioning the organization to a purpose-driven structure or a social enterprise, all with the goal of not only strengthening business practices but also striving for societal advancement.

CAITLIN HORVATH

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jacquelyn Brown, Management and Law and Ethics

Visual Storytelling in Business Leadership Communication: Enhancing Strategic Clarity and Stakeholder Engagement

Traditional leadership communication often suffers from “blurry vision bias,” a cognitive hurdle where abstract language and information overload prevent followers from forming a clear mental picture of a leader’s goals. In information-dense corporate environments, conventional bullet-point presentations and rigid slide formats are increasingly insufficient for engaging modern audiences. This study investigates how business leaders systematically utilize visual storytelling—including presentations, infographics, and interactive design—to inspire teams and mobilize stakeholders. To translate abstract visions into tangible understanding, leaders must apply structured frameworks that optimize how information is processed and perceived. Cognitive Load Theory offers guidance for minimizing extraneous information and improving decision-making through clear, hierarchical design. Additional frameworks, such as Narrative Transportation Theory and the Cognitive Cube Model, can further immerse stakeholders in cohesive narratives that create emotional engagement and trust. Furthermore, emerging tools such as AI-powered design, augmented reality, and the CCT Framework (Creator, Content, Timing) are analyzed for their ability to deliver personalized, high-impact messages.

Ultimately, this study recommends that leaders prioritize minimalist visual hierarchies to reduce cognitive load, utilize human-centric narratives to create emotional resonance, and leverage emerging interactive technologies to ensure inclusive, high-impact communication across diverse global landscapes. Effective visual storytelling in corporate leadership enhances decision accuracy, strengthens investor credibility, and supports improved market performance. These strategies also function as critical cultural bridges, leveraging multimodal communication to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers within diverse, global teams.

GRACE MORGAN

Thesis Advisor: Professor John Demas, Real Estate

Zoning, Density, and Housing Affordability in Pacific Beach

This essay examines the housing crisis in Pacific Beach, California, focusing on how administrative and legal barriers constrain housing density and affordability. Existing policies, including zoning maps, development fees, lawsuits, process times, and building codes, help preserve community character, coastal access, and property value, but they limit housing development. Through an exploratory, comparable case study analysis of Atlantic City, New Jersey; Daytona Beach, Florida; Waikiki, Hawaii; and other cities, this research evaluates how similar coastal communities balance density, affordability, and neighborhood preservation. By analyzing local land-use rules and administrative barriers, the study explores the relationship between regulatory constraints and housing accessibility. The findings aim to identify that zoning law adjustments could increase housing availability in Pacific Beach. This research contributes to broader discussions on sustainable urban planning in high-demand beach communities.

AMANDA SEITZ

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Tara Salinas, Business Ethics

Just Take the Job: Why Gen Z Graduates Are Settling and What It's Costing Them

Currently, Gen Z workers are recording the lowest levels of job satisfaction in history. This is a result of a highly competitive job market in which new graduates are pressured to prioritize securing employment over job satisfaction. I am partnering with Dr. Tara Salinas to investigate how graduating University of San Diego students are approaching post-graduation career decisions, specifically whether employer benefit packages are being considered in the job search process. By collecting university-specific data through surveying graduating University of San Diego students, I hope to draw institution-specific conclusions and offer solutions to increase awareness of workplace happiness on our campus. I anticipate that my findings will demonstrate that Gen Z workers are not considering employer benefit packages in their job search decisions. This thesis will argue that job satisfaction deserves equal consideration to salary when making post-graduation career decisions.

BUSINESS ANALYTICS

PRESTON DORAND

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Wenli Xiao, Operations and Supply Chain Management

The Transformation of Analytics in Sports

At the turn of the 21st century, technological advancement reshaped industries worldwide, including professional sports. Organizations increasingly adopted analytical frameworks, leveraging advanced software systems and performance metrics to inform and optimize decision-making on and off the field. Industry professionals frequently cite the film and book, *Moneyball*, as a cultural turning point that brought data driven methodologies to the forefront. Since that period, professional sports, especially baseball, have evolved from foundational sabermetric theory into a complex data ecosystem characterized by high-resolution tracking technologies, pitch modeling, player valuation systems, and matchup optimization models. My thesis examined how sports organizations operationalized data-driven platforms and how it has shifted sports. Through qualitative interviews with executives and analysts, supplemented by analysis of public analytical resources, the research evaluated the impact of analytics on organizations. My findings indicated that analytics emerged as central mechanisms of competitive advantage and will continue shaping strategic decision-making in professional sports.

CHEMISTRY

AUBRIE ACKLAND

Thesis Advisor: Dr. David De Haan, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Optical Properties of Brown Carbon Aerosols in Aged Smoke

As global temperatures rise, the intensity and frequency of wildfires has accelerated, impacting climate feedback cycles and human health. Of particular concern are the effects of smoke plumes, which are capable of spreading across large areas and contain a complex composition of aerosols and gases. The organic products within smoke, called brown carbon (BrC), have only recently gained widespread attention, and their behavior within atmospheric systems is not well understood. Insight into the optical characteristics of BrC is vital to improved climate modeling and understanding the impact of wildfires on the atmosphere. In order to investigate the optical changes of BrC in the laboratory, experiments were conducted in a suspended aerosol system with sunlight, mimicking real-world conditions of smoke. Results of these studies include selected optical characteristics of aged aerosols, with an emphasis on the differences between humidity levels, oxidants, and the type of biomass burned.

FIONA ALLEN

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Christopher Daley, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Shaking Hands: Synthesis of Enantioselective Metal Catalysts

In the synthesis of small molecules such as pharmaceuticals, precision is essential. Even minor differences in molecular structure can impact how the body metabolizes a compound, determining whether it provides effective treatment, is benign, or causes serious, even life-threatening side effects. For this reason, developing reliable methods to control structural selectivity is a central focus in chemistry. One approach is the use of enantioselective metal catalysts, which allow chemists to selectively produce only one desired molecular orientation during synthesis. The Daley lab has designed and produced a family of potentially enantioselective metal catalysts for use in a variety of chemical reactions. Through the many stages of synthesis, purification, and analysis, this project aims to tell the complete story of the Daley ligand, with the goal of ultimately demonstrating their effective selectivity in small-molecule synthesis.

MORIAH MCLELLAN

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Tim Clark, Chemistry and Biochemistry & Dr. Joan Schellinger, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Expedient Synthesis of Arylphosphonates through the Direct Coupling of Arylboronate Esters with Dialkyl Phosphites

Arylphosphonates are widely used compounds with applications in catalysis as well as agricultural and pharmaceutical industries. Reactions that directly form carbon-phosphorus bonds have been developed to simplify access to these compounds. Known methods generally use arylboronic acids, which are effective, but limited in reactivity and scope. The direct coupling of arylboronate esters with organophosphorus reagents is of particular interest due to the numerous known methods to install boronate esters into simple arenes. In this work, palladium-catalyzed coupling of dialkylphosphites with arylboronate esters was developed using microwave heating after testing a variety of conditions. The reaction provides arylphosphonates in moderate to good yields, tolerating a wide range of functional groups. A two-step reaction sequence was also developed, beginning with a known C-H borylation reaction to provide the boronate ester, followed by the C-P coupling reaction, allowing for the synthesis of arylphosphonates from inexpensive, readily available starting materials.

JD MOURI

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Eleanor Gillette, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Compositional Analysis of Metal Alloy Electrochemical Cobalt/Nickel Electrodes

Metal alloy electrochemical catalysts were prepared using electrodeposition of nickel and cobalt under varying current and voltage conditions. These electrodes were analyzed both for their reactivity as catalysts in oxidation reactions using cyclic voltammetry and compositionally using scanning electron microscopy, x-ray photoelectron spectroscopy, and elemental analysis. This combination of techniques was used for analyzing and understanding the alloy depositions and the resulting catalytic activity. Broadly, this study found that the alteration of certain deposition variables can affect the deposited cobalt to nickel ratio, altering the electrochemical catalytic ability of the electrodes in reactive species such as glucose. In the future, these insights can inform improved design of devices like non-enzymatic glucose sensors.

COMMUNICATION

SARAH BOLAND

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Susannah Stern, Communication

Anonymity and Social Belonging: A Case Study of Campus-Based Social Media at the University of San Diego

College students frequently use campus-based anonymous social media apps like Yik Yak and *Fizz* to connect with others at their school. While prior research suggests that anonymity in digital spaces can facilitate harassment and diminish belonging, it is also possible that these apps foster connection and everyday community, particularly in university contexts. To examine this understudied possibility, this study explores undergraduates' experiences with and perceptions of the anonymous social media platform *Fizz* at the University of San Diego. To capture students' in their own voices, I conducted focus groups with undergraduates from each grade level, paying attention to the ways in which posting, viewing, and interacting play a role in how connected students feel to their campus. The focus groups are analyzed using an inductive thematic approach. The findings will help university communities evaluate the broader impacts of these platforms on students' connection to their school.

KRISTIANA KRASTEVA

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Leeva Chung, Communication

Growing Up, Going Abroad: A Thematic Analysis of Upbringing, Communication, and Adjustment in Study Abroad

College students pursue a semester abroad with the intent of new connections and personal growth, but will default to familiar and predictable patterns when faced with culturally mismatched expectations and rising uncertainty. As a result, meaningful adjustment and self-development for students is limited throughout the semester abroad experience. This project will explore and examine international Study Abroad as an identity negotiation process, explore how cultural socialization impacts one's intercultural communication, and demonstrate the significance of these patterns for student growth abroad. Drawing from Identity Negotiation Theory, Social Identity Theory, and individualism and collectivism, semi-structured interviews were conducted among students who returned from a semester abroad. A thematic analysis examined patterns related to independence, motivation, outgroup contact, and tolerance for uncertainty while abroad. Findings aim to provide general recommendations for how students, based on different upbringings, can more effectively challenge themselves and engage interculturally while abroad.

CREATIVE WRITING

LARA DOMINIQUE SOLANTE

Thesis Advisor: Professor Deniz Perin-Coombs, English

Database: A Poetry Collection

Poets wield their pens to respond to various societal or cultural stimuli—including politics, art, science, and more. Today, artificial intelligence (AI) is an exponential development that has become a leading topic of discussion. This project, titled “Database,” is a collection of poems that interrogates the tensions that exist between humanity and technology, through the use of modern imagery, such as robots and virtual reality. These poems also examine the once distinct markers of humanity that characterized classical poetry, including emotion and sensory experiences, and reframes them within a contemporary context, giving technology and artificial consciousness a voice. Although this collection is ultimately a critique of AI and its ramifications, it offers no resolution, but is rather a poetic expression of the issue through the lens of the author. Now, AI and its metastasization are inevitable and all-encompassing, which requires something incredibly human at its core: a radical acceptance and understanding.

SHEA SALAMACK

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Halina Duraj, English

Moments in San Diego

The thematic overlap of place and the everyday is explored through a variety of well-known fiction and nonfiction publications, in which authors seek out stories in the ordinary goings-on of everyday people. Building upon this expanding literature of the ordinary, the current study explores a sense of place, routine, and belonging in San Diego through a series of compiled ink sketches and flash-nonfiction essays. The end product, a multi-media book, captures ordinary moments in the third spaces San Diegans regularly occupy and linger within, throwing the reader into one place in time and then drawing out again for the next spread. *Moments in San Diego* seeks to capture the places and goings-on that are a part of residents' weekly routines, capturing points where everyday people's paths cross—all while asking the question: What makes San Diego home for San Diegans?

DIGITAL HUMANITIES

GIANNA EATON

Thesis Advisor: Dr. T.J. Tallie, History

Mapping & Metadata: An Analysis of AI Impact Using Medieval Maps as a Framework

This thesis examines the relationship between cartographic technologies and the construction of social hierarchy, tracing a continuity from medieval mapmaking to contemporary artificial intelligence as systems that classify, order, and define human identity in relation to power. Drawing on the framework of metageography, this research argues that geographic and visual technologies have never been neutral representations of the world but instead serve as active participants in its production—determining who belongs where, who is legible to structures of authority, and whose humanity is recognized at the boundaries of political community. This thesis asserts that Medieval cartography helped establish enduring practices of classification and othering that persist in a transformed but structurally continuous manner in today's AI-driven border technologies. By analyzing how algorithmic border systems inherit and reproduce these historical frameworks while simultaneously generating new ones, this research reveals how technology reflects deeply political assumptions about belonging, mobility, and human identity. Ultimately this thesis argues that AI border technologies are not neutral tools but instead systems that reinforce existing hierarchies and disproportionately harm those already marginalized by the categories they encode. By situating these concerns within a longer history of visual and spatial technologies of power, this research contributes to interdisciplinary conversations about algorithmic bias, border violence, and the ethical dimensions of technology development.

ECONOMICS

MARYANN MICHLOVICH

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Adriana Vamosiu, Economics

Designing Cooperation: Incentive Mechanisms in a Public Goods Game on Homelessness Support in San Diego

Homelessness in San Diego remains one of the most visible and complicated challenges facing our community. While discussions often focus on funding levels or housing supply, less attention has been given to how cooperation among individuals and institutions is structured. Drawing on public goods theory and insights from mechanism design, this study examined how different incentive structures shape individuals' willingness to contribute to collective homelessness support. Using an experimental public goods framework, the project modeled support for homelessness initiatives as a strategic interaction in which participants balance personal costs with shared benefits. Results are discussed in terms of the relationship between incentive structure and patterns of cooperation. By reframing homelessness as a coordination problem as well as a resource problem, this research highlights how institutional design may strengthen community engagement and thus inform more effective policy responses.

ELENA WILLIAMS

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jason Campbell, Economics

The Impact of Transaction Costs on Remittances in Latin America & the Caribbean

Remittances, money sent from migrant workers to individuals or households in their home country, are a key driver of economic growth in developing nations and a critical source of income stabilization for households. While several studies have focused on the macroeconomic impact on the economic growth of developing countries, few studies have considered the microeconomic elasticity of remittance flows with respect to transaction costs. This study investigates the elasticity of remittance flows with respect to transaction costs within the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) corridor, both pre-COVID and post-COVID, through the use of an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model applied to individual transaction data from the World Bank's Remittance Prices Worldwide (RPW) dataset. Unlike previous studies, we also control for events that induce increases in remittance flows, such as natural disasters.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCEAN SCIENCES

SOFIA AGUAYO

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Claudia Avila, Environmental and Ocean Sciences

Contaminated Soils and Community Solutions: Urban Gardens, Health, and Environmental Education

Community gardens are increasing in urban areas because they provide access to produce and other social benefits. To acquire soil for raised bed gardens, people often collect free soil from online listings. The use of this soil can pose health risks if it is contaminated with metals. Urban gardeners face exposure through soil ingestion and consumption of contaminated produce. Lead contaminated soils can cause severe health effects in children, including central nervous system damage and developmental issues. To quantify metal distribution in agricultural soils across San Diego County, we collected soil samples from ‘free dirt’ postings found online as well as from urban gardens to evaluate soil quality and contamination. A key finding was that 3 out of 14 samples had lead concentrations exceeding the California Residential Screening Level. This highlights the need for public awareness about soil contamination and emphasizes the importance of accessible soil testing resources.

KEVIN CURRAN

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Sophie Taddeo, Environmental and Ocean Sciences

Site Specific Sea Otter Behavior and Disturbance Impacts from Ecotourism in Morro Bay, CA

Outdoor recreation can put marine animals at risk from human disturbance caused by improper viewing practices. Southern Sea Otters (*Enhydra lutis nereis*) are particularly vulnerable to these disturbances because of their high metabolic rates, along with long periods of required rest. Sea otters also typically use different areas for resting or foraging. Only a single study has been done on sea otter response to disturbance covering the total extent of their range. This study investigates site-specific differences in overall sea otter behavioral responses to disturbance in two sites in Morro Bay, CA. From 2015-2025, surveys were conducted twice a week to record sea otter behavior and responses to stimuli. Shapiro-Wilk tests and regression analyses were used to compare differences between the two sites. By furthering research into sea otter behavioral responses to anthropogenic stimuli, we hope to strengthen laws and viewing guidelines surrounding sea otters.

MAYA MERCHANT

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Sophie Taddeo, Environmental and Ocean Sciences

Impact of land-type disturbances on the composition of wetland plant communities across the conterminous United States

Due to the threat of invasive species on wetland biodiversity, it is critical to assess factors driving their proliferation in wetlands. To address this need, this project analyzes relationships between invasive species, non-native species, and known disturbance types associated with increased biological invasions. Using the 2021 National Wetland Condition Assessment, I analyzed whether plant community dynamics may be predicted by the proportion of agricultural and developed land classifications within a series of equal-area buffers. Watersheds containing the highest mean invasive species diversity, richness, and coverage were calculated and compared to surrounding disturbances and applied in the development of a restoration suitability analysis. These findings can inform future restoration efforts at multiple temporal and spatial scales by identifying high priority areas, as vegetation is a particularly strong indicator of wetland conditions. Through better understanding how plant diversity responds to landscape stressors, conservation and restoration practices may be better advised and supported.

FINANCE

MACY CHERNEFF

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Marko Svetina, Finance and Real Estate

Reading Between the Lines: AI-Driven Vocal Emotion Detection in Corporate Earnings Calls

When a CEO delivers an earnings call, every word is carefully chosen... but what about the emotion behind those words? Investors and analysts often pick apart transcripts for signals that indicate confidence or concern, yet vocal characteristics remain largely unexamined. This thesis develops an AI-driven pipeline applying deep learning emotion recognition models to extract emotional signals such as calmness, tension, and excitement directly from earnings call audio. Speaker diarization distinguishes executives from analysts, enabling comparison of emotional patterns across roles. Using a sample of corporate earnings calls, this study examines whether speaker-level vocal emotion differs systematically by participant role and whether these signals are associated with subsequent stock price movement. By integrating speech emotion recognition with market outcome analysis, this project bridges applied machine learning and behavioral finance. To our knowledge, it is among the first studies combining speaker-level emotion modeling with financial market reaction analysis in earnings call settings.

DEVON EDER

Thesis Advisor: Professor Luis Ceballos, Finance

Relational Analysis Between Sovereign Indebtedness and Asset Return Correlation

In recent decades, sovereign debt levels have risen globally across nascent and mature economies, prompting scrutiny regarding sustainability and implications for global asset prices. Established economic theory indicates that higher public debt increases default risk, inflation risk, and required risk premium. This paper examines the relationship between sovereign debt-to-GDP ratios and risk-adjusted asset returns, whilst exploring whether investors can earn higher risk-adjusted returns for purchasing assets in highly leveraged countries. By constructing debt-sorted portfolios of monthly index data and estimating returns with the capital asset pricing model, it is possible to evaluate whether elevated debt levels are associated with a consistent return premium. The analysis incorporated also investigates whether observed premiums reflect risk compensation or market inefficiency and how premiums respond to factors including rising inflation, interest rates, and financial crises. The findings will propose viable investment opportunities across various sovereign debt profiles and provide investors with strategic trend analysis.

NICK GEORGE

Thesis Advisor: Professor Daniel Rocco, Finance

Technology's Historical Effects on Wealth Advisors and How They Plan to Pivot Around Career Challenges Posed by Artificial Intelligence

The past few decades have molded our contemporary financial experiences and have forced financial advisors to plan for a career-altering pivot in the near future. Over the last fifty years, wealth advisors have seen dozens of incidents known as “extinction-level events”, described as the two-way path a consultant faces when new technological advancements occur. We used data collected from real-world financial advisors, client service associates, and academic publications to assess the next big turning point of the industry, artificial intelligence, and how it both differs and relates to other developments of this caliber within the industry, such as the rise of the Internet. As of now, AI seems to be gearing up for a significant invasion of the wealth management field, and advisors everywhere are worried it could mean an end to their careers as they know them.

MEGHAN RYAN

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Robert Raczkowski, Finance

The Role of Universities in the Successful Fiscal Futures of Collegiate Graduates

The choices college students make early on in their fiscal lifetime have long-term impacts, therefore it is vital universities provide all students, not just business majors, with opportunities to understand financial concepts. Building off of previous research assessing the level of financial literacy at the University of San Diego, this project determined possible solutions the university may implement to create an impact on financial literacy locally. To understand the current status of collegiate personal finance education, an assessment of six universities campaigns presented how other colleges have addressed this subject. Additionally, the project conducted an internal audit of USD's current applications towards student's financial competency, both in programming, curriculum, and online resources. From this audit, the project assembled potential addendums to implement at the University. Equipped with proper foundational tools to succeed in their personal life, students' academic progress can flourish into prosperous future careers.

INTEGRATED ENGINEERING

LOGAN SCOTTLIND

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Diana Chen, Integrated Engineering

The Human Element in Civil Design: Integrating People-Scale Infrastructure into the Built Environment

Many modern cities are designed with an emphasis on moving people to where they are going as efficiently as possible; however, this creates environments that are often hostile to pedestrians and leisure. This thesis examines how integrating human-scale infrastructure into existing civil engineering frameworks can transform auto-centric corridors into safer, more walkable spaces. A central focus of this research is "visual friction," or the use of non-intrusive environmental cues that psychologically encourage drivers to naturally slow down without altering the physical nature of the driving lane. To empirically test these ideas, this research incorporates a mixed-methods tactical urbanism field study along a high-speed corridor. By evaluating how temporary, low-impact spatial interventions influence traffic patterns and community safety perceptions, the study demonstrates that human-centric design can effectively bridge the gap between rigid engineering guidelines and the development of safer, highly walkable environments.

CALEY TAMONDONG

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Susan Lord, Integrated Engineering

STEAM Unseen: User-Centered Design for Accessible Engineering Education for Blind and Low-Vision Students

STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) education frequently relies on visual representations to explain complex and abstract concepts. While these tools support sighted learners, they can create inequitable experiences for blind and low-vision students. My honors thesis investigates how nonvisual senses can be engaged to teach circuits and electricity, a traditionally vision-dependent subject. Using a user-centered design approach, tactile and hands-on learning tools were developed in collaboration with blind and low-vision members of the Braille Institute of San Diego. The tools were tested by blindfolded sighted students and by blind and low-vision students, followed by interviews to evaluate learning outcomes and user experience. Enhancing accessibility for blind and low-vision learners reduces inequities in STEAM education and fosters innovation through diverse perspectives. By expanding access through multisensory design, this work demonstrates that improving accessibility can advance STEAM education for all students.

DANIELLE THOMPSON

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Susan Lord, Integrated Engineering

Integrating Sociotechnical Thinking to Strengthen E-Waste Awareness in Engineering Students

Engineering curriculums often emphasize technical proficiency with limited attention to environmental, social, and ethical dimensions of electronic waste (E-waste), one of the fastest-growing global waste streams. As designers of electronic devices, engineers play a critical role in shaping the lifecycle impacts of these products, but undergraduate students rarely examine these responsibilities within core technical courses. To address this gap, an E-waste module was integrated into a second-year introduction to electrical engineering course covering circuit analysis, device modeling, and engineering design. The 50-minute module connects electrical engineering concepts to sustainability and social responsibility through pre-class research, multimedia content, guided discussion, and reflection. Students examine global and local E-waste systems, informal recycling practices, and policy initiatives like Right to Repair. Evaluation through pre- and post-module surveys and exit tickets assesses changes in knowledge and socio-technical awareness. This work demonstrates an approach for embedding sustainability into existing engineering curriculums without displacing technical content.

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

EMMA ALVAREZ

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Eileen Daspro, International Business

International Experience and Career Performance: Examining the Role of Global Competence in International Business

As businesses become more globally interconnected, companies increasingly need professionals who can work effectively across cultures and borders. Success in international business requires not only technical expertise, but also global competence; the ability to navigate cultural differences and make thoughtful decisions in diverse environments. At the same time, international student mobility and study abroad participation have grown significantly. Research suggests that international experience enhances language skills, intercultural competence, employability, and earnings. However, there is less research that synthesizes these findings within an international business framework or examines how international experience directly influences career performance within global firms. This thesis analyzes the relationship between international experience, global competence, and career outcomes through an integrative review of academic literature and qualitative interviews with individuals who have studied, lived, or worked abroad. The findings inform the development of a practical curriculum designed to help firms cultivate global competence among employees without prior international exposure.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ASHLEY PERRI

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Randy Willoughby, Political Science and International Relations

Something in the Air: A Contemporary Examination of European Air and Missile Defense

As Russia continues their war of aggression in Ukraine, they are keeping NATO busy by violating the airspace of several European states. By making NATO have to constantly protect their own nations, Russia is trying to limit the scope of assistance and aid that NATO can provide to Ukraine. In response to continued Russian airspace violations in Europe, this study explores the capabilities of air and missile defense in Europe among NATO members. It analyzes how Russian airspace violations in NATO states have influenced NATO's security posture regarding air and missile defense in order to determine if NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defense program is strong enough to protect Europe's skies from Russian attack. This study takes a contemporary approach by also examining the changing alliance dynamics between the United States and Europe as the Trump administration urges Europe to defend themselves.

LIBERAL STUDIES

LEILA FRANCISCO

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Molly McClain, History

Rethinking Classroom Power Through Reacting to the Past

This thesis examines Reacting to the Past (RTTP), an active learning pedagogy in which students inhabit historical roles and engage in structured debate, as a model for rethinking classroom power and knowledge production. Traditional history instruction often centers on the teacher as the primary authority and source of information. In contrast, RTTP reframes the classroom as a participatory intellectual community where students collaboratively construct meaning through dialogue, argumentation, and embodied learning. Drawing from scholarship in historical education and student-centered pedagogy, this project analyzes how the model redistributes authority, strengthens student agency, and transforms learning from passive reception into active engagement. Although typically implemented in college settings, this thesis also explores how its core principles might be developmentally adapted for upper elementary classrooms to cultivate early habits of critical thinking, civic reasoning, and shared responsibility for learning.

MARKETING

MAREN BRONSON

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Afsaneh Nahavandi, Management

The Role of Cultural Contexts Within Marketing Strategies of Experiential Tourism Across Countries that Rely Heavily on Tourism

Developing a cultural mindset requires awareness of one's cultural background and recognizing that culture provides a broader framework for understanding the world around us (e.g. values, behaviors, and expectations). At the same time, tourism continues to expand globally, contributing approximately 10% of global GDP in 2025, serving as a major driver of economic growth for destination countries (WTTC, 2025). As destinations increasingly rely on international visitors, tourism marketing must satisfy the needs and wants of international tourists. This literature review of culture, marketing, and tourism scholarship examines how cultural contexts shape experiential tourism marketing strategies in tourism-dependent countries, focusing on Spain and Japan as case studies. By analyzing existing research alongside tourism data, the study explores how culturally informed marketing influences the promotion and perception of experiential travel. This addresses an underexplored intersection of culture and tourism marketing, highlighting how cultural awareness can strengthen sustainable growth in tourism markets.

LAUREN CARPENETI

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Farhana Nusrat, Marketing

Fitspiration vs Body-Positive Wellness Content: The Role of Social Comparison and Authenticity in Shaping Body Satisfaction

The rapid growth of wellness culture on social media has positioned platforms such as Instagram and TikTok as major environments where individuals encounter messages about health, fitness, and body ideals. While wellness influencer content often promotes positive behaviors such as exercise and healthy lifestyle practices, emerging research suggests that exposure to idealized body imagery may also influence body satisfaction through social comparison processes. Despite the increasing popularity of wellness influencer content, limited research has examined how different styles of wellness messaging shape viewers' body perceptions. This study investigates how exposure to two types of wellness influencer content—fitspiration and body-positive messaging—affects individuals' body satisfaction and the extent to which these relationships are mediated by appearance-based social comparison and moderated by perceived influencer authenticity. Drawing on social comparison theory and prior research on social media and body image, this study proposes a conceptual model examining how wellness influencer content influences body satisfaction through comparison processes. A survey-based experimental design will expose participants to simulated social media posts representing either fitspiration or body-positive wellness content before measuring appearance-based social comparison, body satisfaction, and perceptions of influencer authenticity. The findings are expected to contribute to research on social media wellness culture and influencer marketing while offering insights for wellness brands, digital platforms, and public health advocates seeking to promote healthier and more responsible representations of wellness online.

ALEXANDRA MILSHTEIN

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Andrea Flynn, Marketing

I'll Have What They're Having: Social Media and the New Age of Consumer Conformity

This thesis investigates how social media platforms and influencer marketing intensify herd behavior in contemporary consumer decision-making. Integrating psychological theories of conformity, social proof, and social contagion with marketing research on influencer impact and trend diffusion, this study examines how digitally amplified consensus cues shape purchasing behavior. In highly visible online environments, metrics such as likes, shares, and follower counts function as heuristic signals of popularity, potentially increasing reliance on peripheral processing and reducing independent evaluation. This research explores whether these amplified social signals accelerate fad adoption and compress product life cycles, contributing to more volatile consumption patterns. Motivated by the rapid rise and decline of viral consumer trends and influencer-driven product booms, this project bridges marketing and psychology to analyze how digital ecosystems reshape collective judgment. The findings aim to advance understanding of social influence in algorithmically structured markets and offer implications for ethical marketing strategy and long-term brand sustainability.

MATHEMATICS

MADISON GAMBON

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Cameron Parker, Mathematics

A Mathematical & Computational Study of Voting Power in Social Choice Systems

This thesis develops a computational framework for measuring the vulnerability of voting rules to coordinated strategic manipulation. While classical results show that most voting systems are theoretically manipulable, less is known about the magnitude of coordination required to alter outcomes or how that magnitude varies across institutional designs. I define the minimal manipulating coalition size k^* as the smallest number of voters whose strategic ballot changes can overturn a sincere election result under a given rule. To enable cross-election comparison, I introduce the normalized manipulation threshold $\theta = k^*/n$. Using algorithmic search procedures and Monte Carlo simulation, I estimate θ for plurality, Borda, instant-runoff, and sequential pairwise voting. The results provide a systematic quantitative comparison of structural robustness across voting systems.

MUSIC and COMPUTER SCIENCE

KIAN DREES

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Christopher Adler, Music

Investigating creative possibility using automated composition

As a constructive method, Fux's theory of counterpoint defines a space of musical possibility for contrapuntal composition. I developed a computational method for generating melodies to systematically investigate selected properties of this space. My program generates a tree of all possible cantus firmus melodies of a specified length or all possible first species counterpoints on a given cantus firmus, starting with an empty root node and adding child nodes representing possible musical notes at each step until the specified length is reached. I then investigated several properties of the generated melodies, such as the average number of leaps in a cantus firmus and the approximate relationship between the length of a cantus firmus and the number of first species counterpoints possible. This research is a beginning for the categorization of the space of creative musical possibilities and exploration of other properties of music within the framework of Fux's method.

NEUROSCIENCE

KATE BUEHRIG

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jena Hales, Neuroscience, Cognition and Behavior

The Brain Breakdown: Bringing Neuroscience to a Broader Audience.

Neuroscience is a rapidly growing field, which needs to continue becoming more accessible and understandable to younger generations. Expanding access to neuroscience through different modes, such as podcasts, brings the discipline to a broader audience. Podcasts allow listeners to follow an outlined learning path they can pursue on their personal timeline. High school students often do not have access to neuroscience specific materials within their standard science curriculum. To address this knowledge gap, I collected questions about neuroscience via an anonymous google form from high school students across four schools in the United States to develop an understanding about what they are interested in learning. From those questions I created the framework for three podcast episodes: General Background of Neuroscience, Structure and Function of the Brain, and Music and Memory. This podcast aims to increase accessibility and expose both high school students and the general public to neuroscience.

AVERY EHRLICH

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jena Hales, Neuroscience, Cognition and Behavior

The Role of the Medial Prefrontal Cortex and Sex-Based Differences in Spatial Navigation in Rats Performing the Traveling Salesperson Problem

Cognitive impairments, including memory loss, disrupted spatial navigation, and poor executive processing, result from neuronal dysfunction that underlies many neurological disorders. Previous research from our lab using a naturalistic foraging task, known as the Traveling Salesperson Problem (TSP), found that lesions of the hippocampus and medial entorhinal cortex in rats impaired spatial memory, but not spatial decision-making. Given that the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) receives projections from both brain regions and is involved in higher-level cognitive processing, our study examined the effect of mPFC lesions on TSP performance in both female and male rats. We found an interaction between mPFC lesions and sex in TSP performance, with males, but not females, choosing a less optimal path between targets. Examining both male and female rats is critical for measuring sex as a biological variable and addressing the historical underrepresentation of female rats in preclinical studies.

GIANNA FIGUEROA

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jacqueline Bonds, Neuroscience, Cognition and Behavior

Effect of Noggin on Neural Stem Cell Proliferation

Hippocampal neurogenesis persists throughout life, supporting learning and memory through the generation of adult-born neurons in the subgranular zone of the dentate gyrus, where they integrate into existing circuits. Activation of bone morphogenetic protein (BMP) signaling is a potent inhibitor of proliferation which is known to increase with age. Research has revealed that noggin, a BMP inhibitor, increases stem cell proliferation. However, further investigation is needed to determine if the effects of noggin are concentration dependent. Neurospheres isolated from the adult DG were exposed to increasing concentrations of noggin, and proliferative activity was quantified using BrdU incorporation. Findings from these experiments are important to understand how BMP signaling regulates adult neurogenesis and will further clarify this pathway by examining the influence of noggin on neural stem cell proliferation.

KARLA SALDANA

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Elisabeth Walcott, Neuroscience, Cognition and Behavior

Why the Dentist is So Scary: How the Brain Learns and Maintains Dental Fear

Dental Fear is a major barrier for people seeking routine oral health care affecting millions of children and adults. Being often dismissed as simple nervousness, dental fear starts developing early in life and persists throughout adulthood, which leads to avoiding dental visits, receiving delayed treatment, leading to poor oral health. The goal of this project is to examine and understand the complexity why dental fear develops and what occurs in the brain during this fear response. Drawing from research in neuroscience and dentistry, this study examines how early experiences, fear learning, and pain anticipation activate brain regions involved in threat processing. This project also analyzes how avoidance behaviors and socioeconomic factors contribute to long term oral health disparities. Analyzing dental fear through a neuroscience lens offers valuable insight into why this fear can feel overwhelming and hard to overcome. In addition to reviewing current research, this project proposes improved methods for measuring dental fear and highlights patient centered, evidence based approaches to prevention and long term fear reduction.

SOPHIA SKUBIC

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jena Hales, Neuroscience, Cognition and Behavior

Microglial neuroinflammation examined in a rodent model of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

The ability to make spatial decisions is crucial when navigating an environment, but it can be difficult for individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions, such as ADHD. My research used a naturalistic spatial foraging task, known as the Traveling Salesperson Problem (TSP), to examine these processes in rodents. The TSP is an optimization task that requires subjects to identify the most efficient route to travel between targets. My study examined TSP performance of Spontaneously Hypertensive Rats (SHR), the most widely-used rodent model of ADHD, relative to their control model, Wistar Kyoto (WKY) rats. Behavioral findings suggest that SHRs have greater deficits in route selection compared to WKY rats. Histological results measuring neuroinflammation found differential microglia expression and activation morphologies in SHR and WKY rats within defined brain regions of interest. This study expands on literature within ADHD-model rats by exploring their ability to effectively route optimize using a naturalistic task.

MACKENSEY SPEIRS

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Elisabeth Walcott, Neuroscience, Cognition and Behavior and Behavior & Dr. Patricia Kowalski, Psychological Sciences

Evaluating Hippotherapy for Children with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities

Hippotherapy is a type of equine-assisted therapy that uses a horse's movement to stimulate sensory, motor, and cognitive systems in children with neurodevelopmental disabilities. Although it is widely perceived as beneficial by occupational, physical, and speech therapists, the extent to which these perceptions align with empirical evidence remains unclear. Prior journal reviews on the use of equine-assisted therapies for mental health have identified methodological limitations and inconsistent evidence largely based on subjective measures, highlighting the need for further investigation. This project focuses on hippotherapy, as motor outcomes are more objectively measurable and may provide stronger empirical grounding. It combines a literature review of hippotherapy with qualitative surveys of providers' perspectives. Together, these analyses evaluate the alignment between clinical perspectives and the current empirical evidence, aiming to optimize future research and improve hippotherapy as a medical intervention.

PHILOSOPHY

AVA AZUCENAS

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Gary Jones, Philosophy

Is Health Deserved? The Moral and Political Construction of Healthcare through Personal Autonomy and Religious Narratives in the United States v. Japan

Is health “deserved” and how do differing conceptions of personal autonomy influence the legal structures, ethical implications, and political disputes of healthcare in the United States and Japan? This paper compares Western culture’s, as opposed to Eastern’s, understanding of individual rights and personal autonomy—rooted in Western religious traditions— and how this has stunted the improvement of both political and legal structures. This is evident in the for-profit healthcare system in the United States. Drawing on the work of Eric Feldman and his analysis of kenri (rights) in Japan, I argue that American “rights assertion” has become abusive and politicized during disputes over reproductive healthcare, immunization, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging in Western Christian beliefs and Eastern practices, I analyze how religious narratives shape whether health is framed as an individual entitlement or a shared social responsibility. I argue that personal autonomy can become overextended as a political weapon, weakening healthcare structures.

PHYSICS

LILA FOWLER

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Chad Kishimoto, Physics

A Self Consistent Solution to the Quantum Kinetic Equation for Neutrino Evolution in the Early Universe

We present a self consistent solution to neutrino evolution in the first few seconds after the Big Bang. Neutrinos are small, neutral particles that are important to study because they separated from the plasma of the early universe before light did and therefore carry information about the universe at times earlier than we can see. Neutrinos oscillate between three types, or “flavors,” a behavior that is computationally expensive to capture. Existing neutrino evolution models employ significant physics approximations to make them run in reasonable time. We develop a truth model for neutrino evolution that works without these approximations, and present results.

ALBERT OGRODSKI

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Ted Dezen, Physics and Biophysics

Energy Transport in Black Hole X-ray Binary Accretion Disks

When a massive star reaches the end of its life, it will collapse inward due to its own gravity and form a black hole. In a system known as black hole X-ray binary (BHB), a star and a black hole orbit around one another. The black hole pulls material from outer layers of the star towards itself. This gas swirls inwards towards the black hole forming an accretion disk. As the gas moves closer, its potential energy is converted into thermal energy, heating it to extreme temperatures and producing X-rays and gamma rays. We present global three-dimensional magneto-hydrodynamic simulations of accretion flows onto stellar mass black holes. We focus on the potential emergence of a hot corona powered by significant dissipation near the disk photospheres. We also investigate time evolution, paying particular attention to potential sources of quasi-periodic oscillations.

POLITICAL SCIENCE

TANNER BLACKINGTON

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Abigail Stepnitz, Political Science and International Relations

The Supreme Court and Climate Law: A Qualitative Analysis

This paper seeks to aid in characterizing the Supreme Court's understanding of climate justice, its evolution over time, and the primary variables relevant to the issue. I begin with an explanation of the context on climate law, climate change, and the Supreme Court as an institution. I situate the study in the literature on judicial restraint, institutional barriers, and the powers of the Supreme Court as focal points. Then, drawing on a sample of 20 Supreme Court opinions issued between 2007 and 2025, I offer an empirical analysis which reveals the Supreme Court's feelings of confinement within the boundaries of federalism and balancing power with the Legislative and Executive branch. Finally, I discuss the implications this finding has for judicial progress on climate change, both as it explains the past and as it might be used to estimate the future of climate litigation at the federal level.

MAEVE EGGER

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Andrew Tirrell, Political Science and International Relations

Implementation of Laudato Si' at Catholic Universities

College campuses across the United States are grappling with their institutional role and responsibility within the ecological crisis. Moreover, Catholic universities are in a unique moral position compared to their secular counterparts following the publication of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The Pope highlights the need for environmental justice, which prompts Catholic universities to make changes beyond an operational level. Catholic universities are called to undergo a comprehensive transformation, including curriculum development, research opportunities, community engagement, and eco-spirituality. Drawing on institutional documents and a series of conversations with administrators and faculty, this project provides a comparative analysis of the changes Catholic universities in California have made since the publication of *Laudato Si'*. By examining these institutional patterns, successes, and challenges, this project highlights non-state actors, particularly religiously affiliated institutions' role in environmental advocacy and policy.

SALOME MEDINA

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Timothy McCarty, Political Science and International Relations

Rome's Gendered Political Order Displayed in the Persistence of Gendered U.S. Politics

Sexual violence was foundational for Rome's existence, so foundational that every single major political revolution in Roman history has been predicated on the idea of "protecting women" and their virtue from perpetuated violence. To complicate this dynamic more, oftentimes the endeavors that were supposed to "protect" women, instead disenfranchised them further. This thesis argues that Rome's long-standing ideas of Republican civic virtue are not the only politically significant ideas the United States' inherited. In addition, Rome's complicated relationship with women produced a durable gendered logic that can help explain our contemporary gendered US political phenomenon. I explore how women in both Ancient Rome and Modern America have been formally excluded from political authority while simultaneously being seen as moral and religious symbols. This thesis aims to explore how contemporary U.S. political phenomena, such as ambivalence toward women's leadership, the emphasis on women's private lives, and the persistence of gendered double standards in public office are actually a reflection of a long-standing republican inheritance.

DREW POLLARD

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Evan Crawford, Political Science and International Relations

Drivers of Latin America Economic Growth in the 21st Century: Examining the Role of Foreign Direct Investment in Economic Development

Latin America is a region rich in natural resources, but has been persistently plagued by inequality and poverty. My thesis examines economic growth in Latin America, and the role that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) plays in growth. While FDI is often presented as an engine for prosperity, my research evaluates whether FDI functions effectively as a driver of growth, or whether its impact depends on the absorptive capacity of its domestic conditions and macroeconomic performance. My analysis applies a fixed effects panel data regression, studying 20 countries GDP per capita growth from 2006 to 2023, adding to existing literature through a 21st century lens. I will further my regression analysis with a comparative analysis, incorporating political science theories and findings into an understanding of growth in the region. I dive into the differences between El Salvador and Chile to analyze human capital differences, income levels, historical relations, and political stability.

CAMILLE VAN BRUAENE

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Kathryn Statler, History

A Crisis of Authority: The Vietnam War and the Abdication of Congressional War Powers

The Vietnam War defined the mid-20th century through a profound institutional shift from legislative restraint to executive dominance. This thesis analyzes this transition by comparing President Dwight D. Eisenhower's inability to secure congressional authorization for intervention at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and President Lyndon B. Johnson's successful passage of the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Using a comparative historical analysis of congressional records and declassified documents, I argue that the expansion of presidential power resulted from two factors: path dependency and the strategic framing of a manufactured crisis. While the 1954 Congress successfully asserted its constitutional role by demanding multilateralism, by 1964, the United States was so entrenched that military escalation appeared inevitable. This study concludes that the combination of political maneuvering and historical path dependency established a lasting precedent for future presidents to bypass formal declarations of war, offering critical insight into the modern erosion of the separation of powers.

PSYCHOLOGY

SPOORTHI AEDMA

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Steven Berkley, Psychological Sciences

Intergenerational Transmissions of Culture among First-Generation Undergraduate Women of Color

First-generation undergraduate Women of Color (WOC) navigate higher education while holding multiple intersectional identities that shape their experiences. Although prior research has highlighted the importance of intergenerational transmissions within families and communities, psychological literature often overlooks the lived experiences of undergraduate WOC and how intergenerational cultural values influence their collegiate experiences. This qualitative study explores the intergenerational transmission of culture among first-generation undergraduate WOC. Specifically, this paper examines how cultural values, traditions, and practices are passed down across generations, and how these transmissions shape students' identities, self-perception, and experiences within higher education. Using focus groups and qualitative methodologies, including narrative analysis and thematic coding, this study identifies key themes within the narratives of first-generation WOC. By centering their voices, this research offers insight into the unique context of students with intersecting, underrepresented identities and considerations for creating more inclusive college communities.

ALLISON BRANCH

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Daniel Forster, Psychological Sciences

Compulsory Collaboration: The impact of ignoring preference on productivity and engagement

Organizations often incorporate collaborative activities in the workplace environment with the intent to improve relationships, productivity, and engagement. Although organizations intend to increase positive outcomes with these creative implementations, adverse results, such as a decrease in job performance and satisfaction, may arise for people who would prefer not to participate. These negative outcomes not only harm the individual, but may dismantle collaboration, an essential component of a successful organization. In this study, I examined how ignoring an individual's preference to complete a specific task (individual v. collaborative task) influences their productivity and engagement levels within a collaborative activity. In addition to investigating the effects of ignoring preferences, I tested whether individuals respond differently based on their personality traits. Navigating how ignorance of preference and consent affect individuals' engagement will assist organizations in understanding how their decisions may result in unintentional negative outcomes within the work environment.

FAITH GIDEON

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Rebekah Wanic, Psychological Sciences

The Effects of Mental Health Advertising on Brand and Product Perception

Previous research has demonstrated that framing effects, influencer sponsorships, and brand campaigns significantly influence consumer behavior and, consequently, company profitability. However, limited research has examined how these marketing strategies can be used to address social justice issues, particularly mental health advocacy. While past research has examined barriers to mental health resources among college students, little is known about how corporate mental health campaigns might help overcome these barriers and increase consumer awareness of available support services. This study on mental health advertising will address this gap by examining whether there is a difference in the way a mental health-associated campaign is perceived. Specifically, this research will investigate whether corporate mental health advocacy, manipulated through brand familiarity and campaign messaging, affects consumer perceptions of brand authenticity, purchase intent, and consumer's willingness to pay higher prices. The findings may inform future companies on how to best use their platform to promote mental health in a way that is successful for their own profits and to benefit their consumers.

GRACE LAKOSE

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Laura Getz, Neuroscience, Cognition, and Behavior

When Memory Fades, Music Remains: A Curriculum Framework for Integrating Music into Early-Stage Dementia Care for Patients, Caregivers, and Loved Ones

This honors thesis project develops a structured, music integrated curriculum which has been designed to support individuals in the early stages of dementia alongside their caregivers and loved ones. Although dementia disrupts memory, communication, and relational stability as the neurological condition progresses, previous research in neuroscience and psychology suggests that musical memory systems are relatively preserved. This thesis argues that developing a structured comprehensive curriculum grounded in music-based engagement can enhance cognitive stimulation, emotional wellbeing, and relational connection by emphasizing preserved musical capacities as tools for communication, identity reinforcement, and shared experience. Drawing on research conducted in the Language and Music Perception Lab, an interdisciplinary literature review combining key ideas from psychology, neuroscience, and music therapy, and an analysis of existing dementia care curricula, this project identifies important gaps in relationally-oriented intervention models. In response, this project proposes an eight-session curriculum organized into four main modules: Foundations, Music and Memory Activation, Emotional Regulation and Communication, and Human Connection in Care. Each module includes clearly defined objectives and research-supported activities for individuals and care partners. The final thesis includes a comprehensive framework and fully developed prototype sessions to guide practical implementation.

IRIANNA MORALES

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Steven Berkley, Psychological Sciences

Intergenerational Households and Mental Health in Filipino American Young Adults

Intergenerational households create a distinct, acculturated environment in which child rearing and socialization involve grandparents or other older guardians. Filipino culture places a strong emphasis on family and respect for elders, which makes intergenerational living common, and these values may encourage or discourage individuals from seeking mental health support. This study explores the formative role that intergenerational households play in the behavioral and socioemotional development of Filipino young adults, and whether it influences intergenerational cultural conflict between them and their guardians regarding mental health sentiments or provides encouragement to receive mental health support. Using an online survey administered to Filipino American young adults (18-25 years old) in California who have experienced living in an intergenerational household, the present study measures intergenerational family conflict in Filipino families, grandparent importance, and mental health-seeking attitudes. This study addresses the gap in research, and findings will provide insight into the significance of intergenerational household living in the role of acculturation for Filipino American young adults and how it informs their experiences with mental health support.

AVA RIBANDO

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Rebekah Wanic, Psychological Sciences

Client Preferences for Therapist Self-Disclosure

Therapist Self-Disclosure (TSD) refers to personal information a therapist shares with a client in the context of therapy. Historically, TSD usage is controversial, particularly within the psychoanalytic tradition, where TSD was believed to dilute transference. However, contemporary literature indicates that clients often hold favorable perceptions of therapists who self-disclose. Approaches from other orientations also advocate for the utility of TSD, including cognitive-behavioral, systemic, humanistic, and feminist perspectives. Across perspectives, the ethicality of TSD is of major concern. The present study examines current client preferences regarding TSD in relation to the recommendations from specific therapeutic orientations. Participants ($n = 63$) were surveyed using the Disclosure-to-Therapist Inventory IV (DTI-IV) and Therapist Self-Disclosure (TSD) Scale. This research aims to incorporate client preferences into the broader discussion of TSD, thereby assisting mental health providers in making informed and ethical decisions when using TSD.

CLARA SMITH

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Rebekah Wanic, Psychological Sciences

Therapist Self-Disclosure and Perceptions of Competence

Selecting a therapist is shaped by many factors, including interpersonal dynamics and impressions formed from limited initial information. Although research has examined therapeutic effectiveness and the qualities clients seek, less is known about how brief therapist biographies shape client choices and expectations. Little work has explored how prior mental illness influences perceptions of therapeutic effectiveness, and even less research has considered whether a therapist's personal history of mental illness affects client interest or views of clinical quality. This study addresses that gap by investigating how disclosure of prior mental illness (ADHD, depression, or no history) influences potential clients' perceptions of a therapist's effectiveness, likeability, and empathy. As therapists increasingly use digital platforms to attract clients and compete for visibility, understanding which disclosures enhance or hinder engagement is important. Findings may inform how therapists market themselves and support stronger alignment between clients and therapists, ultimately contributing to improved therapeutic outcomes.

MAE VANDERSLICE

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Veronica Galvan, Psychological Sciences

When Sound Meets Self-Belief: How Psychological Mechanisms Affect Literacy Outcomes for Individuals with Speech Sound Disorder

Children diagnosed with speech sound disorder frequently exhibit deficits in literacy outcomes, though the complexity of literacy requires a multi-disciplinary lens to identify potential causal factors. Existing research highlights the impacts of cognitive variables, while considerably less attention has been dedicated to understanding psychological implications. Therefore, this literature review synthesizes empirical articles from the fields of speech-language pathology and psychology to explore the role of self-efficacy and related psychological mechanisms in the relationship between speech sound disorder and literacy deficits. Studies report that students with speech sound disorder experience frequent corrective feedback when reading aloud, heightening awareness of personal speech differences relative to peers. Persistent challenges associated with reading undermine self-esteem, prompting children to avoid activities essential to literacy development and gradually fall behind in reading proficiency. Therefore, understanding the role of psychological mechanisms can inform new approaches to literacy instruction, enhancing classroom environments for the betterment of all students.

UMI SHARIF ALI

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Yessica Green Rosas, Psychological Sciences

Discipline or Damage? How corporal punishment affects the psychological wellbeing of kids.

Corporal punishment is still used as a form of discipline in many homes and schools around the world, even though research has shown that it can negatively affect children's mental and emotional well-being. Studies have linked corporal punishment to higher levels of anxiety, depression, aggression, and trauma-related symptoms, yet it continues to be justified in some cultures and school systems as a way to control behavior. This thesis explores how corporal punishment affects children and adolescents psychologically and emotionally, as well as how these effects can follow them into later stages of life. By reviewing research from psychology, education, and public health, this project shows clear patterns connecting corporal punishment to poorer mental health outcomes, difficulties with emotional regulation, and strained family relationships. The literature also suggests that marginalized students are more likely to experience corporal punishment. Overall, these findings support the need for nonviolent discipline strategies and trauma-informed approaches in schools and families.

SOCIOLOGY

MARIBEL ACEVEDO

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Cid Martinez, Sociology

The sociology of Death: How colonization has affected the Chicano views and practices around death and dying

While death may be understood as the greatest biological inevitability in life, it is also an event where ritual, memory, and culture can be met with the everlasting effects of colonization. For Chicano people death is not only biological; it is ingrained in their history as a people and culture. Their contemporary view on death has been built upon the legacy of Spanish colonization imposed on their ancestors and the continued criminalization of the brown body. For many Chicanos, death has become a site of resistance against the imposed themes of colonization and religion. The Chicano identity reclaims Indigenous cosmologies while also hybridizing with the many years of colonization and religion imposed. Through literature analysis and qualitative methods, this thesis analyzes and aims to understand the way that the impact of colonization has shifted the way that Chicanos have engaged or disengaged with traditional practices around death and dying.

SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

LILLIAN DEMMAN

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jacquelyn Brown, Management and Law and Ethics

The Ethics and Accountability Gap in Corporate Supply Chains: Who Bears Responsibility When Failures Occur?

Growing regulatory pressure and public scrutiny are pushing corporations toward greater supply chain transparency. Prominent retail brands are often praised for their profitability; however, when unethical practices emerge, organizations shift accountability onto other stakeholders. This thesis examines the ethics and accountability gaps within global retail supply chains and asks who should be held responsible when failures occur. Drawing from supply chain, governance, and ethical frameworks, it explores how companies monitor compliance through vendor screening, contract design, and technology integration. Given customers' economic influence over organizational success, this study evaluates how corporate responses to ethical misconduct affect consumer sentiment. Key laws developed in response to industry scandals are examined alongside high-profile cases to determine how responsibility has been assigned, avoided, or enforced over time. Legal obligations and societal expectations are compared to ultimately assess the effectiveness of current oversight mechanisms and propose reforms that strengthen ethical accountability.