

uncg research

Spring 2024

Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

**CHIGGERS &
TICKS &
SAND FLIES
OH MY!**



uncg research

SPRING 2024

VOLUME 26

UNCG Research is published by
The Office of Research and Engagement
UNC Greensboro
1111 Spring Garden Street
Greensboro, NC 27412
336.256.0426

Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement

Dr. Terri L. Shelton

Interim Vice Chancellor for Strategic Communications

Kimberly Osborne

Editor

Sangeetha Shivaji

Art Director

Jaysen Buterin

Graphic Designers

Jaysen Buterin, De'Andre Gilliard, Laiba Siddique

Photography Director

Sean Norona

Contributing Photography

Martin Kane, Loring Mortensen, Jiyoung Park,
David Lee Row, Bert VanderVeen

Contributing Authors

Robin Sutton Anders, Mark Barnes, Rachel Damiani,
Elizabeth L. Harrison, Janet Imrick, Sayaka Matsuoka,
Sangeetha Shivaji, Mark Toscak, Alice Touchette

Copy Editors

Amy Burtch, Janet Imrick, Katy Molony, Alexis L. Richardson

Distribution Manager

Haley Childers

UNCG Research is printed on an FSC and SFI certified paper.
No state funds were used to print this magazine.



**UNC
GREENSBORO**
Office of Research
and Engagement



This issue marks the 15th year of my tenure as chief research officer and my last. What struck me when I looked at the issue we published in my first year is what still moves me in this latest issue – the depth, disciplinary breadth, interdisciplinarity, and quality of the research, scholarship, and creative activity produced by our faculty, staff, and students.

Recently UNCG was recognized again by the Carnegie Foundation for our excellence in

community engagement, and we also received the APLU's designation for excellence in innovation and economic prosperity. The scholarly heterogeneity you find in these pages feeds that larger context – these scholars, and many more like them, are co-creating new knowledge and transforming both our communities and our students.

In many ways, UNCG scholarship reflects what 2023 Research Excellence Award winner Dr. Christan Moraru terms "cosmodernism." He says, "I want people to hear a number of things in this term, like 'cosmos' – the notion that we see ourselves as part of something bigger. No matter where we are, we are in visible – or not-so-visible – relationships with others. We have an obligation to the welfare of others. We are responsible for what happens on the other side of the planet."

This responsibility to be part of something bigger is the fire in the belly of our researchers, scholars, and artists. It is the fuel that drives the resourceful faculty in our "Social Innovation" feature and the team at our Center for Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships, who have served as a force for and with North Carolina's youth and families for over a quarter of a century. It is foundational to the truth-telling impelling undergraduate artist Zaire Miles-Moultrie.

Awareness of our relationships to one another offers deep insights into true excellence and impact, as Dr. Heather Holian uncovers in interviews with Pixar artists, directors, and animators. "Artists would say to me, 'If you took one person out of this team, you'd have a whole different dynamic.' ... Each person brings their own ideas, inspirations, life histories."

And so it was and is at UNCG.

Despite the challenges we face, we must remain committed to what catalyzes the exceptional research, scholarship, and creative activity at UNCG – and what has made my time here so fulfilling. As Andrew Carnegie reflected, "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

TERRI L. SHELTON, PH.D.

Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement

UNCG Research is online. Enjoy additional photography, shareable stories, and more at researchmagazine.uncg.edu.

FEATURES



8

A Growing Effort

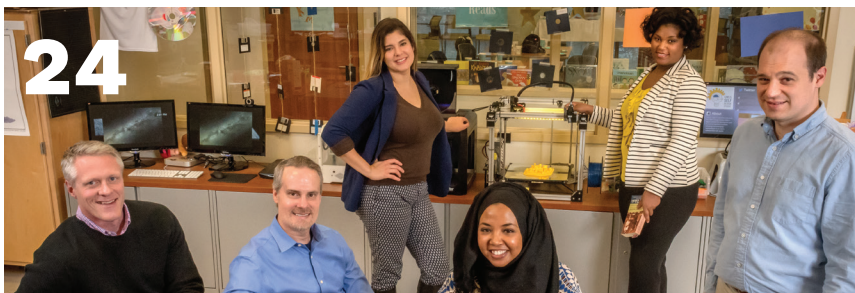
An ambitious obesity study that followed kids from womb to toddlerhood expands into the preschool years. As a core team develops insights on helping kids stay healthy, newcomers dig into the robust data to investigate parents' heart health and the pandemic.



16

A Force for Youth and Families

A child acting out in preschool. A teenager in trouble with the law. A family reeling from a mental health crisis. These are just a few examples of lives touched by UNCG's Center for Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships. Explore the 28-year-old center's impact.



24

Social Innovation

It starts with a desire to solve acute community problems. It's facilitated by critical partnerships. It grows out of creativity and cross-disciplinary savvy. As UNCG builds a culture of social innovation and entrepreneurship, NC communities reap the benefits.

uncg research

DEPARTMENTS

rightidea Best American poet **2** chiggers, ticks, and sand flies (oh my!) **3** a history of mental health **7**

researchexcellence top award goes to English's Dr. Christian Moraru **22**

studentprofiles bio **6** art **14** education **20** dance **32**

theword'sout Disney on display **30** art in motion **32** artificial intelligence and child safety **33**

FAILED MUSICIAN

"Remain curious – to life itself, to nature, to the world."

That's the advice Professor Stuart Dischell, whose work appears in "Best American Poetry 2023," gives to his students.

The vision of a poet as a hermit living away from everyone else is cliché, he adds. "Poets walk among you."

For the last 30 years, Dischell has walked among the English students in UNCG's MFA Writing Program. In that time, he has released six books of poetry with prestigious publishers such as Penguin and the University of Chicago Press, secured two National Endowment for the Arts grants, and won a Pushcart Prize and National Poetry Series award. He also held a Guggenheim Fellowship, two Ledig-Rowohl international writer's residency fellowships in Switzerland, and a North Carolina Arts Council fellowship.

Dischell is widely recognized for his astute portrayals of how people interact in their environments. Restaurants or war zones, mountain summits or ships at sea, alleyways or boulevards, each poem's setting becomes another character in his work.

"The idea of location in poetry is really important to me because it grounds the characters," Dischell says. "It can clarify or complicate the situation."

In the case of "After the Exhibition" – originally published in the Birmingham Poetry Review and selected for this year's Best American Poetry anthology – the location is a hotel room. Two characters at odds with one another have just returned after a day touring a city. It's been raining, and they take their places in different parts of the room.

A Best American Poet

"I like the idea of a hotel because it's a blank space," he says. "The bed itself is like a stage, and the bathroom is off-stage. Because it's rented, there's no ownership."

Despite Dischell's awards and accolades, he is proudest of the bookshelf in his office, filled with dozens of books by former students. "For them to take great talent and transform it into published books is very gratifying."

He takes his advice to "be curious" seriously and believes the best authors are the ones whose inquisitiveness, both natural and honed, propels their careers. "I learn a huge amount from my students – their curiosity and their willingness to learn and go beyond themselves. They have a willingness to read and a dedication and love for what they're doing."

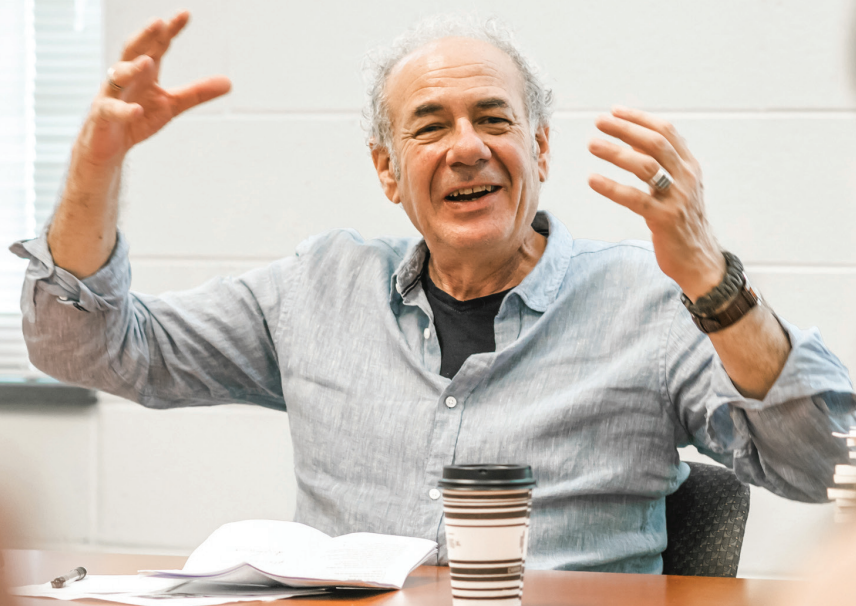
Dischell traces his own enthusiasm for poetry back to high school when he began to write and perform songs. He laughs when he shares that he wasn't encouraged to dedicate himself to the craft of music.

"As it was put to me, the way I played the guitar and sang wasn't so good." But the lyrics resonated with listeners. "So I dedicated myself to the craft of poetry."

by Robin Sutton Anders
learn more at english.uncg.edu/dischell



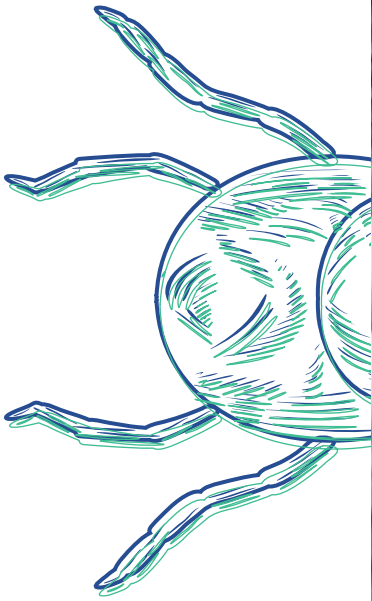
DISCHELL BELIEVES making art is a life-long commitment. "It suits my personality. It suits my way of thinking. For me, poetry has both concision and music."



FIELD



BIOLOGY PROFESSOR GIDEON WASSERBERG collects ticks and chiggers in the field with mentees Reuben Garshong – who graduated with his Ph.D. from UNCG and is now a postdoc at NC State University – and Noah Holland.



When Dr. Gideon Wasserberg and his students began collecting chiggers across North Carolina, they didn't expect to find disease-causing bacteria typically only seen in the Eastern Hemisphere.

But that's just what they discovered. Their observation of *Orientia* bacteria in North Carolina chiggers – part of a collaboration with NC State University – was published in *Emerging Infectious Diseases*.

The scientists were tracking the statewide prevalence of chiggers, mites that feed on human and animal skin tissue while in their larval stage. They were also assessing what – if any – disease-causing bacteria these parasitic arachnids host.

"We tested for *Orientia* because it's really the only known pathogen of medical concern to be vectored by chiggers," Wasserberg says. "But we did not really expect to find it because scrub typhus, the disease associated with *Orientia*, is typically seen in south and east Asia and northern Australia."

Scrub typhus is a potentially lethal disease that can lead to headaches, muscle pain, and mental confusion, and affects approximately 1 million people each year.

The unexpected findings have stirred media interest about potential implications for North Carolinians who spend time outside and may encounter these chiggers.

"We still don't know if the *Orientia* we found is capable of causing disease," Wasserberg says. "This is part of the next phase of our research."

CHIGGERS AND TICKS OF NC

While still unfolding, their findings have the potential to make a big impact – particularly for hikers who hope to avoid insects and arachnids that could make them sick.

Wasserberg led the data collection component of the study, traveling with UNCG graduate students, including study co-author Reuben Garshong, to state parks across North Carolina. The scientists use

everyday items to collect the tiny bugs, simply placing a small black tile on the ground and waiting for chiggers to emerge from their hiding spots.

"Chiggers are known to occur near sheltering items like logs, bricks, and rocks in shaded areas," Wasserberg says. "Once they sense a host, they come crawling out searching for it like little zombies."

Rather than a host, these chiggers encounter a tile and a scientist, who uses a fine paintbrush dipped in alcohol to transfer the chigger to an alcohol-containing vial.

This relatively simple sampling technique, followed by laboratory analysis at NC State, led to their exciting discovery. Now, Wasserberg and biology master's student Noah Holland are working to better understand where and when chiggers appear across North Carolina – and where and when they carry *Orientia*.

Wasserberg is also conducting CDC-funded research in collaboration with the

NC Department of Health and Human Services to track ticks across the state.

“Our findings indicate that blacklegged ticks – some carrying the bacteria that causes Lyme disease – are most prevalent in the northwestern counties of North Carolina,” Wasserberg says. “We also sporadically see them in the Piedmont and coastal regions.”

SOLITUDE AND SCIENTIFIC SUCCESS

To study insects and arachnids, Wasserberg spends a good deal of time outdoors – a passion he developed in high school at a remote boarding school in the deserts of Israel.

“There’s a meditative solitude in nature,” he says. “It helps you to see things clearly.”

During long hikes as a student, Wasserberg would keep a close eye out for sand flies. A bite from a sand fly infected with a protozoan parasite can cause a disease called Leishmaniasis, commonly characterized by severe skin lesions.

Little did Wasserberg know that the sand flies he was avoiding would become a cornerstone of his career.

Over the past two decades, his research on sand flies and Leishmaniasis prevention has been funded by the National Institutes of Health, Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, and North Carolina Biotechnology Center.

Wasserberg’s work has netted over \$2 million in funding, which is not surprising given that Leishmaniasis affects an estimated 1 million people each year in tropical and arid regions of the world. One form can even be fatal if left untreated.

SUPPRESSING SAND FLIES

Studying the ecology of Leishmaniasis and its primary vector, the sand fly, has led Wasserberg to several potential methods to control the disease.

As part of a prestigious NIH R01 project, he and collaborators at NC State have identified chemicals, visual cues, and bacteria sources that entice egg-bearing sandflies to lay their eggs, with the goal of creating attract-and-kill traps.

Sand flies must feed on blood to produce eggs, so egg-bearing – or gravid

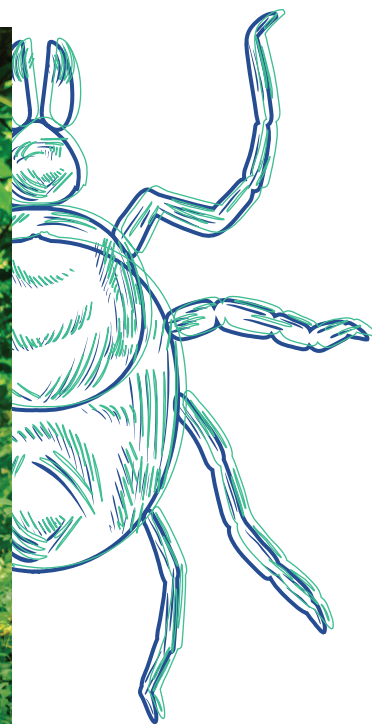
– sand flies are most likely to carry the Leishmaniasis parasite. “By attracting gravid females to a lethal trap, we can simultaneously impact sand fly population and Leishmaniasis parasite transmission,” Wasserberg explains.

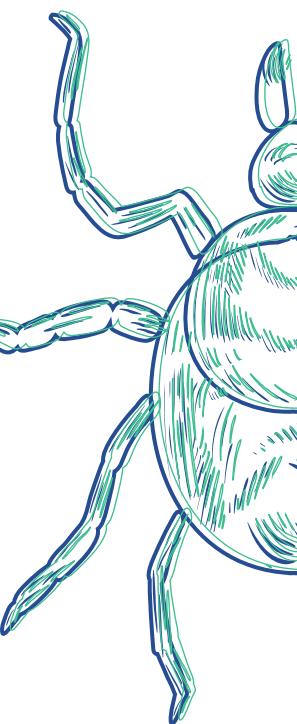
He and collaborators in Israel are also targeting the rodents that sand flies depend on. A rodent burrow in the desert is a hotbed of sand fly activity, serving as a shelter and a place where females feed on rodent blood and larvae feed on rodent droppings. That’s why the scientists are field testing an insecticide-laced rodent bait.

“It’s a trojan horse approach,” explains Wasserberg. While the insecticide is harmless to the rodent, it’s lethal to the sand flies waiting in the rat’s burrow to feed on it.

So far, the researchers have observed decreased sand fly numbers in treated burrows and decreased Leishmaniasis infections in treated areas.

“This work will not eradicate Leishmaniasis in the world, but it could be helpful in reducing human exposure in affected areas,” he says.





LITTLE BITS OF WONDER

To advance his research, Wasserberg maintains a sand fly colony in his laboratory here at UNCG. It's not easy, but Wasserberg says he enjoys working with the fascinating creatures.

His passion is infectious, and his protégés – from the students working with sand flies in the lab to those tromping through the woods in search of arachnids – are equally enthusiastic.

"He, like me, is someone who can just kind of enjoy a little bit of wonder and seeing things you don't necessarily expect," Holland says. During one fieldwork day, Holland and Wasserberg stumbled upon a dung beetle trying to roll a dungball uphill. "We both sat there for maybe five minutes watching and tried to help it get over a stick."

While Wasserberg spends extensive time conducting lab work and writing papers, fieldwork has a special spot in his heart.

"Sometimes I joke that science is an excuse for me to be out in the field," he says. "When you're in nature, it's fascinating and raises questions of why things are working the way they do."

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCHER

Chelsea Akabueze was trained by Ph.D. student Dannielle Kowacich-Swaney to assist with the maintenance of the sand fly colony. "I took Dr. Wasserberg's class last year, and we learned about how environment, vectors, and hosts interact. Humans affect their environment, and there are consequences from that."



by Rachel Damiani & Sangeetha Shivaji
learn more at biology.uncg.edu/wasserberg-lab



Care & Custody

Past Responses to Mental Health



NATIONAL TOUR COMES HOME Parsons, UNCG nursing student Michelle Villanueva, and history graduate student Azariah Journey set up “Care and Custody” in UNCG’s Nursing and Instructional Building, the exhibit’s first stop when it arrived in Greensboro.

For Dr. Anne Parsons, the issue of how society has treated people with mental health conditions falls well beyond academic interest.

That’s because it impacted her family.

“For me, it is a deeply personal issue because my grandmother’s sister had a major developmental disability,” Parsons says. “She was institutionalized in an asylum for 40 years. At that time, it was often the only option for treating people with major disabilities or mental health conditions.”

The UNCG history faculty member recently curated “Care and Custody, Past Responses to Mental Health” for the National Institutes of Health’s National Library of Medicine.

The banner exhibition and companion website explore the treatment of people with mental health conditions throughout history, especially in the United States, bringing to light the tension that exists between care and custody.

On a national tour, the exhibit has already visited Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia. It arrived in Greensboro on October 23rd for display first in UNCG’s Nursing and Instructional Building and then the Greensboro Project Space downtown.

Visitors learn about the history of mental hospitals since the mid-19th century, with depictions including how they were places where care was provided – and where people were kept against their wills.

“I believe strongly that it is important to understand the past in order to change our present,” says Parsons. Her projects, she says, seek to unearth history and build community.

Parsons’ latest book, “From Asylum to Prison: Deinstitutionalization and the Rise of Mass Incarceration after 1945,” co-won the 2019 Disability History Association’s Outstanding Book Award. Research she conducted for the book at the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland became the foundation for “Care and Custody.”

“It is incredibly saddening that there were not more opportunities to keep my great aunt in the community instead of in a far-off asylum,” she says.

“She stayed there until 1969, when she died, at the very moment of change.”

Parsons hopes that exhibit visitors will better understand how the country has moved away from custodial forms of treatment toward more inclusive approaches, and how advocates have worked to protect the rights of those with mental health conditions.

“It’s important to take the history seriously because it can lead to change – to finding ways to help close to home, instead of merely incarcerating people.”

by Mark Barnes

learn more at nml.nih.gov/exhibition/careandcustody

A Growing Effort:

Sweeping child obesity study expands, seeds new inquiries into heart health and COVID impacts

A three-year-old climbs inside his very own rocket ship. In the process, he gives us data on how to prevent one of the most serious epidemics facing American children.

It's a fresh approach by a multidisciplinary team of experts at UNC Greensboro who have joined forces to combat childhood obesity.

Obesity affects 14.7 million children and adolescents in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and is associated with some of the leading causes of death worldwide, including death from diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some forms of cancer.

"Once a child becomes overweight or obese, it's very difficult to reverse that trajectory," says Jefferson-Pilot Excellence Professor Esther Leerkes. "There's more attention now on what you can do early in life to prevent weight problems."

Dr. Leerkes is principal investigator on the \$3 million NIH-funded "iGrowUP" study, which is tracking children from ages three through five – a time in their lives when they begin developing independent self-regulatory behaviors.

The study is an expansion of UNCG's prestigious \$2.8 million iGrow – Infant Growth and Development – study, which followed approximately 300 children from the womb to age two, along with their families, and broke ground as one of the first research studies to simultaneously examine the biological, psychological, and social factors that could raise obesity risk from infancy through toddlerhood.

For the new project, nutrition's Dr. Lenka Shriver, kinesiology's Dr. Laurie Wideman and Dr. Jessica Dollar, and human development and family studies' Leerkes are following many of the same children from the original study, now during the critical time when they start learning how to control their own behavior.

The unprecedentedly detailed dataset around families and the development of healthy – or unhealthy – weights at the earliest stages of life is already producing diverse findings, but, ultimately, the researchers are focused on how they can aid families.



“ *We could create a toolbox for parents that can be tweaked and individualized based on the child's characteristics, the environment, and what's going on within the family.* **”**
- Dr. Lenka Shriver

DATA TROVE Leerkes (center) and Dr. Kierra Sattler (right), seen here working with graduate student Shourya Negi and a toddler, are using iGrow data for a spin-off study on how the pandemic influenced parent and child well-being.

■ agrowingeffort

THEIR *FAVORITE* ROCKET SHIP

iGrowUP study participants will revisit the iGrow lab in the UNCG Stone Building, where they can record their responses to tasks that involve food and tasks that do not. A device called the Bod Pod will measure their body composition.

"It looks like a big egg," says Wideman, UNCG's first Safrit-Ennis Distinguished Professor. "We tell the kids that it's like a rocket ship. It's fun, and we make it interactive for them."

Researchers will also gather information on the children's social environments, including exercise and what foods are within reach at home. They'll collect data using surveys, behavioral observations, and accelerometers.

"We'll have one of the only datasets in the world that has co-assessed parent-child physical activity in kids that young," Wideman says.

Working with such young research participants is no easy task, but Leerkes says, "We are all mothers ourselves, and we're familiar with these struggles."



THE BOD POD, operated here by Wideman, records a participant's weight and volume to learn their body density and fat percentage.



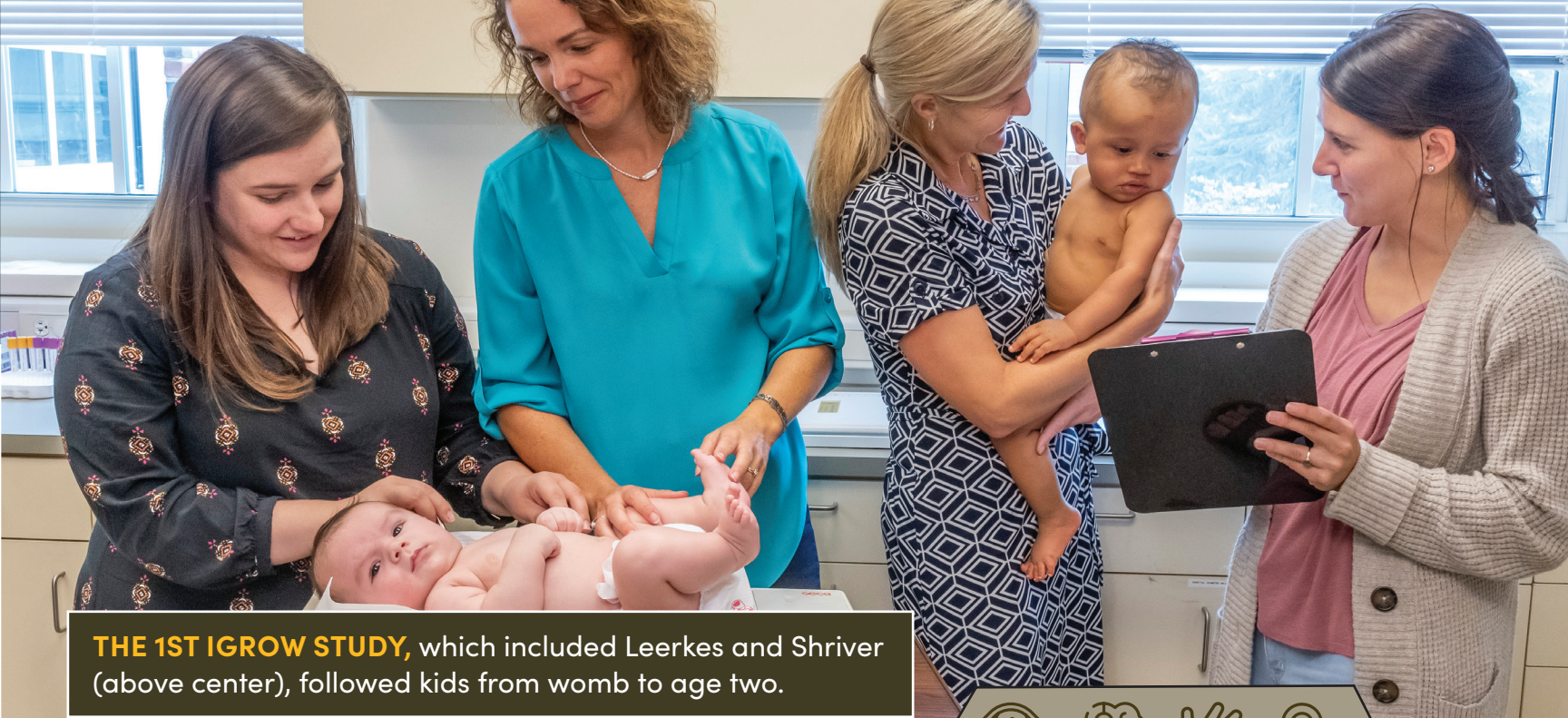
KIDS IN CONTROL

Self-regulation is something we all do, often with very little thought about it. It's what happens when we breathe deeply to relax when we're angry and when a child is able to wait patiently for their turn to play with a toy.

"We think about self-regulation, at a high level, as a child's ability to control how they feel and behave," says Dollar, who is also part of UNCG's Center for Women's Health and Wellness. "Their inner states, their behavior, their ability to cope with whatever is happening in their environment. A child's ability to self-regulate is reflected by their ability to meet the challenges of the moment."

The iGrowUP proposal is built on what scientists already know, that a child's ability to self-regulate can predict obesity.

Now the UNCG team wants to know if general self-regulation is enough for a child or if there are regulation skills that are specific to food. Is choosing not to raid the junk food drawer within easy reach motivated by the same self-regulation skills as not stealing a toy from a sibling's hands?



THE 1ST IGROW STUDY, which included Leerkes and Shriver (above center), followed kids from womb to age two.

PARENTAL EMPOWERMENT

Since many of the children and parents who participated in iGrow will participate in iGrowUP, findings from the new study can be connected to findings from the original. For example, Shriver says, “With our iGrow data from earlier, we’ll be able to look at predictors of these self-regulation skills.”

The researchers have already observed links between stressors faced by new parents – such as lack of sleep and food insecurity – and their feeding practices. An exhausted parent suffering from poor sleep, for example, was more likely to use food to soothe their baby when they became upset. A parent for whom food insecurity was a reality might urge an infant to continue feeding after they were full, out of concern for food waste.

They also saw it was possible for parents to temper their child’s feeding urges. Parents can be empowered with strategies to mindfully address their stressors and in turn reduce the chances that babies develop relationships with food that lead to overeating later in life.

They stress that their research will not be judgmental of parents. In fact, nuanced findings could help parents feel that they’re not being crammed into a “one-size-fits-all” model.

“There might be parents with a permissive feeding style that is generally considered a negative,” says Shriver. “But if that style is used with a child who has very good appetite regulation or general self-regulation, the obesity risk might still be low.”

A ROBUST TOOLKIT

Leerkes, Shriver, Wideman, and Dollar couldn’t be happier to conduct this study together. Dollar says, “We genuinely enjoy one another’s company. We work well together.”

“And having the opportunity to learn from each other has been really fun,” says Leerkes. “Most people would just come to it from one perspective. We’ve been able to integrate all of ours together.”

In the end, the researchers hope the big winners will be the kids.

“I’d love to see us move the needle on childhood obesity,” Shriver says. “That would be the dream – that there will be constructs and interventions based on what we found out from the study that would make a difference for children.”



Methodological Rigor

At ages three and five, child participants visit the lab in UNCG’s Stone Building and carry out various tasks. Each food-related task is paired with a non-food related task.

“We’ll code the children’s behavior,” says Leerkes. “How interested they seem to be, if they appear to get upset. We’ll code the strategies for how they cope. We’ll also measure their physiology, so we’ll have multiple levels of regulation.”

To get meaningful measurements on their levels of food and non-food regulation, Dollar says they made those tasks as similar as possible. If a child can’t reach a toy, it must be as challenging and similar in design as the task in which they can’t reach a piece of candy. That rules out whether the child’s frustration levels are skewed by another factor such as physical exertion.

“That’s a real strength of this study,” says Dollar (below, in the iGROW lab). “We went to great lengths to design tasks across all the different types of regulation, and to make them parallel to one another.”



Childbearing & HEART HEALTH

Dr. Forgive Avorgbedor understands that keeping families healthy extends beyond efforts to prevent childhood obesity. And that many parents face additional barriers putting them at high risk of serious health issues.

Last year, the nursing faculty member joined forces with Leerkes and Wideman to use iGrow data to better understand how structural racism influences the health of childbearing parents, particularly during and after childbirth. They're particularly interested in how pregnancy-related heart and metabolic issues can lead to future heart disease.

Arterial stiffness – a strong predictor of heart disease – affects 47.3 percent of African American women, according to the National Institutes of Health.

When Avorgbedor learned of the iGrow study, it was a perfect opportunity to study a population of parents from a diverse area. According to the 2022 Census, Greensboro was 43.1 percent Black or African American.

"The sample distribution in the iGrow study mirrors this population in Greensboro," Avorgbedor says. "Greensboro also has a very unique history based on landscape, historical laws including zoning, and restrictive practices. It's a unique environment for us to measure and understand how the environment impacts Black maternal health."

Over the next three years, with \$500,000 in funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Avorgbedor's team will examine structural racism using multiple pathways, at both the contextual and individual level. They will use surveys and publicly available data to study residential segregation, socioeconomic deprivation or vulnerability, minority health, food security, neighborhood crime, neighborhood walkability, education level, and household income ratio.

While she says researchers already have some knowledge of how discrimination contributes to adverse outcomes in Black women, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the specific risk of cardiovascular disease that Black women face due to their environment.

Original iGrow project data includes information on various biomarkers and hormone levels in childbearing parents during prenatal visits, as well as recordings like BMI and waist circumference.

Avorgbedor's team will also test parents in the study for risk of cardiovascular disease using an advanced instrument called the Vicorder®. The device tracks pulse wave velocity, a measure of arterial stiffness.

In the past, assessing arterial stiffness typically involved an ultrasound machine, but the Vicorder® fits in the palm of a researcher's hand. Avorgbedor, who trained on the instrument during her postdoc, says, "We are trying to see if measuring sub-clinical levels of arterial stiffness could give us any information about risks of cardiometabolic complications."

Avorgbedor envisions using the study's results to design an easily implemented intervention. Rather than waiting for childbearing parents to be diagnosed with hypertensive disorders in pregnancy or postpartum, arterial stiffness might be discovered early enough to prevent heart disease. "I want to contribute to the solution, and anytime I find an avenue or a medium that can lead to a solution, I pursue it passionately," she says.

"We have a lot of complications and mortality in this population, and we don't really have solutions right now," says Dr. Avorgbedor.



NEW TECH Avorgbedor demonstrates the use of a Vicorder® on Ph.D. student Favour Omondi.



“Does where you live, where you work, where you receive care put you at a higher risk?”



COVID — IMPACTS

Dr. Kierra Sattler understands firsthand how the global pandemic changed the landscape of motherhood. In 2020, she had a two-year old son and had just given birth to her daughter.

“Having a young child at that point in time made it so salient. It really did change so much,” says Sattler, a faculty member in human development and family studies.

Sattler has teamed up with Leerkes and Dr. Cheryl Buehler, another member of the original iGrow team, to research how parent and child well-being has been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The iGrow study started with a cohort of pregnant women, and the way in which the pandemic coincided with data collection, it ended up with two cohorts of pregnant women – those who were pregnant before and those who were pregnant during COVID,” Sattler explains.

She realized that the data collected offered unprecedented insight into how parents’ psychological, social, and economic outcomes changed in response to COVID experiences and how a parent’s outcomes were related to their children’s development.

Up to this point, Sattler says, much of the research around this topic didn’t look at the different aspects of the pandemic’s long-term effects on parents or how it impacted their overall well-being, beyond



DATA COLLECTION paused in March 2020 but resumed in July, with stringent COVID-safe procedures modeled on those launched by pediatric offices.

some preliminary evidence of adverse effects on the behavioral and mental health of both children and adults.

“I think researchers did the best they could, but given the holistic multisystem nature of the pandemic, how do you decide what questions are most important if you can only give a very short questionnaire because your subjects are busy balancing well-being, childcare, and elder care all while worrying if it’s safe to go to the grocery store?”

The iGrow study was one of the first studies of its kind to restart data collection following the outbreak of COVID-19. For Sattler, it provided the ideal population for studying multidimensionality in the pandemic.

Families in the iGrow study come from all income levels, across the socioeconomic spectrum, and offer a racially diverse sample. “We’re able to see differences in experiences in the pandemic across different family configurations and different levels of resources,” Sattler says.

In a testament to the need for these insights, the researchers secured \$1.6 million in NIH funding last year. With the funding, they are reaching out to iGrow participants and conducting interviews with parents and coparents to create timelines of COVID’s impacts on these families.

Their Covid And Resilience Experiences Survey project is called “iGrowCARES.”

In order to get a bigger picture of the pandemic’s influence, Sattler’s team came up with questions related to economic outcomes, caregiving responsibilities, and physical and mental health. To include a whole family perspective, the team is also interviewing co-parents, which could include a partner not biologically related to the child or a grandparent.

“We have so much rich info from iGrow on children at birth, at two months, six months, one year, and two years,” she says. “Now we can specifically go back and add contextual information about COVID and how that was influencing the whole family.”

Sattler’s goal for the study is to provide information for public health professionals that can be used for future pandemics and multi-system disasters.

“I am hoping that by collecting this really rich, in-depth longitudinal information on the pandemic and how it influenced parents and children, we will be able to learn valuable information to support families in the future.”

by Janet Inmrick & Elizabeth L. Harrison

iGrowUP is seeking additional 2-year-old participants! Learn more at igrow.uncg.edu

TO TELL THE TRUTH

The first comic book that Zaire Miles-Moultrie ever received was a 1994 first-edition Spider-Man with a holographic cover – a birthday present from his uncle.

It inspired Miles-Moultrie to use his passion for art to delve into layered storytelling. From then on, he made his own comics, honing his drawing skills and attempting to “tell big narrative stories.”

Now, Miles-Moultrie is a senior at UNCG, pursuing a degree in entrepreneurship with minors in art history and arts administration, and a BFA in studio art, with a concentration in printmaking and drawing.

When he applied for college, Miles-Moultrie sent in applications to UNCG, UNC-Chapel Hill, and one other school. He

told himself that if he got into Chapel Hill, he would go into the sciences to become a doctor. “But if I got into UNCG, I was going to be anybody who I wanted to be.”

When he landed at UNCG in 2019, he chose to pursue the arts. In one formative interaction, Miles-Moultrie had a conversation with his professor Miranda Reichhardt about pursuing drawing as a career. Her response? “What are you doing?”

“It wasn’t in a malicious way,” Miles-Moultrie explains. “It was asking me to try and think deeper about how I make my art and what I’m trying to say to the world.”

Reichhardt’s existential question led him to an answer: He wanted to make art that portrayed truth without sugarcoating reality.

That’s what lay behind his 2022 show at the Greensboro Project Space, “The Lion,

the Jackal, and the Man.” For the project, Miles-Moultrie conducted hours of research into African history, helped by art history professor Elizabeth Perrill and a team of research librarians. He says the process required unlearning negative Western connotations of the continent and its people.

In one issue of the *London Illustrated News* from 1870, Miles-Moultrie found images of Zulu men who were described as “animals,” their hair described as “exotic.” This was a lightbulb moment for the artist.

He took the images of the men and glorified them on paper, emphasizing their hair, their adornments. “I wanted to give them back the energy they deserve,” he says.

The show netted Miles-Moultrie a first-place prize at the 2023 UNCG Undergraduate Research and Creativity



Expo in the visual arts category.

After the art show, Miles-Moultrie learned of the national AXA Art Prize competition through a professor who encouraged him and some fellow students to apply. Miles-Moultrie and his colleagues dissected each other's works for hours, nitpicking them to see which would fare best against the competition.

In the end, Miles-Moultrie submitted "Beautiful Black Pearl," a collage he made from a 1600s print of a Black woman wearing pearls. Miles-Moultrie dresses her in extravagant clothing, framing her face with feathers and setting her in an otherworldly, celestial background.

The piece involved deep research about the woman and her origins.

"When I'm tackling heavier subjects, I have to do research," he says. "I have the responsibility to depict what I'm saying accurately."

Miles-Moultrie ended up as one of 40 competition finalists, selected by a jury of curators from leading American museums and galleries. The finalists were selected from more than 700 students across the country.

Looking back to when he decided to apply to UNCG, Miles-Moultrie says that he wouldn't change a thing.

"It's been great. I'm excited to have this community of up-and-coming artists, to have this community that I never really thought I would have."

"By using printmaking and drawing as my medium of choice, I can express myself, my voice, and message in a multitude of ways while also paying homage to inspirations. My art, designs, drawing, and prints are collages of the many ideologies that I have come to learn, accept, and embody."

by Sayaka Matsuoka
learn more at vpa.uncg.edu & bryan.uncg.edu



A FORCE FOR YOUTH & FAMILIES

A child acting out in preschool.
A teenager in trouble with the law.
A family reeling from a mental health crisis.

These are just a few of the North Carolinians aided by the Center for Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships at UNCG.

For more than a quarter of a century, the center, known as CYFCP, has addressed pressing social concerns among families, children, and young adults across all 100 counties in North Carolina through wide-ranging programs. Today, the center continues to expand, with funding skyrocketing to \$6.8 million annually and a robust staff – currently 30 people – closely collaborating with the community.

“What all the programs in the center share is the translation of research to practice for the greater good and authentic partnerships with the community,” says Dr. Terri Shelton, UNCG’s vice chancellor for research & engagement and a prior director of the CYFCP.

Community engagement isn’t just a catchphrase for the center: working in tandem with the community is their North Star.

“Partnerships with the community are at the heart of what we do, and I would say a lot of evolution for us has been, ‘Where’s the community’s need?’” says Dr. Christine Murray, the most recent director of the CYFCP.

The center fosters its two-way relationship with the community in multiple ways, from participating in outreach events to inviting people who have experience with a project’s focal condition or life event to serve as experts on its teams.

“A real foundational piece of the work at the center is including youth and families with lived experience – or you could say living experience because they may still be living through it,” Shelton says. “It changes everything when you’re in partnership this way.”

These community members provide integral perspectives on conditions a family may face and crucial points in youth development.

In The Early Years

For the past 20 years, Bringing Out the Best has lived up to its name by helping Guilford County residents under 5 years old overcome behavioral, social, and emotional challenges.

"These children are our future," says program director Janet Howard. "If we don't help them at this critical time, they're not going to get where they need to be."

The long-standing program, funded by the Guilford County Partnership for Children, adopts an immersive and evidence-based approach, working with the child, teacher, and parents within the child's preschool or childcare setting for approximately six visits.

Helping approximately 100 children a year, the program has a year-round waitlist with caregivers eagerly waiting for their child's name to be next in line to work with one of Bringing Out the Best's dedicated specialists – trained professionals whom Howard describes as superheroes.

"It takes a really special person to work in this field and have the passion and drive to do this work – it flows out of people like lava," Howard says. "Other teachers and parents feel it, and we make more connections."

A specialist's first school visit is all about observation. They watch the child interact with their teacher. If they notice a disconnect, they suggest approaches to foster trust, such as taking a few minutes to read a book together at the start of the day.

The specialist tracks when the child engages in the behavior leading to the referral, including context. Was the child feeling left out before their aggressive outburst? Did the teacher notice and support the child when she pulled away in the corner?

"They might be throwing things because they're angry, but they don't know how to express it. We work to try and help them understand their emotions, regulate their emotions, and put some words to it," Howard says.

Strategies include helping the child turn inward by finding a quiet spot, such as a comfy corner, where they can calm down. They may also create a story where the protagonist is struggling with a similar situation, so that the child can brainstorm alternative behaviors.

Howard says one strength of the program is that this skill development happens in real time. "There's a lot of modeling that goes on for the child and walking them back through the situation."

The child is not the only focus. Bringing Out the Best invests in coaching teachers and parents on best practices for responding to difficult behavior and supporting more positive alternatives. Howard says coaching one teacher can benefit future students who enter that classroom.

"A teacher I worked with years ago recently said to me, 'Everything you've ever brought to the classroom, it's still here. I use everything you taught me.'"

Especially in the aftermath of COVID shutdowns, as many struggle to reacclimate to school environments, Howard says the program can provide guidance and positivity to teachers, parents, and children.

"We see progress frequently, almost at every visit," says Howard. "If we can be the safe place for that kid and they just want to sit in our lap and that's all we accomplished that day, that's okay. That's progress."



More than 100 kids a year receive support from Bringing Out the Best collaborations between teachers (like Jyo Ramesh, top right, at KinderNest Preschool) and specialists (like Amanda Flynt, bottom left).

The center's support to address behavioral challenges doesn't stop at kindergarten. For example, the NC High Fidelity Wraparound Training Program assists families when youth experience mental health or behavioral challenges. The program trains teams across the state, including family and youth support partners from the community, to help guide and empower youth along their journey.

| Funder NC Department of Health and Human Services
| Impact 18 teams in 74 counties, with plans to grow

IN THE AFTERMATH OF A crisis

After a crisis occurs – whether a high schooler’s violent outburst or a middle schooler’s attempt to self-harm – families are left to pick up the pieces, often unsure where to begin.

That’s where the NC Enhanced Mobile Crisis Unit comes in. Their team of clinicians and community members with lived experience, known as family support partners, work closely with North Carolina families in the aftermath of a crisis involving a young person. “We have four weeks to walk alongside the family,” explains program manager Gayle Rose.

“We’re available by phone. We can answer questions and really focus on, ‘What does the family want? What are they going to set as their goals?’”

The unit, which launched in July 2023 in Buncombe, Henderson, Davidson, Cabarrus, Wayne, and Wilson counties, has already reached 60 families in their first four months of operation. Also known as the Mobile Outreach, Response, Engagement and Stabilization Pilot, the program is funded by the NC DHHS Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services.

The crisis unit receives information about families in need through the counties’ Mobile Crisis Management system. Families may also be referred from other entities like emergency departments, school administrators, and local social service agencies working with youth.

Once the unit receives information for a young person who meets criteria between the ages of three and 21, they quickly assemble a team and contact the family. “When a family is in crisis, they jump from one thing to another, and they’re just putting out fires,” Rose says. “They rarely have anybody sit with them and say, ‘Let’s take a step back and really look at how we can prevent the fires.’”

The crisis team brings empathy and expertise to their conversations with families and aligns their support with family goals, whether it’s providing a referral for treatment, bridging a conversation with school administrators, or sharing evidence-based parenting skills.

They also play to families’ strengths. Rose says that the family support partner often excels at this element, as the team works to make clients’ desired next steps a reality. “They’re listening and really picking up on what a family brings to the table. What are their strengths? What natural supports can they lean on?” For example, a teenager struggling with depression who loves to sing is encouraged to enroll in choir to connect to a community.

While the unit is just getting started, the impact has been powerful. For example, Rose says, multiple families avoided involuntary commitment of a child by the courts while in the program.

In addition to working to expand coverage to additional counties across the state, the team is also active in spreading the word in the community.

“Most people do not know there is immediate crisis help available for people experiencing a mental or behavioral health challenge,” she says. “Part of the pilot is a community outreach component to educate the public and to create community champions to help families connect with these services.”



60 families reached in the first 4 months. Here, staff members Gayle Rose, Shannon Barr, and Naglaa Rashwan – and family – take part in Shae’s Chase 5K, to support Guilford mental health services and spread word about the program.



Community support partners are effective, but finding them isn’t always easy. The center’s NC Voices Amplified program helps recruit new family partners and youth peer support providers. It also helps train them and the agencies employing them.

| Funder NC DHHS Division of Child and Family Well-Being
| Impact 334 partners trained in 2 years

INSIDE the juvenile justice system

In 2022 alone, about 15,000 young people were entangled with the North Carolina juvenile justice system. CYFCP program manager Dannette McCain says the majority of these young people have experienced trauma and related behavioral and emotional challenges.

But people often only see the young person's crime – a theft or violent outburst, for example – and not the struggles lurking underneath.

The NC Juvenile Justice Behavioral Health Partnerships, or JJBH, helps these youth and their families gain access to behavioral health treatment they require for recovery, with the hope of halting further interactions with the justice system.

"We're looking at a young person from a holistic perspective and not just looking at them and evaluating or assessing them as the thing that happened, but also, 'what are some of the things going on with you and your family that may have led to this moment?'" says McCain.

The center supports 21 JJBH teams across the state, providing training, technical assistance, and guidance to ensure these youth can move through the continuum of mental health care.

Center assistance comes in many forms, depending on the needs of the young person. For example, a local team may find that a teenager hasn't attended counseling to address their recent diagnosis. CYFCP experts troubleshoot to uncover the root problem: perhaps the family does not have transportation or leave time.

"It can be very easy to say that a family just didn't show up or want to participate, but if we drill down a bit more, are the processes in place to really help them navigate and move through the system?" McCain asks. "If some of these doors are trapped, how do we identify them?"

CYFCP also serves as a bridge between local teams and state leadership to streamline policies and processes. They ensure local JJBH teams are kept abreast of shifts in policies and up-to-date approaches,

including providing tools to ensure teams are using culturally appropriate methods.

McCain says their teams adopt a strength-based mindset. "We start with: what are the strengths of the young person, their family, and their community, and how do we build upon those things?"

They also prioritize pro-social and community-based activities. For example, if a middle schooler loves to be active, their team may find and suggest a community basketball league where she can build healthy bonds.

"What I love about the work is that we're centering the conversation on the youth and the families and what they need and having the system be led by them, and we're culturally responsive," McCain says. "We're not just doing a one-size-fits-all approach to juvenile justice and behavioral health."



21 JJBH teams across the state receive support from program manager Dannette McCain (center) and program specialists Carla Carpenter (left) and Danielle Dancy.



VOICES, SEEN

A rain-streaked windshield and a street sign don't normally warrant more than a passing glance.

But four high school students found deeper meaning in them as perfect visuals to express their feelings about mental health. With help from doctoral student Stacy Huff and the NC Healthy Transitions pilot program, they found a creative approach to depict their experiences when it comes to anxiety, self-esteem, hope, and security.

The students in Buncombe County, North Carolina, first saw their photovoice exhibit unveiled to the public on September 14, in the lobby of Asheville's new County Health and Human Services building.

The exhibit is comprised of photos participants took while going about their lives. Metal plaques next to each photo share quotes from the students, connecting the images to aspects of their mental well-being.

The photo of the windshield in the rain represents a drive to school, and on a deeper level, the stress and repetitiveness of school days.

A black-and-white photo of a crocheted bouquet, with one flower appearing brighter than the others, represents focusing on the outcome. "It represents how this participant tries to focus on a bright spot as a motivation to get through challenges," Huff says.

Suicide is one of the top five leading causes of death for people ages 10 to 65 in the state. As awareness grows about mental health, Huff, who is getting her doctorate in educational research methodology, wants to help get resources into the hands of young people.

It was important for Huff to not only put young people at the center

of her research, but to give them a voice in the process. "As much as you might presume to know what they're going to say or what they want, you really don't," she says.

It's one reason she uses photovoice, a research method that employs photography to break down and explore social issues.

"It's community-based action research," she says. "It involves participants in the data collection, and it gives results back to the community as a traveling exhibit."

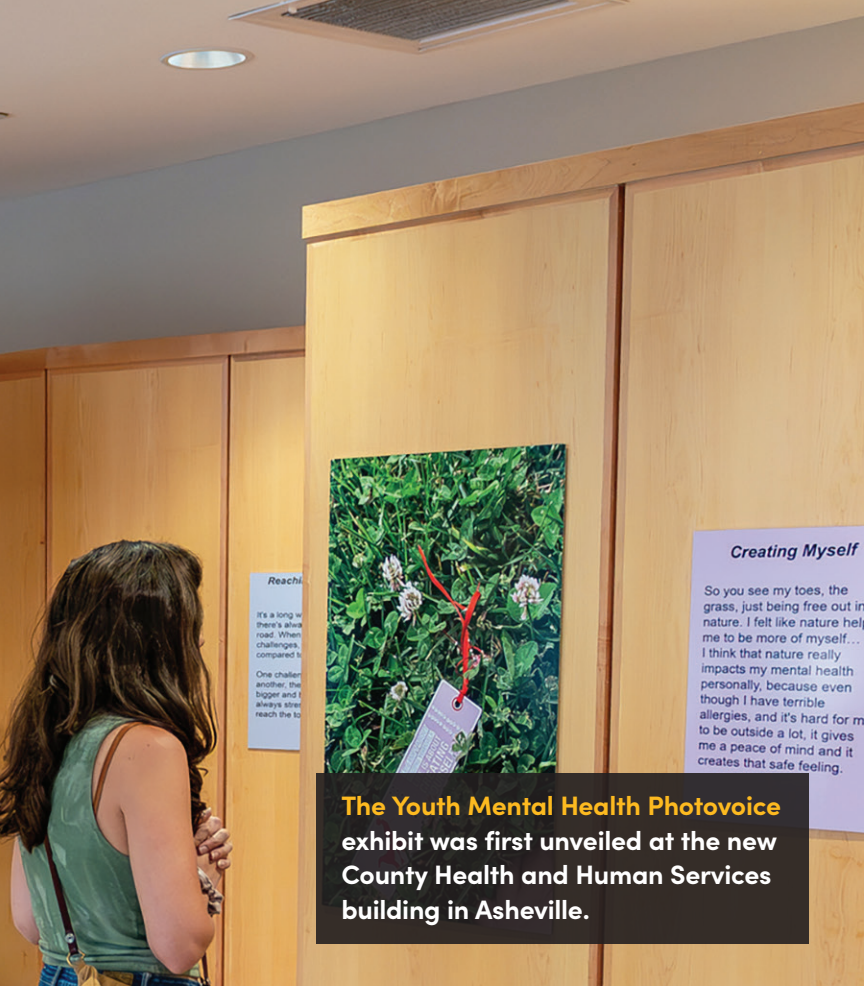
The idea was attractive to her mentor Dr. Tiffany Tovey who connected her with the NC Healthy Transitions Program, for which Tovey is an external evaluator. "Pictures tell deep stories and encourage people to reflect on their own experiences," she says.

"Stacy's photovoice project falls right in line with our program's valuing of youth voice and choice, of reflecting actual experiences of youth," says project director Willow Burgess-Johnson.

Tovey granted Huff's request to lead the project. "I have an enormous amount of gratitude," Huff says. "She let me take charge but was always my safety net."

Huff adds that her work reflects the UNCG School of Education's emphasis on cultural responsiveness. "To be culturally responsive, you need to give back as well as take. You're not just taking data. You're also giving back to that same community."

To develop the exhibit, participants took photos with some guidance from a professional photographer, presented them to the group, and



The Youth Mental Health Photovoice exhibit was first unveiled at the new County Health and Human Services building in Asheville.

MAKING THE NEEDLE MOVE

Across CYFCP's diverse programs, Murray says she has been struck by the interconnectedness of social concerns in North Carolina.

"One of the things I've seen in the center is everything is so related – whether we're talking about early childhood, mental health, family relationships, substance abuse, juvenile justice, or violence prevention," Murray (bottom, left) says. "It doesn't matter what the entry point is into the social challenges. It's all connected."

At the end of her tenure with the center, Murray effervesced about her colleagues and the dedication of CYFCP's staff. "The people in our center are some of the greatest people in North Carolina working in behavioral health systems in innovative ways," she says.

Shelton (bottom, right) says Murray's work over the past four years has helped the center evolve in closer connection with the community, and she's excited to see how the incoming director builds upon this momentum.

The impact doesn't stop with the programs, she adds. "By working in concert with policymakers, we can help ensure that insights gleaned from CYFCP's programs inform and guide statewide policies and programs."

In this way, the CYFCP is reaching beyond academia – both into the community and policy spheres – to address problems and enact changes that help nurture North Carolina families.

Shelton describes her own eight years as the CYFCP director as a dream job that has been a highlight of her career. "I went home feeling like I made the needle move. Sometimes it was a teeny-weeny bit, but sometimes it was big," she says.

"What a joy, what a blessing, and the people I've met along the way and what I've learned – every day was a continuing education."

explained their meaning.

One photo of a community watch sign came as a surprise to Huff until she heard a student's explanation. "It filled them with anxiety. It prompted them to wonder why they needed to have a neighborhood watch. Did somebody get hurt? Would it be safe for them to play outside?"

"That's something that a lot of us take for granted."

September's unveiling was the first of many stops for the display, which traveled across western North Carolina and was seen by community decision makers, including healthcare providers and government officials.

"We want to share a sense of the broader community," says Huff. "What are they seeing in their lives that's helping, or not helping, or making it worse?"

Huff also presented her work at the American Evaluation Association's October conference to help her peers adopt and apply the process.

"To see something that was just an idea now out in the world is just phenomenal," she says.

Tovey says, "It was so fulfilling to see the photovoice exhibit during opening night. It's getting such an important topic in the public eye, for folks to reflect on and hopefully take action for."



by Rachel Damiani, with "Voices, Seen" story inset by Janet Imrick
learn more at cyfcp.uncg.edu

CURE, CARE & DUTY

**AN INTERVIEW WITH
DR. CHRISTIAN MORARU**

SEPARATION IS AN ILLUSION

"We specialize early in my home country, so from high school through college, I studied Romanian and other literatures, including English, intensively. Then I went to Indiana and did a double Ph.D. in comparative and American literature.

"My generation was drawn to the American writers of the 1960s and 1970s because we saw them as models of political resistance. Those authors provided models of how to speak back to and against existing arrangements of culture and power.

"I take pride in my UNCG title of distinguished professor in the humanities. My work unfolds at the crossroads of the history of ideas, modern literature, ethics, and politics. As an English professor, I have tremendous appreciation for the neighboring fields that make my work possible. We tend to think of literature as separate from the real world, but that separation is an illusion."

LITERATURE PROVIDES FUNDAMENTAL INSIGHTS

"Literary studies are crucial for the welfare of a democratic society. We're surrounded by stories. You turn on the media, and there it is, a narrative someone is trying to project. It's important people understand what a narrative is, how it works on them.

"Obviously, a poem cannot cure cancer. But what happens or should happen in literature and humanities classes is the exploration, direct or not, of the very notion of cure. Why is it important to cure something, to care for something or somebody? How indebted are we to others?

"Before biologists or physicists get into their labs, they need to value notions like curing and caring, opening up one's mind toward others, critical thinking, and innovation. This is what the humanities teach, and this is foundational in terms of both further learning and citizenship, of what it means to be a good citizen."

COSMODERNISM AND GEOMETHODOLOGY

"I'm flattered that 'cosmodernism,' a term I introduced in a 2011 book, is widely used. That monograph focuses on a transitional moment in American culture – the 1990s and 2000s – when we're moving past postmodernism. I want people to hear a number of things in this term, like 'cosmos' – the notion that we see ourselves as part

of something bigger. No matter where we are, we are in visible – or not-so-visible – relationships with others. We have an obligation to the welfare of others. We are responsible for what happens on the other side of the planet. That has become a basic reality in the 21st century.

"My term 'geomethodology' expands the analysis of cosmodernism with more emphasis on the epistemological and comparative aspects. The basic notion here is that you cannot read and understand 'A' without some sense or grasp of a certain element or phenomenon 'B' from elsewhere on the planet. 'Local' things always bear the imprint of vaster worlds."

SUBJECTS

"My latest monograph, 'Flat Aesthetics,' is an analysis of contemporary U.S. literature and the 'contemporary' more broadly. My focus, this time around, is on the non-human entities present in the system of world relationships.

"I try to do away with the distinction – and hierarchy – between subjects and objects. We're all objects, or 'subjects,' which means, among other things, that we all have some kind of capacity to affect others. A rock, a tree, the coffee mug on my desk – we're all capable of causing events together as part of our entanglements.

"I produce words on paper or on a computer screen. But I am being made, to the same extent, as an author by the so-called 'instruments' surrounding me. Everything can be a source of affect – whatever effects obtain are the result of all those things, human and not, which all exist – all are – on the same level ontologically, if not politically.

"That brings us back to my notions of care, responsibility, and obligation. The more we recognize in things attributes traditionally set aside for humans, the more we have to rethink the way we behave toward non-human others."

I PLAY FOR UNCG

"UNCG has offered me and my family a home and a team to play for, as it were. I am proud of being here, and I remain fully dedicated to UNCG. It is very important to me that the humanities have received strong support at UNCG over my career and the university continues to invest in humanities research and education."

Interview by Mark Toszczak & Sangeetha Shivaji
learn more at english.uncg.edu/moraru



While many distinguished scholars are known as experts in one field, English professor Christian Moraru received the Senior Research Excellence Award for his mastery of several. Known internationally as an – and sometimes “the” – expert in post-WWII American fiction and postmodernism, and one of the most significant 21st-century scholars of world literature, he is also lauded for his deeply nuanced forays into literary theory.

The Class of 1949 Distinguished Professor in the Humanities has 8 monographs, 8 edited essay collections, over 300 articles and book chapters, over 400 reviews, and over 100 invited talks to his name and has published – in multiple languages – in leading journals and with prestigious academic presses. He has held a Fulbright and multiple Humboldt Research Fellowships and is currently supervising a \$2 million European Research Council-funded international project on transnational literary history. Over his 25 years at UNCG, Moraru has also been a much sought-after mentor, with his advisees publishing their work as books with Oxford, Palgrave Macmillan, and other top scholarly presses.



TEACHERS' AID Dr. Faith Freeman works with Asheboro City Schools teacher Brianna King.

SOCIAL INNOVATION

A Catalyst for Positive Change in NC

Imagine a place where scholars are encouraged to teach, research, and publish – and translate that work into practical solutions that can scale up quickly and effectively.

While many universities reward faculty members who pursue patents, license agreements, and industry collaborations, it's less common to find an institution that also invests in social innovation and entrepreneurship.

"Social innovation is the intentional development of creative solutions to society's problems to create positive change," explains UNCG's Chief Innovation Officer Dr. David Wyrick. "It refers to the development and implementation of new ideas, products, or services that can be applied across the non-profit, public, and private sectors. Social entrepreneurship is similar, but there is an additional focus on applying entrepreneurial principles and generating revenue to achieve sustainability and scalability."

UNCG is building a deliberate culture of both social innovation and social entrepreneurship – and North Carolina communities are reaping the benefits.

It starts with the desire to solve an acute community problem. The need for trauma training among counselors and teachers. To address COVID-19 learning losses in K-12. To effectively recruit and retain teachers, who are currently leaving education in droves.

It's facilitated by UNCG's critical partnerships in our communities. Community leaders communicate needs and work with UNCG researchers to design and refine solutions in real-time.

It's possible because UNCG encourages its faculty to engage in creative thinking and collaboration across disciplines, most recently by bringing them together through idea incubators. Thanks to this expanding collaborative infrastructure, UNCG is advancing knowledge and making tangible, meaningful impact beyond campus borders.

Faculty Flex for USEFUL SOLUTIONS

For most faculty members, publishing their research in peer-reviewed journals is their bread and butter. But the next step, bringing that scholarship out of the laboratory or laptop, can be a bit of a conundrum. They likely will encounter unexpected hurdles as they venture beyond their field into the broader space of trying to make a societal impact.

As Dean's Fellow of Innovation in the School of Education, Dr. Scott Young has an entrepreneurial spirit that helps carve a path for UNCG scholars to apply their research to real world challenges. His guiding tenet: A solution is not useful if no one is interested in it.

He launched the School of Education's Impact through Innovation initiative, or ITI, a space for researchers to figure out what to do with their ideas for improving our world. The program offers tailored consulting to faculty as they re-imagine their research and optimize it for a broader social impact.

"In the beginning, you don't know whether or not an idea is a good idea," Young explains. "You start as an expert and ask why we have not been able to solve a particular challenge. Our participants come to ITI and start talking about it early as they're building their work and their research. ITI helps them connect with other experts, find resources, and hone ideas. And their thinking evolves. ITI provides the space and the environment for idea incubation."

Researchers in the Education's ITI are tackling myriad initiatives such as encouraging healthy habits through library programming and a mentoring program designed to help middle school girls overcome the societal stereotype that they don't belong in STEM.

"The research is already there," Young says. "We want to encourage our faculty and students to think about using their research to create tangible solutions for the people who will use it. Our innovation toolkit is designed to guide them through that thought process. The solution won't work if those it's intended for aren't interested in it."

ITI's model for academic to real world development has encouraged many School of Education faculty to flex new muscles with their work, exciting them and their community partners. Perhaps one of the most exciting outcomes: the creativity and ingenuity coming out of the initiative is contagious.



"ONE ITI INITIATIVE is the distribution of Spartan Innovation Toolkits, which encourage students to innovate and ideate on real-world problems they encounter and propose solutions," says Dr. Young. "From the School of Ed perspective, we think today's workers are increasingly asked to solve problems, so we want our students to have mechanisms to think about how to solve complicated problems."



TRAINED TO TAKE ON TRAUMA

Trauma-based care is a topic that has become ubiquitous within the mental health community in response to the many stressors people endure today – the pandemic, isolation, fear, poverty, health problems, crime, accidents, and abuse.

Counselors, psychologists, therapists, and other professionals struggle to help the vast numbers of traumatized people in their care.

“Traditionally within the mental health field, trauma was thought of as an area of specialization,” explains Dr. Rebecca Mathews, a clinical assistant professor of counseling. “But we have found that all of us need to know how to provide trauma-informed care. It should be a universal protocol.”

In response, UNCG’s Department of Counseling and Educational Development developed the Trauma-Informed Professional Practice certificate training program, or TIPP.

Designed for mental health professionals, counselors, school counselors, and psychologists, the virtual program launched in 2022 is interactive and module-based, using videos, readings, and discussions.

“It’s helping the helpers,” says Anita Faulkner, who directs the UNCG NC Academy for Stress, Trauma, and Resilience through which TIPP is offered. “It will help them operate in a trauma-informed manner.”

In response to community requests, Faulkner and Mathews have also expanded TIPP to include an educator-focused program.

“School districts reach out constantly to us for in-person training,” Faulkner says. “There is such a need, especially in rural schools who don’t have consistent access to mental health providers. This program helps educators and school systems by providing some understanding of trauma. We’re not asking educators to be mental health clinicians, but we are giving them the training to notice what’s going on in their classrooms and tools to effectively communicate with their students and the parents.”

In addition to eight core trauma modules, the new program has eight additional modules specifically for educators, Faulkner says. “We built it based on our research and conversations with K-12 educators from across the country who shared samples of the situations they encounter in their schools.”

Specific and timely, the program trains participants to recognize what trauma looks like in the classroom and apply trauma-informed principles to issues including school safety, classroom strategy, resilience, and educator wellness.



EXPERTISE ON DEMAND Dr. Christian Chan, seen above teaching a graduate class on group counseling theory, is one of the experts professionals learn from in the virtual program.



UNCG’s NC Academy for Stress, Trauma, and Resilience launched in 2021. In two years, NCA-STAR has offered trainings, outreach, and consultation impacting 1,200 teachers and school personnel, 15,000 K-12 students, and 500 community professionals.

Addressing teacher shortages

A collaboration between IPIe and Guilford County Schools is also addressing our pipeline of quality math and science teachers.

“We were facing severe shortages of math teachers, especially after COVID, when we saw a lot of teachers leaving the profession,” says Dr. Alison Coker, Guilford County Schools deputy chief human resources officer. What started off as a collaboration with IPIe for a math residency program designed to recruit, develop and hopefully

Erasing COVID Learning Losses



HELPING HANDS UNCG grad students Grace Finn (left) and Chidinma Ezugwu (right) tutor at Jackson Middle School, with Guilford County Schools tutoring coordinator John Brown.

Schools nationwide opened their doors to students following months of learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To address those losses, UNCG and Guilford County Schools have partnered to create The Tutoring Collaborative, bringing graduate students from across campus into K-12 as tutors. A \$2 million grant supports the program, offering graduate students stipends for 20 hours of tutoring a week.

"It's a crucial intervention, and we're honored to have the district's trust," says Dr. Holt Wilson, co-director of UNCG's Institute for Partnerships in Education, or IPiE, which secured the funding. Established in 2020, the institute facilitates long-term, community-based partnerships that bring solutions for pressing needs in schools.

The Tutoring Collaborative has proven to be agile and responsive to the needs of specific schools, and it has garnered national attention. The Biden Administration named Guilford County as one of 15 school systems nationwide using funds from the American Rescue Plan to their best advantage.

"We started with three graduate students. Now we have between 34 and 40 graduate student tutors each term," says program coordinator Megan Martin. "Over the past three years, we narrowed focus to best meet the needs of the district. We found the highest need

focuses on grades 6 through 12 in math and science."

The program uses high dosage tutoring, meaning students meet with their tutor for at least 30 minutes to an hour, depending on their age, at least three times a week. Research shows this tutoring model is most effective at raising student grades, IPiE co-director Dr. Faith Freeman says. Guilford high school students have seen major gains in math in the aftermath.

Successes don't stop at test scores.

"The Tutoring Collaborative was designed to address learning loss from COVID, but students also lost human connection, social engagement, and experience building relationships during that time," Martin says. "A lot of times we look to test scores to tell whether this program is successful, but Guilford County Schools and our program are also measuring success through attendance rates. Kids are showing up to school more because they have a tutor there who cares for them three days a week."

The Tutoring Collaborative is now scaling up and adapting its model to include hybrid in-person and online tutoring, with the goal of expanding to rural counties.

retain skilled math teachers is now the Math and Science Teachers of Tomorrow, or MST2.

MST2 builds on UNCG's strong teacher education expertise by targeting a growing group of people with content knowledge in math and science, who want to learn to teach.

"The future of teacher education is changing, and we're likely to see a lot of folks entering the profession with a bachelor's degree in something other than teaching and a passion and interest in working for kids," says Dr. Nicholas Kochmanski in teacher

education and higher education. "They have the content expertise but don't have the background in how to support kids' learning."

Guilford County Schools pays for these new instructors to pursue a master's of teaching at UNCG, where they also receive coaching on meeting statewide requirements to continue teaching in North Carolina. In return, participants commit to one year teaching in Guilford County Schools for each semester they spend in the MST2 program.

Tailored Teacher Development

UNCG is also working with school districts to develop micro courses for K-12 educators that can even lead to graduate course credit. The work, led by IPiE, started with Asheboro.

"Asheboro City Schools is committed to improving the teacher experience and re-professionalizing education and teaching," says Wilson. "They're funding the micro courses and putting their teachers at the frontier of what we know about good teaching and learning. It's an awesome effort to elevate teachers and their work."

The process began with a survey of faculty in the district to understand what development opportunities were most needed and wanted. The resulting micro courses each involve five in-person sessions.

"It's a way for us to support the school districts while also giving the educators credit towards an advanced degree," says Freeman, who also serves as a micro course instructor for Asheboro. "This is consistent professional development where they can build on their learning."

IPiE has since expanded these offerings to Orange, Randolph, and Guilford County school systems. Courses are tailored according to each district's needs and choices.



GRAD CREDIT Wilson (left) and Freeman conduct a micro course session with Asheboro City Schools teachers Belinda Cox (second left) and Brianna King.

A **NEED** for Library Media Coordinators

The success of MST2 attracted the interest of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools after they identified a need for media centers staffed by qualified media specialists. At the time the problem was identified, 40 percent of the district's schools were without a dedicated library or media specialist.

They've tapped UNCG's online master's in library and information science program to train a cohort of 10 teachers.

"We could not have done this program without IPiE," says Dr. April Dawkins in the information, library and research sciences department. "When Charlotte-Mecklenburg approached us with the idea for the cohort, the institute helped us figure out the logistics for funding the cohorts' course tuition."

Following the MST2 model, Charlotte-Mecklenburg funds

tuition costs for each cohort member. In exchange, the teachers earn their MLIS degrees and pledge to stay with the school system for a minimum of two years.

For the teachers in the cohort, their courses apply to their positions in real time.

"Our partnership with UNCG is an essential element of our efforts to recruit and retain highly effective school library media coordinators," says Kimberly Ray, director of Digital Learning & Library Services for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

"After only one semester following the launch of this collaboration, already the positive impact has been felt by several thousand students who now have access to a school librarian enrolled in a high-quality library program."

EXPANDING ITI ACROSS CAMPUS

When Wyrick heard about the School of Education's successes, he saw their model's potential to benefit the university as a whole. Wyrick's Innovate UNCG team focuses on helping faculty translate their research and scholarship to spur impact.

"When I learned about what Scott and other groups in education were doing, I realized that every school or college on our campus should have an Impact through Innovation hub," Wyrick says. "In the hubs, faculty with ideas for impact will connect with other innovative faculty in their disciplines. And then those hubs will connect together through Innovate UNCG, bringing innovative faculty across campus together to explore proven strategies for taking ideas to scale, particularly in the context of social innovation and social entrepreneurship."

These ITI spin-off efforts are already underway, beginning within the School of Health and Human Sciences, or HHS. There, Dr. Jeff Milroy, associate professor and graduate program director in the Department of Public Health Education, has been named the inaugural faculty fellow for the HHS Impact Through Innovation Hub.

HHS is a promising location for the next ITI hub: it's a vibrant academic unit where faculty are actively engaged in research relevant for local individuals, families, and community well-being, says Dr. Esther Leerkes, associate dean for research in HHS and Jefferson-Pilot Excellent Professor in Human Development and Family Studies.

The school has been a top producer of contracts and grants on campus for many consecutive years, adds Dean Carl Mattacola. "This hub allows us to harness the exciting energy of research to create more shared products and ideas that directly benefit patients and consumers."

As Milroy steps into his new role, he is meeting with HHS faculty and mining their conversations to determine ways he can help them reach their goals and overcome hurdles related to translating their science for societal benefit.

"What are the really cool things that are going on already, and where are our faculty encountering barriers? Is it funding, translation, or the true community-engaged piece of it? Where does Innovate UNCG fit into their goals?" said Milroy.

Rather than starting from scratch, Milroy is collaborating with Young to replicate what has worked well in the School of Education.

For example, Young might have a roadmap to help a faculty member start a nonprofit that Milroy can share with HHS faculty who have a similar goal.

"Every faculty member is going to be at their own pace," Milroy says, reflecting on what he has learned from Young. "They're going to have their own needs and challenges. Sit and listen. Ask good questions, but listening is going to help you meet their needs."

Milroy is also working closely with Wyrick to connect HHS faculty to services within Innovate UNCG that could be useful for them: a collaboration that Leerkes said is especially helpful.

"The hub, and strengthening our relationships with experts in Innovate UNCG, will facilitate faculty efforts to apply their knowledge," she says.

These impactful hubs don't come together by happenstance. Rather, dedicated UNCG faculty and staff members' knowledge of nonprofits, engagement with the community, and desire to foster cross-disciplinary connections are making innovation a reality.

These leaders continue to evolve their offerings to foster social innovation at UNCG. This year, Innovate UNCG launched their Impact Through Innovation Community of Practice platform – a virtual space designed to connect impact-minded students and faculty with one another, curate knowledge, manage events, and provide training opportunities.

This platform is intended to be a one-stop shop for faculty and students to engage with one another and learn about innovation across campus, including engaging in entrepreneurial training and receiving badges for skills they master. Down the road, Wyrick envisions the platform as a virtual space to connect the ITI hubs across campus, jumpstart societal impact, and break down disciplinary barriers.

"What we want to do is drive research and innovation that's multidisciplinary," Wyrick says. "We'll have these hubs that are within a school, but then we'll use this virtual community to bring people together and come up with new grant proposals, business plans, and nonprofit ideas."

*by Alice Touchette, with contributions by Rachel Damiani
learn more at innovate.uncg.edu & soe.uncg.edu/rdi/iti & ipie.uncg.edu*

HHS RESEARCH IN ACTION The Moving On! program guides college athletes through the difficult transition from the highly structured environment of collegiate athletics to independent adult living, by introducing them to nutritional guidelines, alternative physical activities, and goal-setting for well-being. The program – launched by kinesiology's Dr. Erin Reifsteck and her collaborators – has been implemented at over a dozen NCAA institutions, while an online module also impacts thousands of additional student-athletes.



A GOLDEN AGE

ORIGINAL ANIMATION ART FROM THE WALT DISNEY STUDIOS, 1937-42

Space for Engagement | Fall 2023



Plenty of kids go to Disneyland with their parents, but few come home with a lifelong career inspiration. Heather Holian found hers in an art gallery above the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction. "My parents are artists, and we talked about the Disney production art that was on display just as seriously as they would talk to me about Michelangelo or Van Gogh," she says.

When Holian got back to school and opened her art survey book, Walt Disney's name wasn't in it. "Even when I got into grad school, you couldn't study the art of Disney," she says.

Now as associate director of the School of Art and a professor of art history, Holian has ensured that UNCG College of Visual and Performing Arts students have a broader, more inclusive definition of art. It's all thanks to a collection of Disney originals, which Holian arranged to be loaned to the Weatherspoon Art Museum.

The collection is comprised of original works of art from Walt Disney Studios' "Golden Age," including "Snow White,"

"Pinocchio," "Fantasia," "Dumbo," and "Bambi."

"Each production cel has to be individually hand-painted and animated to show movement," Dr. Holian explains.

In a group of art from "Pinocchio," for example, one cel depicts Geppetto and Pinocchio on a raft. Another cel depicts the waves crashing around them. Yet another is of them in the boat.

At once, the scale of these original drawings makes their artists feel more relatable. Eraser marks hint at the artist's thought process. Narrowing and widening pencil marks show the artist's skill in creating movement. In the margins of each cel, handwritten notes from one artist to another reveal important collaborations.

To examine collaborative processes like these, Holian spent a decade collecting interviews with Pixar artists, directors, and animators. "In a lot of conversations, Pixar artists would say to me, 'If you took one person out of this team, you'd have a whole different dynamic,'" Holian says. "Each

person brings their own ideas, inspirations, life histories. It's like a pot of soup; if you add different ingredients to the recipe, you get a different product in the end."

Her work in understanding the role of individual contributors gives valuable background and insight to students as they grasp the value of diversity, collaboration, and individuality in the production process.

Dr. Emily Stamey, head of exhibitions at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, worked with Holian to select the pieces for the fall 2023 exhibition. "We so often imagine artworks as the outcome of singular individuals alone in their studios," she says. "Understanding how those collaborations happen can resonate with so many other parts of our lives."

Holian knows of only two other art historians focused on Disney, and she is the only one to ever study Pixar in depth. But her latest focus is on the impact of Disney in the art world. "Looking at a variety of primary source materials, I'm trying to reconstruct how many exhibitions there



"Beyond limited onscreen crediting, the names of most Disney animation artists weren't publicly known until the '50s—and even then, it was still a small number of names."

were, where, who saw them, and what was in them. And then we get into these interesting years where Disney art was actually sold."

From 1938 to 1946, Holian says, one gallery owner had exclusive rights to sell Disney artwork, and during this eight-year period thousands purchased the art, including museums. Tracking these purchases and exhibits led her to a contemporary owner with a substantial number of pieces, which would make up the Weatherspoon exhibit. "They were in unbelievably good condition. The launch of the exhibit also dovetailed with the launch of our BFA animation program."

In order to highlight the artistry of animation, Holian introduces her students to unique personalities who forever changed the industry.

Holian is especially interested in sharing the stories of artists from traditionally underrepresented groups. "The art director of Bambi was a Chinese immigrant named Tyrus Wong who fought racism, got a job at the studio, and produced one of the most beautiful Disney films. Mary Blair was one of the first women Imagineers at Disney and arguably one of the most influential artists in the history of the Disney studio – she was the guiding force behind the design of 'Cinderella,' 'Alice in Wonderland,' and 'Peter Pan.'"

Holian hopes students will recognize themselves in these artists who paved the way for diversification in animation. "I'm trying to make history relatable so students can see the history is not perfect, that a lot more can be done, and that they are the future. I want them to feel empowered by these individuals who were the first."

by Robin Sutton Anders
learn more at go.uncg.edu/holian

"THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO SUBSTITUTE for seeing a work of art in person, whether you're talking about a Michaelangelo sculpture or a Disney cel of 'Snow White,'" says Holian, who developed the exhibit as the Weatherspoon's Benjamin Endowed Faculty Fellow. In the photos above, Holian teaches an animation class in the exhibit space and looks over the collection with Stamey.

Drawn to Dance

Art may be set in stone or hang upon a wall, but it's never lifeless.

Dancers are particularly aware of the dynamic and fluid nature of art. That's what propelled two students to partner with the Weatherspoon Art Museum to create a program where art inspires dancers, and dance inspires artists.

Liz Anderson and Tiffany Moss Hale are the brains behind "Drawn to Dance," a series of free public events at the museum where UNCG dance students improvise performances for art students to sketch or film. The successful events launched in the fall of 2023.

"As a dance artist, I am a collaborator at heart," says Anderson. "One of our goals is to make dance and art less removed from each other."

UNCG Dance Director Lee Walton says this is the kind of activity the school is seeking to promote. "We want to turn the school inside out, so that it becomes more accessible, and the public become collaborators in our research."

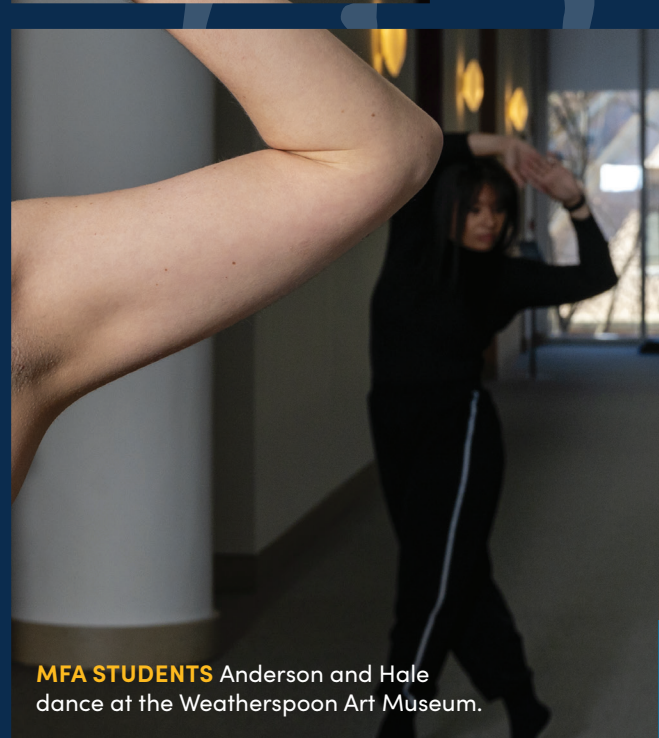
ART BEGETS ART

Anderson and Hale's work began in the first year of their master of fine arts program, as part of a graduate assistantship aimed at developing new dance programming with the Weatherspoon. Anderson had seen a program where dance companies held practices at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, and they decided they wanted to bring a similar experience to Greensboro.

"Liz and Tiffany had a vision of the museum as a place for not only exhibiting art, but for the practice and creation of art," says Mei Méndez, the Weatherspoon's assistant director for strategic engagement.

At the museum events, guests that pass through the atrium or the second-story overlook can watch the dancers and the artists creating alongside them. Paper and pencils are available for any guests who wish to join in.

Hale was particularly touched to see a little girl sitting down to draw alongside the UNCG student artists at a fall event. "We gave



MFA STUDENTS Anderson and Hale dance at the Weatherspoon Art Museum.

people a way to see dance that isn't just on the proscenium stage that they're used to."

She says the exhibits also encourage the dancers to improvise. "I would look at the mural on the wall in the atrium and mimic the lines within it. Dancers would interact with the sculptures in the courtyard and let them influence their movement."

"The art students were fascinated with how the dance students interacted with the space," adds Walton, who is also a professor of art. "They got to see all the things they were learning in art – line, tension, rhythm, pattern – embodied in their performances."

ROOM TO GROW

This is not the first time the Weatherspoon has partnered with UNCG dance, but Walton hopes to foster even more of these collaborations and others across UNCG's College of Visual and Performing Arts – especially in ways that increase public access to art. "Communities benefit from the college making art, artists, and research accessible," he says. "And our students and faculty benefit greatly from the expertise within our communities."

Walton was proud to see first-year students work alongside graduate students in "Drawn to Dance." "Within their first semester, they were performing publicly. We were inspired to see them take that chance, to know that they felt supported."

This spring, Anderson and Hale secured funding from the Sue Stinson Enrichment Endowment, created by Dance Professor Emerita Sue Stinson to promote dance within a context of social justice. They're using it to develop a program they call "The Dance Lab," to create more mobile, interactive events for dance students and the public.

Anderson says it will make dance students more comfortable with letting an audience in on the process and imperfections. "In the School of Dance, we say, 'we're not afraid to fail,'" she says. "What you make may not look great initially, but you get some nuggets of fantastic material that you can develop."

A DRAW FOR STUDENTS

Hale, who is from Rock Hill in South Carolina, and Anderson, who is from Covington in Georgia, say they were drawn to UNCG for the chance to study a diverse array of movement styles, its rigorous academic opportunities, and the stellar faculty. "I came here for mentorship, guidance, and to become a better teacher," says Anderson.

Walton says it's important for programs like these to be student-led, balancing experience with fresh perspectives. "There's so much that students learn from the process of collaborations and project development," Walton says. "They discover they have the skillsets to do important, impactful work."

Méndez hopes more dance students will look to the Weatherspoon for inspiration. "We want to be a place where students feel welcome to collaborate with us and propose new museum programs that capitalize on their experiences and interests."



by Janet Imrick

learn more at weatherspoonart.org & vpa.uncg.edu



EXPLORING AI FOR CHILD SAFETY

Dr. Hamid Nemati, professor of information systems and supply chain management, has been studying artificial intelligence, or AI, for longer than most. He did his doctoral research on AI methods to optimize flows of items across networks. His interest in AI has only grown stronger as advances in AI technologies, including ChatGPT, have made them more widely used.

One project his team has been excited about is the use of AI methods to mitigate child abuse and maltreatment.

Hamid and Bryan alums Dr. Minoo Modaresnezhad and Dr. Yuzhang Han – his past doctoral students – tasked themselves with developing a robust AI system that could help predict child abuse when given information from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System.

The data, which the government began collecting in the 1990s, includes detailed information about child abuse reports down to the zip code. Hamid says those in the AI space have a high interest in the use of this type of structured, detailed data collected over a prolonged period.

The prototype system their team developed could predict recurrence of child maltreatment better than any previously proposed systems. The results appear in the prestigious journal *Knowledge-Based Systems*.

The next steps are testing and feedback from different agencies – a tough ask when agencies are already overburdened. "What we're trying to get is a better sense of how these systems can become part of the daily routine for child protective agencies."



An extended version of this story appears in the Fall 2023 Bryan Business Report. Visit bryanbusinessreport.uncg.edu to read it and to catch up on recent research on tourism, fashion, alcohol, and the workplace.



UNC
GREENSBORO

*The Office of Research
and Engagement*

1111 Spring Garden Street
Greensboro, NC 27412

Non-Profit Org.

US Postage Paid

Greensboro, NC

Permit 533



INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS The COVID-19 pandemic produced months of learning losses within K-12. To close the gap, UNCG and Guilford County Schools have collaborated to bring graduate students from across campus into K-12 as tutors. A \$2 million grant supports student tutors like Grace Finn, seen above center at Jackson Middle School. pg 24