



## NEWSLETTER

- FALL 2024 -

### A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



**Dr. Wendy Chase - Director**

Last August would have marked the 100th birthday of one of our most articulate and clear-sighted wisdom-keepers, James Baldwin. In 1964, Baldwin collaborated with the photographer, Richard Avedon on a book titled, ***Nothing Personal***, where he wrote, “The longer I live, the more deeply I learn that love — whether we call it friendship or family or romance — is the work of mirroring and magnifying each other’s light. Gentle work. Steadfast work. Life-saving work in those moments when life and shame and sorrow occlude our own light from our view, but there is still a clear-eyed loving person to beam it back. In our best moments, we are that person for another.”

I was reminded of this quote last week, when I was having a conversation with some students who were telling me how much they “loved” this professor or that class or this particular idea they learned about in class.

While Baldwin was certainly referring to love between people, I think that quote applies to all of our work at the college. When we put together our syllabi to organize, scaffold, and share knowledge, aren’t we magnifying the light that shines from our particular disciplines? When we mediate class discussions, aren’t we mirroring and magnifying the various perspectives students are sharing in an effort to weave complex and sometimes paradoxical insights into a coherent form? These daily tasks that are at the heart of our job, are most certainly a labor of love.

There is no question that educators at all levels, perhaps nowhere more than in Florida, are concerned about the attack on education; the profession we love. Credible threats to dismantle the Department of Education, the banning of books, the attempted erasure of the darkest parts of our history (as if living in denial and lies of omission have ever led to anything just and good and right in this world), and the absolutely bizarre belief that “Professors are the enemy” are making headlines every day. Anyone who believes that professors have the influence--or even a fleeting desire to-- “indoctrinate” students, has never taught a class where they struggle to get more than half the students to even read their assignments, much less change their entire worldview!

I know that these dark and insidious attitudes towards our profession are demoralizing and weigh heavily on many people who are reading this newsletter. The strategy that has been working for me when I find myself imagining the worst, is to stay grounded in the goodness I see right in front of me, which is why I encourage you to read on! Take a look at the steadfast work of our own wisdom-keepers. Enjoy the evidence of what institutions like FSW actually contribute to our community and society at large. Continue to demonstrate your love of truth, of facts, of critical and creative thinking, of problem-solving and free inquiry. Continue to mirror and magnify one another’s light, and the light that shines from your students. Most importantly, now is the time to speak your truth with civility, respect, and the unwavering strength of your convictions. As the educational activist Malala Yousafzai reminds us, “We realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced.”

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## Nick Santana



### **1. What has been your most impactful experience in the Honors Scholar Program?**

Without a doubt, the most impactful experience for me was completing my capstone research project. When I first heard about it, I thought it would just be a requirement to check off. But diving into the world of microbiology, particularly working with Professor Zirzow in an undergraduate research transformed my perspective. It wasn't just an assignment; it was an opportunity to contribute to our goals and future. I gained hands-on experience in laboratory techniques and real-world problem-solving, skills that I will carry into my future career. This project was evidence of the power of stepping out of your comfort zone and embracing challenges.

### **2. What are your plans after graduation from FSW and how has your experience here helped shape them?**

After graduating, I plan to transfer to a university—my sights are set on the University of Florida, Florida State University, or the University of Miami—to pursue a major in Molecular Sciences or Biochemistry. My ultimate goal is to become a cardiologist and surgeon, using the foundation FSW gave me to make an impact in healthcare. The Honors Scholar Program prepared me for this next step, developing my critical thinking, problem-solving, and academic confidence. The professors and unique opportunities here have truly set the stage for my future.

### **3. What advice do you have for incoming freshmen that would help them maximize their time at FSW?**

Get involved and stay curious! The Honors Scholar Program, campus clubs, and research opportunities offer so much more than academics—they're pathways to growth. Don't be afraid to ask questions, seek mentorship, and take on challenges. FSW is what you make of it, so dive in fully. Build connections, stay organized, and embrace every opportunity. Most importantly, never underestimate your potential to achieve greatness—FSW made me realize that.

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## Catherine Burzo

### 1. What has been your most impactful experience in the Honors Scholar Program?

The Honors Scholar Program has left a significant impact on my life and has been a wonderful experience. The most impactful aspect for me is being able to participate in honors classes. Being able to be surrounded by others who are interested in the same topics as me and working closely with the professors when completing projects has left me with an open mind and a place to express creativity. I love that the Honors Program brings students together, and you are welcome to go to events they host, college tours, and engage in various activities. The Honors Community really feels like a family!



### 2. What are your plans after graduation from FSW and how has your experience here helped shape them?

My plans after graduation are to pursue a bachelor's degree and major in statistics. I hope to become an actuary. My experience at FSW has shaped my career plans through the classes I have taken, the people I have met, and the supportive environment. My time here at FSW, and the opportunities to serve as President of SGA at the Charlotte campus, be an Honors Ambassador, and be a member of Phi Theta Kappa, have given me the tools I need to become a leader and guide my personal growth.

### 3. What advice do you have for in-coming freshmen that would help them maximize their time at FSW?

My advice for incoming freshmen is to put yourself out there! Participating in the clubs, organizations, and programs offered here at FSW has allowed me to diversify my experiences and make lasting friendships. I like to think of each club as a creative outlet that allows a person to express different parts of themselves. Joining a club enables you to strengthen your skills and possibly develop new abilities by surrounding yourself with others who want to grow and become a leader in their own life.

# Faculty Spotlight

## Dr. Mark Herman



### **1. Did you always know you wanted to be a professor, or did you take a more circuitous route to this profession?**

I was interested in archeology and the origins of civilizations when I was in elementary school, so I have had an interest in history for quite some time. We are where we are today as individuals and as a nation because of a series of decisions which we and others have made and the events which we and others have experienced. I have been interested in studying, understanding and analyzing those decisions and events with an eye to creating a narrative or story that pulls these things together. It is an effort about which I feel passionate. As far as my interest in the teaching side, I was fortunate to have history teachers who were passionate about the subject and who were very knowledgeable and effective communicators. In high school, I thought about teaching history at the high school level, and when I was in college, it switched to an interest in teaching at the college level.

### **2. If you could convey one idea about your discipline that you wish everyone could understand, what would that be?**

The study of History involves investigation and research and then the effective communication of what was been discovered.

### **3. You have been teaching at FSW for over two decades; how have students, and the classroom experience in general, changed in that time?**

One big positive change has been the inclusion of Dual Enrollment and Early Admission students in the classroom at FSW. They are very creative high achievers who are motivated to excel, and they bring enthusiasm and a passion to learn. Many of the FSW graduates who transfer to prestigious institutions are from this group.

# Creative Capstone



Dr. Rebecca Harris

## From the Creative Capstone

Course-based undergraduate research (CURE) has emerged as a pivotal element of higher education, especially within the context of general education. The CREATIVE Capstone, the culminating experience to your general education journey in the Associate in Arts, is an entire course dedicated to the student experience of exploration and research. Unlike traditional research models that often engage only a select few students, CUREs enlarge the research experience, allowing all students to benefit from engaging in real-world, inquiry-based projects. This approach is crucial for equipping students with the skills necessary to navigate the challenges of the future and fostering a culture of innovation and critical thinking.

The integration of undergraduate research into international education is particularly impactful, as you'll see hearing from students and faculty like Dr. Alessandro Cesarano in this newsletter. Global learning experiences inherently require students to grapple with new contexts. By embedding research into international education courses, students not only gain exposure to different perspectives but also develop the ability to approach new ideas analytically. Research projects in these settings can range from analyzing comparative studies on nutrition to international fashion to criminal justice. These experiences cultivate student researchers who are both informed and empathetic, prepared to contribute meaningfully to an interconnected world. Moreover, international research fosters collaboration across borders, enhancing students' communication and teamwork skills as they learn to engage with peers and communities from different backgrounds.

Maker spaces, with their emphasis on creativity, design, and hands-on learning, also provide fertile ground for undergraduate research. Dr. Shawn Moore offered the first special “Maker” section of the Capstone in Spring 2024 and will offer another in Spring 2025. In maker space courses, students can turn abstract theories into tangible innovations. These environments encourage experimentation and iterative design, which are core components of the research process. By engaging in research within maker spaces, students learn to approach problems creatively, drawing from interdisciplinary knowledge to develop practical solutions. For example, students conducted research projects on animation, cooking, generative AI for education, sound engineering, and digital art. The emphasis on testing and revision in maker spaces also helps students understand that failure is an essential part of discovery, fostering resilience and adaptability. Furthermore, maker spaces can drive research that has real-world applications, giving students the confidence to see themselves as inventors and change-makers.

Community-engaged learning courses present another vital avenue for course-based research, integrating academic inquiry with civic engagement. Dr. Katharine O'Connor offered our first community-engaged section of Capstone in Spring 2024 and will be offering one again in 2025. Additionally, she organizes, along with Professor Jamie Votraw, our Community Partner Fair every semester. In community-engaged courses, students partner with local organizations to address pressing community challenges through research-driven projects. This approach not only enriches the academic experience but also strengthens students' sense of social responsibility. By conducting research that serves the public good in their local communities, students learn to connect theory to practice, often leading to projects with lasting impact. Community-engaged research fosters meaningful partnerships between the college and the community, promoting a model of education that is both participatory and transformative.

Course-based undergraduate research enriches general education programs by providing students with hands-on, transformative learning experiences. Part of our goal is to inspire faculty to include these experiences in every course! Whether through international education, maker spaces, or community-engaged courses, the CREATIVE Capstone leverages additional high impact practices to empower students to become active contributors to their fields and communities. CUREs help us to cultivate a new generation of scholars who are equipped to address new challenges with creativity, empathy, and a rigorous commitment to quality information.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rebecca L. Harris

Assistant Vice President, College-wide Curriculum and Academic Enhancement



# Creative Capstone: Adventures and Explorations in Italian Culture

## Dr. Alessandro Cesarano:

This past summer semester, I had the wonderful opportunity to lead a study abroad section of the Creative Capstone called “Adventures and Explorations in Italian Culture” in partnership with the FSW Center for International Education and the Lorenzo de’ Medici Institute. One of the highlights of the program was organizing a cooking class for my students at the LdM Institute Cooking School, situated in the Central Market in downtown Florence. The primary objective was to expand the learning experience beyond the traditional classroom setting, immerse ourselves in the taste and flavors of a different culture, and develop a deeper understanding of Italian culture. We were able to participate in an extraordinary culinary journey led by professional chefs in a modern kitchen equipped with the latest tools and appliances, using only the freshest and most authentic ingredients available. The skilled chefs guided us through the process of making handmade trofie (a traditional pasta from Liguria) with Genovese pesto, green beans and potatoes, and classic tiramisù, a renowned Italian dessert. The structure of the class required participants to collaborate during the session, sharing ingredients and equipment. Not only did we learn to prepare the recipes from scratch, but we also expanded our culinary knowledge and gained a greater appreciation for Italian food culture. Specifically, we deepened our understanding of the history and traditions of regional Italian cuisine and the significance of using high-quality fresh ingredients to achieve the best possible taste and aroma. At the conclusion of the class, we savored the results of our efforts in a convivial atmosphere, discussing and evaluating our final dishes. Overall, it was an incredible transdisciplinary co-curricular experience. We all enjoyed enhancing our culinary skills in a relaxed, enjoyable, and collaborative environment based on mutual respect. We left the unforgettable class feeling inspired, with a newfound sense of connection, an apron adorned with the logo of Scuola di Cucina Lorenzo de’ Medici, and a folder containing all the recipe details.



# Herpeton Conference



The 2024 Herpeton South Florida Herpetology Conference met at the FSW Edison Campus on September 28-29th. Though attendance was impacted by Hurricane Helene's landfall, over 128 attendees still participated. Over 35 presenters gave talks, with other attendees presenting over 20 posters. The conference brought together prestigious Herpetological scientists including Keynote speakers Dr. Bruce Means, and Dr. Sean Doody, along with participants from 30 different institutions, including over 45 students from across the state. The conference continued to generate interest in the region and the 2025 conference is already being planned!



# Fall Faculty Symposium: Talk Nerdy to Me



**Thank you to our ARC Grant presenters:  
Prof. Jordan Donini and Dr. Michael Sauer**

**Thank you to our generous sponsors:  
Dr. Allbritten and Dr. Bilsky**



# One Theme, One College (OTOC)



# One Theme, One College (OTOC)



**Dr. Brandon Jett**

## OUR CHANGING WORLDS

How many times over the last few years have we collectively said, “I’ve never seen anything like that before!” From climate change (Hello Hurricanes Helene and Milton!) to the omnipresence, not omniscience...yet, of AI, from the new housing developments across Southwest Florida to the new Culver’s in LaBelle, it seems no part of our lives remains static for very long. In recognition of this reality, the One Theme, One College Committee has dedicated our annual academic theme to exploring how changes are shaping our world and how we are reacting to them. We kicked off our year with an amazing discussion with screenwriter Matt Lopez. The second event of our calendar looked at changes much closer to home, right here at FSW. Lee Campus SGA President Destiny Sanchez led a roundtable discussion featuring Drs. Jeffrey Allbritten, Ian Neuhard, and Rebecca Harris. Each panelist provided an assessment of the major changes that occurred during their tenure at FSW and what they expected to see happen in the future. They also responded to dozens of student questions ranging from the future of athletics at FSW, the possibility of offering more workforce programs in the health professions, future growth at the Hendry/Glades Curtis Center, to possibilities for SGA representatives to meet every semester with FSW leaders.

We kicked off our series of events with a presentation titled “Screenwriting in the Age of AI” which was delivered by Matt Lopez. Matt is a screenwriter and producer in Hollywood whose credits include *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, *Bedtime Stories*, the recent remake of *Father of the Bride* as well as two critically acclaimed TV series. Matt walked the audience through the causes of last year’s writer’s strike, which was directly related to the development of generative AI, and offered his thoughts on the future impact this will have on the industry. A robust discussion followed that lasted for over an hour and carried on during the reception that followed.

While the year has been active so far, there is so much more coming up. There will be two film screenings of the movie *Her* during Connections Week on Charlotte and Lee campuses, a roundtable discussion about the changing world of K-12 education in Southwest Florida, and a discussion about the future of AI and higher education with Dr. Sid Dobrin.

In addition to our events, we’ve also collaborated with FSW Libraries to bring a selection of books that relate to the theme of Our Changing Worlds. Across all FSW sites, you will find book displays prominently featured in the libraries with fiction and non-fiction book suggestions for students who wish to further engage with the theme.

Please keep your eyes out for announcements concerning our future events. We look forward to continuing our exploration into Our Changing Worlds with the FSW community.

# USf Tour

## *Judy Genshaft Honors College*



**On the way home students stopped for a hike at Myakka State Park.**





# Meet and Greet



# HONORS



# RS



# Tea Time



# Thank you to our Honors Ambassadors!



*Maralyn Amador, Catherine Burzo,  
Keyana Forbes, Eden Sterk, and Abigail Warren*

# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK



# Voices from Around the World

Hoan Lam, Ricardo De Leon,  
Nicole Peña and Fabiola Tazzoli





# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## Ofelia Aguirre

### 1. What has been your most impactful experience in the Honors Scholar Program?

My most impactful experiences were definitely the opportunities that are offered for Honors students. FSW cares and supports their honor students greatly. While the classes are “harder”, I believe FSW tries to push their honors students to achieve their best. Giving students the chance to display and present their work on campus is great. I was offered a solo art exhibition and I’m grateful for that.

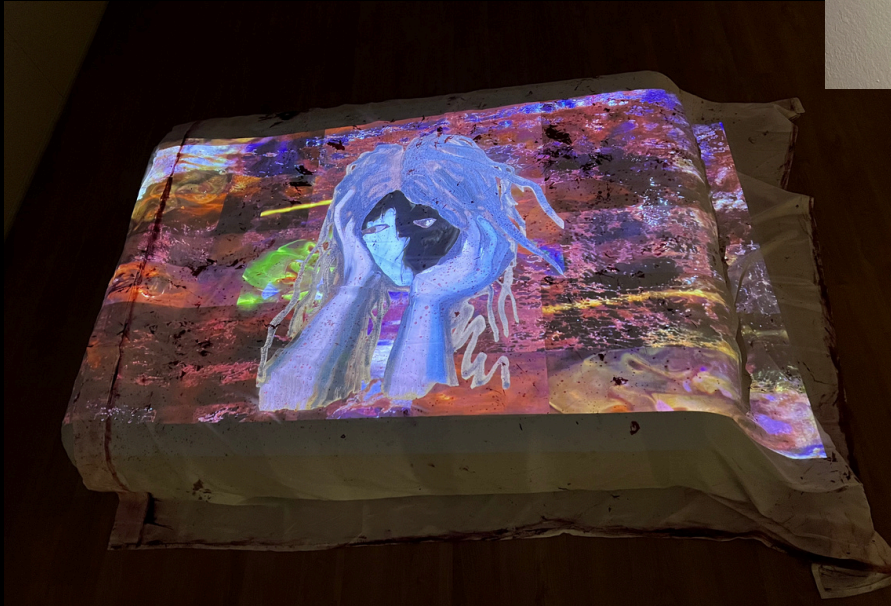


### 2. What are your plans after graduation from FSW and how has your experience here helped shape them?

I’m planning to transfer to Ringling Fall 2025 to pursue a BFA in Illustration. I have plans in the far future to get my Master’s of Fine Arts at the University of New Mexico in either Studio Arts or Digital Media Arts. I would like to make connections at Ringling to become a teaching assistant as I think I might want to become a professor some day.

### 3. What advice do you have for in-coming freshmen that would help them maximize their time at FSW?

Try to participate in campus activities and engage with your professors. The amount of resources the professors at FSW have is unreal and once I started connecting with them, I was invited to participate in student exhibitions each semester. As a first-generation college student, I appreciate that my professors pushed me to maximize my potential. They shared scholarship opportunities with me, and helped me to get them. The professors at FSW really know their stuff, many of them have doctoral degrees just like at a 4-year institution, and yet the cost of education here is unmatched in terms of affordability. The classes I took in the Digital and Fine Arts at FSW improved my skillsets as an artist quickly, and it’s great.



**Ofelia Aguirre**  
*What to be a woman*



# Happy Holidays!

From Wendy, Courtney, Rachelle, Shorty,  
Biscuit, Pluto, Rosco and Ukkie

