

# COPLA CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2025

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Florida Tech COPLA  
College of Psych & Liberal Arts



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### FROM THE INTERIM DEAN: **A YEAR OF IMPACT AND MOMENTUM**

As we close out another academic year at the [College of Psychology and Liberal Arts](#) (COPLA), I find myself filled with both pride and gratitude for the faculty, staff and students at this amazing college. COPLA is the human-centered core of Florida Tech, where curiosity, creativity and compassion converge, and this past year has been a powerful reminder of just how much our students, faculty and staff can achieve together.

We've got a lot to be proud of. We are launching a new bachelor's degree program in [animal behavior and cognition](#), expanding opportunities for students to engage with cutting-edge research and applied science in a growing field. Our on-campus applied behavior analysis programs were successfully reaccredited by the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI), reaffirming the quality and rigor of our academic offerings. And we are proud to be training over 2,000 students in our [online behavior analysis practice master's degree program](#).

Our faculty continue to distinguish themselves as scholars, educators and mentors. We celebrate the promotions of [Kenny Pike](#), [Nikki Souris](#), [Patrick Aragon](#) and [Yanek Mieczkowski](#) to associate professor and congratulate [Natalie Dorfeld](#) on receiving the Faculty Senate Excellence Award for Teaching. These milestones reflect not only individual excellence but also the collaborative spirit that defines COPLA.

In our classrooms, innovation thrives. From dynamic guest speakers and experiential learning to thoughtful integration of new technologies like AI, we are preparing students not just for today's challenges, but for tomorrow's evolving professional landscape. Importantly, we are also developing smart approaches to understanding and detecting AI's role in student work, ensuring academic integrity while embracing change.

Our faculty and students continue to produce impactful research and contribute to national conversations in their fields. At the same time, we've remained deeply committed to student success, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment, where every learner can thrive.

But, we don't rest on our laurels. This year, we undertook an in-depth strategic planning process to shape the next phase of COPLA's growth. That work is already fueling new ideas, new collaborations and a bold vision for the future.

Thank you for being part of this journey. I can't wait to see what we'll accomplish together next.

Respectfully,

Lisa Steelman  
Interim Dean, College of Psychology and  
Liberal Arts

## SPRING 2025

COPLA Connections is produced twice annually by the College of Psychology and Liberal Arts and the Office of Marketing and Communications.

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## EXPERT PERSPECTIVES

### PATTERSON AUTHORS BOOK ON 'SECRET HISTORY' OF FLORIDA TECH

Faculty member and historian [Gordon Patterson](#)'s book, *Missiles, Mischief and Mayhem: The Secret History of Countdown College*, takes a unique and compelling look at the history of Florida Tech.

Published in March 2024 and available on Amazon, the book includes chapters such as "The Great Quail Escapade," "The Atomic Toilet" and "The Zolt Brothers Add 'Fizz' to Florida Tech." It unearths amazing but true tales and spotlights key formative moments that provide an illuminating snapshot of Florida Tech's development and evolution into one of the nation's leading STEM institutions.

### JONES PENS ARTICLES ON POLICE LEADERSHIP

[Marshall Jones](#), assistant professor and director of the [Center for Applied Criminal Case Analysis](#), wrote a series of articles for *The Georgia Police Chief* magazine. The articles, titled "The Law Enforcement Leadership Pipeline," offer a blueprint to help agencies better understand and strategically navigate challenges in maintaining their leadership pipeline.

In the series, Jones introduces the Law Enforcement Leadership Pipeline (LELP) model—an adaptation of a proven business framework that aligns hiring, training, culture and leadership strategies for law enforcement settings. The model emphasizes that retention hinges on leadership, and leadership development must be intentional, sustained and cultural.

Ultimately, Jones emphasizes that a strong leadership pipeline not only develops better officers but also improves morale, boosts retention and protects agency culture. His advice to agencies: Take one bite at a time, start somewhere and build forward.

### BURKE CONTRIBUTES CHAPTER TO OXFORD VIDEO GAME MUSIC BOOK

[Kevin Burke](#), associate professor of [music](#), wrote a chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Video Game Music and Sound*, edited by William Gibbons and Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard. His chapter is titled "Hard Limitations and Soft Possibilities: A 'Systematic' History of Early Video Game Sound Technology."

According to publisher Oxford Academic, Burke "surveys and assesses the hardware and software that powered early video game sound and analyzes how the hardware limitations and innovative software led to specific compositional styles across platform developers."

### MIECZKOWSKI SHARES FAMILY'S STORY OF WAR, SURVIVAL AND LOVE IN NEW BOOK

A new book by [Yanek Mieczkowski](#), assistant professor of history, explores a story of defeat, death and resilience during World War II through

the experiences of his parents, Bogdan and Seiko Mieczkowski.

*Surviving War, Oceans Apart: Two Teenagers in Poland and Japan Destined for Life Together* tells the harrowing but ultimately uplifting story of Bogdan Mieczkowski, a member of the Polish resistance who fought the Germans in the Warsaw Uprising and later spent time in multiple prisoner-of-war camps, and Seiko Kawakami, a teenager who was forced to leave school and work in a Japanese wartime factory.

Both later came to the United States to pursue their education. Job opportunities brought them to New York City, where they met, married and started a family.

### MEISSEN PUBLISHES CHAPTER EXAMINING INFLUENCE OF DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY ON NATURAL HISTORY

The Rev. [Randall Meissen](#), Florida Tech's chaplain, director of [Catholic Campus Ministry](#) and an adjunct faculty member in the [College of Psychology and Liberal Arts](#), has published a new book chapter, "Contemplating Bats and Bees," in the academic compendium *The Dominicans in the Americas and the Philippines (c. 1500–c. 1820)*, edited by David Thomas Orique, Rady Roldán-Figueroa and Cynthia Folquer.

Meissen's chapter examines Friar Francisco Ximenez—the man credited with preserving the only surviving Mayan language texts—and explores the influences of Dominican spirituality on natural history. Ximenez was an 18th-century Dominican priest and missionary linguist known for his preservation of the Maya-K'iche' creation myth, the Popol Vuh.

Meissen conducted research in the rare book archives of Guatemala and Spain. He developed the chapter from a presentation he gave at the International Conference on the History of the Order of the Preachers in the Americas several years ago.

### MILOSEVIC, STEELMAN CO-AUTHOR HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ARTICLE ON POST-MERGER CULTURE

In their *Harvard Business Review* article "A Guide to Building a Unified Culture After a Merger or Acquisition," ICCM research scientist and adjunct instructor Mina Milosevic and COPLA Interim Dean [Lisa Steelman](#), along with industrial-organizational psychologist Katherine Rau, explore why so many mergers and acquisitions fail to meet expectations—and how to fix that.

Based on more than 70 hours of interviews across 15 acquisitions, the authors found that acquired employees often feel overlooked, disengaged and unsupported. To address this, they recommend that organizations focus just as much on employee experience as they do on financials and operations.

Their guidance includes conducting culture assessments of both firms, developing a clear integration plan, mapping out the employee



Gordon Patterson



Marshall Jones



Yanek Mieczkowski



Rev. Randall Meissen



Julie S. Costopoulos

journey, empowering midlevel managers and staying flexible throughout the transition. Companies that invest in cultural alignment and communication early on can better retain talent, boost engagement and realize the full value of their acquisitions.

#### EDWARDS PRESENTS TO PUBLIC RELATIONS GROUP, CO-AUTHORS JOURNAL ARTICLE WITH SOHN, PETERSEN

In July 2024, [Heidi Hatfield Edwards](#), COPLA associate dean and professor and head of the [School of Arts and Communication](#), presented “Practical Strategies for Crafting Effective Narratives” to the Space Coast chapter of the Florida Public Relations Association (FPRA). Held at Brevard County’s Emergency Operations Center, the event served as a professional development opportunity for FPRA members.

Storytelling is central to public communication, Hatfield Edwards noted, and understanding how to craft a narrative is an essential part of a communicator’s toolkit. During her presentation, she discussed why storytelling is effective in conveying messages to the public and ways to do so successfully.

In August 2024, a published paper from Hatfield Edwards and SAC colleagues [Y.J. Sohn](#) and [Ted Petersen](#) titled “Deciphering Misinformation and Disinformation: Insights from Structural Coupling and Penetration” examined a darker aspect of communication—misinformation and disinformation.

Published online in the journal *Kybernetes*, the paper explored the distinct origins, mechanisms, growth

paths and societal impacts of misinformation and disinformation through the lens of Niklas Luhmann’s social systems theory, focusing on structural coupling and penetration.

The authors found that misinformation and disinformation can cause social conflict. Rather than always being negative, such conflict may spur social systems to grow or adapt and, as the authors posit, “serve society as an immune mechanism.”

#### FLORIDA TECH RESEARCHERS TO STUDY CONSEQUENCES OF AI HYPE IN MEDIA

Faculty members [Moti Mizrahi](#), Ted Petersen and Heidi Hatfield Edwards earned a grant from the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication to fund research examining how news media cover artificial intelligence.

The Page Center’s 2025 Page/Johnson Legacy Scholar grants were awarded to proposals focused on the ethics of generative AI in public communication. Florida Tech’s project, “AI Hype Machine: Understanding the News Media’s Role in and Ethics of Hying Generative AI,” was one of nine selected from nearly 90 proposals—a record number of submissions, the Page Center noted.

Over the next year, Edwards, Petersen and Mizrahi will study how AI is hyped in the media and the ethical implications of that hype. The \$6,000 grant will help fund student involvement and software to aid in data analysis.

#### COSTOPOULOS LEADS DIALOGUE ON MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The [School of Psychology](#) played a pivotal role in advancing the dialogue on mental health in the criminal justice system at the second annual Collaborative Conference for Justice Jan. 23.

[Julie Costopoulos](#), professor and SOP head, served as moderator of the roundtable conference, which brought together Circuit 18 judges, attorneys, hospital executives and community program leaders to address the challenges individuals with serious mental illnesses face in the justice system. The goal was not just to identify obstacles but to collaboratively explore innovative solutions.

“It was exciting to see so many leaders from various elements of our criminal justice system join together to collaborate on addressing the challenges faced by individuals with mental illness,” Costopoulos said. “A common goal that stood out was treating people with dignity while ensuring the safety of all involved. The forensic psychology program’s students and faculty are passionate about the places where psychology intersects with the legal system. It is exciting to be a part of the solution.”

**SCAN FOR A FULL LIST OF RECENT FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**



## MAKING MOVES

### ANNOUNCING FACULTY PROMOTIONS

Congratulations to the recently promoted [COPLA](#) faculty members:

- » [Patrick Aragon](#), associate professor
- » [Yanek Mieczkowski](#), associate professor
- » [Kenneth Pike](#), associate professor with tenure
- » [Nikki Souris](#), associate professor with tenure

### INTRODUCING NEW FACULTY MEMBERS

Welcome to the new College of Psychology and Liberal Arts faculty members:

- » [Peter Craft](#) is an assistant professor teaching writing and literature. His research focuses on 18th century British literature, with special interests in postcolonial theory and drama.
- » [Brian Fisak](#) is an associate professor in the [clinical psychology program](#). His primary clinical and research interests include child psychopathology, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive and related disorders, and evidence-based treatments, with an interest in mindfulness and acceptance-based interventions.
- » [Brandon May](#), an applied cognitive and forensic psychologist, is an assistant professor in the [forensic psychology program](#). His research expertise includes decision-making in extreme environments, virtual reality and extended reality technologies to enhance strategic and operational practices in critical incidents, covert intelligence practices and investigative interviewing techniques for witnesses, victims and suspects.



# INSIDE COPLA

## HONORING ROBERT TAYLOR: A LEGACY OF COMMITMENT AND COLLABORATION

At the end of the spring semester, Florida Tech said farewell to one of its most visionary and valued professors: Robert Taylor.

Taylor retired after nearly three decades of service with Florida Tech and the [College of Psychology and Liberal Arts](#), having impacted the academic culture of the university and numerous students and colleagues.

During his career, he served as professor, department chair and dean, earning awards for his teaching skills and changing the organization of the university.

For 25 years, Dr. Taylor has been a dedicated pillar of our faculty, deeply committed to the success of both students and colleagues," COPLA Interim Dean [Lisa Steelman](#) said. "His support, leadership and friendship have left an indelible mark on our college, and he will be greatly missed."

Other faculty, including [Heidi Hatfield Edwards](#), head of the [School of Arts and Communication](#) and associate dean of the college, commended Taylor's leadership during challenging times, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

"His willingness to work across disciplines—both within the school and across campus—fostered a collaborative community of scholars," Hatfield Edwards said.

"Bob is much, much more than a colleague," said Florida Tech historian and longtime history professor [Gordon Patterson](#). "He is a wellspring of talent, insightful wisdom and an unwavering source of collegial inspiration. He possesses a rare dedication and commitment to excellence that permeates everything he does, and in doing so, he invariably makes a difference in the lives of those around him."

Taylor is a teacher at heart and loves being with students in the classroom. Even while serving in the labor-intensive position of dean, he still taught at least one class each semester—a move several colleagues questioned. But he felt spending time in the classroom was essential.

"You either have that urge to teach, or you don't," Taylor said. "I like it too much to ever give it up, and if I'm going to be leading teachers, I've got to be in the classroom to see for myself what's going on."

His passion and dedication to teaching earned him the Teaching Excellence Award, a moment he fondly remembers as a highlight of his career.

"That made me really feel good because that's my peers here at the university saying, 'Hey, you're doing a pretty good job,'" he said.

Throughout his career, he took on leadership roles and helped reshape COPLA structure.



One of his proudest accomplishments is the role he played in growing the humanities and communication department and advocating for its transition to the SAC.

Taylor is optimistic about Florida Tech's future, growing as a successful STEM university with integral and active liberal arts programs.

"There is an energy on this campus that you don't find in a lot of places," he said.

Even in retirement, Taylor plans to remain engaged with Florida Tech.

"There are people on campus who have retired from other disciplines that have been a model for me. These people are still involved, still engaged and still contribute. That's how I would like to be," Taylor said.

Since he joined the university in 1996, some things have changed; some things have stayed the same. But in short, he said:

"It's been a wild, wonderful ride."

Read the full story: [link.fit.edu/taylor-retires](http://link.fit.edu/taylor-retires)



## 50 YEARS ON THE AIR

Having started in some first-floor dorm rooms in Roberts Hall, [WFIT](#) has been a voice for the community for 50 years. Today, it continues its mission to provide quality programming that enhances East Central Florida's cultural and educational environment through its diverse musical programming, live music sessions, thought-provoking news segments as an NPR affiliate station and Florida Tech partner, and so much more.

Pictured here: WFIT's first general manager, Gary Bowie, left, joins Florida Tech's founder and first president, Jerome Keuper, in the broadcast booth.

## SOP STUDENT WINS PRESTIGIOUS BOREN FELLOWSHIP, A UNIVERSITY FIRST

Valerie Robbins-Roth '22 M.S., a doctoral candidate in Florida Tech's [industrial-organizational psychology Ph.D. program](#),

has been awarded a David L. Boren Fellowship to study in Japan.

She is the first Florida Tech student to receive the prestigious award, which is presented by the Institute of International Education on behalf of the National Security Education Program (NSEP).

Robbins-Roth's research focuses on corporate leadership and culture. The fellowship will support her exploration of cross-cultural leadership dynamics in Japan.

"Receiving this fellowship is a tremendous honor. It is meaningful recognition of my hard work over the past four years and a glimpse into my aspiring international career," Robbins-Roth said. "I'm incredibly excited to further my Japanese language skills and to research and collaborate with experts in Tokyo."

Read more: [link.fit.edu/boren-fellowship](http://link.fit.edu/boren-fellowship)



## FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS, FACULTY PRESENT AT CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE

A group of [forensic psychology](#) students, led by faculty members [Brandon May](#) and [Marshall Jones](#), presented their research at the annual Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences meeting in Denver. The undergraduate-heavy group gave more than a dozen presentations over the course of the five-day conference.

Presentations covered the complexities of mental health courts in modern justice, juveniles and the police, law enforcement and community integration, navigating adversity and crime and long-term outcomes of individuals who started offending as juveniles, among other topics.

The students' research was conducted through the university's [Center for Applied Criminal Case Analysis](#), which Jones directs. The center partners with federal and local law enforcement agencies, so students can analyze data from real criminal case files and records. Their findings have helped several agencies determine policy and practice.

"Students need to learn how to be culturally competent in the culture of policing. The only way to do that is to engage and be involved," Jones said.



## COPLA AND COB STUDENTS STUDY IN SPAIN

During a communicating social responsibility study abroad course in Spain with the [Bisk College of Business](#) in June 2024, COPLA students visited corporate and government organizations, where they observed how these entities communicate, tailor and implement messages about social responsibility and sustainable practices to meet the diverse needs, concerns and interests of various stakeholders.

## A SOUND ESCAPE: THE FLORIDA TECH MUSIC PROGRAM

At Florida Tech, where rigorous STEM programs demand focus and precision, the [music program](#) offers a unique space for students to balance their academic pursuits with creative expression.

The university's music program is unique in that it doesn't offer a degree. Instead, its focus is on flexibility and accessibility, making it a popular choice for students seeking a break from the demands of their science, engineering or business courses.

"The music program is essential for maintaining balance amid the rigor of my studies; it's my outlet and keeps me motivated at Florida Tech," said [multiplatform journalism](#) student Mia Cuffel. "It makes Florida Tech feel like a true home away from home."

For many students, music becomes an integral part of the college journey.

"The music program has made me more well-rounded and is a unique highlight on my résumé as an aerospace student with a singing scholarship," said Emma Conti, an [aerospace engineering](#) and [computer science](#) student. "I've seen the program grow significantly since my first semester, which has introduced me to incredible people and provided a creative outlet that adds variety to my schedule."

Tommy Galletta, a computer science student, shares a similar sentiment.

"I initially joined the music program because I needed an outlet for my passion," he said. "It's been an incredible experience. What I enjoy most about the classes is the incredible talent around me and the shared commitment to creating something great."

For many, the music program has become more than just an outlet for artistic expression—it serves as a stress reliever and a powerful tool for building community.

"We try not to overschedule or stress them out—the program should do the opposite. It is purely for their enjoyment and to continue their love of music," said music program chair [Eliza Healy](#).

"Music makes me happier and more productive, which is a boost for my mental health," said Pedro Marcet, a computer science student. "Overall, the music program has been a very rewarding addition to my experience at Florida Tech."

Learn more about the music program: [link.fit.edu/sound-escape](https://link.fit.edu/sound-escape)



“Music makes me happier and more productive, which is a boost for my mental health. Overall, the music program has been a very rewarding addition to my experience at Florida Tech.”

—Pedro Marcet

## Academic Updates

### UNDERGRAD ABA PROGRAM EARNS ABAI ACCREDITATION

Florida Tech's undergraduate program in [applied behavior analysis](#) (ABA) has been accredited by the Association for Behavior Analysis, International (ABAI), the parent organization for the academic discipline of behavior analysis.

Florida Tech's ABA bachelor's program prepares graduates to apply for and take the exam to earn the Board-Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA) designation, an undergraduate-level certification in behavior analysis.

This is the program's first ABAI accreditation.

### UNIVERSITY LAUNCHES NEW BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN ANIMAL BEHAVIOR AND COGNITION

Starting in fall, Florida Tech is launching a new [Bachelor of Science in Animal Behavior and Cognition](#), becoming one of just 10 schools nationwide—and only the second in the Southeast—to offer the innovative degree.

The program, developed and led by [School of Psychology](#) associate professor [Darby Proctor](#) and assistant professor [Catherine Talbot](#), combines psychology, ethology and behavioral ecology to uncover how animals perceive, learn, make decisions and solve problems. Whether observing animals at Brevard Zoo or conducting novel research in the on-campus Roach Lab, students gain hands-on experience that prepares them for graduate school and various careers working with animals.

Already, graduates of Florida Tech's [animal behavior](#) concentration are working with employers such as Brevard Zoo, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Save the Chimps and Phoenix Zoo. Students also find internships with facilities including MOTE Marine Laboratory & Aquarium and Dolphins Plus.

The new major speaks to Florida Tech's collaborative education and powerful partnerships. Students get to utilize Florida Tech's dedicated Brevard Zoo research facility, the Animal Cognitive Research Center, where Talbot and Proctor study the behavior of [spider monkeys](#). In addition to working with the monkeys, students can study other animals, such as lions and bears.

"If you want to work in an animal-focused career, the most important thing to do is get hands-on experience working with animals," Talbot said. "This degree will help you get those experiences."



## FEATURE

# FROM LAUNCH TO LEADERSHIP

Florida Tech offered one of the first major programs for **applied behavior analysis (ABA)**. Today, its ABA offerings are among the best in the world. And they've propelled alumni success in a diverse range of careers.

"We're incredibly active in the field, speaking at conferences and appearing in journals," says [David Wilder](#), [School of Behavior Analysis](#) head. "We have name recognition, and people know that we're among the best in this discipline."

The future for the school continues to look bright, in part because of ABA's valuable role in any number of the world's challenges, from politics to climate change.

"Any change that involves human behavior can benefit from a behavior analytic perspective," says [Bryon Neff](#), associate professor and Online ABA Institute director. "When we change human behavior, we can make an impact on important issues."

To learn more about the importance and the impact of the field, we talked to alumni in diverse roles to understand how they've used ABA principles to inform their work.

### USE ABA TO... IMPROVE SAFETY

It was October 2021, and Reggie Seecharan '20 M.S., '20 MBA, was scaling the corporate ladder at Amazon with lightning speed. After earning plaudits for leading safe and productive teams, his boss tapped him for a particularly difficult assignment: improving the safety record of an Oregon warehouse that ranked dead last among more than 100 sites across the country.

As Seecharan began mapping out a plan, he knew that integrating ABA principles could make a difference.

"ABA is so focused on feedback," he says. "We're drilled to make sure that we're delivering feedback in a way that's timely, specific and impactful. I made sure I did these things early on."

Not long after he arrived on site, Seecharan took action. He worked with the team that was already in place to define safe behaviors and leverage a recognition program to reward these actions. He created a group chat to escalate concerns quickly and identify gaps. And he drove accountability with mechanisms that ensured that problems that were identified were fixed promptly. Within a matter of months, safety issues plummeted.

"We saw a 31% reduction in recordable incidents and a 100% reduction in significant, serious events,"

he says. "And a lot of that comes back to behavior analysis."

### USE ABA TO... CRUSH A BASEBALL

It takes less than a half second for a 90-mile-an-hour fastball to go from a pitcher's hand to home plate.

That means that hitters have just milliseconds to identify what pitch is being thrown, where it might cross the plate and whether to swing at it.

For his master's degree thesis, Josh Ford '21 used an ABA tool known as "stimulus prompts" to analyze how uniquely colored seams on a baseball might help hitters identify the spin and trajectory of a pitched ball more quickly—and, ultimately, give them an edge in the batter's box.

"Pitch recognition is just one aspect of hitting," Ford says. "But this is a topic that has a lot of upside potential for further research."



**“Any change that involves human behavior can benefit from a behavior analytic perspective. When we change human behavior, we can make an impact on important issues.”**

Bryon Neff,  
Associate Professor,  
School of Behavior Analysis,  
and Online ABA Institute  
Director

**“When teams communicate better, they get along better, perform better and win more.”**

Kaitlynn Gokey, Assistant Professor, School of Behavior Analysis

### **USE ABA TO... RUN A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS**

Karin Torsiello '98, '00 M.S., says she was “happy as a clam” working for the Behavioral Analysis Service Program in child welfare early in her career. But when state funding got cut in 2008, she decided to go all in on her side business, Behavior Basics.

She and a few colleagues reached out to the agencies they'd had relationships with through their previous work, pitching a plan to run all of the same services through Behavior Basics.

Today, Torsiello leads a team of more than 70 employees at Behavior Basics, and the company specializes in working with individuals with conditions including autism spectrum disorders, bipolar disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. She's particularly proud of the work the company has done to reduce the recidivism rate among perpetrators of child abuse.

As her company has grown, so have her ambitions:

“Originally, ‘success’ was just paying the bills and paying myself a salary,” she says. “Then, it was growing the team and serving more people. Now, we’re doing research, presenting our work, strengthening our team and training students. I love being able to be involved with so many different things.”

### **USE ABA TO... IMPROVE AUTISM CARE IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

Amanda Bueno dos Santos '19 M.A. had always wanted to work with people who have autism. But the Brazil native admits she began to sour on the idea when she started her undergraduate education in her home state of Paraná. She realized that she was being taught outdated, if not outright harmful, ideas about autism care. ABA techniques, if they were considered at all, were taught inaccurately.

Her experience led her to work methodically with others to create and support legislation in her home state that required practitioners in the field to use evidence-based practices with their patients. When she enrolled in Florida Tech's ABA master's program, she realized she could take her efforts even further.

With the support of leaders at Florida Tech and in the Paraná government, Bueno dos Santos helped push forward a multiyear partnership to provide high-quality

online training materials for hundreds of professionals in Paraná who provide care for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. She wrote guidelines that are currently available on the Paraná Health Department website.

Bueno dos Santos continues to advocate for laws that ensure the ethical treatment of people with autism.

Now she is also part of ANPAC, a new Brazilian Association focused on creating ABA guidelines for practitioners and building savvy consumers. Her next goal? Establishing licensure law for behavior analysts and behavior technicians.

“I had a chance to study at Florida Tech, and now I can give back to my country for the opportunities I had,” she says.

### **USE ABA TO... GIVE ESPORTS PLAYERS AN EDGE IN COMPETITION**

**Esports**—multiplayer video games played competitively for spectators—is a \$1.38-billion-and-growing industry. Yet despite its massive economic impact, research to support its players and coaches “barely exists,” says Florida Tech assistant professor [Kaitlynn Gokey](#) '12 M.S., '20 Ph.D.

That's starting to change, thanks to research being done by Gokey and her doctoral students, James Riswick-Estelle, Candace Fay and Alyson Intihar. Among the topics of their research are effective communication skills in the intense, hours-long games in which players have little visual interaction with one another.

“Players have to talk in a way that is clear, concise and on-topic,” she says.

To support this work, Gokey and her doctoral students help players set goals, collect data on communication behaviors, and provide training and feedback to help them understand key areas for improvement. The goal, says Gokey, is to use the tools of ABA to give players and coaches skills to achieve at the highest levels of competition.

“When teams communicate better, they get along better, perform better and win more,” Gokey says.



Reggie Seecharan



Josh Ford



Karin Torsiello



Amanda Bueno dos Santos

## FACULTY PROFILE

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

# ANNA MUENCHRATH

It all started with a simple question: Why do we read?

For [Anna Muenchrath](#), assistant professor of English, that question has guided a lifetime of curiosity—and a career devoted to uncovering how literature is made, shared and understood.

"I've always been a big reader," Muenchrath says. "But what really interested me was the question of 'why?' Why do I enjoy this so much? Why do people like different books? What's actually happening when we read?"

That curiosity grew into a career. After earning her Ph.D. in English from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Muenchrath spent three years as a visiting assistant professor at Appalachian State University before joining Florida Tech. Today, she focuses on literary sociology—the study of the people, institutions and systems that shape the books we read. Specifically, her work examines how world literature is constructed in the United States, including which global texts get translated, published and promoted—and why.

Muenchrath's work is captured in her two recent books: *Selling Books with Algorithms* and *Making World Literature*. The former introduces readers to how recommendation systems work on platforms like Amazon and how they change the way we encounter literature compared to traditional bookstores. The latter is an expansive study of how global books get selected, translated

and circulated in the U.S. She explores what institutions and individuals make those decisions and the protocols—rules, standards and market forces—that shape them.

While *Selling Books with Algorithms* is aimed at a broader audience, *Making World Literature* is a field-specific work intended for scholars of literary sociology and world literature.

To write it, Muenchrath visited archives across the country, piecing together how everything from World War II book programs to Oprah's Book Club and Amazon's translation imprint have contributed to what readers think of as world literature.

"I went through a number of archives and read documents about how selections of world literature were made and why," Muenchrath says. "I tried to reconstruct some of the publishing networks and figure out how those networks changed over time—how decisions were made and by whom."

Her work has earned national recognition, and Muenchrath was named a [2025 Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies](#). Selected from a pool of more than 2,300 applicants, she was one of just 62 scholars chosen to receive up to \$60,000 in funding for six to 12 months of full-time research and writing. It's the second time her work has been recognized by the council.

Muenchrath will use the fellowship to help further her research on



**“We usually think of algorithms as mathematical or technological, but I’m interested in how they intervene in our culture. In a way, I’m bridging STEM and the humanities.”**

—Anna Muenchrath

algorithms, specifically how algorithmic influence on human-made data drives literature translation and, ultimately, culture in the United States.

"It means a great deal that my peers thought this project was worth funding and recognized its value," Muenchrath says. "It feels especially meaningful because I'm at a STEM-focused school, where the spotlight is often on STEM scholarship. So, in that sense, it's doubly rewarding to have my humanities research recognized."

Muenchrath's project, "Amazon Crossing: Translation Publishing, Algorithmic Data, and the Future of the Literary Marketplace,"

will directly investigate how algorithmically produced and processed data affects the U.S. translation market. Muenchrath will use her findings to explore how humans use algorithms to replace their own judgment and selections and the implications that could have on our culture.

"I think one of the reasons I was a good fit for Florida Tech is that my research has focused more on how algorithms influence what we're reading," Muenchrath says. "We usually think of algorithms as mathematical or technological, but I'm interested in how they intervene in our culture. In a way, I'm bridging STEM and the humanities."



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



### Meet Christina Banbury '23 M.A.

After earning her degree from Florida Tech, Christina earned a second master's degree in nonprofit administration and leadership from Moody Bible Institute. In March 2025, she became a licensed Board Certified Behavior Analyst.

She then founded Behavior On Demand, a Christian nonprofit dedicated to developing the next generation of behavioral therapists while helping them discover their purpose in Christ. Her organization has formed partnerships with local churches, businesses and, most notably, Moody Bible Institute, where she leads an internship program that trains undergraduate seniors to become Registered Behavior Technicians.

**Residence:** Maggie Valley, North Carolina

**Florida Tech Degree:** [Behavior Analysis Practice, M.A.](#)

**Job Title:** Executive director at Behavior on Demand Nonprofit; Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)

**Impactful Faculty:** Shane Spiker and William Carlucci

## UP CLOSE WITH... Christina Banbury

### Why did you choose Florida Tech?

To further my capabilities within the field of behavior analysis, since securing an afterschool contract with Atlanta Public Schools to deliver ABA therapy. Also, earlier on in my career, Florida Tech had one of the top notable programs for the field of behavior analysis.

### How did your experience at Florida Tech prepare you as a professional?

It became another gateway for me to advance my career and move toward mastery—something that doesn't come easily when I'm known for taking on more projects than I probably should at once.

### Specifically, were there any courses or faculty that had a significant influence on your education?

Absolutely, Dr. Shane Spiker for his authenticity in storytelling about how he started his career and Dr. William Carlucci for his IOA Data in-class challenges.

### Share your best Florida Tech student memory.

One of my most memorable moments at Florida Tech was attending a speaking engagement by Florida Tech alumnus Mike Moses ['91 M.S.], president of Spaceline at Virgin Galactic. While his main presentation was inspiring—filled with insights into leadership, space exploration and innovation—what truly connected with me was a small story he told, affectionately known as the “Donut Story.” It was a surprisingly powerful lesson about how something as simple

as a box of donuts can build trust, create opportunities and shape relationships in unexpected ways. Ironically, before I attended Florida Tech, an investor I worked with used the same gesture.

### What have been the highlights and milestones of your life and career so far?

Getting to drive my nonprofit forward, completing the final stages leading up to us launching our app (launching in 2026) and the connections that I am constantly making with all types of people from different countries and settings, and doing business cross-culturally, especially during my time living in Chicago. Also, since graduating, I have joined a global women's organization (P.E.O.), where I serve on the philanthropy and fundraising committee, was given a nomination for vice chair on a feeding the homeless NGO organization and, most recently, I joined the governing board of the BACB as a volunteer subject matter expert.

### What advice do you have for current COPLA students who want to make the most out of their time at Florida Tech?

Attend your program with no regrets; if there's an opportunity—take it; and take the time to truly gain the full value of your investment in your education.

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



### Meet David Thompson '20

David started freelancing with The Direct, an entertainment news website, in November 2020 and joined as a podcast co-host in June 2022. He joined The Direct full time the following year and today, serves as senior editor and podcast host/producer, helping lead TV and movie coverage, ideate article pitches and co-host "The Direct Podcast," while also taking on other occasional freelance opportunities in the entertainment space. While he and his wife, Jasmine, live in Atlanta, they plan to move back to Florida in early 2026.

**Residence:** Atlanta, Georgia

**Florida Tech Degree:** [Multiplatform Journalism, B.S.](#)

**Job Title:** Senior editor and podcast host, The Direct

**Top Florida Tech Course:** Mass Communication with Heidi Hatfield Edwards

**Impactful Faculty:** Ted Petersen, Dzmitry Yuran, Heidi Hatfield Edwards

## UP CLOSE WITH... *David Thompson*

### Why did you choose Florida Tech?

In all honesty, my mom worked at Florida Tech, and that was a major influence. Also, my senior year of high school, I didn't overcomplicate my application process and only applied to a few schools. The final allure to me was the smaller classroom sizes that Florida Tech offered, which really worked out better than I had expected.

### How did your experience at Florida Tech prepare you as a professional?

My time at Florida Tech prepared me well for my professional career. On top of my classwork, I worked at the [Clemente Center](#). That experience was invaluable when it came to responsibility and people skills. I still tell people that's the best job I have ever had.

My time as a writer and editor at [The Crimson](#) student newspaper was also valuable when it came to honing interviewing skills and getting comfortable with receiving critical feedback on my writing. That's such an important aspect of any writing job that you never truly realize as a student. From my classes, I had some tremendous professors: [Ted Petersen](#), Dzmitry Yuran and [Heidi Hatfield Edwards](#) really stand out in my mind.

### Specifically, were there any courses or faculty that had a significant influence on your education?

Mass communication with Dr. Edwards was awesome. I talked so much, probably too much, but I was so engaged! The topics about a changing media landscape really grabbed my attention. I genuinely think I raised my hand at every question!

The other class that really sticks out was senior design with Dr. Petersen. It was an incredibly collaborative process, conducting the interviews was fun and I was really passionate about our topic. Then, when COVID hit, the documentary we were working on became my favorite daily activity.

### Share your best Florida Tech student memory.

My favorite memory would have to be when my friend, Kevin Boodoosingh ['20, '21 M.S.], and I relaunched Panther Radio as Panther Podcasts. We were producing a few shows and spending a ton of time in that recording studio next to FITV. It was during my senior year, so I had friends on campus and a newfound love for podcasting. I have been podcasting ever since!

### What have been the highlights and milestones of your life and career so far?

From a life perspective, marrying my wife in June 2023 has been the greatest milestone I have achieved! On the business side, it was a major accomplishment to make entertainment news my full-time job after graduating amidst COVID, working odd jobs, freelancing and being a full-time English teacher for two years. Last July, it was a pleasure to cover Comic-Con San Diego, where I conducted over 20 different interviews (including one with a Japanese interpreter) and attended different panels, including Marvel Studios in Hall H, which was a lifelong dream of mine.

### What advice do you have for current COPLA students who want to make the most out of their time at Florida Tech?

I graduated at the worst possible time, August 2020. If I can make it work, so can you. My greatest piece of advice is to make small goals for yourself and complete them. Are you a writer? Write every day. Want to start a podcast? Start one. Right now. There's no time like the present, and you can start building your portfolio immensely while at Florida Tech, especially if you participate in clubs and campus events.

# PANTHERS ON THE RISE

**1 JODY CASSELL** '07, a [psychology](#) alumna and seasoned leader in the zoo and conservation field, joined the Birmingham Zoo as its deputy director in February. In her new role, Cassell oversees critical areas of the zoo's operations, including animal health, operations, maintenance, landscaping, learning and engagement, and the living collection and animal care.

Before joining the Birmingham Zoo, Cassell spent more than [20 years at the Brevard Zoo](#), holding various leadership roles. Her most recent position was director of guest experience and vendor management. She also served as director of conservation at Brevard Zoo, where she earned national awards for her conservation work.

"I am honored to join the incredible Birmingham Zoo team and look forward to working together to advance our mission of inspiring passion for the natural world," Cassell said.

**2 KATE BRODERICK** '10, '14 M.S., made a life-changing promise after nearly losing her life to severe health complications: If she survived, she would pursue her dream of opening her own café.

True to her word, and along with her mother, Broderick co-founded Moon River Café & Curiosities—a Downtown Melbourne business that blends her love of food, art and community.

Broderick's background in [communication](#) and passion for creative expression are reflected throughout the space. In addition to serving an array of café favorites, like coffee, tea, mocktails, sandwiches and pastries, Moon River also showcases local talent through a library of works by area authors, a

retail space for handcrafted items and a dedicated art gallery.

In line with her commitment to supporting local creators, Broderick also plans to host a series of events, including poetry readings, live music, workshops and book signings.

## **3 JULIANNA (FISCHER) WALSH**

'17 M.S., '19 Ph.D., moved to London after graduating from Florida Tech and began building a career in consulting and technology. Now, she's charting a bold new path as founder of LeadHerself, a business she launched in 2023 to help young women navigate the early stages of their professional lives with confidence, courage and clarity.

Walsh's decision to create LeadHerself was shaped by both her professional experience and personal journey. Before starting the company, she worked as a leadership consultant, building and delivering assessment and development programs for global corporations. During that time, she became increasingly aware of the challenges women face in leadership, especially in a world still influenced by the "think manager, think male" mindset, she said in an interview with *Authority Magazine*.

Drawing on her academic research in gender and leadership—as well as her experience as a consultant and psychometrician, Walsh created LeadHerself to challenge those norms. The company offers one-on-one leadership coaching and serves women who want to take ownership of their careers and fulfill their leadership potential.

**4 ALEXANDRA WOOD** '18 has been appointed senior marketing manager for the Hilton West Palm Beach, a AAA Four Diamond hotel.

Wood brings a wealth of marketing experience, having previously worked with both Marriott and Hilton properties. She played a key role in elevating the Cavalier Resort in Virginia Beach, helping transform it into a premier vacation and dining destination.

In her new role, Wood oversees the planning and execution of all marketing strategies, brand positioning and annual strategic planning. She will also manage the hotel's social media strategy and performance.

"Allie's passion for storytelling and branding will help us continue to be the go-to destination for anyone traveling to West Palm Beach," said Chris Inman, general manager of Hilton West Palm Beach.

**5 KRISTALYNN DORIA** '23 M.A. a board-certified behavior analyst, has embarked on a new venture that blends her expertise in psychology with her deep passion for animal welfare.

Along with her husband, Doria opened Jungle Doria's Wildlife Park in Acadia, Florida. The park is home to a diverse collection of animals, including capybaras, lemurs, alligators, emus, tortoises, snakes, birds, mules, horses, bulls and pigs. The park not only offers visitors a chance to see these animals up close but also serves as a sanctuary for those rescued from unfortunate circumstances.

As the park's director of animal behavior and welfare, Doria plays a central role in providing the animals with proper care, diets and enrichment to help them thrive in a safe environment.

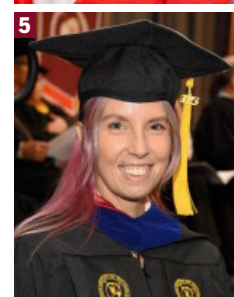
**6 ANDERSON WILDER** '24 M.S. got a front-row seat to two of NASA's Human Exploration Research Analog (HERA) missions from Johnson Space Center in 2024. He served as an alternate in the September and November missions, training alongside teams of researchers for the simulated journeys to Mars.

NASA's 650-square-foot closed simulation habitat acts as an analog for isolated, confined and remote conditions in various exploration scenarios, such as Mars. The HERA missions examine how people respond to the deep space conditions experienced by astronauts, such as isolation, confinement, work and life demands and remote exploration.

Wildier is pursuing a [Ph.D. in industrial-organizational psychology](#) at Florida Tech. He recently completed a [master's degree in aviation human factors](#). His research focuses on team resiliency and human-machine interactions, as well as how spaceflight contributes to astronaut neurobehavioral changes.

Participants on both missions completed tasks such as "harvesting plants from a hydroponic garden, growing shrimp, deploying a small cube-shaped satellite to simulate gathering virtual data for analysis, 'walking' on the surface of Mars using virtual reality goggles and flying simulated drones on the simulated Mars surface," according to NASA.

"There aren't a lot of people who get selected, and then even fewer actually get to go into the habitat," Wildier said. "My goal is always to be able to do research and help move forward human spaceflight."





## EVENTS

### 'LET TRUTH STAND ON ITS OWN.'

#### PULITZER PRIZE WINNER MELINDA HENNEBERGER HEADLINES FREE SPEECH WEEK

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Melinda Henneberger captivated students at Florida Tech's Free Speech Week in February, offering insights into investigative journalism, ethical reporting and the evolving challenges of free speech.

Having worked at top media outlets across the country, including *The New York Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *USA Today* and *The Kansas City Star*, Henneberger has covered everything from presidential politics to corruption within the justice system. She has tackled high-profile investigations, including wrongful convictions, sexual assault cases and law enforcement misconduct.

Before her 2022 Pulitzer Prize victory for editorial work revealing Kansas City's governmental corruption, Henneberger had reached the final round three times.

During her presentation, sponsored by *The Crimson* student newspaper, Henneberger highlighted how journalism serves to sustain democratic systems while holding authority figures responsible.

"Your job is to tell the truth and do the best you can," she said. "It's not really about getting the outcome you want—it's about getting the facts right and letting the truth stand on its own."

She also discussed the increasing challenges facing modern journalism, particularly in an era of growing public distrust.

Students were particularly interested in her advice for aspiring journalists. Henneberger stressed the importance of crafting a compelling lead.

"If you don't write a compelling first sentence, no one will ever get to the rest of your story," she said. "Especially now, when there are thousands of things they could read today. If you don't grab them by the lapels, they're gone."

She also emphasized the power of simplicity in writing.

"Simple words are better than fancy ones," she said. "You're not running a language lab. You're trying to bring people in."

She credited *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White as one of the best



resources for young writers, particularly for its emphasis on concise and vigorous writing.

"One of my first editors told me, 'What you leave out is as important as what you put in,'" she recalled. "Take out the extraneous stuff, and let your words shine."

Henneberger's keynote address came in the middle of the week, which included other activities, such as the Free Speech Wall, a slam poetry event hosted by the *Kaleidoscope* student-run publication and Panther Radio, the "Live Free or Eat Free: You Can't Do Both" First Amendment rights demonstration, and a local news panel featuring reporters from *Florida Today*.

"Journalism is tough," Henneberger said. "But if you love it, there's no better job in the world."

Read the full story: [link.fit.edu/let-trust-stand](https://link.fit.edu/let-trust-stand)

#### 10TH ANNUAL AFRICAN AMERICAN READ-IN CELEBRATES HARLEM RENAISSANCE AND BLACK LUMINARIES

On Feb. 21, the 10th Annual African American Read-In brought together people of all backgrounds to celebrate Black culture through spoken word, literature, song and dance in *Evans Library*. The free event was open to the campus community and the public.

With a focus on the Harlem Renaissance and Black influence, the event welcomed over 150 attendees, who watched as Florida Tech alumni, faculty, students and community members spoke about Black luminaries, read poems, gave performances and sang.

"It was an incredible event, both entertaining and educational," said Sandra Pelham, a local community activist who has attended several read-in events over the years.

Jordin Chandler '19 served as emcee for the event, which was hosted by the library and the *School of Arts and Communication*.

Keynote speaker Sonya Mallard, cultural center coordinator for the Harry T. & Harriette V. Moore Memorial Park and Museum in Mims, Florida, spoke about the museum and shared a slideshow with photos from the African American Heritage Preservation Network, a collective with members



throughout Florida who are working to preserve the state's African American culture.

Near the end of the event, *Heidi Hatfield Edwards*, head of the SAC and associate dean of the *College of Psychology and Liberal Arts*, thanked both of the event's longtime organizers, communication instructor *Rolanda Hatcher-Gallop* '10 M.S. and associate dean of libraries *Nancy Garmer*, and assistant professor *Felipa Chavez* presented them each with flowers.

"This type of event isn't really found elsewhere," Garmer said in *an article in The Florida Tech Crimson*. "We absolutely hope this is a tradition that is carried on in the years to come."

#### 3 PANTHER BATTALION CADETS COMMISSIONED

Just one day before graduating with master's degrees from Florida Tech, three cadets from the university's *Panther Battalion Army ROTC* program were commissioned as second lieutenants during a ceremony May 10.

Nicholas King '25 earned an *M.S. in global strategic communication*. He was commissioned as an active-duty officer into the chemical corps, where he will be until he transitions to military intelligence. His first duty station will be Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Juyoul Lee '25 earned an *M.S. in computer information systems*. He was commissioned as an active-duty officer in the cyber branch. His duty station will be Fort Eisenhower outside of Augusta, Georgia.

Daniel Ochoa Perez '25 earned an *M.S. in human resources management*. He was commissioned active duty into the adjutant general's branch and will attend the basic officer course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He will be stationed at Camp Humphreys in the Republic of Korea.