



STETSON UNIVERSITY

# Summer 2024 - Spring 2025 COHL Annual Report

*Prepared by*

The Center for  
Optimal Health  
across the Lifespan

*<https://www.stetson.edu/other/cohl/>*



# ABOUT COHL

The Center for Optimal Health Across the Lifespan (COHL), is an interdisciplinary, collaborative space in the new Cici and Hyatt Brown Hall for Health and Innovation. COHL was born out of Hyatt and Cici Brown's goal of enhanced health education, and investment into the local community's health care providing an opportunity to create community outreach experiences.

The goal of the center is to promote human flourishing through research, education, training, and easy-access programs for health and wellbeing.

# FACULTY



## **COHL DIRECTOR- JESSE FOX**

Associate Professor of Counselor Education

Jesse Fox, PhD, earned his doctorate from the University of Central Florida and spent several years on the faculty at Loyola University Maryland in the Department of Pastoral Counseling before joining Stetson in 2017. He has experience working with a range of clinical populations including college counseling, outpatient addiction treatment, community mental health and private practice. He is a project leader for the Spiritual and Religious Competency Project, a \$5.1 million grant funded by the John Templeton Foundation. Since 2020, Dr. Fox has served the Executive Director of the Episcopal Counseling Center, a non-profit counseling center serving the DeLand Community since 1987.



## **BFA PRESIDENT AND BFA DIRECTOR- MATT SCHRAGER**

Health Science Professor

Matthew Schrager teaches courses in human anatomy/physiology, the physiology of aging, exercise physiology, biomechanics and research methods. His research focuses primarily on aging, bioenergetics, and functional capacity. He has a secondary research focus on the physiology and biomechanics of mobility and human performance. In his aging research, Dr. Schrager analyzes large-scale databases through the National Institute on Aging, and he has published with Stetson students research on blueberries as a potential countermeasure to the functional effects of aging.

# FACULTY



## **BFA FACULTY RESEARCHER- SARAH GARCIA**

Associate Professor of Psychology

Sarah Garcia, PhD, is a clinical neuropsychologist who studies non-pharmacological interventions for cognitive decline in a variety of medical populations. Her past work has examined cognitive deficits in a wide variety of populations (e.g. heart failure, bariatric surgery candidates, and dementia) as well as the use of exercise, sleep and electrical stimulation as potential preventative and treatment approaches.

# STAFF



## **COHL COORDINATOR- ARIEL CHIVERS**

Ariel Chivers, a health-and-wellness expert who has been working with the senior population for 12 years, is the coordinator for the BFA and the Center for Optimal Health Across the Lifespan (COHL). She leads the Brain Fitness Academy sessions with the assistance of three or four undergraduate students who have strong backgrounds in psychology and health sciences-based courses. Chivers is the former associate executive director of the Volusia Flagler Family YMCA.



# COUNSELOR ED ALUMNI



## CARE PARTNER SUPPORT LEAD-NICOLE KING

Nicole King is an alumni of Stetson University and graduated with both a bachelors in sociology and a master's in clinical mental health counseling. She is now a registered mental health counseling intern at a local counseling practice and enjoys seeing clients from diverse backgrounds. Her clinical niche is grief and loss, but she also works to advocate for the unhoused and for survivors of domestic violence by working with national organizations that support increased access to care and resources. Facilitating connection is a passion of Nicole's and her work in both developing and running the Care Partner Support Group has been deeply fulfilling.

# SMART LAB PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Our SMART Lab is part of a consortium of SMART Labs with the Ohio State University.

We utilize a standardized curriculum and technology developed by the world renown Heart Math Institute TM.

We have created a self-paced guide for helping people identify where stress comes from, and how that can better anticipate and respond to situations that create stress and overwhelm.

Participants in the smart lab receive these benefits free of charge, supported in part through grant funding, and can participate in research on a voluntary basis.

## SMART LAB



# SMART LAB PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



TEMPLETON WORLD  
CHARITY FOUNDATION

## Human Flourishing: The Science of Spiritual and Religious Exercises

The Templeton World Charity Foundation began a strategic initiative to scientifically study the spiritual exercises from the world's great religious traditions for their potential to foster human flourishing. Spiritual exercises have been a fundamental aspect of the human species for thousands of years, offering a range of methods through which people have discovered thriving and transformation throughout the globe and across all known civilizations.

The Center for Optimal Health Across the Lifespan, led by Jesse Fox, PhD (Principal Investigator), in partnership with Joseph Currier, PhD (Co-Investigator) from the University of South Alabama and Paul Granello, PhD (Co-Investigator) from The Ohio State University, received a \$500,000 research grant through the generous funding of the Templeton World Charity Foundation to study the implications of human flourishing from the spiritual practice called *Lectio Divina* (Latin for the "Divine Reading"). This project is a collaboration with the practice partners of Contemplative Outreach.

This project is expected to last for two years, beginning in 2024 and ending in 2026 (Grant Number: 32530; Grant: DOI DOIORG/10.54224/32530).

Partnering Institutions:



STETSON  
UNIVERSITY



Contemplative  
Outreach



UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTH ALABAMA



THE OHIO STATE  
UNIVERSITY

# SMART LAB PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Officially surpassing 700+ Stress Management and Resiliency Training sessions since our labs' founding in 2022!

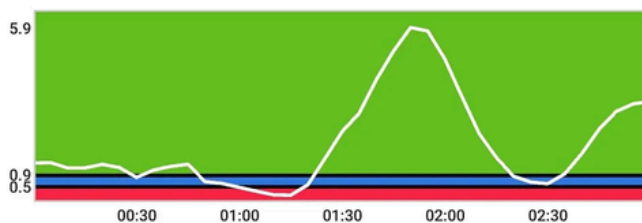
Logged 140+ Stress Management and Resiliency Training Sessions with Stetson and Ohio State Students

Submitted and received a \$10,000 Hollis Institute Impact Grant to update lab equipment!

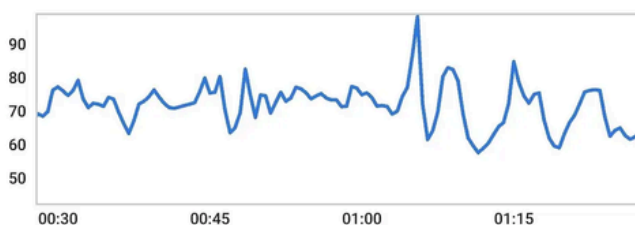
Recruited 80 + individuals from across the country to participate in daily emotional and spiritual tracking 3x daily called Ecological Momentary Analysis

Recruited 40 + individuals from across the country to participate in Heart Rate Variability monitoring paired with contemplative practices

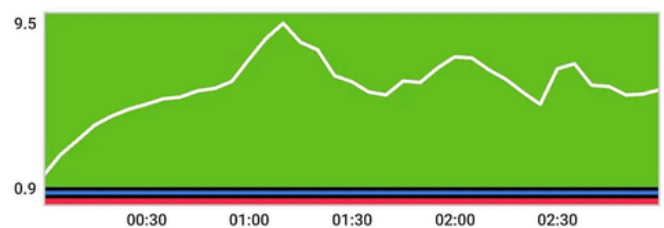
Coherence Over Time



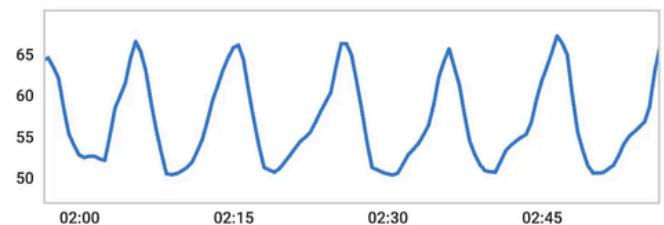
HRV



Coherence Over Time



HRV





# AWAKENED AWARENESS GROUPS

Our SMART Lab offered an 8 week wellness workshop in Fall 2024 and Spring 2025: **Awakened Awareness**

Stetson University undergraduate students were invited to participate in **Awakened Awareness: Spiritual Mind Body Practices for Enhanced Well-Being.**

Each 8-week, 90-minute workshop included meditation practices, an introduction to Awakened Awareness concepts, and sharing of reflections. During these 8 weeks students learned techniques and tools to reduce stress, increase overall wellbeing, and find deeper meaning and purpose in life!

All participants were required to be at least 18 years of age and enrolled at Stetson University.

The group was facilitated by Reverend Campbell, Kristie Perez, Director of Student Counseling and Counselor Education Students.

Awakened Awareness is a meditation-based series of workshops that was developed from research at Columbia University's Teachers College and the work of Dr. Lisa Miller, and has been conducted with hundreds of undergraduates.



AWAKENED AWARENESS FOR UNDERGRADUATES

# BFA PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Served biweekly cognitive rehabilitation program for 20+ participants and provide important intergenerational learning through internship and practicum experiences.

## Summer 2024

- 13 participants
- 12 participants returned for Summer 2024 semester

## Fall 2024

- 15 participants
- 13 participants returned for Fall 2024 semester

## Spring 2025

- 15 participants
- 13 participants returned for Spring 2025 semester

Currently recruiting for our Summer 2025 semester

3rd Year receiving the Hollis Impact Grant



# BFA PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- Collaborations with Hollis center trainers including regular classes with Frankie Painter
- Tai chi with Bill and Pat Hoback
- Dance classes with Susan Femino-Floyd
- Talks on research and aging by faculty including Dr. Matt Schrager and Dr. Wendy Anderson
- Trips to Gillespie Museum, Hand Art Museum, and duPont-Ball library
- The Alzheimer's Association Brain bus coming to Stetson's campus in November 2024
- Participation in Alzheimer's Association's annual Walk to End Alzheimer's in November 2024
- Attended World Parkinson's Day with Rock Steady Boxing in April 2025 at the Marine Discovery Center.
- Planted herbs cilantro, thyme and basil in the teaching garden with volunteers Chantal Michaud and Barbara Chivers
- Wet and dry art activities with Dr. Shankar-Brown, Associate Professor of Education
- Individual and couple portraits from local photographer, Betsy Stange





# BFA STUDENT INTERNS

## Student Experiences

Undergraduate students participate in a number of internship activities, working one-on-one with participants, and being trained on and utilizing cognitive rehabilitation and physiology techniques.

This internship gives them real-world health experience, and exposes them to advanced healthcare training earlier in their academic career.

### Summer 2024

- 6 Stetson student interns

### Fall 2024

- 6 Stetson student interns

### Spring 2025

- 6 Stetson Student interns

Many students credit internship experiences to helping them develop professional skills and contacts and identify a career path for themselves.

This combination helps ensure students are successful in their immediate years post-Stetson

**Post graduation, BFA Student interns have pursued the following:**

- Occupational Therapy
- Medical school
- Research at major universities
- Clinical psychology graduate programs

# BFA STUDENT INTERNS AND RESEARCH

Each semester 3 student interns help with research

Senior projects from health sciences look at cognition and quality of life correlates for their capstones.

3 times a year, interested BFA participants did a longitudinal study evaluating cognitive, physical, and quality of life outcomes.

1 student looked at grip strength asymmetry as a potential biomarker of cognitive performance for her capstone.





# CARE PARTNER SUPPORT GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

Each semester our Counselor Education Alumni, Nicole, and one Internship student each semester participated in the leadership and planning of the bi-weekly meetings.

In addition to providing much-needed support and opportunities to share with other care partners, topics covered in the groups included becoming a resilient caregiver; tips for managing stress and burnout; diffusing family conflict and tips for improving communication; nutrition and wellness; tips for creating a dementia friendly home; mindfulness activities; and sharing community resources.

Research was conducted on the impact of the Care Partner support groups on the stress and strain/burden experienced by family caregivers.

## Summer 2024

- 9 Care Partners attended support groups

## Fall 2024

- 10 Care Partners attended support groups

## Spring 2025

- 12 Care Partners attended support groups



# CARE PARTNER SUPPORT GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

## Summer 2024

### Guest speakers included

- Beau Herman from Assisted Living Locators
- Audrey Bellini from Home Instead
- Vonshelle Beneby and Lyndsey Taylor from the Alzheimer's Association

## Fall 2024

### Guest speakers included

- Dr. Shankar-Brown with an integrative art activity
- Marissa Wilcox with Assisting Hands Home Care
- Josh Freitas from CERTUS Memory Care
- Coren Meeks, Elder Care Attorney and Double-Hatter

## Spring 2025

### Guest speakers included

- Marissa Wilcox with Assisting Hands Home Care
- Frankie Painter Stetson University certified exercise instructor
- Gail Bundow M.D.F.A.C.E.P



# NEW AND UPCOMING PROJECTS!

We are pleased to announce some new additions to our list of projects. Take a minute and get to know them:

## The Hollis Institute Impact Grant

We applied for and received a \$10,000 Hollis Institute Impact Grant (renewable up two additional years for a total award of \$30,000). In this first year of funding, this award will help update some technology in the SMART Lab, partner with Stetson University's Center for Public Opinion Research to conduct a mental health vital signs survey in Volusia County, and to hold a public outreach even in the Spring of 2026. We are very excited for the new avenues this seed funding will open up to expand the work of the center.

## The CONNECT Lab

Coping with Numinous Narratives in Combat Trauma (CONNECT) Lab is dedicated to exploring the complex interplay between moral injury, PTSD, and spirituality particularly within U.S. military veteran populations. We aim to elucidate the psychological distinctions between individuals with moral injury and those with PTSD, hypothesizing that the numinous - sixth personality trait-, predicts distress resulting from traumatic experiences. Currently, we are in the process of obtaining IRB approval for our study and will provide additional links to a 30-minute survey for participants once approval is secured. The CONNECT Lab is led by Jesse Fox, PhD (Principal Investigator), in partnership with Ralph Piedmont, PhD (Co-Investigator) from the Center for Professional Studies and Trinideé Mercado (Co-Investigator) from Stetson University.



# NEW AND UPCOMING PROJECTS!

## The Meaning-Making Project

Meaning-making is a core trait of our humanity. Our capacity to create meaning and to nurture its growth is essential to the flourishing of our species. The Nazi Death Camp Survivor and Psychiatrist Victor Frankl observed that western society broadly suffered from a "cry for meaning" which he identified symptomatically through the proliferation of depression, violence, and addiction in society, also called the "diseases of despair." Over time it became apparent to many observers that this cry for meaning escalated into a "crisis of meaning." The 2023 public health advisory issued by the US Surgeon General identified for the first time that the top public health need is a lack of social meaning: The Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. This project delves deeply into this crisis, and will develop new ways of understanding how people make meaning through a model called the Logoplex developed by Ralph Piedmont, PhD in partnership with the Center for Professional Studies in Towson, Maryland.

# NEEDS OF THE CENTER

The work we undertake in the center is not possible without your support. Though we apply regularly for external funding, there are needs we often must seek additional support to carry out essential tasks.

When you give, the intention of your gift can be designated for any of the following purposes:

- The mission of the center to promote training and research in health related disciplines.
- Material and technology for our labs.
- Full and part-time administrative and coordination positions.
- Graduate assistantships.



Center for Optimal Health Across the Lifespan





## **WANT TO SEE MORE ABOUT COHL?**

**[Click Here](#)**



## **INTERESTED IN DONATING?**

- Follow this link [Give](#) to the College of Arts and Sciences giving page.
- Under the designation drop-down menu, please select "Other" and then type in "COHL".