

# NEWSLETTER

- FALL 2025 -

**FLORIDA**  
**SOUTHWESTERN**  
STATE COLLEGE

CENTER FOR UNDERGRADUATE  
RESEARCH & CREATIVITY

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**HONORS**



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dr. Brandon Jett, Director

As we begin the Spring 2026 semester, I wanted to reflect a bit my first semester as the Director of the Honors Scholar Program and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity. It is such a privilege to join a college community so deeply committed to academic excellence, creativity, and student success.

Last fall was an exciting time for the Honors Scholar Program. We launched a new application window and welcomed 20 outstanding students into the program. These new Honors Scholars bring fresh perspectives, energy, and curiosity to our growing community. Each FSW location now has Honors-specific advisors to help guide HSP students on their academic journey through the Honors Scholar Program more effectively.

Something near and dear to my heart, we welcomed the first HSP student cohort at the Hendry/Glades Curtis Center, with hopes to expand the program by 15 new HSP students next year. In addition, we offered our first Honors Seminar, "Peace Studies: Nobel Laureates, Leadership, and Civic Engagement," to ten dedicated students last fall (but more on this later in the newsletter).

The Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity is also building momentum. We're in the process of launching several new projects connected to Bucs Corner Experiences, including collaborations with the Creative Writing II course and the Mosquito Surveillance Program on the Collier Campus. These initiatives highlight the Center's mission to provide hands-on, interdisciplinary learning experiences that connect classroom knowledge with real-world discovery.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Wendy Chase, Courtney Daniels, and Dr. Christy Gilfert for their guidance, mentorship, and support throughout this transition. I'm also deeply grateful to the dedicated faculty and staff who serve on the Honors Advisory Council and the CURC committees. Your continued commitment and collaboration make these programs thrive.

It's been a rewarding start to the semester, and I'm eager to continue working with students, faculty, and staff to make FSW a place where curiosity, creativity, and innovation flourish.

-Brandon Jett

# Starting the Year Off Right... Honors Meet and Greet



# CURC and OTOC Hosted Award-Winning Author Annabelle Tometich



On Oct. 1, the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity (CURC) and One Theme One College (OTOC) welcomed award-winning author and Fort Myers native Annabelle Tometich to Florida SouthWestern State College for an engaging event exploring the power of story.

During her visit, Annabelle shared insights from her recently published memoir, *The Mango Tree: A Memoir of Fruit, Florida, and Felony*, and reflected on her journey from medical-school flunky to line cook, journalist, and ultimately, acclaimed author. Her conversation offered students, faculty, and community members a powerful look at how personal experiences, identity, and place shape the stories we tell.

Annabelle spent 18 years as a food writer, editor, and restaurant critic for the *News-Press* in her hometown of Fort Myers. Her writing has also appeared in *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Catapult*, and the *Tampa Bay Times*, among others. She has earned more than a dozen awards for her work, including first place for Features Writing from the Florida Society of News Editors in 2020. *The Mango Tree* was recently named the winner of the 2025 Southern Book Prize for Nonfiction.

Stay tuned for future CURC and OTOC events that continue to explore the power of story and highlight the creativity, scholarship, and voices that shape our community.

# Outstanding Academic Opportunities at FSW



The Honors Scholar Program and CURC worked with several faculty last semester to provide students with outstanding academic opportunities across the college. On the Collier Campus, Professor Jordan Donini's students conducted a variety of different turtle and amphibian based research projects in the IDH2910 Seminar. Activities included trapping and tagging turtles at four different field sites for demographic work, blood hematology and parasite analysis using staining technique, and the development of a force analyzer to assess the impact of head size (megacephaly) on bite force. Other projects include continuation of salamander diet studies, investigation into burrowing ecology of invasive lizards, and the development of educational wildlife signage for local community groups.

In addition to research, 10 students attended the Herpeton: Florida Herpetology conference where they observed over 50 different presentations and 20 posters from professionals and students from all over Florida (and beyond) while also making connections and potential transfer lab arrangements. One student, Nikko Bustamante, presented his preliminary findings on the diet of two-toed *Amphiuma* Salamanders in southwestern Florida.

# Outstanding Academic Opportunities at FSW



Dr. Brandi George's and Dr. Michael Sauer's students explored their connection to Southwest Florida ecosystems in one of the most popular Honors Seminars we offer: Connecting to Southwest Florida's Ecosystems: Nature Writing and Environmental Science. Students interrogated and expanded the ways they see the world around them through two academic disciplines: environmental science and creative writing. Students completed a variety of assignments which expanded their knowledge and understanding of how academics in these fields create, conduct research, and exchange ideas. This class introduced basic creative writing techniques, ecological concepts, fundamental characteristics of SW Florida's ecosystem, and provided students with many different opportunities for visiting our natural environment in guided fieldtrips across the region.

# Outstanding Academic Opportunities at FSW



The Honors Scholar Program established the inaugural Honors course at the Hendry/Glades Curtis Center in Fall 2025. Dr. Brandon Jett and Dr. Stacey Klein designed IDH 2910, an Honors Seminar titled "Peace Studies: Nobel Laureates, Leadership, and Civic Engagement," which examined the historical development of the Nobel Peace Prize and analyzed the contributions of distinguished laureates across multiple decades. Through structured inquiry, students identified potential nominees whose work aligned with Nobel Peace Prize criteria, conducted comprehensive research on their backgrounds and accomplishments, and presented evidence-based arguments to their peers. The course's rigorous approach to peace studies scholarship earned recognition from the National Collegiate Honors Council, which designated it as part of their prestigious Partners in Peace program.

# International Education Week



International Education Week at FSW, a collaboration between the Center for International Education and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity, promoted global awareness through engaging activities. Students explored world languages and traditions, created international art, and savored global cuisines. The week culminated in the International Photo Exhibit and Awards, showcasing student and faculty travel photography and inspiring global appreciation across the campus community.



# Honors Tour of USF

## Nov. 22



# Honors Tour of FGCU

## Dec. 5



# Applied Research and Professional Skills Bucs Experiences



The Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity is starting to build a series of research opportunities for students across multiple FSW locations through the Applied Research and Professional Skills Bucs Experience. CURC is piloting two programs, one on Collier Campus and one on Lee Campus during the 2025/2026 academic year.

Dr. Mitchell Lucas is running the Mosquito Surveillance Program on the Collier Campus. This program engages selected students in hands-on training, mentorship, and research activities, focusing on mosquito capture, identification, and data analysis. Student researchers are gaining proficiency with scientific equipment, field protocols, and data management techniques. Conducted on the Collier Campus, this ongoing initiative adapts to student interests and county public health needs, providing a foundation for future expansion and collaboration with the Collier Mosquito Control District.

# Applied Research and Professional Skills

## Bucs Experiences



The second experience is being offered as part of the Creative Writing II (CRW 2002) course that FSW is relaunching in Spring 2026. This experience will involve completion of the CRW2002: Creative Writing II course, taught by Professor Lynn Embick on the Lee Campus that will be geared toward applying basic skills learned by students who have completed CRW2001 to the development of professionally polished projects, including collections of poetry, creative nonfiction essays, and short fiction, the development of a short film/play production, and/or working as a staff member of Illuminations, an established FSW Literary Journal.

Students can find these opportunities on Bucs Corner by clicking on the “Opportunities” tab and selecting “Experiences.”

Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.

-John Dewey

## CURC Committee Members

Dr. Adam Davis  
Prof. Stuart Brown  
Prof. Jordan Donini  
Dr. Brandi George  
Prof. Sharon Hill  
Dr. Katharine O'Connor  
Dr. Myriam Mompont  
Mandy Niemiec  
Dr. April Ring  
Dr. Michael Sauer

## Honors Advisory Council

Dr. Bruno Baltodano  
Prof. Jane Charles  
Dr. Jacquelyn Davis  
Dr. Mark Herman  
Prof. Laura Henning  
Prof. Ihasha Horn  
Dr. Douglas Magomo  
Prof. Leonard Owens  
Sherri Parks  
Jessica Teets  
Prof. Amanda Zirzow