

NEWSLETTER

- SPRING 2026 -

FLORIDA
SOUTHWESTERN
STATE COLLEGE

CENTER FOR UNDERGRADUATE
RESEARCH & CREATIVITY

HONORS



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dr. Brandon Jett, Director

As we conclude the 2025-2026 academic year, I am filled with gratitude for the collective effort of the students, faculty, and staff who made this year such a resounding success.

While this spring looked a bit different than previous years, the Honors Scholar Program (HSP) has continued to thrive. We have already accepted 63 new students into the program and we recently celebrated 39 incredible graduates who completed the program this spring!

It has been a banner year for both HSP and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity (CURC). A few highlights include:

Bailey Ritchie presented her work at the Florida Conference of Historians annual meeting while Samantha Luc and Taylor Newman represented FSW at the Florida Association of International Educators annual meeting.

More than 40 students and faculty joined us for a craft talk and reading by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Nathan Hill.

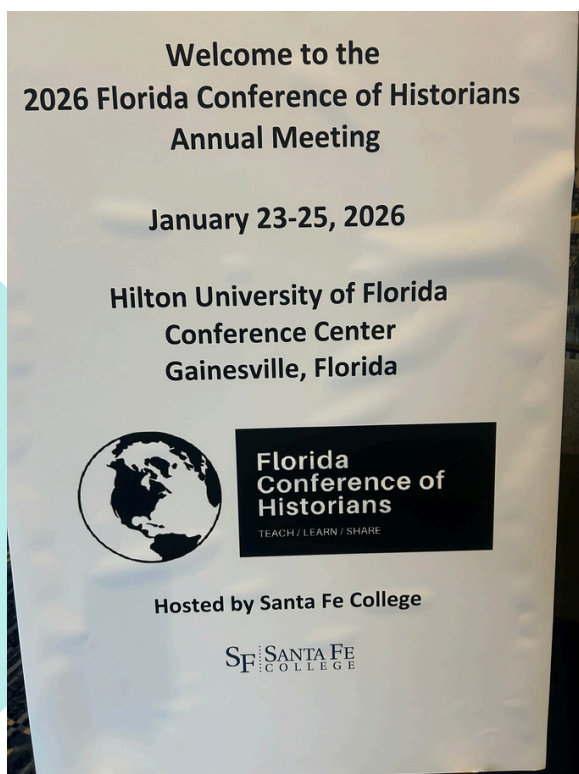
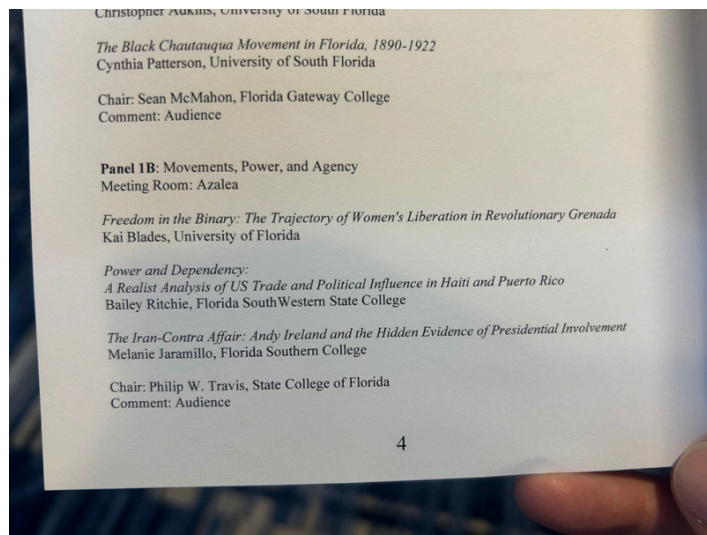
We celebrated student research at the Three Minute Thesis contest, the Research Celebration Reception, and the inaugural Collier STEM Research Expo.

There is so much to look forward to in the coming year. The collaboration across the FSW community is what fundamentally sustains CURC and Honors, and I am deeply grateful to the faculty and staff on the Honors Advisory Council and CURC committees, as well as Dr. Christy Gilfert, Dorothy Valcourt, and Courtney Daniels. Your commitment is why these programs flourish.

On a personal note, I'd like to share that after seven wonderful years at FSW, I will be leaving on June 30th to begin a new chapter at Santa Fe College. Leaving is bittersweet; I cannot thank you all enough for the love, support, collegiality, and fun I've experienced here. I step away knowing that the work you do will continue to make FSW a place where curiosity, creativity, and innovation flourish. It has been an honor to be part of this team.

With appreciation,
Brandon Jett

Bailey Ritchie at the Florida Conference of Historians



Florida Association of International Educators Conference



The Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity (CURC) was proud to sponsor student participation in the Florida Association of International Educators Conference at Florida International University.

As alumni of FSW's study abroad programs, Samantha Luc and Taylor Newman gained a "behind-the-scenes" look at the logistics of global education. Through networking with international education professionals and university representatives, they explored how global learning strengthens both national security and the U.S. economy.

The experience underscored the tangible, long-term value of FSW's global initiatives. Research highlights just how much these opportunities matter: on average, study abroad alumni earn \$4,159 more annually than their peers. We are thrilled to see our students connecting their FSW experiences to such promising professional futures.

Nathan Hill Craft Talk and Reading

April 8



On April 8th, the Honors Scholar Program and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity (CURC) hosted New York Times Bestselling fiction writer, Nathan Hill, who gave a craft talk and read from his novel, *Wellness*, which won the prestigious Grand Prix of American Literature, as well as the Book of the Year prize from the Deauville Film Festival.

Hill's craft talk, "Your Brain on Fiction," explored the neuroscience of sentence structure, explaining why the unique language and sentence structure of literary writing increases empathy in readers. We were also given a rare treat, as Hill debuted his new novel—not yet titled—for the first time to any audience. His first chapter, which poked a bit of fun at Florida wildlife and the pickle ball community, had the audience laughing out loud.

Nathan Hill's books have been published worldwide in more than two dozen languages, and he has also written nonfiction for *Wired*, *ESPN the Magazine*, *The Times of London*, *Poets & Writers*, and the *New York Times Book Review*. A native Iowan, Nathan lives with his wife in Naples, Florida.

Research Celebration Reception

April 9, 2026

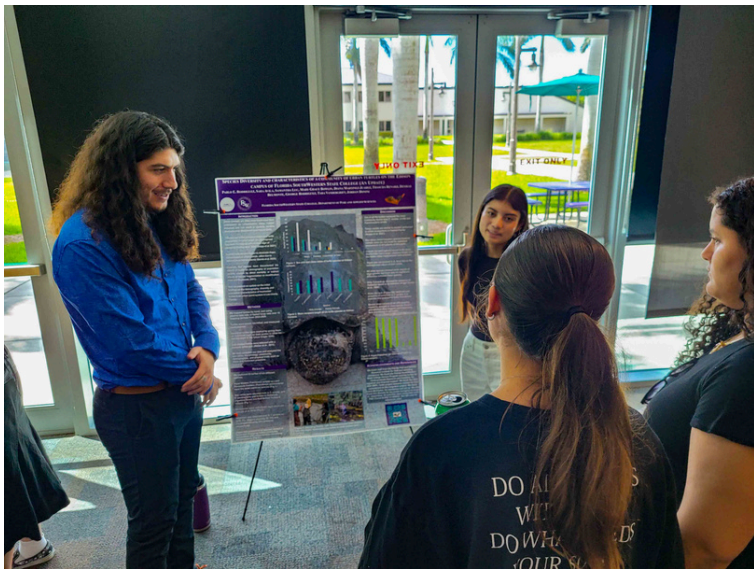


CURC, International Education, Student Involvement, the School of Business and Technology (SoBT), and FSW's Art and Honors programs recently joined forces to celebrate the research and creative work flourishing across our campuses. By recreating the atmosphere of a professional conference reception, we provided students with both formal and informal venues to share their projects with faculty and peers.

Event highlights included:

- **Entrepreneurship in Action:** Six students from Prof. Adam Davis's course delivered impressive "I am Creative..." business pitches.
- **The Academic Journey:** "Cornerstone to Capstone" tables featured students from Prof. Sharon Hill's courses, illustrating how the new Cornerstone foundation leads directly to high-level Capstone success.
- **Global Perspectives:** Education students from Dr. Anne Angstrom's class shared insights from their Spring Break experience shadowing teachers in Spain.
- **Artistic Expression:** A gallery of self-portraits created by Prof. Berry Van Boekel's drawing students was on display.
- **Community Connection:** The event concluded with lively conversation and refreshments in the Garden of Inspiration.

Science Research Expo on Collier Campus



Honors Cord Ceremony Class of 2026!!



Sara Avila Sanchez

Demitri Bazinet

Sarah Berkowitz

Cora Bitter

Richelle Britto

Payton Buteau

Julie Copithorne

London Daniels

Carlos de Lima Rivera

Colton Eberhart

Serena Estevez

Orianna Fernandez Restrepo

Julia Flores

Jaxson Heneise

Rebecca Larrea

Samantha Luc

Alana Martinez

Diana Martinez-Juarez

Madlyn McDaniel

Cullen McManus

Kirill Milov

Ava Nadekow

Emma Palmer

Asish Panakkal

Dhrusha Patel

Juliana Pienkos

Thascha Renard

Claire Reppert

Bailey Ritchie

Bryson Robbins

George Rodriguez

Estevan Roig Sanchez

Angela Rojas

Daniel Roman-Diaz

Victor Salinas

Gabriela Silva-Passos

Sandra Trapp

Brayden VanPham

Katherine Monroe

Maralyn Amador

Dr. Wendy Chase Life Changer Award Winners: Jordan Donini and Terri Housley



Three Minute Thesis and Collier STEM Expo Award Winners



Our Honors Capstone students on the Lee and Charlotte campuses recently showcased their hard work in a Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition. Spanning six thematic groups, students were challenged to condense their complex research—including methodologies and larger significance—into just three minutes, followed by a rigorous seven-minute Q&A with a panel of FSW judges.

Congratulations to our Best 3MT Presentation winners:

- Julie Copithorne
- Sandra Trapp
- Richelle Britto
- Colton Eberhart
- Melanie Ruch
- Brayden VanPham

Over on the Collier Campus, students participated in the inaugural Collier STEM Research Expo. They presented their findings to a diverse audience of peers, community members, and FSW colleagues. Our science faculty evaluated the work based on research design and presentation quality.

Congratulations to our Collier award recipients:

- Joseph Meyer: Best Overall Research Presentation
- Mary Grace Bowlin: Best Research Design

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 Mompoin
Mandy Niemiec
Dr. April Ring
Dr. Michael Sauer

Honors Advisory Council

Dr. Bruno Baltodano
Prof. Jane Charles
Dr. Jacquelyn Davis
Dr. Mark Herman
Prof. Ihasha Horn
Dr. Douglas Magomo
Sherri Parks
Jessica Teets
Prof. Amanda Zirzow
Dr. Alessandro Cesarano