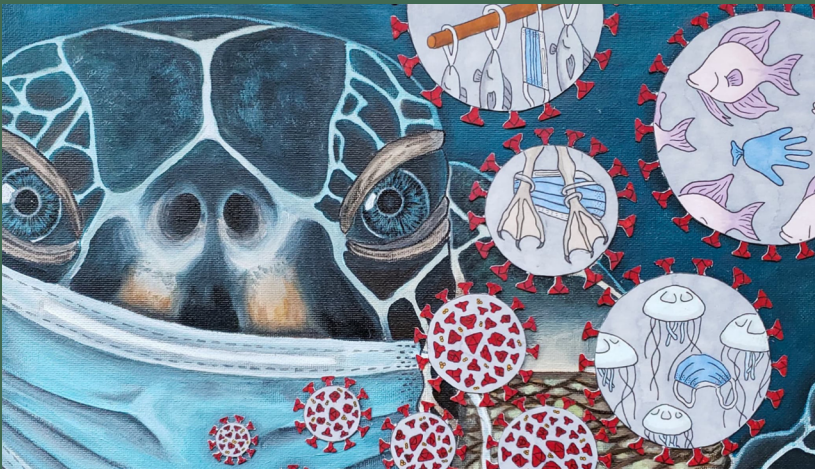


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MEDICINE, HEALTH, and SOCIETY



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2025 ANNUAL REPORT

The Vanderbilt University Department of Medicine, Health, and Society annual report is published every spring for current and prospective students, family and friends.

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Cover images (clockwise from top left): Painting by Leo Huang (MA'25), courtesy of the artist; Campus in the fall, courtesy of Vanderbilt University; Department faculty.

From the

CHAIR *of* MHS

It is with tremendous pride and gratitude that I write to launch the 2025 annual report for the Department of Medicine, Health, and Society (MHS). Our department continues to thrive, thanks to the brilliance, grace and spirit of our students, staff and faculty. MHS stands as a testament to the transformative power of interdisciplinary inquiry around matters of illness and health. As its director, I have witnessed firsthand how our department challenges conventional boundaries of medical education, urging students to explore the intricate tapestry of cultural, economic and biological factors that influence health outcomes. Our curriculum is not merely an academic exercise; it's a call to critically examine the societal structures that shape well-being and its discontents.

As this report details, our students delve into pressing issues such as health economics, media, sports, mental health disparities, the global burden of disease and the ethics of health care delivery. Students are encouraged to question prevailing narratives and to understand how policies and societal attitudes can impact individual and community well-being. This approach is rooted in the belief that to truly address health and illness, one must also understand their origins in social and systemic structures.

MHS is a cutting-edge champion of a movement toward a more equitable and just health care system and healthier communities. By fostering critical thinking and interdisciplinary collaboration, we prepare our students to become civic leaders who will not only navigate but also reshape the landscape of health and medicine. Across labs, offices, classrooms, and multiple diverse public spaces, MHS also continues to support to the broader publics of which we are a part.

Indeed, fostering and sustaining community represents the health challenge of our era. Too often, it feels as if the algorithms of life and death push us ever-farther away from finding common purpose, common cause or common solutions, even as the stakes of the issues about which we disagree get ever-higher.

It's the opposite of what we should be doing. Research repeatedly shows that equity, community and social cohesion represent key drivers of health. Studies by MHS Professor Tara McKay and colleagues show how access to health insurance promotes well-being, not just by providing access to doctors, but by strengthening social bonds within communities. Our departmental research on "structural competency" similarly reveals how investments in common infrastructure yield healthy bodies and more-vibrant economies.



We strive to create communities in which we feel safe in a world that feels ever-more perilous.

Which is why I'm exceptionally honored to note the remarkable achievements that this report details. MHS students, staff and faculty continue to create meaning by becoming champions of community, in large ways and small. Over the past year, MHS students rallied to form outreach networks and assist those at risk. Faculty and staff worked to reimagine the power of curriculum and of critical thinking. We grew together through acts of mutual support.

As this report details, MHS students and faculty have worked at the fore of exploring the social foundations of health, developing new health technologies, and expressing the relationships between medicine, the humanities and the arts. They have addressed the structural drivers of health inequities, advised corporations and government about best safety practices and developed new ways to address the holistic needs of patients. These and other efforts have been guided by our overarching commitment to health and well-being that suffuses our diverse efforts to address health, health care, and health care solutions in the U.S. and the world. Along the way, our community proved over-and-again the adage that, if you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

This is the eleventh edition of the MHS newsletter. I particularly wish to thank Professors Aimi Hamraie and Ken MacLeish for their tremendous efforts in crafting and editing the content that appears within these pages.

We boast a growing cohort of top-of-the-field scholars and expanding, innovative undergraduate and graduate

curricula. We now offer more than 80 MHS courses, and we support more than 700 undergraduate majors and a smaller number of minors. 251 MHS majors will graduate in spring 2025 and 19 more will graduate in the fall.

Success stories abound. A remarkable 83% of MHS students who applied to medical school were accepted—more than double the national average. Our undergraduate curriculum offers seven important concentration areas driven by student interest and faculty expertise, including health policies and economies, global health and health justice. We continue to support a vibrant and growing master's degree program—the M.A. in Medicine, Health, and Society. Master's students, too, are embarking on exciting and diverse careers in a variety of fields from medicine to finance to media. We also collaborate with a number of other departments to help support Ph.D. students.

Our robust cohort of core faculty spans a continuum of expertise, including mental health, global health, health policy and health economics, health demography, research ethics, military mental health, men's health and racial disparities, gender and disability studies, literature and medicine, and education and curricular innovation, to name but a few!

As this annual report details, our faculty published important articles and books, won major awards and appeared on a host of national media outlets over the past year. With the added expertise of our jointly appointed and affiliated faculty members, the department is truly a trans-institutional cog bridging Vanderbilt's many intellectual strengths.

We also continue to publish scholarly articles that detail the impact of our curriculum. By teaching students to grapple with these monumental societal questions, MHS is helping develop sophisticated thinkers who are trained to be unsatisfied with the status quo—a generation of students who are prepared to find new solutions out of a complex web of challenges that we will face as a nation and as a community. The future feels in many ways uncertain—but I feel great confidence knowing that our students will become the leaders of tomorrow and will show us the way forward.

These and other initiatives are continually updated on [our website](#), and our doors are always open to students, parents, scholars, community members and all others. We hope that you will visit often and stay tuned as we grow.

Wishing continued safety, health and vibrance for our community,

Jonathan Metzl, MD, PhD

*Frederick B. Rentschler II Professor of Sociology
and Medicine, Health, and Society*

Director, Department of Medicine, Health, and Society

Professor of Psychiatry

@JonathanMetzl

Department Snapshot

763

Undergraduate Majors

79

Undergraduate Minors

80

Courses

13

Master's Students

23

Primary Faculty Members

63

Affiliate Faculty Members

MASTER *of* ARTS *in* MEDICINE, HEALTH, *and* SOCIETY

The Master of Arts in Medicine, Health, and Society provides students with the interdisciplinary knowledge and skills that future health care professionals require. The field of contemporary health care is increasingly shaped by the realization that social, environmental, personal and structural factors are as essential as basic biological processes to understanding a patient's illness and suffering.

Social and cultural aspects of illness and health are a growing component of pre-health education. Our master's degree program is aimed at students who want to gain research experience, enhance their interdisciplinary training and strengthen their applications before entering the job market, medical school, professional school or doctoral programs.

Our broad curriculum allows students the unique opportunity to take classes in the Vanderbilt Graduate School as well as the Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Law, and in the Master of Public Health Program. Through interdisciplinary course work, faculty mentorship and research collaborations, students learn skills now emphasized on the MCAT and essential to success in health care.

In addition to traditional applications to the Master of Arts in Medicine, Health, and Society open to all students who have earned their bachelor's degree, current Vanderbilt undergraduates have the opportunity to earn both a bachelor's degree and master's degree in just five years of study through the 4+1 B.A./M.A. program.

Successful candidates for the Master of Arts in Medicine, Health, and Society exhibit the following:

- Passion about health disparities, health justice and the connections between the biological and social foundations of health.
- Interest in science communication, bioethics and health policy.
- Interest in broadening their knowledge and skill base before pursuing medical school or other advanced degree programs.
- Desire to approach contemporary health care from an interdisciplinary perspective.
- Drive to understand the social and cultural aspects of illness and health.

Isabel Allen

Isabel Allen graduated with a bachelor's degree in integrated studies at Jacksonville State University in May 2024. Isabel has always had a dedication to push the improvement of female student-athlete performance. Her practicum, "Contraceptive Methods: The Potential Effects on Female Student-Athletes," highlights the links between how contraceptive methods can affect female student-athletes and their performance.

Being a member of the Vanderbilt women's bowling team, Isabel's experience in an athletic institution and with female student-athletes is a notable motivation behind her research. Isabel aspires to use her research in the future, aiming to work in an athletic institution supporting female student-athletes with their health choices, performance support and mental well-being in sports. Through her project, Isabel hopes that female student-athletes can gain the necessary support to understand their reproductive health and how it correlates with performance.



Isabella Bareford

Isabella Bareford is a graduate of Loyola Marymount University, where she earned a bachelor of science in health and human sciences in 2024. Geared toward human anatomy and physiology, her undergraduate studies confirmed her desire to pursue a career in health care as a physician assistant. From middle school through her freshman year of college, Isabella and her family were the primary caregivers for her elderly grandmother. As a caregiver, she was responsible for helping her grandmother with tasks like medication management and accompanying her to appointments when not at school or volleyball practice. Isabella's experience as a caregiver also came with her own mental health struggles. For her capstone project, Isabella is creating an informational pamphlet with resources for caregivers that will be available at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Through this project, Isabella hopes that others can have resources to ensure their own well-being while simultaneously meeting the needs of others.

Isabella is also a member of the Vanderbilt volleyball team, where she will complete her final year of eligibility in fall 2025. Through her experiences as a student-athlete and a caregiver, Isabella intends to provide equitable care to those in underserved communities.



Leo Huang

Leo Huang (BA'24) received his bachelor of arts in medicine, health and society; neuroscience; and architecture from Vanderbilt University before enrolling in the MHS graduate program to study the culture of care surrounding cancer surgery. He began his research journey with Dr. Michael Topf as a freshman studying the applications of 3D scanning and extended reality in improving head and neck cancer surgery. Through this experience, Leo developed a protocol to 3D scan tumor resections during surgery. He combined this protocol with his experience piloting the radiation-oncology volunteer program at the Vanderbilt Ingram Cancer Center to study the use of personalized tumor models in post-operative patient consultations.

For his master's thesis, Leo aimed to improve physician-patient communication for cancer surgery patients using full-color, anatomically-sized 3D prints. This interactive visual tool was given to patients during their first post-operative visit to allow physicians to better describe surgical outcomes and future treatment plans.

Leo plans to attend an M.D./Ph.D. program in biomedical engineering to continue exploring how the intersection of medicine and technology can lead to improved comprehensive care for cancer patients.



Reagan Mathieson

Reagan Mathieson graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in public health and concentration in population data science from San José State University in 2024. Reagan is on the Vanderbilt swim team and recognizes her experience as a student-athlete as crucial to her understanding of health. Her experience with athletics is highlighted in her capstone project titled, "Fueling Success: Exploring Food Security in Student-Athletes and Advocating for Health Equity in University Settings." Her research involves the relationship between university resources and student-athletes' experiences with food security.

Reagan hopes to highlight the disproportionate rates of food insecurity that student-athletes experience to better advocate for more university investment in students' psychological and physical health. Her goal is for her research to serve as a tool for organizations to provide adequate resources for the needs of student-athletes, particularly for students experiencing food insecurity. She hopes to carry the MHS program's emphasis on research through the lens of health equity and commitment to decreasing health inequalities in marginalized communities with her in the future. After graduation, Reagan is looking to gain experience and further her education in the epidemiology and public health fields.

Heeba Momen

Heeba Momen received her bachelor of arts in medicine, health and society with a minor in human and organizational development from Vanderbilt University. Her time as an undergraduate solidified her passion for scholarly research and writing. Heeba was involved in undergraduate research labs focused on advancing the communication needs for children with intellectual or developmental disability. She also worked in the CHEEL Lab, which focuses on the intersection of human health and environmental factors.

In her master's thesis, Heeba delves into the ties between hair, perceptions of beauty and mental health. Experiencing hair loss due to alopecia, chemotherapy or stress can negatively impact self-esteem and mental health. Similarly, women who choose to cover their hair—whether for religious, cultural or personal reasons—often navigate a world of misunderstanding, stereotypes and beauty standards that do not always align with their own. Hair is often regarded as an aesthetic feature; however, Heeba wants her work to showcase the value and connection women have with their hair. Beauty and mental health are intertwined, and Heeba's work highlights this unusual combination.

Heeba aspires to pursue additional higher education or to work in the public health management sector after graduating with her master's degree.



Jane Nwaba

Jane Nwaba received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Pepperdine University in 2024. Her master's degree capstone project involves a program evaluation within the Vanderbilt Athletic Department, where she examines the effectiveness of policies, training, financial investments and other initiatives for student-athletes. As a member of the women's basketball team, Jane is passionate about the intersection of sports, mental health and performance, aiming to improve support systems for athletes.

As an intern with the Sports Science Department, Jane collaborates on projects that enhance athletic performance and well-being. After completing her master's in medicine, health and society, Jane plans to pursue a career in technology. She plans to integrate her interdisciplinary training to develop innovative tools for communities such as the elderly, reflecting her growing interest in gerontology.



Maggie O'Rourke

Maggie O'Rourke (BA'24) is a graduate of Vanderbilt University, where she double majored in history and medicine, health and society. Her undergraduate exploration into the history of diabetes and the social determinants of health heavily influenced her graduate research interests. Maggie's capstone research focuses on diabetic stigma and the role of medical education in its perpetuation.

Diabetics and others suffering from chronic "lifestyle" diseases often face stigmatization from multiple fronts, including from medical practitioners. Furthermore, disease stigmatization is associated with poorer health outcomes, making it both a moral and medical priority. Given her interest in medicine, Maggie is investigating how health care practitioners' stigma is developed, particularly by exploring the role of medical school. Maggie believes that by identifying how stigma is developed in medical school, these institutions might be better equipped to combat medical stigma going forward.

Maggie plans to take these insights with her throughout her medical school journey, advocating for health equity and combating stigma along the way. She intends channel her passion for medicine into becoming a physician who works to dismantle inequities within the health care system.



Brina Ratangee

Brina Ratangee (BA'24) is an alumna of Vanderbilt University, where she majored in medicine, health and society and neuroscience. Building upon her undergraduate honors thesis work investigating family caregiver mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, she joined Vanderbilt's HEAL Project for her graduate research.

Inspired by her experiences volunteering at Alive Hospice and Abe's Garden, Brina's thesis explores advance care planning and the impact of end-of-life preparation on spouse/partner mental health following an individual's death. Although documenting one's wishes for end-of-life care results in improved quality of life and treatment that aligns with one's preferences, advance care planning remains severely underutilized. Through exploring the impact of advance care planning on loved ones, Brina aims to better understand what types of planning yield the best outcomes for individual and family well-being.

Brina will take these insights and skills to medical school, where she hopes to continue exploring the intersection of clinical care, public health and health policy in the domains of aging and caregiving.

Aimee Salakhov

Aimee Salakhov (BA'24) received a bachelor of arts in medicine, health and society from Vanderbilt University in 2024. Her master's capstone project explores the accessibility of ketamine clinics in the Southeast United States and the broader implications for socioeconomic inequities. Ketamine is gaining popularity as an off-label intervention for chronic pain and treatment-resistant mental illness, but specialized clinics seem to be concentrated predominantly in the wealthiest neighborhoods. Through her investigation, Aimee intends to understand why some individuals seek alternative health care and whether the inaccessibility of new experimental treatments serves as a protective difference or harmful disparity for vulnerable populations.

Aimee works as a graduate writing consultant at the Writing Studio and spends her spare time volunteering at Alive Hospice and The Store, a local food pantry that addresses food insecurity in Middle Tennessee. As a future pediatrician, Aimee hopes her MHS training will inform her perspective on the diverse circumstances of patients and their families, allowing her to address all aspects of their health care in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Aimee is dedicated to maintaining an inclusive health care practice that strives to uplift socioeconomically disadvantaged members of her community.



Emmy Schuler

Emmy Schuler (BA/MA'24) is a graduate of Vanderbilt University, where she received a bachelor's degree in medicine, health and society and in psychology. Her research centers around barriers to chronic care, treatment adherence, and the role of psychosocial support networks in disease prevention and management, particularly for underserved and historically marginalized populations.

While working with the Vanderbilt Hemostasis Treatment Center, Emmy recognized a need to better support adolescent and young adult patients through the transition from pediatric to adult health care. Her thesis research examines structural, institutional and psychosocial barriers to chronic disease management for college students. Through her work, she hopes to develop strategies to better support young adults with special health care needs through higher education.



Timenit Teklai

Timenit Teklai is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in child development and family studies, alongside minors in African American studies and nutrition and food science. With nearly four years of experience in patient care and advocacy in behavioral health, her professional interests are centered on the long-term medical, social and psychological effects faced by individuals enduring various forms of adversity, as well as preventative and mitigative approaches to these challenges.

Timenit's thesis explores the aftermath of the Tigrayan Genocide, specifically focusing on its profound impact on the mental health of women and the rebuilding of their lives and communities. Through her research, she examines the intersection of mental health, community recovery and social structures, identifying key steps in fostering healing after genocide. Her work aims to not only amplify the voices of Tigrayan women, but to also advocate for policies and resources that prioritize their needs in post-war recovery. Rooted in a passion for advocating for marginalized voices, Timenit's work is a testament to her commitment to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by underserved communities worldwide.



Master's students and department faculty gather for the annual holiday party.

What is a Dream Come True?

Master's student Brina Ratangee tests her knowledge on Jeopardy!



In April, master's student Brina Ratangee took her trivia interests to the screen as a contestant on *Jeopardy!* A long-time fan of the show, Ratangee discovered her love for trivia early on. She began competing in academic quiz tournaments in eighth grade and, in 2018, earned gold and silver medals at the International History Olympiad in Berlin, Germany.

She has since maintained her involvement in the quiz competition scene, competing on Vanderbilt's quiz bowl team and working as an assistant tournament director for International Academic Competitions, which runs the National History Bee and

National Geography Bee.

She described the experience as a dream come true.

"I've watched the show with my family since I was little. We'd even plan our dinnertime around it," Ratangee said. "Being surrounded by so many *Jeopardy!* contestants and champions in my work, I'd always dreamed of being on the show but never thought I'd actually have the chance to go. It was truly an honor and a privilege to compete alongside such brilliant people, and I'm thrilled to now be part of a lifelong *Jeopardy!* community."



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Additional program and application information is available at as.vanderbilt.edu/medicine-health-society/ma-admissions/.

Contact us at mhs-ma@vanderbilt.edu to learn more about our program and the admission process.



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Athletes Excel in Our M.A. Program

Jane "Juice" Nwaba, #10 for the Commodores' women's basketball team and current master's student, invited Professor Heidi Bludau to Faculty Appreciation Day. Bludau observed a shoot around and was presented with a game ball signed by the team. She then joined the team for lunch and attended their game against Appalachian State. Nwaba is a team captain this year and represented women's basketball and Vanderbilt University on the SEC Leadership Council.

Nwaba is one of four student-athletes in the master's degree cohort this year. The one-year master's program is a great fit for athletes with eligibility in their fifth year.

Students Given "Most Creative" Award for Sunscreen Pod Design



Current master's students Leo Huang (BA'24) and Brina Ratangee (BA'24) won third place overall in the ASM Materials Education Foundation G.B. Olson Undergraduate Design Competition. They also received the Most Creative Project award for a zero-waste biodegradable sunscreen pod they developed through various programs on campus, including the SyBBURE Searle Undergraduate Research Program and the Sullivan Family Ideator Program at the Wond'ry.

With the help of Vanderbilt's Center for Technology Transfer and Commercialization, Huang and Ratangee filed a provisional patent for the sunscreen pod design.

Alum Welcomed Back for Admitted Student Day



Emmy Schuler (MA'25) discusses her master's thesis.

The department welcomed admitted students to a one-day program highlighting the opportunities available in the M.A. in Social Foundations of Health on March 25. Admitted students had the chance to network with each other and MHS faculty during lunch. Afternoon sessions included information from Graduate and Postdoctoral Academic Success, regarding the unique support Vanderbilt offers graduate students, and a campus tour.

A highlight of the day was a talk by Emmy Schuler (MA'25), who discussed her research on transition to university life for students with chronic illnesses. Schuler pointed out that while much research has been done in the areas of transition from pediatric to adult care and of the transition to university life, there is a dearth of research on the intersection of the two. The day ended in a dinner with the current cohort. The group discussed the health care challenges that their generation will have to address.

Where Are They Now? Master's Alumni Highlights

Salma Abuhamda ('24) started medical school at University of Texas at Austin's Dell Medical School during summer 2024.

Odalys Arbelaez ('22) enrolled in the Health Behavior and Health Education Ph.D. program at the University of Michigan last fall.

Brittany Cox ('19) is a registered dietitian nutritionist and works as a clinical dietitian with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Rachel Gross ('21) will start the residency program at Vanderbilt University Medical School in June 2025.

Beatrice Juskeviciute ('23) won the Lithuanian national championship in 100-meter hurdles (12.95 seconds) and the heptathlon (6,136 points), qualifying her for the 2024 Paris Olympics. Unfortunately, due to an injury, she was unable to compete.

Meredith Mattlin ('18) is a biostatistician at Genospace Precision Medicine.

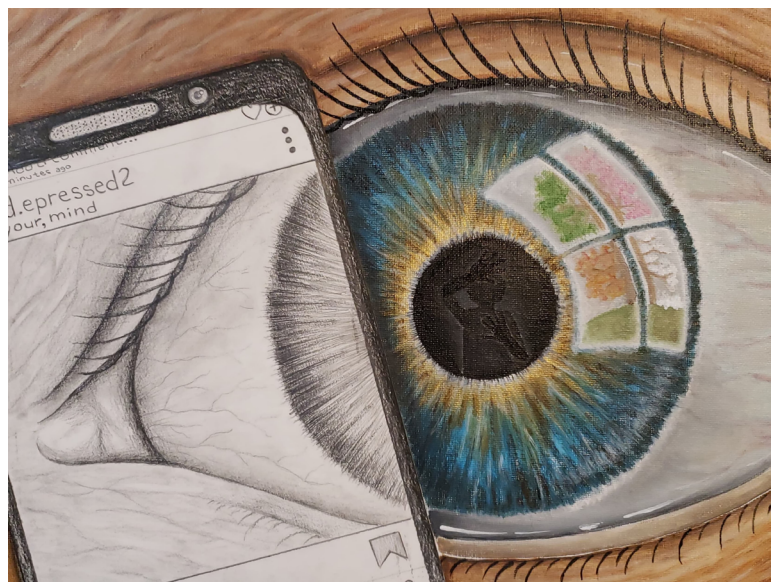
Finn Shelp-Peck ('23) published "The necessity of including gender-affirming care in student health insurance plans" in the *Journal of American College Health*. Shelp-Peck wrote this paper while in the M.A. in the Social Foundations of Health program.

Grace Smith ('22) started coursework toward a Ph.D. in the history of science at Princeton in fall 2024.

Matt Zgombic ('23) is enrolled at the New York University Grossman Long Island School of Medicine with a directed pathway for their pediatrics residency program.



Leo Huang Reflects on the Health of Our World in His Master's Thesis Artwork



All images courtesy of Leo Huang.

BACHELOR *of* ARTS *in* MEDICINE, HEALTH, *and* SOCIETY

Our curriculum is designed to train students to meet emerging challenges in our health care system, as well as changes in medical education. We are dedicated to training the next generation of national and international health leaders—from doctors and nurses to economists and policy makers.

The Major

The major in medicine, health and society investigates the cultural, economic, demographic and biological factors that impact health. Drawing on courses in the medical sciences, humanities and social sciences, this innovative interdisciplinary field of study transcends the traditional biomedical approach to understanding health and illness. Majors craft a plan of study that includes foundational classes, electives that meets their particular interests and an area of concentration.

The Minor

The minor in medicine, health and society is an excellent addition to any student considering a career in health care, government, biological science and related fields. Gaining an understanding of the social foundations of health through the minor, students get an in-depth education on health care, health policy, economics, health disparities, and other related perspectives to help them achieve their long-term career goals.

Exploring the World, One Fellowship at a Time

Eight exceptional Vanderbilt students are embarking on transformative global journeys as this year's cohort of the Michael B. Keegan Traveling Fellowship program. This prestigious fellowship empowers students to immerse themselves in diverse cultures, pursue bold ideas and engage in hands-on learning that shapes their future as global citizens and leaders. Through independent exploration and cross-cultural engagement, fellows can develop the adaptability, resilience and leadership skills necessary to drive meaningful impact in an interconnected world.

Two MHS majors will spend a year traveling the world, independently researching topics and creative interests of their choosing.

Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education Tiffany Tung emphasized the fellowship's role in shaping globally minded leaders. "The Keegan Fellowship exemplifies Vanderbilt's commitment to experiential learning and global leadership," Tung said. "By immersing themselves in diverse cultural settings and collaborating with people who have had different life experiences, our Keegan Fellows develop the adaptability, resilience and empathy needed to be thoughtful leaders who make a lasting, positive impact in their neighborhoods and nations and across the globe."

The 2025 Postgraduate Keegan Fellows include Ellie Pazol (BA'25) and Caitlin Scannell (BA'25).

Ellie Pazol, a medicine, health and society major from Northbrook, Illinois, with a minor in special education, will embark on "The Voices of Those Who

Rose Before Us: Elderly Activism in an Ever-Aging and Changing World." She will explore global movements led by older individuals, examining cultural attitudes, social roles and welfare systems. Pazol aims to shift perceptions of aging by highlighting the agency and activism of older adults.

"I'm incredibly grateful to be a Keegan Traveling Fellow. This opportunity will challenge my understanding of activism and allow me to spend a year listening to diverse global voices. I'm especially excited to visit Zimbabwe and meet the women of The Friendship Bench, whose work in community-based mental health care has inspired change worldwide," she said.

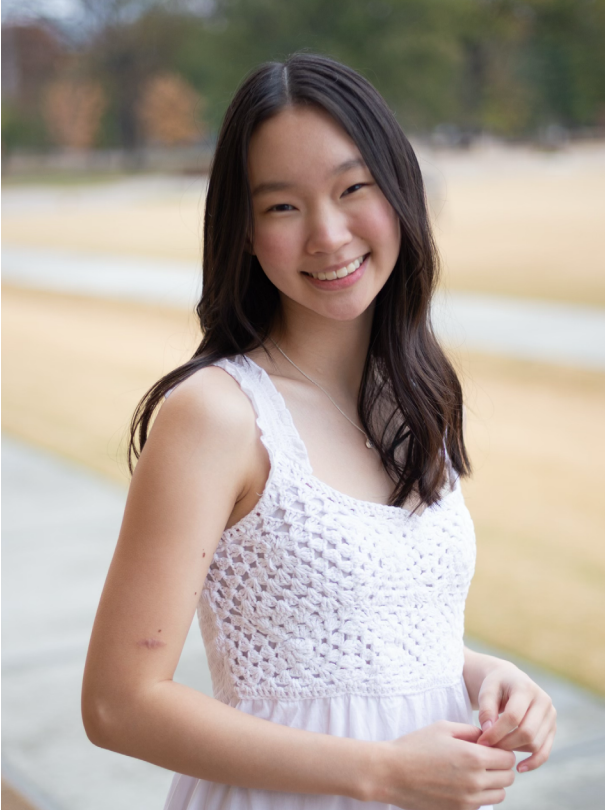
Caitlin "Catie" Scannell, a climate studies and medicine, health and society double major from San Francisco, will pursue a project titled "Climate Health Through Women's Narratives: Exploring Geographic, Cultural and Socio-Historical Factors Shaping Women's Experiences of Climate Change and Public Health."

Through conversations, art and service, she hopes to shed light on how climate change uniquely impacts women's health. Her goal is to amplify women's voices and translate their lived experiences into actionable insights for a more equitable and sustainable future.

A version of this story was originally published in MyVU News.



Sophomore Publishes Article on Gun Violence



Lisa Kim (BA'27)

Lisa Kim (BA'27), a sophomore double majoring in medicine, health and society and in child development, recently had an academic article accepted for publication in the University of Michigan's *Undergraduate Journal of Public Health*. "Addressing America's Gun Violence Crisis: An Epidemiological Approach to Environmental and Behavioral Interventions" examines gun violence as a public health crisis and advocates for an epidemiological approach to reducing firearm-related injuries and deaths.

During the spring 2024 semester, Kim took Professor Julie Ward's Foundations of Population Health Theory and Practice course, where she was first introduced to understanding gun violence from a public health perspective. Drawing on principles learned in this course, and with guidance from Ward, Kim started drafting her article.

Kim's publication highlights the importance of coupling firearm policies with environmental and behavioral interventions, such as increasing green spaces, limiting alcohol sale hours and promoting safe gun storage. These solutions would effectively target communities disproportionately impacted by gun violence and promote overall community safety. This publication serves as a call to action for policymakers, public health professionals and community members to adopt a multifaceted approach to reducing gun violence.

Summer Research Scholar Wins Sci-Fi Award

Liam Betts (BA'25) won the 2025 Dell Magazine Award for Undergraduate Excellence in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing for his story "Echo." Betts, who double majors in English and computer science, wrote the story while participating in the Vanderbilt Undergraduate Summer Research Program with MHS Writer-in-Residence Fatima Kola.

Told entirely through entries in a Notes app, the story follows the main character Olivia as she deals with a form of autonomic dysfunction that makes it difficult for her to be outside. "Echo" explores her developing relationship with a pool boy and with the app itself, which she believes can give her access to a new body.

"I love the community of writers this competition has connected me to," Betts said. "I'm a big believer in the power of creative writing not only to express our individual stories, but to connect us to others, to create and sustain community."

Vanderbilt undergraduates have placed in the Dell Magazine competition 11 times, which puts the university in second place for most winners.

"Liam joins a number of sci-fi luminaries in winning this one," said Kola.

[A version of this story was originally featured on the College of Arts and Science Instagram.](#)



Ryan Zurcher (BA'25) spent two months volunteering at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

From Studying Health Disparities to Driving Olympians around Paris



IMMERSION
VANDERBILT

MHS and French double major Ryan Zurcher (BA'25) had the incredible opportunity to spend eight months studying and living in France at Columbia University in Paris.

His studies were followed by a summer volunteering at the 2024 Paris Olympics, an experience funded by Immersion Vanderbilt.

During his time in Paris, Zurcher worked with a post-doctorate researcher at Aix-Marseille Université to study health disparities, specifically STI prevalence, mental health and access to care among the LGBTQ+ population in France.

This research shed light on possible public health campaigns that the French government could implement to target LGBTQ+ health disparities.

"It was an excellent application of my MHS education to a different health care system in a foreign country that expanded my understanding of public health and international health care," said Zurcher.

Over the summer, Zurcher worked in Paris driving athletes, coaches, International Olympic Committee members and other Olympic stakeholders to various Olympic venues.

"Along the way, I learned about unique jobs, perspectives and people from all over the world. I also got the chance to attend more than seven Olympic events as a fan, which fulfilled a childhood dream of mine. It was an incredible experience that expanded my understanding of the world and how MHS and French can apply to the real world," said Zurcher.

Balamurugan Receives Clinical Research Training Scholarship



In March 2025, Charu Balamurugan (BA'25) received an Access for Students to Clinical Research Training Scholarship from the Association of Clinical Research Professionals (ACRP). Balamurugan was selected for the \$5,000 scholarship in part because of her work on an MHS honors thesis, which she completed with Professor Kirsty Clark. Balamurugan majors in medicine, health and society and in molecular and cellular biology.

"Her research experience spans neurovascular imaging, fungal evolutionary genomics and behavioral health disparities with a focus on underserved populations. She aspires to integrate research and advocacy to improve health care accessibility and outcomes as a future physician-scientist," ACRP wrote in a statement about the award.

"It is our pleasure to support these talented students as they pursue careers in clinical research and contribute their talents to advancing the discovery of new therapies and improved health outcomes," said Susan Landis, executive director of ACRP, in a statement.

Bebarta Presents Firearm Research Poster

Grace Bebarta (BA'26) presented an original research poster at Vanderbilt's fall 2024 Undergraduate Research Symposium, which provides an opportunity for undergraduates to share their work in a campus-wide celebration of student research.

"State and County Trends in Florida's Extreme Risk Protection Order Implementation: A

Descriptive Policy Analysis" stems from the research Bebarta conducted during the 10-week Vanderbilt Undergraduate Summer Research Program under the mentorship of Professor Julie Ward. The research was also selected for an oral presentation at the National Research Conference for the Prevention of Firearm-Related Harms in December 2024.

Students Discuss Suicide Prevention with Legislators

Several Department of Medicine, Health, and Society majors ventured to the Tennessee General Assembly in Nashville to advocate for suicide prevention.

Alongside members of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, student volunteers met with legislators from the State of Tennessee's Senate and House of Representatives to discuss potential new laws aimed at keeping people safe in the midst of mental health struggles.



Alum Founds Education and Health Care Nonprofit

Vanderbilt students and faculty drive the Global Social Enhancement Corporation's success



Ishaan Chaubey (BA'24)

In April 2024, Ishaan Chaubey (BA'24) founded the Global Social Enhancement Corporation (GSE), a nonprofit organization aiming to empower communities worldwide in education and health care.

From free virtual academic assistance and college admissions counseling through the Virtual Outreach Tutoring Institute to scholarly discussions empowering underrepresented voices in the Intellectual Discussion of Advancements and Affairs Institute, GSE seeks to reduce the profound inequities in global education. Currently, Chaubey and his team work with several schools, including Templeton Academy, and with the Inspiritius refugee organization to provide free English literacy and STEM assistance. Chaubey's team also hosted an interdisciplinary academic conference in October 2023 to explore the medical and sociopolitical challenges and advancements after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aside from education, GSE aspires

to raise awareness of public health challenges and provide virtual consultation services to rural populations for greater accessibility to health care. In February 2025, Chaubey, Professor Lauren Mitchell and Professor Allison Leich-Hilbun conducted a webinar regarding tips to improve mental health among adolescents.

The services and operations of the nonprofit benefit from the dedication of several Vanderbilt University students leading the GSE team: Sajjad Khobaib, Faris Abusharkh, Connie Kang, Azeeza Syeda, Lucero Perdomo, Karson Baumgartner, Isabel Soliman, Brianna Dahle, Brady Gibson, Musab Nuh and Canyon Pruitt. Their commitment and hard work are instrumental in the success of GSE's initiatives.

Kendall Reese Selected as New Ingram Scholar

Six incoming first-year students and two rising sophomores were selected for the Ingram Scholars Program. They are among more than 1,000 students who applied for the prestigious merit scholarship, which is awarded each year to students who have demonstrated excellence and passion academically and in service.

Members of the Class of 2027 includes Kendall Reese of Katy, Texas. Reese majors in medicine, health and society with a concentration in inequality, intersectionality and health justice. Reese's second major is law, history and society.

Of these new scholars, Faculty Director Kelly Goldsmith says: "We couldn't be more excited to be welcoming our new Ingram

Scholars! These eight individuals are poised to make great contributions to Vanderbilt, to the Nashville community and far beyond!"

These eight will join the more than 300 current Vanderbilt students and alumni who have been named Ingram Scholars since the first awarding of the scholarships in 1994. The program was conceived in 1993 by E. Bronson Ingram, president of the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust from 1991 until his death in 1995, to encourage students to combine a professional career with a commitment to community service and giving. Since Ingram's passing, his wife, Martha Rivers Ingram, and their sons have been instrumental in the program's operation.

Ingram Scholars engage in a minimum of 16 hours of civic and

community service each month in collaboration with well-established organizations in service to the Nashville community addressing a range of needs. During their sophomore years, Ingram Scholars create and propose a sustainable and collaborative summer service project for the following summer. Currently, 12 Ingram Scholars are implementing their summer service projects domestically and abroad, serving communities as distant as Chennai, India, and as close as Nashville. The program encourages the scholars to create durable service projects that become self-sustaining. Ingram Scholars are awarded a full tuition scholarship with housing benefits and a stipend for a summer project.

A version of this story was originally published in MyVU News.

Honors Thesis Focused on Food and Immigrants in the U.S. South Accepted for Publication

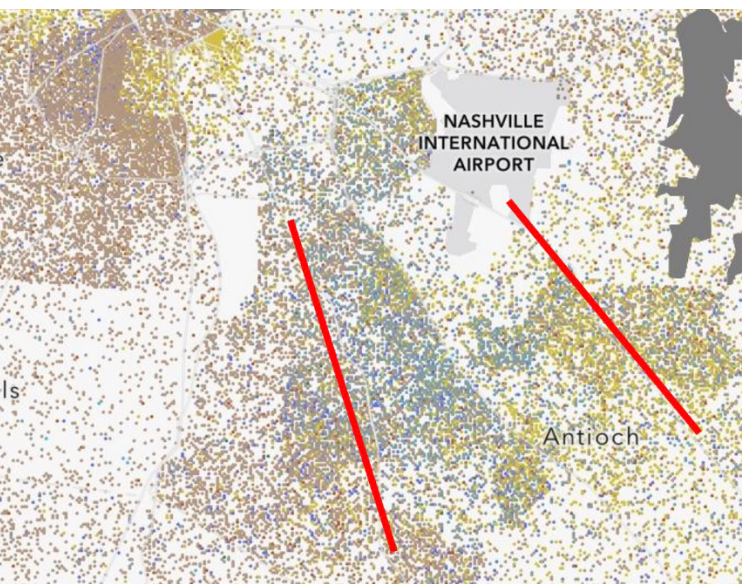


Figure from Luckner's publication showing immigrant diversity in Nashville, TN. Courtesy of the author.

Alumnus Justin Luckner (BA'24) had his honors thesis accepted for publication in the *Journal of Undergraduate Ethnography* at Dalhousie University.

"Food as a Method of Placemaking for Latin American Immigrants in the U.S. South: A Case Study Examination of a Neighborhood in South Nashville, TN," will be published in the journal's fall 2025 issue.

Professor Aimi Hamraie advised Luckner on his thesis, which was also chosen for the Advanced Research Spotlight presentation at Vanderbilt's 2024 Undergraduate Writing Symposium. The author has since revised the work for publication. Given the journal's international nature and its broad accessibility online, Luckner is excited to have Nashville-based research reach a global audience.

"This publication comes at a crucial time for the region, as Nashville remains one of the country's fastest-growing metropolitan areas, and immigration and food systems remain two of the country's most prescient issues," said Luckner.

Alum Pursues Dual Degrees to Bridge Gap Between Health Care Policy and Practice



Luwi Shamambo (BA'19) identified an experience she had as a very young child growing up in Zambia during the AIDS epidemic as her motivation to pursue medicine and public policy.

"A lot of kids—struggling with being ill themselves—became orphaned because they lost their parents to AIDS. I remember seeing kids out on the street and wondering, *how is it that they are out begging for food, and I am here in this car with everything I need?* I've never been able to get that image out of my mind."

When Shamambo and her family moved to the United States when she was nine, she said the challenges of moving to another country and essentially starting over inspired her to get involved with community organizations like food pantries and other organizations to help other families in need. "And my memory of those kids in the street in Zambia motivated me to volunteer at hospitals, spending time with kids who were sick and didn't have family around."

Shamambo completed her bachelor's degree in medicine, health and society at Vanderbilt University in 2019, then spent a gap year with Americorps Vista in Boston, where she worked for an epilepsy center for Boston Medical Center. That program was also a capacity building

program, which she said was a transformative experience.

"I was able to attend conferences as well as have a paper published on the use of language pertaining to race and ethnicity in medicine."

Shamambo went on to study at Emory School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2020.

Halfway through her fourth and final year of med school, however, Shamambo decided to pursue her Master of Public Policy at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy.

"I wanted to learn about the policy world because there's so much overlap between policy and public health but not a lot of communication between the two."

Now well into her first year at the University of Chicago, Shamambo looks forward to exploring her policy interests in education, housing and health policy.

"I've realized how broad health policy is because it can encompass all of those public health issues," she said.

As a student at Harris, Shamambo said, "I try to keep in mind the experiences I've had with patients, the stories I've heard working in the clinical environment, and the systemic issues that individuals and families from marginalized communities face as I go into policy and think about solutions."

After completing her master's degree, Shamambo plans to return to Emory to complete her final year of med school, finish her rotations and apply for residency. "My goal and my hope—and what feels like a responsibility to me—is to be a physician who can support and advocate for patients outside of the clinic or the hospital room. Because ultimately, that's what is going to affect their health long term."

This story was originally published by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy.

IN THE CLASSROOM

For student-athletes, being a Dore is about work and play.



Jane "Juice" Nwaba. Photo by Hustler Multimedia/Alondra Moya.

"I wanted to give a lot of hustle and give a lot of heart," Vanderbilt women's basketball player Jane Nwaba (MA'25) told the student newspaper, the *Hustler*.

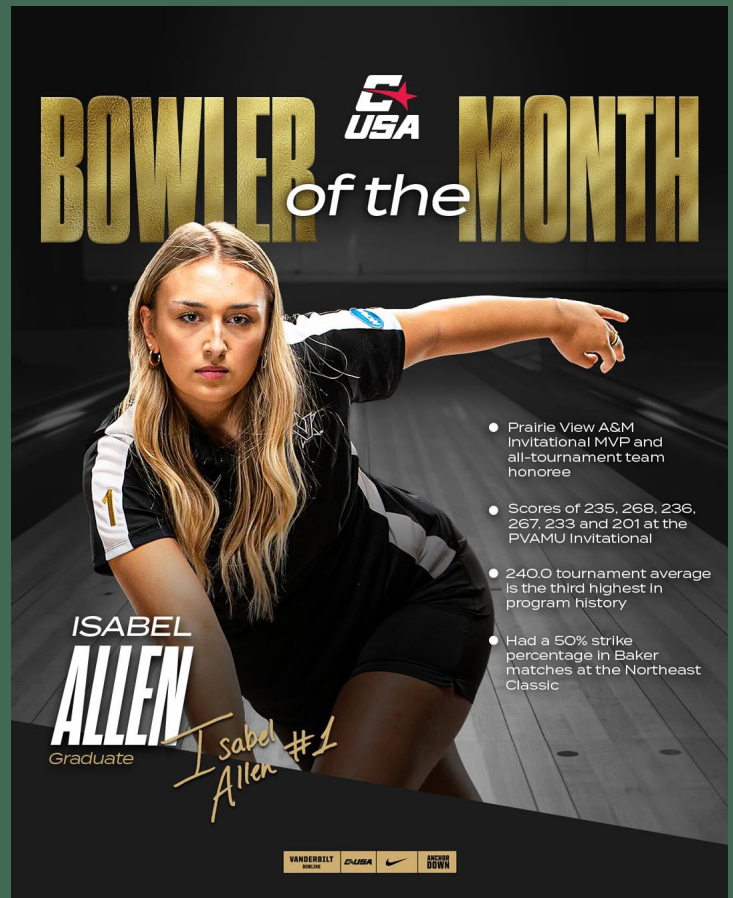


Image courtesy of Vanderbilt Bowling and Conference USA.

Isabel Allen (MA'25) was named the January 2025 Bowler of the Month by Conference USA.

& ON THE



The department's football student-athletes were guests at the Oher Foundation Annual Gala. The organization's mission is "to empower socio-economically disadvantaged youth by providing them with opportunities and supports they need to overcome poverty through education, mentorship, and community."

The board of the foundation generously invited (pictured from left) Jalen Gilbert, Marlo Sewell, Issa Quattara, Professor Jaime Bruce, Miles Capers and Trudell Berry to attend the meeting and learn more about the foundation's goals and objectives.

FIELD COURT

LANE

PITCH

COURSE

TRACK

Maryna Nading Delivers Lecture on the Practice of Weaving Camouflage Nets in Wartime Ukraine

Guest speaker Maryna Nading delivered the lecture "Weaving Peace, Weaving Victory: Camouflage Nets in Wartime Ukraine" in an October 2024 event co-sponsored by the Department of Medicine, Health, and Society. Nading is a professor of anthropology at Luther College, where she teaches courses in the fields of medical anthropology and global health. Her research focuses on the health care workforce and gender.

'The opportunity to hear from an academic guest speaker really gave me insight into the world of scholarly conversation and how important interacting with other academics in the field is!'

- Maggie O'Rourke (BA'24, MA'25)

The weaving of camouflage nets is a cultural phenomenon that has swept Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022.

Towns big and small have multiple groups who procure the needed materials, gather regularly to weave on site or coordinate weaving by dispersed volunteer hands. Nading's inquiry is with one such group in a large town in Western Ukraine. They call themselves "Maskuty," which is a creative take on the verb "to mask." Maskuty members created thousands of camouflage nets for trenches, army vehicles, evacuation buses and an airplane. For over two years, Nading has collected stories of Maskuty volunteers.

In her talk, Nading spoke about how the camouflage net weaving opens new ways for thinking about care and reproduction, both important concepts in medical anthropology.

She discussed the notion of care from clinical settings to everyday life locations, like private residences, volunteer center courtyards and college classrooms, all of which serve as makeshift sites for weaving camouflage nets. The making of the camouflage bridges the domains of work and kinship in its constitutive capacity. Fiber used for creation of the camouflage conceals civilians-



turned-fighters from enemy weapons and thus ensure the reproduction of the Ukrainian nation. For Nading, discussing war through the lenses of care, kin-making and social reproduction can help us to gain a better understanding of human behavior in trying times.

Nading joined faculty and graduate students for lunch to discuss her work as an anthropologist.



Photo by Brandy Byrd.

Politics of Firearms

Guest speakers participated in powerful panel as part of the "Guns in America" course in fall 2024. Speakers included U.S. House of Representatives candidate Maryam Abolfazl; Jessica Jaglois, political reporter for the *New York Times*; and Beth Joslin Roth, executive director and policy director of the Safe Tennessee Project. Speakers are pictured left with Professor Jonathan Metzl.

FACULTY DEDICATED TO STUDENT SUCCESS AND RESEARCH EXCELLENCE



Professor Jaime Bruce Joins Inaugural Cohort of Immersion Vanderbilt Faculty Fellows



Immersion Vanderbilt, now in its third year as a graduation requirement, consistently provides students with the opportunity to pursue a variety of in-depth experiences and independent projects. Students align their immersion projects with their interests—whether those are artistic, research-oriented, career-focused, globally aimed or community-engaged.

Faculty from all 10 schools and colleges support students' goals and ambitions within immersion, and this year, that support is enhanced by a new cohort of 10 Immersion Faculty Fellows who are supported by Undergraduate Education in the Office of the Provost. The faculty fellows are instrumental in guiding students on experiential and applied learning journeys by leveraging their expertise, insights and connections on campus, in the community and across the globe. Through directly mentoring students, the fellows help them design rich, immersive learning opportunities that are tailored to individual academic and career paths that support student growth, exploration and success.

The faculty fellows' areas of expertise include public policy, research on addiction, clinical applied research at VUMC, sports analytics, ethnographic studies, design of surgical robots, music performance and much more.

"Working with the student-athletes to explore their immersion interests and opportunities has been truly inspiring and great fun. I am in awe of their entrepreneurship, philanthropy, artistic talents and travel abroad experiences—just to name a few," said Professor Jaime Bruce, senior lecturer of medicine, health and society. "From baseball players starting small businesses, swimmers partnering with nonprofit organizations, football players filming documentaries and soccer and basketball players studying abroad, these student-athletes do not limit their learning to the classroom. They are building skills outside the classroom that will undoubtedly take them to great heights following their time at Vanderbilt."

The Immersion Faculty Fellows also play an essential role in reviewing hundreds of students' grant proposals for immersion funding. Through the grant application process, students are developing critical skills in grant writing, pitching ideas to secure project support and developing realistic budgets. The faculty fellows provide feedback on those proposals, so even if a proposal is not funded, the student learns strategies to improve their grantsmanship, enhance their pitch and practice resilience as they resubmit their applications.

A version of this story was originally published in MyVU News.

'Working with the student-athletes to explore their immersion interests and opportunities has been truly inspiring and great fun. I am in awe of their entrepreneurship, philanthropy, artistic talents and travel abroad experiences.'

- Professor Jaime Bruce

Tara McKay Wins Chancellor's Award for Research on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Chancellor Daniel Diermeier, Provost C. Cybele Raver and Faculty Senate Chair Alissa Hare, who is assistant dean of the College of Arts and Science, presented awards at this year's Fall Faculty Assembly to 10 faculty members who have made significant contributions through their scholarship, research or creative expression.

Three faculty members received the Chancellor's Award for Research on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, which recognizes excellence in research, scholarship or creative expression that specifically advances understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion.

Tara McKay, associate professor of medicine, health and society, was honored for her work on an article published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* titled "Association of Affirming Care with Chronic Disease and Preventive

Care Outcomes among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Older Adults."

McKay's work focuses on the mental and physical health needs of sexual minority persons, and on the resources and social conditions to remediate their marginalized status. The article assesses the quality of screening and care received by older LGBTQ+ adults in the U.S. South. It takes into consideration their access to affirming care providers and demonstrates that without inclusive and affirming care, health disparities persist. This research—which is policy relevant, action-oriented and guided by theoretical depth—contributes significantly to the field of LGBTQ+ health.

A version of this story was originally published in MyVU News.



Tara McKay (pictured front row, center) received the Chancellor's Award for Research on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion during Fall Faculty Assembly.

Career Investigator Award

In 2024, McKay was awarded the Mid-Career Investigator Award by the NIH Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office "for exemplary and substantial research contributions to the field of SGM health."

Lucie Kalousová Explores Alzheimer's Disease, Cognitive Health and End-of-Life Planning



In 2024, Professor Lucie Kalousová received a major grant award from the National Institute on Aging to support a five-year study on how national employment policies that facilitate workforce participation influence the risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia in later life, as well as disparities in cognitive health more broadly. To carry out this study, she will collaborate with colleagues in Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

This year also marked the launch of data collection for the Health Equity at the End of Life through Community and Policy Action (HEAL) project, supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In this mixed-method study, co-led with Deborah Carr from Boston University, Kalousová is investigating the structural and systemic drivers of racial disparities in end-of-life planning. The project combines focus groups with local caregivers and national Medicare data analysis. A talented team of graduate and undergraduate student researchers has played a key role in driving the project forward, and findings will be presented at several national conferences in the coming year.

Updates from the HEAL Project

The Vanderbilt Health Equity at the End of Life through Community and Policy Action (HEAL) Project led by Professor Lucie Kalousová aims to understand and address health disparities at the end of life.

Compared to white Americans, Black Americans are more likely to receive aggressive life-sustaining medical care, are less likely to use hospice, spend fewer days in hospice before death when they use hospice and are less likely to engage in advance care planning (ACP), which is associated with improved end-of-life quality. Much of the existing literature attributes these disparities to individual factors, such as religious or cultural preferences.

The HEAL Project aims to uncover the structural and institutional barriers to ACP and hospice use for Black and white Americans, as well as explore the effects of recent policy changes to Medicare that aimed to increase ACP completion and hospice use.

Kalousová serves as co-director of the HEAL Project together with Deborah Carr of Boston University. The team also includes postdoctoral researcher Clifford Ross; Emmy Schuler (MA'24); and graduate students Bennie Damul, Noah Lian, Brina Ratangee (MA'25) and Zhe Zhang.

Made possible by funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Vanderbilt's Seeding Success Grant, the HEAL Project has cultivated meaningful community partnerships with numerous hospices across middle Tennessee, the Tennessee Justice Center and the Tennessee Caregiver Coalition and maintains an active social media presence.

Since the project's inception last year, the team has conducted focus groups with physicians and bereaved friends and family who engaged in end-of-life decision-making. It has quantitatively investigated



The HEAL Project at Vanderbilt includes a postdoctoral fellow, M.A. alum and current master's degree candidates. It is led by Professor Lucie Kalousová (pictured third from the right).

topics spanning racial disparities in post-pandemic death quality to the role of relationships and social support in advance care planning.

Preliminary quantitative findings point to two indicators of structural exclusion—having one's health care wishes usually met and having previously experienced racial discrimination in health care—as strong influences on end-of-life treatment preferences of Black Americans.

Furthermore, the investigation of death quality before and during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals that, though death quality ratings decreased across all racial groups during the pandemic, the friends and family of Black decedents who used hospice care reported significantly poorer death quality.

The team's preliminary qualitative findings reveal several structural and systematic barriers to end-of-life planning and care, as well as misaligned perceptions of these barriers among health care providers versus bereaved caregivers.

Members of the HEAL Project team presented their preliminary findings at the Population Association of America annual meeting in April 2025.

In the coming months, the HEAL Project is expanding its analysis to individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias (ADRD), given the lack of information on racial health disparities in ACP and end-of-life planning among patients with ADRD and their caregivers. This work will include focus groups with current and bereaved caregivers and interviews with health care providers at the Vanderbilt Memory and Alzheimer's Center.

In tandem with this continued qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, the team will maintain its resource-sharing and community outreach on topics pertaining to end-of-life planning and care. These efforts will help advance the HEAL Project toward its mission of eliminating racial disparities in ACP use and end-of-life quality through system and policy solutions.

Q&A with Kirsty Clark: The Impact of Negative Media Coverage on LGBTQ+ Young Adults



Recent Achievements

In May 2024, Clark was named Advocate of the Year from the Office of LGBTQI Life.

Together with Joseph Sexton (BA'23), Clark published a manuscript in *Injury Prevention* on risk factors for suicidal ideation among LGBTQ+ young people. The paper was developed as part of Sexton's honors thesis.

Clark won the Rosalind Franklin Society Award in Science for the publication, "Developing the 'Oppression-to-Incarceration Cycle' of Black American and First Nations Australian Trans Women."

Kirsty Clark, assistant professor of medicine, health and society, studies mental health disparities impacting LGBTQ+ populations through her lab. The Clark Lab then develops evidence-based interventions to disrupt the course of such disparities.

Clark recently published research in *JAMA Pediatrics* that explores the effects of negative news and media coverage on the intensity of suicidal thoughts in LGBTQ+ young adults. Clark shared the results of her research, the impact it may have on the LGBTQ+ community and implications for public policy.

What issue does your research address?

Our research addresses the role of exposure to negative news and media—like a news headline, a television advertisement or a social media post—on the heightened risk for suicidal thinking among LGBTQ+ young adults in Tennessee.

In the past few years in the U.S., more than 1,000 bills have been introduced at the state level targeting the rights and visibility of LGBTQ+ people. Many of these laws and policies have been coupled with a large amount of negative news and media coverage in local and national news outlets, in print, on television and online.

We used a novel research design that allowed us to capture in real time exposure to negative news or media and suicidal thinking. We recruited a sample of Tennessee-based LGBTQ+ young adults aged 18 to 24 with histories of suicidal thinking and mild depressive symptoms.

What were your findings?

Our main finding was that levels of suicidal thinking increased in the hours immediately following exposure to LGBTQ+ negative news or media, but not following exposure to general negative news or media unrelated to one's identity. This finding underscores the critical role of exposure to identity-related negative news or media on real-time fluctuations in suicidal thinking among LGBTQ+ young adults in Tennessee.

What impact might your findings have on the LGBTQ+ community?

This study provides additional evidence supporting the growing body of research demonstrating the harmful effects of anti-LGBTQ+ laws and policies on the mental health of LGBTQ+ young people. It underscores the urgent need to strengthen support systems for LGBTQ+ youth, especially in places like Tennessee, where there is significant negative public discourse around LGBTQ+ topics.

It's essential for parents of LGBTQ+ youth to be aware of these mental health risks and to offer additional support and affirmation. Educators and school counselors should also recognize the heightened vulnerability of LGBTQ+ youth during periods of intense media coverage and seek to provide safe spaces where these young people can come together to build confidence and pride.

A version of this story was originally published by Mary-Lou Watkinson.



Laura Stark Releases Podcast Collaboration

Professor Laura Stark collaborated with students in her "American Medicine and the World" course on an interview with the author of *Whiteout: How Racial Capitalism Changed the Color of Opioids in America*. The interview was published as a podcast on the New Books Network.



Aimi Hamraie's Design Lab Awarded Grant

Professor Aimi Hamraie's Critical Design Lab was awarded an organization grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts for "Design Meets Disability: A Translational Repository of Critical Accessibility Practice." The grant was awarded jointly with the UK-based organization, The Dis/ordinary Architecture Project.

Bencsik Examines Congestion and Fast-food Consumption

According to new research from Professor Panka Bencsik, on days when highways are more congested, particularly during weekday afternoon rush hour, people are more likely to choose the fast-food option.

Bencsik worked in collaboration with researchers at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to analyze the causal effect of time lost on food choice in Los Angeles County. The team analyzed smartphone GPS data from 2017 to 2019 to track foot traffic to restaurants and grocery stores during periods of heavy traffic congestion.

"These results are concerning from a public health standpoint," Bencsik said. "Fast food tends to be higher in

fat, sodium and energy density, and lower in whole grains, fruits, vegetables and nutrients than food consumed at home. The time commuters spend in congested traffic has substantial implications for eating habits and potentially caloric intake."

Prior research estimates that people consume about 134 more calories per meal when they eat elsewhere versus eating at home. Bencsik said looking at that combined with the results of this study, which also suggests a decrease in visiting supermarkets, likely leads to unhealthier eating habits as a result of traffic congestion.

Bencsik said the results of the study also do not suggest that people are swapping their planned "take out day" for the day with more traffic, but they are instead choosing to visit fast-food



restaurants more in total.

"Increased consumption of fast food due to traffic congestion during peak travel times potentially plays a role in the rise in obesity, heart failure and diabetes among Americans, given that fast food is typically less healthy than other options," Bencsik said. "Our results suggest that policies aimed at reducing time spent commuting by car could help battle unhealthy eating habits. For example, improving infrastructure to mitigate traffic congestion, or expanding and speeding up public transport, could reduce fast-food dependency."

Praise for Jonathan Metzl's Latest Book

"What We've Become" was named an editor's choice title and won several awards



New York Times Editor's Choice

Amazon Editor's Choice

Starred Review, *Booklist*

Best Nonfiction of 2024, *Kirkus Reviews*

2025 Harry Stack Sullivan Award, Sheppard Pratt Hospital

"The Harry Stack Sullivan Lecture and Award recognizes the leadership and contributions of a scientist, clinician, or administrator in American psychiatry.... This award, which has been given for 40 years, is the highest award given by Sheppard Pratt."

2025 Award for Scholarship, Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry

2025 Jerry M. Wiener Endowed Lecturer in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, George Washington University Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health

Clark Honorary Lectureship on the movement of sociological perspectives into public discourse, Department of Sociology, University of Kansas

Doron Award for Contributions to Global Public Health

Julie Ward's Research Cited in Multiple Outlets



Professor Julie Ward's academic research was recently featured in multiple media outlets, including *Undark Magazine*, *Filter Magazine* and *Axios*.

UNDARK

Filter

AXIOS

