

C&R NEWS

Counseling & Rehabilitation Program Newsletter

(Red brick pathways leading to a metal and brick gate. Behind the gate lie trees and a red brick building)

Students & Faculty Present at “Career Tracks”



A group of people sits around a table in a conference hall, facing a projector screen.

Counseling and Rehabilitation Program faculty and students recently participated in the second annual Career Tracks event, hosted by the College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management at the University of South Carolina. This event brought together students,

alumni, and industry professionals for a day dedicated to connection, learning, and career exploration.

Career Tracks 2025 featured engaging sessions designed to amplify student voices and build meaningful connections. For our C&R faculty and students, it was a valuable opportunity to step outside the classroom, network with professionals, and explore career paths that intersect with counseling and rehabilitation.

Drs. Farren Stackhouse and Robert Dawson, along with Graduate Assistant Emily Kallis, presented on mindfulness and the application of virtual reality in counseling—highlighting innovative approaches within the field.

Take a look at the recap: [Career tracks 2025 recap video!](#)

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(Students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Save the Date

May 2nd, 2025:

SCDOC Mental Health Awareness Day

May 6th, 2025:

C&R Specialty Areas Information Session

RSVP HERE

May 8th, 2025:

School of Medicine Hooding Event

RSVP HERE

May 9th, 2025:

Commencement Ceremony

May 28th, 2025:

Tuition Payment Deadline

June 6th, 2025:

Advisory Board Meeting

CHECK OUT OUR SOCIALS



Celebrate with our Spring Graduates Alongside CACREP CEO, Dr. M. Sylvia Fernandez

The Counseling and Rehabilitation Program is thrilled to announce the upcoming graduation of three outstanding students from the program during the spring '25 semester. These individuals have demonstrated exceptional readiness and dedication as they move towards the next step in their professional careers.

- Nicholas Collins
- Lori Hornsby
- Hayden Petee

Hayden reflected on her time in this program:

"The C&R program at USC has been a truly transformative experience—combining rigorous academics with compassionate, hands-on mentorship. Through both classroom learning and real-world clinical training, I've gained the skills and confidence to support people facing some of life's toughest challenges. The faculty's dedication and the supportive community within the program have inspired me to commit fully to this field and to continue empowering individuals on their journey toward recovery, independence, and a better quality of life."



Black graduation cap and yellow tassel held in the air with pride!

As we near the end of the semester, we invite you to join us in celebrating our graduating students at the upcoming Hooding Ceremony—a meaningful tradition that honors their hard work and marks a major professional milestone. For those interested in attending as a guest, please [fill out the RSVP form here.](#)



(students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Celebrate with our Spring Graduates Alongside CACREP CEO, Dr. M. Sylvia Fernandez

This year's keynote speaker at the School of Medicine Professional Graduate Hooding Ceremony is Dr. M. Sylvia Fernandez, the President and CEO of Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs – CACREP!

CACREP is the national accrediting body solely in the Counseling profession with accredited master's and doctoral programs in 472 institutions across the country including at the University of South Carolina.

Dr. Fernandez was a counselor educator and academic administrator for 29 years prior to joining CACREP. Her favorite courses to teach were the professional orientation and clinical experiences courses at both the master's and doctoral levels. Mentoring of doctoral students and early career faculty and practitioners is one thing she enjoys.



Dr. Fernandez smiles in an orange blazer in front of a brown backdrop.

Dr. Fernandez has extensive professional service and leadership experience in state, national, and international Counseling professional membership, accreditation, and credentialing organizations. She has served in state professional counseling associations and served or chaired a counselor licensing board. She has served on and chaired the Board of Directors for the National Board for Certified Counselors and CACREP. She currently serves as the Vice-Chair of the Peace Education Foundation. She is also actively involved in the professionalizing of counseling in several countries in collaboration with professional membership organizations and governmental entities.





(students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Student Awards Recipients

Each academic year, awards are presented by the Counseling and Rehabilitation faculty. This year, all August 2024, December 2024, and May 2025 graduates of the MA in Counseling and Rehabilitation program were considered by the faculty during the Spring semester review process.

We're pleased to announce that the recipient of the **2024-2025 Distinguished Rehabilitation Counseling Student Award is Hayden Petee**. This award is presented to a program graduate who excelled in their academic work, including the field experiences, and demonstrated leadership qualities through involvement in activities supporting the rehabilitation counseling profession, the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program, and/or community agencies. For Hayden, her outstanding achievements extend beyond her academic endeavors, demonstrating excellence in her professional counseling skills in her practicum and internship experiences. Additionally, some of Hayden's contributions to the field include her role as a Graduate Assistant, working with VR to support SOM students, being a leader in CRSA, and her dedication to research (and her creativity for drumming up opportunities for professional growth).



Hayden holds a colorful "tomorrow needs you" sign near the fountain, with trees, and people in the sunny background.



Zachary, smiling and seated in a dark-blue chair, wears glasses and a graduation gown while holding a red rose.

The recipient of the **2024-2025 Award for Clinical Excellence in Counseling and Rehabilitation is Zachary Ho**. This award is presented to a program student who has demonstrated exceptional interest and skill development in clinical work in their field placement site(s). Zach embodies what this award represents. He fulfilled his practicum at Columbia College, working with students, and his internship at Foundations Counseling and Wellness Center, LLC, where he actively engaged in working with a variety of clients from a range of age groups and backgrounds. His professional counseling skills and desire to continually work towards competency, active participation in counseling skills classes with students, and curiosity and commitment to learning are among the standout qualities that faculty noted when reviewing candidates for this award.



(students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Student Awards Recipients

Finally, this year there are two worthy recipients of the **2024-2025 Dr. Kerry Lachance Outstanding Contribution to the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program Award**. This award is presented to an individual (or individuals this year) based on the value and degree of service that has contributed to the growth of the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program while promoting a sense of community. The recipients are **Erica Hoyer and Chiesoiro Okoro**. Erica's dedication to serving clients, active involvement in community engagement as a leader in CRSA, and her creative contributions to the Counseling and Rehabilitation Programs social media and newsletter were considerations for her being awarded this honor.



Erica, wearing a graduation gown, poses in front of the Cocky statue.



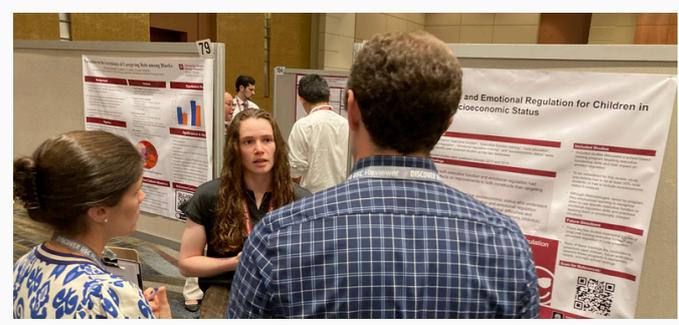
Chiesoiro, smiles while holding a small, gray robot toy.

Chiesoiro, also contributed immensely to the Program, and did so through her work with consumers at the SC Commission for the Blind (an then presenting on that work at one of our LCS days), her active involvement in community engagement at SC-CATER and the School of Medicine, and her incredible contributions to research in virtual reality and technology with folks with disabilities and in counseling.

These awards will be presented at the USC School of Medicine Hooding Ceremony on Thursday, May 8 at 11:00 a.m. The ceremony will be held in the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, [1101 Lincoln St, Columbia, SC 29201](#).

Congratulations Hayden, Zach, Erica, and Chiesoiro!

Discover USC 2025



A group of people gathers around Emily's poster on Emotional Regulation for Children in Socioeconomic Status.

For the second year in a row, the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program was represented at the Discover USC conference by three students. Discover USC brings the university's research and scholarly community together by unifying celebrations of graduate student, postdoctoral and medical scholar innovation and scholarship into a single full-day extravaganza. The event brought stakeholders and partners from every

part of USC and the C&R program's students took full advantage of the networking opportunities by showcasing their research.



(students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Discover USC 2025



A group gathers around Hayden and Dave's research poster at Discover USC.

C&R students, Hayden Petee, Dave Tussey and Emily Kallis each presented evaluators, visitors, staff and faculty throughout the day. Emily delivered a literature review on **Training Executive Function and Emotional Regulation for Children in Rural Schools or of Low Socioeconomic Status** while Hayden and Dave presented their joint research on **Graduate Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT in Mental Health Education**.

Emily reflected, "Discover USC was a great way for me to network and get more connected to other graduate programs. My poster was around a lot of other SOM students, so it was cool to see what students in other programs in the SOM are working on and how their work can be used for rehab counseling. My main goal with signing up for Discover USC was to get experience with presenting research, and it was a great opportunity for a low-pressure environment to build these skills and get feedback about my research."

This year's iteration of the conference hosted more than 2,000 people throughout the day. We'd like to extend our congratulations to Hayden Petee, Dave Tussey and Emily Kallis for their exceptional contributions and presentations.

New Clinic Brings Free Mental Health Services to Rural SC



Seen Is a brick building, surrounded by trees, and a campus-like landscape.

The University of South Carolina School of Medicine Columbia will launch a new mental health clinic this summer to help address the provider shortage in rural South Carolina. Operated by students and supervised by faculty, the clinic will offer free in-person and telehealth counseling to residents of Bamberg, Calhoun, Fairfield, Orangeburg, and Chester counties.

This initiative also serves as a practicum for Counseling and Rehabilitation Program students, helping build a pipeline of future counselors dedicated to serving their communities. It's

a meaningful step toward expanding mental health access across the state's underserved areas.

To learn more, visit the full article [here!](#)



(students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Stackhouse Selected for the Provost's AI Teaching Fellowship



Dr. Stackhouse smiles wearing a blazer and in front of a beige background.

Dr. Farren Stackhouse has been selected to participate in the prestigious Provost's AI Teaching Fellowship Program at the University of South Carolina—a competitive initiative led by the Center for Teaching Excellence. This yearlong fellowship, running from March 2025 to February 2026, supports faculty in exploring innovative ways to integrate artificial intelligence into teaching and learning.

Through workshops, collaborative learning communities, and an AI Teaching Fellowship Showcase, participants will develop creative, tech-forward strategies to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. The program emphasizes the transformative potential of AI in higher education and empowers educators to bring cutting-edge tools into the classroom.

We are proud to see Dr. Stackhouse representing our program in this exciting initiative and look forward to the impact this experience will have on our approach to teaching.

Please join us in congratulating Dr. Stackhouse for this incredible achievement!

Join Prisma Health in Fundraising for NAMI

NAMIWalks is NAMI's (National Alliance on Mental Illness) oldest signature fundraising program, and it enters 2025 as one of the nation's Top 30 Peer-to-Peer events for the fifth straight year, after raising an unprecedented \$15.8 million and registering a program high 8,859 teams. Over 190 community Walks are presented by NAMI State Organizations and NAMI Affiliates from coast to coast. United by our unique experiences, journeys and stories, NAMIWalks is a beautiful celebration of each of us - individuals with mental illness, their family, their loved ones, their community.

“Some people walk together, in step and arm in arm. Others walk together in spirit. Still others, sadly, walk together in memory. However, we raise money that connects those in need to the life-changing, even life-saving, mental health programs and guidance that NAMI offers.”

Join Prisma Health in fundraising for a great cause as they work towards their \$1000 goal by [dontaing through this link](#).



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Dr. Sacco-Bene Attends Fairfield Behavioral Health Services 5K Run/Walk: "Run for Recovery"

On April 19, 2025, the Fairfield Behavioral Health Services 5K Run/Walk, also known as "Run for Recovery", took place in Winnsboro, SC, as part of Alcohol Awareness Month. This annual event aims to raise awareness about alcohol abuse and underage drinking while promoting healthy lifestyles and community involvement.

Dr. Sacco-Bene, Program Director of the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program at the University of South Carolina, was in attendance to show support for this important cause. As a leader in the field of counseling and rehabilitation, Dr. Sacco-Bene's participation underscored the program's commitment to advocating for mental health and substance use recovery within the community.



Dr. S-B and Mr. Vernon Kennedy, Executive Director of Fairfield Behavioral Health Services pose for a picture outdoors, standing on grass in athletic clothing.

The 5K Run/Walk served as both a celebration of recovery and a call to action for greater awareness around the critical issues of alcohol abuse and underage drinking. Participants from all walks of life came together to take part in the event, whether by running, walking, or simply supporting the cause. The event provided a chance to unite the community in the shared goal of fostering better mental health, addiction recovery, and prevention efforts.

Dr. Sacco-Bene, who has long been an advocate for raising awareness around substance use and mental health, took part in the event to show her dedication to the ongoing recovery journey and to engage with local leaders, professionals, and individuals directly affected by these issues. The success of the Fairfield Behavioral Health Services 5K Run/Walk is a testament to the collective efforts of individuals, families, and organizations working toward positive change in the community. With Dr. Sacco-Bene's leadership and support, the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program continues to prioritize community-based recovery and prevention initiatives, helping students and local residents take meaningful steps toward wellness.



(students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Alumna, Emily Walsh Invited to Speak at 9th Annual Southeast Adult Autism Symposium



9th Annual Southeast Adult Autism Symposium Poster.

Emily Walsh, a proud alumna of the University of South Carolina Counseling and Rehabilitation Program, has been invited to speak at the 9th Annual Southeast Adult Autism Symposium in Chattanooga, TN, on July 26, 2025. Emily's presentation will focus on how autistic adults can optimize their homes using assistive technology to promote independence and enhance their daily lives.

Emily's presentation will provide valuable insights into how assistive technology can empower autistic adults by increasing independence and simplifying daily tasks. Her work underscores the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program's commitment to improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

The 9th Annual Southeast Adult Autism Symposium is an essential event for anyone in the autism community, including autistic adults, caregivers, service providers, and those interested in learning more about autism. This event is dedicated entirely to topics relevant to autistic adults and provides a welcoming space for neurodivergent individuals, people on autism assessment waitlists, and anyone who self-identifies as neurodiverse.

Attendees can expect to find new resources, engage in informative presentations, and connect with others who share similar experiences and challenges. The symposium's inclusive nature makes it a great place for learning, collaboration, and support within the autism community. Emily Walsh's involvement in this event highlights her ongoing commitment to the field and her dedication to helping others by sharing knowledge that can have a meaningful impact on the lives of autistic individuals.

Emily's journey from our program to becoming a recognized leader in the field of autism advocacy is an inspiration to current students. Her work exemplifies the power of education, passion, and action in creating positive change. Emily's invitation to speak at this prestigious symposium is a testament to her expertise and the valuable contributions she is making to the autism community.

Should you be interested in attending, you may [RSVP here](#).



(students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Wellness Corner

Feeling overwhelmed with studying? Step away from your books and take a 10-15 minute walk outside. Fresh air and light movement can boost your mood, improve focus, and reduce stress—helping you return to your work with a clearer mind. Remember, short breaks are not a waste of time—they're an investment in your well-being and academic success!



Woman walking on a nature trail during sunset.

USC's Writing Center

Struggling to start a paper? Need help organizing your ideas or polishing your final draft? The University of South Carolina's Writing Center is here to support you at every stage of the writing process. Open to students from all majors, the center offers free one-on-one consultations—both in-person and online.

Whether you're working on an essay, lab report, personal statement, or research project, trained peer consultants can help you clarify your ideas, strengthen your argument, and improve your writing skills. It's a great way to build confidence and produce stronger, more effective work.

Learn more or schedule an appointment at sc.edu/writingcenter.

Pet of the Month

This is Boogie! She is a four year old blue nosed pit, and she is nothing but love and excitement. She got her name because when she wags her tail, she shakes her whole body along with it. She's always ready to play, but is a perfect cuddle buddy at nap time, too. She loves playing with/annoying her brother and sister, and always asks for two pup cups at the drive thru.

Show us your pet by filling out the form below:

[Pet of the Month](#)



Boogie, the blue nosed pit looks down at the camera.

Save the Date

5/2 - SCDOC Mental Health Awareness Day

Watkins Pre-Lease Center: 1700 St. Andrews Terrace Rd, Columbia SC 29210
Join Dr. Farren Stackhouse and Dr. David Dawson as they participate in the upcoming event by staffing a table complete with VR Headsets for attendees to explore.

5/6- Counseling and Rehab Program Specialty Areas Information Session

The Counseling and Rehabilitation program is pleased to remind you that in addition to the Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling specialty, we offer two new specialized practice areas: Clinical Addiction Counseling and Career Counseling. As these specialties are new to the program (they were offered in Fall '24 for the first time), we'll be hosting a live virtual information session designed to give an overview and answer student questions pertaining to each specialty. For those interested in either specialty, please plan to join us on Tuesday, May 6th at 4:00pm to learn more by logging in using the link below.

[RSVP HERE](#)

Specialty Practice Area Info Session [Login Link](#)

5/8- School of Medicine Hooding Event

[RSVP HERE](#)

5/9- School of Medicine Commencement Ceremony

5/28- Summer Tuition Payment Deadline

6/6- School of Medicine Hooding Event Commencement Ceremony