

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)

Highlighting Hope: USC's Counseling and Rehabilitation Program Celebrates Mental Health Awareness Month



The green ribbon represents Mental Health Awareness Month.

This May, in recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, USC's Counseling and Rehabilitation Program proudly joins with national partners to celebrate the strength, resilience, and courage of individuals on their mental health journeys.

Mental Health Awareness Month is not only a time to honor personal experiences but also an opportunity to reduce stigma, promote open dialogue, and emphasize the critical need for accessible mental health care—especially in underserved communities.

See some research-inspired tips for advocating and thriving on the next page!

This issue:

Highlighting Hope

PAGE 01-02

SOM Clinic

PAGE 03

SCDC Event

PAGE 03

Student Spotlight

PAGE 04

Faculty Spotlight

PAGE 04

Graduation

PAGE 05

Wellness Corner

PAGE 06



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

Save the Date

June 6th, 2025:

Advisory Board Meeting

August 15th, 2025:

New and Returning
Student Orientation

October 24th, 2025:

Professional Speaker
Series

October 25th, 2025:

Learning Community
Saturday

Later this Summer:

Ollie Johnson Memorial
Interstate 95 Annual
Health Fair

CHECK OUT OUR SOCIALS



Highlighting Hope

Research-Inspired Tips for Advocating and Thriving this May:

1. Normalize the Conversation:

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), over 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. experience mental illness each year. Talking openly about mental health reduces stigma and creates space for support and understanding.

2. Share Your Story (Safely):

Research from Corrigan et al. shows that hearing stories of lived experience helps challenge negative stereotypes. You never know who you might help by speaking your truth.

3. Prioritize Mental Wellness Daily:

Small habits matter—whether it’s journaling, moving your body, reaching out to a friend, or practicing mindfulness. Studies show daily mental health practices improve mood and decrease stress over time (APA, 2020).

4. Reconnect with Your Purpose:

Helping others gives meaning to our own struggles. Consider mentoring, volunteering, or simply checking in on someone you care about. Collective resilience builds stronger communities.

Together, we are not just raising awareness, but we are building a culture of compassion and empowering others to thrive.





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

USC School of Medicine Columbia’s Clinic for Counseling and Assessment Set to Open its Doors this Summer

The CCA, set to open this summer will offer free counseling services to South Carolina residents who face barriers such as limited-service availability, financial difficulties, lack of insurance, or living in rural areas.

Operated by students and overseen by faculty, the clinic is part of the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program at the School of Medicine Columbia. Its primary mission is to help address the shortage of mental health providers in rural counties including Bamberg, Calhoun, Fairfield, Orangeburg, and Chester. The initiative will also serve as a practicum site for students, aiming to build a sustainable network of counselors who choose to remain and practice in their home communities.



Drs Toriello and Richardson smile during the Clinic’s ribbon cutting.

The Counseling and Rehabilitation Program is currently in the process of interviewing prospective Graduate Assistants who will staff and operate the clinic. We look forward to announcing the newest GA’s soon!

USC C&R Program Supports Mental Wellness at SCDC Employee Mental Health Event



3 Police officers stand in front of a chain link fence.

Earlier this month, the USC School of Medicine’s Counseling and Rehabilitation Program proudly participated in the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) Employee Mental Health Day, bringing innovation and insight to an event focused on the well-being of those who serve our state.

Dr. Farren Stackhouse and Dr. David Dawson represented the program, offering attendees a unique virtual reality meditation experience

designed to promote relaxation and mindfulness, the VR booth provided a calming retreat during the day’s activities and received enthusiastic feedback from participants.

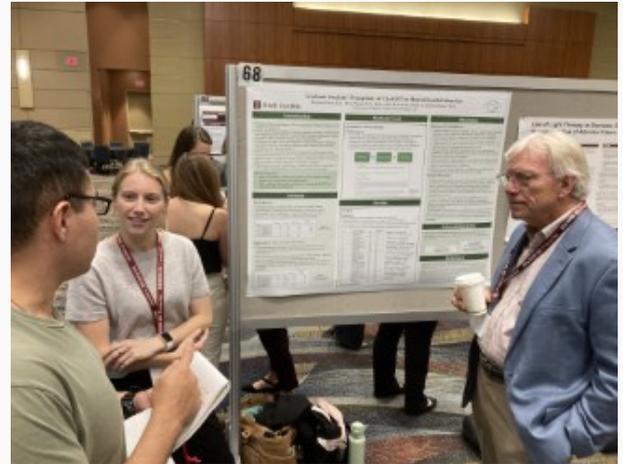


(students walking across a field of green grass with trees and a stone statue standing in the middle of the field)

Student Spotlight: Hayden Petee Wins Discover USC Session

For the second year in a row, the Counseling and Rehabilitation Program was represented at the Discover USC conference by several students, Hayden Petee, Emily Kallis and Dave Tussey. Discover USC grows in attendance and impact yearly, boasting over 3,300 attendees and a variety of outstanding presentations during the 2025 conference.

For graduate students, there were 24 total poster sections at Discover USC 2025, and we'd like to extend a special congratulations to Counseling and Rehabilitation student, Hayden Petee whose presentation on Graduate Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT in Mental Health Education took home the Graduate Student Award for her entire section!



Hayden and Dave stand in front of their research, discussing their findings with a fellow student.

The program looks forward to sponsoring student attendance at next year's Discover USC event on April 26th, 2026.

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Sacco-Bene Attends Conference

On May 20, the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA) hosted a pre-conference at the VRTAC-QE event in Madison, WI. Aimed at graduate students and new professionals, the event provided a platform to share clinical work, research, and interests. Presenters from across the U.S. covered topics such as self-compassion, program evaluation, social determinants of health, and vocational rehabilitation for individuals with severe mental illness. The event fostered connection and community among students, educators, and professionals.

The main TACQE conference followed on May 21-22, bringing together 1,451 participants from 55 states and territories. With over 60 sessions, roundtables, and keynotes, the conference focused on enhancing the skills of vocational rehabilitation professionals and supporting sustainable strategies for improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Dr. S-B and Allie Ledbetter represented USC SOM Counseling and Rehabilitation at the event.



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

A Behind the Scenes Look at Graduation

The Counseling and Rehabilitation Program is thrilled to announce the graduation of three outstanding students (**Lori Hornsby, Nic Collins and Hayden Petee**) from the program during the spring '25 semester as well as the anticipated graduation of Counseling and Rehabilitation student, **Sam Onkka** who participated in the ceremony early. These individuals have demonstrated exceptional readiness and dedication as they move toward the next step in their professional careers.



Dr. Fernandez addresses the graduates

During this year's Commencement Ceremony, the C&R Program was also proudly represented by current student, **Yana Walker** as she delivered the Alma Mater to those in



Our very own Yana Walker sings the Alma Mater to the graduates.

attendance. This marks the first time that a student of the Counseling and Rehabilitation program has delivered the Alma Mater during the event.

Finally, the program wishes to extend a heartfelt thanks to **Dr. M. Sylvia Fernandez**, the President and CEO of Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) for sharing her wisdom as she delivered a memorable keynote speech at the School of Medicine Professional Graduate Hooding Ceremony. Dr. Fernandez reminds us that geese always support each other. When a goose gets injured two birds always accompany it down to the ground. Just as geese do, we must support each other.

Let's hear three honks for all of our spring '25 graduates and representatives!!!



Our graduates getting ready to walk across the stage!



Hayden, Sam, and Nic smile with Dr. Stackhouse.



Nic shows off his Carolina gear!



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

Wellness Corner

The 4-7-8 breathing technique is a simple yet powerful practice to reduce stress and promote relaxation. To do it: inhale through your nose for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 7 seconds, and exhale slowly through your mouth for 8 seconds. Repeat this cycle up to four times. This method helps calm the nervous system, lower anxiety, and improve sleep by encouraging deep, mindful breathing.



The word "breathe" In front of a tan background.

USC's Writing Center

The USC Writing Center is committed to helping students at any stage of the writing process become better writers. Their mission is to help writers in all academic disciplines develop their writing abilities, to promote collaborative learning, to train graduate students in writing center teaching and administration, and to provide writing resources to USC's academic community.

The Writing Center's summer '25 schedule has recently gone live, offering remote appointments (live video and document drop-off) May 12 through July 31. Student Clients can now start booking sessions with the two tutors, Meg and Sam during these dates.



Sky, the pit/husky mix looks up at the camera.

Pet of the Month

This is Sky! Sky is a Pit/Husky mix who belongs to second year Counseling and Rehabilitation Program student, Lindsey Veit. Named after her blue eyes, Sky is as sweet as she is striking, with the playful energy of a husky and the loyal heart of a pit. Although she has a lot of energy, at the end of the day she is a cuddle bug who just wants to be close to her people!

Show us your pet by filling out the form below:

[Pet of the Month](#)

Save the Date

6/6 - Counseling and Rehabilitation Program Advisory
Board Meeting

Later this Summer - Ollie Johnson Memorial Interstate
95 Annual Health Fair

8/15 - New and Returning Student Orientation Event

10/24 - Professional Speaker Series

10/25 - Learning Community Saturday