

Participant Abstracts - Oral Presentations

EMU Academic and Creative Excellence Festival 2026

Listings are in alphabetical order by the last name of the presenter. In the case of group projects, the entry is alphabetized under the name of the student who submitted the entry.

Bridging between Two Languages & Two Worlds

Sophia Armato

Faculty Mentor: Ronald Shultz

The "Documentation of Student Learning" (DOSL) is a capstone project for all education majors. As a Spanish Education major, this particular project provides an in-depth look at a science unit taught to a group of 4th-grade students within a dual language program. In the role of a student teacher, the author experienced the entire process of planning and teaching a unit about ocean environments in alignment with a 4th-grade science SOL. Attention was given to effective instructional strategies, formative assessment tools to help gauge students' learning, and the opportunity to reflect on all aspects of instruction. The project concludes with the author's thoughts about their own learning from this experience that will aid them in their journey to becoming an effective educator.

Más que Palabras: Cómo el Español Construye Comunidad

Sophia Armato

Faculty Mentor: M. Esther Showalter

Learning a second language is more than memorizing vocabulary—it builds connection and community. This presentation highlights how learning Spanish has fostered meaningful relationships, deepened cultural understanding, expanded global awareness, and opened countless opportunities in my own life. Language has become a bridge that allows me to connect with people, perspectives, and communities across cultures.

Figma To Deploy

Kidus Assefa, Abraham Mekonnen

Faculty Mentor: Charles Cooley

Turning a Figma design into production-ready code is still a slow, manual process — one that creates unnecessary friction between designers and developers. Figma To Deploy eliminates that gap by automatically converting Figma design files into deployable Next.js applications using a distributed multi-agent AI system.

Five specialized agents handle the end-to-end transformation through an event-driven Kafka pipeline. The Listener Agent monitors Figma's API for design

changes and triggers the pipeline when a new design is ready. The Parser Agent processes the raw Figma JSON, extracting component hierarchies, layout constraints, and design tokens into a structured intermediate representation. The Planner Agent analyzes that representation and produces an ordered generation plan — determining component boundaries, dependencies, and file structure. The Code Generator Agent then synthesizes idiomatic Next.js components with Tailwind CSS, translating visual properties into accessible React code. Finally, the Validator Agent runs static analysis and runtime checks, ensuring the output meets quality standards before deployment.

Agents communicate asynchronously through Kafka topics, enabling parallel execution and fault-tolerant processing. The system is containerized with Docker and orchestrated via Kubernetes, supporting horizontal scaling as design complexity grows.

Figma To Deploy demonstrates how multi-agent coordination and modern infrastructure can make high-fidelity design-to-code generation practical at scale.

Good Bones: Teaching the Foundations of Writing during the DOSL

Miranda Beidler

Faculty Mentor: Kathy Evans

The "Documentation of Student Learning" (DOSL) is a capstone project for all education majors. As an English Education major, this particular project provides an in-depth look at a writing unit taught to a group of 7th-grade students. In the role of a student teacher, the author experienced the entire process of planning and teaching a unit about narrative writing and dialogue punctuation. Attention was given to effective instructional strategies, formative assessment tools to help gauge students' learning, and the opportunity to reflect on all aspects of instruction. The project concludes with the author's thoughts about their own learning from this experience that will aid them in their journey to becoming an effective educator. Connections will be drawn between this unit and the author's second student teaching placement where she taught writing to high schoolers.

'Scope for the Imagination': The Shifting Narratives and Morals of Jo March and Anne Shirley

Miranda Beidler

Faculty Mentor: Mary Sprunger

Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* are two of the most enduring novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Re-reading these books as adults brings up questions that can be troubling: why do Marmee and Marilla, the mother figures, seem so concerned about making Jo and Anne, the main characters, into proper, "good little girls?" Why is propriety a central theme of seemingly children's books? How do the characters learn moral lessons and establish ethical codes?

Close reading provides the framework for examining the text for answers to the aforementioned questions. However, a much more interesting perspective emerges: Jo and Anne embark on journeys of transformation, guided by the lessons learned from mistakes made and mother figures. This transformation is evidenced by their creative writing and by the stories that they tell, shifting from romanticism to sincere appreciation of the world around them.

Drawing on extensive scholarly work on each novel, popular culture discussions on the novels, and my own interpretations, I examine both novels to discover what these novels have to teach us about storytelling, meaning making, and morality.

Nia Theory

Nia Boyd

Faculty Mentor: Chad Gusler, Kirsten Beachy

A creative nonfiction thesis about the learnings I've experienced in my life. There are prayers incorporated into the piece to magnify the importance of my faith. I talk about my love life, my hopes, my dreams, and my shortcomings. I discuss theories that evolve from my observation of life as it is.

Strategic leadership and planning for Spanish Lab & Learning Center

Esdras Burgos, Claire Koontz, Royale Parker, Guadalupe Tenorio

Faculty Mentor: Lindy Backues

This project analyzes how strategic leadership and planning can support the development of a community-based organization, Spanish Lab & Learning Center, a Spanish immersion preschool and daycare located in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The project was completed as part of the Strategic Leadership in Organizations course and connects classroom concepts with real-world organizational experience.

As part of the course's community learning requirement, our team completed more than fifteen hours of volunteer service with the organization while conducting an organizational analysis. During this process, we observed daily operations, communicated with leadership, and examined the broader childcare environment in the Harrisonburg area. Strategic planning tools were applied to better understand the organization's position and future opportunities. In particular, a PESTLE analysis was used to evaluate political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors that may influence the organization's growth and sustainability.

The analysis highlights several opportunities for the center. Harrisonburg has a growing Hispanic and immigrant population, which increases demand for bilingual education and culturally responsive childcare. Spanish Lab & Learning Center addresses this need through its Spanish immersion model, emphasis on emotional development in early childhood, and leadership with extensive experience in ESL education. At the same time, the organization must respond to challenges such as

economic pressures affecting families, regulatory requirements, and competition from other childcare providers.

Overall, the project demonstrates how strategic leadership and planning tools can help community organizations better understand their environment and develop strategies that support their long-term mission and impact.

Perceived Norms and Hidden Beliefs: Religion, Campus Climate, and Identity Expression Among University Students

Joel Chamberlain

Faculty Mentor: Jenni Holsinger

Religious identity is an important issue in the context of faith-based universities because it is linked to the student's sense of belonging, authenticity, and community involvement. Previous research has identified changes in the religious identity and expression of emerging adults; however, little attention has been devoted to the effect that the perceived climate for religion in the particular institution may have on the outward expression of religion. The present study investigates the effect that the perceived religious population at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) has on the outward expression of religion for the student. The participants were undergraduate students at Eastern Mennonite University, a private Christian university in the mid-Atlantic region in the United States. The participants answered a structured questionnaire that measured the perceived religious population at the university and the outward expression of religion. Quantitative methods were used to examine the association between perceived religious population and the outward expression of religion. findings were presented and further implications were discussed.

What Changed Electoral Politics in Appalachian Virginia? An Analysis of the Voting Trends and Cultural Change between Buchanan County and Rockingham County

Chase Comer

Faculty Mentor: Mary Sprunger

Rockingham and Buchanan Counties, both located in Appalachian Virginia, have seen differing election trends since the 1970s. While the mountains and valleys of Appalachia have their own unique characteristics, their political trends are said to be in sync, meaning that all counties in Appalachia have generally followed a similar election trend and have shifted in tandem. However, close examination of these two counties shows that there is a variation in Appalachia voting shifts. Based on election data and political trends, this paper will demonstrate how these counties have voted at the presidential level and how their voting patterns have evolved and continue to differ in the modern era. After this examination, it will be clear that Buchanan County has gradually shifted to the right since the 1970s, but has been significantly pushed to the right during the 21st century and more so since 2016. Rockingham County has reliably

voted for the Republican candidate for president since the 1970s and has held this streak up to the modern day. However, since the 21st century, Rockingham has seen a slight shift to the left overall, with this being furthered since 2016. Both these counties vote Republican, but both by drastically different margins, and are both shifting in two different ways based on many factors.

Building a Custom Scenario for The Battle for Wesnoth

Rebekah Copeland, Ankita Adhikari, Yohanna Kebede

Faculty Mentor: Charles Cooley

Wesnoth is an open-source fantasy strategy game first released in 2003. It has complex world building features, is based on its own scripting language, and has a long tradition of user modding. This project focuses on creating an original scenario for the game by changing an existing level to add a new plot, characters, actions, and map. Using the game's built in tools, as well as new functions and actions, the scenario will be redesigned with unique dialogue and a fully playable story from start to finish.

The user plays as a dragon, terrorizing a small human village and attempting to destroy all of their cottages before the turns run out, or before the humans can fight him off. This requires custom-built features that are not typical to Wesnoth, like the ability for characters to change the gamemap, and an original win condition. The end goal of our project is to deliver a complete and functional game level that feels original and engaging to players, and hopefully to open the door to further and more complex modifications.

Cleaning Mode LLC

Zazkia De la Vega, Jean Betancourt, Payton Simmons

Faculty Mentor: Lindy Backues

This project involves working with a real-life business and providing consultancy services to help them improve their business while we get hands-on experience before graduating.

Cleaning Mode LLC is a startup level cleaning business located in Meridian, MS. The company offers flexible and personalized cleaning services with moderate fair prices, their clients are usually connected through word-of-mouth which shows client satisfaction.

As consultants we identified opportunities to improve their marketing strategies and explore ways to increase the number of employees, as the demand for expansion grows. Additionally, there is the desire to gain more commercial clients, to compete with other more established businesses.

Impact of Motivation on Sports Performance Anxiety in College Athletes

Eve Detter

Faculty Mentor: Jenni Holsinger

The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of motivation on sports performance anxiety in college athletes. Motivation in sport has been examined in many studies, often using Self-Determination Theory. SDT describes motivation as a continuum ranging from intrinsic, where actions are self-chosen, to extrinsic, where actions are shaped by external demands or rewards. This range is linked to whether three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. My research involves an online survey and interviews of undergraduate students at EMU enrolled full-time at the Harrisonburg campus, who participated in an in-season sport during the 2025-26 fall and winter seasons.

Why Everyone Should Care About Economics

Emily Diaz

Faculty Mentor: Lindy Backues

Purposed to educate our population on the importance of the economic system and how it is currently failing at an unprecedented rate. Economics is intertwined within everything that has to do with our daily lives, from the air we breathe to the socks we wear and food we eat. The project will synthesize insights from several key economists and interdisciplinary scholars works such as Doughnut Economics by Kate Raworth, For the Common Good by Herman Daly and John B. Cobb Jr., Essentials of Economics by John B. Taylor and Travis J. Lybbert, and Development as Freedom by Amartya Sen which will provide theoretical foundations for examining alternative perspectives on economic success and human development. Not only will this challenge our economic system but our philosophical comprehension of what it means to be a human on this earth when establishing what's currently acceptable through the profit approach and how it's inherently affected our development as a society. Being that GDP only measures economic activity rather than overall well-being we must shift our economic policy primary indicator from GDP into a well-being index paired alongside policies within the author's frameworks that promote a better tomorrow, one where we not only succeed but also thrive as a society and as a species.

The research methods include comparative analysis of economic and social indicators using publicly available data from government sources such as the U.S. Census, congressional records, and environmental datasets. Visual graphs will be used to compare GDP growth trends with indicators such as wealth inequality, agricultural and environmental degradation, and broader measures of social well-being. These comparisons aim to challenge the assumption that economic growth alone equates to improved quality of life. The importance lies in educating but also helping our students realize that we are more alike than different and to get people talking about uncomfortable conversations regarding our government decisions and how they stem from a system that wasn't made to work for the people but instead for economic growth.

Eidson Outdoors Efficiency

Colby Eidson, David Joslyn, Colby Massengill

Faculty Mentor: Lindy Backues

Our presentation looks at how a lawn care business in Virginia is affected by outside factors using a PESTLE analysis. Even though lawn care might seem like a simple business, there are actually a lot of things going on that can impact how successful it is. The purpose of this presentation is to explain these different factors and show how they influence the day to day operations and long-term success. First, political factors include rules about pesticide use and environmental regulations that companies have to follow. These rules can limit what services a business can offer. Economic factors also matter because lawn care is not always a necessary service, so if the economy is bad, people might not spend money on it. Social factors are important too, since many neighborhoods expect lawns to look a certain way, and more people are starting to care about environmentally friendly options. Technology has also changed the lawn care industry. Businesses now use online advertising and better equipment to be more efficient. Legal factors include safety rules for workers and making sure the business has the right licenses and insurance. If something goes wrong, there could be legal consequences. Environmental factors are especially important because weather conditions and issues like pollution can affect how and when services are done. Overall, this presentation shows that running a lawn care business is more complicated than it seems. Our analysis helps break down these different influences and makes it easier to understand the challenges and opportunities. This can help our business we are helping make better decisions and adapt to changes in their environment.

Mindful Transitions: Supporting Mental Health in Long-Term Care

Odesa Elezi, Madison Bowyer, Elijah Spicher

Faculty Mentor: Holly Herr Stravers

Transitioning from independent living to residential or nursing home environments is a significant life event for many older adults and is often accompanied by emotional distress, loneliness, and difficulty adjusting to new routines and social environments. Newly admitted residents frequently experience feelings of loss related to independence, familiar surroundings, and established social networks, which can negatively impact mental health and overall well-being.

A review of current literature indicates that relocation to long-term care settings is associated with increased risk of depression, social isolation, and reduced quality of life among older adults. Research consistently identifies social engagement, and coping-skills education as protective factors that can improve emotional adjustment and reduce feelings of loneliness during this transition.

In response to these findings, nursing interventions should focus on promoting social connection and emotional support for newly admitted residents. Structured group

activities, guided discussions about coping with life transitions, and educational sessions focused on grief, adjustment, and resilience can provide opportunities for residents to share experiences and build supportive relationships. These interventions encourage peer interaction, emotional expression, and the development of coping strategies that support adaptation to community living.

Addressing the emotional challenges associated with relocation is an important component of holistic nursing care in long-term care settings. Nurses play a critical role in identifying signs of emotional distress, facilitating supportive environments, and implementing interventions that promote social connectedness and psychological well-being. Supporting residents during this transition can improve adjustment outcomes, reduce loneliness, and enhance overall quality of life living in residential care communities.

Sustainable, Low-Cost Electric Bike

Benjamin Friesen Guhr, Zander Armstrong, Sean Swartley

Faculty Mentor: Daniel King

Students commonly experience inadequate access to transportation on a day-to-day basis. This project addresses this issue through the development of a sustainable, low-cost electric bike as an alternative transportation option. By researching and comparing existing solutions, this project aims to match their performance while maintaining the goal of lower cost. Sustainability is also a priority with the use of recycled materials when possible. The design and creation of our own battery allows for the reuse of battery cells as well as an existing bike frame. Overall, the project involves extensive research, development of concept designs, and testing for optimization to achieve as effective of a product as possible. Additionally, collaboration with the EMU Bike Co-op rental program and detailed design documentation allows for easier and quicker access for students.

Documentation of Student Learning

Liliana Guerrero

Faculty Mentor: Ronald Shultz

The "Documentation of Student Learning" (DOSL) is a capstone project for all education majors. As a Elementary Education major, this particular project provides an in-depth look at a Social Studies unit taught to a group of 2nd-grade students. In the role of a student teacher, I got to experience the entire process of planning and teaching a unit about "American Symbols". Attention was given to effective instructional strategies, formative assessment tools to help gauge students' learning, and the opportunity to reflect on all aspects of instruction. The project concludes with my thoughts about what I learned from this experience that will aid me in my journey to becoming an effective educator.

Environmental Justice and the EJAtlas

Jenni Holsinger, Malia Bauman, Joel Chamberlain, Jayden Downing, Gavin Ferguson, Julian Gonzalez, Madelynn Hamm, Emma Ruth Hua, Samuel Myers, Jenna Oostland, Ellie Shemanski, Serenity Sites, Sara Smith, Elliott Yoder

Faculty Mentor: Jenni Holsinger

In this presentation we introduce the concept of Environmental Justice (EJ) and we demonstrate how the Global Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas) serves as a critical tool for documenting socio-environmental conflicts. We share from case studies that we contributed to the online global database.

Parent Relationships and Overall College Adjustment

Emma Ruth Hua

Faculty Mentor: Jenni Holsinger

Parent relationships can affect college students in areas like academics, communication, social life, and emotional well-being. Understanding this relationship can help explain how family dynamics influence student adjustment in college. The following research is intended to investigate this correlation. Participants were full-time undergraduate students at a small university in the U.S. Participants completed an online survey. Results are presented along with implications for college student health and how parents can be better support their children during the college years. .

Resisting the Disposability of Indigenous Women

Sara Kennel, Ewan Benjamin, Varsha Ramasubramanian

Faculty Mentor: Timothy Seidel

How does neoliberalism reflect the disposability of Indigenous women? The Politics of Disposability describes how marginalized groups are systematically erased. Colonial history constructed a capitalist, patriarchal world, which exploits the bodies of Indigenous women. This project will explore how the structure of neoliberal-patriarchal systems perpetuates the disposability of Indigenous women in three contexts: Marshall Islands, Australia, and Canada. Marshall Islanders have experienced the effects of radioactive fallout since the U.S. began bombing tests on Pacific Islands in 1946. Childbearing Marshallese women on contaminated land and within impoverished circumstances represent the continuity of Indigenous life. The experiences of Marshallese women as disposable demonstrate the systems of white supremacy and patriarchy maintaining their marginalization. International accountability mechanisms for reparations have been minimally responsive, necessitating a grassroots response to advocate for respect of Pacific Islander lives. The disposability of Aboriginal Australian women manifests through several key issues, including nuclear waste disposal, adverse health conditions, criminalization, and more. Indigenous Australian women's unique positionality is not often considered when addressing these issues, and when they are, they are often thought of as a side to an overwhelming colonial feminist ideology. In the

midst of gendered exploitation, there is hope and empowerment in movements rooted in traditional practices of care, allowing Indigenous women throughout the world to reclaim their identities and ground their inherent value.

Since the closure of the boarding schools, the disposability of Aboriginal Canadians, particularly women, has changed form. Instead of removing children from their parents, now the parents are removed from their community. Aboriginal Canadians, particularly women, are facing higher rates of incarceration, for longer, and with heavier sentences. This section will investigate the colonial legacy within this new form of disposability and the Aboriginal resistance to state detention of their mothers, daughters, and sisters.

Evaluating Community Reintegration Outcomes in an Interdisciplinary Wraparound Re-entry Program

Jazi Knight, Abby Foltz, Caris Lucas, Gabriella Seal

Faculty Mentor: Kate Clark

Men transitioning from incarceration to community living face complex social, economic, and health-related challenges that significantly affect their ability to successfully reintegrate. Justice-involved individuals experience disproportionately high rates of substance-related mortality, untreated chronic illness, mental health concerns, unemployment, and housing instability during the critical reentry period, highlighting the need for supportive community-based interventions.

Current literature emphasizes the effectiveness of interdisciplinary wraparound approaches that address social determinants of health and strengthen protective factors during reentry. Evidence suggests that programs incorporating health education, financial literacy, coping skill development, and connections to community resources improve reintegration readiness and engagement with supportive services.

This project partnered with Gemeinschaft Home, a residential reentry program in Harrisonburg, Virginia, to engage men currently participating in the program through structured, discussion-based educational sessions. Nursing students facilitated interactive learning focused on health literacy, nutrition, financial literacy, stress management, and relational stability while encouraging participants to explore wraparound resources available within the community as they prepare for independent living.

Findings highlight the importance of nursing involvement in interdisciplinary reentry programs that address key social determinants of health. Nursing-led educational interventions can strengthen reintegration readiness, support engagement with community resources, and promote improved health, stability, and long-term reintegration outcomes for justice-involved individuals.

A Voice in a Headcovering: The Activism of Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus In Mennonite Spirituality and Politics (1915-2008)

Naomi Kratzer

Faculty Mentor: Mary Sprunger

Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus was a Virginia-born Mennonite woman and EMC alum who built a legacy advocating for female leadership in the church, home, and broader U.S. context. Stoltzfus' life reflects the shift in Mennonite communities as modernization and secularization nudged their values from nonresistance to activism. Research questions include: How did Ruth's involvement in Mennonite Central Committee, radio broadcasting, and women's rights reflect the larger Mennonite trends during that time? What strategies did Ruth use to change the Mennonite perspective on female leadership and political engagement? Lastly, what can Mennonites learn from Ruth about institutional change and advocacy, especially when her mix of progressive and conservative values at the end of her life reflected the variety of North American Mennonite perspectives today? Research draws from Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus' memoir, as well as the rich collection of EMU, Virginia, and North American Mennonite history in the Menno Simons Historical Library and Archives at Eastern Mennonite University.

Justice For and With All- Rereading Jael's Agency Through Trauma-Informed Liberation Hermeneutics

Virginia Maina

Faculty Mentor: Stephanie Powell

The narrative in Judges 4 and 5 is frequently preached as a momentous liberation story for Israel and as such, a model of God's involvement in delivering the oppressed. Informal research reveals that Christians favor a traditional liberationist view that celebrates Deborah and Barak's leadership while overlooking Jael's critical role in this victory. When asked for commentary on Jael, they viewed her as a proto-feminist deliverer, a type of savior. While this celebrates Jael's subversion of patriarchal power, it ignores the realities and intersections of liberation with violence, injustice, and trauma that also shape her story.

This paper argues that although Judges 4-5 offers motivational, liberative insights, such as communal reliance on both God and available resources to resist oppression, a singular, pro-Israel interpretive lens creates substantial ethical dilemmas and ignores the costs and complexities of resistance in pursuit of liberation. The paper introduces a trauma-informed lens to address commonly ignored nuances in the story. Adding this lens does not discredit liberation theology but seeks to expand it to produce a more honest, ethical, egalitarian reading and preaching of this text.

This paper accomplishes this by focusing on the text's traumatic, theological, violent, and ethical dimensions. Highlighting the realities of violence in times of war, I offer a rereading of Jael's character in light of the shaping influence of trauma. I also explore the contradictions between hospitality and sexual violence in the time of war

and the fantasies of revenge against triumph for a particular community. I conclude that this expanded, hybrid exegesis contributes to reframing the justice of God not as a zero-sum game that celebrates the destruction of the enemy, overlooks the moral costs of the encounter, and further marginalizes participants, but as a pursuit of justice with all and for all.

Determining the Presence of Two Rare Salamanders in local waterways through eDNA Methodology

Esme Martin, Madelynn Hamm, Malachi Peachey-Stoner

Faculty Mentor: Doug Graber Neufeld

Environmental DNA (eDNA) are segments of DNA shed by various organisms into their environment, including skin cells, feces, and other biological remnants. By collecting water samples and isolating the eDNA through quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR), it is possible to determine whether a species resides in a sample location. This is a non-invasive approach to surveying the distribution of vulnerable species, which makes it possible to identify a species' presence without needing direct observation.

We applied this methodology to two species of local interest: the Eastern Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*), and the Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*). Both the Hellbender and Tiger Salamanders are of special interest to the US Forest Service, and drive decisions for local management strategies. Water samples from Maple Flats, a local area known to have Tiger Salamanders, did not show presence of Tiger Salamander eDNA, which suggests possible novel genetics of this population. Water samples from Laurel Fork, an isolated mountain valley stream, indicated a low presence of Hellbender Salamander eDNA. We have identified a new, possibly more successful method of collecting eDNA through soaking filters overnight in sample water. This year, our focus has been testing the reliability of the eDNA methodology, including clarifying our method of use of probe-based qPCR to test both field samples and samples spiked with oligonucleotide.

Colección de poemas: Navigating identity challenges, grief, and trauma through poetry.

Arelys Martinez Fabian

Faculty Mentor: M. Esther Showalter

As a first generation college student who is a proud daughter of Mexican immigrants, learning how to navigate the challenges of college can be a lonely battle. Throughout my time as a Spanish major, I have been able to find a community and the opportunity to reconnect with my mother tongue in a manner I have never done before. I learned so much about myself and the grief and trauma that exists within my family and to those in our communities. These personal experiences along with the experiences and stories I heard during my intercultural trip to Guatemala and Cuba in the Spring of

2024 began to reshape the way I was viewing the world. Seeing the ongoing effects of our current political environment in the U.S. and how they have impacted my loved ones and those around me, grieving became a little more difficult. In order to process those feelings and thoughts, I will be presenting a collection of poems I brainstormed and wrote throughout my time at EMU.

Beyond Border: A look into immigration in today's America

Dibora Mekonnen, Genesis Figueroa

Faculty Mentor: Ji-Eun Kim, Mark Sawin

This presentation examines immigration through legal, historical, and local lenses to better understand the implications of current federal enforcement practices. The presentation begins by defining immigration and outlining its role in shaping the United States socially, economically, and politically. It then explains the purpose of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement), including its authority in enforcing federal immigration laws, before introducing the constitutional concept of due process and why it is fundamental to democratic governance.

The first section will analyze documented concerns regarding ICE detention centers and longstanding allegations of human rights violations. Particular attention is given to reported enforcement tactics and controversies in Minneapolis, exploring how federal immigration enforcement intersects with local communities. This section will be mostly informed by previous student research on the topic.

The second section will focus on due process protections, highlighting the case of Kilmar Abrego Garcia to examine questions about legal representation, detention, and constitutional rights. This section will be informed by a student's experience working closely with Abrego Garcia's case.

The presentation also explores the impact of immigration enforcement on local communities and highlights organizations providing support, including New Bridges Immigrant Resource Center, the local Harrisonburg Police Department, and a representative from EMU. This section connects federal policy with local realities and aims to clarify the efforts made to ensure safety in our local communities, including EMU.

Ultimately, this presentation seeks to foster informed dialogue grounded in research, legal frameworks, and community perspectives, encouraging participants to think critically about immigration enforcement and its broader societal consequences.

Politic Together: Exploring the Political Socialization of University Students

Caleb Metzler

Faculty Mentor: Jenni Holsinger

The political socialization of undergraduate university students is an important area of discussion in this political moment as this generation of university students

begins entering the workforce and shaping the United States of tomorrow. First, this report will explore previous literature on political socialization of young adults highlighting the three common themes of educational background, parental influence, and exposure to media. The project then explores themes that emerge from an online survey and in-person semi-structured interviews conducted at a religiously-affiliated private university located in the Mid-Atlantic US. It concludes by discussing implications of the results, exploring potential ways in which their implementation into university policy can further promote campus community.

Bridging Language and Opportunity: The Impact of the Intensive English Program at EMU

Fadi Michael, Roumany Sefin, Anisa Sharhabeel

Faculty Mentor: Lindy Backues

This Study investigates how the Intensive English Program (IEP) at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) develops international students' academic abilities and language skills and their understanding of different cultures. The IEP helps non-native English speakers develop their language skills for completing university courses and managing daily life in the United States. Our project analyzes how the program teaches language skills while it helps learners build self-assurance and effective communication abilities and develop their ability to adjust to new cultural situations. The IEP includes important elements that make up its program through interactive classroom learning and customized educational experiences, and through actual language use training. The IEP program helps students develop their academic abilities because it creates a real-world educational experience that includes multiple teaching methods and social learning environments. The program helps students from different backgrounds create a fellowship that students can use to work together and help each other. The IEP program at EMU functions as an essential bridge because it helps students overcome their language difficulties to achieve academic success. The program provides students with critical English language proficiency, which enables them to participate in academic and social activities and results in better educational and professional possibilities.

EMU Lost and Found Website

Diego Morales Torres, Ravi Holsinger

Faculty Mentor: Shravan Akula

EMU Lost and Found is a web application created for the Eastern Mennonite University campus to help its students report and recover their lost items efficiently. As it stands many lost and found posts are made in the EMU Royal Radar GroupMe or through campus wide emails. These messages and emails are often overlooked. This project aims to solve this problem by providing a centralized easy to use platform that specializes in lost items. Ultimately leading to more items being returned to their owners.

The web application allows students to complete a form describing information regarding a lost item such as location, date, and image. Submitted items are stored in a database and displayed on a searchable lost items page where students can browse posts. Once a user believes they have found their item they will have the option to submit a claim request through the website. We have a system in place that automatically sends an email to the person who made the post, therefore connecting both people to facilitate the item retrieval. A follow up email is sent that asks for confirmation regarding the exchange in order to update the item status on the website.

This web app was developed as a group Capstone project by Diego Morales Torres and Ravi Holsinger. The site prioritizes ease of use and simplicity in order to make this tool available for the diverse community on our campus. Through the creation of a dedicated lost and found platform, this project aims to replace the inadequate communication currently taking place to provide a reliable system for reconnecting students with their rightful belongings.

Campus Hub Event

Ashutosh Niraula, Ruach Deng

Faculty Mentor: Shravan Akula

Student engagement with campus life is frequently hindered by the absence of a centralised and accessible source of event information. Details such as event location, timing, category, and available capacity are typically dispersed across multiple channels, making it difficult for students to efficiently identify and plan attendance at events relevant to their interests. This project addresses that challenge through the development of Campus Event Hub, a web application designed to consolidate campus event information into a single, searchable platform.

The application enables students to browse all upcoming events in one place, with each listing presenting key logistical details including location, date, time, and event category. Users can filter events by category — spanning Academics, Sports, Social, Clubs, and Workshops — and search by keyword to quickly surface relevant opportunities. A built-in RSVP system allows students to confirm attendance, providing both the user and the event organiser with a clear picture of expected turnout. Registered users additionally have access to a personal dashboard that consolidates the events they are attending alongside those they have created, reducing the cognitive overhead of tracking multiple commitments across a busy academic calendar.

The system is developed using Python, Flask, and a SQLite database, with planned extensions including event capacity limits, email reminders ahead of confirmed events, and public deployment to a live URL. The overarching goal is to lower the barrier between students and campus life by ensuring that the right information — where, when, and how to attend — is always easy to find.

Gender-Based Violence, Human Trafficking, and Forced Displacement

Sarah Peak, Qin Nan, Fiker Yigzaw

Faculty Mentor: Timothy Seidel

This project explores how gender-based violence and human trafficking forms in active conflict zones as a result of forced displacement. This topic will be explored through the three different case studies: Myanmar, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Each case study explores a narrative of those living in the conflict, an analysis of current responses to address this violence, and the creation of a society where gender-based violence does not exist.

Caregivers in Nursing Homes

Fernando Sanchez

Faculty Mentor: Jenni Holsinger

Elderly people are not always easy to take care of. Studies show that caregivers in nursing homes deal with compassion fatigue and traumatic stress that comes from being understaffed and having to communicate with the family members about the wants and needs for the residents. This study explores different perceptions people have of caregivers in nursing homes. Participants included college students in biology and pre-med programs at a private university. Participants completed a 10 minute online survey. Findings are presented and implications for caregivers and family members are discussed.

Consulting with NP contracting

Chris Santisteban, Ben Knutsson, Dimas Portillo

Faculty Mentor: Lindy Backues

My group and class are currently consulting with different companies to identify strengths, weaknesses, and other ventures that make up management and leadership to hopefully amplify the business into something that is sustainable, ecological, and working in the interest of the greater good. As of now, the project is still in progress, so I'm giving a brief overview.

Experiences of Trauma Among the Unhoused

Marianne Short, Leah Beachy, Joshua Stucky, Elliott Yoder

Faculty Mentor: Kate Clark

Trauma, including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), is both a causal and perpetuating factor in homelessness, which is a major issue within the United States. Examining the relationship between trauma and homelessness, including its specific sources and outcomes, is critical to understanding potential solutions. Literature suggests that homelessness is itself a traumatic experience. Data also shows that experiences within various assistance programs are linked to poverty, homelessness, disproportionate amounts of ACEs, and trauma. Interventions to address ACEs and

prevent further trauma should be designed in a way that is sensitive to individuals' lived experiences of trauma. Advocating for systemic changes and implementing trauma-informed care is critical in the nursing care of homeless and impoverished patients as well as in preventing homelessness.

Community Development in Harrisonburg: Food and Transportation Systems

Elias Stoll

Faculty Mentor: Timothy Seidel

The purpose of this independent study is to explore and analyze the current structure of transportation in Harrisonburg, VA. Through interviews, research, and observation, I will conduct a conflict analysis using Lisa Shirsch's Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning methodology. I will create models in addition to the lenses to help visualize the data I will obtain. The analysis will be contextualized within a community development framework to determine if and how resources are best leveraged to meet the needs of the community.

Carbon Emission Tracking at EMU: A Multi-Year Comparative Analysis

Levi Stutzman, Tara Cahill, Madelynn Hamm, Jenna Oostland, Kate Stutzman, Maya Tutton

Faculty Mentor: Doug Graber Neufeld

Eastern Mennonite University has committed to becoming carbon neutral by the year 2035, as outlined and advertised in the institution's Climate Action Plan. This goal necessitates the collection and analysis of campus climate emissions data for each fiscal year, along with tangible reductions in emissions release and practices. Using a university emissions tracking software called SIMAP (Sustainability Indicator Management and Analysis Platform), EMU's senior Environmental Sustainability Capstone cohort collected and entered data for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, which can be used to illustrate emissions trends and progress on our campus over the past two decades. An effective multi-year analysis can provide crucial information regarding which sectors of campus have effectively reduced carbon emissions and which are in need of reevaluation and readjustment.

Single-Axis Shake Table

Levi Stutzman, Ivan Betancourt, Myles Dixson, Christian Schmidt

Faculty Mentor: Daniel King

This project aims to create a single-axis shake table designed to recreate the relative ground acceleration experienced near the epicenter of real-world earthquakes. The device utilizes a belt driven design to move a 2' by 2' plate along a prescribed path upon which scale models of infrastructure are mounted for testing. While the scale model construction limits the testing of real seismic-engineering solutions, it has educational utility by demonstrating the effects of dynamic loading on structures and

can be used in a number of lab applications. The device will recreate user input acceleration data sets from real earthquakes while providing real-time feedback on the actual generated motion. The motion is controlled using an Arduino R3 Uno microcontroller connected to a stepper motor driver utilizing the AccelStepper library, among others.

Breaking the Silence: Stigmatization of Sexual Violence Survivors

Emily Suarez Nunez, Jacqueline Jackson, Meygan Kyger, April Stafford

Faculty Mentor: Kate Clark

Stigmatization of sexual violence is a prevalent problem in many communities today. According to the Virginia Department of State Police (2025), there have been a total of 69 rape cases between the Harrisonburg, Rockingham, and Page county areas in 2024. These statistics support the prevalence of this problem in our surrounding communities. The topic of interest is the impact of stigmatization on sexual violence on victims' mental health, as well as why these crimes go unreported. In addition, recommended policy changes and public health interventions to reduce the impact of stigmatization on the reporting and response to sexual violence will be described. Researchers have found that victims of sexual violence who experienced negative psychological outcomes increased with instances of factors such as self-blame, stigma, and barriers to self-compassion. The overall desired outcomes are to reduce the impacts of stigmatization and improve the number of sexual violence crimes reported. Evidence-based interventions include having formal and informal support persons for victims while reporting, information made and distributed by youth for youth, finding ways for victims to better understand the legal process, and reduction of stigma. A potential response by the general public is addressing, and enforcing a general and universal definition of what makes up sexual violence. This presentation aims to ensure future nurses are properly trained in supporting victims during reporting events. As well as providing ample amounts of education materials regarding options for reporting and care within all healthcare facilities in the community.

The Effect of Social Media on Mental Health in Children and Adolescents

Kristina Suslaev, Emily Guin, Reina Landa

Faculty Mentor: Holly Herr Stravers

Social media use has become increasingly prevalent among children and adolescents, prompting growing concern about its potential influence on emotional well-being and mental health. As digital engagement continues to expand among youth, understanding how social media experiences may affect psychological health has become an important focus of current research.

Findings from recent literature suggest that certain patterns of social media use may be associated with increased psychological distress among youth, including heightened stress, depressive symptoms, and engagement in risky behaviors.

Additionally, exposure to negative online interactions, social comparison, and harmful online trends may contribute to emotional challenges for some children and adolescents.

Nursing and community-based interventions may help mitigate these risks by promoting education on healthy social media use, encouraging emotional awareness, coping strategies, and supporting early identification of mental health concerns in youth populations.

Greater awareness of the relationship between social media use and youth mental health highlights the importance of prevention and early support. Nurses play a critical role in advocating for youth mental health, promoting safe digital behaviors, and supporting strategies that foster emotional resilience in both healthcare and community settings.

Internationally Displaced Persons (IDP's)

Nahom Teshome, Kensly Cassy, Mercy Francis-Harris

Faculty Mentor: Timothy Seidel

Under the broader global category of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) we will explore more specifically the connections of civil conflict and violence to internal displacement focusing on the failure of the GLOBAL VILLAGE, intern the organisations and treaties responsible for insuring the well being of neighboring countries. Through narration we will briefly examine the magnitude of internal displacement, historical context, as well as the violence and how it is experienced. Also looking at what has been done to bring change to the conflict through the network of the GLOBAL VILLAGE. We will explore IDPs from civil war/conflict and violence through an examination of three different local contexts, Ethiopia, Haiti and Sudan. This will be in written paper format with a powerpoint presentation at the ACE festival.

Mundane Realities: The Bureaucratic Life of Female Spies

Jordyn Thompson

Faculty Mentor, Mary Sprunger

The popular imagination of female espionage is largely defined by the "Mata Hari" or "Bond Girl" trope, a solitary, hyper-sexualized femme fatale who uses seductive intrigue to manipulate powerful men. Modern media further distorts this reality by emphasizing high-tech gadgets and cinematic physical combat. However, the historical reality of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) challenges these myths. This thesis reframes intelligence work as a sophisticated form of psychological labor rather than a series of erotic encounters or tactical skirmishes.

Historical accounts from the "invisible apron strings", a massive infrastructure of over 4,000 women, reveal that female operatives served as the clerical and intellectual backbone of American intelligence. In *Undercover Girl*, Elizabeth P. Macdonald details how missions like "Project Black Mail" relied on journalistic and academic skills to craft

"black propaganda." These forged documents and rumors intended to mislead Axis forces demonstrate that the real-life female spy functioned as a human information processor rather than an erotic icon. Furthermore, oral accounts from Julia Child characterize the professional environment as a disciplined, almost boarding school-like atmosphere. This professional reality directly contrasts with the fetishized, exotic scenes favored by the media. Ultimately, the American obsession with the singular, sexualized heroine obscures the historical significance of the white-collar expertise and mundane labor that defined women's contributions to the OSS.

Strategy for Impact: Strengthening Nonprofit Leadership Through Community Engagement

Tre Uzzle, Abenezer Abebe, Sarah Prroj

Faculty Mentor: Lindy Backues

This presentation reflects on a service-learning project completed through volunteering with Church World Service in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The project was part of a strategic leadership course and required students to complete at least fifteen hours of community service while developing a strategic plan for the organization. The purpose of the assignment was to move beyond theoretical concepts and allow students to practice leadership and strategic thinking through real-world experience in a nonprofit setting.

Church World Service plays an important role in supporting refugees, immigrants, and vulnerable communities through resettlement assistance, education, and community programs. Volunteering with the organization provided insight into the challenges nonprofit organizations face, including funding limitations, community needs, and the external factors that influence their work. Through this experience, the project examined how strategic leadership tools can help organizations remain effective, sustainable, and responsive to the communities they serve.

Overall, this project demonstrates how volunteer service and a fresh perspective on the organization's standings as well as direction can strengthen leadership skills while also contributing meaningful strategic ideas to nonprofit organizations. The experience highlights the value of combining community engagement with strategic planning to support organizations like Church World Service in continuing their humanitarian mission.

Analysis of working with Grimes Insurance Agency

Erik Wilkinson, Aidan Miller, Dalton Rocke

Faculty Mentor: Lindy Backues

This will be our semester long partnership with Grimes Insurance Agency from Fairfax, Virginia. We are looking to show the mutual growth that resulted from this collaboration. Throughout the project, we worked with the agency to better understand their day to day business operations, client relationships, and other strategies. In turn,

we contributed our young perspectives and practical solutions, including ideas to enhance their efficiency in the workplace and maximize time. This experience allowed us to apply classroom knowledge to a real world company, improving our communication, problem solving, and professional skills. At the same time, Grimes Insurance Agency has given us great mentorship, insight into this very niche insurance industry, and feedback that shaped our work. This presentation will further show the challenges, successes, and important takeaways from the collaboration, emphasizing how partnering between students and businesses can create meaningful, real world impact for both parties.