

Department of
Health and Kinesiology

HK

2025 Honors and Awards



**College of Applied
Health Sciences**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Message from the Department Head

Dr. Kim Graber

Message from the Dean

Dr. Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell

Awards

Reginald J. Alston Award for Excellence in Community Health and Rehabilitation

Jungsun Moon, Ryan Santens

Jerry D. Burnam Scholarship

Sydni Branch, Magali Escobedo

Pamela C. Butler Scholarship

Isha Patel

Joanne M. and Charles M. Carraway Scholarship

Rachael Adewumi, Simone Daly, Lili Frey, Milayna Grisham, Deanivea Mendes Felix

Carol L. Chittenden Scholarship

Nia Adeogun, Ava Hendershott

William H. Creswell Jr. Graduate Student Award

Vaishnavi Sridharan

F. Patricia Cullen Scholarship

Fatima Pantoja Lara

T.K. Cureton Physical Fitness Research Award

Casey KY Lim

Delores Curtis Professional Development Award

Klayton Donoghue

Helga M. Deutsch Scholarship

Collin Janusz, Jackie O'Brochta

Beulah Drom Scholarship

Zara Mkrtychian, Samantha Pagnucci

Aurelio E. "Joe" Florio Scholarship

Alec Painter

Ralph Geeseman Scholarship for Veterans

Daniel Banda, Maria Boyce

Kathleen M. Haywood Graduate Kinesiology Scholarship Fund

Revati NR Malani, Madelyn Rose Szamocki

Howard S. Hoyman Student Award

Rafael Guimarães

Laura J. Huelster Award

Youngjoon Kim, Sahel Moein, Nicolette Smith-Suchon

Burris F. Husman Scholarship

Luke Bellizzi

H.E. “Hek” Kenney Memorial Award

Luke Bellizzi, Harrison Guo

Kinesiology Scholarship

Sydni Branch

Benjamin H. Massey Memorial Award

Diana Morales, Shreya Verma

Floyd and Etta McAfee Award

Samyla Williams

Pam and Betty Milchrist Scholarship

Jemimah O. Bakare

Roger Winfield Morse Memorial Scholarship

Jihoon Choi, Brianna DiFilippo, Reese Patton

Ann E. Penstone Scholarship

Brandon Snipe

Carita Robertson Scholarship

Brina Arvanetes, Joel Emil, Ana Selzer, Sanjay Shrestha,
Thalia Skoulikaris

**Karin A. Rosenblatt Community Health Graduate
Scholarship**

Haeley Alaina Peters, Huaijin Xu, Sajib Zaman

Robert L. Sprague Graduate Student Award

Emma McCabe

Seward C. Staley Scholarship

Julia Cox, Ian Zubrickas

Ronald G. and Patricia L. Stopka Scholarship

Julia Cox, Isha Patel

Mariana Trekell Scholarship

Billy Braid

Agnes Radich Vidovic Award

Jae'da Thompson

Kenneth L. Watkin Scholarship

Mary Chrisos

Edmund J. James Scholars**Additional Recognition**

Message from the Department Head



Dr. Kim Graber

Our department's top-tier programs—Kinesiology, Community Health and Interdisciplinary Health Sciences—are recognized as leaders nationwide and beyond. But it is our exceptional students who truly set us apart. Each year, we honor the best and brightest with awards and scholarships celebrating academic excellence, personal and professional growth and service to campus and the broader community. This year's recipients have gone above and beyond, excelling in both academics and leadership.

Your achievements reflect the core values of the Department of Health and Kinesiology and the College of Applied Health Sciences: justice, fairness, respect and compassion. You have worked tirelessly to reduce disparities in physical activity, health and healthcare while championing equitable access to safe and healthy communities. Your research, outreach and dedication remind us that diverse perspectives drive meaningful progress.

As you move forward—whether continuing with HK or charting a new path—I have no doubt you will make a lasting impact. You are, and always will be, esteemed representatives of this department.

Congratulations!

Message from the Dean



Dr. Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell

Now more than ever, the world needs skilled practitioners, educators and researchers dedicated to improving health and well-being. This year's scholarship and award recipients are poised to lead the way, shaping healthier communities and enhancing lives across diverse populations.

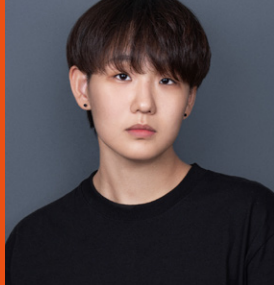
With your interdisciplinary expertise in human movement, holistic health and community well-being, you are tackling the challenges of healthy living head-on. Your work will leave a lasting impact, driving positive change for individuals, families and society as a whole.

I am incredibly proud of all you have accomplished—both in the classroom and beyond. Your dedication, curiosity and hands-on efforts in research and community engagement set you apart. You have earned these honors through hard work and perseverance, and with them, our deepest admiration.

Congratulations! May your future be filled with excellence, innovation and success. Keep pushing boundaries and making a difference!

Reginald J. Alston Award for Excellence in Community Health and Rehabilitation

*Community health alumnus
Travis Gayle (Ph.D., 2006)
created this award in honor
of his mentor, Dr. Reginald
Alston. Preference is given
to a student with a focus on
rehabilitation, disability and
chronic illness, with special
preference for students who
are applying, have applied
or will apply scholarly work
to clinical and/or practical
applications within the
community.*



Jungsun Moon

Moon is a second-year Ph.D. student in Kinesiology, specializing in biomechanics. She earned a B.S. in Sports Medicine from CHA University in South Korea and an M.S. in Movement Science from the University of Michigan, where she focused on gait mechanics in stroke survivors and knee injury rehabilitation. Currently, Moon is studying shoulder biomechanics in manual wheelchair users with Assistant Professor Matthew Hanks. Her research focuses on identifying the risk factors associated with pain and movement mechanics. With a strong commitment to rehabilitation sciences, she aspires to advance evidence-based strategies that promote functional independence and quality of life for individuals with movement disabilities. In her free time, she enjoys watching Netflix and YouTube, playing tennis and soccer and exploring local coffee shops.



Ryan Santens

Santens is graduating this May 2025 with a Ph.D. in Community Health. He earned his Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health degrees from the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. As assistant director of the Psychological Services Center, a research and training clinic in the Department of Psychology here at Illinois, he led community engagement initiatives to establish campus-community partnerships to address social and health inequities. As provider relations director with a care-coordination entity, he partnered with the state of Illinois Department of Child and Family Services and Department of Health and Family Services to lead systems-level change for youth and families involved in the child welfare system and/or enrolled in Medicaid needing behavioral health services.

For his dissertation research, Santens conducted successful feasibility and pilot testing of a new mindfulness-based intervention he developed, delivering it in a community-based setting with disadvantaged adults as a strategy to ameliorate stress-related health disparities.

Jerry D. Burnam Scholarship

Established in 2015 by Dr. Jerry Burnam, who held the position of associate dean of Academic Affairs in the College of Applied Health Sciences for many years before retiring in 2000, the scholarship is awarded to students who are transferring or have transferred into AHS from another institution or another college within the University of Illinois. Preference is given to students who are first generation, have a history of community service, participated in the U.S. military or ROTC or graduated from an Illinois high school in a “low-sending” county.



Sydni Branch

Branch is an undergraduate student from the Chicago suburbs majoring in kinesiology with a minor in chemistry. Branch's plan is to continue her education in medicine, focusing on preventative care. Driven by her early exposure to health and science, she wants to contribute to making health care more accessible to those in underserved populations. Branch is a part of the American Medical Women's association, which was created for pre-health women to give them resources, community service opportunities and mentorship. Branch has dedicated her time as a student volunteer at Carle Sports Medicine clinic, as well as worked as a pharmacy technician at Carle Hospital. She has actively assisted in the Pedagogical Kinesiology Laboratory, focusing on the scholarship of teaching and learning. Additionally, Branch was able to partake in a study abroad experience in Italy to gain insight into all facets of the Italian public health care system.



Magali Escobedo

Previously having attended Loyola University Chicago, Escobedo plans to graduate from the University of Illinois in May 2026 with a degree in interdisciplinary health sciences and a minor in public health. She is interested in the field of epidemiology with a specific focus on health diversity and equity, and plans to pursue a Master of Public Health after graduation. She is an I-LEAP scholar and a part of the College of Applied Health Sciences' START program, where she participates as a research assistant and will present her team's project at this year's undergraduate research symposium. Escobedo is passionate about health education and serves as secretary on the board of Healthy Smiles, an RSO on campus that volunteers at elementary schools in the Champaign-Urbana community to promote oral health to young students. She spends her summers working as a medical assistant at an urgent care center in her hometown and as a receptionist at a local dental practice.

Pamela C. Butler Scholarship

The Pamela C. Butler Scholarship provides vital support to undergraduate students within the Department of Health and Kinesiology. This award embodies Pam's enduring commitment to fostering equitable opportunities and empowering aspiring scholars to pursue their academic dreams.



Isha Patel

Patel is a dedicated advocate for preventative healthcare and health equity, set to graduate with a B.S. in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences in May 2025. Patel aspires to become a physician associate, hoping to work in a federally qualified health center to improve health outcomes for the underserved.

A leader in her community, Patel serves as a training coordinator for the Illini Medical Screening Society, where she empowers pre-health students with clinical skills and provides preventative healthcare screenings for underserved populations in Urbana and Champaign. She also contributes to patient-centered care as an intern in OSF Healthcare's Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation Department and as a patient safety ambassador in the Cardiac Medical Telemetry Unit and Outpatient Surgery Center.

Patel is a proud Illinois Commitment Scholar and has been recognized for her academic excellence as a seven-time Dean's List recipient. Beyond health care, she finds joy in playing badminton, journaling and painting.

Joanne M. and Charles M. Carraway Scholarship

This scholarship was established through a generous estate gift made by Robinson, Ill., native Joanne Carraway (PEW, 1951) and her husband Charles. Their endowment provides permanent financial support and recognition to students studying in the Department of Health and Kinesiology.



Rachael Adewumi

Adewumi is a junior from Hoffman Estates, Illinois, majoring in community health with a concentration in health administration and a business minor. She is getting her health technology certificate. She is involved in Acts Campus Ministry as the co-director of the Barnabas Ministry, while being a James Scholar and a member of the Student Advisory Board. Adewumi is also a Shelly Ambassador for the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center, a stress management peer for McKinley Health Center and an information and service associate at The Jeffries Center.



Simone Daly



Lili Frey

Joanne M. and Charles M. Carraway Scholarship continued

Daly is a sophomore at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, majoring in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences on the pre-medicine track. She is passionate about medicine and learning more about public health initiatives. Here at Illinois, she conducts undergraduate research at the Infant Cognition Lab learning about early cognitive development. Additionally, she serves as the president of the Illinois chapter and a national board member of Mu Epsilon Delta, a professional pre-health fraternity, leading efforts to enhance professional development and foster inclusivity within collegiate pre-health student communities. Outside of her academic pursuits, Daly works at Lurie Children's Hospital in her hometown Chicago, gaining valuable clinical experience while working with children with unique medical complexities in transitional care facilities. She is also a violinist in the Illini Strings orchestra and spends lots of time playing music. With family originally from Ireland and Brazil, she is well-traveled and loves exploring different cultural experiences worldwide.

Frey is passionate about pursuing a career in physical therapy and remains actively involved in research, campus recreation, and student organizations. In fall 2024, she had the opportunity to present at the Midwest American College of Sports Medicine conference, where she shared her work and gained valuable experience in the field. She is also dedicated to service, holding a leadership position in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and volunteering at her church, where she enjoys building community and supporting others.

Beyond academics, Frey finds fulfillment in working closely with research participants and interacting with patrons at her job. She loves connecting with people, whether through meaningful conversations, spending time with friends or sharing a movie night. Her passion for healthcare and advocacy continues to shape her professional goals, and she is excited to keep learning, growing and making a difference in the field of rehabilitation.



**Milayna
Grisham**



**Deanivea
Mendes Felix**

Grisham, originally from San Diego, California, moved to Illinois in high school and developed a passion for rehabilitation after experiencing sports-related injuries as an athlete. Now a sophomore at the University of Illinois majoring in kinesiology on the pre-medicine track, she aspires to become a sports medicine physician specializing in orthopedics. She is particularly interested in rehabilitation and injury prevention to help athletes and active individuals regain mobility and improve performance.

Beyond academics, Grisham is an undergraduate research assistant in the Physical Activity and Neurocognitive Health Lab, studying the impact of physical activity on cognitive function. She also serves as a board member of the Student Success Undergraduate Advisory Board and is an active member of Alpha Epsilon Delta, a pre-health professional fraternity. With a strong commitment to community service and healthcare, Grisham is dedicated to helping individuals recover from injuries, regain mobility and improve their overall quality of life.

Mendes Felix is a dedicated Ph.D. student in Community Health, and a researcher with a multidisciplinary background in public health, Brazilian studies and international relations. She seeks to contribute to impactful health initiatives through evidence-based interventions. She is passionate about designing and evaluating public health programs that address population disparities, with a focus on communication strategies, behavioral change, and practical applications of research.

Currently, Mendes Felix is a research assistant working on an evaluation project of SHIELD Illinois. She is an active member of the Aging and Diversity Lab; the Epidemiology, Physical Activity & International Collaboration Lab; and the Longitudinal Analysis in Physical Activity, Sleep, Sitting, Screen Time and Accelerometry Lab.

Carol L. Chittenden Scholarship

Supported by gifts made by Carol Chittenden and her spouse Bill through the Chittenden Family Foundation, this award recognizes undergraduate students who have shown some professional promise, scholarship and service to their profession.



Nia Adeogun

Adeogun is a junior majoring in kinesiology with a minor in molecular and cellular biology. Adeogun's goal is to apply to a physician assistant school with the intent to matriculate in 2026. Her aspiration to be a PA comes from the desire to give back to the communities that have helped shape who she is today. Her pursuit was solidified this past summer as she had the opportunity to shadow in various specialties through Northwestern Hospital's Pre-PA Internship. The experience was priceless and an incredible chance to see the inner workings of the field at such an early stage in her career.

Adeogun is an EMT and is in the process of obtaining her phlebotomy certification to continue to bolster her hands-on experience. On campus, she can be found managing her chapter as the vice president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, volunteering with Eastern Illinois Foodbank or in the ADAPTLab as an undergraduate research assistant under Associate Professor Shannon Mejía.



Ava Hendershott

After graduating, Hendershott plans to pursue a doctorate of occupational therapy. She hopes to work with children with disabilities, or with the aging population in an in-patient setting. Hendershott also hopes to conduct research regarding assistive technology for the aging population, especially those with chronic conditions.

In her past two years at Illinois, Hendershott has volunteered at Disability Resources & Educational Services where she works with a PT and OTA, a DPT intern and students with different physical disabilities. She is also a research intern in the Disability Participation and Quality of Life Lab, in which she helps plan events and create a website to provide tools for advancing disability related research. She plans to be an Anatomy and Physiology Lab assistant next semester.

Hendershott was a BEST Scholar her freshman year, is a current James Scholar and has been a multiple-time Dean's List honoree. In her free time, she enjoys crocheting, traveling and spending time with friends and family.

William H. Creswell Jr. Graduate Student Award

This award honors a long-time faculty member and head of the former Department of Health and Safety Studies. Dr. William Creswell (1920–2001) was one of the first researchers to study the health hazards of smoking and authored the well-regarded School Health Practice. The Creswell Award provides financial support to community health graduate students who excel academically, participate in professional organizations and demonstrate potential leadership in the field of health education, health promotion and/or public health. It is funded by contributions from the Creswell family, colleagues and friends.



Vaishnavi Sridharan

Sridharan is a Ph.D. candidate working in the Health Promotion and Rehabilitation Laboratory with Associate Professor Chung-Yi Chiu. She plans to complete her Ph.D. in 2025 and pursue a career in academia.

During her master's training at Loughborough University, Sridharan gained hands-on experience working with athletes, providing performance support and game analysis. At Illinois, she has expanded her expertise to learn research skills including physiological data collection using wearables, fitness assessments, EEG and qualitative research under the mentorship of Associate Professor Chiu. She has received generous support from the department for conference attendance and travel and funding from the Behavioral Health Networking Group to attend the 101st Annual Conference of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine.

Beyond academia, Sridharan actively facilitates Mindfulness Discussion Group as part of the Education Justice Project at Danville Correctional Center and engages in psychoeducation on mental health topics, including anxiety and suicide prevention, through Inner Voices Social Issues Theater.

F. Patricia Cullen Scholarship

Dr. Patricia Cullen (1923–2007) was a member of the University of Illinois physical education family for 10 years, earning a Ph.D. in 1964. She went on to a position at San Diego State University, retiring as a professor emerita in 1985. Supported through an estate provision, this scholarship provides financial support and recognition to undergraduate students in the Department of Health and Kinesiology.



Fatima Pantoja Lara

Pantoja Lara is a sophomore studying I-Health and plans to graduate in 2027. She was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, and at the age of 12, moved to the United States to continue her education. She plans to continue her studies in medical school soon after graduation. Advocating for minority populations is very important to her, and serving the Hispanic community has sparked her interest in attending medical school. She is currently working as an undergraduate research assistant in Professor Wendy Rogers' Human Factors and Aging Lab. Some of her previous duties have involved finding the best recruitment methods for older adults of minority populations. She is also a volunteer at Carle Foundation Hospital in the pediatrics department. In her free time, she enjoys drawing—both traditionally and digitally—and spending some time in the library.

T. K. Cureton Physical Fitness Research Award

Dr. Thomas Cureton (1901–92), often referred to as the “father of physical fitness,” was an internationally renowned scientist who played a crucial role in the development of the fitness movement in the United States. The T.K. Cureton Physical Fitness Research Award is supported by gifts made by Dr. Cureton’s wife Portia and friends and alumni of the department. Portia Cureton (1917–2010) received a master’s degree in kinesiology from the University of Illinois in 1945.



Casey KY Lim

Lim is an international student from Malaysia. From an early age, Lim has been fascinated by the intricate ways the human body functions, adapts and heals through stressors. His research aims to uncover how biochemical interactions influence disease progression, and overall physiological resilience, an endeavor that bridges the gap between molecular science and tangible health outcomes. During his undergraduate program, he performed experiments looking at inflammatory bowel disease in murine models and had extensive cell culture experience. This strong foundation led Lim to become a graduate research assistant and enhanced critical skills imperative for being a successful and impactful researcher. His ultimate career goal is to translate scientific discoveries into real-world applications. Whether through developing novel therapeutics or refining treatment strategies, Lim seeks to contribute to solutions that improve human health. The prospect of working on innovative research that directly benefits individuals, particularly those facing debilitating conditions, drives his commitment to this field.

Delores Curtis Professional Development Award

The Delores Curtis Professional Development Award supports the growth and advancement of undergraduate students in the Department of Health and Kinesiology. Established by Delores Curtis, this award encourages students to engage in lifelong learning by attending professional conventions and conferences. By providing financial assistance, the award helps students expand their knowledge, build professional networks and explore career opportunities. Curtis's vision ensures that students gain valuable experiences that enhance their education and prepare them for future success in the field.



Klayton Donoghue

Donoghue is an undergraduate student majoring in kinesiology with a concentration in physical education. Prior to attending the University of Illinois, Donoghue earned an associate degree from Illinois Central College while serving active duty in the United States Air Force as an Aircrew Egress Systems Specialist. Since arriving in the Champaign-Urbana community, he has spent much of his time serving as a youth sports instructor for programs such as “Iddy Biddy Baseball” and “Mini Dribblers” with the Champaign Park District, as well as the youth wheelchair basketball program with the Stephens Family YMCA. Donoghue has also recently had the opportunity to serve as a camp counselor at Camp Webber, which is an adaptive sports camp near Anchorage, Alaska, for youth who are blind and visually impaired. Following graduation, he plans to be a physical education teacher at Garden Hills Academy in Champaign, and to also continue his own education by attending graduate school.

Helga M. Deutsch Scholarship

Dr. Helga Deutsch (1938–93) served the Department of Kinesiology for more than 20 years as a professor, assistant department head and director of undergraduate studies. Established in 1994 by her family, the scholarship recognizes kinesiology students who have shown scholarly merit and professional promise.



Collin Janusz

Janusz plans to complete a B.S. in Health and Kinesiology in May 2026. This upcoming summer Janusz will be applying to physical therapy programs. He is interested in physical therapy because he played various sports growing up and would frequently have his injuries rehabilitated through physical therapy. He hopes to help people the same way his physical therapists have helped him. Currently, Janusz volunteers with Beckwith students and the wheelchair track team at Disability Resources & Educational Services. Here he helps the students through their exercise routines and sanitizes workout equipment. He is also involved with Illini Service Dogs on campus. This is a club that trains mobility service dogs and places them to an individual with a physical disability for free.

Janusz is a recipient of the Presidential Award Scholarship and is a James Scholar student. In his spare time, he enjoys playing sports, going for bike rides, cooking and hanging out with friends.



Jackie O'Brochta

O'Brochta plans to receive her Bachelor of Science degree in Kinesiology and Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance this coming May. Following graduation, O'Brochta will be attending a Doctor of Physical Therapy program where she will learn the necessary skills required to become a successful physical therapist.

O'Brochta works as a pre-health ambassador with the Career Center, where she helps students navigate their own journey on the pre-health track. O'Brochta is also named a James Scholar student with the College of Fine and Applied Arts, where she previously served as an advisory board member. She is a proud recipient of the Talented Student Tuition Award, which has been presented to her on behalf of the Department of Dance across all eight semesters.

Outside of school, O'Brochta enjoys weightlifting, trying new Thai food restaurants, watching college gymnastics and going on long walks.

Beulah Drom Scholarship

Beulah Drom (1904–2003), a kinesiology faculty member from 1947–70, was known by her students as the “teacher of teachers.” She was a pioneer in the field of body mechanics and movement. In recognition of her significant contributions, her colleague Dr. Alyce Cheska established the scholarship, which is supported through gifts made by friends and alumni.



Zara Mkrtchian

Mkrtchian plans to complete a dual degree with a B.S. in Community Health and a B.S. in Psychology this May. After she graduates, she plans to gain some work experience as a community health worker or research coordinator to prepare herself before returning to university and continuing her education towards a master's degree in epidemiology or biostatistics.

Mkrtchian's passion for research stems from the fortunate opportunities offered by the university. She is currently a research assistant for the Laboratory for Emotion and Stress Assessment, as well as the Developing Equitable Minds Lab. In addition, she works as the program assistant for Student Wellness at Campus Recreation, which has helped her develop a great passion for community outreach.

In her free time, Mkrtchian loves to weight lift and hopes to compete in a bodybuilding competition one day. She also loves to cook and share meals with her friends, travel the world and try new foods all around.



Samantha Pagnucci

Pagnucci is a sophomore pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences with a concentration in behavior change. After earning her degree, she plans to obtain a Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies and work in either pediatrics or dermatology.

She works as a CNA in an assisted living facility, helping residents with activities of daily living. Pagnucci also volunteers in the Disability and Movement Biomechanics Lab, researching how physical activity affects shoulder musculoskeletal health in wheelchair users. She serves as the volunteer chair for her medical fraternity, where she independently organizes events for members. Additionally, she tutors organic chemistry through the James Scholar program.

Pagnucci has been named to the Dean's List multiple times and is a James Scholar. She has also been awarded the John O. Whitney and Don and Denise Mayer scholarships. In her free time, she enjoys long runs, listening to music and playing sports.

Aurelio E. “Joe” Florio Scholarship

Providing financial support to undergraduate students in community health who demonstrate academic excellence and potential leadership as health educators, the scholarship is supported by the Florio family, alumni and friends. Professor Florio (1910–2001), a faculty member in community health for 40 years, was a well-regarded leader in traffic and driver education safety programs and served as the first president of the Illinois Driver Education Association.



Alec Painter

Painter is pursuing a degree from the college of Applied Health Sciences and plans to graduate in May 2026. He then plans to become a certified physician's assistant, most likely in the field of pediatrics. He loves helping people and making a difference in the lives of those around him.

He has been a member of the Champaign-Urbana community his whole life, and he hopes to be able to provide medical care in the future to the region that has helped him get to where he is today. He currently works as a medical assistant at Christie Clinic in the pediatrics department, where he works alongside Dr. Michael Palazzolo, a great mentor and friend.

Ralph Geeseman Scholarship for Veterans

Ralph Geeseman provided 39 years of service to the University of Illinois Department of Kinesiology. He was proud of his service to the College and of his service in the United States Navy. Recipients of this scholarship have either served in or are training for a branch of the U.S. military, or are dependents of active members of the military.



Daniel Banda

Banda is a community health major at the University of Illinois. Originally from Illinois, he earned an Associate of Arts from Joliet Junior College before transferring to the University of Illinois. Banda is a dedicated member of the Illinois Army National Guard, where he served in Operation Spartan Shield in the Middle East. Upon his return, he secured a slot in the Basic Leadership Course, preparing for promotion to sergeant. His passion for healthcare stems from his combat lifesaver certification and the influence of his sister, a registered nurse. Banda's career goals include becoming a healthcare consultant or hospital administrator, focusing on improving accessibility and outcomes for underserved populations. He is also the recipient of the International Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship, which he had used to study Public Health in Italy and gain insights into global healthcare practices.



Maria Boyce

Ralph Geeseman Scholarship for Veterans continued

Boyce is planning to graduate a year early with her B.S. in Community Health with a concentration in Health Planning and Administration and a business minor. She is passionate about making a difference in the healthcare industry and hopes to pursue a career in healthcare consulting to create meaningful change.

Growing up in a military family, Boyce has moved all over the world due to her father's service in the U.S. military. This scholarship holds deep personal significance for her, as it represents the sacrifices her family has made and the resilience and adaptability she has developed along the way.

Kathleen M. Haywood Graduate Kinesiology Scholarship Fund

Dr. Kathleen Haywood (Physical Education, Ph.D., 1976) is a retired professor and associate dean emeritus who is an internationally known scholar of motor development. She has authored several books and articles on the subject, and has also published extensively on the instruction of archery. Established in 2022 by Dr. Haywood, the scholarship is awarded to graduate students majoring in kinesiology or physical education.



Revati NR Malani

Malani is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Originally from India, she began her career as a rank-holding physical therapist, gaining clinical experience in hospitals and diabetic clinics. This work sparked her passion for research, particularly the role of early physical interventions in health outcomes.

Her master's thesis explored how mind-body exercises influence cognition in adults, deepening her commitment to promoting brain health through evidence-based interventions. Now, her doctoral research focuses on identifying early markers of cognitive decline in middle-aged adults, aiming to develop targeted strategies for long-term cognitive well-being.

With a commitment to bridging the gap between research and clinical practice, Malani strives to create accessible, evidence-based interventions for aging populations. She is proud to contribute to the department's diverse academic community and to be recognized for her achievements.



**Madelyn Rose
Szamocki**

Kathleen M. Haywood Graduate Kinesiology Scholarship Fund continued

Szamocki began her Kinesiology Ph.D. at the University of Illinois in Spring 2025, co-advised by Professor Steve Petruzzello and Assistant Professor Jack Senefeld.

Building on her B.S. and M.S. in Kinesiology from Illinois, Szamocki has demonstrated leadership as the youngest member of the Illinois Fire Service Institute research team. She led the development of the Firefighter Wellness Program, applying her expertise in physical training, nutrition education, and psychological resilience research to improve the well-being of over 200 recruit firefighters.

Recognizing the importance of preparing future professionals, Szamocki developed Tactical Strength and Conditioning, a kinesiology course she will teach in fall 2025. The course provides upperclassmen and graduate students with hands-on experience in designing strength and conditioning programs for firefighter populations.

Szamocki's vision extends beyond research and education. Upon completing her Ph.D., she aims to establish the nation's first Firefighter Wellness Center, a service-oriented initiative grounded in translational research in fitness, nutrition, sleep, mental health and spiritual well-being.

Howards S. Hoyman Student Award

Dr. Howard “Mike” Hoyman was a premier health educator whose major interest was curriculum at the secondary school level. During his long career at the University of Illinois, he served as the first head of the Department of Health and Safety Studies and developed the Four Cycle Curriculum for health instruction (a major contribution to its theory and practice). The Hoyman Student Award was established by Dr. Hoyman’s wife, Annelis, alumni and friends to provide financial support to graduate students in community health.



Rafael Guimarães

Guimarães is a Ph.D. student in Community Health, expected to complete his degree in May 2026. He aims to pursue an academic career as a researcher and professor, focusing on developing digital technologies for public health, particularly nutrition apps for managing chronic diseases among food-insecure populations.

Currently, Guimarães coordinates the Aging and Diversity Lab, led by Associate Professor Andiaara Schwingel. His research includes a qualitative study in Brazil on the challenges food-insecure individuals face when using health apps, conducted under the mentorship of Teaching Assistant Professor Kristen DiFilippo. He also studies digital innovation, exploring how technology can improve access to healthy foods for food-insecure populations.

Guimarães holds degrees in Nutrition and Mechatronic Engineering, an MBA in Project Management, and a master’s degree in Health Technologies. He was a Lemann Foundation fellow and has experience with teaching and mentoring undergraduate students. In his free time, Guimarães practices triathlon and enjoys books and movies.

Laura J. Huelster Award

Laura Huelster (1906-86) was a faculty member in the Department of Physical Education for Women for 43 years, including 17 years as department head. Dr. Huelster was known for her leadership in changing the role of women in physical education. The Laura J. Huelster Award—which supports graduate students in kinesiology who are working on their dissertations—was created to honor Dr. Huelster's many contributions to the University of Illinois and the profession.



Youngjoon Kim

Kim is on track to complete his Ph.D. in Kinesiology in May 2025. He plans to pursue a career as a teacher educator committed to preparing future physical educators and advocating for the physical education workforce. His career goal is to understand and enhance teacher motivation, which will impact teachers' positive workplace perceptions, effortful engagement with teaching, and ultimately student motivation and learning.

Prior to starting the Ph.D. program, Kim worked as a full-time elementary physical education teacher back in South Korea. At Illinois, he currently serves as the graduate lab lead in the Pedagogical Kinesiology Laboratory coordinated by his advisor, Associate Professor Kevin Andrew Richards.

Kim has been actively engaged in quantitative and qualitative collaborative research concerning teachers' socialization and workplace experiences, psychological well-being and professional identity. Furthermore, Kim has served for two years as the graduate student representative for AERA SIG 93: Research on Learning & Instruction in Physical Education.



Sahel Moein



**Nicolette
Smith-Suchon**

Moein is a Ph.D. student in the Disability, Participation, and Quality of Life Research Laboratory with Associate Professor Laura Rice. She plans to complete her Ph.D. in kinesiology in 2027, aspiring to secure a faculty position focused on teaching and research in kinesiology and rehabilitation science. Moein's master's thesis, published in *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, developed and validated a mobile health intervention for fall prevention for people who use wheelchairs/scooters by a co-design approach.

Her academic achievements include the President's Research in Diversity Travel Award for her 2024 presentation at the American Occupational Therapy Association Conference and the HK Kathleen Haywood Award in 2024. A licensed general practitioner in Iran, Moein brought a clinical perspective to her behavioral research. In her free time, she enjoys cooking, reading and spending time with family.

Smith-Suchon is a Ph.D. candidate working in the Pedagogical Kinesiology Laboratory. She plans to complete her Ph.D. in 2025 and pursue a career as a physical education teacher educator. Her research focuses on faculty socialization, gender dynamics and the integration of social-emotional learning in Physical Education Teacher Education programs. Committed to advancing inclusive and intervention-based research in kinesiology, Smith-Suchon aims to support faculty mentorship, professional development, and teacher preparation. Upon graduation, she will serve as a professor in physical education, preparing future educators and contributing to the evolution of PETE.

In her free time, Smith-Suchon loves spending time with her husband and their two dogs, visiting her extended family and practicing hot yoga.

Burris F. Husman Scholarship

Dr. Burris F. Husman completed a Bachelor's degree in the College of Education and a Master's degree in physical education from the College of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Illinois. Dr. Husman retired as a professor from the University of Maryland where his research interests included fitness and physical education programs. This scholarship fund was established to assist undergraduates in the College of Applied Health Sciences. The recipients demonstrate interest in fitness and physical education through a record of scholarship, experience and service in this area.



Luke Bellizzi

Bellizzi is from Algonquin, Illinois. Bellizzi is a transfer student who went to Elgin Community College for two years prior to attending the University of Illinois. He plans to graduate in May of 2027 with a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology, and he will be getting a certification in physical education as well. Bellizzi volunteered for two years at his alma mater high school as an assistant baseball coach for the varsity team where he grew his passion for sports and helping out kids. His goal is to get his master's degree, and eventually become an administrator with the goal of becoming an athletic director for a high school or college.

H.E. “Hek” Kenney Memorial Award

Alumnus Harold E. “Hek” Kenney (1904–72) was a highly regarded coach, teacher and administrator in physical education with a career that spanned four decades at the University of Illinois. With support from family members, colleagues and friends, this award recognizes outstanding students in the Department of Health and Kinesiology.



Luke Bellizzi

Bellizzi is from Algonquin, Illinois. he is a transfer student who went to Elgin Community College for two years prior to attending the University of Illinois. Bellizzi plans to graduate in May of 2027 with a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology, and he will be getting a certification in physical education as well. Bellizzi volunteered for two years at his alma mater high school as an assistant baseball coach for the varsity team where he grew his passion for sports and helping out kids. His goal is to get his master's degree, and eventually become an administrator with the goal of becoming an athletic director for a high school or college.



Harrison Guo

H.E. "Hek" Kenney Memorial Award continued

Guo plans to graduate with a bachelor's degree in kinesiology by May 2027. He plans to continue his education after his bachelor's and to pursue physical therapy school.

Guo works in the Pedagogical Kinesiology Laboratory under Associate Professor Kevin Richards with the "Imposter Syndrome Project." Additionally, Guo is the community outreach chair for the Kinesiology Student Association, searching for volunteer opportunities within the University of Illinois community for the students in the RSO to get involved in. Some opportunities he has gotten KSA involved in are the EIU Foodbank, Future So Bright 5K and the ARC blood drive.

During his summers, Guo shadows orthopedic clinics and offices near his hometown of Forsyth, Illinois. He loves staying active in his free time, whether it's weightlifting, running or pickleball with his family and friends.

Kinesiology Scholarship

Recipients of the Kinesiology Scholarship show professional promise and academic merit. The scholarship is funded by generous alumni and friends of the kinesiology program.



Sydni Branch

Branch is an undergraduate student from the Chicago suburbs majoring in kinesiology with a minor in chemistry. Her plan is to continue her education in medicine, focusing on preventative care. Driven by her early exposure to health and science, she wants to contribute to making health care more accessible to those in underserved populations. Branch is a part of the American Medical Women's association, which was created for pre-health women to give them resources, community service opportunities and mentorship. Branch has dedicated her time as a student volunteer at Carle Sports Medicine clinic, as well as worked as a pharmacy technician at Carle Hospital. She has actively assisted in the Pedagogical Kinesiology Laboratory, focusing on the scholarship of teaching and learning. Additionally, Branch was able to partake in a study abroad experience in Italy to gain insight into all facets of the Italian public health care system.

Benjamin H. Massey Memorial Award

This award was established by the family of Dr. Benjamin Massey, who was a faculty member in the Department of Kinesiology from 1969 until his death in 1990. During his tenure he served as director of the Physical Fitness Research Laboratory and director of graduate studies, often helping his students financially. Through this endowment, Professor Massey's dedication to graduate students continues.



Diana Morales

Morales is a Ph.D. student in Kinesiology who expects to graduate in 2026. After completing her degree, she plans to pursue a career in research and teaching at a university.

She is currently working with Assistant Professor Susie Aguiñaga in the Health Equity and Aging Lab, where she studies brain health among Latinos. Her research focuses on non-pharmacological approaches to reducing the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

Morales has received several awards, including the Aspire Graduate College Fellowship, participation in the American College of Sports Medicine Leadership and Diversity Training Program, and the Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Fellowship. In her free time, she enjoys baking, going on scenic walks and spending time with her loved ones.



Shreya Verma

Verma is a third-year Ph.D. student in Kinesiology and a research assistant in the Neurocognitive Health Behavior Lab under the mentorship of Associate Professor Naiman Khan. Originally from India, she holds a B.Tech in Engineering and an M.S. in Biomedical Engineering and is deeply passionate about using advanced statistical and computational approaches in healthcare research. Her research explores the vascular underpinnings of brain health and applies machine learning to develop diet- and physical activity-based interventions for cognitive enhancement. She has been actively involved in data collection and analysis for both pediatric and adult studies and contributed to the development of a research proposal on predicting health outcomes using machine learning, which secured funding from the Personalized Nutrition Initiative. Verma aspires to a career in academia, where she aims to integrate computational methods and healthcare research to advance precision health interventions and improve brain function and overall well-being through data-driven strategies.

Floyd and Etta McAfee Award

This award supports undergraduate students in the College of Applied Health Sciences who demonstrate a commitment to multicultural issues. The McAfee award was created by the family of Floyd (PEM 1957) and Etta McAfee to honor their parents' 50th wedding anniversary and to recognize their parents' lifelong commitment to helping students reach their potential.



Samyla Williams

Williams plans to complete her B.S. in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences in May 2025 and wants to pursue a career as an obstetrician-gynecologist. She has an extensive understanding of medical racism and the history of mistreatment of Black women in the world of gynecology. She has a passion for maternal health and well-being and wants to decrease the rates of maternal mortality for Black women in the United States. During her time as a student, she has done research in Associate Professor Shannon Mejía's ADAPT Lab, worked as an intern for the McKinley Health Center, worked as a Jeffries Center Ambassador, volunteered in the Shelley Ambassador Program as well as volunteering at the Champaign Public Library, and took on a role as the Academic/Alumni Chair for the Mannie L. Jackson Illinois Academic Enrichment and Leadership Program. In her free time, she enjoys taking long walks, watching anime and drawing.

Pam and Betty Milchrist Scholarship

Dr. Pamela Milchrist (physical education BS, 1965; PhD, 1979) is a retired professor emeritus and higher education administrator. Early in her career, she spent two years in Thailand as part of the Peace Corps (1966–68) and also volunteered in Cambodian refugee camps (1980). These experiences provided a foundation of cross-cultural experiences that helped define her life's work. She established the scholarship in honor of her mother, Betty Milchrist, to support graduate students pursuing kinesiology Master's or Ph.D. degrees. Recipients are students who focus on physical activity and quality of life for aging populations. Preference is given to students who focus on cognitive health and/or social cognitive factors resulting from elderly participation in meaningful movement activities.



Jemimah O. Bakare

Bakare is a master's student set to graduate in May 2025 and plans to pursue a doctoral degree in community health, focusing on culturally inclusive nutrition interventions for aging populations.

Beyond her research, Bakare serves as a Volunteer Chair at ClarkLindsey Retirement Community, coordinating student volunteer activities to foster meaningful engagement with residents. She is also an executive board member of the African Student Organization.

In her free time, Bakare finds joy in simple things like sleeping, dancing and redesigning her space.

Roger Winfield Morse Memorial Scholarship

This scholarship was made possible by an estate gift from Catherine G. Morse in memory of Roger Winfield Morse, who graduated with a degree in physical education in 1934. The scholarship is awarded to students showing academic and professional promise.



Jihoon Choi

Choi is a doctoral student in kinesiology and plans to complete his Ph.D. by May 2026. His career goal is to pursue a tenure-track position in sport studies or sport media field.

Working with Associate Professor Emerita Synthia Sydnor and Teaching Assistant Professor Jesse Couture, his relevant work involves research on Korean popular culture and golf. Choi is researching sports media to understand the ways in which golf as a culture is being consumed. He uses qualitative and interpretive research methods to explore how sport is understood and influences contemporary society. In his free time, he enjoys cooking and spending time with his nine-year-old dog, Kimmy, who came with him from Korea.



**Brianna
DiFilippo**



Reese Patton

DiFilippo is a kinesiology major, planning to go to physical therapy school. She hopes to work in either athletics or pediatrics. DiFilippo is a member of the Kinesiology Student Association, the Illinois Chapter of Phi Chi, AHS Ambassadors and the James Scholar Honors Program. She is a dance teacher at a local studio, where she teaches varying ages of young girls in lyrical and jazz. In her free time, she enjoys attending Illinois sporting events, spending time outside and getting tea with friends.

Patton plans to complete her B.S. in Kinesiology and graduate in May of 2028. She aims to attend medical school after undergrad and specialize in orthopedic sports medicine to help athletes perform at their best.

Through various shadowing and mentoring opportunities, Patton has solidified her passion for medicine. This summer and fall, she plans to gain further experience in both medical and research fields. She has also enjoyed coaching and teaching children in youth sports.

In her free time, Patton loves spending time with family and friends, jamming out to Taylor Swift, and playing any sport she can find.

Ann E. Penstone Scholarship

The Ann E. Penstone Scholarship is a testament to alumna Anni Penstone's gratitude for her time at the University of Illinois. This prestigious scholarship recognizes and supports undergraduate and graduate students in the Department of Health and Kinesiology. Anni created the scholarship to enable future Illini who are willing to be challenged and work hard to realize all their potential.



Brandon Snipe

Snipe earned his undergraduate degree in community health and is currently completing his Master of Public Health before starting medical school. With experience in research, education and community service, he aims to bring a well-rounded perspective to medicine and advocate for progressive change as both a physician and public health professional. He is passionate about working with underserved communities and is specifically interested in improving access to mental health care for immigrant families navigating cultural barriers.

Snipe is currently part of the leadership team at Avicenna Community Health Center, where he supports the ShelterMed initiative. His background includes roles as a TA, tutor, CNA, and now dance instructor at Urbana Dance Company. Committed to integrating creativity into public health, he continues to dance and create content online, hoping to inspire others and build community. He values lifelong learning and looks forward to advocating for meaningful change.

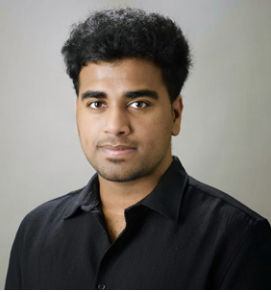
Carita Robertson Scholarship

The Carita Robertson Scholarship was established to recognize outstanding juniors or seniors majoring in physical education. This honor is presented to those who demonstrate the personal and professional involvement which Miss Robertson exemplified, as this award was established by The Alumnae Association of Physical Education for Women in honor of Carita Robertson, a '29 alumna of the University of Illinois.



Brina Arvanetes

Arvanetes is a third-year kinesiology student at the University of Illinois. She is an aspiring physical therapist applying to graduate schools this cycle. She was drawn to physical therapy after overcoming her own injury, and because her heart is drawn to helping others. Arvanetes wants to work in pediatrics because of her love for kids. She has gained hands-on experience as a rehabilitation aide in her hometown of Tinley Park, accumulating more than 300 hours of experience. Her favorite part of this job is building strong patient relationships. Here, she has seen firsthand the benefits of rehabilitation translate to the patients. On campus, Arvanetes works under Assistant Professor Rafael Tassitano in his Lifetime Physical Activity Research Lab, deepening her kinesiology foundation. She is also an active member of a Pre-Health Medical Fraternity and other student organizations, where she has taken on leadership roles. In her free time, she enjoys playing soccer, reading, playing music and spending time with friends and family.



Joel Emil



Ana Selzer

Carita Robertson Scholarship continued

Emil plans to complete his B.S. in Kinesiology in December 2025, with an ambition to pursue a career as a physical therapist, specializing in sports and pediatric neurology. He is passionate about helping individuals regain mobility and improve their quality of life. Emil works as a personal assistant at Beckwith Residential Support Services, where he supports students with physical disabilities by assisting with routines, transfers, and daily activities. He also volunteers at DRES, learning how physical therapists work with student-athletes with disabilities.

Emil has research experience as an undergraduate assistant in Associate Professor Chung-Yi Chiu's lab, studying the transition of student veterans to civilian life. He volunteers in Dr. Anna Arthur's Lab at Kansas Medical University, contributing to breast cancer research through the James Scholar Project. His research goal is to contribute to evidence-based approaches in physical therapy, particularly in improving rehabilitation strategies. Emil's academic achievements include receiving the James Scholar Award, Carol L. Chittenden Scholarship and Helga M. Deutsch Scholarship.

Selzer is a Ph.D. candidate in the Kinesiology program, completing the program in May. Working with Assistant Professor Susie Aguiñaga and Associate Professor Andara Schwingel, her work is surrounding community health workers' interactions with physical activity, and how to maximize training on health topics so it is also applied to their health behaviors. In the past, she received two grants to examine the sustainability of training CHWs in Brazil, her home country. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with friends, cooking, hiking and traveling.



**Sanjay
Shrestha**



**Thalia
Skoulikaris**

After earning his B.S. in Kinesiology with a minor in Business, Shrestha will attend Rosalind Franklin University's Doctor of Physical Therapy Program this summer. He aspires to be an orthopedic physical therapist because of its profound impact on improving people's daily lives. He is passionate about promoting a healthy lifestyle, working hands-on, and building meaningful patient relationships.

Currently, Shrestha works as an Undergraduate Anatomy & Physiology Teaching Assistant, helping students strengthen their understanding of the human body's inner workings. Throughout his time at Illinois, he served on the executive board of Pre-PT Club and as Philanthropy Chair of Phi Delta Theta Fraternity. He has also presented research on dietary interventions for elderly physical therapy patients and the effectiveness of virtual reality in stroke rehabilitation.

In his free time, Shrestha enjoys playing volleyball with his intramural teams and listening to music, especially while bartending at Brothers Bar & Grill. He loves traveling, exploring different cultures, and spending time with friends and family.

Skoulikaris is a junior on the Pre-Physical Therapy track, majoring in kinesiology and minoring in modern Greek. She plans to attend graduate school to become a physical therapist who specializes in sports medicine. In previous semesters, she shadowed at Athletico Physical Therapy in Champaign and the Greek American Nursing Home in Wheeling, Illinois. This semester, Skoulikaris volunteers with Disability Resources & Educational Services in their Wellness Gym where she works directly with University of Illinois athletes. She enjoys working with the athletic trainers, witnessing training and understanding the path to full strength and rehabilitation. With her background as a USA Gymnastics competitive gymnast, Skoulikaris is also a gymnastics coach and four-year certified lifeguard, lifeguarding at home and with Campus Recreation. She holds immense value in the power of athletics and the community it creates. Skoulikaris also keeps her Greek community close as a member of the Hellenic Student Association and Orthodox Christian Fellowship.

Karin A. Rosenblatt Community Health Graduate Scholarship

Dr. Karin Rosenblatt (1954–2021) was a longtime faculty member in the Department of Health and Kinesiology. Her research focused on environmental causes of gynecologic cancer and led to multiple publications and national presentations. She especially enjoyed teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The fund was established through a generous estate gift from Dr. Karin Rosenblatt to support graduate students in the field of community health.



Haeley Alaina Peters

Peters, originally from Dahlgren, Illinois, is a second-year Community Health Ph.D. student in the Department of Health and Kinesiology. She is a member of the Aging, Caregiving and Technology Lab, with research focusing on nutrition, dietary assessment and cultural inclusivity in healthcare. She plans to continue her research and pursue a career as a professor after graduation. Peters holds two bachelor's degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences with a concentration in Health and Diversity and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. She graduated with high honors and highest distinction. Before her graduate studies, she worked as a certified clinical medical assistant in various healthcare settings, including long-term care, plastic surgery and fertility.



Huaijin Xu

Xu is planning to complete her Ph.D. in Community Health by August 2026 and aspires to become a data scientist in the health sector, contributing to health promotion on a national and global scale.

Xu is a research assistant at Associate Professor Chung-Yi Chiu's Health Promotion and Rehabilitation Lab and is co-advised by Xiaotian Gao. Her research focuses on applying machine learning techniques to predict obesity among children and adolescents and assess suicide risk among military personnel and veterans.

Xu has been recognized multiple times as Teachers Ranked as Excellent by Their Students for both undergraduate and graduate courses. Her M.Sc. background in Kinesiology and Applied Statistics enables her to develop strong analytical skills while maintaining a deep appreciation for the clinical and interpersonal implications of health data. In her free time, she enjoys ice skating, composing music, singing, dancing and reading.



Sajib Zaman

Zaman is a Ph.D. student in Community Health, working under the mentorship of Associate Professor Chung-Yi Chiu. His research focuses on digital health interventions, AI-driven mHealth solutions, and behavioral science, aiming to enhance self-management and behavior change through intelligent health technologies. Before joining the University of Illinois, Zaman led multiple studies, including an mHealth intervention designed to improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health in Bangladesh. He is also actively involved in creating an AI-powered self-management app for individuals with multiple sclerosis, integrating adaptive journaling and behavioral tracking. Zaman represented AHS at the Global Young Scientists Summit 2025 in Singapore and has been listed multiple times on the Teachers Ranked as Excellent by Their Students list as a teaching assistant. He was also recognized by the Bangladesh Dental Society for achieving the highest academic scores in his Bachelor of Dental Surgery.

Robert L. Sprague Graduate Student Award

This award is supported through generous gifts made by Dr. and Mrs. Robert Sprague. Dr. Sprague joined the faculty in 1964 and retired after 36 years of service in 2000. This award recognizes academically strong graduate kinesiology students.



Emma McCabe

McCabe is a kinesiology student on track to complete her doctoral work in spring 2027. Her primary interest is in understanding the relations between mental health, physical activity, and cognition across the lifespan.

Before joining the University of Illinois, McCabe investigated lifestyle behaviors and mental health with student-athletes at Elon University and in patients with alcohol use disorder at the National Institutes of Health. Her current work with Associate Professor Naiman Khan seeks to understand the relation between mental health and physical activity over one calendar year in early adolescents aged 8 to 14 years. She has received funding from the Illinois Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance and will report her findings in 2026. She is also assisting with a physical activity and nutrition education intervention for children at risk for poverty.

In her free time, McCabe enjoys boxing, weightlifting, watching horror movies, and cuddling with her cat, Gerald.

Seward C. Staley Scholarship

This award is intended to support undergraduate students who are enrolled in a curriculum in kinesiology studying physical education. Scholarship recipients are selected on the basis of academic merit with priority given to those students who show a special interest in the field of physical education.



Julia Cox

Cox is a kinesiology major and demonstrates a strong commitment to both academic excellence and making a positive impact on the lives of others. Originally from Glen Carbon, Illinois, Cox is passionate about the study of human movement and its influence on health and well-being. She is a James Scholar honors student, reflecting her dedication to rigorous academics. Cox has gained valuable hands-on experience in Assistant Professor Shelby Keyes's lab, where she has deepened her understanding of kinesiology through research.

In addition to her academic pursuits, Cox actively invests in the lives of others through her role as a resident assistant, where she fosters community, supports her peers and encourages personal growth. Cox aspires to advance the field of kinesiology through innovative research and clinical practice while continuing to make a meaningful difference in individuals' health and quality of life.



Ian Zubrickas

Seward C. Staley Scholarship continued

Zubrickas is a freshman studying kinesiology. He is an ISSA-certified personal trainer and nutritional coach with a strong interest in fitness, health and research. His research focuses on designing a mobile health app to help professionals manage chronic diseases by connecting individuals with food pantries and other nutrition resources. Ian has worked as a personal trainer, lifeguard, and camp counselor, gaining experience in leadership, safety and client engagement. He also volunteers with a senior outreach program, providing companionship to older adults. He plans to pursue higher education, either in medical research or medical school, with the goal of integrating exercise science, nutrition and health care to improve patient outcomes.

Ronald G. and Patricia L. Stopka Scholarship

Ronald Stopka received his Bachelor's ('62) and Master of Science ('64) in physical education from the College of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Illinois. He and Patricia established this scholarship to support students in the College of Applied Health Sciences.



Julia Cox

Cox is a kinesiology major and demonstrates a strong commitment to both academic excellence and making a positive impact on the lives of others. Originally from Glen Carbon, Illinois, Cox is passionate about the study of human movement and its influence on health and well-being. She is a James Scholar honors student, reflecting her dedication to rigorous academics. Cox has gained valuable hands-on experience in Assistant Professor Shelby Keyes's lab, where she has deepened her understanding of kinesiology through research.

In addition to her academic pursuits, Cox actively invests in the lives of others through her role as a resident assistant, where she fosters community, supports her peers and encourages personal growth. Cox aspires to advance the field of kinesiology through innovative research and clinical practice while continuing to make a meaningful difference in individuals' health and quality of life.



Isha Patel

Patel is an advocate for preventative healthcare and health equity, set to graduate with a B.S. in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences in May 2025. Patel aspires to become a physician associate, hoping to work in a federally qualified health center to improve health outcomes for the underserved.

A leader in her community, Patel serves as a training coordinator for the Illini Medical Screening Society, where she empowers pre-health students with clinical skills and provides preventative healthcare screenings for underserved populations in Urbana and Champaign. She also contributes to patient-centered care as an intern in OSF Healthcare's Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation Department and as a patient safety ambassador in the Cardiac Medical Telemetry Unit and Outpatient Surgery Center.

Patel is an Illinois Commitment Scholar and has been recognized for her academic excellence as a seven-time Dean's List recipient. Beyond health care, she finds joy in playing badminton, journaling and painting.

Mariana Trekell Scholarship

This scholarship was established by Richard F. Schweig (Kinesiology, 1981) to honor his mentor Marianna Trekell (1926-2004), a faculty member in the Department of Physical Education. Professor Trekell was well known for her expertise in oral history research and the history of sport, teaching and mentoring countless students throughout her 30-year career.



Billy Braid

Braid will earn his B.S. in Kinesiology in May 2025 and plans to attend SIU School of Medicine to become a physician. He aims to build teams of health care specialists to provide holistic, patient-centered care, integrating exercise and nutrition as foundational approaches before considering more invasive treatments or medications when necessary.

At the University of Illinois, Braid was a leader in the Kinesiology Student Association, fostering student connections. His passion for exercise science led him to work as an undergraduate assistant in Associate Professor Nicholas Burd's Nutrition and Exercise Performance Lab. He also promoted health and fitness as a personal trainer and a member of the Exercise is Medicine Committee.

Outside academics, Braid enjoys the outdoors—hunting, fishing and hiking. He is currently training to crush a half-marathon Spartan Race this summer.

Agnes Radich Vidovic Award

Agnes Radich Vidovic received a B.S. in physical education from the University of Illinois in 1951. She taught physical education from 1952 to 1990 when she retired from teaching. Mrs. Vidovic has been an active member of the College of Applied Health Sciences and University of Illinois Alumni Boards throughout her career. The Agnes Radich Vidovic Award is presented to an outstanding junior or senior student in the Department of Health and Kinesiology who has shown scholarly merit and professional promise.



Jae'da Thompson

Thompson's career goal is to become a child/adolescent psychiatrist. She has seen so many people within her family and in her community experience so many different mental health challenges and she wants to play an active role in combating these issues. She currently works as a research assistant in Dr. Shardé Smith's African American Family Stress and Resiliency Lab on campus and is actively researching ways to address the mental health challenges that the African American community faces.

Thompson has a passion for community service and has had various experiences volunteering at Crisis Nursery, Wesley Food Pantry, Carle Foundation Hospital and Clark Lindsey. She also does a lot of community service through the Mannie L. Jackson Illinois Academic Enrichment and Leadership Program where she serves as president of their student advisory board. She is excited to continue this commitment to service in her future career.

Kenneth L. Watkin Scholarship

Dr. Kenneth Watkin was the founding Director of the Center on Health, Aging and Disability, a faculty member at the College of Applied Health Sciences, and also held appointments in the Beckman Institute and the College of Medicine before retiring in 2016. Dr. Watkin's research interests included the development of nanoparticles for drug delivery, imaging contrast agents for image guided therapy, and cyber-physical systems for health monitoring and therapy; high resolution 3-D multimodal brain imaging; and nanomedicine. This memorial scholarship was established by his wife, Dr. Tanya Gallagher, the former dean of the College of Applied Health Sciences.



Mary Chrisos

Chrisos is a community health major with a concentration in health administration and planning and a minor in business. She was inspired to go this route as she has a lifelong personal experience with the healthcare system. She plans to graduate in Dec. 2026 and hopes to work at a pediatric hospital in Chicago or Epic Systems.

This upcoming summer she is studying abroad in Italy to learn about the Italian health care system for three weeks. She hopes to get an internship at Lurie Children's or Northwestern Hospital this summer or next summer.

Apart from her academics, she is involved in many RSOs. Chrisos is in Future Healthcare Executives, Society of Women in Business, Phi Eta Sigma and Alpha Gamma Delta Sorority. In her free time she likes to cook, read and binge watch TV shows.

Edmund J. James Scholars

The Edmund J. James Scholars Program, named for the fourth president of the University of Illinois, is the honors program within the College of Applied Health Sciences. The program recognizes undergraduates who have achieved academic excellence and provides them with unique learning opportunities. The following students in the Department of Health and Kinesiology are 2024–25 James Scholars.

Community Health

Rachael Adewumi
Afnaan Afsar Ali
Shayna Andrews
Grace Antonesi
Jiayin Cai
Aileen Chesniak
Charlotte Conway
Victory Elekwachi
Eghonghon Eromosele
Matthew Franzen
Savannah Guo
Peyton Houser
Jubilee Kim
Jessica Krklus
Caitlyn Lam
Joyce Li
Estefania Linarez
Sofia Logacho
Rhianna Lovekamp
Zara Mkrtychian
Fiona O'Brien
Claire Osborn
Alec Painter
Ami Patel
Nishkaam Patel
Rudra Patel
Juliana Petrov
Addisyn Pettry
Nicole Piekarski
Heba Rashid
Litzzy Rodriguez
Mayela Rodriguez
Fernanda Romero
Jocelyn Salazar
Saanchi Sansare
Ray Scifres
Om Shukla
Asha Suresh
Aarya Thakkar

Anika Urbonas
Anna Vanisko
Suhasni
Venkatsubrahmmian
Noreen Vohra
Jadyn Walker
Emily Wang
Kanon Wilson
Dianne Winterbottom
Nitya Yelakanti
Nicole Zagone
Angela Vladimirova

Kinesiology

Fangyu Cao
Jacqueline O'Brochta
Samuel Adeoye
Alexis Anaya
Sophie Anderson
Sophia Bach
Cole Basden
Priscila Bedoy
Isabel Bemont
Carson Berg
Megan Berry
Katherine Bollman
Allison Braaten
Genavieve Braden
Sarah Bruch
Lydia Burger
Aubrey Cervantes
Gangyuan Chen
Rafia Choudhry
Jack Colgan
Logan Covolo
Julia Cox
Kevin Davy
Alexander Dekker
Tyson Dewey
Eesha Dhingra

Mia DiBraccio
Rachel Divan
Natalia Duarte
Anna Duda
Joel Emil
Colin Emsweller
Jillian Fanning
Gilberto Galindo
Charles Gentle
Maeve Geraghty
Shaun Gillespie
Dong-In Han
Matthew Hargrave
Nico Henley
Alex Hernandez
Avah Hitchcock
Fafali Hodogbey
Megan Houlihan
Stephanie Hu
River Hudon
Meagan Hughes
Collin Janusz
Claire Kakac
Ashley Kim
Angelina Kmiec
Juliana Knies
Lydia Kohlenberger
Sruja Konada
Katherine Kraft
Paige Lafferty
Janna Elyssa Laxamana
Alyssa Lopez
Kendell MacDonald
Maya Madej
Elizabeth Martinez
Caroline Martini
Elizabeth Matimore
Robert Mattas

Trent Matthews
Maggie May
Caroline McDevitt
Jenna Meisinger
Giselle Mejia
Lukas Moore
Alexander Moreno
Nicole Muench
Katherine Naveja
Abigail Nawa
Haley Neudorf-Alshanski
Alexandra Nita
Brianna Osmon
Niamh Parsons
Emily Paulus
Ella Phalen
Liam Potenberg
Grace Prange
Daniela Pule
Linda Ray
Audrey Rexford
Ariana Sanchez
Ximena Sanchez
Julianna Schenkel
Audrey Schissler
Clairece Seal
Sydney Shannon
Rihanna Shegog
Jakob Sheppelman
Silver Shore
Kira Skoufos
Thalia Skoulikaris
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Syed Ajmal
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Syed Sinan Anwar
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Caroline Wu
Elyssa Wuerffel
Haroon Yasir
Lorelie Yau
Pedro Young
Maxim Zagorski
Yu Zheng
Ella Zick
Lucy Ziemba

Additional Recognition

Master of Health Administration

MHA Applied Practice Experience Leadership Award

Kaylee Haff, Drew Toohill

Carle Health Administration Capstone Award

Kaylee Haff

Master of Science in Health Technology

Wendy A. Rogers Travel Award

Melissa Kuo, Araditta Iyer

HFES Design Competition Travel Grant

Melissa Kuo, Tian Qui, Chieh Wang

Healthcare Education, Research, and Innovation Foundation (HERIF) Scholars

Melissa Kuo, Amanda Graf

James K. and Karen S. McKechnie Fellowship in Applied Health Sciences

Araditta Iyer, Anna Mathew

Michael Vitoux Health Technology Scholarship

Chieh Wang

Master of Public Health

Spring 2024 Graduates

Outstanding Integrative Learning Experience

Devanshi Bhadola, Haven Elliott, Prasanna Vuyyuru, Tarjani Bhatt, Vishakha, Kacie Vlach

Summer 2024 Graduates

Outstanding Integrative Learning Experience

Kaiya Bernard, Sydney Goodman, Nisha Shiroom

Outstanding Applied Practice Experience

Will Maloney, Mary Clare Woodson

Fall 2024 Graduates

Outstanding Integrative Learning Experience

Sara Malik, Camryn Shirley

Outstanding Applied Practice Experience

Vishnu Jaisree Mohandas, Meghana Daliparthi

Doctor of Philosophy in Community Health

Carol L. Chittenden Fellowship in Kinesiology

Yao-Lin Tsai

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