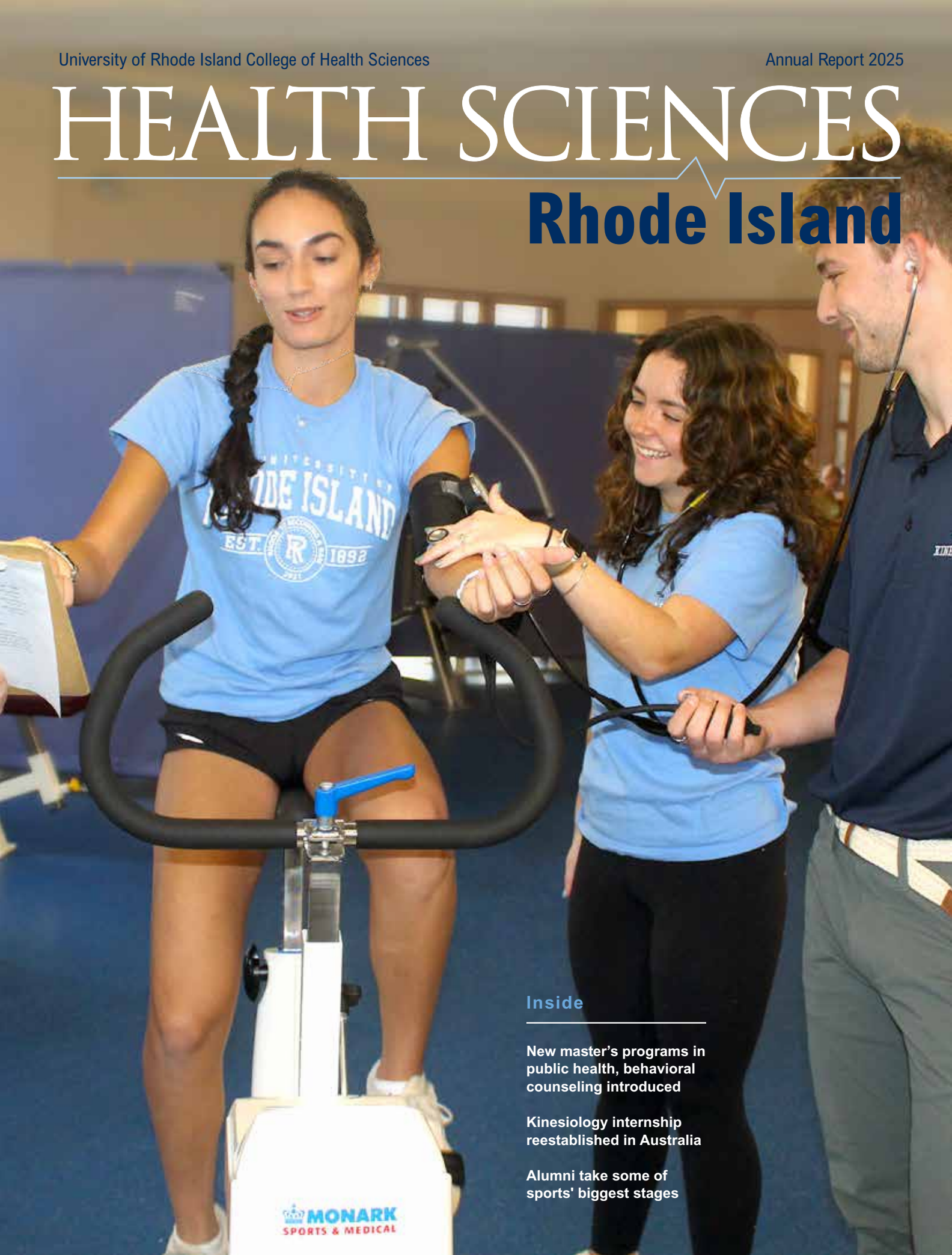
HEALTH SCIENCES

Rhode Island

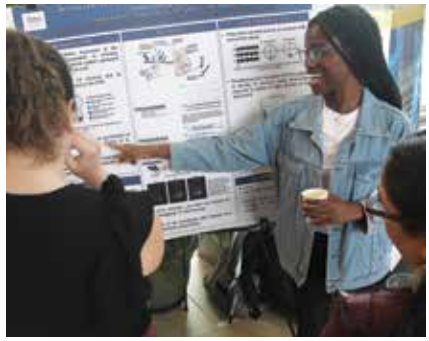


Inside

INSIDE

URI College of Health Sciences

This annual report includes the latest news and feature stories about our programs, research, faculty, staff, students, and alumni.



WHO WE ARE

VISION

We seek to be leaders in education, research, and outreach in the promotion of optimal health and wellness across the lifespan. We are committed to high-quality teaching that emphasizes evidence-based practices, engages students in multidisciplinary learning, and produces graduates who can effectively translate and apply knowledge in their professions. Our research seeks to develop innovative solutions to complex problems that improve the health and well-being of others. Recognizing that the best solutions occur when issues are approached from multiple perspectives, we value our diverse faculty and community, state, and national partnerships in both teaching and research. Through service and outreach, we strive to better the health, well-being and quality of life among members of the university community, the state of Rhode Island and beyond.

MISSION

The College of Health Sciences promotes the health and well-being of individuals, families, and populations in a diverse global society through excellence in teaching, research, and outreach.

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University of Rhode Island
College of Health Sciences

URIHealthSci

Patrick M. Vivier, Dean, College of Health Sciences, University of Rhode Island

Message From Dean Vivier

The myriad health challenges facing the world cannot be solved by one individual discipline. They require a broad interdisciplinary approach, leveraging the expertise of multiple health professionals working together to achieve the optimum outcome.

The URI College of Health Sciences—with a mission to promote "the health and well-being of individuals, families, and populations in a diverse global society through excellence in teaching, research, and outreach"—is uniquely positioned to meet these complex health challenges, leveraging the broad range of expertise in the college, including communicative disorders, gerontology, human development and family science, kinesiology, neuroscience, nutrition, physical therapy, psychology, and public health. We are happy to share with you the 2025 annual report for the College of Health Sciences, highlighting the incredible work of our faculty, staff and students, and alumni.

Our educational programs continue to expand, including the launch of our Master of Public Health program and the Master of Mental and Behavioral Health Counseling.

Our faculty have excelled in research, with highlights including national awards of excellence, and large NIH grants fueling dynamic research projects that have the potential to shape health and health policy locally, nationally, and even internationally.

> **"The URI College of Health Sciences is uniquely positioned to meet these complex health challenges, leveraging the broad range of expertise in the college."**
>
> *—Patrick M. Vivier*

Our faculty, staff, and students also directly serve the community in Rhode Island and around the world. Our students and alumni continue to excel in multiple industries, extending URI's impact around the globe.

Join me for a look back at 2025, an exciting year for the College of Health Sciences, as we look forward to all that will be accomplished in 2026 and beyond!

With thanks to our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners for all you do.

Dean Patrick M.Vivier, M.D., Ph.D.

BY THE NUMBERS 2025

Research by the Numbers

During the 2025 calendar year, the College of Health Sciences continued to demonstrate strong momentum in research and sponsored activity, reflecting the depth of faculty expertise and the growing national profile of our programs.

Faculty and staff submitted 81 proposals totaling $33.01 million, with the majority directed to federal sponsors (86.7%). Additional proposals were submitted to nonprofit organizations (10.7%) and the state of Rhode Island (2.6%).

Student Head Count by Major

Psychology	1,095
Kinesiology	595
Human Development and Family Science	304
Public Health	252
Communicative Disorders	213
Neuroscience	184
Dietetics	60
Nutrition	22

2,497
Undergraduate students across all programs

163
Doctoral candidates

163
Master's candidates

1,368
Students on Dean's List

422
Students with active internships

200+
Unique internship sites affiliated with college

885
Total degrees conferred (undergraduate and graduate)

95%
Graduates engaged in anticipated career six months after graduation

‘Cocoon Therapy’ for Pediatric Concussions May Have Adverse Effects

Active Rehab Now Recommended

Guidelines for treating pediatric concussions no longer recommend complete mental and physical rest—known as “cocoon therapy”—but many clinicians are still following outdated guidelines and advising patients to avoid sensory stimulation and activity following a concussion, according to Assistant Professor Nathan Cook, Ph.D. ’15, Department of Psychology.

“Active rehabilitation,” which involves gradually increasing the level of physical and cognitive activity and remaining engaged in typical daily activities and routines as much as possible, is the preferred treatment, says Cook. However, some health-care providers still advise the more cautious approach.

“Unfortunately, there is a knowledge-to-practice gap, leaving some clinicians slow to adapt to updated guidance,” Cook said. “I believe continuing to recommend ‘cocooning’ reflects habitual practice patterns or reliance on outdated guidelines rather than deliberate opposition to evidence.”

Cook suggested taking an approach that is overly cautious could have adverse effects. The professor recommends patients seek advice from providers who are well-versed on current, scientifically supported treatments. The official concussion guidelines currently include:

- Continuing typical activities of daily living.
- Engaging in aerobic exercise below the level that would provoke symptoms, such as light walking or pedaling a stationary bicycle.
- Gradually increasing exercise intensity as symptoms improve.

Assistant Professor Nathan Cook, Ph.D. ’15, Department of Psychology

Study Shows Physical Activity Can Help Manage ADHD

Top left: Assistant Professor Nicole Logan, Department of Kinesiology

ADHD can impact many common childhood milestones and cognitive processes, but studies by Assistant Professor Nicole Logan have shown that physical activity can be beneficial for the development of such cognitive processes, particularly in children who may have room to improve in those areas.

The Department of Kinesiology professor is examining the association between various levels of physical activity and neurocognitive functioning in all children, particularly those with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder who might struggle with daily executive functioning skills. She and her team—including students and communicative disorders professors Vanessa Harwood and Alisa Baron—work with children ages 6 to 17 with and without ADHD, who visit her lab for two visits. First, they take standardized academic achievement tests—reading, math, oral achievement—and a physical fitness test on a treadmill. The participants receive a smartwatch to record their physical activity, intensity of activity, and time spent being physically active.

A week later, the children complete cognitive tasks while wearing an electroencephalogram net to measure neuroelectric brain activity. Participants are assessed on cardio respiratory fitness, physical activity, body composition, strength, language and academic development, and mental health. Logan's study aims to develop physical activity interventions to help stimulate cognitive development and inform the next guidelines from the federal Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. New interventions could potentially supplement the use of ADHD medications.

Link Between ADHD, Alcohol Use Risks Examined

Young adult drinkers with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder are at increased risk for experiencing alcohol-related problems and developing alcohol use disorder compared to non-ADHD peers. However, it is unclear why, as research supports that they drink less than or equivalent to non-ADHD peers.

Associate Professor Amy Stamates, Department of Psychology, is studying this discrepancy to find out why and to identify opportunities to tailor prevention and intervention approaches aimed at reducing alcohol-related risks for young adults with ADHD, thanks to a five-year Research Scientist Development Award (KO1) from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, a division of the National Institutes of Health.

Stamates will assess individuals in the laboratory and in their natural environments to study associations between executive functioning, craving, and alcohol-related behaviors. Young adult drinkers will visit her lab three times over a one-year period to examine their conscious decision-making and behaviors involving alcohol. Each lab session is followed by 17 days of ecological momentary assessments, during which participants will record their alcohol use and any associated problems they encounter, including dangerous behaviors like driving after drinking. During this period, they will also record their experiences, social settings, emotions, and involuntary cravings.

Associate Professor Amy Stamates Department of Psychology

The study's aims include examining the impact of ADHD on executive function and alcohol use, cravings, and associated problems, and determining how they change in people with and without ADHD. Stamates also aims to identify predictors like social settings that could heighten risks for those with ADHD.

> "The research seeks to address knowledge gaps, with the goal to tailor prevention and intervention approaches."
>
> — *Amy Stamates*

Seeking To Better Understand Suicide and Alcohol Use Disorder

Decades of research have highlighted the strong connection between alcohol use disorder and suicidal behavior, determining that the likelihood of a suicide attempt is as much as 37 times higher when an individual is under the influence of alcohol. But research has not shed light on the precise timing of suicidal risk in relation to alcohol use and what it is about alcohol use that increases that risk.

Psychology Professor Nicole Weiss aims to address those limitations in a study funded by a $3.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Weiss is recruiting 300 people with an alcohol use disorder who are preparing to be discharged from residential treatment facilities. Study participants will wear an alcohol sensor called the BACtrack Skyn, which measures alcohol content in sweat. Participants will wear the device for 30 days, while it records alcohol consumed, rate of absorption, and intoxication level.

Participants will receive brief surveys on an app multiple times each day to record their experiences, including cravings for alcohol, stress level, emotions, and any instances of suicidal thoughts or actions. That information will be combined with data from the BACtrack Skyn to determine how long after drinking an individual experiences any escalation in suicidal ideation or behavior and at what volume of alcohol, pace of drinking, and level of intoxication the risk occurs. Weiss aims to create algorithms of risk to guide when treatment may be needed.

Left: Professor Nicole Weiss, Department of Psychology

"Often, individuals and providers aren't aware of the risk until it's too late. So perhaps there's an opportunity to increase awareness that risk is on the verge, giving them an opportunity to intervene."

— *Nicole Weiss*

"Often, individuals and providers aren't aware of the risk until it's too late," Weiss said. "So perhaps there's an opportunity to increase awareness that risk is on the verge, giving them an opportunity to intervene."

Professor To Help Build R.I. Overdose Research Infrastructure

Psychology Professor Nicole Weiss will support research to combat the ongoing opioid epidemic throughout the region after being named director of the Community Engaged Research Core of Rhode Island Hospital's Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) on Opioids and Overdose.

COBRE brings together leaders from institutions across Rhode Island to support the research needed to treat and prevent opioid misuse and overdose. The goal is to build research infrastructure and provide services to early-stage investigators to support the recruitment and retention of vulnerable and underserved individuals as research participants. The core also aims to promote the importance of community engagement with the goal of developing more robust, rigorous, and competitive research projects.

Weiss will work on the overall operation and fiscal management of CERC; provide administrative and financial support to COBRE investigators; develop a mentoring program to support COBRE project leaders in achieving research independence; and generally help establish research processes that lead to comprehensive outcomes and involve those individuals the research aims to impact.

Alum Studies Disparities in Treatment for Veterans With Opioid Use Disorder

Military veterans often experience distinct health issues and disparities that can heighten their vulnerability to opioid use. Yet despite the heightened risk, nearly 60% of veterans with opioid use disorder do not receive effective treatment.

While medications like buprenorphine are readily available to treat OUD, their use among veterans is low. Stigma has been identified as a barrier to medication treatment, impacting both treatment decisions and patient experiences. Rachel Girard, M.A. '24, a recent doctoral student in psychology, studied the stigma factors that affect medication treatment access and utilization among veterans and how stigma may influence clinicians' treatment decisions.

Below:
Rachel Girard, M.A. '24, a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology

Girard's study, funded by a Predoctoral Individual National Research Service Award (F31 grant) from the National Institutes of Health, examines data from a sample of Veterans Health Administration physicians who have prescribed buprenorphine to examine clinician characteristics, attitudes, and prescribing practices. The data includes interviews from a sample of veterans who suffer with OUD exploring the barriers they face.

Study Examines Speech Perception in Parents of Children with Autism

Children with autism often process audiovisual cues differently than their peers, often refraining from making direct eye contact or focusing intently on a speaker's mouth. Direct relatives of people with autism sometimes display similar traits, in a milder form.

While the broad autism phenotype—mild autistic characteristics or behaviors in relatives of people with autism—has been studied extensively in siblings, few studies exist on parents, prompting communicative disorders Professors Alisa Baron and Vanessa Harwood, to fill that gap.

Harwood and Baron use eye-tracking technology to determine subtle differences in where participants tend to look when observing someone speak. That technology is combined with electroencephalogram (EEG) sensors that monitor tiny differences in the neurons that fire in the brain when looking at a speaking face.

"We learn by looking at a speaker's mouth and integrating it with what we hear," Harwood said. People with autism "don't gaze the same way at the eyes and mouth. This is one theory why kids with autism might not develop language at the same levels as neurotypical kids."

Baron and Harwood examine differences in how the brain processes subtle aspects of speech to gain a better understanding of the broad autism phenotype. Studying direct relatives can help add to the knowledge base around the autism spectrum, giving researchers a wider look at the condition, the characteristics of which may be displayed in more people than researchers and clinicians realize.

Associate Professor Alisa Baron, left, Associate Professor Vanessa Harwood, right, Department of Communicative Disorders

Study Explores Disparities in Obesity Treatment for Hispanic-Latino Communities

Hispanic-Latino individuals experience some of the highest obesity rates in the U.S. (45.6%) compared to other ethnic groups yet have far lower rates of metabolic and bariatric surgery (15% compared to 70%, respectively). A doctoral student's study examined why, identified sociocultural factors, aimed to improve understanding of obesity health-care access and develop culturally relevant educational materials.

Viviane Fornasaro-Donahue, M.S. '12, Ph.D. '25, a dietitian at The Miriam Hospital who earned her doctorate in behavioral psychology in fall 2025, spoke directly with study participants recruited through community partners in Providence to understand their perspectives on obesity and obesity-related care. She explored potential barriers to accessing treatment and helped inform the community about available obesity treatments to improve their health. Her findings may offer insights on opportunities to enhance patient-provider communication regarding obesity.

Viviane Fornasaro-Donahue, M.S. '12, Ph.D. '25

Funded by awards from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, The Miriam Hospital, and URI, the study highlights the effectiveness of MBS on treating obesity, which only about 1% of eligible individuals undergo, said Fornasaro-Donahue, who worked with Ceren Gunsoy, assistant professor, on the study.

Homelessness Rates Vary Sharply by Race

The prevalence of homelessness varies across communities by race, with Black communities experiencing disproportionately higher rates of homelessness, according to research in the URI Department of Public Health. While all racial groups are hampered by a lack of affordable housing, Black and Latine residents face additional obstacles in accessing housing.

Assistant Professor Molly Richard, Department of Public Health

Local community leaders should note the racial disparities and acknowledge that racialized conditions influence the prevalence of homelessness, according to Assistant Professor Molly Richard, in the Department of Public Health. Her paper, "Homelessness and Race: The Impact of Structural Conditions on Black, White, and Latine Homelessness," was published in the national journal, *Social Problems*.

Higher rental prices, income inequality, and race-specific employment rates affect homelessness rates, Richard notes. Some key findings include:

- Black communities experience homelessness at a rate nearly four times higher than the average—63 people per 10,000 residents, compared with the overall average of 17 per 10,000 residents.
- Even in places not known for large homeless populations, Black people face disproportionately high rates, even when compared to areas with higher homeless populations.
- Higher rental costs are associated with Black, Latine, and white homelessness, underscoring that homelessness is a housing problem across racial groups.
- Other structural conditions—income inequality, poverty, employment—also factor into homelessness rates, but they vary by race.

Professor Brings Pediatric Feeding Expertise to URI

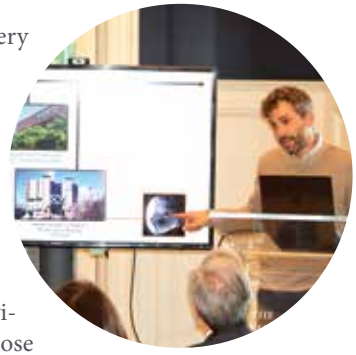
Assistant Professor Meg Simione, Department of Communicative Disorders, shares the research she has conducted on assessing and treating age-related feeding development and disorders.

Before joining the Department of Communicative Disorders in 2025, Assistant Professor Meg Simione served as an assistant professor of pediatrics at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, helping inform her research on child feeding and growth, family-centered care outcomes, digital health innovation, and the implementation of evidence-based practices into clinical care.

Simione is a speech-language pathologist with extensive clinical experience across early intervention programs, private practice, and hospital settings. Her work with families from low-income communities heightened her awareness of differences in health outcomes and access to services, fostering her interest in the need to bridge the gap between research and clinical practice.

Simione collaborates across disciplines to study early feeding development, early-life health determinants, national implementation of healthy lifestyle programs, and the impacts of pediatric feeding disorder. A career development award from the National Institutes of Health is supporting Simione's current research on how digital health innovations can be implemented into pediatric care to support healthy feeding and nutrition.

Study Seeks To Help Identify Language Delays Earlier



Assistant Professor Marc Maffei, Department of Communicative Disorders

Despite the well-documented academic, cognitive, and social difficulties associated with persistent language disorders, predicting early-life language issues remains a significant challenge for researchers and clinicians. Using acoustic equipment and an advanced optical motion capture system to record facial movement, Assistant Professor Marc Maffei, in the Department of Communicative Disorders, aims to improve outcomes for children with early language delays.

Maffei secured a grant from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation to set up a motion capture lab on the Kingston Campus to study physical movement of the lips and jaw during speech. Maffei will recruit 20 children through the URI Speech and Hearing Center—10 identified as late talkers and 10 with typical language development—to visit the lab. Maffei will begin with a free play session to assess their spontaneous language use. That is followed by tests of gross motor skills, like walking, jumping, and balancing, and fine motor skills, like stacking blocks and threading beads.

Researchers will perform a standardized speech assessment, recording speech sounds identifying which sounds the children can and cannot pronounce properly. They will attach reflective markers on participants' mouths, chins, and foreheads, and have them pronounce a series of words in front of the many cameras in Maffei's lab. He will record the movement of their lips and jaw, measuring the precision, consistency, and coordination of speech movements—how wide the young participants open their mouths, for example, and whether their faces move as expected when pronouncing certain words.

"We can derive some very interesting things from those signals, like the speeds of the different movements, the coordination between two structures, and the consistency of repeated movements involved in speech," Maffei said. "Previous research shows that those measurements develop in predictable ways, so we can use them to see if the motor system is maturing typically or not. The primary goal is the early identification of a persistent language disorder so we can put well-established language interventions in place earlier. And research shows, the earlier the better."

Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/language**

Social Media 'Significantly' Influences Nutrition, Emotional Well-Being

Emma Cotter '25 earned her undergraduate degree in dietetics and is now earning her master's degree in dietetics through a partnership with URI and Sodexo.

The relationship between social media and nutrition has become increasingly intertwined, shaping individuals' dietary behaviors, perceptions, and choices in profound ways, especially through dietary trends and fads pushed by "influencers." Emma Cotter '25, a recent dietetics graduate and student in the URI-Sodexo M.S. in Dietetics Program, has done research to help understand the influence social media has over nutrition and food choices.

Using surveys with URI students aged 18–28, the study explores social media's impact on dietary choices, focusing on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and YouTube. Cotter examines the frequency and effects of food-related content, analyzing how significantly such online content influences dietary choices among participants. Cotter presented her research at the American Society for Nutrition Conference in Orlando, Fla., on May 31, 2025.

Initial results show social media holds significant influence over nutrition and dietary choices. About half of respondents reported being persuaded by social media advice to add supplements to their diets, including chia seeds, protein powders, probiotics, and magnesium glycinate. About the same percentage of respondents acknowledge being swayed by influencers to attempt nutrition fads like intermittent fasting and the carnivore diet, which loosely mimics one of the early online fads, the Atkins diet.

Consumers should consider the qualifications of the "influencers" giving them advice, Cotter said, and avoid falling victim to the viral nature of social media that tends to lend more credence to some advice simply because it is repeated by multiple people, none of whom may be experts.

"A lot of it is recycled material with just slight tweaks to it. It's all about the trends," Cotter said, noting social media users need to consider the qualifications of those giving advice. "It's good that there is content making people question the things they're eating and consuming. But nothing on social media is really monitored for its accuracy. You never know if an influencer is speaking on behalf of companies that are paying them to endorse their products."

Smart Cart App's Aim: Healthier Food Purchases

Study Explores User Experience With New App

Online grocery shopping applications became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic and have continued to attract new users ever since. An ongoing URI study aims to understand whether the app can help consumers eat a healthier diet.

Associate Professor Maya Vadiveloo, Department of Nutrition, is conducting a consumer research study using a platform developed at URI called Smart Cart 2.0. The study explores user experiences with the newly developed Smart Cart 2.0 app, which is designed to be used online with Instacart and is intended to help people make healthier food purchases.

Participants in Vadiveloo's current study are asked to complete a survey, do their grocery shopping using only Instacart for a week, and then do their grocery shopping the following week using the Smart Cart app and Instacart. The professor expects to publish the results of her study in a scientific journal by the spring or summer of this year.

In a previous study, Vadiveloo led researchers in investigating barriers to healthy eating and using personalized apps, such as Smart Cart 2.0, for online grocery shopping. Feedback from participants was used to enhance the design of Smart Cart 2.0. The results of that study, published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, found that while health motivates most food purchases, barriers to healthy eating include money, time, and inconvenience.

Those who participate in Vadiveloo's current study will receive $40 for completing a survey, doing their grocery shopping with Instacart for a week, and grocery shopping the following week using the Smart Cart app and Instacart. Participants will submit PDFs of their Instacart receipts. An additional $10 can be earned for spending at least $10 on produce during the second week of shopping.

To receive the gift card, all inclusion and survey criteria must be met, and surveys will be reviewed for completion.

To be eligible for the study, people must:

- Be the primary shopper in the household
- Regularly shop online using Instacart
- Have a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher or diagnosed with hypertension/high blood pressure
- Have access to a desktop computer
- Speak English
- Be at least 18 years old

The study explores user experiences with the newly developed Smart Cart 2.0 app.

Associate Professor Maya Vadiveloo, Department of Nutrition

Bella DeVito '25, above, worked alongside a practicing physiotherapist at a private clinic in Perth, Australia, right, during her kinesiology internship.

Kinesiology Internship Reestablished in Australia

Undergraduate Department of Kinesiology students have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience during a one-semester internship in their junior or senior year. Some internships take place about as far away as one can get from URI's Kingston Campus.

Bella DeVivo '25, of Bethel, Maine, is among the most traveled interns at URI, conducting her internship with a private physiotherapy clinic in Perth, Australia, from February to May 2025.

"I learned so many things from this life-changing experience," said DeVivo. "I learned manual and exercise therapy techniques for multiple injuries, such as ACL rehabilitation, Achilles tendon tears, chronic low back pain, chronic migraines, arthritis pain rehabilitation and prevention, and more. I also learned strength and conditioning techniques, the benefits of dry needling, electrotherapy, and reformer and mat Pilates used for rehabilitation."

URI began sending kinesiology students to Australia in 2014. The program was put on hiatus in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but has since returned.

"We have plans to expand internship opportunities in Australia to additional cities," said Matthew Delmonico, M.S. '97, professor and chair of the Department of Kinesiology. "A kinesiology internship in Australia broadens our students' global perspectives and enhances their adaptability."

Because Australia was such a positive experience for DeVivo, she decided to pursue a doctorate in physiotherapy at Curtin University in Perth after she graduated from URI in December 2025.

College Introduces Master of Public Health

Program To Help Address Practitioner Shortage

Students are trained in CPR during Public Health Week on the URI campus. The College of Health Sciences now offers a full public health program, including a Master of Public Health degree.

Addressing the increased attention focused on public health and an urgent need for more public health practitioners in communities across the region, the college introduced a new master's degree in public health designed to provide graduates with comprehensive knowledge and skills to address current and future health challenges.

The program, which began in the fall of 2025, is the only such program offered at a public institution in Rhode Island. Designed to meet the needs of students, including those already working in the field, the program offers flexible options to allow students to attend full or part time, on campus or online. The 42-credit program will prepare students to address critical public health issues, covering such areas as health policy, epidemiology, biostatistics, social and behavioral influences on health, and grant writing, as well as an internship and a capstone course, according to Associate Professor Natalie Sabik, director of the program.

Public health encompasses overarching health policy, such as vaccine guidelines, as well as interventions to improve health outcomes like installing a stop sign to prevent accidents or placing a water fountain along a bike path. The field also includes epidemiology, disease prevention, and structural and social determinants of health. Students are trained by nationally recognized faculty members, and an individualized mentoring program lets them work directly with public health experts in the field, exposing them to the diverse opportunities.

Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/public-health**

Olivia La Hue '26 and Finnigan Schwoebel '27 (not pictured) spent part of their internships preparing food at Camp Surefire, a camp in Rhode Island for children and teens with Type 1 diabetes.

Leadership Program Cultivates Changemakers in Nutrition, Dietetics

Seven URI students majoring in dietetics learned what it takes to become leaders in their field through a joint project with LaGuardia Community College and New York University.

The Inclusive Model for Developing Future Nutrition, Food, and Culinary Leaders program, or IMODEL, was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

"IMODEL is an innovative leadership development and mentored experiential learning program for nutrition, food, and culinary undergraduates to prepare for postgraduate opportunities, increase content knowledge, and build a community of practice," said Professor Ingrid Lofgren, former chair of the Department of Nutrition at URI, who co-led the program.

IMODEL fellows had to commit to 13 weekly workshops via Zoom during the spring semester, a 10-week summer internship, professional development, and a virtual presentation, at which the students spoke about their summer internship experience. At the start and end, participants completed surveys on leadership, problem-solving, networking, and belonging.

Novel Approach to Personal Finance Addresses Economic Disadvantages

Professor Jing Jian Xiao, in the Department of Human Development and Family Science, attended a workshop in 2019 that promoted inclusive teaching in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses. The workshop inspired Xiao to integrate an approach to teaching that would make students feel more comfortable and increase their chance of success.

"I generated the student-created case approach and implemented it in my courses in the following semesters," said Xiao.

The approach flips the conventional case study method on its head. Instead of the instructor providing cases for students to discuss and write about, the students are tasked with creating their own cases based on personal experiences.

Xiao wrote about the students' perception of the unique teaching approach in the *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*. The article, titled, "Toward Inclusive Teaching: Utilizing Student-Created Case Studies in a Personal Finance Course," was selected as the journal's best paper in the subject of personal finance and consumer economics for 2024. Xiao was honored for the distinction at the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Annual Conference in June 2025.

The approach flips the conventional case study method on its head.

The teaching method has become a mainstay in some of Xiao's courses.

Professor Jing Jian Xiao, Department of Human Development and Family Science

New Master's Program Offered in Mental and Behavioral Health Counseling

With a goal of addressing societal mental health issues and improving overall well-being in the community, the college's Department of Psychology has introduced a mental and behavioral health counseling master's program.

Adopting the practitioner-scholar model, the program provides students with generalist training in intervention, assessment, ethics, and supervision. The program emphasizes practice-related research, empirically based intervention models, and the integration of psychological science and practice, including a focus on psychometrics.

Students in the program are exposed to a variety of psychotherapies and treatments, which they will implement during internships at area health centers, helping them attain 2,000 hours of postgraduate supervised counseling experience required for licensure. Students will work with diverse populations in experiential settings, with an emphasis on cultural values and other diversity factors that influence mental health and behavior.

The program provides a workforce development path for students in psychology and related degrees, helping meet the increased need for mental health services. Students will gain an understanding of core concepts required by the American Psychological Association, satisfy the educational requirements for a licensed mental health counselor, and attain the knowledge needed to pass the required National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination.

Professor Ellen Flannery-Schroeder, Department of Psychology, leads her students in a mock group therapy session in the Psychological Counseling Center on the Kingston Campus.

Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/behavioral-counseling**

Graduate Jenna Riley gestures to the crowd before walking the stage during the spring 2025 College of Health Sciences Commencement ceremony, above. Dean Patrick Vivier, left, addresses Commencement graduates.

College of Health Sciences Celebrates Spring 2025 Commencement

College of Health Sciences Dean Patrick Vivier, joined by URI President Marc Parlange, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Barbara Wolfe, and the college's faculty and staff conferred degrees upon the graduating Class of 2025 on May 17, 2025.

Dean Vivier and the entire College of Health Sciences extend their heartfelt congratulations to the Class of 2025.

Below: Provost Barbara Wolfe and Professor Nicole Weiss, Department of Psychology, place a doctoral hood on graduate Emmanuel Thomas.

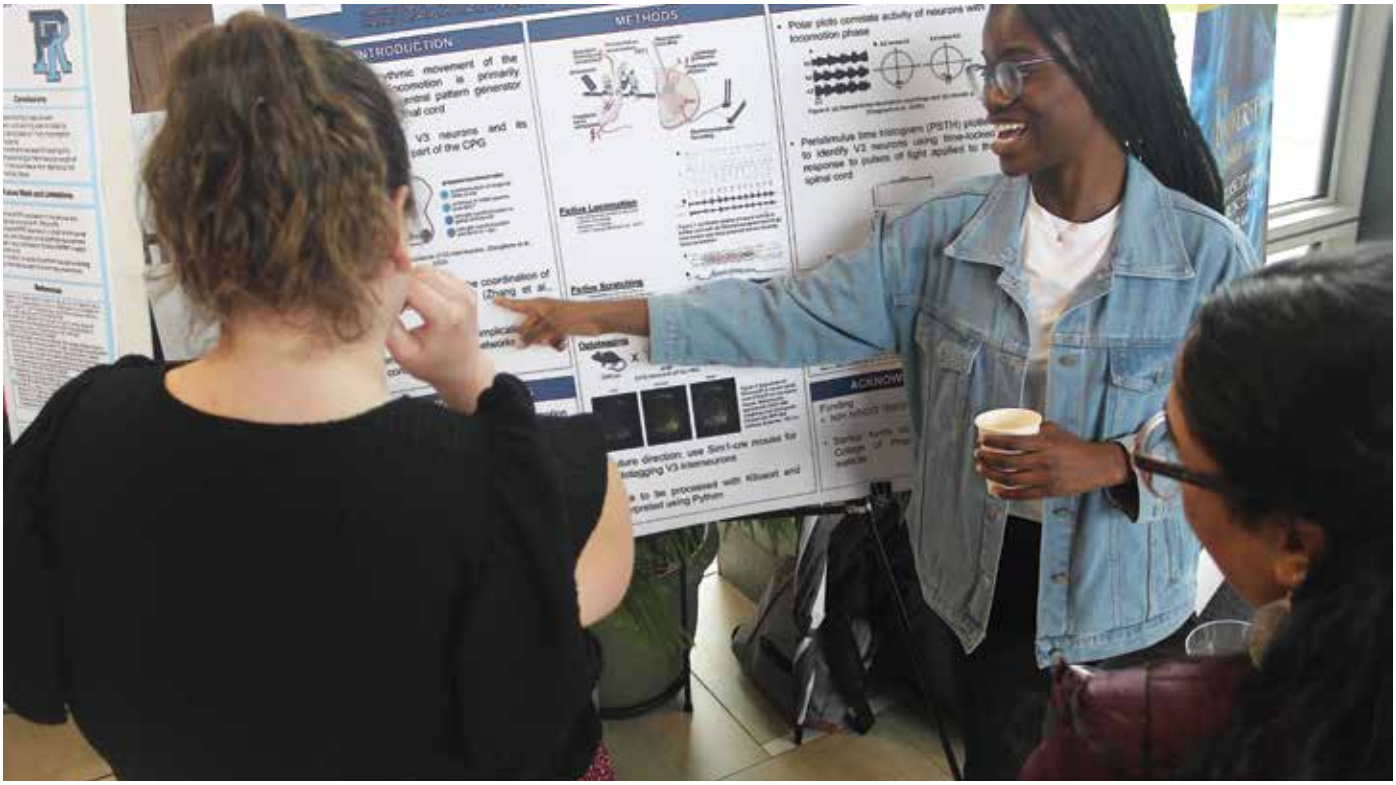
Meet Lauren Peckham, Spring 2025 Commencement Speaker

Lauren Peckham's interest in law and justice started early, watching courtroom dramas with her grandparents and imagining herself one day on the bench—or behind the lectern at the White House. That spark turned into purpose as she pursued studies shaped by personal experience and a passion for advocacy.

With three majors across two colleges—criminology and criminal justice, political science, and psychology—Peckham '25 has worked to understand the legal system from every angle—intellectually, emotionally, and systemically. The East Haddam, Conn., native celebrated her achievements as this year's spring Commencement student speaker for the College of Health Sciences.

At URI, Lauren Peckham fully embraced student life. She served as an advisor in the Student Event Advising Office and a peer mentor in the College of Arts and Sciences, and she held leadership roles in P.I.N.K. Women—Powerful Independent Notoriously Knowledgeable Women—and Student Senate, most recently as speaker of the assembly.

One of her proudest moments at URI was receiving the A. Robert Rainville Servant Leadership Award. "The Rainville isn't just an award—it's a memory, a celebration, and a reflection of the community that makes URI feel like home," Peckham said, noting URI taught her to lead with compassion and resilience. "I've learned how to be kind even when it's hard, how to keep showing up when things get messy, and how to let challenges shape me rather than stop me."



Interdisciplinary neuroscience students detail their studies during the annual symposium in Avedisian Hall.

INP Program, Ryan Institute Host Neuroscience Symposium

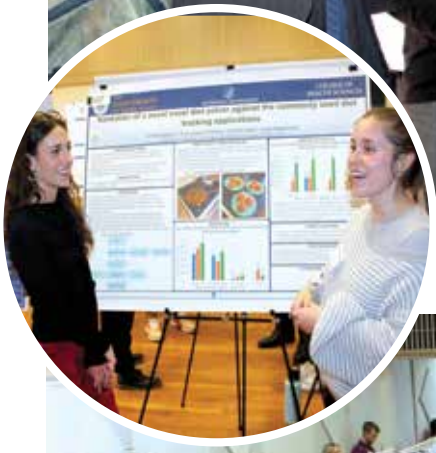
Dozens of Students Display Research Spanning Multiple Disciplines

The Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Program (INP) and the George & Anne Ryan Institute for Neuroscience highlighted student research and explored the neuroscience of drug addiction at the annual University of Rhode Island Neuroscience Symposium on April 7, 2025.

Dozens of URI INP graduate and undergraduate students shared research projects in a range of areas during an afternoon poster session, many including work done under the mentorship of Ryan Institute faculty. The INP brings together a wide range of disciplines—from basic research and clinical studies to new drug development—allowing for a more thorough study of neurological diseases and disorders. URI's unique neuroscience program offers students access to training and faculty expertise from multiple colleges, including health sciences, pharmacy, and engineering.

"This is the third annual neuroscience symposium offered at URI, and it has doubled in size since the first year it was offered," said INP Director Lisa Weyandt, M.S. '87, Ph.D. '91. "The quality of this year's poster presentation was superb and reflects neuroscience research conducted over four main colleges, ranging from bench to clinical and translational neuroscience. We are proud of the achievements of our interdisciplinary neuroscience students and faculty."

Students Present Dynamic Projects at Research Night



Dozens of students from multiple departments showed off their dynamic research projects on various health topics during the college's second annual student Research Night on April 22, 2025.

Undergraduate and master's degree students, as well as Ph.D. candidates from all of the college's academic programs, displayed their research posters in the Memorial Union ballroom, and discussed their studies with passersby and with College of Health Sciences faculty members who judged their presentations. Students studied such diverse topics as malnutrition, stroke and heart disease, intimate partner violence, cognitive function, premature birth, post-traumatic stress disorder, and many more.

Winners for best poster presentation include:

- Doctoral category: Tyler Foster, Ph.D. candidate in health sciences, with a physical therapy specialization
- Master's category: Tiffany Ung '23, Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Program
- Undergraduate category: Sarah Naughton '25, psychology

Health sciences students from multiple disciplines display their research studies in the Memorial Union ballroom.

Physical therapy students work with members of the community with Parkinson's disease during regular exercise groups.

Physical Therapy Students Host Parkinson's Exercise Group

URI Doctor of Physical Therapy students regularly host members of the community living with Parkinson's disease for exercise sessions designed to help improve balance, strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular health while supporting cognitive functions that tend to diminish as Parkinson's progresses.

The Parkinson's Exercise Group has been working with members of the community since 2012, hosting them in the exercise rooms of Independence Square on the edge of the Kingston Campus. The exercises are incremental and continuous, but repetition of such movements is what strengthens participants' ability to keep and recover their balance and allows them to minimize the amount of time it takes to get back up on their feet should they suffer a fall.

Membership to URI Parkinson's Exercise Group is free of charge, and people living with Parkinson's at any stage of the disease are invited to attend. If you or someone you know is living with Parkinson's and is interested in learning more about the services provided, attending a session, or accessing more resources, contact Professor Christine Clarkin, Ph.D. '20, at chrisclarkin@uri.edu.

Traumatic Accident Inspired Clinical Neuroscience Studies

URI's Neuroscience Program Helped Doyle Understand Father's Injury and Positioned Her To Help Others

When Cailyn Doyle '25 was only 2 years old, the trajectory of her life, and those of her family members, changed forever. Doyle's father, a police officer in their hometown of Wilbraham, Mass., was struck by a drunk driver while on the job and suffered a severe traumatic brain injury.

"I had a difficult time understanding an injury that I couldn't see," said Doyle. "The injury severely affected his cognition, including impairments to his memory, attention, problem-solving ability, judgment, logic and reasoning, and self-control. I wanted to know exactly what caused my dad to behave the way he did."

Doyle enrolled in the University of Rhode Island's clinical neuroscience program to gain a better understanding of her father's brain injury. She graduated in May 2025, crossing the commencement stage in URI's Thomas M. Ryan Center.

"This program has given me a greater understanding and appreciation for my dad and all that he has been through," said Doyle. "It takes an incredible amount of strength to rebuild your life after such a life-altering accident. I couldn't be prouder of him."

Cailyn's father, Christopher, is proud of his daughter for finding a positive path forward from a difficult experience.

"I wish she didn't have the firsthand experiences she had that led her to where she is now," said Christopher Doyle. "I am happy, however, that she found a way to change a negative life experience into such a positive. She never ceases to amaze me. I am super proud of her."

For the last year and a half of her time at URI, Doyle conducted research in associate professor Katharina Quinlan's laboratory, which is dedicated to investigating how spinal neurons change and deteriorate in neurodegenerative diseases or after injuries where movement is critically impaired or lost.

"Cailyn possesses a rare combination of dependability, curiosity, and the ability to work hard to achieve great results. She is one of the best students I've had," Quinlan said of the George H. Bond & Mary Kulik Bond Endowed Scholarship recipient.

The most common motor disorder in children is cerebral palsy, marked by increased muscle tone and exaggerated reflexes. Cerebral palsy is most often caused by brain injuries that occur at or around the time of birth. This injury weakens the developing corticospinal tract, which is the major pathway for voluntary control of movement.

"My research is focused on whether damage to these pathways is associated with anatomical changes that could lead to exaggerated reflexes," said Doyle. "I use a research method known as immunohistochemistry, which labels specific proteins in cells to help visualize them under a microscope. This allows us to determine if there are anatomical changes in the spinal cord after an injury that could lead to the exaggerated reflexes in cerebral palsy. Our preliminary data suggests these changes do exist and contributes to these exaggerated reflexes."

Cailyn Doyle '25

Psychology Professor Lisa Weyandt, a director of URI's Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Program, had Doyle as a student in her clinical neuroscience course and met with her several times during office hours.

"Cailyn has high standards for herself and others," said Weyandt. "She also has a tender heart for those impacted by misfortune, particularly those suffering from traumatic brain injury and other neurological conditions."

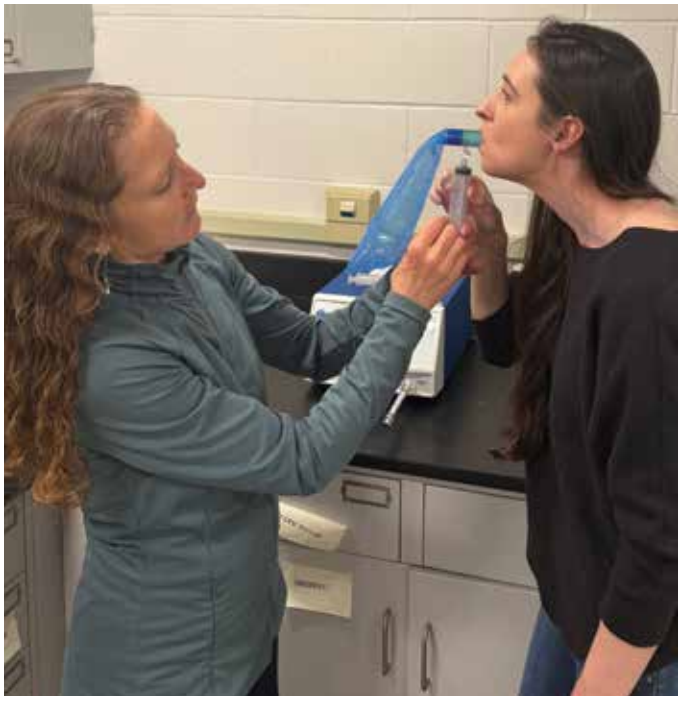
Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/senior-profile**

Professor Recognized as Excellence in Nutrition Fellow

Professor Kathleen Melanson, in URI's Department of Nutrition, was honored by the American Society for Nutrition as one of the organization's inaugural Excellence in Nutrition Fellows. The recognition program honors nutrition professionals who are 10 or more years past their terminal degree and have been a member of the American Society for Nutrition as a scientist, clinician, or professional for at least five years.

Melanson was among 55 American Society for Nutrition members who were chosen for their contributions and sustained engagement in the nutrition community. She directs URI's Energy Balance Laboratory, where she's conducting research on ultra-processed foods, diet quality, markers of metabolic health, and approaches that address healthy body composition and well-being.

"A large part of my work investigates eating behaviors along with methodology for studying them in various settings, food properties and human factors that may influence them, and their potential impact on appetite, energy intake, and related outcomes," said Melanson.



Professor Kathleen Melanson, Department of Nutrition, who also works with wearable technology, was inducted as an Excellence in Nutrition fellow by the American Society for Nutrition.

Assistant Professor Sammy Ahmed, Department of Human Development and Family Science

Ahmed Recognized as Leading Scholar of Executive Functions

Assistant Professor Sammy Ahmed, in the Department of Human Development and Family Science, is ranked among the top scholars in the world in the study of executive functions, which are a set of cognitive processes that support goal-directed behavior by regulating thoughts and actions through cognitive control.

The rankings were calculated by ScholarGPS. The company categorizes those whose scholarly contributions rank them within the top .5% of scholars worldwide. Ahmed qualified for the distinction based on his research performance over the previous five years.

ScholarGPS calculates rankings by quantifying research productivity, impact, and quality of research by applying artificial intelligence, data mining, machine learning, and other data science techniques to its database of more than 30 million scholar profiles and 120,000 institutional profiles worldwide.

Ahmed is interested in the mechanisms that support human learning and behavior, when they emerge, and the role experiences play in shaping their development.

"In our Applied Cognitive Development Lab, we've found that executive functions play an important role in how humans control their thoughts and behavior, plan for the future, and problem-solve across a variety of different settings," said Ahmed. "We found that the development of executive functions during early childhood is related to a host of important adult outcomes."

New Chair To 'Elevate' Psychology's Research, Prominence

With its growing collection of dynamic researchers and educators, its diverse curriculum, and the support from university administration and external donors typical of an R1 research institution, the URI Department of Psychology is poised to expand into a top-ranked program, according to David Schnyer, new department chair, who helped elevate his previous psychology program into one of the nation's best.

Schnyer joined URI after 19 years at the University of Texas at Austin, the last six as chair of the highly ranked Psychology Department. He brings a wealth of interdisciplinary experience and plans to continue building relationships at URI and beyond the Kingston Campus, including the Carney Institute for Brain Science at Brown University. He is also working to establish a TRACK-TBI site in Rhode Island, a public-private network of researchers dedicated to Transforming Research and Clinical Knowledge in Traumatic Brain Injury, which Schnyer helped establish at UT Austin.

Schnyer plans to implement programs for faculty members in the department to collaborate on research projects, advise each other on competitive applications, and involve students heavily in research to continue the tradition into the future.

Professor David Schnyer, Chair, Department of Psychology

"There is a lot of potential here coming both from the ground up, in terms of our faculty and students and their interest in taking things to the next level, but also from the top down," said Schnyer. "As an R1 university, we have a dual mission: research and education excellence. This is a really great place that has the tools needed to elevate it quite rapidly."

Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/psychology-chair**

Faculty, Staff Earn Year-End Excellence Awards

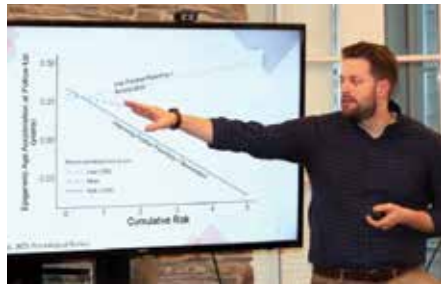
The college distributed awards for excellence in research, teaching, and service, as well as a staff excellence awards during its annual year-end reception in December 2025.

The awards and their winners include:

- Staff Excellence: **Wendy Gallo** '20, M.A. '22 (psychology)
- Excellence in Teaching: **Caitlin Nash**, Ph.D. '24 (public health)
- Excellence in Service: **Jessica Cless** (human development and family science)
- Excellence in Research: **Sammy Ahmed** (human development and family science)

Professor Earns Presidential Early Career Award

Assistant Professor Justin Parent, in the Department of Psychology, has been awarded the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE), the White House announced, placing him among just 400 researchers nationwide to earn the highest honor bestowed by the U.S. government on scientists and engineers.



Assistant Professor Justin Parent, Department of Psychology

PECASE recognizes scientists and engineers who show exceptional potential for leadership early in their research careers. Parent, whose research program focuses on child development, family stress, and epigenetics, was nominated by the National Institutes of Health. He has also been honored with the NIH Early Stage Investigator award and the Association for Psychological Science Rising Star award.

As a professor and director of the Kids Development and Stress Lab at URI, Parent explores how families influence child adaptive and maladaptive development with the goal of optimizing intervention and prevention outcomes. One study focus on epigenetic aging among children, who tend to undergo faster biological aging if they experience adversity in their early years. Parent's study has found that enhancing positive parenting through a family-centered program resulted in lower levels of accelerated biological aging.

Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/epigenetic-aging**

Meet the College's Newest Faculty Members

The College of Health Sciences Welcomed Seven New Faculty Members for the 2025–2026 Academic Year.

Wenhui Feng

Wenhui Feng joined the URI faculty as an assistant professor in the Department of Public Health after spending six years as an assistant professor of public health and community medicine at Tufts University. One topic Feng studied at Tufts, and continues to research at URI, is the role dollar stores play in public health and food insecurity.

April Highlander

April Highlander's research focuses on the psychosocial mechanisms underlying symptom presentation and unequal mental health outcomes among children and families experiencing stress and adversity. Before joining the URI faculty as an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology, Highlander completed two postdoctoral fellowships at Brown University, in child mental health, and childhood stress, trauma, and resilience.

Bethany Kotlar

Bethany Kotlar will join the URI faculty as an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology in the spring semester of 2026 after completing a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University. Her research interests are in maternal and child health. Kotlar is especially interested in studying early exposure to adversity, either in utero or during early childhood, and its effects on child and family well-being.

Marc Maffei

Marc Maffei's research explores how motor skills are related to language development. His goal is to leverage his clinical and research experiences to improve the lives of children with speech and language impairments. During Maffei's first semester at URI as an assistant professor in the Department of Communicative Disorders, he finished a study on early speech and language development of autistic children.

Molly Richard

Molly Richard joined the faculty at URI as an assistant professor in the Department of Public Health after completing a postdoctoral fellowship in Boston University's Center for Innovation in Social Science. She is laying the groundwork for community-engaged research by fostering relationships with service providers, advocates, and policymakers across Rhode Island to identify issues that can be addressed together.

David Schnyer

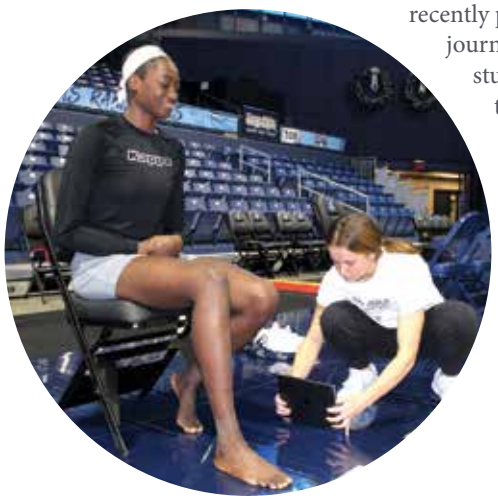
After working 19 years at the University of Texas at Austin, the last six as chair of the Psychology Department, David Schnyer joined URI's Department of Psychology as a professor and department chair in the fall 2025 semester. He plans to elevate the department's ranking, something he helped accomplish in his previous position.

Meg Simione

Meg Simione, an assistant professor in the Department of Communicative Disorders, is a researcher and speech pathologist with extensive clinical experience across early intervention programs, private practice, and hospital settings, specializing in care for infants and children with pediatric feeding disorder. She plans to examine barriers and facilitators of using digital health tools, including artificial intelligence, for pediatric feeding, nutrition, and growth management from the perspective of parents and healthcare providers.

Assistant professor Ryan Chapman measures the jump height of URI women's basketball player Maye Toure.

URI alumna Catherine 'Dolly' Cairns, below right, measures former URI women's basketball team forward Maye Toure's, left, arch before testing her foot biomechanics in the Ryan Center.



Alumna's Published Study on Foot Biomechanics Includes Women's Basketball Team

A biomechanics study conducted by graduate and former star guard on the women's basketball team Catherine "Dolly" Cairns '23 was recently published in an international journal. Cairns conducted the study on the basketball floor of the Ryan Center and in the advanced kinesiology labs on campus with the help of some of her former URI teammates.

"The Relationship Between Foot Anthropometrics, Lower-Extremity Kinematics, and Ground Reaction Force in Elite Female Basketball Players," published in the journal *Biomechanics*, investigated the connection between foot structure (specifically, arch height index and navicular drop, essentially a flattening of the arch) in elite female basketball players and their lower extremity movement patterns, as well as the force they generate when landing and pushing off the ground.

The overarching goal of the study, conducted while Cairns was a URI student with kinesiology Assistant Professor Ryan Chapman, was to determine whether differences in the anatomy and function of the foot impact movement, performance, and the propensity for injury.

Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/foot-biomechanics**

Alumnus Is Going 'Bananas'

Trystan Levesque

Banana Ball teams attract sell-out crowds by using dancing, music, props, stunts, and tomfoolery add to the baseball experience for fans.

Trystan Levesque '25 was all business as a starting pitcher for the University of Rhode Island baseball team. His laser focus contributed greatly to his success and to the Rams earning a trip to the NCAA Baseball Championship in his final season in 2025.

Six months after throwing his last pitch for URI, Levesque learned that his baseball career would continue as a "Banana." The East Lyme, Conn., native was drafted in November 2025 by the Savannah Bananas, one of six teams in the entertaining Banana Ball Championship League.

Banana Ball teams attract sell-out crowds by using dancing, music, props, stunts, and tomfoolery to add to the baseball experience for fans.

The past two years have been an emotional roller coaster for Levesque. After his second game played in his senior year in 2024, a hamstring injury sidelined Levesque for the rest of the season.

In 2025, Levesque made a momentous comeback. After rehabilitating his injury and earning his bachelor's degree from URI in public health, with a minor in psychology, he returned to the baseball team as a graduate student and earned Second Team All-Conference honors.

When Levesque's baseball career is eventually over, he plans to attend chiropractic school.

Amanda Tassoni

Kinesiology Alum Officiates Hockey in Winter Olympics

During the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan, Italy, former URI ice hockey player Amanda Tassoni's Olympic dreams will come true—but not as a player, as an official. Tassoni '11, M.S. '13, was one of 11 on-ice officials selected by the International Ice Hockey Federation to officiate the Olympic women's ice hockey competition.

"To be selected for the Olympics and work at the top level of hockey in the world is an incredible honor," said Tassoni. "Embracing feedback, being coachable, studying the game, and spending hours in the gym are required to perform at the highest level."

That work ethic served Tassoni well as a student-athlete who studied kinesiology and played hockey at URI from 2007–2011. She completed her bachelor's degree in kinesiology in 2011 and finished her master's degree in kinesiology from URI in 2013.

Tassoni works as a product manager of physical activity for a company that installs fitness and wellness spaces for Fortune 500 companies. She also does personal training on the side.

Left: URI President Marc Parlange challenges a kinesiology student to a grip strength test during Biomechanics Day in the Mackal Field House April 9.

Right: a URI student tests her motor dexterity on a computer application used in rehabilitation for patients with neurodegenerative disease or those recovering from a stroke.

Below: a URI kinesiology student tests the force a participant generates when dead-lifting, while another tests the grip strength of visiting high school students.

Biomechanics Day

Local High School Students Get STEM Lessons

More than 500 students from 10 high schools visited URI's Mackal Field House for National Biomechanics Day on April 9, 2025. Hosted by the Department of Kinesiology, the students sampled the high-tech equipment used in biomechanical research and challenged themselves—and each other—in several physical tests laid out across the gym floor.

Students assessed their sprint speed, grip strength, dead-lift ability, and motor dexterity. They stood on force plates to test their balance and the amount of force they put on their feet; sampled motion capture technology to see how their bodies move; and, using wearable sensors, watched a real-time digital readout of the energy their bicep muscles use when curling a dumbbell.

The exhibits, organized by professors and graduate students in kinesiology, physical therapy, biomedical engineering, and strength and conditioning, encouraged those interested in science and technology to see kinesiology, biomechanics, or other STEM fields as an option for them in the future.

"They get to see that STEM can be hands-on and URI can provide a path to a viable career in one of these fields," said Ryan Chapman, assistant professor of kinesiology.

Speech and Hearing Center Specialist Gives Gift of Hearing to Hundreds in Panama

Sara Andreozzi '92 Fits 400 for Hearing Aids

When a young girl was walked into a rural school in an impoverished part of Panama, she had never seen her mother's face or even heard her voice. Born deaf and blind in a region without adequate health care, the young girl was destined to live her life in darkness and silence.

But her life changed in an instant when she met Sara Andreozzi '92 and her audiology team in that classroom. The young girl was just one of 400 individuals the URI Speech and Hearing Centers operations specialist fit for hearing aids during a four-day trip, part of a medical mission she goes on each year with the Volunteer Optometric Services for Humanity of New England.

Volunteers pay their own way to travel and procure donated goods and equipment ahead of time. Andreozzi partners with Beltone, one of the largest hearing aid companies in the country, and its Beltone Hearing Care Foundation, which donates the hearing aids, along with associated equipment and batteries to last a year. Two additional volunteers made ear molds on the spot for the more complex hearing losses that require a custom fit. She also worked with local nursing students, who performed lavage to clean clients' ears before being fit for the hearing aids.

"Every person there—doctors, nurses, volunteers, translators—we're all there for the common good," Andreozzi said. "We just go there to help. It's a mission. It's not a religious mission; it's a medical mission. It's all to give back and to serve people."

URI Speech and Hearing Center specialist Sara Andreozzi (left center) travels to Panama each year to fit hundreds of people for hearing aids.

Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/hearing-aids**

URI Hosts Progress in Motor Control International Conference

The URI College of Health Sciences hosted the biennial Progress in Motor Control conference for the first time from June 30 to July 2, 2025, attracting 143 leading scientists, early career researchers, and clinicians from all parts of the United States and seven other countries, including Canada, Netherlands, Poland, India, Israel, Brazil, and Italy.

The conference, held in URI's Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences, featured poster sessions and presentations on such topics as "Theoretical Advances in Motor Control," "Motor Learning and Neural Plasticity," "Motor Disorders Mechanisms and Rehabilitation," and "Recovery of Motor Function."

Assistant Professor Mariusz Furmanek, in the Department of Physical Therapy, chaired the conference's organizing committee.

"Our goal was to create a space where people could explore the crossroads between neurophysiology and application," said Furmanek. "We aimed to foster meaningful discussions across disciplines, highlight advances in motor control, and build a sense of community that extends beyond the conference."

Above, children from URI's Dr. Pat Feinstein Child Development Center are escorted back to the center from their weekly walk to the Providence Public Library. Right, librarian Bonnie Lilienthal reads a book to the children at the Providence Public Library. Lower left, the children work on an intergenerational art project.

Child Development Center Gives URI Unique Presence in Providence

URI's Dr. Pat Feinstein Child Development Center has been based on the first floor of the historic Shepard Company Building at 80 Washington St. in downtown Providence since Sept. 9, 1996. The center accepts up to 17 3- to 5-year-old students in each of its two large classrooms.

Along with the URI Child Development Center on the Kingston Campus, URI manages the only two "laboratory schools" for early childhood education in Rhode Island after the Henry Barnard School closed at Rhode Island College in 2021.

While each classroom at the Providence Child Development Center has ample space, the location doesn't have a playground. So, the city itself becomes their playground, as the teachers take the students outside to explore each day.

"The children dress for different types of weather, and they learn the traffic rules," said Director Delia Hall '94, M.A. '08. "We teach them about architecture by pointing out the differences in buildings. We discuss art by showing them murals and sculptures. We work on their math skills by counting windows. When we encounter flowers, plants, and trees, they discover what grows outside."

Once a week, each class walks to the Providence Public Library. The children visit nearby parks and have stopped by the mayor's office at City Hall, in addition to other daily adventures.

Scan to learn more or visit: **uri.edu/chs/child-development**

URI CDC Hosts International Laboratory Schools Conference

URI's Child Development Centers hosted the International Association of Laboratory Schools' annual conference, offering participants an opportunity to explore how the perspectives of educators, students, and parents help guide the research, policies, and practices of lab schools worldwide.

The conference drew 112 participants from seven countries, representing 32 laboratory schools, which are designed to assist in preparing professional teachers while delivering quality instructional programs for children in the classroom. Lab school leaders, teachers, and university faculty members from across the U.S. and Canada—and from as far as Finland, Nepal, and Thailand—traveled to URI to witness its College of Health Sciences' laboratory preschool program in action to inform their own lab school practices. URI hosts two lab schools—one on the Kingston Campus and the other in Providence.

The CDC offers developmentally appropriate early childhood education for children ages 3 to 5. Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the full-day preschool programs provide educational opportunities for preprimary children, serve as a teacher training facility, and support research in early childhood education.

Right: URI students work with older adults in the community during a Cyber-Seniors event.

Below: attendees check out instruments available for preschool children in the URI Child Development Center, which hosted the International Association of Laboratory Schools' annual conference.

Cyber-Seniors Program Earns National Recognition

A college program intended to "bridge the technology and generational gap" as students help teach older adults to use technological devices has received national recognition from Generations United, a nonprofit organization that aims to improve the lives of children and older adults through intergenerational collaboration.

The organization named Engaging Generations: Cyber-Seniors a "program of distinction," listing it among "an elite class of intergenerational programs that demonstrate excellence in bringing together people of different ages for mutual benefit and positive impact." URI Professor and Cyber-Seniors principal investigator Skye Leedahl, accepted the award at the organization's international conference in June.

The goal of Cyber-Seniors is to increase digital competency in older adults while also bringing the gap between generations. The program pairs older adults with URI students to provide training and technical support they need to access online resources, work and meet remotely, and virtually communicate with family and friends. Dozens of students travel throughout the state to meet older adults in senior centers, libraries, and housing developments to provide technology training on their devices, as well as some intergenerational companionship.

A Courage Quest Camp counselor blow bubbles during the adventure camp.

Courage Quest Camp Blends Fun With Strategies for Managing Anxiety

Children Learn To Build Courage, Embrace Adventure

URI hosted an adventure-themed summer camp in July to teach children how to manage anxiety in a fun, interactive way. Courage Quest, for children aged 8–12, was designed to strengthen coping skills and build self-confidence by guiding campers through a series of challenges.

Offered through URI's Child Anxiety Program, which is part of the Psychological Consultation Center, the camp was open to children with mild to moderate anxiety, including those previously diagnosed with anxiety disorders.

Ellen Flannery-Schroeder, who is the Dr. Glenda L. Vittimberga '88 Endowed Professor of Psychology and the director of training in clinical psychology at URI, served as the camp director. Flannery-Schroeder has specialized in the cognitive-behavioral treatment of childhood anxiety disorders for more than 20 years. The Vittimberga Fund made the camp possible.

"The camp was created to address a real need—children are facing a mental health crisis—one that's grown since the pandemic," said Flannery-Schroeder. "More kids than ever are struggling with anxiety, depression, and low confidence, and families are looking for meaningful, effective support."

The camp introduced coping skills through interactive activities. The "quests" solidified the newly learned skills through mildly anxiety-provoking tasks, such as a scavenger hunt that requires someone to lead the way.

Professor Ellen Flannery Schroeder, Department of Psychology, leads children ages 8-12 in team-bonding activities designed to build confidence and strengthen coping skills during Courage Quest, offered through the URI Child Anxiety Program.

THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

College of Health Sciences
Quinn Hall, 55 Lower College Road,
Kingston, RI 02881

The URI Free Farmers Market provides fresh, URI-grown produce to URI students at no cost.

04/2026 2,000 PHOTOS: NORA LEWIS; PATRICK LUCE; CATHERINE SCOTT
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