

# heartbeat

FALL 2024

University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies

IT'S  
GO  
TIME



**Dean Santos**  
rolls out a bold new vision



# Celebrating a CENTURY of EXCELLENCE

We are proud to congratulate all **University of Miami**, faculty, staff, students, and the community at large on this incredible milestone.

**Here's to another 100 years of academic excellence.**

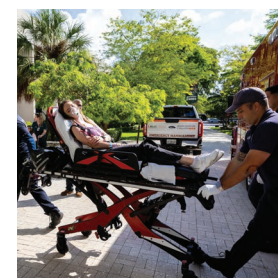
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI  
SCHOOL of NURSING  
& HEALTH STUDIES



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transform lives and health  
care through education,  
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service across the hemisphere.

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DEAN’S MESSAGE

Welcome to our Fall 2024 issue of *Heartbeat* magazine. This marks my first opening message for *Heartbeat* as dean. It has been a tremendous privilege to transition into this leadership role at the School of Nursing and Health Studies. I truly love the job, the school, the people, and the opportunity to foster existing and new partnerships. It is so fun and enjoyable to see our talent from a broader perspective and be able to help connect the dots. From this vantage point, I see our limitless potential more clearly than ever. We are positioned to lead, innovate, and collaborate.

This magazine conveys the excitement I’ve witnessed as we continue advancing health care and working with faculty and community partners to develop new teaching and research strategies at the School of Nursing and Health Studies. Our cover headline, “It’s Go Time,” is both a promise and a call to action that I hope everyone connected with this school will take to heart.

In this issue, you can read about new research grants and new leadership appointments aimed at strengthening our academic health center relationships while prioritizing clinical placements. You can learn about our key role in the University’s first multi-agency active-shooter simulation. You can see how our global health and research programs abroad are immersing students in learning experiences that will last a lifetime. You can meet an inspiring trio of recent grads who soared above their diverse life challenges to make a meaningful impact. And you can gain insights from many other students, alumni, and faculty dedicated to advancing knowledge and changing lives, whether helping veterans, transforming hospitals, or bringing Hispanic health to the forefront.

This is a momentous time for the University of Miami, from its



Life in a Flash

approaching centennial to the announcement of Joe Echeverria as the University’s new president—the first alumnus named to this post. I look forward to working with President Echeverria as we lay the groundwork for our school’s bold new future of innovation and partnership. We are not just aiming for greatness, we are creating it. In this time of urgent need for compassionate, committed world-class health care, greatness means making sure each of our students is ready to meet the moment, to contribute mightily, to advance the profession, and to change lives through the indispensable fields of nursing,

public health, and health science. As you will see in this magazine, go time is now.

Go ‘Canes!

**Hudson P. Santos, Jr.**  
**Ph.D., RN, FABMR, FAAN**  
*Dean, Professor, and Dolores J. Chambreau, RN Endowed Chair in Nursing*

*On the Cover: Dean Santos on his electric scooter in front of the M. Christine Schwartz Center for Nursing and Health Studies. Photo by Life in a Flash / Carl Frederic Francois*



# Students Celebrate NCLEX Success



Over the summer, a flurry of recent School of Nursing and Health Studies Bachelor of Science in Nursing graduates took to social media to share their excitement over passing the NCLEX-RN. One of those newly minted 'Cane nurses was Samantha Melendez-Infante, B.S.N. '24.

Aventura Hospital as a new grad nurse in orthopedics... and [to making] a positive impact on patient care... Here's to new beginnings and continued growth!"

Melendez is not alone in her success or enthusiasm. In the first quarter of

rate is significant because average first-time pass rates for the NCLEX, the standardized licensing exam administered by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc., are commonly used as a metric for overall nursing program quality.

"This remarkable accomplishment is a testament to the exceptional quality of our faculty, staff, and program. Your leadership, commitment to excellence, and dedication to the undergraduate nursing program has made this achievement possible," Dean Hudson Santos Jr. stated in a school-wide memo sent after the 100 percent passing rate was announced.

As for Melendez-Infante, now a registered nurse working in Aventura Hospital, she credits her nursing faculty and preceptors, hands-on simulation experiences, and



beloved study buddy Diesel the dachshund for supporting her nursing journey. "The School of Nursing and Health Studies really prepared me," she said. "I feel very confident."

**NCLEX-RN**  
2024 SECOND QUARTER\*  
PASS-RATE  
**100%**

"I am thrilled to share that I have graduated from the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and a minor in psychology this past May," she posted. "I am even more excited to announce that I have successfully passed my NCLEX! I am looking forward to joining HCA Florida

2024, 92 of the school's 94 graduates who took the NCLEX-RN for the first time passed it to become registered nurses. The next quarter, April through June, all 63 of the graduates who took the NCLEX-RN passed on first attempt. As a result, the school's first-time pass rate for the first half of 2024 averaged 98.73 percent. That near-perfect pass

# NIH Grants \$3.8M for New Ending HIV Study

Dr. Audrey Harkness, assistant professor at the School of Nursing and Health Studies, is a psychologist with years of training and experience working with sexual minority men in the areas of mental health, HIV, and public health. Now the National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Mental Health has awarded her a highly competitive R01 grant in the amount of \$3.8 million to support her new five-year study, "Leveraging a Strategic Alliance of Community-Based Implementers and Researchers to Characterize, Protocolize, and Scale Up Local Implementation Strategies for Ending the HIV Epidemic among Latino MSM."

Dr. Harkness and her team will visit community organizations in Miami and Orlando, Florida, and San Juan, Puerto Rico, to identify and assess the strategies they are using to improve the reach of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and mental health/substance use treatment to Latino men who have sex with men (MSM). The team will then build an online dashboard to showcase the most promising strategies, making them available to other organizations serving Latino MSM in the United States.

"Often, researchers develop programs to bring HIV services into the



community and then try to get organizations to implement them—but these programs aren't always feasible in a real-world setting," said Harkness. "This study is different because we're taking the reverse approach: centering the knowledge and experience



of community organizations and leveraging the strategies they've developed to engage Latino MSM." The researchers will assess each strategy to learn about how well it is working, whether it addresses key factors known to be important in increasing use of health care services, and whether it uses an effective method to promote behavior change. "Our approach upholds rigorous scientific standards," said Harkness. "If a strategy meets these standards, we'll develop a protocol that other organizations can follow to use the strategy in their own setting."

Dean Hudson Santos Jr. said the study "addresses an urgent public health issue because Latino MSM are disproportionately impacted by HIV—and it is transformational in its approach to identifying and scaling up community-generated strategies that can benefit other organizations across the nation."

The new study responds to the "Ending the HIV Epidemic" initiative for the US, which aims to reduce

by 90 percent new HIV cases by the year 2030 through science-based diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and response strategies. The study builds on formative work supported by an NIH "Ending the HIV Epidemic" administrative supplement awarded to Harkness through the University's Center for HIV and Research in Mental Health (CHARM).

As principal investigator, Harkness will collaborate with a 30-member team of community-based implementers and researchers known as SOMOS Alianza (San Juan, Orlando, Miami Organizational Strategic Alliance). Edda Santiago Rodriguez, Dr.P.H., M.P.H., and Eric Schrimshaw, Ph.D., will serve as lead investigators at the University of Puerto Rico and University of Central Florida, respectively. The network will tap into community wisdom and organizational best practices across three EHE regions that share many commonalities and cross-geographical migration but experience their own barriers to sharing resources and information. "Community organizations are often fragmented networks," said Harkness. "This study allows us to be the bridge that helps to connect organizations to each other, so they in turn can help Latino MSM connect to the resources and treatments that work."

*Research reported in this publication was supported by the National Institute Of Mental Health of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number R01MH138237. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.*



## ‘CLaRO’ Gets \$3.3M Research Boost

The Center for Latino Health Research Opportunities (CLaRO)—a joint venture of the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies and Florida International University—will continue mentoring outstanding Latino health disparities researchers for another five years, thanks to a \$3,324,993 grant from The National Institutes of Health’s Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. “This momentous award will enable CLaRO’s leadership to ignite and advance the research careers of our most talented emerging investigators, providing them with the mentoring, training and resources they need to flourish,” said School of Nursing and Health Studies Dean and Professor Hudson Santos Jr. “The grant builds on our long-standing partnership with FIU to ensure we identify an exceptional cohort of promising scholars across the diverse South Florida region.”

The grant, awarded earlier this year under the highly competitive P50 Specialized Center funding mechanism Centers of Excellence in Investigator Development and Community Engagement, will support at least three new pilot studies per year from early career investigators who are implementing innovative, evidence-based interventions tailored to local Latino communities. Pilot projects employing an equitable implementation science approach and addressing conditions related to substance abuse, violence, and HIV/AIDS (known as the SAVA syndemic), and mental health issues will be selected.

Professor Guillermo “Willy” Prado, the University of Miami’s interim executive vice president for academic affairs and provost, is the grant’s principal investigator will co-lead CLaRO, originally established in 2017, with Mario De La Rosa, an FIU professor. “We helped our initial pilot study awardees generate programs of research based on the



pilots we funded, which led to their securing \$28 million in NIH funding as new investigators,” said Dr. Prado. “That track record is our recipe for success, our secret sauce: bringing very promising and stellar early career faculty together with really committed and motivated senior scholars, who are going to do everything to help them succeed.”

CLaRO’s Investigator Development (ID) Core—co-led by School of Nursing and Health Studies Professor Victoria Behar-Zusman and FIU assistant professor Mariana Sánchez—offers early investigators guidance through a Research Enhancement Program and a network of belonging with other early career investigators. CLaRO’s Community Engagement and Dissemination (CED) Core—co-directed by Yannine Estrada, research assistant professor at the School of Nursing and

Health Studies, and Patria Rojas, an FIU associate professor—works closely with a Community Advisory Board to guide CLaRO scholars through each step of the research process. “It’s important to train early career investigators on how to work with the community,” said Dr. Estrada. “In line with an equitable, social justice perspective, we need to represent the voice of the community in the work we’re doing.” Added Prado, “Nobody has the insights the community does.”

*Research reported in this publication was supported by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number 1P50MD019468. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.*

## Extreme Heat and Maternal Health

In July, amid record temperatures, Jazmin Ramirez, a Ph.D. in Nursing Science student, was awarded a National Institutes of Health grant to support her study, “Effects of Heat Exposure on Maternal and Pregnancy Health: Understanding the Role of Social Determinants and Adaptive Behaviors.” “My experience as a NICU nurse [for five years] made me aware of the environmental and social issues that can affect pregnancies,” she said. “The F31 award provides me with the opportunity to learn more about how exposure to high levels of heat can impact pregnancy outcomes in our South Florida communities.”

The “F31” is the National Institute of Nursing Research’s F31 Ruth L. Kirschstein Predoctoral Individual National Research Service Award for promising predoctoral students conducting dissertation research who demonstrate potential to develop into productive, independent research scientists. For the next two and a half years, the award will support Ramirez’s examination of the complex interactions between hyperlocal heat exposure, social determinants of health, and adaptive behaviors among pregnant women.

Specifically, she will consider micro-environments within ten diverse Miami-Dade County neighborhoods—from Homestead to Hialeah—gathering hyperlocal temperature and humidity data from iButton sensors affixed to structures in local parks, as well as from Elitech sensors placed inside the homes of 100 pregnant women selected to participate in the study. “As we gain more understanding about how climate and social factors interact to affect pregnancy outcomes, we can develop interventions to help pregnant women adopt more protective heat-adaptive behaviors, and guide communities in implementing changes—such as increasing the amount of tree cover



in neighborhoods—that can help mitigate the growing impact of extreme heat,” she explained. “This is an emerging research area within nursing science, and there is an urgent need for more nurse researchers who are environmental health experts.”

Dean Hudson Santos Jr., Ramirez’s mentor and grant sponsor, is an expert in maternal and child health. He will link her study to the multimillion-dollar NIH-funded initiative he is leading, Miami-ECHO: A Diverse Cohort of Mothers, Children and Fathers in Miami-Dade



County, thereby providing access to research participants, study data, and other resources. “Ms. Ramirez is an exceptional scholar who will be conducting urgently needed research at the intersection of nursing and environmental sciences,” he said. “As higher levels of intense heat and humidity increasingly affect South Florida and the world, her work has the potential to make significant contributions that will help address climate-related health impacts on vulnerable populations.”

Her other study mentors are University of Miami faculty members Katharine Mach, professor and chair of the Department of Environmental Science and Policy, Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science; JoNell Efantis Potter, professor of Clinical Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, Miller School of Medicine; and Raymond Balise, associate professor of biostatistics in the Department of Public Health Sciences, Miller School of Medicine.

Ramirez’s research responds to one of the NINR’s priorities: to understand how climate impacts health, especially in more vulnerable populations and communities. “Heat affects everyone, but it can be very physiologically taxing for pregnant women, especially when they have underlying health conditions,” said Ramirez. “This study will help us learn more about how social and environmental factors interact with high levels of heat to exacerbate its impact on pregnancy outcomes such as the mother’s health and well-being, stress, gestational weight, and preterm birth—all of which can affect the baby’s overall health as well.”



# NIH Grants \$3.8M for New Study Aimed at Ending HIV Epidemic

Raymond Levy made a promise to his mother before she died. “My mother passed away about three years ago,” he said. “One of her dying wishes was that she wanted me to do something for the community she grew up in.” The Miami businessman and philanthropist recalled a photo that his mother, a long-time nurse, kept framed in her home of the tiny hospital in Chapeltown, Jamaica, where she, his grandmother, and many uncles had been born.

Levy entered the health care business in 1996 and more recently founded the not-for-profit corporation Breaking Healthcare Barriers. But he wanted to do more to honor his promise to his late mother. When a friend introduced him to Johis Ortega, associate dean for Hemispheric and Global Initiatives and professor of clinical at the School of Nursing and Health Studies, he found the perfect way to do just that.

Within weeks of their first meeting, the two had organized an initiative with the Jamaican hospital that meant so much to Levy’s family. During Spring Break 2024, Levy and medical staff from his clinics joined Dr. Ortega, two fellow faculty members, and 10 master’s degree nursing students in the foothills of Jamaica about two hours from Kingston. There the team hosted a Community Health Fair on the grounds of Chapeltown Community Hospital, in memory of Levy’s mother and several other relatives. Jamaican government official Michael Stern (Levy’s cousin) and area radio stations provided essential support locally.

“This was our first year,” said Levy. “We saw over 600 folks who came for dental services, medical services, or vision exams.” Nurse practitioner students triaged patients, took vital signs, checked blood glucose levels, and completed



cholesterol and lipid panels before doing more extensive head-to-toe assessments.

“This trip was professionally enriching and personally rewarding for all participants,” said Ortega. “Our students had a unique opportunity to put their advanced nursing skills to use in an underserved environment. They made a substantial impact on the well-being of individuals in need while gaining a deeper understanding of global health care disparities and the power of collaborative care. We are very grateful to Mr. Levy and his provider team for their partnership on this important work.”

Clinical faculty Drs. Juan M. Gonzalez and Kenya Snowden also supervised. “When you’re home in the States, you have everything at your fingertips,” said student participant Josh Boyd, M.S.N. ’24. “It doesn’t work that way in [rural] Jamaica. You have to think, OK, what

else can I do that’s going to facilitate patients getting this care they need, this continuity, these medications? It forces you to challenge yourself and come up with different ways to be successful.”

The student practitioners helped Levy’s team build electronic medical records to facilitate follow-up care. “Some of these patients haven’t been to a doctor a day in their life,” said Boyd. “They were just so grateful to have us there and providing these services. That will always be near and dear to my heart.”

Added Levy: “The whole purpose of doing this mission is to create continuity of care with the folks in that community, to keep coming back. It’s a proactive approach. We try to catch the condition on the front end and treat it, and hopefully eliminate it.” It’s a goal any mother, but especially Levy’s, would be proud of.

# Move Over, March Madness

In April, the Nurse Anesthesia Students Association (NASA) chapter of the School of Nursing and Health Studies hosted “SimWars,” a creative team-based simulation competition, at S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education®. How it worked: 18 mixed teams of second- and third-year nurse anesthesia students competed to address various regional anesthesia scenarios. Rated by faculty from the school’s B.S.N.-D.N.P. Nurse Anesthesia Program on collaboration and other factors, the bracket was whittled to eight teams, then four. NASA hosted a livestreamed watch party so program students and faculty could cheer on the final two teams.

“It’s all part of trying to engage students in a different way. It’s not the same old typical classroom,” said Nicole Gonzaga Gomez, NASA’s faculty advisor and associate director of the Nurse Anesthesia Program. “When you put the responsibility of leadership, team skills, and team-building communication on them, it positively effects learning and retention of competencies.”

The first-time event was educational for Dr. Gomez as well. Using validated research tools, she and her colleagues measured team interactions and cohesion, communication skills, how students critically think and assess the situation. “It’s not so much about accuracy in some of the decision-making,” she explained. “It’s more how they come together to tackle a situation that needs addressing quickly. We put them into high-acuity, low-frequency situations—emergencies, or something that needs to be addressed right away. The self-awareness and emotional intelligence to know your strengths and weaknesses, being able to identify those and address them—that’s important too.”

Taking home the inaugural SimWars trophy was Team Heliox, named for a helium-oxygen breathing gas mixture used to aid patients in respiratory



distress. Other clever team names included “Bougie Bae” (in addition to its slang usage, a bougie is a medical device to help with difficult intubations) and “Free Labor.” The fun, collegial atmosphere was intentional, she added. “When students are learning, they want to be able to do it in a safe space, and that’s part of one of the core foundations of simulation. It’s not to be punitive or for it to make a learner feel terrible about themselves. It’s more like discussing, OK, what were you thinking, or what was going through your mind, let’s talk about it and debrief.”

Emergency medicine residents have participated in SimWars for years, but adapting it for nurse anesthesia



doctoral students is more rare, and Gomez is hopeful next year’s event will yield even more new insights. “In this profession, there’s no book with a chapter about effective communication or interprofessional relationships,” she said. “Being able to communicate and mesh well with people from the various interprofessional backgrounds populating the operating room is a non-technical skill that doesn’t always receive enough attention, but it’s a necessary skill set for our profession.”

Gomez and former school faculty member Shayne Hauglum, Ph.D. ’15, developed the innovative effort together and hope to present initial findings soon.



## Cross-Equatorial Gains

They came from the mountains of Huaraz and the coastal town of Barranca, from Lima and Lambayeque, Ayacucho and Arequipa, Cusco and Chachapoyas, Piura and Paturpampa. A group of 17 veteran nurse educators and leaders from over a dozen academic institutions throughout Peru spent a week at S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education® this summer learning strategies for clinical education with simulation. The group represented ASPEFEEN: Asociación Peruana de Facultades y Escuelas de Enfermería. Peru's national association for nursing faculty and nursing schools.

"I am very grateful to the University of Miami," said Dr. Maria Elena Gamarra Sanchez, coordinator of the nursing school at César Vallejo University



Peruvian nurse educators complete simulation training.

in Trujillo, Peru. "This has been a marvelous experience." Sanchez, who has been a nurse for 35 years, said she learned many new ways to help faculty and students. "Learning about simulation for academic purposes in nursing is very interesting for me and for my students because it allows us to practice our nursing skills," added Sonia Tejada Muñoz, a nurse for 28 years who directs the nursing school at Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodriguez de Mendoza de Amazonas. "This experience is very important for me and my faculty in my country. I learned a great deal this week."

S.H.A.R.E. simulation educators Michelle Arrojo, Amauri Quintana,

and Michelle Osso led the course with help from simulation technologist Didier Torres. They engaged the faculty in piloting and debriefing on simulations addressing prevalent health issues, such as hypertensive crisis, hyperglycemia, asthma exacerbation, and psychotic crisis. "I was happy to see these esteemed faculty motivated to experience simulation like a nursing student would," said Arrojo. "It was truly great knowing that what we taught these professors will be reaching many different students and faculty from universities throughout Peru," added Osso. Another group from ASPEFEEN was scheduled to take the course in October.

## Emergency Aid Available

The Florida-based Gertrude E. Skelly Charitable Foundation has awarded \$15,000 to the School of Nursing and Health Studies in memory of Gertrude E. Skelly to help nursing students in need of emergency funds. The funds are intended to go toward supporting expenses for books or required class equipment, transportation emergencies, child care, food,



temporary assistance with unanticipated housing cost shortfalls and/or moving costs, student fees or tuition, medical care, travel to and from Miami in case

of family emergency, funds needed for evacuation and/or damage to property and belongings as a result of disasters such as hurricanes, among other urgent necessities. Skelly established the foundation in 1991, just four years before her death to provide medical care and educational opportunities to those who could not afford them. As a result of Skelly's foresight, over 30 years later, her generosity will help ensure that the University's next generation of nurses can be trained and developed into lifesaving health professionals.

## Historic Focus on Hispanic Health

The first edition of the American Journal for Public Health (AJPH) dedicated entirely to Latino/Hispanic health debuted this July with Dr. Cynthia Lebron, assistant professor, as guest editor. Lebron, the president of the Latino Caucus for Public Health, spearheaded the pioneering supplement to honor the caucus's 50th anniversary. The open-access supplement, available at <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/toc/ajph/114/S6>, features 19 scholarly papers, essays, editorials, and field reports addressing the health and well-being of the Hispanic population, with abstracts in English and Spanish. "We wanted to address the dearth of Latino health research highlighting the policies, systems, and structures contributing to health disparities," said Lebron. "This issue is special for many reasons, but one in particular is that the idea came



It Has to Be From Here, Forgotten But Unshaken © 2012 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program / Betsy Casañas, APM, 3263 North Front Street. Photo by Steve Weinik.

from Latinos, the editors and authors are Latino, the program officer funding this

endeavor is Latino, the artist gracing the cover is Latino..."

## Nursing Research: State of the Science

Every two years, important health and health policy findings are shared at the State of the Science Congress on Nursing Research, hosted by the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS) in Washington, D.C. Hudson Santos, dean and endowed chair at the School of Nursing and Health Studies, calls it "the top nursing research conference in the nation." This year, three of the school's Ph.D.

in nursing science candidates shared their work at the three-day event. NIH-funded Ph.D. candidates Dalton Scott and Alexa Parra, B.S.N. '16, B.S.P.H. '16, both gave podium presentations—titled "Intimate partner violence is associated with subsequent substance use among a nationwide sample of LGBTQIA+ people: Results from The PRIDE Study" and "Cultivating Healthy Lifestyles: A Nurse-Led Intervention Study Targeting

Hispanic Mothers and Children," respectively. Parra said she gained "invaluable constructive feedback" from the experience that has inspired her to continue her hard work "with the hope of someday being a keynote speaker at this very conference." Judy Greengold said the opportunity to present her poster "The Policy of Care: Understanding the Health Care Professional Lobbying Landscape" at the congress was "a wonderful experience. Attending national conferences like CANS is an important way to share the word about the innovative work we are leading at the U and build stronger bridges across our discipline." Dean Santos—who accompanied the students and championed their work—gave the three-day event's closing remarks as chair-elect of the 2024 National Advisory Committee of CANS, a signature initiative of the American Academy of Nursing.



Judy Greengold, Alexa Parra, and Dalton Scott

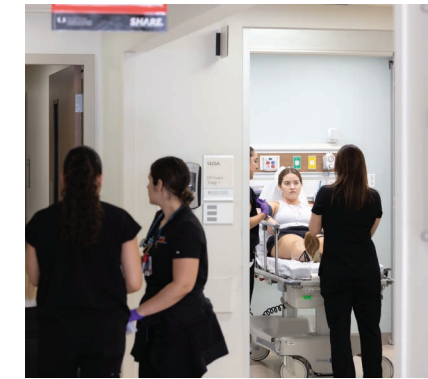


# At the Ready: Operation Phoenix

Photos by Joshua Prezant/UM and School Staff



On the morning of May 22, Operation Phoenix, an active-shooter mock exercise involving over 200 police, fire rescue, role players, and others from a dozen South Florida agencies, unfolded on the University of Miami campus. The School of Nursing and Health Studies played a critical role in the exercise, with S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education® transformed into a Level 1 Trauma Center. “We feel incredibly blessed to have the opportunity to work with the School of Nursing and Health Studies,” said Matthew Shpiner, the University’s executive director of emergency management and leader of the exercise. Since day 1 the school has been “all in,” he added. “What we saw today is really reflective of that level of commitment.” For over two hours, about 30 clinical instructors, simulation educators, faculty, and staff worked with over 40 acute care graduate nursing students, accelerated undergraduate nursing students, and nurse anesthesia students in S.H.A.R.E. as some 20 “casualties” (volunteer nursing students) began arriving. “This was a tremendous event,” said Nichole Crenshaw, associate dean for undergraduate nursing programs, who acted as chief nursing officer for the drill. “We really wanted our students to experience how to prioritize, delegate, triage, and communicate.” Every patient had to be triaged within a minute, using the respirations, perfusion, mentation (RPM) assessment. The exercise was monitored from behind the scenes and recorded by over 25 still and video cameras, fixed and roving. “This exercise is going to benefit many people,” said Zuzer Calero, executive director, S.H.A.R.E. business operations. “There are so many external agencies involved that it makes it unique. This is a great opportunity for students to experience something very few get the opportunity to experience, but if they do, our students will have that edge.” Dr. Ruth Everett-Thomas, associate dean for simulation programs, agreed. “We took the exercise to the next level and ran it through the hospital as a true event,” she said. “This was a perfect opportunity for our students from different programs to work together from the perspective of both nurses and patients. Now we have a very nice template we can build on for future exercises that address issues of this magnitude.”









# A Decade of Diversity

In 10 years, the school's groundbreaking research training program empowered over 100 aspiring scientists to take on the world of health disparities.

By Robin Shear

For ten years, one exciting summer at a time, the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies has played a role in diversifying the health science workforce, a critical step toward achieving health equity in the 21st century. This ambitious aim began with a grant of more than \$1 million from the National Institutes of Health/ National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) to immerse promising students from diverse backgrounds in international research experiences.

The inaugural research training program took flight, literally and figuratively, in Summer 2015 with students traveling to noted academic institutions in Chile, Dominican Republic, Spain, and Australia for a two-month Global Health Disparities Research Experience. The program's reputation for excellence grew quickly, and new partner sites were added. Dr. Johis Ortega, associate dean for hemispheric and global initiatives and professor of clinical, has been principal investigator on the school's grant since 2016.

Only about a third of program applicants were accepted in the first five years. Of those, demographically speaking, 43 were females and 8 were males, 23 identified as Hispanic, 21 as Black, and 7 as non-minority white students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Each year the experience culminated in "Research Day" at the School of Nursing and Health Studies, with program graduates presenting their findings to local and international mentors.

Five years of successful outcomes led to a renewed five-year, \$1.35 million grant in 2019. With eligibility expanded to students outside of the University of Miami and at any stage of education, from undergraduate to postdoctoral, acceptance became even more selective. From 2020 to the present, another 51 participants from around the US took part in the program.

Alexa Parra, who grew up in a predominantly Hispanic, low-income neighborhood in Hialeah, Florida, was one of the first participants of what is officially known as the Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training (MHRT) program. As an undergraduate nursing and public health major at the University of Miami, Parra was chosen to spend the summer of 2015 in Chile, at Pontificia Universidad Catolica, under the mentorship of one of that country's leading HIV research scientists, Lilian Ferrer, Ph.D. While there, Parra worked on a study of the experiences of sex workers on the streets of Chile. "I got to interview potential research subjects," said Parra. "I learned things about commercial sex workers' lifestyles I never would have guessed from just reading about the topic." Less than a decade later, Parra is a National Institutes of Health-funded Ph.D. in nursing science candidate at the

University of Miami, focused on improving maternal and family health for the Latinx community.

"In the beginning, I was intimidated to be interacting with world-famous researchers, and did not say much," said Alex Perez, another graduate of the first cohort of MHRT (formerly MHIRT). "By the end of the eight weeks, I wasn't afraid to ask questions. Giving us that ease in thinking of ourselves as health care professionals and scientists is one goal of this program—and it was accomplished!"

To celebrate ten incredible years, *Heartbeat* compiled a list of all graduates, their cohort years, and research sites. Special thanks to all of the devoted faculty and research mentors, global partners, advisory committee members, and other MHRT supporters through the years.

## Summer 2024



Jasmine A'Lycee Davis, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Alexandra Amaya, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia  
Andrea Jacobo, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil  
Anuradha "Anu" Ramdas, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Daisy Lopez, Instituto Nacional de Cancerología (INCAN), Mexico

Julio A. Martin, Nuevos Rumbos Corporation, Colombia  
Rosseirys "Ro" De La Rosa, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil  
Lily Friedman, Nuevos Rumbos Corporation, Colombia  
Lynda Jimenez, Instituto Nacional de Cancerología (INCAN), Mexico  
Sascha Frias-Kaehler, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil

## Summer 2023



Gabriela Da Silva, Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Peru  
Miguel A. Portales Guemes, Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica  
Sergio Gutierrez, Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica  
Ranya Marrakchi, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Connor McCarley, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Heidy N. Medina, Instituto Nacional de Cancerología (INCAN), Mexico

Valentina Rojas Posada, Nuevos Rumbos Corporation, Colombia  
Neha Reddy, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil  
Dalton Scott, Nuevos Rumbos Corporation, Colombia  
Joann Seunarime, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil  
Valentina Waschbusch, Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Peru

## Summer 2022



Ana Borja, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Julia Byerly, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia  
Jennifer Carpenter, CIET-Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica  
Melissa Castillo, Universidad de las Americas Puebla (UDLAP), Mexico  
Ye Chen, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Taleah Frazier, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Jessica Garafola, Nuevos Rumbos Corporation, Colombia  
Layan Ibrahim, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Jahn Jaramillo, Nuevos Rumbos Corporation, Colombia

Cassandra Michel, University of Miami, United States  
Nicole O'Dell, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Luka Ojemaye, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Franklin Saeteros, CIET-Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica  
Kerri-Ann Scott, Universidad de las Americas Puebla (UDLAP), Mexico  
Kimberly Thomas, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic  
Deanna Uddin, University of the West Indies, Jamaica

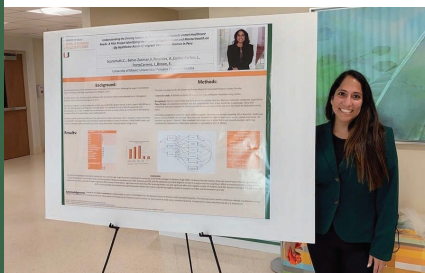
## Summer 2021



Dailianys Barrios, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia  
Brandie Bentley, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Lilian Bravo, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia  
Bria-Nicole Diggs, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Jennifer D. Francisco, Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica

Dulce Gomez, Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica  
De'Asia Harris, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic  
Gerardo Lazaro, Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Peru  
Stefan Williams, University of the West Indies, Jamaica

## Summer 2020



Stacey Bevan, Universidad de las Americas Puebla, Mexico  
Lilian Bravo, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia  
Hayley McLean, Universidad de las Americas Puebla, Mexico

Matta Sannoh, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Carolina Scaramutti, Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Peru

## Summer 2019



Tracey Agyeiwaa-Piasare, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Amir Davoodi, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Patricia Emelle, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Elena Extrand, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Jayden Pace Gallagher, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Belén Hervera, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile  
Maryam Jawid, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile  
Kemika Lundy, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Megan Page, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Maya Symes, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

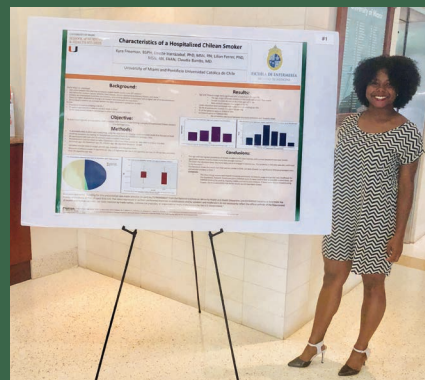
## Summer 2018



Nicole J. Bazinet, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile  
Lydia Franklin, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile  
Claudia I. Ramirez, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Eloise Davenport, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile  
Herveline Saintil, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Antonio J. Sanchez Gonzalez, Australian Catholic University, Australia

Brianna Scott, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Sabrina S. Smith, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Joanna C. Valencia, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic  
Alexander Vernon, University of the West Indies, Jamaica  
Giselle Rodriguez-Henriquez, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic

## Summer 2017



Kyra Freeman, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile  
Chikaodinaka Gbenoba, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Fermin D. Gomez, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Jonathan Lo, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic  
Shaitia Martin, Universidad Andrés Bello, Chile  
Olumayowa "Mayowa" Olujohungbe, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Margarita Ramirez, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Marla Sagatelian, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic  
Brianna Valdes, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Georgina Whelan, Universidad de Alicante, Spain

## Summer 2016



Donna Bean, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Lauren Gonzalez, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Elizabeth Hernandez, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile  
Chinonyelum (Chi-Chi) Maduka, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Tiffany Pomares, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Ja'Shondra Pouncey, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Carleigh Schley, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Monica Skoko, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Christine Sullivan, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile  
Valentina Vargas, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

## Summer 2015



Imari Daniels, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Mikayla Farr, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Dominique Hardy, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic  
Crystal Jackson, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Alexa Parra, Universidad Andres Bello, Chile

Alexis Perez, Universidad Andres Bello, Chile  
Jazmin Ramirez, Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic  
Erika Redding, Universidad de Alicante, Spain  
Weslin Roldan, Universidad Andres Bello, Chile  
Ariel Smith, Australian Catholic University, Australia



# It's Go Time!

In his first 100 days as dean, Dr. Hudson Santos revs up research, innovation, and infrastructure initiatives.

By Robin Shear  
Photos by Life in a Flash

Sporting a dark blue helmet and steel-gray suit, Hudson Santos zips around campus on his e-scooter—just one sign a new era is in motion at the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies. It's no secret he has an affinity for accelerated progress. In just two years, he ascended from tenured professor and Dolores J. Chambreau Endowed Chair in Nursing to his current role as dean. Along the way, he cemented his reputation for visionary leadership, serving as associate dean and then vice dean for Research Affairs, acting Ph.D. program director, and associate dean of the Graduate School. In a profession historically dominated by women, he is not only the first male dean in the school's 75-year history, at age 40, he's also one of its youngest and only the second to hail from Latin America.





## Humble Beginnings

Born in Paulo Afonso, Bahia, Brazil, Dean Santos has shared that his family experienced economic hardship. “Survival was an achievement for us, and thriving seemed beyond reach,” he said. Santos admired how hard his mother, a licensed practical nurse (L.P.N.), worked to support him and his siblings. “Her professionalism was imprinted on me at a very early stage of my life,” he recalled. “Nursing became our shared passion.”

When Santos was just a teen, his mother died, but her legacy inspired him to become an L.P.N. “I worked in psych mental health and urgent care, and I just fell in love with it,” he said. The position helped pay his college expenses at the State University of Paraíba in Campina Grande, where he completed his bachelor’s degree in nursing, summa cum laude, with a minor in pedagogy.

While there, Santos was chosen for a program that paired students with research faculty. Not only did it provide scholarship funds, the experience forecast his future. “When I finished my bachelor’s in nursing, I had 10 scientific papers published, which was very unusual,” he said.

Santos went on to earn his Ph.D. in nursing from the University of São Paulo. His Visiting Scholar posts at both the University of North



Carolina Chapel Hill and University of British Columbia were followed by a postdoctoral fellowship at Duke University School of Nursing. He was a distinguished professor and director at UNC Chapel Hill when he joined the University of Miami in May of 2022. “I discovered the transformative power of education in lifting individuals out of poverty,” he said.

## Rocketing Research

Hudson Santos has devoted much of his professional life to identifying genetic risk factors affecting maternal mental health and the neurodevelopment of children. To date, he has published more than 120 scientific papers and secured over \$47 million in research funding as a principal investigator (PI) or co-investigator. His concentration

genomics (a field of biology focused on an organism’s complete DNA) has led to greater understanding of how early life stressors affect perinatal health and child developmental outcomes in high-risk populations, particularly among socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse communities. “My research tries to understand the environment people live in, how it affects their underlying biology, and how it leads to health outcomes,” he explained.

A crowning achievement in his scientific career came last year with a \$23.57 million award from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and invitation to establish a Miami outpost of the NIH’s Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) Program, a nationwide group that includes over 50,000 children and their parents. To establish Miami-ECHO, Dean Santos and his research team, including co-principal investigator Michael Paidas, chair of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Science Department at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, partnered with UHealth - the University of Miami Health System, and Jackson Heath System, to recruit over 1,200 study participants. Miami-ECHO data will be integrated with other NIH funded



ECHO cohort sites around the nation to establish the largest data repository of child health outcomes, including data on at least 60,000 children and their families.

This seven-year grant—the largest single amount awarded on the Coral Gables campus—will allow the team to examine how social and economic inequities as well as other stressors parents experience may biologically and psychologically impact their offspring, even in utero.

## Vice Dean to Visionary Leader

In the past few years, Dean Santos has been elected president of the International Society of Nurses in Genetics (ISONG) and chair of the National Advisory Council of the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science. He was inducted as a Fellow of the Academic of Behavioral Medicine Research and the American Academy of Nursing. With all of these accolades, he still considers his deanship “the greatest honor of my professional career.”

“It’s my great privilege to lead our school with a new vision for innovation and partnership,” he said. He plans to realize this vision through retaining renowned faculty, building transformative partnerships, designing cutting-edge curricula,



nurturing the dreams of world-class students, and leading pioneering, distinctive research. “Dean Santos is an internationally known nurse leader and scientist who has transformed research at the School of Nursing and Health Studies in his short two years at the school,” said University Provost and Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs Guillermo “Willy” Prado. “I am confident his leadership and his vision for the school’s academic programs and research will elevate the school as a premier destination for both nursing students and faculty across the country.”

With his funded research contributions, Santos helped the school leap from 24th place in FY 2022 to 16th place in FY 2023 for NIH funding to nursing schools nationwide. He predicts the school will rise again in the FY24 rankings.

He is equally passionate about clinical opportunities. “We need to create a bridge to our academic and other area health systems that is hardwired, where the connection between the health systems and the school is in place,” he said. To that end, Santos created the position of associate dean for academic health centers integration and named chief nursing officers from UHealth and Jackson to the role. “This collaboration ensures the school’s programs align with the evolving needs of the health care landscape,” he said. “Our goal is to

become the top school in the nation, educating providers who will become leaders in health systems. We want to be big and bold, and we cannot do this alone. Establishing strong connections with university and Health System leadership will lay the foundation for robust partnerships.” Since becoming dean, Santos has been appointed to both the UHealth Board of Directors and the UHealth Nominating and Governance Committee.

He shared this news, as well as his vision for the school, during his “100th Day Report” to faculty and staff on September 10. At this event, Santos detailed his vision for guiding the school’s future: “Cultivate a culture of transparency and innovation, foster a collaborative spirit that drives team success, establish accountability to set new standards of excellence, embrace growth, transformation, and cutting-edge innovation; build strong, authentic connections that fuel our mission; and create a foundation of mutual respect and visionary collaboration,” he stated, adding, “With our top-ranked faculty, academic programs, research portfolio, and state-of-the-art S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research and Education®, together we are poised to become the nation’s preeminent school of nursing and health studies.”

*Interviews by Daniel Casciato and Robert C. Jones Jr. contributed to this report.*





# New Grads Take Flight

By Robin Shear

Meet three diverse School of Nursing and Health Studies alumni from the Class of 2024 who soared above challenges to attain meaningful success and inspire change.

## The Advocate



The youngest of seven children born to Haitian immigrants, first-generation student **Sarah Petit, B.S.P.H. '24**, was the Toppel Career Center's 2024 #Breakthru Award winner for overcoming barriers. After her twin, Celine, decided to attend the University of Miami, it didn't take long for their mother to convince Sarah to join her. "It was a good choice," said Petit, who was active on campus in the Haitian club, Planet Kreyol, and Office of Multicultural Student Affairs. Passionate about health disparities, Petit pursued a public health degree, minoring in sports administration, biology, and chemistry. In one public health class, she was assigned to write a health policy and chose to address the need for more support and mental health resources for amputees. Front of mind was her own brother, who'd lost a limb in an accident. As an Adobe Scholar, Petit also developed a podcast in which she spoke with amputees about their health care before, during, and after surgery. "Public health definitely set me up to have these conversations with empathy," she said. It also helped her see "how much impact we all have as health providers—and what it takes to make change." In her senior year, Petit created a life skills program for fostered youth and, along with her twin, received the Nanga Award at the U's Senior Mwambo Ceremony for her numerous contributions. Petit, determined to become her family's first physician, considers

herself first and foremost an advocate. "Being an advocate is working in your own environment to support or speak for communities that are more underprivileged," she explained. "If we do our part reaching one person at a time, we can make a difference."

## The Achiever

Success was never a given for **Josh Boyd, M.S.N. '24**. "I grew up the oldest of eight in a broken home in Northern Virginia," he said. But nursing—a path first inspired by his licensed practical nurse (L.P.N.) mother and combat medic grandfather—offered a way to excel by helping others. This past August, Boyd—the first in his family to earn a bachelor's or master's degree—received the M.S.N. Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Excellence in Academic and Clinical Performance Award during the 2024 Graduate Awards Ceremony. Cheering Boyd on that evening was his partner, Emily McConnell, a student in the school's nurse anesthesia program set to graduate this December. She and Boyd worked together as travel nurses through the pandemic. When McConnell started her doctoral program, Boyd not only accompanied her to Miami, he soon decided to enroll in the school's M.S.N. Acute Care program. During the two-year program, he continued working as an emergency department charge nurse at a nearby hospital. He especially enjoyed the chance to bond with classmates and provide greatly needed



Dr. Juan Gonzalez, Josh Boyd, and Dean Hudson at the school's Summer Awards Ceremony.

primary care services during a school-led medical mission trip to rural Jamaica. After fielding job offers from around the country since graduation, Boyd accepted a trauma surgery APRN position at a Level I trauma center in Phoenix, Arizona. "I truly believe this program is going to make me a stronger, better nurse practitioner compared to those who have gone to other programs," he said. "I wouldn't trade my time at this school for the world."

## The Equalizer



Not long after **Khulud Almutairi, M.S.N. '19, Ph.D. '24**, was inducted into the prestigious Edward Alexander Bouchet Graduate Honor Society—recognizing individuals who embody attributes of scholarship, leadership, character, service, and advocacy—she went on to successfully defended her nursing science dissertation. "My doctoral research focuses on the nuances of religiosity as a moderator in the relationship between religious discrimination and quality of life among Muslim nurses in the USA," she said. "This topic is crucial for creating more inclusive health care environments that recognize and mitigate the impacts of discrimination." The topic holds both professional and personal interest for Almutairi. In a 2023 essay, Almutairi described an incident she had in clinicals as a student nurse practitioner, when a patient "made an offensive remark" about her hijab and called her "un-American." She detailed the resulting internal struggle she faced between removing her hijab and feeling "safer" or wearing her traditional head covering and feeling "like

a whole person" again. "My nursing journey began out of a deep-seated desire to make a meaningful impact in health care, particularly in understanding and advocating for underrepresented groups like Muslim nurses in the US," she said. "This passion stems not only from my personal identity as a Muslim Arab woman, but also from a professional commitment to advancing health care equity." For the past two years, Almutairi has presented on this and other topics at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting. The recipient of the Ph.D. Student Scholarly Project Grant from Beta Tau, the school chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society, Almutairi now lectures at King Saud University, where she earned her undergraduate nursing degree and a master's in physiology. Being a 'Cane Nurse "represents resilience, excellence, and the relentless pursuit of knowledge," she said. "It is a commitment to not only personal growth but also to empowering others and making a tangible difference in the world."



# Global Health Postcards

From Spain and Peru to the Dominican Republic, students and faculty spent an enlightening summer learning about health care abroad.

By Robin Shear  
Photos by SONHS Students and Faculty



Machu Picchu, Peru

For 18 years faculty member Dr. Diego Deleon has been taking University of Miami students around the world to learn about global health. “We’ve been everywhere—India, Ecuador, Chile,” he said. “I really enjoy it. It attracts a lot of students.” This summer, Dr. Deleon led students through Spain and Peru. “The countries we go to have different

health care systems from the United States,” he said. “I want students to think, to compare and contrast the pros and cons of these systems.” The learning continued this fall as participants turned insights, research, and reflections from their adventures into papers and presentations for BPH 487, a three-credit Global Health Practicum. A dozen Master

of Science in Nursing students also spent time abroad this summer, led by Dr. Johis Ortega, associate dean for the school’s hemispheric and global initiatives on a journey through the Dominican Republic’s health care landscape. Here are some visual highlights from what many participants described as an unforgettable opportunity.

## Saludos de España

For two weeks in May, 11 students majoring in public health, health science, and several other subjects, toured Madrid and Valencia. “They go to hospitals, clinics, and health centers, and they learn a lot,” said the group’s leader, Dr. Diego Deleon, a senior lecturer at the School of Nursing and Health studies. “I tell the students, ‘When we talk to the doctors and nurses, ask questions.’ We



Dr. Deleon, right, snaps a group selfie.

take them to public hospitals and private hospitals because they need to learn the differences between the two and how they function, their funding, and all those details, such as why people choose to work in private vs. public settings, or vice versa. They also learn about the education system.”

The students learned about business processes in the European Union during a three-day health innovation and technology workshop and visit to a center for health innovation in Valencia, Spain, that funds health care-related startups.



“I loved how everything was so walkable,” said junior Sydney Litten, right.

“Health innovation and technology is really big in Spain now,” said Deleon.

Students enjoyed visits to non-medical sites of interest, too. “We want our students to learn not only about the country’s health care but also about the culture, which is part of the whole experience because culture impacts health behaviors and choices significantly, which impacts everything we do. I tell that when they are out in public places to look at people, walk around, and think about how their behavior and cultural factors compare to the way we live in the US and impact health. I have them consider the country’s health indicators.” He instructed them to keep a daily journal throughout the trip as well. “The journal entry is not only supposed to be where they visited, but also what their experiences were, what they learned that day,” he said, noting it helps inform their future assignments.

Sydney Litten, a junior majoring in health science, with a premed concentration, had never been to Spain. She said she

will carry the global health knowledge she gained into her future career as a physician. “I was able to tour and shadow at various hospitals and mental health centers, learn about global health, and take a course in Health and Innovation Technology. I am so grateful for this experience and all of the people I met,” she said. “My favorite parts of the experience were going to different public and private hospitals and seeing how they operated compared to our US health care system. I was able to grasp how different people had different access to health care. It definitely opened my eyes to disparities in health care around the world.” For their health innovation assignment, Litten and her team presented a technology app they named All Health, designed to establish and track weekly health care routines for individuals, providing highly personalized exercises, diets, and medications. “This experience gave me a greater respect for people on the business side of health care,” said Litten. “A lot goes into it.”

## From the U to Peru

In August, Dr. Deleon and fellow faculty member Dr. Joseph De Santis, an associate professor, took 15 students to the Universidad Cayetano Heredia, one of the school’s hemispheric global partners, in Lima, Peru. Among the educators and care providers they met, said De Santis, was a researcher studying ways to predict malaria outbreaks in the Peruvian Amazonia. Students also visited public hospitals and family clinics, as well as a large private hospital in Lima, to learn how health care is delivered in Peru in comparison to the United States. “The students and I were very surprised



to see the difference between the public health care system and the private health

care system in Peru,” said Dr. De Santis. In the Andes, they visited the city of





Lexx Lang makes a llama friend.

Cusco 11,000 feet above sea level and traveled to Machu Picchu, a UNESCO World Heritage site often referred to as the “Lost City of the Incas.” They rode dune buggies, watched the sun set in the desert, and even had close encounters with Peru’s iconic pack animal, the llama.

“Spending two weeks in Peru with the School of Nursing and Health Studies was absolutely amazing!” said sophomore Lexx Lang, a neuroscience major at the College of Arts & Sciences from Toronto. “Outside of learning about the



Kevin Malave revels in Peru’s natural beauty.

Peruvian health care system in depth from representatives of different Peruvian hospitals and clinics and Cayetano University, we got to visit landmarks around Peru, including Machu Picchu, Cusco, the sand dunes in Huacachina, and more! Having the chance to visit a country in South America was really eye-opening and helped me understand the differences in public versus private health care practices in different parts of the world.”

“The breathtaking views from the mountains of the sacred valley of

Macchu Picchu will stay with me forever,” said junior health science major Kevin Malave. In addition to “vibrant scenery,” he was captivated by Peru’s “beautiful and rich culture” and “drastic changes in landscape” from oceanside to mountains to desert. “It was surreal,” said Malave. He also “really enjoyed” getting to know their wonderful hosts at Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia and seeing firsthand various types of health centers available to the people of Peru.

## Warm DR Welcome

In June, just a couple of months before graduation, a dozen Master of Science in Nursing (M.S.N.) students spent a week at La Unión Médica Clínica del Norte, a private institution in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic. “La Unión Médica is a leading hospital and health care company with which our school has maintained an active relationship since 2013,” said Dr. Johis Ortega, who led the students on this excursion. “The immersive experience would not have been possible without the unwavering support of Dr. Daniel Rivera and Dr. Francis Fajardo, esteemed physicians at La Unión Médica.” Students rotated through various medical services, including in emergency, intensive care, surgery,

maternity, pediatrics, hematology, gastroenterology, and radiology, with attending physicians and residents helping them hone new clinical and cross-cultural skills.

Adam Snider, M.S.N. ’24, contributed his own expertise even while learning by teaching an ultrasound class. “I was humbled and appreciative of the opportunity to give a point-of-care ultrasound (POCUS) presentation to medical residents, which further enriched my experience,” said Snider. “This trip not only enhanced my medical skills but also deepened my appreciation for global health initiatives and the importance of cross-cultural medical collaboration.”

“It was impressive to see the level of care given and eye-opening to learn

about parallel protocols and technology from the Dominican Republic to the US,” said Egle Haven, M.S.N. ’24.

“I’ve come home with a reignited excitement for the medical field,” added Lily Newbern, M.S.N. ’24.

“All of the skills I had yet to perform as a provider-to-be became a reality during this week,” explained Francesca Vizoso, M.S.N. ’24. “We felt respected as providers—the residents and physicians were happy to have us there, and they truly made us feel at home.”

“I’d go back tomorrow if I could,” said Ross Anthony Schmitt, M.S.N. ’24. “I was in a highly supportive environment and got to meet amazing human beings. Even though I speak very little Spanish, I was able to form bonds and create

a trust rivaling that of family. ... The physicians, attendings, fellows, and residents were happy to teach and encouraging. ...”

“This experience was a powerful reminder of the beauty of medicine and patient care—the core reason I became a nurse at the age of 18,” reflected Tatiana Arce, M.S.N. ’24.

“Dr. Ortega gave each of us the chance to focus on our particular interests,” noted Anabel Caceres, M.S.N. ’24. “Seeing cultural values applied from another country’s medical perspective was amazing. Experiencing different health care priorities, structure, and methods opened my mind and made me more appreciative personally and professionally.”

“La Unión Médica has a strong spirit of joy, passion, and teamwork that leaves a lasting impression,” observed Melissa Lau, M.S.N. ’24. “I hope to incorporate the same passion I observed in DR into my own nursing practice.”



Dr. Ortega, center, and M.S.N. students get a group shot with medical staff from La Unión Médica Clínica del Norte.



# New Leaders

## Dean Expands His Executive Team

Dean Hudson Santos announced in August that he has implemented the position of Associate Dean of Academic Health Centers Integration at the School of Nursing and Health Studies, naming the first two appointments to the position in August. “In this pivotal role, Dr. Elizabeth Vieito Smith and Dr. Carol Biggs will join the Dean’s Executive Leadership Team, strengthening the collaboration between the UHealth System, Jackson Health System, and University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies,” said Dean Santos. “This integration marks a significant stride forward in our mission to lead in health education, research, and service.”



Dedicated to patient care and the advancement of the nursing profession, **Dr. Carol Biggs** has been the senior vice president and chief nursing executive for Jackson Health System since 2021. Prior to joining Jackson Memorial Hospital as its chief nursing officer in 2017, Dr. Biggs was vice president and chief nursing officer for Baptist Health South Florida. She holds a Doctor of Health Science degree from Nova Southeastern University, an M.B.A. from the University of Miami, and a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Rutgers University.



As the chief nursing officer for UHealth – University of Miami Health System since 2022, **Dr. Elizabeth L. Vieito-Smith**, M.S.N. ’09, D.N.P. ’12, is fully committed to fostering the UHealth nursing team’s delivery of innovative, quality care and evidence-based practice. She is responsible for all clinical practice and nursing operations for inpatient, ambulatory, procedure, infusion, surgical services, APP practice, and physician practice, as well as operations of hospital/nursing education, professional practice, and nursing accreditation programs. She is the 2024 Alumna of Distinction (see page 35).



**Dr. Mary McKay**, professor of clinical and Wallace Gilroy Endowed Chair, was named director of the school’s D.N.P. program, overseeing all Doctor of Nursing Practice tracks except nurse anesthesia.



**Dr. Carmen Presti**, associate professor of clinical, was named the school’s Director of Clinical Partnerships, a position newly created to “manage our various clinical sites and ensure student clinical placements,” said Dean Hudson Santos.

## Transform Lives and the Future of Health Care

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# Awards and Honors



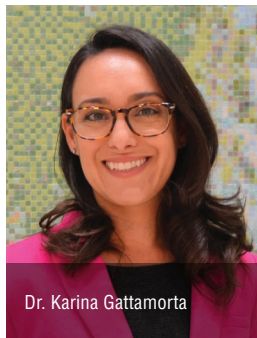
Dr. Gerardo Chang



Dr. Giovanna Cecilia De Oliveira



Dr. Cynthia Foronda



Dr. Karina Gattamorta



Dr. Nicole A. Gonzaga Gomez



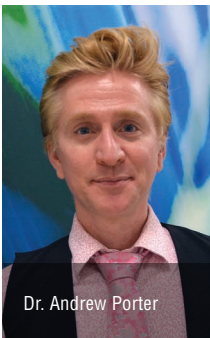
Dr. Cynthia Lebron



Dr. Latoya Lewis



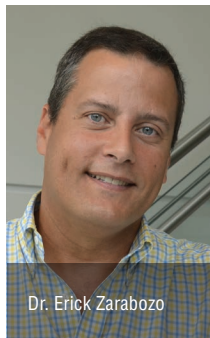
Dr. Yui Matsuda



Dr. Andrew Porter



Dr. Beatriz Valdes



Dr. Erick Zarabozo

**Dr. Gerardo Chang**, adjunct clinical faculty, received the 2024 Faculty Clinical Excellence Award from his School of Nursing and Health Studies students.

**Dr. Giovanna Cecilia De Oliveira**, associate professor of clinical, was inducted as a 2024 Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

**Dr. Cynthia Foronda**, professor of clinical, is principal investigator on “Miami United: Navigating Conflict Through Debriefing for Cultural Humility.” Granted \$25,000 by the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, the project is aimed at identifying best practices for teaching empathic and ethical patient care by incorporating cultural humility in simulation scenario debriefings with students in an adult gerontology course.

**Dr. Karina Gattamorta**, research associate professor, is multiple principal investigator on a National Institutes of Health R01 grant, co-leading the study “Mental Health Risk and Resilience Among Latinx SGM Adolescents and Their Parents” with Dr. Russell Toomey, University of Arizona, and Dr. Roberto Abreu, University of Florida.

**Dr. Nicole A. Gonzaga Gomez**, assistant professor of clinical and associate director of the D.N.P. Nurse Anesthesia Program, was inducted into the American Association of Nurse Anesthesiologists 2024 Class of Fellows.

**Dr. Cynthia Lebron**, assistant professor, was selected as a

2024 participant of the prestigious National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Institute.

**Dr. Latoya Lewis**, associate professor of clinical, was the Interdisciplinary Work-in-Progress September Fellow for the Center for Global Black Studies at the University of Miami. She also was promoted to editor of the *Association of Black Nursing Faculty Foundation Journal* and was named a 2024 Legacy Miami Healthcare Issue South Florida Top Black Healthcare Professional.

**Dr. Yui Matsuda**, associate professor of clinical, was inducted as a 2024 Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

**Dr. Andrew Porter**, associate professor of clinical, received grant support from the Merck Investigator Studies Program with colleague Spring Cooper, Ph.D., of the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy, to examine drivers of HPV vaccine hesitancy among caregivers of adolescents. They aim to develop an evidence-based AI tool and HPV Vaccine Decision Aid for parents.

**Dr. Beatriz Valdes**, associate professor of clinical, and **Dr. Erick Zarabozo**, senior lecturer, were named Teachers of the Year 2024 in a tie vote by the School of Nursing and Health Studies student body.



New Faculty



Dr. Lilian Bravo joined the school as an assistant professor in August, after completing her postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the National Clinician Scholars Program (a continuation of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation), Division of General Internal Medicine & Health Services Research. Dr. Bravo is a registered nurse with research interests in improving suicide risk detection and identifying mental health service



Dr. Yhovana Gordon joined the school as associate professor of clinical and director of the Family Nurse Practitioner Program in September. She is an advanced practice registered nurse and board-certified family nurse practitioner. In two decades on the nursing faculty at Florida International University (FIU), Dr. Gordon held increasingly responsible leadership positions, including chair of the graduate nursing department, director of the Doctor of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.) program, and most recently associate dean of academic affairs. In 2022, she

engagement strategies for ethnoracially minoritized adolescents. She is 2023-2025 fellow of the George Washington University School of Nursing Fellowship in Health Policy and Media for her project “Suicide prevention awareness among Latinx youth and young adults.” She received a T32 Pre-Doctoral Trainee Award through the Interventions for Preventing and Managing Chronic Illness at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she earned both her Ph.D. and baccalaureate nursing degrees. She also received funding from the Alex and Rita Hillman Foundation and the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

was essential in submitting several Linking Industry to Nursing Education (LINE) proposals that resulted in a total funded amount of \$5.22 million. Gordon, a 2022 Fellow of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, completed HACU’s Leadership Academy (La Academia de Liderazgo). She specializes in family, maternal-child, and women’s health and is a past recipient of the Florida Nurses Association President’s Award. In addition, Gordon is an active member of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing and the American Nurses Association. She earned her D.N.P. from the University of South Alabama, Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) from Nova Southeastern University, and master’s and bachelor’s degrees in nursing from FIU.

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# ‘Where It All Began’

By Alan Gomez



Christopher Weidlich’s 23 years in the US Army included tours in Baghdad and Mosul, Iraq, and dozens of military awards. But you won’t see any of those accolades on display. “I’m not a hero,” insisted Weidlich, B.S.N. ’94, Ph.D. ’13, “but I served with a bunch of heroes.” Those individuals and experiences helped him decide exactly how to spend the rest of his post-military career. “Instead of sitting on my rocking chair,” said the retired lieutenant colonel. “I wanted to spend my time passing on my knowledge. I feel a strong sense of paying it forward.”

What Dr. Weidlich does display with pride is his Teacher of the Year Award from 2022, bestowed by students at the very school where he earned two nursing degrees. In 2020, amid the pandemic, Weidlich returned to the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies as an assistant professor of clinical. He found being back at his beloved alma mater, where he’d first met his wife, and living in his home state again both soothing

and reviving. “I needed the ocean,” he recalled. “I needed to be near family.” Weidlich has been teaching psychiatric nursing, evidence-based practice, and nursing leadership here at the school ever since, employing the same mentorship approach he did as a company commander. “I try to teach my students study habits,” he said. “Sometimes it’s talking to them about stress and anxiety. Sometimes they just need a mentor to guide them.”

As a Ph.D. student, Weidlich studied the trauma experienced by doctors and nurses who faced death regularly. A decade later, he continues to advance knowledge on this subject, looking at how extreme stressors like combat, medical emergencies, and most recently COVID-19 impact health providers and other first responders. Currently he is working with colleagues on a project aimed at understanding how members of urban search and rescue crews from South Florida, who frequently rush toward both local and

global catastrophes, are impacted by the weight of their work. “We’re caring for patients,” he said. “But who cares for us?”

As active as Weidlich is professionally, family remains his priority. Decades ago, when he first met his wife, Robin (Stewart) Weidlich, A.B. ’94, in a Hecht Residential College laundry room, he was struggling academically. She helped him get back on track. He went on to earn his master’s degree in nursing at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. Meanwhile, the couple married and had four children. Now, after having lived in Kentucky, Georgia, Texas, and Washington, among other states, they are grateful to be back in the place that united them. To remind him of this good fortune, Weidlich carries with him an inscribed keychain, a gift from Robin. “On one side it says, ‘Where it all began,’ and on the other it has the grid coordinates of Hecht Residential College,” he said. “I have a lot of personal pride and attachment to UM.”

## 1960s

**Marilyn Smith Van Houten, B.S.N. ’69**, retired last year and sold her company, Rehab Case Management, which she founded in 1985. Van Houten was an active member of Delta Gamma sorority and launched the first Anchor Splash, now a national event. She obtained her master’s in human services administration in 1984 and in 2005 received the Case Manager of the Year, a national award from SFCMN (All Florida Case Management Network). Van Houten—a 19-year survivor of triple negative breast cancer—is a volunteer mentor with Komen for the Cure. She and her husband, Mike, live in Kendall with their two Golden Retrievers. They enjoy traveling in their RV and she loves keeping in touch with classmates.

## 1990s

**Sandra Wolfe Citty, B.S.N. ’95, M.S.N. ’98**, a clinical associate professor at the University of Florida College of Nursing, received the prestigious 2024 Secretary of Veterans Affairs Award for Excellence in Nursing (Nurse/Expanded Role category) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In preparing to receive the award, she reconnected with SONHS alumna **Kathryn Sapnas, Ph.D. ’99**, of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Nursing Services. “Dr. Sapnas was my clinical faculty from senior year,” explained Citty. “I haven’t seen her in 29 years, and we got to reconnect through this award, so it has definitely been a full-circle experience and one that truly reminds me the University of Miami is everywhere! I am so very grateful to the UMSONHS for the education I received and the privilege to be able to care for people during all stages of their health continuum.”

**Renae Patterson, B.S.N. ’98, Ph.D. ’24**, the CEO and founder of Unified H.I.N.T.S. Corporation, successfully defended her Ph.D. in nursing science dissertation in June. The dissertation is titled, “Seventy-Eight Would Be Great: An Exploration of the Use of Patient Portals as a Supporting Intervention to Improve HIV Care Engagement among

Black Men Who Have Sex with Men Living with HIV.”

## 2000s

**Sarah (Iverson) Hardan, B.S.N. ’05**, is the Neonatal ICU clinical coordinator at Nicklaus Children’s Hospital in Miami. She chairs the NICU’s Employee Engagement and Recognition council and co-presented “Nurturing Resilience: Enhancing Parental Well-being in the NICU through a Nurse-led Parent Positivity Group” as a poster presentation at the 2023 National Association of Neonatal Nurses Conference with **Arielle Gurien, B.S.N. ’19**, and **Amanda Morales, B.S.N. ’12**.

**Myriam Oluyinka, B.S.N. ’05**, completed her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree at Seattle University, with a concentration in psychiatric/mental health nursing.

**Emily Stauffer Rocha, B.S.N. ’08, M.S.N. ’13**, is director of clinical innovation at Texas Health and Human Services and chair of the American Nurses Association’s Individual Membership Division, representing almost 6,000 nurses.

## 2010s

**Marie O. Etienne, D.N.P. ’10**, was welcomed as a new committee member of the American Nurses Association’s 2023-2024 National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing and at the state level is president of the Florida Nurses Association.

**Amanda Morales, B.S.N. ’12**, a neonatal ICU clinical education specialist at Nicklaus Children’s Hospital in Miami, presented posters at the 2023 and 2024 National Association of Neonatal Nurses conference and at the Society of Pediatric Nurses 2024 conference. The posters included “Cracking the Code: Unlocking a Multimodal Approach to Code Blue Education in the NICU,” “Nurturing Resilience: Enhancing Parental Well-being in the NICU through a Nurse-led Parent Positivity Group,” and “Optimizing Workflow of Safe Sleep Education and

Resources in a NICU within a Stand-Alone Pediatric Facility.” She also was an invited speaker at the 2024 National Cribs for Kids conference.

**Madeline Fernandez-Pineda, B.S.N. ’13, Ph.D. ’18**, assistant professor at East Carolina University, presented “The Intersection of Pandemic and Loss: Examining Patient Experiences of Miscarriage in North Carolina During the COVID-19 Pandemic” at the Postpartum Support International conference in Washington, D.C. Her research article “Compounding stress: A mixed-methods study on the psychological experience of miscarriage amid the COVID-19 pandemic” was recently published in BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth.

**Megan Gray Cohen, B.S.H.S. ’14**, has a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from the University of Miami and practices aquatic physical therapy. She and husband Spencer, also a ‘Cane, were featured in “A Love Story at the U,” <https://tinyurl.com/2p9kdmdc>.

**Shayne Hauglum, Ph.D. ’15**, was named chief science and practice officer of the American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology (AANA), reporting to the organization’s CEO effective September 30. He contributed to the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies as an assistant professor of clinical (2015-2021) and associate professor of clinical (2021-2024) in the nurse anesthesia program.

**Khulud Almutairi, M.S.N. ’19, Ph.D. ’24**, successfully defended her Ph.D. in nursing science dissertation in June, titled, “Religiosity as Moderator of the Relationship Between Religious Discrimination and Quality of Life.”

**Arielle Gurien B.S.N. ’19**, is the first nurse liaison in the bioethics department at Miami’s Nicklaus Children’s Hospital and is the only clinical nurse to sit on the hospital’s ethics committee. She and two colleagues, both SONHS graduates, were invited to co-present a poster



titled “Nurturing Resilience: Enhancing Parental Well-being in the NICU through a Nurse-led Parent Positivity Group” at the 2023 National Association of Neonatal Nurses Conference.

**Jodi Israel, B.S.N. '19**, started a new position as assistant nurse manager on the medical oncology unit’s progressive care unit at AdventHealth.

2020s

**Fabrizio Darby, B.S.H.S. '23/B.S. '23**, a second-year medical student at Yale University, recently co-organized a New Haven Voices panel discussion featuring community members with lived experiences in homelessness and drug use and nonprofit organizers. He

also writes for the medical school’s Long COVID blog and helps organize its global health events.

**Hailey Laurenson, B.S.N. '24**, is a registered nurse at the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab, a translational research hospital in Chicago, Illinois.

**Arielle Levy, B.S.P.H. '24**, is a clinical nutrition and dietetics graduate student at New York University.

**Madeline Smith, B.S.N. '24**, was accepted into the New Graduate Nurse Residency Program at NYU Langone Health as an acute care float nurse on the Nursing Resource Team.

In Memoriam



Mary Alice Spensley Yoham, B.S.N. '65, January 4, 1940 - June 7, 2024

Memories from Alumni Weekend and Homecoming 2024

Photos by Life in a Flash



2024 Alumna of Distinction: Elizabeth L. Vieto-Smith

By Alan Gomez and Robin Shear  
Photos by Jenny Abreu Photography

From her first job at Jackson Memorial Hospital over 40 years ago to her current position as chief nursing officer for University of Miami Health System, **Elizabeth L. Vieto-Smith, M.S.N. '09, D.N.P. '12**, has played a vital role in the well-being of this region’s patients and nurses. For her dedication to the health of the community, to the professional and educational development of nurses, and to the growth of the UHealth – the University of Miami Health System, Dr. Smith has been named our 2024 SONHS Alumna of Distinction.

During October’s Alumni Weekend and Homecoming festivities, she returned to accept the award from the school where she earned her Master of Science in Nursing and Doctor of Nursing Practice degrees. Smith, who came to the US from Cuba at age 6, dedicated the award to her late parents and her godmother. “I wouldn’t be standing here before you if it were not for their enduring love, selflessness, and sacrifices, so that I could achieve my dreams,” said Smith. She thanked her husband, Walter, calling him her “rock through it all” and urged fellow ‘Canes to “continue to pay it forward to future alumni and leave this world better than when we found it.”



This was just Smith’s latest honor. She received the UM Impact Award in 2018, Nursing Leadership Recognition Award in both 2011 and 2022, and in 2024 was named to the Miami-Dade Women’s Chamber of Commerce Thelma Gibson 25 Most Influential Women.

Smith said she was born with her passion for health care. In 1977 she started her career as a trauma RN at Jackson, advanced to the role of trauma nurse coordinator, and later became the assistant director of nursing and education University of Miami Hospitals and Clinics. After health care leadership roles elsewhere in South Florida, she returned to her alma mater in 2013 to serve as the chief nursing officer at the University of Miami Hospital and Clinics/

Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and satellites. Her scope now includes Bascom Palmer Eye Institute and satellites, and UHealth Tower and, as of 2022, UMMG (physician practices).

Since 2019, Smith has served on the board of directors for the Nursing Consortium of South Florida (now the Nursing Consortium of Florida). Re-elected to the board this past March, she said the position is important because it enables her to “help more nurse leaders participate in the decision-making that shapes, heals, and strengthens our communities.”

One of her greatest undertakings to date has been leading UHealth’s Magnet Recognition Program efforts, a distinction for nursing care excellence that the American Nurses Credentialing Center awards to only about 10 percent of all US hospitals. To keep her team informed and energized in the home stretch of this monumental journey, Smith launched an educational video series at UHealth called “Magnet Mondays.” In her first broadcast, she praised the more than 3,000 professionals she is responsible for leading on a daily basis. “This is not possible to do without the support of the leaders, nurses, and the staff,” she said. “Really this is about them.”





# Jackson Nursing Exec Leads By Learning in New Program

By Alan Gomez

Sunitha Abraham’s nursing journey began in India, where she discovered her love for surgical nursing and her talent for running operating rooms. Immigrating to the United States on her own, she rose to management positions in surgical services with Aventura Hospital and Medical Center, Memorial Regional Hospital, and Jackson Health System. By 2022, she had directed over 1,000 employees, and held graduate degrees in both business administration and nursing.

But Abraham, the senior director of Jackson Memorial Hospital’s Perioperative Division, still felt she had more to learn as a health leader. When she shared this with her boss, Oscar Betancourt, Jackson Memorial Hospital’s chief operating officer, he mentioned it to double ‘Cane David Zambrana, D.N.P. ’09, Ph.D. ’17, Jackson Health System’s executive vice president and chief operating officer. In turn, Dr. Zambrana informed Betancourt that the University of Miami, where Betancourt earned his M.B.A., was about to launch a unique joint degree collaboration between the School of Nursing and Health Studies and Miami Herbert Business School.

Among the first of its kind, the Master of Science in Leadership (M.S.L.)/ Doctor of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.) program launched in January 2023. This December, Abraham earns the distinction of being its first-



ever graduate. “I’m so glad I took this program,” said Abraham, who implemented a surgical smoke evacuation plan at Jackson for her scholarly project. “The curriculum was heavily focused on leadership. That’s my passion. I like to lead and influence people, and I’m so grateful to Jackson for fully supporting my journey.”

The M.S.L./D.N.P. program offers motivated nurses like Abraham in-depth preparation in organizational behavior and management, finance, ethics, practice improvement, and much more. One of her classes focused

on leading team members from different cultures, an important skill to have in South Florida. For example, in some cultures looking someone straight in the eyes is seen as a sign of disrespect. “There are a lot of details of each culture,” she said. “Those classes really taught us how to lead from a cross-cultural perspective.”

Another class, “Building High-Performance Teams,” demonstrated the importance of giving front-line employees a voice in major decisions. This motivated Abraham to create the Perioperative Governance Alliance (PGA) at Jackson, where she oversees more than 600 employees across six departments. Today, the PGA has representatives from each department, from secretaries and OR nurses to anesthesia technologists and certified registered nurse anesthetists. Moreover, noted Abraham, its first meeting, held

in April, generated exciting proposals she never would have come up with herself. “They bring the challenges they face,” she said, “and together they will find a solution.”

It was Abraham’s pride and love for her own family—particularly her special needs son—that inspired her to excel. Opting for full-time enrollment, she managed to earn her joint degree in six semesters. “I recommend the M.S.L./D.N.P. program to every nurse supervisor,” she said. “It will really help you become a transformational leader.”





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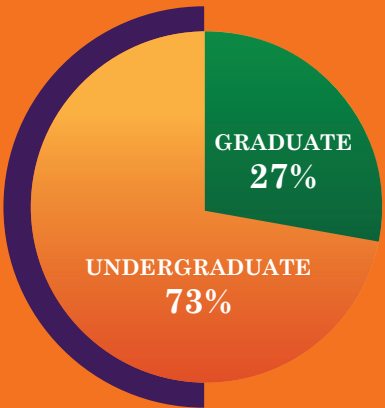


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