



# HNFE NEWS

## Virginia Tech Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise

### FROM WALLACE HALL

Dear Virginia Tech HNFE Alumni and Friends:

The Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise (HNFE) at Virginia Tech continues to thrive. We have a large, rigorous undergraduate program that prepares our students to continue their education beyond Virginia Tech to become athletic trainers, physical therapists, occupational therapists, physician assistants, nurses, physicians, registered dietitians, researchers (PhDs), and so much more.

In addition, our graduate programs are substantial and ever-growing! The HNFE Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) program has graduated three classes so far, preparing future registered dietitians to work in many aspects of nutrition and dietetics. A new generation of future researchers in areas ranging from basic science, clinical and applied science, and community-based science have been trained by our faculty in our Master of Science (MS) and PhD programs. Through our Online Master of Agricultural and Life Sciences (OMALS) program, students have been able to access the same excellence for which Virginia Tech is known; however, OMALS provides asynchronous modes of teaching to allow flexibility for students. We are excited to announce that our OMALS programs will be partnering with our dietetic internship programs in Blacksburg and Northern Virginia to provide another venue for the interns to obtain a MS degree! The HNFE dietetic internship program shows no sign of stopping and continues to thrive. In fact, this past May, they celebrated graduating their largest class of interns to date!

The Family Nutrition Program continues to provide programming excellence in promoting nutrition security as a major part of Virginia Cooperative Extension. With respect to research, our faculty have obtained a large number of federal and foundation grants this past year. These grants demonstrate intra-departmental and inter-departmental collaborations, exhibiting the collaborative nature of our faculty. Our staff continues to provide excellence in service to our entire department.

Furthermore, we have had a number of HNFE faculty and staff win awards for their work. To name a few: Renee Eaton, undergraduate program director, received the 2023 Alumni Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Academic Advising; Sarah Misyak, research assistant professor, won the Virginia Cooperative Extension evaluation award for the third year in a row; and Angela Anderson, collegiate associate professor, received the 2023 CALS Outstanding Recent Graduate Alumni Award. The grants and awards obtained by faculty only form the tip of the iceberg of all that we have accomplished this year! I am excited for you to read more about these accolades in the latest edition of our HNFE newsletter.

If you are ever in Blacksburg, please be sure to stop by our main office in Wallace Hall. We welcome visitors and like to hear about what our alumni are doing. Have a wonderful summer! Go Hokies!

Sincerely,

Stella L. Volpe, PhD, '87, '91  
Professor and Head

Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise

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COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES  
**HUMAN NUTRITION,  
FOODS, AND EXERCISE**  
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### STAY CONNECTED

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[WWW.HNFE.VT.EDU](http://WWW.HNFE.VT.EDU)

Follow us on social media for daily content, which includes announcements, event information, student features, departmental plans, and more!



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Virginia Tech  
Human Nutrition,  
Foods, and Exercise

## Education at Virginia Tech a family affair for the Raceks

Four members of the Racek family currently are pursuing degrees at the university, and they're enjoying being together while also blazing their own trails.



*The Racek family has deep ties to Virginia Tech, including current first-year student Will (far left), junior Katie (second from left), and senior Dawson (far right). Their parents are alumni of the university, with Lisa (second from right) currently pursuing a master's degree in leadership studies. Photo by Clark DeHart for Virginia Tech.*

Genetics provides the evidence that Dawson, Katie, and Will Racek inherited their hair color, eye color, and other certain physical and personality traits from their parents. And though not scientifically proven, Joe and Lisa Racek, two Virginia Tech alumni, probably passed down their overwhelming affinity for this university as well.

Higher education certainly is a family affair for this Blacksburg family of six and worthy of celebration on Spring Family Weekend 2023. Of special note, four of these six family members currently are pursuing degrees at Virginia Tech. Every college features its share of legacy students - children of alumni - but three of those attending college at the same time seems rare. That mom is working on a master's degree makes this story even more unique.

"It's been awesome," Katie said. "We see each other a lot, which is just so cool. We get to go home and hang out with family a lot. [...] On campus, I will just get lunch with them or go see Will's dorm. I'll go hang out with him and his friends, and it's just really cool to be in the same place. In high school, we didn't really get to have the student experience together. Kids in high school are separated, honestly, but in college, you definitely get to do a lot together, and it's awesome."

Dawson, the oldest child and a senior pursuing degrees in both corporate finance and entrepreneurship from the Pamplin College of Business, started the parade of Racek children going to Virginia Tech in 2019. He originally wanted to play football in college and received a scholarship offer from Jacksonville University. Like many local teens, a part of him longed to get away and try something different. But when it came time to decide on a college, Dawson said he had a gnawing feeling that he needed to be at Virginia Tech.

"I just felt like I was being called here, and I felt like there was something I needed to do here," he said. "I wrestled with it. [...] I think it's partially because I was close with my family and how close we are to the community here and how we're very integrated. My dad's a pastor and a real estate broker, and so I'd say we're pretty integrated into the Blacksburg area."

Katie followed a year after Dawson's enrollment and is working on a degree in human nutrition, foods, and exercise from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. She eventually hopes to become a high school science teacher or a sports nutritionist. Will is a first-year student and pursuing a degree in hospitality and tourism management from the Pamplin College of Business. He is looking at management or entrepreneurial careers in the hospitality industry.

[Read the full story here.](#)



# STUDENT NEWS

## Southeast American College of Sports Medicine (SEACSM) Conference

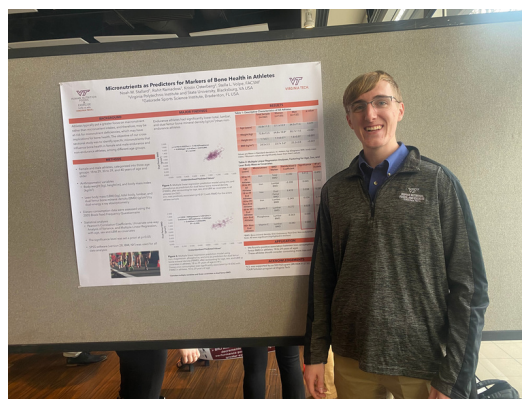
Our department was well-represented at the Southeast American College of Sports Medicine (SEACSM) regional conference in Greenville, South Carolina that occurred February 23 to 25. Renee Eaton, Angela Anderson, and Stella Volpe, two graduate students, and 18 undergraduate students attended SEACSM, where they engaged in lectures, poster sessions, and a mentoring breakfast. Way to go team!

Here were the highlights:

Three of our undergraduate students, Noah Stallard, Sabina Holz, and Gretchen Olazabal competed in the SEACSM Student Bowl. These students were in first place leading into Final Jeopardy, but alas, missed the Final Jeopardy question. Nonetheless, we are still very proud of them! Stallard and Holz were part of the 2022 regional and national championship Student Bowl team and the third team member, Pierre-Anne Laird, graduated in 2022.

Stallard (photographed in the third photo from the top) presented a poster entitled, "Micronutrients as Predictors for Markers of Bone Health in Athletes" at SEACSM. This research was conducted in the Volpe lab. Volpe, Kristin Osterberg, and Rohit Ramadoss were co-authors of this research.

Photographed in the bottom photo, Leah Johnson, doctoral student mentored by Kevin Davy, gave a free communications presentation on dark chocolate intake and its increase in energy expenditure.





## Undergraduate Research Week

April 19 to 23, 2023 marked the nationwide celebration of Undergraduate Research Week. To celebrate, we highlighted a few of our undergraduate researchers across all of our social media platforms and, now, in our latest edition of our newsletter. The research performed by these students represents the wide array of projects going on in our department.



**NICK  
COVINGTON**

Nick Covington, HNFE senior, is a researcher in the Physical Activity Research & Community Implementation (PARCI) Lab at Virginia Tech run by Samantha Harden, HNFE associate professor.

As an undergraduate researcher within the PARCI Lab, Covington had the unique opportunity of working on a parallel project that is related to supporting patients who suffer from chronic pain. Over the course of this semester, he had been working to identify how to best support veterans that suffer from chronic pain. Much of this was done by understanding the intersections of care and defining interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary approaches.

**AMANDA  
SWEETEN**

Amanda Sweeten, HNFE sophomore, is an undergraduate research assistant working in professor Robert Grange's Lab studying treatment methods for Facioscapulohumeral muscular dystrophy (FSHD). She assists and works alongside HNFE doctoral student, Claire Yuan, to collect and analyze muscle function data from a mouse model of FSHD to test various treatments.



**RACHEL  
KAPLAN**

Rachel Kaplan, HNFE junior, is an undergraduate researcher in the Physical Activity Research & Community Implementation (PARCI) Lab run by Samantha Harden, HNFE associate professor. Her research focuses on implementing physical activity into the community. Currently, Kaplan is working on a project to promote physical activity in endometrial cancer survivors.



**JON DOTSON**

Jon Dotson, HNFE junior, has been working in the Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism (NEM) Laboratory under the leadership of Enette Larson-Meyer, HNFE professor, since January 2022. Dotson has assisted mostly with overseeing the 10-week supervised resistance training regimen that is part of the lab's healthy intentional weight gain in athletes and military personal study funded by the Peanut Institute. He has also assisted in data entry and in analysis of physical activity questionnaires. Dotson presented an abstract entitled "Repetitions in Reserve in Research: Analyzing the Relationship of Strength and Loading Choices" at the annual scientific meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine which took May 30 to June 2 in Denver, Colorado.



**MCKENNA  
HELDER**

McKenna Helder, Food Science & Technology Outstanding Senior, performed research in the Laboratory for Eating Behaviors and Weight Management run by HNFE professor, Brenda Davy. Helder, along with a team of researchers, is working on a study looking at the role of ultra-processed foods (UPF) in reward processing and ad lib energy intake (i.e., are we "driven" to eat more when exposed to UPF). She's also a researcher on another study focused on UPF and risk for type 2 diabetes where she's responsible for quantifying food additives in diets high in UPF and assessing food texture in ultra-processed and non-UPF.



## Undergraduate Research Week



The Craige Lab highlighted eight undergraduate researchers for Undergraduate Research Week this year. These students are investigating how vascular dysfunction due to the loss of an important protein (endothelial nitric oxide synthase) affects the acute responses to exercise. They are working in pairs and each have a specific organ they are investigating (e.g., skeletal muscle, heart, liver, etc.).

Top row from left to right:

Nabeel Siddiqui, HNFE junior, works mainly with Jacob Bond, a Translational Biology, Medicine, & Health (TBMH) doctoral student in the lab, on exercise science research; specifically, he investigates the role exercise can play on obesity-induced bone metabolic dysfunction.

Genet Mehari, biochemistry senior, works as a volunteer in the Craige Lab and works closely with Adele Addington, Craige Lab manager, on genotyping. Mehari intends to attend medical school to become either a physician or physician scientist in the future

Arbaaz Gill, biological sciences junior, volunteers in the Craige Lab and also mainly works alongside Bond. Gill aspires to attend medical school and become a physician one day.

Jimmy Anderson, neurology junior, is deeply interested in exercise science and passionate about the clinical applications of an optimal lifestyle. Anderson believes a holistic approach to chronic diseases is critical in treating metabolic and cardiovascular diseases.

Bottom row from left to right:

Isabella Filippone, HNFE junior, is pursuing a minor in adaptive brain and behavior and her interest lies in exercise science research. She plans to attend medical school after receiving her degree.

Anika Mansdoerfer, HNFE senior, is pursuing a minor in psychology and intends to start a career in the health industry.

Abhinav Krishnan, biochemistry sophomore from Charlotte, North Carolina, enjoys lifting, playing basketball, and cooking new meals. These hobbies and interests are ultimately what lead him to join the Craige lab.

Justin Moses, HNFE senior, works as a volunteer in the Craige Lab under the guidance of Rebecca Mammel, HNFE doctoral student with a concentration in molecular and cellular sciences. He plans to attend medical school after graduation to become a pediatrician.



### DARYN OLSEN

Daryn Olsen, HNFE junior, is an undergraduate researcher in the Physical Activity Research & Community Implementation (PARCI) Lab at Virginia Tech run by Samantha Harden, HNFE associate professor.

During her time in the lab, Olsen has worked on a number of studies. One of Olsen's projects is a meta-analysis about group versus individual exercise where she got to take part in lots of data collection and analysis with researchers all over the world. Another project that she is working on focuses on endometrial cancer survivors where she makes multiple important documents and videos for the study and its participants.

### NOAH STALLARD

Noah Stallard, HNFE Outstanding Senior, is an undergraduate researcher under the mentorship of Stella Volpe, HNFE professor and department head.

In the Volpe Lab, Stallard studies micronutrient intake and bone health in female and male endurance and non-endurance athletes, specifically measuring if any micronutrients are predictors of bone health.



### SEAN BURNETT

Sean Burnett, an HNFE senior participating in our accelerated master's program, is an undergraduate researcher under the mentorship of Sarah Misyak, HNFE research assistant professor. He is assisting with a scoping review of the literature examining Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education outcomes and impacts.



## Virginia Tech Women's Basketball Team made it to the Final Four



In a historic first for the Hokies, the Virginia Tech Women's Basketball Team reached the Final Four! We wanted to take a moment to highlight all of our students who took part in this incredible moment in Virginia Tech Athletics history. (Left column, first row) Elizabeth Kitley, senior, (second row) Cayla King, junior, and (third row) Charlise Dunn, freshman, were all players on the team.

We also want to shoutout HNFE students Katie Schiefer, Peyton Kiser, Jonas Lane, and Chloe Shupe. Schiefer was an athletic trainer assistant for the team, Kiser was a student manager for the team, and Lane and Shupe were on the Cheer squad.



Fresh off a historic Final Four appearance, several members of the Virginia Tech women's basketball team including Elizabeth Kitley, senior (on the right in the photograph), joined other female athletes and trailblazers during an evening to celebrate the history of Title IX. The Virginia Tech School of Communication hosted a roundtable discussion event titled "50 years of Title IX History at Virginia Tech" at the Moss Arts Center.



## Virginia Tech Athletics Excellence Banquet Award Winners

Several HNFE students were recognized at the Academic Excellence Banquet hosted by Virginia Tech Athletics. Scholar-Athletes earned a 4.0 GPA during the 2022 calendar year. All-Academic Team Members are the top student-athletes academically in their sport and support group during the 2022 calendar year.

### HNFE SCHOLAR-ATHLETES RECOGNIZED



**CAYLA KING**  
WOMEN'S BASKETBALL



**ELIZABETH KITLEY**  
WOMEN'S BASKETBALL



**ELIZABETH CANFIELD**  
ATHLETIC TRAINING



**SADLER LUNDY**  
CHEERLEADING



**LAUREN HARGROVE**  
WOMEN'S SOCCER



**KATIE ANDREINI**  
WOMEN'S TENNIS

### HNFE ALL-ACADEMIC TEAM MEMBERS RECOGNIZED



**CERA POWELL**  
VOLLEYBALL



**GRACIE KENNEDY**  
LACROSSE

[Read the full story here.](#)

Katie Andreini was the recipient of the Skelton Award for Academic Excellence in Athletics, which is given to a rising junior, senior, or fifth-year student-athlete who has participated in intercollegiate athletics for at least two seasons at Virginia Tech and who holds an overall grade-point average of 3.40 or better. Each recipient receives a scholarship of \$5,000. Congrats!



## Senior Spotlights



### GRACE BARBARO

Grace Barbaro received a Bachelor of Science in Dietetics this spring and, after graduation, she will be attending Virginia Commonwealth University to complete their RD program.



### NATHAN MOYA

Nathan Moya received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, Moya is intending to take a gap year before attending PT school.



### KAHLAN ERICKSON

Kahlan Erickson received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, Erickson will be completing George Mason University's Public Health Program.

### MARCIANA CASTILLO



Marciana Castillo received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. Post-graduation, Castillo will be traveling to Hong Kong to teach English in an English immersion program called Summerbridge Hong Kong. When she returns to the United States, she'll be taking a gap year to apply to dental schools, work as a substitute teacher, earn her yoga teacher certification, and travel some more.

"I have loved HNFE so much," Castillo said. "The amazing opportunities, wonderful professors, and enriching experiences have really enhanced my college experience greatly. It is such a collaborative major and I feel prepared for post graduate life because of it."

Earlier this spring semester, she was a recipient of an Aspire! Award for the month of April. The Aspire! Awards recognize students, faculty, and staff who exemplify Virginia Tech Student Affairs' Aspirations for Student Learning. Castillo exemplified the aspiration of embracing Ut Prosim as a way of life.

[You can read more about this accomplishment here.](#)



### VIVIAN REED

Vivian Reed received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, she will be taking a gap year then pursuing a master's in athletic training.

"I've had a great experience with the professors in HNFE," Reed said. "I've always felt like they cared about our education as students and our success beyond college."



## Senior Spotlights



### MYA MANNS

Mya Manns received a Bachelor of Science in Dietetics this spring. After graduation, she'll be applying to online nutrition graduate programs over the summer.



### WILLIAM MONTEITH

William Monteith received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, he'll be joining the workforce as an Implementation Specialist focusing on Clinical Data Solutions at Secure Exchange Solutions.



### KUNIKA TIWARI

Kunika Tiwari received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this summer. After graduation, Tiwari will work towards becoming a PA.



### ANNA OWENS

Anna Owens received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, Owens will be applying for nursing schools.



### SOFIA EBERSOLE

Sofia Ebersole received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring.

"I loved this program! I think it's great and I'm sad to be leaving!"



### KARLIE BYRNE

Karlie Byrne received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. Byrne will be attending graduate school at Elon University for Physical Therapy after graduation.



## Senior Spotlights



### RYAN BREEDLOVE

Ryan Breedlove received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. Post-graduation, he will be attending graduate school at James Madison University for athletic training.



### SYDNEY JOHNSTON

Sydney Johnston received a Bachelor of Science in Dietetics this spring and, after graduation, she will be receiving a master's degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and then completing a dietetic internship program at Virginia Commonwealth University.



### MASON CLEMENTS

Mason Clements received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring and will begin working as a Rehab Tech at Sheltering Arms Institute after graduation.

### BREANNA LYTTON



Breanna Lytton received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, Lytton will be attending professional school at the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine (WVSOM).

"I cannot say enough great things about HNFE," Lytton said. "I'm taking what I learned into my profession as a D.O. and am excited to emphasize the true importance of nutrition and exercise in practice. The HNFE faculty have supported me throughout my journey at Virginia Tech, and I am forever thankful for their kindness and mentorship! I love HNFE!"



### KYLA LONG

Kyla Long received a Bachelor of Science in Dietetics this spring and, after graduation, she will be attending the University of North Florida to complete their RD program.



## Senior Spotlights



### SAMANTHA ODEH

Samantha Odeh received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. Post-graduation, Odeh will begin work as a Medical Assistant at the Virginia Spine Institute.



### VIVIAN LU

Vivian Lu received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. Post-graduation, she will be taking a gap year and then applying for dental school.



### ANNAKATE ERSTLING

AnnaKate Erstling received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, she will be attending George Washington University to complete their nursing program.

### MADDY BURKE



Maddy Burke received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, Burke will be headed to Spain to complete the Camino de Santiago study abroad program and, upon her return, will apply to graduate programs in Florida for exercise physiology and kinesiology. She also plans to continue her research and speak at addiction rehab centers about how exercise can aid in addiction recovery and raise money to put treadmills and gym equipment in rehabilitation centers.

"I am going to miss this program! I came into college as a biology major and switched to HNFE," Burke said. "This program really helped me discover my passion in life! I am forever grateful!"



Christine Jung received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. Following graduation, she will be joining the U.S. Army as a Medical Services Officer.



Breanna Brewer received a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. Following graduation, she will be taking a gap year then applying for medical school.





## NOAH STALLARD RECOGNIZED AS HNFE'S OUTSTANDING SENIOR

Each year, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech proudly graduates over 800 seniors across 17 majors. Prior to commencement, each department within CALS takes on the significant task of recognizing one graduating senior who stands out amongst their peers. This student is selected as their departmental outstanding senior. We are proud to announce that Noah Stallard from Warrenton, Virginia has been recognized as HNFE's Outstanding Senior for the Spring 2023 semester. After graduation, Stallard plans to apply to PA schools and work as an EMT and Medical Assistant.

Stallard decided to get involved with undergraduate research during his sophomore year because he wanted to learn about the intricacies of research. By volunteering in the lab of Stella Volpe, HNFE professor and department head as well as Virginia Tech alumna, Stallard was able to improve his writing and public-speaking skills as well as his ability to critically review literature. He says that each of these skills will help him in his future profession through evidence-based practice. He also adds that Volpe significantly impacted him and made a difference in his life.

"She challenges me to continuously improve my skills, she taught me the value of effective critical feedback, and she taught me to be open-minded and to be comfortable not knowing something," Stallard said. "Furthermore, Dr. Volpe helped me be in positions where I was able to present our research at conferences, which were great opportunities."

Stallard's favorite Hokie memory was the moment when he and his team won the National American College of Sports Medicine Student Bowl. He says that being able to share this moment with his teammates, Sabina Holz and Pierre-Anne Laird; his coach, Angela Anderson, HNFE collegiate associate professor; and his fellow HNFE classmates and professors was a true joy.

## MARLEY MCCARTNEY HONORED WITH CALS OUTSTANDING MENTOR AWARD

We're thrilled to announced that Marley McCartney from New Kent, Virginia received the CALS Outstanding Mentor Award. This award recognizes an outstanding graduating senior who has demonstrated excellence in mentoring. McCartney will graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) with a minor in medicine and society. After graduation, she plans to obtain a Master of Art in Biomedical Sciences through Bluefield University with hopes to matriculate into the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine in the following year.

Over the past four years at Virginia Tech, McCartney has had the opportunity to serve in several leadership positions in many different clubs and organizations across campus. She's served as the Class of 2023 Secretary, the Director of Internal Affairs for the Student Alumni Associates (SAA), as well as a 2023 Senior Class Gift Co-Chair, just to name a few. In each of these positions, McCartney has been able to educate students about the importance of philanthropy and Virginia Tech traditions which make Blacksburg feel like home. She says that she's been very fortunate to be in these positions as it has allowed her to learn more about herself as a leader and how she can best serve her community.

"Being a Hokie has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life as I have learned what it means to give back," McCartney said. "Being able to give back to a community that has given so much to me is the embodiment of Ut Prosim."

McCartney's favorite Hokie memory was having the opportunity to make one of the floral arrangements for the April 16th memorial this spring semester. She says that it was an honor to be able to help out in the floral lab and to make an arrangement in honor of the Hokies who lost their lives.







## SAMANTHA SOULE HONORED WITH CALS COMEBACK AWARD

Join us in congratulating Samantha Soule from Williamsburg, Virginia for receiving the CALS Comeback Award. This award honors and recognizes a graduating senior who has overcome adversity - whether academically, personally, emotionally, and/or physically and has demonstrated tremendous grit and perseverance. Soule is an HNFE senior minoring in psychology and will be graduating from Virginia Tech this spring. After graduation, she plans to take a gap-year and work at a hospital in Richmond, Virginia. After working for a year, she has plans to pursue an associate's degree in sonography to become a licensed Ultrasound Technician.

During her sophomore year, Soule applied and was later accepted into the Student Alumni Associates (SAA) of Virginia Tech. She says that SAA helped her come out of her shell and really connect with what it meant to be a Hokie and to uphold the pillars of Virginia Tech. She would eventually serve as the Director of Communications on the SAA's executive board. In this position, Soule learned a lot about how to bridge connections between future and current alumni.

Later, in her junior year, she completed her field study requirements as a sports medicine aide for the Spirit Squad with Virginia Tech Athletics. In this role, she gained over 100 hours of hands-on experience with athletic trainers and was given the opportunity to translate what she learned in the classroom and in textbooks into real-life application through supervised guidance. She adds that she made long-lasting professional connections that she knows she'll be able to rely on throughout her career.

Soule's favorite Hokie memory was the October 2019 football game between the Virginia Tech Hokies and the UNC Chapel Hill Rams. While she admits to not being the biggest football fan, during this game, she was all in.

"It was a record-breaking game! We went into six overtimes and, miraculously, the Hokies won," Soule said. "It was during that game when I felt like I'd been inaugurated into the Hokie family. From that day on, I knew that this was home."

## KHADEEJAT LAWAL HONORED WITH CALS DIVERSITY & INCLUSION SERVICE AWARD

The Diversity and Inclusion Service Award was established in 2006 to recognize outstanding diversity accomplishments of faculty, staff, and students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS). The service award for students was named the Randolph L. Grayson Outstanding CALS Diversity Scholar Award and graduating students receive this award for exemplifying excellence in advancing the college's mission of promoting diversity. Khadeejat Lawal, HNFE senior from Fairfax, Virginia is the recipient of this award for the Spring 2023 semester. After graduation, Lawal will be attending UNC Chapel Hill to complete their Master of Public Health program.

Lawal knows that her Virginia Tech degree will take her far in life. She recognizes that Hokies are everywhere and, even where there aren't Hokies, people recognize the Virginia Tech name and address it with such high regard. Lawal says that when you're in a room full of professionals, saying that you have a degree from Virginia Tech automatically opens so many doors to potential connections and opportunities. According to her, the institution maintains a certain reputation and level of rigor and to call yourself a Hokie means that you're a hard-working and committed individual.

Lawal also recognizes the importance and prestige of Virginia Tech's motto Ut Prosim. To her, Ut Prosim means prioritizing a community's wellness and ensuring that people within the community are heard. Lawal has always devoted her time to serving her community but, through Ut Prosim, she learned to not only serve but to engage and listen to her community's wants and needs. She says that when you take a step further beyond serving and actively connect and embrace people, they feel secure and encouraged to share their thoughts, which makes all the more room for effective and equitable change.

Lawal's favorite professor during her undergraduate career was Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, HNFE senior instructor.

"From the minute I took NALS my freshman year, to now in my senior year, she has always been a supportive and encouraging individual and I've always enjoyed my time in the classroom and in office hours with her," Lawal said. "She has always made an intentional effort to make her students feel heard and seen, and continues to support my educational goals as I pursue my graduate degree."





## Celebrating Our Students: Spring 2023 Commencement



On April 28, the Virginia Tech Sports Medicine Club hosted their Athletic Training Olympics and Senior Signing Day to highlight all of the students who participated and contributed to an excellent year. During the senior signing portion of the event, seniors of the club shared their post-graduation plans.



On May 10, our department hosted our Senior Gift Give-Out event to celebrate our graduating seniors. Seniors picked up their gift, struck a pose in front of our step and repeat banner with family and friends, and interacted with other students, faculty, and staff. We enjoyed having the opportunity to celebrate with them in person.

## SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: CATHERINE SLUPE



"It's been a great four years! I'm thankful for the education and memories."

Catherine Slupe will be receiving a Bachelor of Science in Dietetics this spring. After graduation, Slupe is hoping to work as an instructor or as a member of the customer service/management team in corporate fitness studios. Over the next year, she will also be looking into graduate schools and dietetic internships.



Check out our Facebook photo albums to view all of our commencement-related photos!

[HNFE Senior Gift Give-Out Event](#)

[Spring 2023 Commencement Photos](#)



## Celebrating Our Students: Spring 2023 Commencement

On May 10, ten graduates of the Virginia Tech Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) program celebrated with a luncheon held at the Corporate Research Center Training and Event Center in Blacksburg, Virginia, just prior to the university commencement ceremony for graduate students. Students were joined by family members, HNFE faculty, Carilion Clinic leadership, and preceptors to celebrate their hard efforts over the past two years as part of the program's accelerated BS-MS pathway.

Several program graduates secured job offers prior to graduation, and others will be seeking employment across a variety of practice areas to include weight management, in-patient clinical, pediatrics, food service management, sports nutrition, and eating disorders/outpatient counseling.



On May 5, 21 intern graduates of the Virginia Tech Internship in Nutrition and Dietetics celebrated together with a luncheon at CrossKeys Vineyards in Harrisonburg, Virginia, a half-way point between the Blacksburg, Virginia and Northern Virginia program sites. Two of the interns participated in the Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway allowing them to earn their RDN credentials while completing their doctorate degree. This represents the program's largest class in the almost 30-year history of the program resulting in 358 alumni!

Several graduates already have job offers, mostly in practice sites where they completed rotations. Others are looking for positions in practice areas ranging from public health to sports nutrition to outpatient counseling.

## SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: LEILA PRUSCINO



Leila Pruscino will be receiving a Bachelor of Science in Science of Food, Nutrition, and Exercise (SNFE) this spring. After graduation, Pruscino will be attending Boston College to complete their master's program in mental health counseling.





## CLASS OF 2023: MADDIE SLAGLE USED HER MASTER'S TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

*As a student in the Online Master of Science in Agricultural and Life Sciences Program and a student-athlete, Slagle used her knowledge to improve performance for herself and other female student-athletes.*

You are what you eat. Or so the saying goes. While that isn't entirely true, Maddie Slagle, who chose the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Online Master of Science in Agricultural and Life Sciences Program for the added flexibility as a student-athlete on the volleyball team, found that other female student-athletes had a knowledge gap when it comes to nutrition and athletic performance.

"A lot of young women don't understand how important nutrition is," said Slagle, whose final project looks at collegiate athletes' knowledge of nutrition and sports performance. "They say they value nutrition but don't know what it takes to amplify performance."

When you eat is just as important, Slagle said, such as before, during, and after practice or a game. Tentatively, Slagle found that that is where the knowledge gap exists. As a result, an athlete lacks enough fuel to sustain maximum performance. One course taken early on in her graduate school career completely changed Slagle's perspective on food as fuel both on and off the court - Advanced Nutrition and Physical Performance.

"That made me realize I need food or fuel during competition. Specifically, how many grams I need to raise glucose levels and what I need to keep my energy up," said Slagle, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "In my courses, I always thought of my athletics angle and how I should take things into consideration."

Slagle came to Virginia Tech having never lived outside of Iowa and wanting to experience something new as she finished her athletic eligibility.

"I fell in love with Virginia Tech and the New River Valley. The mountains are different than back home, and the campus is so pretty," she said. "I've had new academic experiences, too. I had agricultural-focused courses for the first time that gave me a new perspective and mindset on nutrition as a whole."

[Read the full story here.](#)



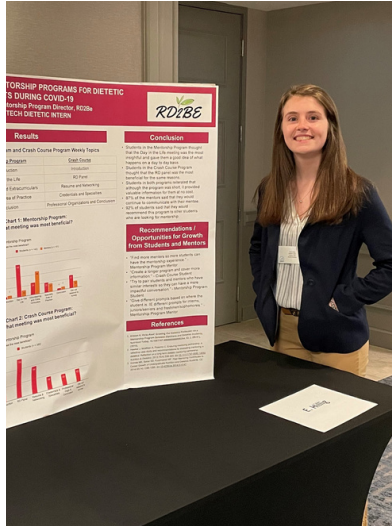
This spring semester, we had three students graduate from our OMALS program. Maddie Slagle (photographed above), Collin Gerardi (photographed in left image standing to the left of Angela Anderson, HNFE collegiate associate professor), and Naida Berbic (photographed in the right image standing on the left).

Gerardi was recently accepted to the Virginia Tech HNFE Internship in Nutrition and Dietetics Program and will be inducted in the 2023 to 2024 class of dietetic interns.

Angela Anderson and Sarah Misyak, HNFE research assistant professor, were co-chairs on Berbic's committee.



## VAND and DCMAND Annual Meetings



Overall, HNFE had strong representation at the Virginia Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (VAND) Annual Meeting in Richmond, Virginia on April 16 and the DC Metro Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (DCMAND) Annual Meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland on April 17.



Carol Papillon and Amy LaFalce from the Virginia Tech HNFE Internship in Nutrition and Dietetics Program and Kristen Chang and Enette Larson-Meyer from the Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) program accompanied a total of ten dietetic interns and eighteen graduate students to the VAND Annual Meeting. Prior to the meeting, the MSND students attended a tour of Shalom Farms (middle photo). During the meeting, Emily Hillig (top right) and Diane Schleicher (top left), dietetic interns, presented posters based on professional projects they completed.



Later during the meeting, Hillig, a dietetic intern in Northern Virginia, was recognized as Virginia's Outstanding Dietetic Intern. Hayley Miller, a second-year graduate student in HNFE's MSND program, was recognized as Virginia's Outstanding Graduate Dietetic Student. Hillig and Miller (photographed together in the bottom left image) were selected to receive these awards for their leadership, scholarship, and professional achievements.

The following day at DCMAND, six dietetic interns were in attendance (see image at top of writeup) and one of the interns, Carolina Hernandez, presented a poster (photographed in bottom right photo). Two of the interns, Audie Spear and Gwyneth Hadash, had the honor and privilege to serve on the DCMAND Conference Planning Committee (not photographed).



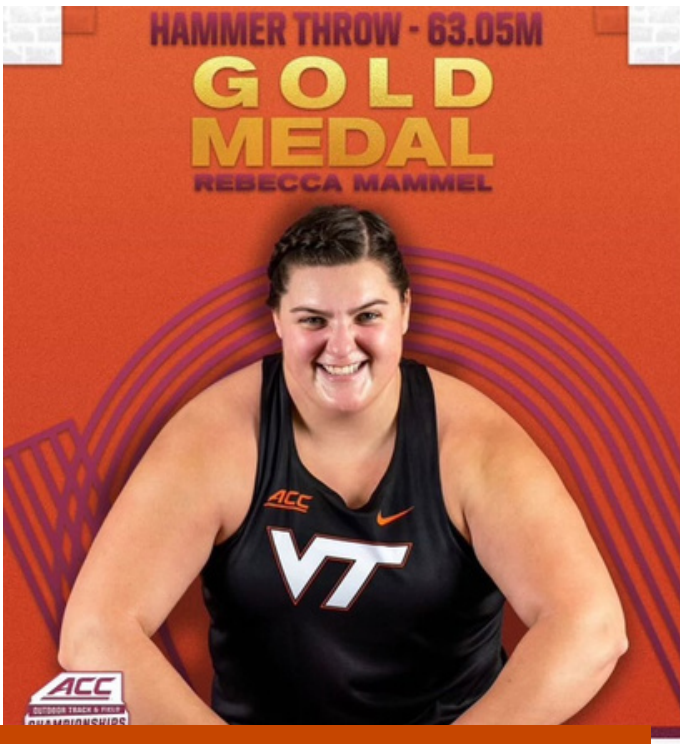
## Graduate Student Accomplishments



Maria DeNunzio, HNFE master's student, mentored by Sarah Misyak, HNFE research assistant professor, presented a poster entitled, "Using a Social Vulnerability Lens for Exploring Food Insecurity and Negative Mental Health Outcomes for Low Income Mothers of Young Children" in the Virginia Tech Center for Advanced Innovation in Agriculture (CAIA) Graduate Student Poster Presentation Showcase.



Orion Willoughby, HNFE doctoral student mentored by HNFE assistant professor, Joshua Drake, was awarded the American Physiology Society: Cell Physiology Pre-Doctoral Award at the Muscle Biology Conference at the University of Florida in March. Only 3 pre-doctoral and 3 post-doctoral awards were given out for the whole meeting and the award winners were selected from the 240 posters presented.



Coming off of winning the weight throw in the Atlantic Coast Conference Championship earning first team All-American status, Rebecca Mammel, doctoral student mentored by Siobhan Craige, HNFE assistant professor, was named the U.S. Track & Field and Cross-Country Coaches Association (USTFCCA) Southeast Region Women's Field Athlete of the Year! Most recently, Mammel also won the ACC Championship in the hammer throw category.



Noor Tasnim, Translational Biology, Medicine and Health (TBMH) doctoral student being mentored by Julia Basso, HNFE assistant professor, was awarded The Roger & Debbie West Student Grant through the Virginia Tech Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT). His work was featured in a performance at The Cube at the Moss Arts Center in May.



## Graduate Student Accomplishments



**PAIGE HARRIGAN,**  
MENTORED BY  
SARAH MISYAK



**REBECCA MAMMEL,**  
MENTORED BY  
SIOBHAN CRAIGE



**KATE STANLEY,**  
MENTORED BY  
VIVICA KRAAK



**FIROOZEH TARKESH,**  
MENTORED BY  
ENETTE LARSON-MEYER

Congratulations to the above HNFE doctoral students for receiving the Margaret C. Hepler Summer Research Fellowship for summer 2023! This fellowship provides excellent graduate students with financial support to work on their research project over the summer months. Any HNFE graduate student who is actively working towards completion of a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation project is eligible.



**MARY FRAZIER**

Mary Frazier and Emma Leslie were recognized as Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health's (TBMH) 2022-2023 Students of the Year.

The Virginia Tech community recognized Frazier and Leslie for their effort and commitment to the TBMH mission as well as for upholding the TBMH pillars: Science, Education, Leadership, and Community.

Frazier is a TBMH doctoral student mentored by Samantha Harden, HNFE associate professor. Leslie is also a TBMH doctoral student being advised by Alexandra DiFeliceantonio, HNFE assistant professor.



**EMMA LESLIE**



**ZACH HUTELIN**

Zach Hutelin, Translational Biology, Medicine and Health doctoral student, was awarded a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. He is being mentored by HNFE assistant professor, Alexandra DiFeliceantonio. Brenda Davy, HNFE professor, and Jeff Stein, HNFE assistant professor, also serve on Hutelin's committee.



## Graduate Student Accomplishments



**AZIN PIRKHALILI**

Azin Pirkhalili successfully defended her thesis "Effect of program implementation fidelity on outcomes of the Lifestyle Change Program conducted through distance learning by Cooperative Extension" and received her doctorate degree. Her advisor was Carlin Rafie, HNFE assistant professor.



**ALEXANDER THOMSON**

Alexander Thomson successfully defended his thesis "Novel Diagnostic Approaches for Genetic and Environmental Sources of Mitochondrial Dysfunction" and received his doctorate degree. His advisor was Joshua Drake, HNFE assistant professor.



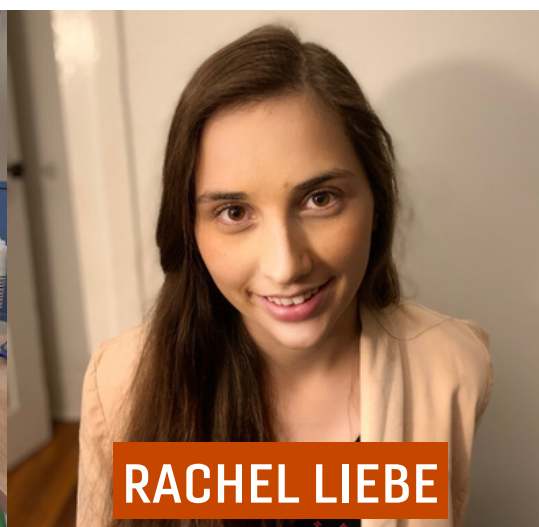
**KYLEA ANDREANO**

Kylea Andreano successfully defended her thesis "Effectiveness Evaluation of COVID-19 Regulations in Collegiate Sports: Quantifying Player Proximity and Workload During Soccer Training" and received her master's degree. Her advisor was Jay Williams, HNFE professor.



**ERICA HOWES**

Erica Howes successfully defended her thesis "The Impact of Weight Bias and Stigma on Energy Misreporting in 24-Hour Dietary Recalls" and received her doctorate degree. Her advisor was Valisa Hedrick, HNFE assistant professor.



**RACHEL LIEBE**

Rachel Liebe successfully defended her thesis "Exploring the Relationship Between Food Security Status and Mental Health Among SNAP-Eligible Virginia Mothers" and received her doctorate degree. Her advisor was Sarah Misyak, HNFE research assistant professor.



**MOLLY PARKER**

Molly Parker successfully defended her thesis "Development and Evaluation of the Planetary Health Diet Index for the United States and Assessment of Dietary Constructs Associated with Sustainability" and received her doctorate degree. Her advisor was Valisa Hedrick, HNFE assistant professor.



# ALUMNI NEWS

## Celebration of Ut Prosim Award recipients recognized by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni Organization

Five alumni and an honorary alumnus received awards for their contributions and service to society.



2023 Ut Prosim Award recipients. Photos by Tim Skiles for Virginia Tech.

Alumni and friends were honored by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni Organization for their achievements and service during the Celebration of Ut Prosim Awards program on March 17.

Outstanding alumni and supporters of the college were recognized for their contributions to the fields of academia, government, or industry through community outreach, development and empowerment, entrepreneurship, leadership, scholarship, service, and philanthropy to Virginia Tech, the college, a department or school, the CALS Alumni Organization, or one's community that illustrates the university's commitment to Ut Prosim (That I May Serve). Two of the awards went to two HNFE alumni!

[Read the full story here.](#)



**CATHERINE WOTEKI**  
M.S. '72, PH.D. '75  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
AND LIFE SCIENCES  
HALL OF FAME

Woteki is currently a professor of food science and human nutrition at Iowa State University and visiting distinguished institute professor at the Biocomplexity Institute of the University of Virginia. She currently serves as a member of President Joe Biden's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, the sole body of advisors from outside the federal government charged with making science, technology, and innovation policy recommendations to the president and the White House. In addition, Woteki is chair of the Board of Trustees of the American Society for Nutrition Foundation.



**ANGELA ANDERSON**  
PH.D. '13  
OUTSTANDING RECENT  
GRADUATE ALUMNI

Anderson is a collegiate associate professor in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise at Virginia Tech. While completing her doctorate, she found her passion for teaching. Anderson has intentionally advanced her pedagogical training, implements new active learning techniques in the classroom, publishes her findings in peer-reviewed journals, presents at conferences, and applies for grants that further better pedagogical practices.



# EXTENSION NEWS



## VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION EARNS NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR ITS DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAM

According to the CDC, more than 37 million Americans have diabetes and about 90 to 95 percent of them have Type 2 diabetes. The national organization has for decades worked to develop effective programs that can impact the trajectory of diabetes for people who are not yet diabetic. Late last year, Virginia Cooperative Extension was awarded full accreditation by the CDC as a provider of the Lifestyle Change Program. The status is awarded to organizations that achieve a certain quality of standards. Normally awarded for a two-year period, Extension was awarded this recognition for five years because of the high retention of its participants.

Extension adopted the program in 2016, which is tied to the National Diabetes Prevention Program, an evidence-based initiative aimed to help people who have prediabetes and are at a high risk of diabetes. Participants meet as a group during weekly sessions with their lifestyle coaches, who serve more as facilitators than educators. Beyond the expected topics of weight loss and exercise, people share personal successes and challenges of staying on track with their goals. Many participants continue the conversations beyond meetings via Facebook and other social media platforms.

Extension specialist Carlin Rafie, an assistant professor in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, has been a big proponent of the program. She joined Extension in 2015 with expertise in nutrition and chronic disease management. She worked closely with a core group of Extension to adopt the Lifestyle Change Program. She has been particularly impressed with how it measures outcomes.

[Read the full story here.](#)

## COVID EXPANSION OF SNAP BENEFITS EXPIRES, HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY LIKELY TO RISE, SAYS FAMILY NUTRITION EXPERT

Millions of Americans who rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to purchase food will have more difficulty doing so. A pandemic-era policy that enhanced SNAP so that participants all received the maximum possible benefits expired March 1. Researchers have estimated that the SNAP emergency allotments kept \$4.2 million out of poverty, and with those benefits ending, U.S. poverty rates will rise.

SNAP serves as the nation's and the state's largest line of defense against hunger and food insecurity. SNAP, formerly called food stamps, provides cash benefits to purchase food to eligible individuals with low incomes. Elena Serrano, director of the Virginia Cooperative Extension Family Nutrition Program, says, "Ending the enhanced benefits will affect households who have the most to lose, those households that qualified for maximum benefits, who will lose an added \$95 per month in benefits. On average SNAP participants will lose \$82 per month."

Serrano emphasized that even when enhanced, SNAP was not enough to cover all food expenses and eliminate food insecurity. "SNAP benefits do not close the meal gap. Living costs have outpaced family income and more families, individuals, and seniors are suffering from food insecurity. Food insecurity is hidden. The face of food insecurity is not the face you may picture," she said.

However, Serrano, said, "There are numerous opportunities to address the increase in food insecurity brought about by this change, and to overcome barriers to participation in nutrition assistance programs."

[Read the full story here.](#)







## VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SPECIALIST CREATES PODCAST TO HELP REDUCE BURNOUT AT WORK

To aid those in academia and all those who work with others, a Virginia Cooperative Extension specialist and Virginia Tech faculty member created a podcast to help reduce burnout and focus on flourishing in the workplace.

Using the yoga kernels for public health – breathwork, meditation, and movement – Samantha Harden, an associate professor in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, focuses on strategies that help people balance work priorities, the responsibilities of life, and relaxation in her podcast, “Higher Vibrations in Higher Education.”

“By listening to this podcast, people will learn these principles and be able to practice them and change the way they conduct research and the way they show up in the classroom so that we promote health for all,” said Harden, an Extension specialist and affiliated faculty of the Fralin Life Sciences Institute and the Center for Health Behaviors Research. “I want to build a culture of health within academia and the workforce.”

On the podcast, Harden guides listeners through visualizations and meditations. There are also long-form interviews with a variety of guests within and outside of academia and Extension specifically.

“Listeners should join us if they are struggling or flourishing within academia so that they could share the things that they’ve learned,” Harden said.

[Read the full story here.](#)

## VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AND THE HALIFAX COUNTY COMMUNITY PARTNER TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY

There’s an oasis in a food desert that sits at the edge of Virginia. Halifax County, home of South Boston, is a sprawling landscape that makes up the fourth-largest county in the commonwealth. But for the residents, there’s a significant lack of a basic access to food.

To combat that issue, the Healthy Harvest Community Garden aims to provide healthy fruits and vegetables to the people who call this region home. And Virginia Cooperative Extension is there to help the garden in its mission to provide nutrition to the underserved.

“The majority of the population in Halifax County lives in a food desert, including many young children, families, and senior citizens,” said Maria Traynham, chair of the Healthy Harvest Community Garden and an assistant with Extension’s Family Nutrition Program.

“The garden is bringing the entire community together toward this mission, and we’re seeing the difference it’s having on our community. Access to healthy food and the ability to afford fresh fruits and vegetables are real challenges that ultimately affect the quality of life and their well-being.”

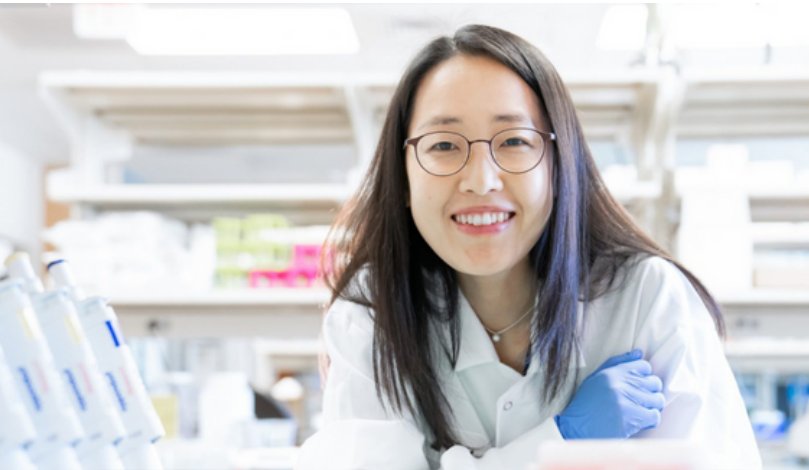
By sharing food from the garden with the community, the group is removing barriers such as the financial ability to afford healthy food. Extension has been part of building relationships and providing more recipes, classes, and resources to empower people with healthy living and lifestyles.

[Read the full story here.](#)





# FACULTY + STAFF NEWS



## RESEARCHERS HOPE TO UNCOVER THE UNDERLYING MECHANISMS OF WHY ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS ARE SO REWARDING - AND SO OVERCONSUMED

Scientists at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC are looking to uncover the “why” of the American diet. Why are people drawn to ultra-processed foods, which have been linked to obesity, Type 2 diabetes, different types of cancer, and increased risk of heart disease and death?

It’s a critical question because ultra-processed foods make up about 58 percent of calories consumed in the United States. These foods have been through multiple manufacturing processes and contain many added ingredients. Examples include sweetened cereals, hot dogs, chips, and soft drinks.

“We have seen an explosion of these foods in our environment since the 1980s,” said Alexandra DiFeliceantonio, an assistant professor with the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC and associate director of the institute’s Center for Health Behaviors Research.

With support from a \$2.2 million grant from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health, her lab is recruiting participants for a study that will combine metabolic, neural, and behavioral measures with statistical modeling to uncover what drives people to reach for ultra-processed foods.

“We want to understand what it is in particular about these foods that leads to changes in body, brain, and behavior,” said DiFeliceantonio, who also holds an appointment in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. “What are the underlying variables we have not thought about yet?”

## PHILANTHROPY SUPPORTS PILOT PROJECTS TO TAKE ON HEALTH CHALLENGES SUCH AS HEART DISEASE, DIABETES, CANCER, STRESS, AND CHRONIC PAIN

Virginia Tech alumni Carol and Bill Seale believe investing in high-impact biomedical research now pays dividends for future generations.

The Seale Innovation Fund helps crossdisciplinary research teams pursue bold ideas in science, gathering preliminary data needed to apply for larger, multiyear research grants. The investment has helped jump-start innovative high-risk, high-reward pilot concepts by supporting the early data and results needed to support larger projects.

“We’ve benefitted from past scientific discoveries and their contributions to modern medicine,” Bill Seale said. “Now we want to pay it forward.”

In 2023, seven new research teams led by Fralin Biomedical Research Institute investigators were selected to benefit from the Seales’ gift. Sora Shin and Junco Warren, HNFE assistant professors, and their teams were among the recipients of this funding.

Shin will work to better understand stress-induced altered sensitivity to pain by exploring the impact of specific neurons on inflammation and chronic pain. Warren will seek to develop novel therapies to treat heart failure in patients with type 2 diabetes.

“The Seale Innovation Fund is an important catalyst for supporting innovative research in early stages and making new health discoveries. We are very grateful for the Seales’ generous investment in science in the service of health.”

[Read the full story here.](#)



[Read the full story here.](#)





## RENEE EATON, WINNER OF THE 2023 ALUMNI AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING

Though she has her hand in many pies in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, from teaching first-year experience courses to supervising the advising center to leading study-abroad trips, undergraduate program director Renee Eaton excels at advising some of the department's 920 undergraduates.

"I would not be a nurse or public health advocate if I had not had the opportunity to work with her," said alumna Marya Hubbard. "I often refer to her as one of the most influential women in my life."

What challenges do you help your undergraduates overcome? It can be something as simple as "These two courses are scheduled at the same time" or "I've changed my mind about a career." But sometimes it's having a family member with significant illness and trying to make adjustments for classes.

What's a time you felt you had an impact on a student? One student was not doing well in classes and didn't know what he wanted to do after graduation. He followed through with things we talked about, to the point that he got to know a professor well and got involved in research in multiple labs. The student ended up doing a master's at VT before med school. His journey was not straightforward, but he found a way to use his strengths.

Do you have a mantra? From Dr. Jane Goodall: "Every day you make an impact, and you have to decide what kind of impact you're going to make."

[Read the full story here.](#)

## VIRGINIA TECH'S INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM HELPS SCIENCE EDUCATORS FOSTER INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

For the last five years, a \$1 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute has funded more than 80 faculty and staff members in their work to change Virginia Tech's climate for marginalized students in the sciences. Now, after receiving a two-year extension, their work will continue.

The \$1 million grant was awarded to Virginia Tech in 2017 as part of the program's first cohort of 24 colleges and universities. The grant extension will continue funding until September 2024.

The program is part of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), which along with supporting education, funds scientific and biomedical research. With more than \$20 billion in net assets, the institute is one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the United States.

"This grant was unlike any other proposal I've participated in writing. There's a deliverable, which is to increase inclusive excellence at Virginia Tech, but we could be very flexible in our approach," said Deborah Good, associate professor in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise and a co-investigator for the grant.

Along with Good, the program has been led by a core team of co-investigators: Sarah Karpanty, a professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation; Michele Deramo, associate vice provost of diversity education and engagement; and Mike Bowers, assistant professor in the School of Neuroscience, who passed away in July 2021. Jill Sible, associate vice provost for undergraduate education, is the principal investigator for the grant.



[Read the full story here.](#)





A group of our HNFE faculty published a book chapter titled "Lessons Learned during the Transition to Online Learning in a University Nutrition and Exercise Department" in March. Join us in congratulating the following authors! From left to right, top row: Angela Anderson, collegiate associate professor; Heather Cox, senior instructor and director; and Renee Eaton, undergraduate program director. From left to right, bottom row: Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, senior instructor; Debby Good, associate professor; and Michelle Rockwell, adjunct faculty. [You can check out the full chapter here.](#)



The Embodied Brain Laboratory had a busy semester which kicked off with a visit from Grounded In Memphis. Grounded in Memphis is an organization created by Memphis artists to harness the power of art to inspire healing. Julia Basso, HNFE assistant professor and PI for the lab, is photographed between Mauricio "Dr. Rico" Flake (left) and Alan Spearman, Co-founder of Grounded (right). Later in the semester, the lab put on their first live performance at the Moss Arts Center, where they explored the dynamics of human brain analysis through sonification and visual projection. The project was conducted by Noor Tasnim, Sooruj Bhatia, and Ben Beiter (Embodied Art, an ICAT Student SEAD Grant recipient). This summer, the lab will be featured in the June 2023 edition of Virginia Living Magazine!



**STELLA VOLPE**

Stella Volpe, professor and department head, was elected as the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) President-elect and will begin her duties following the 2023 ACSM Annual meeting.



**SARAH MISYAK**

Sarah Misyak, HNFE research assistant professor, won the Virginia Cooperative Extension evaluation award for the third year in a row.



**CAROLYN SMITH**

Carolyn Smith, fiscal manager, retired on May 24. Smith has served Virginia Tech for 36 years and dedicated 17 years to HNFE. Join us in extending our best wishes on her well-deserved retirement.



**SAMANTHA HARDEN**

Samantha Harden, HNFE associate professor, had many news appearances this semester. She was on WAGA (FOX) Atlanta, WJLA (ABC) DC, and WFIR (Radio) offering tips for staying healthy in the new year.

She's also been featured in Virginia Living discussing how to create the world's sixth Blue Zone in Virginia and included in a mini-feature in Beyond Science Magazine for the work she's done on her podcast "Higher Vibrations in Higher Education."



**DEBORAH GOOD**

Deborah Good, HNFE associate professor, received a \$50,000 Proof of Concept Grant with Sean O'Keefe (Virginia Tech, Food Science Technology (FST)), Jacob Lahne (Virginia Tech, FST) and Melissa Wright (Virginia Tech, FST) to examine commercial potential of a conjugated linoleic acid food product for medical use (Prader-Willi Syndrome) and recreational/health use (obesity, infertility). Deborah Good also received a CALS Strategic Plan Advancement Seed Grant for her research project "CLA Nutraceutical for Treating Hypogonadism and Obesity" with Co-PIs: Georgia Hodes (Virginia Tech, Neuroscience), Sean O'Keefe (Virginia Tech, FST), Young Ju (Virginia Tech, HNFE), and Melissa Wright, (Virginia Tech, FST).

**JOSHUA DRAKE**

Joshua Drake's NIH/NIA R01 proposal, entitled "Exercise and muscle mitochondria in Alzheimer's Disease", scored at the 12th percentile (pay line is <30). Co-Investigators included in the grant are Junco Warren (Virginia Tech, HNFE), Jill Morris (University of Kansas Medical Center), Mohammed Haeri (University of Kansas Medical Center), and Ben Miller (Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation). Drake is an assistant professor in our department.

**ELENA SERRANO**

Elena Serrano, HNFE professor, is the recipient of a CALS Strategic Plan Advancement - Integrated Internal Competitive Seed Grant, which will fund her project "Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Food Security Programs." Co-investigators on the project include George Davis (Virginia Tech, Ag and Applied Economics), Sarah Misyak (Virginia Tech, HNFE), Chanita Holmes (Virginia Tech, Ag and Applied Economics), and Natalie Cook (Virginia Tech, Population Health Sciences).

**BRENDA DAVY**

Brenda Davy, HNFE professor, was awarded a \$3.2 million 5-year NIH R01 grant, entitled "Water and Weight Control in Older Adults." Co-investigators include Kevin Davy (Virginia Tech, HNFE), and Ben Katz and Tina Savla (Virginia Tech, Human Development and Family Studies).

**SARAH MISYAK**

Sarah Misyak, HNFE research assistant professor, is one of the Co-PIs for a project, entitled "Food insecurity at Virginia Tech", which received a CALS Strategic Plan Advancement Seed Grant. The PI of this project is Chanita Holmes (Virginia Tech, Ag and Applied Economics) and the other Co-PI is Ralph Hall (Virginia Tech, School of Public and International Affairs).

**CARLIN RAFIE**

Carlin Rafie, HNFE assistant professor, is the recipient of a CALS Strategic Plan Advancement Seed Grant, which will fund her project "Embedding Community Health Workers with Cooperative Extension". Co-PIs include Kathryn Parraga-Estrada (Virginia Tech, Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center), Karen Munden (Virginia Cooperative Extension), Kristina Jiles (Center for Public Health Practice and Research (CPHPR)), and Kathy Hosig (CPHPR).





#### UPDATES FROM HEATHER COX ABOUT OUR BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN HNFE - DIETETICS OPTION

The Dietetics option in HNFE is a Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD). Graduates of the program are eligible to apply to all types of dietetics supervised practice programs, including dietetic internships and graduate programs, which lead to the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) credential. National RDN Day took place on March 8 this year and we wanted to take the time to congratulate all of our new RDN alumni! We had 18 alumni join the RDN ranks in 2022 and a total of 110 new RDNs in the past five years. Based on our RDN exam first attempt pass rate during this time, our program ranks at the 88% among didactic programs. We thank all of our faculty teaching and contributing to serve our students and make the Dietetics program strong, including the 11 faculty with the RDN credential! Do you have questions about the DPD? Please reach out to me, Heather Cox, at [hcox1@vt.edu](mailto:hcox1@vt.edu)

To ensure program interns will meet the new requirement to earn a graduate degree to be eligible for the registration examination for dietitians, the internship will partner with Virginia Tech's Online Master of Agricultural and Life Sciences (OMALS) to enable interns to integrate the internship into their graduate coursework. They will take additional courses in research methods, community food systems, multicultural competence, communications, and elective courses in topics related to applied nutrition and physical activity. They will also be required to complete a culminating project related to one of their supervised practice experiences. Interns will finish the internship and their master's degree in approximately 15 months. We will continue to offer the standalone 9-month internship for those who already have a graduate degree. With the shortage of RDNs, these program changes will offer a flexible and individualized pathway for up to 20 Virginia Tech and other DPD students to enter the profession while retaining our significant presence in the DC metro area and throughout the state. Do you have questions about our Virginia Tech Internship in Nutrition and Dietetics Program? Feel free to reach out to me, Carol Papillon, at [cpapillo@vt.edu](mailto:cpapillo@vt.edu).



#### UPDATES FROM CAROL PAPILLON ABOUT OUR VT INTERNSHIP IN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS PROGRAM



#### UPDATES FROM ENETTE LARSON-MEYER ABOUT OUR MASTER OF SCIENCE IN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS PROGRAM

The Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics (MSND) program has graduated 33 students since it began in August 2019. We graduated another 10 students in this spring. The program is currently working on enrolling its fifth cohort of students to start in August 2023. Program graduates have had a high success rate in passing the credentialing exam for registered dietitians on their first attempt, and have gone on to work in a variety of areas including clinical dietetics, long term care, sports nutrition, behavioral health, outpatient eating disorders, private practice, clinical research and wellness. Two former graduates are also currently enrolled in doctoral programs. The program continues to partner with Carilion Clinic, Virginia Tech and community stakeholders to provide high quality supervised practice experiences and to fulfill its mission to prepare graduate-trained registered dietitian nutritionists who can advance professional practice through food and nutrition to accelerate improvements in health and well-being among diverse populations. Do you have any questions about our MSND program? I'd love to hear from you! Reach out to me, Enette Larson-Meyer, at [enette@vt.edu](mailto:enette@vt.edu).



# DONOR GRATITUDE



Giving Day this year took place on February 15 to 16 from noon to noon and we had 54 donors support the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise. We also met our department challenge, which unlocked an additional \$2,000 gift from Janet Johnson and Jim Johnson '60, '67 M.S. Special thanks to Janet and Jim for giving those funds for the Giving Day 2023 challenge. Thank you to those who gave on Giving Day and to donors who give to HNFE year-round! We hope that you know just how much we appreciate your support!

We deeply value your investment in the education and training of the next generation of registered dietitians, physicians, physical therapists, physician assistants, athletic trainers, among others. Your generous gifts can help students gain a better understanding of human nutrition, foods, and exercise through hands-on learning experiences, and help fund pilot studies for graduate applied research.

*“As a student athlete I prioritize understanding how my body works and what I can do to become better or stronger. In the Craige Lab, I am able to ask the basic questions about exercise that I am interested in, and it is the hands-on and intellectual challenge I’ve searched for which has allowed me to grow in ways I never thought imaginable.”*

*Rebecca Mammel, HNFE doctoral student*

This is just one of the many examples of the lasting impact our professors and researchers have on our students. Contributions of any size can have an immediate and lasting impact on our department!



## MAKE A GIFT TO HNFE TODAY

You can securely make a gift by filling in our secure online pledge form! When you fill on the form, choose “College of Agriculture and Life Sciences”, then click “select a fund”, then scroll and click on “Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise Department Annual Fund.” Alternatively, click “select an area” and begin typing “Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise” in “Search for an area to support” and our department fund will be found via search.





## DR. S.J. RITCHEY FUND FOR FACULTY PILOT STUDIES

An anonymous donor came together to create the Dr. S.J. Ritchey Fund for Faculty Pilot Studies in honor of Dr. S. Jewel Ritchey, a professor and dean emeritus of the College of Human Resources. Prior to his role in the College of Human Resources, Ritchey was the Head of the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise. He also served as assistant director of the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station and the director of the Center for Gerontology.

The purpose of the Ritchey Fund is to provide financial awards to faculty members within HNFE to conduct pilot and feasibility studies to generate preliminary data for use in research grant applications to funding sources outside the University.

The goal of the Ritchey Fund is to strengthen the recipient's grant application, and thus, increase the likelihood of a successful application for additional research funding.

A gift to the Ritchey Fund will support research in our department and allow our faculty to get the data they need to apply for larger, federal and non-federal grants.

*"On any single day 63-80% of individuals consume a sugar sweetened beverage and in the US adults consume about ~46% of total added sugar intake in the form of sugar sweetened beverages. Beyond the established links with weight gain and increased adiposity, excessive sugar intake is associated with reduced insulin sensitivity and sugar intake from sugar sweetened beverages specifically may increase risk for type 2 diabetes (T2D).*

*The S.J. Ritchey Funds will allow us to investigate an underexplored mechanism driving sugar sweetened beverage consumption, post-oral peripheral signals that reach the brain and drive reward and food choice. Our lab is using these funds to collect preliminary data for an R01 proposal to NIH-NIDDK. These preliminary data will greatly strengthen that proposal's chance for funding."*

Alexandra DiFeliceantonio, HNFE assistant professor

*"The Dr. S.J. Ritchey Fund for Faculty Pilot Studies allowed our labs to collaborate on a project to examine the role of mitophagy in ovarian cancer metastasis. Unlike other metastases that travel through the body via the blood or lymphatic system, ovarian metastases use the fluid in the peritoneal cavity to attach to abdominal organs and grow secondary tumors. The adaptation of mitochondrial form and functions to these changes in the cancer cells' environment is needed to support survival during dissemination and growth after attachment.*

*This is the Achilles heel of the cancer cells and can be used to prevent metastatic outgrowth. The cancer cells rely on mitophagy to remove defective mitochondria for survival. ULK1 is involved in the induction of mitophagy in response to stress and we hypothesize that inactivation of ULK1 will enhance ovarian metastasis. We look forward to seeing preliminary results and using this preliminary data to apply for larger proposals in the future."*

Eva Schmelz, HNFE professor, and Joshua Drake, HNFE assistant professor

*"Consistent exercise is a game-changer, even better than medicine! Our research focuses on how different types of cells in our muscles communicate to unlock the incredible benefits of exercise. Through the SJ Ritchey Funds, we're launching an exciting undergraduate research program to delve into this cellular "language." Our goals are twofold: first, to gather data on cell signaling, and second, to assess the success of our program in attracting ambitious undergraduates who can make meaningful discoveries. The insights gained through these studies will support a proposal to the National Science Foundation."*

Siobhan Craige, HNFE assistant professor

### GIVE TO THE RITCHEY FUND

You can securely make a gift by clicking the link above! Alternatively, you can send in a check. Donations by check should be made out to the Virginia Tech Foundation and sent to this address:

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