

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

# LEAD

SCHOOL OF GLOBAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATICS

2024



# INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 03** From the Director
- 04** By the Numbers
- 05** Academic Programs
- 06** Expanding Access to Life-Saving Opioid Treatments
- 08** Professor Su-I Hou Named Fulbright-Saastamoinen Distinguished Chair
- 09** New Center Aims to Revolutionize Decision Support Systems with Data  
UCF Researchers Patent Tool Enhances Chronic Disease Care Through Digital Mapping
- 10** Bridging Academia and Industry: UCF's Pathway to Prestigious Fellowships
- 14** Student Success
- 16** Innovative Learning: Unique Courses Shaping Future Healthcare Leaders
- 18** Faculty Highlights
- 20** Building Healthier Communities Through Service
- 22** Alumni Engagement
- 23** Advisory Boards

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR



**As the newly appointed permanent Director of the School of Global Health Management and Informatics, I am honored to lead our school and our shared commitment to innovation, research excellence and preparing tomorrow's healthcare leaders. As we continue to grow and transform healthcare education, I look forward to guiding our exceptional faculty and students.**

In Spring 2025, our school will launch a new Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Informatics. The thoughtfully designed program will fill a crucial gap in our curriculum and address the evolving interests of our students. Recognizing the growing demand for health informaticists in Florida and across the nation, this program will create

new opportunities for students to gain specialized knowledge and skills, further solidifying our school's reputation as a health management and informatics education leader.

Additionally, our dedication to delivering exceptional education remains unwavering. As director, one of my core objectives is to continue to amplify our mission and values by showcasing the great work of our faculty and students in research, community impact and individual achievement. We strive to equip our students with the tools they need to excel as future leaders in the healthcare industry. While our industry is ever-evolving, academic excellence and innovative research will continue to be the pillars of our success.

I am grateful for the support of our community as we embark on this exciting journey together. I am confident that, united in our mission, we will achieve our shared vision for the future of the School of Global Health Management and Informatics.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kendall H. Cortelyou". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Kendall H. Cortelyou, Ph.D., MHA**

*Professor & Director*

*School of Global Health Management & Informatics*

*College of Community Innovation and Education*

*University of Central Florida*

## BY THE NUMBERS

COLLEGE OF COMMUNITY INNOVATION AND EDUCATION

# SCHOOL OF GLOBAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATICS

Celebrating Remarkable Achievements by Our Faculty, Staff, Students and Alumni

64

PEER  
REVIEWED  
ARTICLES

17

AWARDS

6

HEALTH  
ADMINISTRATION  
FELLOWSHIPS

93%

EXECUTIVE MHA  
EMPLOYMENT RATE  
WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF  
GRADUATION

88%

HEALTH ADMINISTRATION  
EMPLOYMENT RATE  
WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF  
GRADUATION

700+

INTERNSHIP  
AFFILIATIONS, INCLUDING  
FLORIDA'S LARGEST  
HOSPITAL SYSTEMS

1,114

STUDENTS

31

FACULTY

1:36

FACULTY TO  
STUDENT  
RATIO

#7

BEST ONLINE  
BACHELOR'S

*(US News and World  
Report, 2024)*

#5

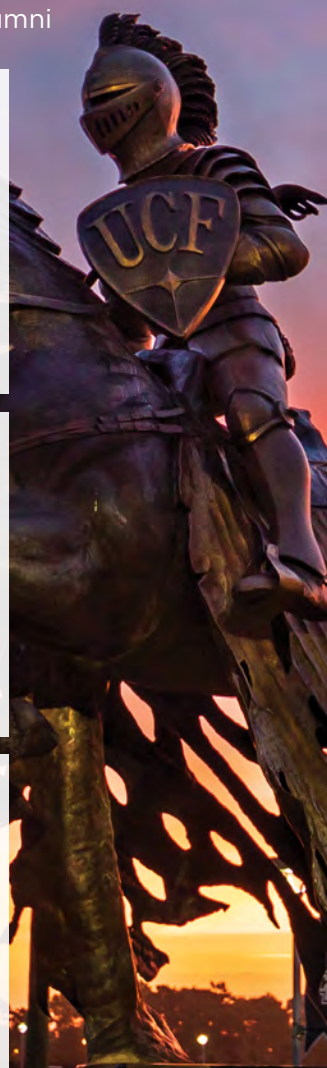
BEST ONLINE  
BACHELOR'S FOR  
VETERANS

*(US News and World  
Report, 2024)*

#14

MOST INNOVATIVE  
SCHOOLS

*(US News and World  
Report, 2024)*



**WITH DEGREE PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON CREATING TOMORROW'S HEALTH ADMINISTRATION AND INFORMATICS LEADERS,** the UCF School of Global Health Management and Informatics at UCF Downtown provides flexible learning options, including face-to-face, online and hybrid classes to suit each student's unique needs. Located in the heart of downtown Orlando, the school is just minutes away from the city's largest hospital systems, ensuring accessible opportunities for internships and partnerships with top industry experts. Classes are also available at UCF's main campus to accommodate a variety of academic interests and provide additional learning options for students.

### HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

*Managers of health systems, healthcare organizations and hospital networks*

#### UNDERGRADUATE

- Health Services Administration, B.S.
- Health Services Administration, Minor
- Healthcare Quality and Revenue Management, Minor

#### GRADUATE

- Health Administration, MHA
  - Health Services Administration Track
  - Executive Health Services Administration Track

### HEALTH INFORMATICS

*Leaders in the clinical, management and business aspects of health informatics*

#### UNDERGRADUATE

- Health Informatics, B.S. (Coming in 2025)
- Health Informatics and Information Management, B.S.
- Health Informatics and Information Management, Minor
- Healthcare Quality and Revenue Management, Minor

#### GRADUATE

- Health Care Informatics, Professional Science, M.S.

### INTRODUCING UCF'S NEW B.S. IN HEALTH INFORMATICS

We are thrilled to announce the launch of the Bachelor of Science in Health Informatics beginning in 2025. This program, the first of its kind in the State University System of Florida, addresses the growing demand for health informatics professionals by offering innovative education tailored to the needs of the healthcare industry. The program leverages the strengths of UCF's College of Community Innovation and Education and the School of Global Health Management and Informatics, supported by extensive institutional planning and external stakeholder endorsements from AdventHealth, Nemours Children's Health and Piedmont Healthcare.

UCF's Health Informatics program will be one of the first to pursue accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM), ensuring the highest educational standards for the program.

Distinct from our existing Health Information Management (HIM) program, which focuses on RHIA certification, the Health Informatics degree emphasizes the development, maintenance, and appropriate use of health data and technology.

With a projected job growth rate of 22% in Florida and an average annual salary of \$80,730, the demand for health informaticists is clear. This program aims to meet this need, preparing graduates to excel in this dynamic field in Florida and beyond.



# EXPANDING ACCESS TO LIFE-SAVING OPIOID TREATMENTS

In 2021, opioid overdoses claimed more lives in the U.S. than any previous year, according to the CDC. A recent University of Central Florida study published in *Health Affairs* reveals that one of the most effective medications for treating opioid addiction, buprenorphine, is among the least covered by insurance plans often used by patients with substance use disorder.

The study found that while most insurance plans covered the immediate-release sublingual form of buprenorphine, extended-release buprenorphine injections were covered by less than half of commercial plans and less than a fifth of Medicare Advantage Plans. Though most Medicaid plans did cover it, over a third required prior authorization.

Barbara “Basia” Andracka-Christou, Ph.D., J.D., the study’s lead author, is passionate about expanding access to these treatments. “Approximately 20% of people use buprenorphine or methadone for opioid-use disorder treatment,” she says. “Most people either get no treatment or less effective treatment due to barriers like lack of insurance coverage or prior authorization requirements.”

Buprenorphine, prescribable by any clinician licensed by the Drug Enforcement Administration, comes in two

forms: an oral immediate-release version taken daily and a monthly extended-release intramuscular injection. The oral versions, available in generic form, are cheaper. The injection, newer and patented, is more expensive.

## THE FINDINGS

Andracka-Christou collaborated with researchers from the University of Michigan, University of Georgia and Indiana University to analyze insurance formulary files from 2017-2021. They compared coverage, prior authorization requirements, and other potential barriers across commercial providers, Medicaid and Medicare.

Their research found that while nearly all plans covered at least one immediate-release buprenorphine, the extended-release injection had significant coverage disparities. In 2021, only 46% of commercial plans and 19% of Medicare Advantage plans covered it, while most Medicaid plans did, though 37% required prior authorization.



“ MOST PEOPLE EITHER GET NO TREATMENT OR LESS EFFECTIVE TREATMENT DUE TO BARRIERS LIKE LACK OF INSURANCE COVERAGE OR PRIOR AUTHORIZATION REQUIREMENTS. ”

“Prior authorization requirements are problematic because addiction patients have a narrow window for seeking treatment,” Andraka-Christou says. “Removing these barriers could prevent overdoses and save lives. While insurers may use prior authorization to cut costs, the cost of overdoses is far higher.”

The team’s findings suggest that attention must now shift to the intramuscular injection to address these barriers. Andraka-Christou urges policymakers and community advocates to prioritize access to life-saving treatments, highlighting that tools like buprenorphine and methadone could halve overdose deaths if not underused.



**BARBARA “BASIA”  
ANDRAKA-CHRISTOU,  
PH.D., J.D.**

**Position:** Associate Professor, UCF School of Global Health Management and Informatics

**Expertise:** Health services, health policy, substance-use disorder treatment

**Education:** Juris Doctorate and Doctorate in Law and Social Science from Indiana University Bloomington

**Notable Work:** Author of *The Opioid Fix: America’s Addiction Crisis and the Solution They Don’t Want You to Have* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020)

**What’s Next:** Andraka-Christou will take a sabbatical in 2024 to collaborate with the American Society of Addiction Medicine. During this time, she will engage in advanced research and professional development, further contributing to substance-use disorder treatment.

*Photo credit: Blake Osting*

## PROFESSOR SU-I HOU NAMED FULBRIGHT-SAASTAMOINEN DISTINGUISHED CHAIR

Su-I Hou, a professor of global health management and informatics, has been named the 2024-25 Fulbright-Saastamoinen Foundation Distinguished Chair in Health Sciences. This prestigious award recognizes senior scholars with significant publication and teaching records, enabling them to study and teach abroad.

Hou will join the University of Eastern Finland's Finnish Geriatric Intervention Study to Prevent Cognitive Impairment and Disability (FINGERS) study, which focuses on preventing cognitive impairment and disability through five lifestyle changes: nutrition, exercise, mental stimulation, social activities, and cardiovascular risk management. She will assist the research team in exploring the effects of digitally enhanced lifestyle interventions.

"Researchers have found that these lifestyle changes are linked to better thinking and problem-solving abilities," Hou says.

"They emphasize the importance of sticking to these changes for lasting benefits."

Hou's work will also include a new trial studying the correlation between hearing impairment and cognitive decline. She will evaluate a

digital self-assessment tool using her expertise in mixed-methods research.

"We don't typically link hearing impairment with mental decline, but the team is trying to study how personalized hearing rehabilitation may impact cognitive function," she says.

Hou's research focuses on aging in community, helping older adults live independently while fostering community connections. She has previously presented her research globally and served as a Fulbright Specialist in Israel.

"The cultural differences have always stood out to me whenever I've traveled or collaborated with colleagues around the world," she says. "I'm really excited to see how Finland's perspective contributes to healthy aging-in-community."

Hou is thrilled to contribute to the FINGERS team and believes this experience will lead to positive developments in brain health research.

"I foresee more opportunities through this Fulbright Distinguished Chair program, which I'm really honored and grateful to be part of," she says.

**"I'M REALLY EXCITED TO SEE HOW FINLAND'S PERSPECTIVE CONTRIBUTES TO HEALTHY AGING-IN-COMMUNITY."**







## NEW CENTER AIMS TO REVOLUTIONIZE DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEMS WITH DATA

Established in January 2024 by Associate Professors Varadraj Gurupur, Ph.D., and Christian King, Ph.D., the Center for Decision Support Systems and Informatics focuses on advancing decision support science by developing innovative algorithms, technologies and tools to positively impact communities.

“Our vision for the Center for Decision Support Systems and Informatics is to push the boundaries of decision support science in ways that directly benefit our communities,” says Gurupur, co-founder and lead researcher of the center. “We are excited about the potential of our research to create innovative tools and technologies that will empower healthcare professionals and improve the quality of life for countless individuals.”

The center’s faculty collaborate on interdisciplinary projects with local industry and community partners to enhance research outcomes. The lab currently hosts several tools designed to improve decision support for clinicians:

**UCF Survey Resource Tool:** This software automates survey calls, allowing users to create questions and receive graphical summaries of responses, applicable for customer satisfaction and employee surveys.

**AI-Based Medical Information System:** A component of an Electronic Health Record system, this tool assists ICD-10 coders by using AI and natural language processing to accurately select codes, advancing the development of EHR systems.

**Cardiovascular Readmission Decision Support System:** This tool helps clinicians and patients identify factors leading to cardiovascular disease readmissions, offering education to improve patient health.

The center also focuses on mentoring students and post-doctoral scholars in healthcare decision support research and securing external funding to train assistant professors, ensuring the next generation of researchers is well-prepared.

### UCF RESEARCHERS PATENT TOOL ENHANCES CHRONIC DISEASE CARE THROUGH DIGITAL MAPPING

A patient’s entire medical journey lives in digital health records, but those records can be incomplete or inaccurate. That’s especially true when patients have multiple physicians who are managing their chronic disease care.

Earlier this year, Professor Gurupur and Ayan Nasir ’20MD, Gurupur’s former student, secured a patent for a digital tool designed to improve care for patients with chronic illnesses like diabetes and heart disease. Their UCF-patented algorithm uses computer science and mathematics to digitally map electronic medical records and find inconsistencies in diagnoses, illness staging and follow-up care.

Gurupur compares missing information in the electronic health records to that of a leaking pipe. If you don’t know where the leak is, you can’t fix it, he says, and soon the house can flood. The same dangers can happen in healthcare.

“While electronic health records have been in use for more than a decade, healthcare is just scratching the surface of how to better use this data to improve care,” Gurupur says.

The team hopes the patent will encourage clinics and health systems to adopt this digital mapping tool, improving patient care and ensuring more accurate insurance reimbursements.

ADMINISTRATIVE FELLOWSHIPS

# BRIDGING ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY:

**UCF'S PATHWAY TO PRESTIGIOUS  
FELLOWSHIPS**



### Six master of health administration graduates secured highly sought-after fellowships with some of the top hospitals in the country

Often considered springboard into a professional career, health administration fellowships offer recent graduates advanced training and direct exposure to the healthcare industry. Six graduates from UCF's master of health administration (MHA) program earned fellowship positions that regularly attract more than 200 applicants per site, highlighting the program's excellence and students' dedication.

"Our MHA program was carefully designed to develop the next generation of healthcare leaders," says Reid Oetjen, Ph.D., professor and MHA program director. "Fellowships provide our graduates with an unparalleled opportunity to gain hands-on experience in healthcare management and ensure that they are well-prepared to lead in an ever-changing industry."

The UCF health administration program is one of only 150 programs nationwide accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) and stands out for its rigorous curriculum and strong partnerships with leading healthcare organizations.

"We have a close working relationship with Central Florida's largest health systems, AdventHealth and Orlando Health, in which our students conduct experiential learning," Oetjen says. "In addition, we have a long-standing relationship with the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) of Central Florida, and our students serve in leadership roles. These partnerships provide students with hands-on experiences, networking, and professional growth."

It is estimated that approximately 200 health administration fellowship positions are available annually across the nation. Fellowship placements by six students from UCF's School of Global Health Management and Informatics is a significant accomplishment for the program.

#### A Competitive Edge in Health Administration

These prestigious fellowships often lead to full-time employment with the host organizations.

"The hands-on experiences and industry partnerships offered through our MHA program significantly enhance both the learning outcomes and career prospects of

our students," Oetjen says. "Students can apply their classroom knowledge in practical settings and prepare students to impact and transform healthcare."

The fellows programs range from one to two years and focus on a specific project or gain exposure to a particular area of healthcare. The application process is rigorous, involving multiple written applications, essays and interviews.

"Students work hard on their applications," says Kourtney Nieves, Ph.D., MSHS, associate lecturer and assistant director of the School of Global Health Management and Informatics. As the former MHA program director, she takes pride in the fellow's accomplishments and the alumni's willingness to help others earn these coveted positions.

"We are so very fortunate that many of our past fellows have come back to mentor current students and help them walk through the process," Nieves says.

#### Impactful Alumni Create Ongoing Legacy and Source of Pride

These new fellows follow in the footsteps of past UCF graduates who have rapidly advanced in their careers. Jason Washington '19 was a 2020 fellow and is now vice president of operations for HCA Hospital in Tallahassee. Rashard Johnson '04 '06MHA, president of South Area Atrium Health, is an accomplished healthcare leader with extensive operations, care delivery and community relations experience. Oetjen says Rashard's success is a testament to the comprehensive training and leadership development provided by UCF's MHA program.

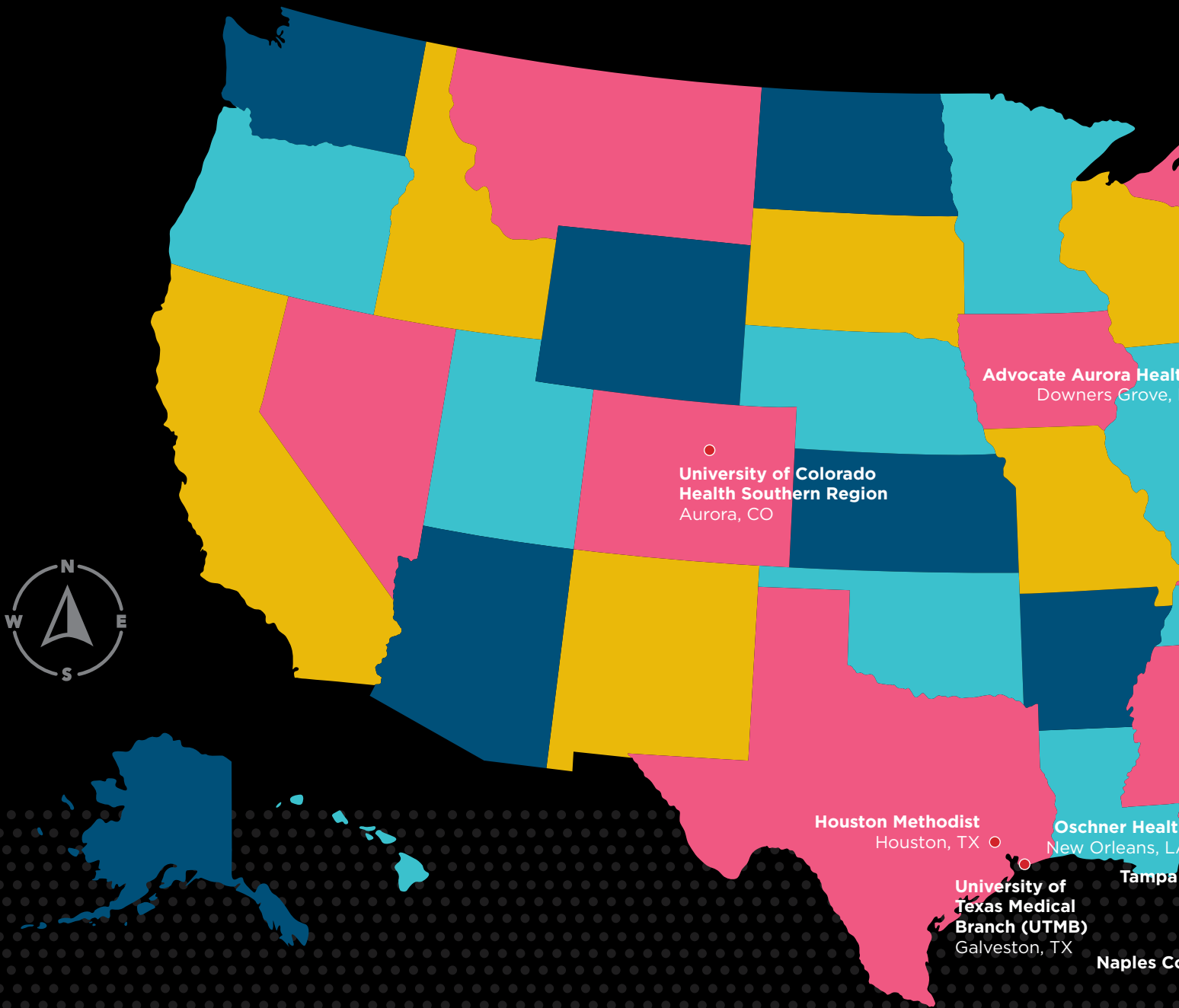
For Nieves, the most rewarding aspect is witnessing the growth and success of MHA program graduates.

"It's so amazing to see what they were like as students, and then see these poised industry professionals," she says. "It gives me such a source of pride."

Through rigorous training and exceptional support, UCF's MHA program continues to prepare its students to excel in prestigious fellowships, bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world applications in health administration.

# MAPPING SUCCESS

UCF GRADS EXCEL IN ADMINISTRATIVE FELLOWSHIPS ACROSS THE U.S.



**“IT’S BEEN AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY DIVING INTO THE HEART OF HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP AND OPERATIONS.**

One of the highlights was getting an exclusive tour of the new Critical Care Tower under construction. Donning hard hats and PPE, we explored the future of patient care firsthand, and I’m excited to see its impact unfold. As I look ahead, I’m eager to dive into projects and continue learning and growing throughout my fellowship.”

— Andrea Hernández Ruiz  
Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Hospital



# 2024 FELLOWS



**Andrea Hernández Ruiz**  
Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Hospital



**Samuel Ali**  
BayCare Health System Florida



**Jason Gallarday**  
Orlando VA Healthcare System



**Taylor Horne**  
Memorial Healthcare System



**Jonathan Reichfield**  
Naples Comprehensive Health



**Gitanjali Varma**  
Ohio Health

## HEALTH ADMINISTRATION MASTER'S STUDENTS SECURE FIFTH PLACE AT NATIONAL CASE COMPETITION

UCF's School of Global Health Management and Informatics master's students Cristian Ruiz Veras, Melissa Jackson and Samuel Ali have achieved remarkable success at the National Association of Health Services Executives (NAHSE) 28th Annual Everett V. Fox Student Case Competition, held in Atlanta. Competing against 31 teams, the UCF team clinched fifth place.

The competition challenges students to develop innovative solutions to real-world healthcare crises, preparing them for future roles in healthcare administration. This year, the team tackled a hypothetical security breach, devising strategies involving public relations, human resources and other departments.

"At the NAHSE case competition, they give you a real-world problem to solve," Ali says. "They want you to consider every aspect of the problem and things like who it affects and how."

Jackson adds, "Our job was to find a solution and come up with different innovations and technologies to contain the breach. It was a really fun competition."

The students spent three weeks analyzing and developing their case. Ruiz Veras explains, "From day one, we were already analyzing it, seeing what the root cause was and determining what they were asking for."

The competition includes preliminary, semi-final and final rounds, each with increasingly selective criteria. The UCF team made it to the final round, facing intense questions from industry professionals, including CEOs, CFOs and technical officers.

"The Q&A sessions were intense, but it's a good experience because these are the questions you will be asked if you're at that level," Ali says.

Beyond the competition, the students networked with healthcare professionals and peers, expanding future career opportunities. Jackson highlights the importance of joining organizations like the NAHSE at UCF, which provide support, mentorship, and opportunities for professional growth.

"If you start getting involved in your undergraduate career, you're already ahead in the industry," Ali says.



“ IF YOU START GETTING INVOLVED IN YOUR UNDERGRADUATE CAREER, YOU’RE ALREADY AHEAD IN THE INDUSTRY. ”

## UCF HOSTS INAUGURAL BLACK VS. GOLD CASE COMPETITION



The school hosted its inaugural Black vs. Gold Case Competition, during which three teams of UCF health administration master's students showcased their skills and expertise. Each team was tasked with presenting solutions to a hypothetical crisis to a panel of industry experts, drawing on their management skills, statistical analysis and knowledge of the healthcare industry. Their proposed solutions demonstrated the real-world application of the student's academic training and their readiness to tackle complex challenges in the field.

The event concluded with master's students Katherine Grand, Alayna Feilmeier and Gregory Richey taking home the first-place prize for their innovative solutions. Their victory underscored the high level of talent and preparation within UCF's health administration program.

Looking ahead, the school aims to make the Black vs. Gold Case Competition an annual tradition, further enriching the educational experience for its students. There are also plans to expand the competition to include other Florida schools, fostering a broader exchange of ideas and elevating the overall standard of health administration education across the state.

## VENERINA COSTANZA: AN EXTRAORDINARILY FAST JOURNEY TO GRADUATION



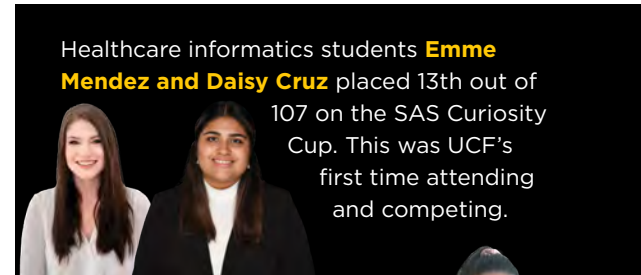
At just 18 years old, Venerina Costanza graduated summa cum laude with her bachelor's degree in health services administration, accomplishing this feat in record time. Her academic journey has been nothing short of remarkable; she graduated from high school and Daytona State College simultaneously at

17, thanks to dual enrollment and online homeschooling. By skipping seventh grade, Costanza accelerated her educational path even further.

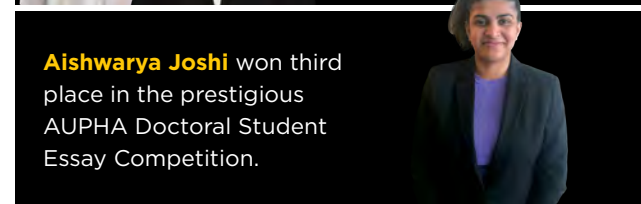
Her next goal is to pursue a master's degree in biomedical sciences, with aspirations of entering medical school and becoming a doctor by 25. Outside the classroom, Costanza is equally impressive. She runs the Enough is Enough Foundation, a nonprofit focused on addressing youth homelessness, and competed for Miss Florida Teen after winning the title of Miss Port Orange Teen.

As president of UCF's Golden Key International Honor Society and a participant in the Honors Undergraduate Thesis program, Costanza has remained deeply involved at UCF, despite completing her degree online. Her commitment to her community and academic excellence reflects her drive to inspire others.

"Don't let anything limit you," Costanza says. She hopes her story will inspire others to pursue their dreams.



Healthcare informatics students **Emme Mendez and Daisy Cruz** placed 13th out of 107 on the SAS Curiosity Cup. This was UCF's first time attending and competing.



**Aishwarya Joshi** won third place in the prestigious AUPHA Doctoral Student Essay Competition.



Students **Alayna Feilmeier, Emily Freed, Kim Nyguen and Laine Henry** traveled to Miami to participate in the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) annual Healthcare Leadership Development Case competition. The undergraduate team earned 2nd place.

# Innovative Learning:

## UNIQUE COURSES SHAPING FUTURE HEALTHCARE LEADERS

At the forefront of innovative education, the School of Global Health Management and Informatics offers unique classes designed to provide students with a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the healthcare administration and informatics industries. Courses are tailored specifically to address the complexities and nuances of healthcare, ensuring that students receive a robust education from a variety of perspectives. By integrating cutting-edge research, real-world applications and interdisciplinary approaches, the School of Global Health Management and Informatics prepares students to become adept and versatile professionals, ready to provide solutions to the evolving challenges of the healthcare industry.

### Elevating Care Through Patient-Centered Approaches

*HSA 4003: The Patient Experience in Healthcare*  
Professor: Dawn Oetjen, Ph.D., MHA



The “Patient Experience in Healthcare” course introduces students to the vital concept of the patient experience (PX), emphasizing the integration of patients’ needs and perspectives into care delivery. This focus stems from growing evidence that PX improves stakeholder satisfaction, health outcomes, service efficiency and health-related business metrics. Inspired by the Institute of Medicine’s report “Crossing the Quality Chasm,” PX has gained national importance and public attention. Despite numerous initiatives, many healthcare organizations still struggle to shift from a provider-focused to a patient-focused culture.

Throughout this course, students explore the roots and key dimensions of healthcare quality, focusing on patient-centered care (PCC), PX and patient engagement. They learn the terminology and concepts of these care quality dimensions, the main determinants of PX and the impact on health outcomes. The course examines the current state of PX, highlighting leading organizations and identifying existing challenges, needs and opportunities for improvement.

Key topics include measuring and assessing PX, conducting patient-centered research and applying technology to enhance PCC. Students also delve into patient activation, shared decision-making and using patient-reported outcomes to focus on patient-centered value.

Upon completion of the course, students have a comprehensive understanding of how to enhance patient experience and engagement effectively.



## Empowering Patient Advocates

*HSA 2117: Civic Engagement in the U.S. Healthcare System*

Lecturer: *Ashley Wilt, Ph.D., SHRM-CP*

Knowing the right questions to ask and having someone to assist in processing information and making informed decisions can significantly improve the patient experience. Open to everyone and fulfilling the university's social foundation General Education Program (GEP) requirement, "Civic Engagement in the U.S. Healthcare System" is particularly relevant for those who may find themselves or their loved ones in need of medical or emergency care. The course provides the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate the complex U.S. healthcare system effectively, while emphasizing the critical role of patient advocates, including medical professionals, family members and friends, in ensuring that patients receive appropriate care and attention.



Throughout the course, students explore various aspects of the U.S. healthcare system, gaining a comprehensive understanding of how care is delivered. Topics include the differences between primary care physicians and specialists, the appropriate use of urgent care facilities versus emergency departments, and an introduction to various healthcare careers and industries. Designated as a High Impact Practices course, the course includes practical assignments that allow students to apply their newly acquired skills in real-world scenarios while building confidence and reducing stress in medical settings.



**“As a football student-athlete, I have had a handful of sport-related injuries, but I’ve always had a loved one or coach making sure everything was handled and that I received the best care. This class helped me understand the places I would go to for care, and the types of professionals who work in healthcare and support those getting medical treatment.”**

— Kylan Fox

First Year Student in the  
Department of Criminal Justice

## GIANG VU SECURES PRESTIGIOUS CDC FELLOWSHIP

Between earning a doctorate in public health sciences with a concentration in health management and policy and a doctorate in dental surgery, assistant professor Giang Vu has already accumulated notable accolades. Now, he has added a competitive Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) honor to his list, setting him on the path to board certification in dental public health.

Vu, an assistant professor in the School of Global Health Management and Informatics, was recently accepted into the CDC's two-year Dental Public Health residency program. This advanced training, recognized by the American Dental Association as one of the 12 dental specialties, gives Vu a head start on becoming board-certified.

The CDC program combines residency and fellowship, providing Vu with experience and skills across all ten competency areas of dental public health. The program emphasizes health management, health outcomes surveillance and health policy for oral health. It offers access to world-class

experts and CDC resources, including the latest data and connections with institutes like the National Institutes of Health. Vu is one of only two fellows selected this year, making his acceptance particularly prestigious.

"I'm very excited and proud to get this fellowship," Vu says. "It's extremely competitive, attracting applicants from around the world. This will advance my career in health management, health policy, and informatics. The fellowship is about the training, networking opportunities and advantages when applying for future grants."

Upon completing the program, Vu hopes to obtain board certification in dental public health and become a diplomat in the field. Fellows take the first part of the board exam before finishing the program. "The opportunity to train with the CDC is very prestigious," Vu adds. "The faculty are extremely supportive, checking on you weekly to ensure your success."



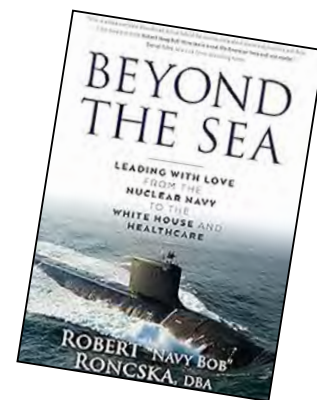
“[THE FELLOWSHIP IS] EXTREMELY COMPETITIVE, ATTRACTING APPLICANTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.”

**NEW RELEASES:  
RECENT PUBLICATIONS FROM SGHMI FACULTY**



**Yara Asi, Ph.D.**, published “How War Kills: The Overlooked Threats to Our Health” in January 2024, revealing how war creates conditions for disease and suffering beyond the battlefield. She also contributed to “Are We Making a Difference? Global and Local Efforts to Assess Peacebuilding Effectiveness” with a chapter on the importance of public health in peacebuilding, emphasizing the need to evaluate societal fragility beyond combat-related injuries and mortality.

**Robert “Navy Bob” Roncska, DBA, M.S.**, published his debut book “Beyond the Sea” in June 2024, detailing how he transformed the struggling USS *Texas* into the top-ranked submarine in the Pacific Fleet within two years. The book offers adaptable strategies for leaders in any industry, emphasizing strong relationships and organizational excellence.



**Barbara Andracka-Christou, Ph.D., J.D.**, covered U.S. policies on combatting opioid addiction on Swiss Public Radio. She was also awarded Best Abstract by an Associated Professional from the national American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), in April 2024, and received UCF’s Luminary Award, which recognizes faculty members across all disciplines for academic leadership in their fields and for conducting work that has a significant impact on the world, in October 2023.

<https://go.ucf.edu/hmi-SPR>

**Michelle Crozier, Ph.D.**, joined the Executive Board of the Central and North Florida Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) Chapter in June 2024.

**Samuel Towne, Ph.D., MPH, CPH, FAAHB, and Adam Reres, M.A., CCC-SLP, PMP**, contributed to Rural Healthy People 2030, which summarizes the top twenty pressing public health concerns as determined by stakeholders in rural America.

<https://go.ucf.edu/hmi-rural-health>

**Lucia Russell, M.S., MHS, RHIA**, received the Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching Award for the UCF College of Community Innovation and Education at UCF’s annual Founder’s Day Honors Convocation.

**Samuel Towne, Ph.D., MPH, CPH, FAAHB, and Varadraj Gurupur, Ph.D.**, received the Research Incentive Award.

**Kourtney Nieves, Ph.D.**, received UCF College of Community Innovation and Education’s Teacher Incentive Program award, which celebrates remarkable faculty members who exhibit exceptional productivity and teaching excellence, in April 2024.

Several faculty presented at the Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA)’s Annual Meeting: **Jillian Harrington, Ed.D., CCS, CCS-P, CPC, CPC-P, CPC-I, CEMC, MHP**, spoke about “FastTrack Learning: Mastering Adaptability in Just 300 Seconds,” where she explored how adaptive learning personalizes education to fit students’ unique needs. **Reid Oetjen, Ph.D.**, and **Dawn Oetjen, Ph.D., MHA**, presented “Reimagine, Reinvent, Transform: Adapting Higher Education through AI.”

**BUILDING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SERVICE**

# **SUPER TEAM HOSTS SYMPOSIUM FOR COMMUNITY**

The Substance Use Policy Evaluation and Research (SUPER) team, led by Barbara “Basia” Andraka-Christou Ph.D., J.D., exemplifies a commitment to community service through innovative research and interdisciplinary collaboration. Comprised of faculty and graduate students from the University of Central Florida (UCF), Florida State University, Brown University and the University of Massachusetts, the SUPER team brings together expertise in substance use disorder (SUD) health services and policy, mental health services and diverse research methodologies.

In February 2024, the SUPER team hosted its inaugural biannual symposium at UCF Downtown’s Dr. Phillips Academic Commons. This all-day, in-person event drew researchers, students, healthcare professionals and community members, all eager to explore the multifaceted nature of SUD research.

The symposium featured an array of research presentations and interactive workshops covering topics such as the justice system, counseling, public affairs and anthropology. The interdisciplinary approach highlighted the diverse contexts in which SUD impacts individuals and communities. Attendees gained valuable insights into the methods and theoretical frameworks used to study SUD policies and health services, learned strategies for engaging community members in research and became familiar with the groundbreaking work of the SUPER team.

The event advanced knowledge and understanding of SUD while strengthening the connection between academia and the community. Through their dedication to addressing complex social issues, the SUPER team continues to lead the way in fostering collaborative, impactful research that serves the greater good.





**SPREADING  
HOLIDAY CHEER  
AT ADVENTHEALTH  
CHILDREN'S  
HOSPITAL**

To give back over the holiday season, School of Global Health Management and Informatics faculty, staff and students came together to bring joy to AdventHealth Children's Hospital patients. Thanks to the generous donations of the faculty, 100 festive care packages were brimming with holiday decorations for families to decorate their children's hospital rooms during the holidays. The bags also included a Christmas craft for the children to create and display, spreading even more cheer! Of course, the beloved Knightro squishy toy also made it into each and every bag!

**HEALTH LEADERS  
SUMMER ACADEMY  
INSPIRES THE NEXT  
GENERATION**



In July 2023, the Health Leaders Summer Academy, in association with the UCF College of Medicine, hosted 50 ambitious high school students, connecting them with leading healthcare providers. This transformative event offered a unique opportunity for young students to gain firsthand insights into the healthcare industry, fostering both learning and inspiration. Through interactive sessions, students engaged with professionals, explored various medical fields and learned about the pathways to pursue careers in healthcare. The academy ignited their passion for medicine and equipped them with the knowledge and motivation to become healthcare leaders of tomorrow.

## ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

### FROM TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH:

#### Alumna Tiffany Colón Oliva Merges Passions in Healthcare Informatics at Disney

Tiffany Colón Oliva '17, '19, a project manager for The Walt Disney Co., has accomplished remarkable feats since earning her master's in healthcare informatics through UCF's fully online program.

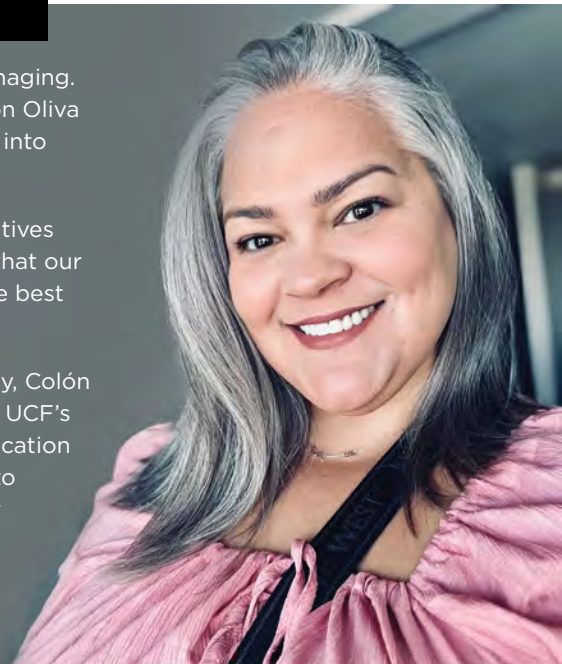
As a child, Colón Oliva was deeply impacted by two tragedies: surviving Hurricane Andrew and being selected to travel to Oklahoma City to deliver letters of support to children after the 1995 bombing. These experiences, along with overcoming a history of childhood abuse, shaped her into a compassionate and driven individual.

Colón Oliva knew that she wanted to work for Disney, and had previously worked in healthcare as a patient financial counselor,

a scheduling coordinator and in imaging. After completing her degree, Colón Oliva says she has merged her passions into healthcare informatics.

"Since 2022, I support safety initiatives through technology that ensures that our guests and cast members have the best experience," Colón Oliva says.

Balancing a full-time job and family, Colón Oliva pursued her degree through UCF's online program, exemplifying dedication and perseverance. She continues to inspire others by sharing her story and advocating for mental health and education.



### LEADING INNOVATION: Alumnus Peter Kizza Blazing a Path in Health Informatics and IT Management

Peter Kizza '18 is making significant strides in the health informatics field. Kizza graduated summa cum laude with a master's degree in health informatics from UCF and later earned his doctorate in health informatics from the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston as part of the first cohort worldwide to earn this degree.

Kizza's advanced education has given him a competitive edge. As the information technology and electronic health records (EHR) manager for Aegis Medical Group, Kizza oversees the company's entire EHR system and helps with IT products and solutions.

His accomplishments are further highlighted by his entrepreneurial venture, GatorIT, which he founded in November 2022. The company offers affordable IT support and application services. Kizza continues to aspire to leadership roles in the field, aiming to become a director of electronic medical records or a chief information officer.

### BOOSTING TESTICULAR CANCER RESEARCH:

#### Alumnus Mason Moore Establishes UCF Fund

Health services administration alumnus Mason Moore '97 has created a new fund to expand research and awareness programs on testicular cancer at the UCF College of Health Professions and Sciences. Himself a three-time testicular cancer survivor, Moore has become an advocate for men's health and wellness both in the community and across the nation.

While serving as a speaker one day at UCF Moore met Associate Professor

Michael Rovito in the Department of Health Sciences. Rovito's research investigates testicular self-examination, testicular cancer, male health behavioral change, intervention and instrumentation design and health communication. Moore felt it was a natural fit to create a fund to further Rovito's research and awareness programs on testicular cancer at the college as well as bring more focus to the mental health aspects of the disease.



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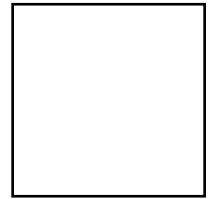
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**GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS IN HEALTH: Javeriana University, Bogotá, Colombia**

The School of Global Health Management and Informatics welcomed visitors from one of its global partner universities, Javeriana University in Bogotá, Colombia, to engage and collaborate, further strengthening the bonds between the two institutions.

The visit marks the third from Javeriana and was met with an enthusiastic group of three faculty members and 17 alumni and students, who are completing their Master of Health Management and Public Health programs. The visitors toured UCF Downtown and the main campus, as well as several prominent healthcare institutions in the region, including UCF Lake Nona Hospital and Nemours Children's Health. The tours were designed to facilitate a comparative analysis of global healthcare systems and led to meaningful exchanges about healthcare practices, challenges and innovations, as well as cooperative research initiatives that could benefit both institutions.