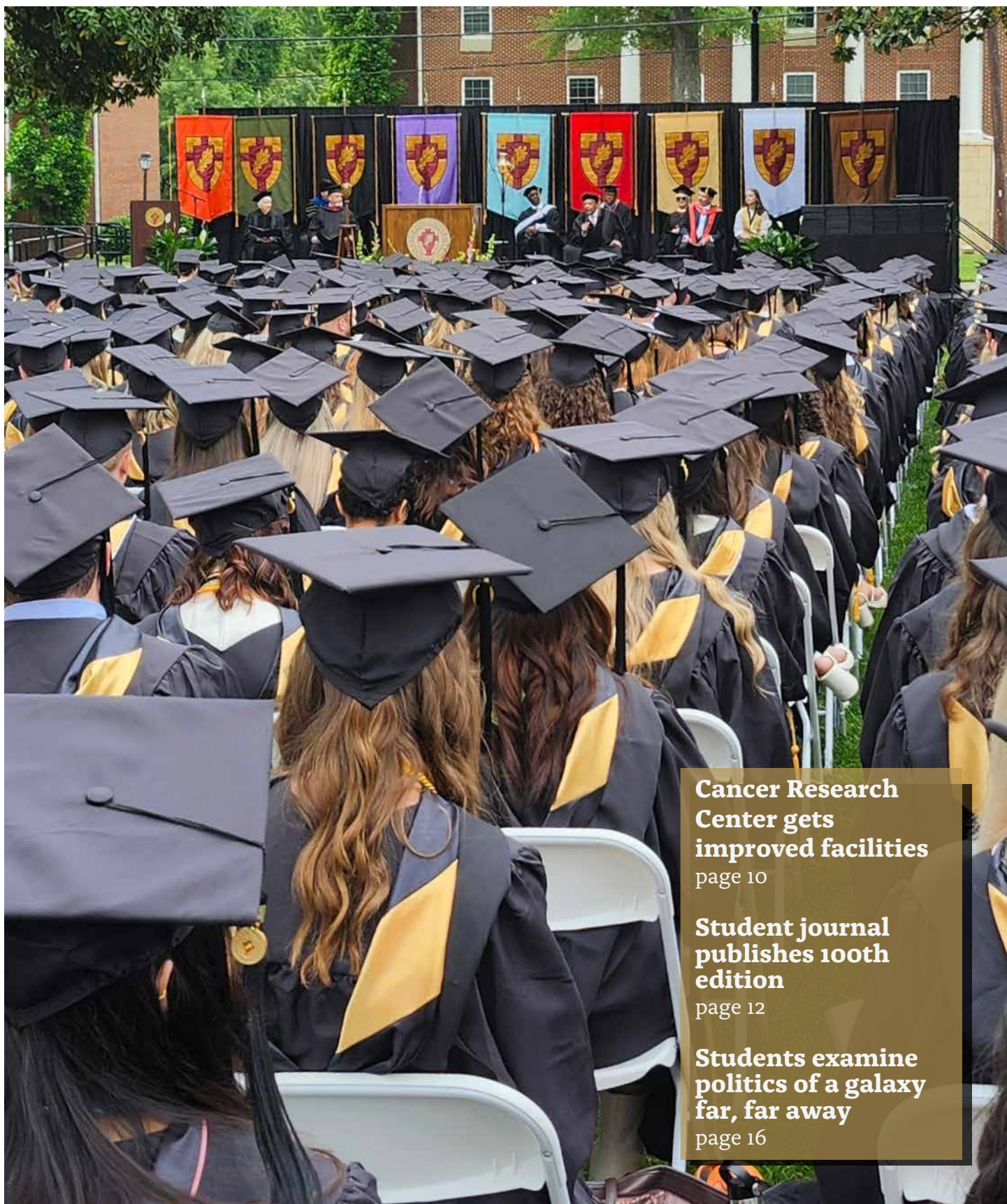


# SYNTHESIS

Summer 2025



**Cancer Research  
Center gets  
improved facilities**  
page 10

**Student journal  
publishes 100th  
edition**  
page 12

**Students examine  
politics of a galaxy  
far, far away**  
page 16

Anderson University College of Arts and Sciences



## In this issue

- Office decor showcases professors' personalities **3**
- Morgan makes the world her classroom **6**
- Students build camera skills through sports photography **8**
- Cancer Research Center gets improved facilities **10**
- Student journal publishes 100th edition **12**
- Simulation teaches with roleplay **14**
- Students examine politics of a galaxy far, far away **16**
- Psychology helps students understand people **18**

## On the cover

*A sea of mortar boards leads to the platform at Anderson University's graduation ceremony on the Alumni Lawn on May 9, 2025. More than 500 students participated in graduation ceremonies, including 133 from the College of Arts and Sciences. Andrew Young, former ambassador, Atlanta mayor and civil rights leader was the commencement speaker. (Photo by Robert Reeves)*

## SYNTHESIS

**Anderson University** Vol. 7, Issue 1 | Summer 2025

### Dr. Wayne Cox

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

### Dr. Carrie Koenigstein

Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

### Dr. Jim Haughey

Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

### Robert Reeves

Chair, Department of Communication

Synthesis is a publication of the College of Arts and Sciences at Anderson University in Anderson, South Carolina, published once or twice each year.

## SYNTHESIS STAFF



Katie Koon



Ella Lundgren



Charlie Lynch



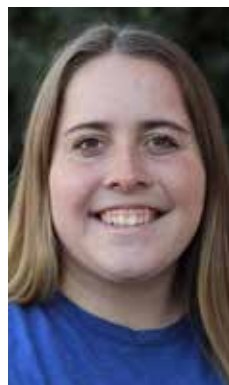
Ashton Marchbanks



Jenna Martin



Jada Patton



Corianne Pittman



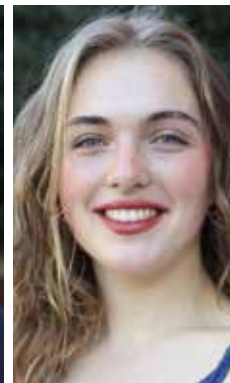
Sam Quiambao



Klaire Rhodes



Condyl Richardson



Giovana Throckmorton

## From push pins to bobbleheads

# Office decor showcases professors' personalities

By Ella Lundgren

Imagine entering a professor's office for a meeting. The walls are blank and the clean desk in the center of the room holds only a computer and telephone. The office communicates no welcoming warmth and no display of the professor's personality.

Thankfully, this is unlike the offices of the professors in the College of Arts and Sciences at Anderson University. Offices have colorful decorations and project a sense of welcome and relatability to students.

From student artwork to artifacts from years of study, the diversity in the decorations showcase professors' personalities and the range of subjects taught.

Assistant Professor of Political Science Zach Lang displays a framed map of the United States close to his desk. Every student who visits him places a push pin from a box beside his desk on their hometown.

"This is my first year at Anderson, but after a couple of years, I'd like to see a filled-up map," Lang said.

He said his favorite decoration is a representation of



*Students place pins to mark their hometowns on a map in Zach Lang's office. (Photo by Ella Lundgren)*

the Shard of Narsil, a fragment of the sword, Anduril, described in J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings." In the story, the character Aragorn receives Anduril so that he would one day return to bring freedom by claiming the throne. Lang received the sword from close friends in Missouri who hope he will return one day.

Lang's office decorations create a welcoming atmosphere for students, while expressing his personal interests.

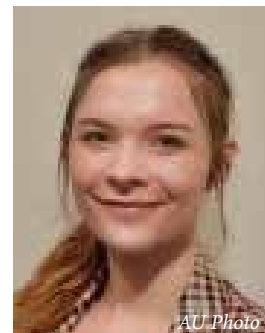
"I wanted to be a professor who's available (with an office) that students would actually like to come in," he said. "If you just have a bland office with a desk, it's not as inviting."

Elyse Conley, visiting professor of history, enjoys bringing in life and color to her office as well.

"I like sprucing it up with living things," Conley said. "I like having my plants in here. It brings a little bit of brightness and life."

The plants, the lights she has pointed at them, and books shelved along the walls help create a cozy atmosphere.

A small, framed map of South America also hangs on the history professor's wall.



**Elyse Conley**



*Assistant Professor of Political Science Zach Lang stands in front of framed Lord of the Rings posters in his office. (Photo by Charlie Lynch)*

**Continued on page 4.**





Senior Lecturer of Biology Jenilyn Mulkey displays paintings of her favorite bugs created by her mother, LEGO kits, and other science-related decorations on her office bookshelf. (Photo by Charlie Lynch)



Plants brighten Visiting Professor of History Elyse Conley's office space. (Photo by Ella Lundgren)

Mulkey instructed her students to draw one of two genetics problems for extra credit. The students all created the animals differently, resulting in a crazy collection of unique drawings.

"I was laughing hysterically at how they interpreted it," Mulkey said. "I just thought they were so neat. I compiled them all and it makes me laugh every time I look at it."

"I primarily study Latin American history and specialized in Chilean history, so I've got some little homages to that as well throughout the space," she said.

Senior Lecturer of Biology Jenilyn Mulkey teaches classes in genetics, cell biology, and various special topics.

On her office wall hangs a collage of various students' interpretation of a genetics

Mulkey's favorite decorations are her paintings, her insect collection, and her daughter's artwork. She has an expansive insect collection framed and four paintings by her mom of her favorite kinds of bugs on top of her bookshelf.

"I try to keep everything very neat so that I can see the colors, the artwork, and things that make me happy," Mulkey said. "I think best in a clean environment, so I try to keep my office very neat."



Two collages with students' artwork of genetics problems hang on Senior Lecturer of Biology Jenilyn Mulkey's office wall. (Photo by Charlie Lynch)



Down the hall, Associate Professor of History Lindsay Privette displays a variety of decorations in her office. Many are related to the Civil War, including bobble-heads of Civil War leaders.

Prominently behind her desk, a poster hangs depicting the painting “The Death of Marat,” a 1793 painting by Jacques-Louis David. The painting shows, Jean-Paul Marat, a French revolutionary who was stabbed to death in a bathtub. This may seem like an odd choice for an American historian, but Privette has a fascinating story behind this poster.



**Jenilyn Mulkey**

Privette said her interest in history began in middle school when she saw a picture of the painting in a textbook. Then in college, when she studied abroad in the Netherlands, she had the opportunity to visit the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium and saw the original painting. That’s when she purchased the print now displayed in her office.

“I bought the poster of the painting while I was out there to just kind of tie all of those things together,” Privette said. “It’s my full circle moment.”



*A poster of “The Death of Marat,” the painting that inspired her interest in history, hangs behind Associate Professor of History Lindsay Privatte’s desk. (Photo by Charlie Lynch)*

The history professor enjoys decorating by adding bulletin boards, artwork, and even lamps. Privette claims personalization of her office helps her through tough times.

“I think creating a nice space is one of those ways that you can encourage yourself when you are really stressed, and you have a lot going on,” she said.



*Bobbleheads of President Abraham Lincoln and Gen. Ulysses Grant are part of the decor for Associate Professor of History Lindsay Privette’s office. (Photo by Charlie Lynch)*



*Associate Professor of History Lindsay Privette works in her office where she has created a personalized and homey space. (Photo by Charlie Lynch)*



# Morgan makes the world her classroom

By Katie Koon

Rachel Morgan, a senior English literature major and Spanish minor, doesn't miss an opportunity to be involved at Anderson University. From serving in clubs, studying abroad, and working an on-campus job, Morgan has been able to apply what she learns in the classroom to the world around her.

When Morgan was younger, her mom was an American Sign Language interpreter and planted the seed of interest in languages.

She is "passionate about the deaf world," Morgan said of her mother. Morgan said this gave her an interest in ASL that she started to take seriously when she began college.

She joined the American Sign Language Club on campus and started attending silent dinners. Silent dinners are a way for students to immerse themselves with the deaf community. Morgan said she was intimidated at first because she did not know much sign language. Then she met Becky Walker, an adjunct professor who teaches ASL.

Walker provides her students with an immersive class experience. She teaches her classes without speaking and her students are required to attend eight events in the community with deaf people.

"I believe that experiencing this course helps these students understand the challenges and beauty of the deaf community," Walker said.

Morgan was a freshman at the time and could not



*Rachel Morgan stands in front of a mural depicting the Toro de Oro, a 12th-century tower in Seville, Spain, while studying abroad. Morgan is an English Literature major with a Spanish minor. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Morgan)*

get into the ASL classes because they were always full. This led Morgan and Walker to start meeting together on campus at Brashier Glade, a quiet, wooded area near the student ministry office.

Walker encourages students who are in Morgan's position to socialize and involve themselves with deaf people as much as possible. Walker gave Morgan the confidence and support to be involved with ASL and Morgan now serves as the president of the American Sign Language Club.

"She is truly a leader and has been very passionate about sign language. I am so proud of her," Walker said.

Morgan is not only a president of the American Sign Language Club. She is also the president of the Spanish club, Viva el Espanol.

Morgan took her first Spanish class in the 6th grade and has been interested in it ever since.



*Becky Walker, top center, leads an activity with students in the American Sign Language Club. (Photo courtesy Rachel Morgan)*



*Rachel Morgan, center, poses with her cohort for her semester abroad in Seville, Spain, during the summer of 2024. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Morgan)*

"It blew my mind that there are other ways that people can perceive and talk about the world," Morgan said.

She first started as a member of Viva el Espanol, but after others saw her drive and involvement, she was asked to be president. While serving as president she has been able to work on skills like event planning and marketing.

Her passion for languages led Morgan to study abroad. Morgan had the opportunity to study in Seville, Spain, for one month over the summer through Semester in Spain, a language-immersion program that helps students to experience and learn about Spanish culture first-hand.

Morgan took two classes while in Spain. She learned about history, literature, and art from the 15th and 26th century in a "Golden Spanish Age" class and also took a "Modern Day Culture of Spain" class.

While in Seville, she lived with a host family and a roommate who was also in the program. She spoke Spanish all day and would watch TV entertainment and news programs in Spanish as well.

She said the immersion was draining at times, especially in the beginning. However, she enjoyed it when the students got to hang out together and "turn their brains off" and speak in English.

She encourages other students to "go with an open

mind and heart" if they get the opportunity.

Along with leading clubs, Morgan also serves as a content writer for AU's Office of Marketing and Communications. She writes blogs and stories for the magazines, and any other projects she is assigned.

Morgan attends weekly team meetings on Monday mornings. During this time, the team discusses current and upcoming assignments and brainstorms ideas.

"We have a blast during meetings," Morgan said.

A typical day can vary for Morgan depending on her assignments. Throughout the week, she usually writes one or two blogs. Because she is able to work remotely, she spends most of her time writing in the Books and Beans campus coffee shop or in Thrift Library.

Morgan said the campus job has given her foundational experience in the world of professional writing and is preparing her for opportunities after graduation.

She said she has become trained on how to work with a professional team, how to generate blog ideas and execute them, how to manage time, and how to network professionally.

Morgan said the job, along with her involvement on campus, has provided her with skills that she will be able to use as she graduates.





*Davidson Cothran, AU's assistant athletic director of sports marketing and event management, captures the action at an Anderson University football game while a packed stadium watches behind him. (Photo by Charlie Lynch)*

# The Perfect Shot

## Students build camera skills through sports photography

**By Charlie Lynch**

How does someone become “good” at photography? Is it by sitting inside and watching videos on YouTube all day? Or is it by getting hands-on experience that can project a student forward in their career and build their portfolio?

At Anderson University, one of the ways students are learning their way around a camera is by working campus jobs through AU’s Sports Communications Office. These sports media photographers are always on the hunt for the perfect shot.

Sports media is a growing industry with over over \$400 million in revenue in 2024 that is expected to grow to more than \$1 billion by 2032, according to Zion Market Research. Sports media professionals capture content for all sports, manage social media, and create graphics for videos and broadcasts.

Jackie Tiongco, a junior art major with a concentration in photography and a minor in digital media communication, said she developed her interest in sports photography after she arrived at AU.

“I never really thought of doing photography until I

came to Anderson,” Tiongco, who also plays lacrosse for AU, said. “I mean, I took pictures in high school but was never very serious about it. But when I started going to the games here, I started loving it. I learned a lot from classes and other people.”

The past year was one of the biggest for sports at Anderson University. Over 60 sports media personnel were present to capture the university’s first-ever football game in front of a South Atlantic Conference record-breaking attendance of over 6,300 people.

“There was just so much energy everywhere on and off the field for that first (football) game,” Kyle Trussell, a senior communication major with a concentration in digital media, said. “I’m just glad I could be there and have the best view of it all from the field.

“I love being involved with athletics, and I’m a big sports fan,” Trussell added. “I really like helping athletes relive their best moments (through my photography).”

With 21 varsity sports teams, there was a lot of sports to cover.





*Student sports photographer Kyle Trussell follows a player off of the field after the coin toss during an Anderson University football game. (Photo by Charlie Lynch)*

Trussell said shooting sports at AU helped him get established as a photographer. He now has an online presence with more than 2,500 Instagram followers and has been able to capture photos for Clemson University and the University of North Carolina as well as for AU.

Becoming a photographer or videographer requires a lot of practice, the student photographers said. AU's digital media program offers multiple options for beginning one's journey into sports media with courses in photography, video production, sports reporting and more. But real growth is seen outside of the classroom, the students said.

The sports media student workers at AU can sign up for all home athletic events to capture the games and matches. Once on the field, the photographers shoot tight, medium, and wide shots to provide a variety of material for news and promotion.

The student photographers said there are many technical variables that go into taking a great picture or putting together a great video. But what makes a photo or video a "great" shot?

"I think it's the subject and what someone feels when they look at a picture," Trussell said.

Tiongco said capturing the viewer's attention is key.

"I think if you look at a picture for more than five seconds, it's a winner," she said. "A photograph can have a lot of depth, from emotion to celebration or sadness."

Sports photographers and videographers are largely supervised at AU by Assistant Athletic Director for Sports Marketing Davidson Cothran. Cothran has been the assistant athletic director for Sports Marketing and Event Management since May 2019.

Trussell and Tiongco describe Cothran, who earned a degree in communication with a concentration in digital media from AU himself, as a leader and mentor.

"Anderson has been a part of my life since my childhood and since receiving my degree from here, my love for the AU community has only grown. I have been an avid sports fan my whole life, so getting to connect my passion for AU and sports has been a great blessing," Cothran said. "These students have been a great addition to help achieve the creative goals we have here within AU athletics. I did not have the same opportunity as these students when I came through AU, so getting to see them learn and grow in their abilities as students in support of what we do daily has been incredible to see. I'm proud of how they represent our department and support our athletic programs, and I know each of these students have bright futures ahead of them."



*From left to right, Kyle Trussell, Jackie Tiongco, and Charlie Lynch pose with their camera gear at Melvin and Dollie Younts Stadium before an Anderson University football game. (Photo by Willie Ceuss)*

# Cancer Research Center gets improved facilities

**By Ashton Marchbanks**

A recent move to new facilities is enabling Anderson University professors and students to expand their research into the causes of cancer through the Anderson University Center for Cancer Research.

The center moved into a new facility at 400 N. Fant St, Anderson, in December. The new building, supplied by AnMed Medical Center in Anderson, is near its previous location but is larger and offers improved facilities.

Professor of Biology Diana Ivankovic, director of the Anderson University Center for Cancer Research, said the new building continues a years-long relationship between the university and the medical center that serves the upstate.

“AnMed has a very strong connection with Anderson University,” Ivankovic said.

The move was made with the help of many students and faculty of Anderson University, Ivankovic said. The center was able to get fully moved before students left for winter break.

Maintenance workers from the university also assisted with the move, including installing white boards and fire extinguishers, Ivankovic said.

“It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a village to get the move,” Ivankovic said.

AU’s student researchers and faculty say they are very satisfied with the move.

“The additional space at the new Center for Cancer Research will benefit our Cancer Scholar program because it allows for more students to work simultaneously within the sterile culture hoods as well as provides more space for collaboration,” biochemistry major Emma Keeling said. Students and faculty are now able to have meetings



**Diana Ivankovic**



**Emma Keeling**



*From left to right, Cancer Research Center student researchers Lauren Baskin and Ethan Waybright work with lab specimens under the direction of Anderson University Center for Cancer Research Director Diana Ivankovic. (Photo by Ashton Marchbanks)*

and gatherings in the new research facility that were not possible in the smaller building. The new facility also offers better lighting and more efficient space organization.

The new building offers multiple tissue culture rooms and multiple prep rooms, along with white boards in meeting rooms.

Ivankovic said AnMed has also assisted in providing items like additional sinks and new flooring to make a safe environment for the students.

“We got a way better building,” Ivankovic said.

Ivankovic said students engaged in research at the center are making an important impact every day as they learn how to fight and kill cancer cells. Many students





*From left to right, student cancer researchers Ethan Waybright and Lauren Baskin, Professor of Biology Diana Ivankovic, and Associate Professor in Biology and Chemistry Andy Norris pose in front of the new building for the Anderson University Center for Cancer Research on Fant Street in Anderson. Ivankovic serves as director of the center and Norris as assistant director. (Photo by Ashton Marchbanks)*



*VanZant Photo*

### **Montana VanZant**

VanZant said she believes that cancer research being conducted has the power to “improve the lives of families and individuals that are affected by cancer.”

VanZant said she finds excitement in researching at the

will continue their research past Anderson University.

Montana VanZant, a junior majoring in biology said the new facilities have already begun making a practical difference.

“The advanced technology and equipment have greatly enhanced the efficiency of my research,” she said.



*Ireland Photo*

### **Ryan Ireland**

“Even if my research project does not result in a ‘breakthrough,’ there will still be value in showing which treatments do not work, so that people can look for solutions elsewhere,” Ireland said. “Either way, the research is contributing to the body of knowledge we have about the disease, and I think that is a worthwhile thing to be a part of.”

center because “I also get to use the gifts that God has instilled in me to possibly help others and contribute knowledge in a field that is highly needed.”

Ryan Ireland, a junior studying biology, agrees that student cancer research can be highly impactful.

# Student journal publishes 100th edition

By Jenna Martin

The Ivy Leaves literary and art journal of Anderson University celebrated its centennial anniversary with its most recent publication, adding a major milestone to its longstanding tradition and legacy at the university.

Ivy Leaves began in 1916 as a literature journal only, led by an all-women student group, but it was originally published under the name The Orion, according to the official Ivy Leaves website. The journal was renamed to Ivy Leaves in 1964.

The change of name was not the only time “Ivy Leaves” grew with Anderson University, as the visual arts were added into the journal to display student creativity in another way.

“The collaboration between visual arts and literature has really progressed so that it’s now a 50/50 product where you open the pages and see just as much amazing student visual work as you do amazing student writing,” said Associate Professor of English Derek Updegraff who serves as the literary advisor for the publication.



**Derek Updegraff**



*The cover of the latest edition of Ivy Leaves. The literary and art journal of Anderson University recently produced its 100th issue.*

Through the years, the journal has sought to reflect the topics of interest to students, said Editor-in-chief Emma Brightman. Students do all the writing, editing, layout and design in addition to producing the artwork.

“Ivy Leaves’ shows that we have varying views, opinions, and struggles,” Brightman, an English major with a concentration in writing and digital studies, said.

She said she is very happy that “anyone can be represented, and the ugly truths of real life can be displayed.”

Brightman said some of the stories in this year’s journal cover hard topics such as mental illness, self-harm, and suicide.



*Associate Professor of English Derek Updegraff meets with the editors of Ivy Leaves. Students write, edit and produce all the artwork for the literary and art journal. (Photo by Jenna Martin)*





**Emma Brightman**

Brightman's sentiment is shared among her peers on the editorial team. Editors seek to select the highest quality pieces that give voice to a wide variety of perspectives, opinions, and creative approaches.

"Ivy Leaves gives students at AU a chance to express themselves creatively and share their voices with the campus," said junior Milena

Ulrich, a creative writing major and member of the editorial team for the journal. "An AU student, regardless of their major or experience, can participate, which I appreciate."

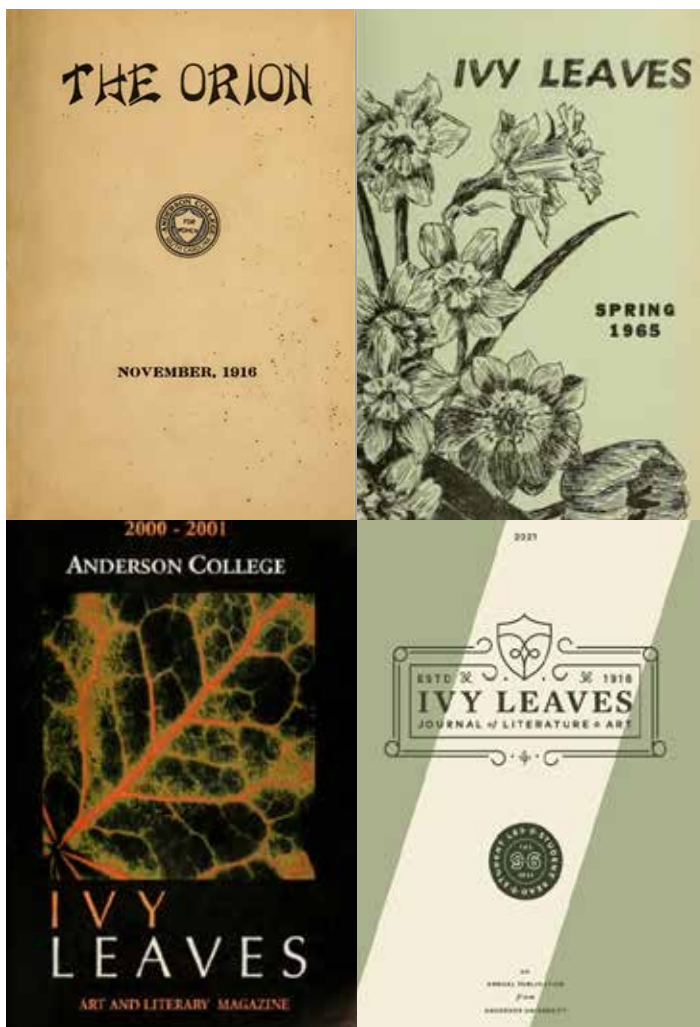


**Milena Ulrich**

The milestone of a 100<sup>th</sup> issue of any printed journal is a major achievement, Updegraff said, noting that many similar publications have not received the consistent longterm support that has benefitted Ivy Leaves.

"I've seen a number of really good literary journals either fold completely or switch from print to being online

only," Updegraff said. "The fact that AU is maintaining a print journal, I think, is really, really huge."



*Four covers of the literary and art journal through the years at Anderson University.*



# Simulation teaches with role-play

By Jada Patton

It's the 11th century and you are a Roman senator. You want to conquer and claw your way to the top. You want to become the most powerful in the empire. So, you declare war on your enemies, and you battle it out...

...by rolling dice.

While that might not have been exactly how it worked in medieval Byzantium, both luck and strategy were key elements for Anderson University students playing out a simulation through the history department's "Augustus" game during the spring semester.

Through the simulation, any Anderson student could role-play life in the 11th-century Byzantine Empire and strategically work their way to the top of society. The game lasted nine days and helped students experience in a fun way the political turmoil in the empire during the time period.



**Lynneth Renberg**

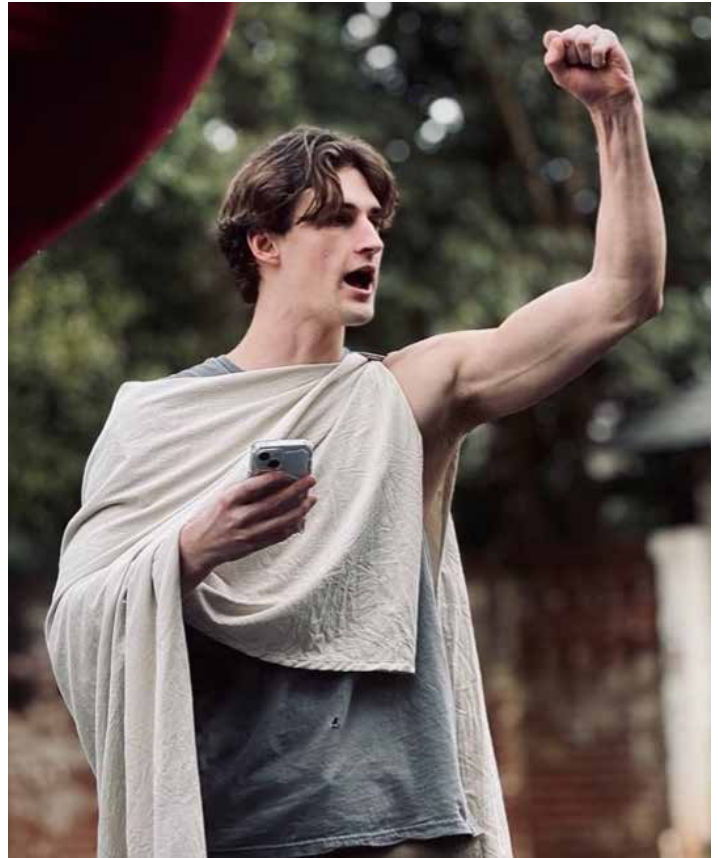
Associate Professor of History Lynneth Renberg helped the students with the game, written by an AU alumnus, to show them "how much fun history can be" and to help students with similar interests find community.

Renberg said the role-playing game uses costumes and props to represent the attire of the Byzantine Empire. In the game, each player is assigned a historical figure from the time period, and must act as the person for the duration of the game.

Alexa Atkinson, a junior elementary education major, played as a character named Vevdene.

"She was the first wife of Nikephoros Botaneiates, who was a general and later an emperor," Atkinson said. Not much is known about Atkinson's historical figure but that did not stop her from winning one of the games of Augustus.

While the props and costumes make Augustus seem all fun and games, the simulation can get intense, players said. A player can earn points by engaging in business or starting a coup.



*Cade Cockrell claims a new title for himself as part of the Augustus role-playing game that teaches students about life in the Byzantine Empire during the 11th century. (Photo by Easton Edora)*

They can also earn points by putting on period-relevant events that correlate to the historical setting of the game.

Atkinson said she once held a Feast of the Three Holy Fathers, an Eastern Orthodox Christian celebration held on Jan. 30 to honor the lives of Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom.

Easton Edora, a sophomore clinical psychology major, enjoyed all the exciting opportunities that Augustus had to offer.

"There are many ways to win Augustus, and idling is NOT one of them," Edora said.

Most of the action in the game happens during "Senate" meetings held every day at 4 p.m. throughout the game to discuss the progress of the players and the





*To learn about the religion of the Byzantine Empire, students playing the Augustus role-playing game visited an Eastern Orthodox church. From left to right are Joe Atherton, Austin Hooker, Lucy Doyle, Easton Edora, Alexa Atkinson, Stephen Davis, Mariella Vidor, Ansley Pedersen, Cade Cockrell, Logan Davis, John Vassey, and Father Anthony Perkins. (Photo by Easton Edora)*

game.

"This is where a lot of conversations happen from gaining titles, promoting your business and the occasional coup," Atkinson said. The meetings become quite competitive because every player wants to earn titles but only a few are awarded.



*Ansley Pederson addresses the Senate during the Augustus game. (Photo by Easton Edora)*

"The shifting of titles happens quite often, and Augustus becomes an intense tug of war between the popular, the clever, and the rich," said Edora.

While Augustus is filled with exciting quests and endless possibilities, it is still an educational game. Players get to learn about 11th-century language and culture. When the players of the game dress up, they gain an understanding

of the fashion during the period. The Augustus clan even visited a modern Eastern Orthodox church to

learn more about how religion was practiced.

Players can also go the extra step and research the period to gain a secret advantage. Two players learned that it was illegal for the emperor to make and sell incense. The players then used their research to discredit the sitting emperor who was making rose water.

"Whether donning a chlamys, attending an Orthodox vespers service, feasting on Greek cuisine, or leading troops into battle against barbarian Turks, Augustus allows you to lean into the history no matter your gameplay style," said Edora.

Not every aspect of the game is cutthroat. The main point of the game is to have fun. One of the most valuable things players gain from the game is friendship.

"The environment allows people to reveal their beautiful personalities, and I have found many friends I wouldn't have met otherwise," said Edora.

At the end of Augustus, there is a closing ceremony, where all the players celebrate together. They celebrate their glorious victories and mingle with each other one last time.

The game Augustus allows students to relive history

## Star Wars in the classroom

# Students examine politics of a galaxy far, far away

By Sam Quiambao

If you think “Star Wars” is just about Jedi, Sith, and lightsaber duels, think again.

At Anderson University, Zach Lang, an assistant professor of political science, uses the iconic “Star Wars” saga as a vehicle to teach U.S. politics in a new and unique way.

Lang has been teaching “Politics of Star Wars” for three years. According to him, the class consistently has a waitlist, attracting students from many different majors.

“This is the only class I teach where most people are not political science majors,” Lang said

He said the class stays focused on the “Star Wars” universe to help students engage with political ideas,

using familiar stories to make the material easier to understand.

He utilizes scenes and important movie events, like the famous executive coup, Order 66, to highlight political concepts such as the general expansion of executive power and its impact on democratic systems.

“As long as you graft real-world content onto something students are actually interested in, you can get them to go a very long way,” Lang said.

Lang said his interest in combining “Star Wars” and political science began during his doctoral studies when he recognized the franchise’s underlying political themes. He said modern American politics reflects the politics in “Star Wars” in a very similar way. His love for both topics fuels his teaching.

“When you’re teaching a class like this, you have to enjoy it. Passion goes a long way,” Lang said. “I probably know more about ‘Star Wars’ than I do about political science, and I have a Ph.D. in political science.”



**Zach Lang**



*Children attend school in a scene from “The Mandalorian” (Season 2, Episode 8). Students in Anderson University’s popular course, “The Politics of Star Wars,” use the storylines of the Star Wars saga to delve into the intricacies of American politics. (Lucasfilm/Disney+ photo)*





Assistant Professor of Political Science Zachary Lang said the *Star Wars* franchise's underlying political themes often reflect modern American politics which makes it an ideal way to teach political concepts to students. (Promotional image for *Star Wars* film series created by George Lucas)

Senior public policy major Skylar Bruner said students enrolled in Lang's classes describe his teaching methods as structured and interactive.

Bruner also said Lang seeks to meet students where they are and encourages his students to ask questions to deepen their understanding.

"His organization allows you to learn and retain the knowledge," Bruner said. "But he's always willing to meet the student where they're at and address any questions."

Bruner said Lang begins each class week by taking prayer requests which creates a deep sense of community in the classroom.

Beyond the classroom, Lang's unique approach to teaching has sparked conversations among students about how pop culture can reflect deeper political

realities. Many students leave the course with a new perspective on government structures, power dynamics, and historical parallels.

"It's crazy how TV shows and media have the power to shape how we view politics and the real world stuff," junior Josh Tofel said.

Tofel said the class has deepened his understanding of "Star Wars."

"I have always loved 'Star Wars,' but the depth of it is something I've missed in the past," Tofel said. "Because it's deeper now, it's definitely more enjoyable."

By blending the beloved "Star Wars" universe with political theory, Lang's class does more than teach about the Jedi and the Republic; it encourages students to think critically about the world around them in a fun and unique way, he said.



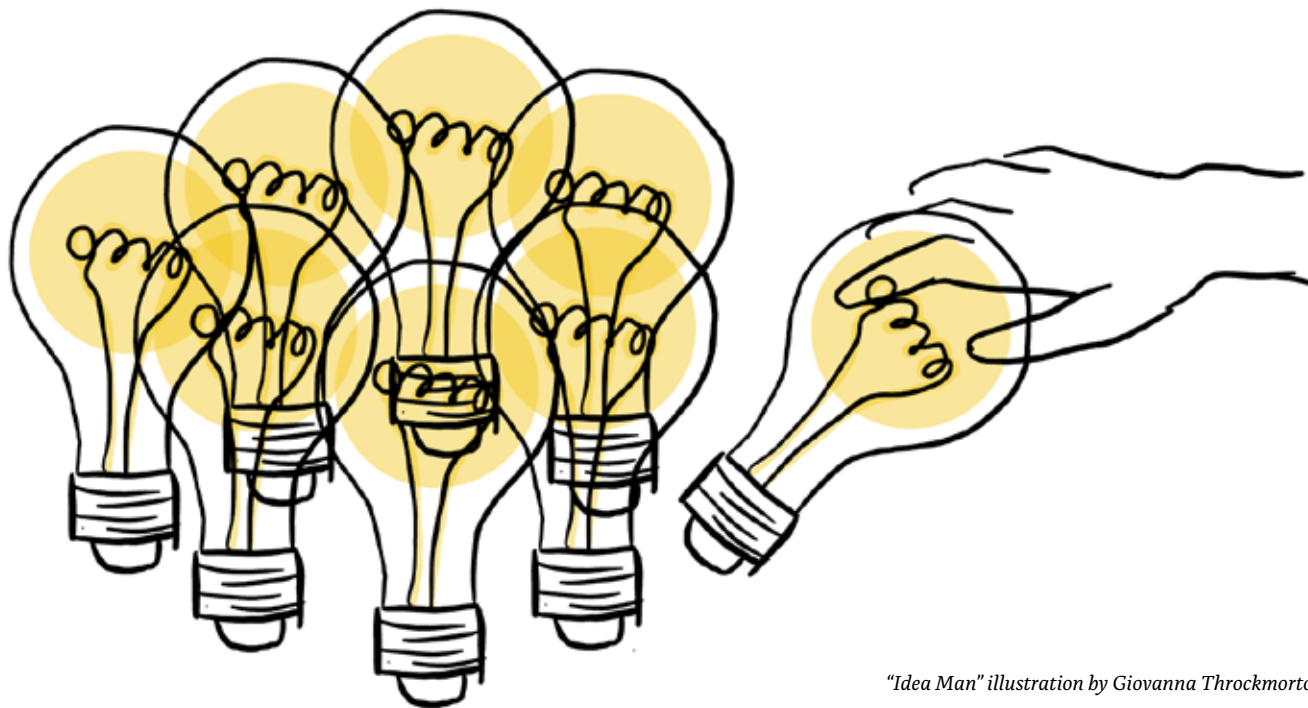
Bruner Photo

**Skylar Bruner**



Tofel Photo

**Josh Tofel**



*"Idea Man" illustration by Giovanna Throckmorton*

# Psychology helps students understand people

By Giovanna Throckmorton

Anderson University's behavioral science degrees are helping students discover careers in a variety of people-focused fields.

The university offers a bachelor of science in psychology and a bachelor of arts in human development and family studies. According to AU faculty in the Department of Behavioral Sciences, both degrees offer students excellent career opportunities through somewhat different approaches.



**Patty Slaughter**

Professor of Psychology Patty Slaughter, who chairs the department, said the bachelor of arts degree in human development and family studies has a liberal arts focus, whereas the bachelor of science degree is focused on the clinical side of psychology

She said both the human development and family studies degree and the psychology degree open the door for stu-

dents to pursue graduate school and the workforce.

"The nature of the psychology degree at a liberal arts institution like Anderson is just so valuable because

it allows a breadth of exposure to material," said Slaughter, who holds a doctorate in guidance and psychological services.



**Grant Swafford**

She said that at a most basic level, the majors are useful in helping students understand issues they encounter in their personal lives. She said AU encourages students to understand people from an empathetic, humble perspective.

The degrees also teaches students how to work with people and groups, which many employers are now looking for, she said.

"About 50% go on to grad school and then the other 50% go into the workforce," Slaughter said.

Many students also take advantage of internships, which helps them gain experience in working with people, Slaughter said, noting that keys to success in the career path are experience and connections.

Senior Grant Swafford, who is working on a bachelor of science degree in psychology with a clinical concentration, said pursuing his degree has been helpful



as he plans to work in ministry to support adolescent boys in their mental health struggles.

Swafford's said AU's degree program "pushes you to grow so much in empathy for other people and gives you a lot of tools to do that."

He said he was able to participate in three internships, one at Ruth's Gleanings, a Spartanburg area food program, and two other ministry-focused internships.

"God made us for a community and for other people, where it says in the word, to bear one another's burdens with love, and that's what so much of this helps you do," said Swafford. He said the program and internship experiences clarified his passion for ministry.

Associate Professor of Psychology Robert Franklin said that there are many different psychology-focused career options, and most will entail working with people.

"(Finding a position) is a lot more about connections, being able to make sure you have experience in what you are doing," Franklin said.

Addison Carlson, a first-year psychology major, said she has a desire to help children and decided on psychology as her major the summer before arriving at AU. She described psychology as a science pursuing the understanding of actions, and she enjoys learning how the brain works.

Carlson said that she has faced mental health struggles herself which gives her empathy for others facing similar issues. She said this has driven her desire to understand different mental health issues.

"That was like an eye opener, I guess, as to how I can help people and how I can use that experience," Carlson said.



**Robert Franklin**



**Addison Carlson**

ter's," Neill said.

He noted that if a student does not want to pursue further education after receiving the bachelor's degree, internships play the biggest role in helping to make connections within his or her desired field.

"I know that employers are looking for...individuals who are competent and have a certain knowledge base," Neill said. "I think the discipline of psychology would help them achieve that."

He said psychology teaches students to work with people by helping them understand how their brain works and the thought processes of others.

Neill said that there are multiple internships for students trying to narrow down their career search.

"We had a student who did his internship in the human resources department," he said. "We've had students that have worked in school settings with school counselors, students who worked with the police at police stations."



**Jason Neill**



# SYNTHESIS

Anderson University  
316 Boulevard  
Anderson, SC 29621



*Beth Batson, public information director for the City of Anderson, answers a student's question during a presentation sponsored by the Anderson University chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America. The chapter, sponsored in part by the College of Arts and Sciences, helps students interested in careers in communication network with professionals in the field and each other. The chapter sponsors professional development presentations, field trips, and service projects. (Photo by Robert Reeves)*