

April 2026



Research in Action

Updates from the **Arnold School of Public Health** Office of Research

A NOTE FROM THE ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Staying the Course

If you've found yourself checking eRA Commons, other funding agency portals, and your email a little more often than usual as you await a grant score, summary statement, or notice of award (NOA), you are not alone. Across agencies, we are continuing to see longer review timelines and delays in NOAs due to backlog from government closures and evolving processes. These delays are frustrating. Waiting may be part of the process but that doesn't make it any easier.

At the same time, many of you may be receiving an increase in invitations to review grant proposals. This is a meaningful form of professional service and a clear sign that your expertise is recognized. It can also be difficult to know when to say yes, how much to take on, and how each opportunity fits into your broader goals. We are also seeing a growing challenge across journals in securing peer reviewers. Many of you are likely receiving more requests to review manuscripts. This reflects both the amount of

research being produced and the strain on the peer review system that truly depends on shared responsibility. Taken together, these trends are connected. The same individuals are writing, submitting, reviewing, and revising. Capacity is being stretched to its limits.

If you're navigating these decisions (I know I still do), I encourage you to lean on your mentors and peers for guidance.

While decisions about what to review and how to prioritize your commitments are personal and discipline-specific, you do not have to navigate the broader research landscape alone! The ASPH Office of Research and your department and center grant managers are here to support you as you plan for the next proposal, prepare resubmissions, and think through continuing year budgets. I also encourage you to take advantage of resources from the Office of the Vice President for Research, including tailored grant opportunities.

For some inspiration, I also hope you will join us on Monday, April 13 as we welcome the Editor-in-Chief of the *American Journal of Public Health* to kick off our ASPH Voices in Leadership program. Dr. Lau's seminar and small group discussions will provide an opportunity to talk openly about scholarly publishing and how we navigate many of the challenges impacting us in a changing research environment.

We also look forward to receiving applications for our PH GLIDE Faculty Cohort Leadership Development Program, where we will continue these conversations and invest in building leadership capacity across our school.

This newsletter is another reminder of the impact already happening across our school. From new awards and publications to student-led research initiatives, the work featured here reflects the Arnold School's creativity, persistence, and values.

Thank you for continuing to support one another.

Best,

Daniela



P.S. In case you're wondering how my colleague is faring after the "6th time was a charm" biosketch situation: while our February proposal submission required six tries, our April submission was one and

done. We're calling that a win. And when another submission took a team of four to get the biosketch across the finish line ... well, that's team science, right?

UPDATES FROM OUR OFFICE

So far in FY 2026, the ASPH has...

223

Grant Awards

\$37 M

in Research Funding

489

Publications

- **The ASPH Office of Research (OoR)** is proud to have launched PH GLIDE (Public Health - Growing Leadership that is Inclusive, Deliberate, and Engaged).
 - **PH GLIDE** is a new cohort-based leadership development initiative for ASPH faculty members of all ranks and tracks seeking deeper, intentional engagement with their role as leaders in the public health world. Participants will complete the program in person over two academic semesters, with a focus on value-driven leadership, building and sustaining relationships, enhancing communication skills, managing conflict, and strategic decision-making.
 - For full program details, application requirements, and to apply, click [here](#).
- **The OoR** is still accepting proposals for the Postdoctoral Fellows Research Grant Program! Sumissions are due April 20. Click [here](#) for full details.
- **Publications** -our school had 32 new publications in [February](#) and 67 new publications in [March](#). This brings our total to 489 publications so far in FY2026.
- **University Libraries** have launched a pilot subscription to [AI Discovery](#), an artificial intelligence-enhanced research tool developed by Elsevier and included in the Scopus platform. AI discovery enables natural language searching, summarizes key insights from scholarly literature, and helps users explore research topics more efficiently while maintaining clear links to source material. This pilot will allow the Libraries to evaluate the tool's effectiveness and value for the USC community. Access is now available through [this link](#).
- **Research security training update** - [research security training](#) is required every year. Previously, CITI certificates generated for refresher training indicated that certification was valid for three years, however this was a system error and training will need to be completed each

year. Please make sure you stay up to date on your training. You should receive reminder emails at 90, 60, and 30 days out from your certificate expiring.

- To comply with the **new state-level approval requirements**, central purchasing has updated the [Sole Source Request form](#). This form must be attached to all sole source requisitions.
- **The NIH** has created some [guidelines](#) on reference letters and letters of support: when to use them, who writes them, and what key information you should include in them. They have also extended the leniency period for using the new Biosketch and current and pending other support common forms through May 2026. See full details on this change [here](#).
- **The NIH Late Application Submission Policy** has been updated. It ends the Continuous Submission (as of August 10, 2026) and announces modifications to reasons considered for late submission (for due dates on or after May 25, 2026). For full details, click [here](#).

STUDENT RESEARCH POSTER CONTEST

Submissions are paused for the summer and will resume in Fall of 2026. Stay tuned for the updated submission form.



Undergraduate Student Winner: March 2026

Alina Tofiqul - Public Health major

Everyday Positive Affect and Well-Being Across Daily Activities among African American Older Adults

View Alina's poster [here](#).

Graduate Student Winner: March 2026

Mojtaba Norozi - PhD Candidate in Communication Sciences and Disorders

Physiological Responses to Stranger Approach in Autistic Children, Non-Autistic Siblings, and Neurotypical Peers: Insights into Early Social Fear



View Mojtaba's poster [here](#).



Undergraduate Student Winner: April 2026

Gia Mendicino - Public Health major

Determining Influences of Adolescents' Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Consumption in Urban Bangladesh

View Gia's poster [here](#).

Graduate Student Winner: April 2026

Kiani Jacobs - PhD Candidate in Exercise Science

Plasma Proteomic Signature of BMI Reveals Heterogeneous Cardiometabolic Risk Profiles Within and Across Standard BMI Classifications



View Kiani's poster [here](#).



OFFICE OF RESEARCH STAFF SPOTLIGHT: KIM DURDEN

Assistant Director, Office of Research

Kim has been part of the Office of Research since February 2018, bringing with her nearly 20 years of experience from the USC Aiken campus. As Assistant Director, Kim guides and supports faculty and staff on post-award matters, and steps in to assist departments facing staffing challenges. She works closely with the Dean's Office during Time & Effort reporting periods to ensure all approvals are completed by deadline, manages monthly expense reconciliations for Discovery I departments, and provides compliance support in the Director's absence. Whether reviewing reports, following up with principal investigators and business managers, or helping close out grants, Kim's days are varied and detail-driven.

The most rewarding part of her work, Kim says, is helping faculty and staff untangle budget issues that have been difficult to resolve. “I take pleasure in alleviating some of their burdens by uncovering discrepancies or errors, allowing them to concentrate on what truly matters, such as their research,” she shared, noting that she especially enjoys the “forensic accounting” side of the job. Outside of work, Kim enjoys spending time with her husband and family, attending car shows in the mountains, antique shopping, camping at the beach, and cherishing time with her grandchildren. A fun fact her colleagues can easily confirm: she loves decorating her office for holidays (often earlier than anyone else) to create a welcoming, comfortable space where she can be both approachable and productive.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT-FACULTY RESEARCH MATCHING SURVEY

Undergraduate students - please fill out [this interest survey](#) if you would like to get involved with ASPH research initiatives. Once completed, the OoR will help you explore opportunities and connect to potential mentors.

Faculty members - are you interested in being added or removed from this survey? Email Olivia Burnitz (rutledgo@mailbox.sc.edu) for assistance.

ASPH FACULTY SPOTLIGHTS



Dr. Xueying Yang

Dr. Yang's article, [Long COVID among people with HIV: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#), was recently recognized as a top cited article of 2025. The article was co-authored by Fanghui Shi, Hao Zhang, William Giang, Amandeep Kaur, Hui Chen, and Xiaoming Li, and published in *HIV Medicine*.

Dr. Yang is an assistant professor in Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior. Her research focuses on understanding the physical, psychosocial, and behavioral aspects of HIV infection among diverse vulnerable populations, and reducing disparities of health outcomes of people affected by HIV.

Congratulations Dr. Yang and team!

Dr. Mark Sarzynski

Dr. Mark Sarzynski received the 2026 Henry J. Montoye Scholar Award from the Southeast Chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). The Scholar Award honors and recognizes outstanding contributions to the body of knowledge related to medicine and science in sports and exercise.



Dr. Sarzynski is a professor of Exercise Science, a fellow of both the American Heart Association and American College of Sports Medicine, and a recipient of the Scott Grundy Fellowship Award for Excellence in Research Metabolism.

Congratulations Dr. Sarzynski! To read more about this award and Dr. Sarzynski's work, click [here](#).

A HEDGEHOG STORY: SC RURAL HEALTH RESERACH CENTER

Hedgehog Fun Fact: Hedgehogs can run up to six miles an hour - pretty speedy for such little legs!

The [Hedgehog Model](#) explains how great organizations succeed by focusing on the intersection of three things: **what they are deeply passionate about, what they can be the best in the world at, and what sustains and supports their work**. Recently, the OoR asked the Rural Health Research Center (RHRC) to reflect on their "why" using this model. Here's what they had to say.



SOUTH CAROLINA RURAL HEALTH RESEARCH CENTER (RHRC)

The RHRC focuses on investigating inequities in health status within rural populations in the United States, with an emphasis on social determinants of health (SDOH). Lead by co-directors Dr. Elizabeth Crouch (third from left) and Dr. Peiyin Hung (fourth from left), the RHRC strives to make research findings useful to organizations and individuals working to improve the health status and quality of life for rural communities. Here's what Drs. Crouch and Hung had to say about their Hedgehog concept.

What are we passionate about?

The Rural Health Research Center is “deeply committed to understanding and dismantling the health inequities experienced by rural populations.” Their guiding questions sit at the intersection of place, policy, and health systems: How do these forces shape disparities? And how can evidence-based interventions strengthen rural health systems?

The Center’s commitment stems from the persistent, systemic challenges rural communities face: workforce shortages, limited infrastructure, and socioeconomic disadvantages.

What can we be the best at?

A defining strength of the RHRC is its ability to integrate health services research, population health data, and policy-relevant scholarship for real-world impact. The team excels at examining “the complex web of healthcare systems, policies, and social determinants that influence health outcomes in rural communities.”

Using large administrative and population-level datasets, the RHRC applies rigorous quantitative and policy analysis methods to identify patterns in healthcare access, utilization, and outcomes in rural and underserved settings. Just as importantly, colleagues recognize the team’s ability to translate complex data into actionable knowledge and tools for policymakers, healthcare leaders, and community stakeholders.

If there is one thing the RHRC hopes to be known for, it is “leadership in translating rigorous evidence into real-world policies that transform rural healthcare access and outcomes.”



What sustains and supports our research?

The Center’s work is fueled by the people and systems it serves: rural communities, policymakers, and healthcare organizations. By producing policy-relevant evidence, the RHRC supports decision-makers as they tackle pressing real-world issues such as limited healthcare access, workforce shortages, and structural barriers to care. As the team describes it, “these issues require data-driven solutions, and our role is to provide evidence-based solutions.”

Strong interdisciplinary collaborations, deep partnerships with community and healthcare organizations, and decades of federal funding focused on rural health form the foundation that sustains this work. These relationships not only support the research itself, but ensure that findings reach the hands of those positioned to implement meaningful change.

The long-term vision that drives the Center forward is clear: “a future with improved health equity, resilient rural healthcare systems, and policies that enhance the health and well-being of rural populations across the United States.”

If captured in a single sentence, the Center’s Hedgehog Concept is:

Advancing research findings to dismantle rural health inequities, and translating complex data into interventions that improve healthcare access and health outcomes for rural communities.

UPCOMING EVENTS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Denys T. Lau, PhD, Editor-in-Chief, American Journal of Public Health

April 13th, 9:30-10:30 AM

Discovery Building, Room 331

Panel Discussion with Faculty Members who serve on NIH CSR Study Sections

April 24, 3:00 PM

Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center - Carolina Meeting Room

PH GLIDE Application Deadline

April 30, 2025

Click [here](#) for full details.

OFFICE OF RESEARCH MEETINGS

Brewing Success: Research and Coffee Meetings for ASPH Grant and Business Managers

April 24, 9:00-10:00 AM

ASPH Office of Research, Discovery Building Suite 503

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Discover USC

April 24, 2026

Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center

LEWIS-BURKE ASSOCIATES

Lewis-Burke Associates Federal Grant Update Calls for ASPH Faculty and Grants Staff

[June 24th](#) at 1 PM

Click date for meeting link

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Additional updates, reminders, and resources you won't want to miss.

UPDATES & REMINDERS

- The **ASPH OoR** has updated the [budget template](#) to reflect increased insurance rates. Make sure you use the new version when you create a project budget.
- **The NIH** issued a notice announcing [new documentation requirements](#) for NIH proposals submitted on or after January 25, 2026. NIH grant policies are always evolving; see the latest updates [here](#).
- The **boilerplate** document for the ASPH can be found [here](#).
- The ASPH has a **BioRender subscription** available for use! To be added to the BioRender subscription, please contact Ally Hucek (fhucek@email.sc.edu).

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

- **The VPR's Research and Training Education Services** office provides comprehensive resources on USC grant processes. There is an especially useful [video on hiring RGP's](#) available for your reference.
- **Research security training update** - [research security training](#) is required every year. Previously, CITI certificates generated for refresher training indicated that certification was valid for three years, however this was a system error and training will need to be completed each year. Please make sure you stay up to date on your training. You should receive reminder emails at 90, 60, and 30 days out from your certificate expiring.
- **The Carolina Grants and Innovation Hub** offers [a suite of helpful tools](#) and training to support USC faculty and research administrators in meeting these new requirements. PIs are encouraged to use these services for editing their proposal documents while working with their department's grant manager for proposal preparation.
- **The University Libraries'** [GitHub page](#) contains a repository of notebooks, code, and tutorials that can help researchers or students get acquainted with new tools. The notebooks support many dimensions of the research process including data analysis, visualization, and machine learning.
- **The Foundation Directory** offers tools to identify potential grant makers and insights into their giving patterns, priorities, and award amounts. It also includes the recipient profiles to benchmark peers, uncover new opportunities, and support strategic partnerships. [This tool](#) may

be especially valuable for those seeking research funding beyond federal grants. There are some [helpful resources](#) to help you navigate the Foundation Directory offered through the University Library.

- *Search the Philanthropy Classification System for keywords to use when conducting searches in the Foundation Directory. For non-federal funding sources, unclick “Include U.S. Federal Funders” to exclude U.S. government sources. Then type the search terms identified using the Classification System into the white box, separated by “AND”. Click on “Advanced Search & Filters” and check to make sure that all selected search terms appear in the correct places.*



A few of the ASPH grant managers in the Saint Patrick's day spirit at the OoR

March 'Brewing Success' meeting.



Some Discovery friends gathered to celebrate Charlotte Stalvey's birthday in February.



The OoR team and friends gathered to celebrate Dr. Friedman's birthday in March.

Do you have an item you'd like featured in the next edition of *Research in Action*? Fill out [this form](#) to get connected with our team!



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