

February 2026



Research in Action

News and Updates from the ASPH Office of Research

A NOTE FROM THE ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Dear Arnold School of Public Health Colleagues,

Every year around National Squirrel Appreciation Day, many of you kindly remind me of my complicated relationship with squirrels, a fact that has somehow become part of my professional identity. While I still find them to be bizarre, I appreciate the spirit behind it and how the small traditions and inside jokes help build community during complicated times. In our Arnold School Office of Research news, the spotlight shifts from squirrels to hedgehogs as we highlight the Hedgehog Concept and the importance of focus, clarity, and aligning our work with what matters most.

Lately, some of us have probably felt a bit more like guinea pigs as we navigate new grant processes, shifting priorities, testing updated document formats, and learning in real time as we submit proposals. Somewhere around the sixth revision of a new NIH biosketch (yes, sixth time was the charm for a dear colleague!) and a desk covered in Goldfish crackers and chocolate, we found ourselves celebrating every small win and laughing until we teared up. Grant proposal submissions seem more collaborative than ever as we learn and adapt together. Perhaps this is an unexpected silver lining for us to consider.

As part of our continued effort to strengthen support and promote our work in a changing research environment, I am very pleased to introduce you to Olivia Burnitz, DPT, ASPH alumna and new Program Coordinator in the Office of Research. Olivia will be helping us capture and communicate the impact of our research through meaningful data, storytelling, and metrics that reflect the depth of our work. With Olivia's support, we will also be expanding professional development offerings and upcoming leadership programming that is intentional and guided by your input. Stay tuned for the launch of the Arnold School's *Voices in Leadership* initiative.

Now back to those forest creatures. Let's not forget the owls among us - those thoughtful observers who help us pause and reflect when the pace of deadlines and new processes seem overwhelming. As you read this newsletter, I hope you see yourself somewhere among these creatures: determined like a hedgehog, curious like a guinea pig, wise like an owl ... and yes, even like those squirrels who may keep us laughing and connected to one another.



Thank you for your continued collaboration and leadership.

Daniela Friedman

UPDATES FROM OUR OFFICE

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

167

Grant Awards

\$31 M

Research Funding

392

Publications

- **The Office of Research (OoR)** is preparing to launch a new leadership development initiative for ASPH faculty. Stay tuned for more updates about ***Voices in Leadership!***
- **Call for 2026 Post Doctoral Fellows Research Grant Program** - The OoR is now taking submissions for the 2026 post doctoral fellow research grant program. We will issue 2 grants worth \$5000 each in support of the research programs of our postdoctoral scholars. See [this document](#) for details and deadlines.
- **The ASPH Office of Research** and **South Carolina SmartState Center for Healthcare Quality (CHQ)** invite applications for the [2026-2027 CHQ Junior Scholar Program](#) (click the link for full

flyer and application info). Interested students should submit application via email ctam@mailbox.sc.edu by **March 16, 2026**. For questions and inquiries, please contact **Dr. Cheuk Chi (George) Tam** (ctam@mailbox.sc.edu).

- **Publications** - the ASPH had 50 [new publications](#) in January of 2026. Click [here](#) to see the full list of ASPH publications in 2025.
 - *Note: The OoR is working with the USC University Libraries and Dr. Valerie Vera, Research Impact Librarian, to ensure that the Arnold School of Public Health and all of its departments are accurately represented in Web of Science. We are working with Web of Science representatives to add the Department of Environmental Health Sciences and the Department of Health Services Policy and Management as department affiliations within the Arnold School of Public Health, ensuring all departments are represented. We strongly encourage all faculty and students to list the ASPH and their department's affiliations when publishing to ensure all publications are captured in our monthly review.*
- **The OoR** has updated the [budget template](#) to reflect increased insurance rates. Make sure you use the new version when you create a project budget.
- **Time and Effort reports** are due on Wednesday, March 18th. Review the [email from the controllers office](#) for updates and resources.



SAVE THE DATE

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

As part of the new ASPH ***Voices in Leadership*** initiative, Dr. Denys Lau will be visiting the ASPH on April 13th! He will present a seminar and host small-group sessions for ASPH Faculty and Graduate Students.

- Seminar: ***American Journal of Public Health: Direction, Priorities, and Engagement***
 - 9:30-10:30 am, DISC 331

- Small-Group Sessions: **Engaging with *AJPH* as Authors, Peer Reviewers, Guest Editors, and Students**

- Spots are limited! See full details and request a spot [here](#).

STUDENT RESEARCH POSTER CONTEST

Open to ASPH undergraduate and graduate students, as well as any other student who worked with an ASPH faculty member on their project. New posters selected monthly. Click [here](#) to apply.



The Arnold School Office of Research Presents the

Student Research Poster Contest

Do you have a research poster that you have presented in the past year?

Each month, an undergraduate and graduate poster will be selected and displayed outside of the Office of Research and featured in their bi-monthly newsletter. Selected students will also receive a gift card. Open to all undergraduate and graduate students within the Arnold School of Public Health.

   Link: <https://tinyurl.com/3fnars5d>
Or use the QR code to upload your submission!



Undergraduate Student Winner: January 2026

Sara Holden - Biological Sciences major

Language and Reading Impairments: Developing Case Study Profiles to Explain a Systematic Review

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

Doctoral Student Winner: January 2026

Khushboo - Doctoral Candidate in Environmental Health Sciences

Exposure of Selected Sunscreens to Artificial Sunlight Generates Persistent Free Radicals



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



Master's Student Winner: February 2026

Rachel Gressick - Master of Public Health student in Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior

Understanding Fertility Care Decision Making Among Sexual and Gender Minority Adults

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

Doctoral Student Winner: February 2026

Penias Tembo - Doctoral Candidate in Epidemiology and Biostatistics

Perceived Racial Discrimination Predicts Diet-Associated Inflammation in U.S. Adolescents: Evidence from the Adolescent Brain and Cognitive Development Study



View Penias' poster [here](#).



OFFICE OF RESEARCH STAFF SPOTLIGHT: CHARLOTTE STALVEY

Director, Office of Research

Charlotte has been with the Office of Research since November 2013, when she began her career as a Pre-Award Grant Coordinator. She now serves as Director for the Office of Research, where she supports faculty research across the school. While no two days are exactly the same, her work often includes meeting with investigators to help shape funding strategies, coordinating with staff and campus partners on grants and compliance, and troubleshooting challenges as they arise. “At the end of the day, my focus is on strengthening the school’s research enterprise and helping our faculty do their best work,” Charlotte says.

One of the most rewarding aspects of Charlotte’s role is supporting early-career faculty through their first grant submissions. She especially enjoys seeing their confidence grow and sharing in the excitement of their first award. Outside of work, Charlotte channels her creativity into paper crafting with her Cricut, learning to paint with acrylics, and tackling DIY home projects; “DIY plus power tools energy,” as she describes it. She also spends time with her three dogs and three cats and is an avid vinyl collector. She loves a hunt for a rare press. Her collection includes a mix of classic rock, vintage vibes, and a little bit of everything in between. Charlotte also recently completed a Master of Science Degree in Data and Communications here at USC. Congratulations Charlotte!

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.

A NOTE FROM THE OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

The Office of Undergraduate Research is currently recruiting for the 2026-2027 cohort of **Undergraduate Research Ambassadors**. This is a paid, peer leadership experience where student researchers will be able to share their journey through undergraduate research across campus in UNIV 101 presentations, research workshops with student organizations, resource fairs, and tabling events. If you are interested in learning more about this role, please visit the OUR [website](#) for the position description, eligibility criteria, and application process. **The deadline to apply is Thursday, February 26th at 11:59 p.m.**

A HEDGEHOG STORY: The Sustain Lab

Hedgehog Fun Fact: A group of hedgehogs is called a Prickle

The [Hedgehog Concept](#) 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 Dr. Katie Hirsch and the team at the Sustain Lab to reflect on their "why" using this framework. Here's what they had to say.



The Sustain Lab

Run by Dr. Katie Hirsch, assistant professor in exercise science (far right), the Sustain Lab investigates the use of physical activity and nutrition to *sustain*, strengthen, and support health across the lifespan. Their research focuses on practical approaches to exercise and nutritional supplementation, with a special interest in women's health.

What are we passionate about?

At the core of Dr. Hirsch's work is a deep curiosity about how nutrition and exercise shape metabolism, muscle health, and overall wellbeing. Her early love of running sparked a fascination with how the body adapts to training and fueling. That curiosity evolved into a research career centered on applied physiology: asking practical questions, testing them rigorously, and translating the answers into meaningful action.

What excites her most is the ability to make science understandable and usable. "I love this area, because it applies to everyone," says Dr. Hirsch. "Everyone needs nutrition and exercise. Everyone can benefit from this work in some capacity...so it makes it really easy to connect with people and have a practical impact."

What can we be the best at?

The Sustain Lab's work is distinguished by creativity and practicality, especially in the world of female physiology. One defining aspect of their current work is the use of continuous, at-home hormone monitoring through daily urine testing paired with smartphone-compatible technology. For the first time, this approach allows researchers to observe day-to-day hormone fluctuations across the menstrual cycle, rather than relying on single blood draws that may miss important variability.

This shift opens the door to more precise and inclusive research. It allows for better characterization of hormone patterns, more feasible study designs, and new questions about how hormonal variability influences physiology, symptoms, and responses to nutrition and exercise interventions.

Beyond methodology, Dr. Hirsch sees communication as central to success in research. Whether in manuscript, grant, classroom, or public-facing setting, she approaches research writing as storytelling, while ensuring that the underlying science is also clear, compelling, and actionable.



What sustains and supports our research?

The Sustain Lab, named for its mission to sustain health and performance across the lifespan, is committed to practical impact. "I hope my work helps practitioners provide women with better care and recommendations," says Dr. Hirsch. "Whether it's nutritional care, exercise recommendations, weight loss, medications, or hormonal therapy, I hope my work helps facilitate getting women the right care sooner."

This work addresses a pressing need. Many women report feeling confused, underserved, or misunderstood in traditional health settings. By improving methods to monitor physiology and tailoring interventions more precisely, this research aims to give women greater autonomy and to support practitioners in delivering more responsive care.

The work is supported through a combination of federal, foundation, commodity, and industry funding, along with strong collaborations across the Southeast and nationally. Partnerships — particularly with other researchers committed to advancing women's health — are essential to moving the field forward.

Finding the Overlap

When asked to describe their 'research hedgehog concept' in one sentence, Dr. Hirsch replied, "leading female-focused research that uses real-time physiology to inform the practical nutrition and exercise strategies to help women thrive across the lifespan."



UPCOMING EVENTS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ASPH First-Generation Faculty Panel

February 24, 6-7:30 PM

The primary audience for [this event](#) is first-gen students within the ASPH.

17th Annual James E. Clyburn Health Equity Lecture

April 7, 10 AM - 12:30 PM

Ballroom of Pastides Alumni Center

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

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

Discovery Building, Room 331

OFFICE OF RESEARCH MEETINGS

Research Advisory Council (RAC)

February 26, 3:00-4:30 PM

Public Health Research Center 211

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

March 13 and April 24, 9:00-10:00 AM

ASPH Office of Research, Discovery Building Suite 503

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Annual Nutrition Research Symposium

February 27, 9:00 AM-3:00 PM

See [ASPH website](#) for full details

SCPHA Annual Conference

"Exploring Horizons: Innovating for the Future of Public Health"

March 16-18, 2026

Register [here](#)

USC AI Day

March 19, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM

Russell House - register or submit a poster for presentation [here](#)

Save the date for [Discover USC!](#)

April 24, 2026

Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center

Registration now open!

LEWIS-BURKE ASSOCIATES

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

[March 25th](#) at 1 PM/[June 24th](#) at 1 PM

Click dates for meeting links

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](#).
- **Discover USC** registration is now open for [presenters](#) and [reviewers](#).
- 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** information can be found [here](#).
- **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.*

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!

As always, thank you for reading our newsletter and making the ASPH such a thriving hub for research and innovation!



Cheers from the SHARE research team members who are enjoying tea and fruit at one of their morning meetings!

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