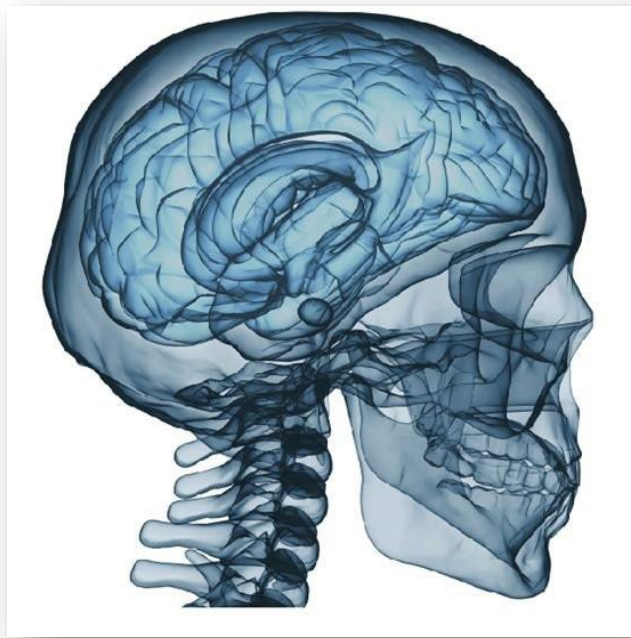


UAFS™

THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

15TH ANNUAL

PSYCHOLOGY SYMPOSIUM



MORTALITY & THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

COLLEGE OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND HUMAN SCIENCES

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2025, 8:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

CAMPUS CENTER - REYNOLDS ROOM

*****About our Psychology Program and this Symposium*****

Understanding human behavior is a distinct advantage in any career pursuit involving human interaction. Our Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology develops critical and analytical thinking skills as well as research skills. It also offers students a breadth of knowledge of Psychological Science in preparation for graduate or professional training and helps students apply their knowledge in real-life situations.

Our Annual Psychology Symposium assists students in understanding the requirements for acceptance in graduate and professional schools and in developing a perspective on the many different career choices in the broad science of Psychology. Additionally, our students will enjoy engaging in discussion on current research in Psychology from our Plenary speaker and peer researchers. Our Psychology program is one of the largest programs in the College of Health, Education, and Human Sciences. It has been and continues to be one of the largest academic programs offered at UAFS. We thank you for attending the Symposium.

Enjoy!

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

All events will take place in the Smith-Pendergraft Campus Center

Time of Event	Event
8:00 a.m.	Psychology Majors Check-in (Main Hallway)
8:30 a.m.	Welcome and Overview Nicha Otero, Ph.D. – Department Head, Psychology D. Antonio Cantù, Ph.D. - Dean, College of Health, Education, and Human Sciences
8:45 a.m.	Session 1: Plenary - “The Psychology of Death: A Nexus of the Time Paradox and Mortality Paradox”, D. Antonio Cantù, Ph.D., Dean of the College of Health, Education, and Human Sciences, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith
9:50 a.m.	Networking Event with Agencies
11:00 a.m.	Alumni Panel
11:45 a.m.	Lunch
12:30 p.m.	Session 2A: Student Research Session – Paper
1:15 p.m.	Session 2B: Student Research Session – Posters
2:00 p.m.	Outstanding Student Awards and Pinning of Fall Graduates
2:30 p.m.	Closing

Join us immediately following the symposium for “Grad School 101” with Taylor Martinez, in the Reynolds Room. All students welcome!

PLENARY SPEAKER

“The Psychology of Death: A Nexus of the Time Paradox and Mortality Paradox”



D. Antonio Cantù, Ph.D.

*Dean of the College of Health, Education, and Human Sciences,
University of Arkansas – Fort Smith*

D. Antonio "Dean" Cantù, Ph.D., is dean of the College of Health, Education, and Human Sciences at the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith. Dr. Cantù received his Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from Southern Illinois University; Ed.S. in community college education, M.A. in history, and B.S. in social science education from Arkansas State University; and A.S. in social science from Highland Community College in Freeport, Illinois. Dr. Cantù has over 30 years of experience in professional education from high school through the university level. Prior to his current appointment at UAFS, he served as associate dean and director of the Department of Education, Counseling, and Leadership at Bradley University. Prior to beginning his teaching career, Dr. Cantù also served as a military intelligence officer in the U.S. Army at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Dr. Cantù is the author of numerous research articles, book chapters, and books on history/social studies education and technology integration. He has served as a curriculum writer for various national organizations including The History Channel, The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition, and PBS Frontline and is the author of several books and curriculum monographs, including: "Early Education in Arkansas Delta," "Take Five Minutes: Reflective and Critical Thinking American History Class Openers," and "Teaching History in the Digital Classroom." Finally, Dr. Cantù has presented three TEDxTalks, the first of which, “Memento Mori: The Personification of Death,” was presented at the University of Tulsa. The second TEDxTalk, “Why are We Obsessed with the Image of Death?”, was presented at the University of Illinois Springfield. The third TEDxTalk, "Requiem: Death's Guide to Life," was recently presented at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Dr. Cantù was also interviewed by The Bradley Scout regarding his TEDxTalks.

Please give him a warm welcome!

Nicha Otero, Ph.D.

Moderator

NETWORKING EVENT WITH AGENCIES

The Networking session will be held in Campus Center (CC) 129. Please visit the various agencies and graduate schools, ask many questions, and enjoy the experience!

Graduate Schools

Arkansas Colleges of Health Education (ACHE) School of Occupational Therapy

Arkansas Colleges of Health Education (ACHE) Master of Public Health

UA Little Rock School of Social Work

Harding University

UAFS Master of Healthcare Administration

UA Fayetteville Counselor Education and Supervision Program

Clinton School of Public Service

Agencies & Organizations

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

Pediatrics Plus

The Guidance Center

Youth Villages

Fort Smith Boys and Girls Club

Crisis Intervention Center

Center for Psychiatric Trauma and Mental Health

Comprehensive Juvenile Services

The Affirmative

ALUMNI PANEL

This year we are pleased to introduce five alumni who will be sharing their experiences both here at the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith and post-graduation. Please take a moment to read on each alumnus and their accomplishments as we welcome them back to UAFS.



Taylor Martinez, MS

Taylor graduated from UAFS in the Spring of 2014 before going on to the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville to complete her Master’s in Human Development and Family Sciences. There, she received an assistantship working on NIH-funded research in the Bar Lab studying alcohol's effects on perceptions of sexual assault. After graduating with her master’s degree, she worked in fundraising and grant writing at Mercy Health Foundation – Fort Smith. A year ago, Taylor returned to UAFS as Director of Research and Sponsored Programs, where she combines her research background and grant expertise.

Braden Nguyen

Braden graduated from UAFS in December of 2024. Following his graduation, he completed a Human Resources internship with ABB here in Fort Smith. In August 2025, Braden moved to Norman, Oklahoma to attend the University of Oklahoma. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. with the Department of Educational Psychology in their Science of Psychology, Data, and Research in Education program. Currently, Braden’s research interests include motivation, learning theories, mixed methods, and assessment and evaluation in education.





Kellie Franklin

Kellie graduated from UAFS in 2012 with her B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Philosophy. Since then, Kellie and her husband Mike have dedicated their time and applied their knowledge of psychology to their work in massage therapy. They opened Intuitive Massage Therapy and Bodywork in 2015 and provide spa-style massages and skin care, in addition to Thai and medical massages that are beneficial for pain relief. Kellie also works closely with the VA helping veterans understand the process to find proper help for themselves and their families.

Brad Scott, LPC

Brad graduated from UAFS in 2013 with his B.A. in Psychology, as well as a minor in History. He then received his M.S. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from John Brown University in 2016. Since then, he has worked in community mental health with both Valley Behavioral and The Guidance Center. In 2019, he shifted to private practice where he currently works with The Couch Counseling. Brad is clinically trained in EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing), EFT (emotionally focused therapy), and TFCBT (trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy).



Ariana Bray

Ariana graduated from UAFS in May of 2023 with her B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Social Work. Currently, she works as a Behavioral Technician at Pediatrics Plus supporting children with ASD and their families. Additionally, Ariana is working on finishing her Montessori Primary Guide credential as she has co-founded a Montessori micro-school, Hollyhock Montessori, with fellow UAFS alumnus Erin McCarroll.

STUDENT RESEARCH SESSIONS

It is our pleasure as Psychology faculty to present to you a session specifically designed to showcase the original empirical research studies designed by your colleagues in PSYC 36133 Experimental Psychology. Each student has earned an ethics certification from the Global Health Training Centre, certifying that they are aware of the care necessary to protect the rights of humans and animals as research participants or subjects. As a requirement, the student research studies presented below have been approved by the UAFS Institutional Review Board (IRB) via additional individual protocol submission.

Among the student presenters are junior and senior PSYC majors who have worked many long hours to decide upon a topic concerning human behavior, search through hundreds of empirical research articles to determine a research question and formulate a hypothesis, design a methodology to test their hypothesis, recruit participants, collect data, conduct statistical analyses, and have offered an interpretation of the results. In the following pages, you will find a copy of each student's abstract, which provides a concise summary of their research and findings.

Please support our students during this daunting, but exciting, task of presenting and defending their research projects. Listen to their oral papers and proposals, visit their posters, and ask lots of questions! They are well prepared.

Yours in service,

Nicha Otero, Ph.D., Department Head,

James Benjamin, Ph.D., Associate Professor,

Gregg Roberts, Ph.D., Associate Professor,

Stephen Berry, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

SESSION 2A STUDENT RESEARCH SESSION: PAPER



The Use of Social Media and Its Influence on Mindfulness

Taylor Christensen, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

Prior psychological research suggests that the rise of social media use can be interfering with individuals' functioning and overall level of mindfulness. For example, failing to regulate social media use can prevent college students from completing important tasks, increase poor sleep, depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. Mindfulness is characterized by an attentional focus on present experiences, cognitions, emotions, and perceptions. Studies have shown that higher levels of mindfulness are associated with better mental health, more effective processing of thoughts and regulation of emotion, as well as lower levels of anxiety and depression. However, fewer research studies focus on the correlation between increased social media usage and the level of college students' mindfulness. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between mindfulness and the use of social media. For data collected at the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith (UAFS), I hypothesized that higher levels of social media activity account for decreased levels of mindfulness. Survey research will be conducted, in which potential participants will be recruited via a centralized survey distribution system. All participants will respond to the same survey questions about mindfulness (e.g., their level of focus and present emotional awareness) and their use of social media. The importance and implications of this study will be discussed, as well as future research.

Keywords: *mindfulness*, social media, emotion regulation, college students

Christensen, T., Barrett, R., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *The use of social media and its influence on mindfulness*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

SESSION 2B STUDENT RESEARCH SESSION: POSTERS

POSTER #1

Links Between Depression and Music Preference in UAFS College Students

Marissa Caulfield, James Benjamin, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

Prior psychological research has shown connections between music and one's mental state. It can be a powerful tool in treatment of psychological disorders, including depression, schizophrenia, and dementia. The core effects of music also can affect an individual's mood, motivation, pleasure, and social functioning. As a musician, I personally have observed first-hand the effects of music on various people ranging from young, hyperactive children to elderly adults. Private music listening, however, is often influenced by one's musical preference, and psychological symptoms may either affect or be affected by this choice. Thus, I plan on collecting data relating to this fact. For data collected at the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith (UAFS), I hypothesized that preferences for classical music will show lower depression scores and that preferences for rock or metal music would increase those scores. Survey research will be conducted, in which potential participants will be recruited via a centralized survey distribution system. All participants will respond to the same survey questions regarding music preference and a traditional depression screening questionnaire. The implications and importance of this study will be discussed, as well as future research.

Keywords: music, music preference, depression, mental health

Caulfield, M., Benjamin, J., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *Links between depression and music preference in UAFS college students*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Art Therapy as a Coping Strategy: Public Attitudes and Willingness to Participate

Kylie Becker, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & James Benjamin, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

In this study, we explored individuals' attitudes towards art therapy and examined their willingness to use it as a coping strategy for stress and mental health problems. Our primary research question asked: What are people's attitudes towards art therapy, and how willing would they be to try it as a coping method? We hypothesized that individuals with more knowledge and positive perceptions of art therapy would exhibit a greater willingness to participate. Alternatively, we hypothesized that individuals with prior exposure to creative activities or mental health treatment would report more favorable attitudes towards it. To test these hypotheses, we conducted an online questionnaire using a quantitative research design. Participants were assessed on perceived effectiveness, openness to participate, and prior experience with art or therapy. We expect to find that participants generally hold positive attitudes toward art therapy. We also predict that greater familiarity of art and prior experience with therapy will be associated with a higher willingness to participate. Our anticipated conclusion suggests that public interest in art therapy is strong and that promoting awareness of its benefits may further increase engagement. These findings could better inform mental health treatments and highlight the value of creative approaches in the mental health field.

Becker, K., Barrett, R., & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Art therapy as a coping strategy: Public attitudes and willingness to participate*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Correlations in Being Children of Immigrants and School Performance

Brandon Chavez & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

We conducted a correlational study to examine whether being a child of immigrants is associated with differences in academic performance among young adults. Our research question asked whether immigrant generational status predicts school performance indicators such as GPA, academic confidence, and perceived academic support. We hypothesized that children of immigrants have no considerable difference in academics. 32 participants completed an online Likert scale survey assessing immigrant generational status, school performance, academic motivation, and perceived barriers. Results indicated a small but positive correlation between being a child of immigrants and academic performance, suggesting that these individuals may experience stronger internal or cultural pressure to succeed academically. However, differences in GPA were minimal, indicating that increased motivation did not necessarily result in significantly higher grades. Additionally, children of immigrants reported higher perceived academic barriers, such as balancing school and work or limited parental familiarity with U.S. school systems. These findings suggest that while immigrant background students may be highly motivated, they may also face unique challenges that impact academic outcomes. Our results align with previous research indicating that first and second generation students often display strong academic drive but also navigate disproportionate stress and structural constraints. Further investigation with a larger sample is needed to clarify how cultural, social, and institutional factors interact to shape academic performance in this population.

Chavez, B. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Correlations in being children of immigrants and school performance*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Simple Habits of Mindfulness Meditation for College Students

Amariah Chomphilath & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

We conducted a study to determine whether a brief, 10 minutes mindfulness meditation session could effectively reduce stress and anxiety among undergraduate college students. Fifty students between the ages of 18 and 25 were randomly assigned to either a mindfulness meditation group or a quiet rest control group. Participants completed pre and post intervention assessments measuring perceived stress and state anxiety. The results showed that students in the meditation conditions demonstrated greater reductions in both stress and state anxiety compared to those in the control group. Additionally, open ended responses indicated that many students would experience improved emotional clarity, better focus, and a temporary sense of calm following the session. These findings suggest that even very short mindfulness practices may support emotional regulation and stress management among college students. Given how common academic stress and mental health challenges are in this population, incorporating brief, accessible meditation sessions into university wellness programs may offer meaningful benefits. Further research is needed to explore long term effects and variations across different majors, class years, and prior meditation experiences.

Chomphilath, A. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Simple habits of mindfulness meditation for college students*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Correlations Between Parenting Styles and Young Adult Functioning

Maddie Davenport, James Benjamin, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Parenting Styles and Young Adult Functioning study is to examine how different parenting styles experienced during early childhood influence mental health, academic performance, and social functioning in emerging adulthood. Participants will be asked to complete surveys that contains questions about their perceived childhood parenting styles and the current state of their mental health, academic performance, and social functioning.

Keywords: parenting styles, mental health, academic performance, social functioning, emerging adulthood

Davenport, M., Benjamin, J., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *Correlations between parenting styles and young adult functioning*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Social Media Use and Self-Esteem in College Students

Parker Evans, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & James Benjamin, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

This study looked at how social media use relates to self-esteem in college students. We thought that students who spend more time on social media would report lower self-esteem than those who spend less time. One hundred students from the University of Arkansas–Fort Smith completed an online survey that asked about their age, gender, and ethnicity, how much time they spend on social media, and how they feel about themselves using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The results showed a small but meaningful negative relationship between hours spent on social media and self-esteem scores. Students who reported high social media use tended to rate themselves lower in confidence and self-worth. These findings suggest that heavy social media use might be linked to lower self-esteem in college students. More research should look at which platforms or behaviors cause the biggest changes and how healthy media habits could improve self-image.

Evans, P., Barrett, R., & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Social media use and self-esteem in college students*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

LGBTQ+ College Students Face More Risk of Mental Illnesses Than Their Heterosexual Cisgender Peers

Julie Gilbreth & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

We conducted an experiment to see if LGBTQ+ college students were more susceptible to developing mental illnesses in their school career, than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Fifty university students filled out a survey questioning them about their sexual orientation/gender identity, and mental health. The results showed that LGBTQ+ students were slightly more susceptible to developing a mental illness than their heterosexual peers. These findings suggest that there may need to be better help on campus that is specifically geared to students who identify withing the LGBTQ+ community.

Gilbreth, J. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *LGBTQ+ college students face more risk of mental illnesses than their heterosexual cisgender peers*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Deception Detection: Confidence, Intuition, and Emotional Intelligence

Hailey Hadley & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

We investigated whether emotional intelligence, confidence, and intuitive judgment predict accuracy in deception detection. Our research question asked: To what extent do confidence, intuition, and emotional intelligence interact to influence a person's ability to detect lies? Based on prior research we hypothesized that (1) higher emotional intelligence would be positively correlated with deception detection accuracy, (2) greater reliance on intuition rather than deliberate reasoning would improve performance, and (3) confidence ratings would not reliably predict accuracy. To test these hypotheses, participants first completed the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT; Schutte et al., 1998). They then watched ten short video clips of individuals either lying or telling the truth. After each clip, participants made three judgments: truth vs lie classification, a confidence rating (0-100%), and whether their decision relied more on intuition or reasoning. Accuracy scores were calculated by comparing each judgment to the true status of each clip. Although data collection is ongoing, we anticipate results consistent with prior research showing that human accuracy in lie-truth judgment is only marginally above chance (Bond & De Paulo, 2006; Curci et al., 2019). We also expect intuition to show a small positive relationship with accuracy (Ten Brinke et al., 2014). Previous work further suggests that participants' confidence is not reliably tied to their detection accuracy (Curci et al., 2019). Additionally, because a relatively small number of individuals report exceptionally high lying ability and use distinct strategies (Verigin et al., 2019), we infer that individual differences in emotional intelligence, may contribute modestly to detection accuracy. Overall, our findings will likely emphasize that deception detection depends on multiple psychological factors, but confidence remains an unreliable predictor of performance. Understanding how confidence, emotional intelligence, and intuition interact may improve training practices in forensic, clinical, educational, and interpersonal contexts.

Hadley, H. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Deception detection: Confidence, intuition, and emotional intelligence*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

The Relationship Between Passive vs. Active Social Media Use and Self-Esteem in Young Adults

Zoe Helms, James Benjamin, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

This proposed study examines how different styles of social media use, passive versus active engagement, may influence self-esteem among young adults. Prior research suggests that passive behaviors, such as scrolling or viewing others' posts without interacting, are associated with social comparison and lower self-worth. Active behaviors, including posting, commenting, and messaging, are linked to higher self-esteem and stronger social connection. The project is designed to use a correlational approach, exploring whether levels of passive and active social media use predict differences in self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. This study's design reflects a growing interest in how specific digital behaviors, not just screen time, impact mental health. This research could help educators, counselors, and app developers better understand the psychological effects of online engagement and promote healthier, more intentional social media habits among young adults navigating the challenges of digital life.

Keywords: social media, self-esteem, young adults, mental health, social comparison

Helms, Z., Benjamin, J., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *The relationship between passive vs. active social media use and self-esteem in young adults*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Sleep Deprivation Effects on Short-Term Memory

Emily Hensley, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

Sleep plays a critical role in maintaining optimal cognitive functioning, particularly in processes related to learning and memory. The present study aims to examine the effects of sleep deprivation on short-term memory performance among college students at the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith (UAFS). Participants aged 18 years and older will complete a self-report survey assessing average sleep duration, perceived sleep quality, and other relevant lifestyle factors. Following the survey, participants will complete a digit span test, a standardized measure of short-term memory capacity in which individuals are asked to recall sequences of numbers that progressively increase in length. Each participant will report the highest level of difficulty reached before an error occurs. It is hypothesized that students who report obtaining more hours of sleep and higher-quality rest will perform significantly better on the digit span test, reaching higher levels of difficulty before failing. The anticipated findings are expected to provide insight into how variations in sleep patterns influence short-term memory performance among college students. Understanding this relationship may emphasize the importance of adequate sleep for cognitive functioning, academic success, and overall psychological well-being.

Keywords: sleep deprivation, short-term memory, cognitive performance, college students

Hensley, E., Barrett, R., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *Sleep deprivation effects on short-term memory*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Gender and Initiative: Do Male and Female Students Differ in Social Approaches?

Caroline Hillman, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

Social initiative is the willingness to approach or engage with others and can play a key part of everyday interaction and personal success. This study aims to examine potential gender differences in college students' perceived approach behaviors when presented with a range of common social situations. Participants will be presented with short, hypothetical scenarios grouped into four categories: Academic (e.g., talking to a classmate about a current project), Social (e.g., initiating conversation at an event), Help-Seeking (e.g., requesting assistance from a stranger), and Everyday interactions (e.g., casual encounters in a public setting). After reading each scenario, participants will be asked to rank their likelihood of initiating an approach and/or give a definitive yes or no response to the scenario. This design allows for comparison both between genders and across situational differences. This research is expected to contribute to a better understanding of gendered social behaviors on college campuses. Findings may highlight how perceived comfort levels, social norms, and self-presentation concerns affect interpersonal dynamics.

Keywords: approach behavior, gender differences, college students, common social situations

Hillman, C., Barrett, R., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *Gender and initiative: Do male and female students differ in social approaches?* Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Narcissistic Traits and Romantic Attraction: Do Individuals with Narcissistic Tendencies Prefer Borderline Traits?

Rebecca Hines & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

Narcissistic individuals crave admiration and possess a heightened sense of self-importance, while borderline individuals frantically avoid abandonment and tend to have an unstable self-image. Together, the romantic pairing of these personalities creates a world of push-pull turmoil, driven by power imbalance and cycles of intense conflict.

The question remains: are individuals with narcissistic traits finding themselves in these relationships due to circumstantial factors, or are they actively attracted to those with borderline traits? Drawing from research on personality dynamics and attachment theory, we hypothesized that higher narcissism scores would be associated with greater attraction to borderline features, and secondarily, that vulnerable narcissism would be a stronger predictor of this attraction than grandiose narcissism.

In the present study, we surveyed 151 adults using the brief Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI-B) to measure grandiose and vulnerable narcissistic traits, and a 20-item scale to measure romantic attraction to borderline features. We found that both narcissism types were positively associated with attraction to borderline traits, with grandiose narcissism as the stronger predictor. These findings suggest that individuals with narcissistic traits may indeed be drawn to borderline traits in others, possibly explaining why these volatile pairings are common and persist.

Hines, R. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Narcissistic traits and romantic attraction: Do individuals with narcissistic tendencies prefer borderline traits?* Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Art and Anxiety Levels: A Potential Correlation

Alexandria Jones & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

A question I consistently thought about was why some people draw to ease their minds and express emotions, while others seem to panic when given a pen and paper. I hypothesized that making art, such as drawing, coloring, and doodling, reduces anxiety levels. I gave participants a pre-test questionnaire on anxiety, which was a six-item online survey. Then I contacted them and had them draw for 20 minutes. After this, I gave the same questionnaire on anxiety as a post-test. The results of this study showed the hypothesis as correct. Even for 20 minutes, the act of drawing, doodling, and coloring decreased the participants' anxiety levels.

Jones, A. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Art and anxiety levels: A potential correlation.* Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Are You More Likely to Make a Change Than Others?

Cyd Keener, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

Are more people more likely than others to try and help change the world and proactively provide aid to those around them? My hypothesis is that those who are majoring and/or wanting a career path in the health field will be more likely to volunteer and try and make a change in the world around them. A survey will be conducted on UAFS students.

Keywords: college students, prosocial, helping professions

Keener, C., Barrett, R., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *Are you more likely to make a change than others?* Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Emma Kennedy & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

Most universities offer students traditional medical treatments and therapies in their on-campus clinics; however, there has been a substantial increase in the popularity of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Prior research suggests that up to 90% of the adult population use some form of CAM to prevent or treat health issues, yet these modalities are rarely offered by university clinics. Given the growing popularity of CAM, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes, influences, and usage of CAM among the student population. The purpose of this is to inform the potential integration of CAM therapies into college health services. For this study, I hypothesized that male participants would be more reluctant or resistant to experience CAM than female participants. Survey research will be conducted in which potential participants will be recruited through a centralized survey distribution system and via email dissemination by psychology faculty. All participants will respond to the same survey questions regarding their beliefs (e.g., whether CAM is better for health) and influences (e.g., culture, family). The importance and implications of the findings from this and similar studies will be discussed, as well as future research directions.

Keywords: college students, CAM, beliefs, attitudes, natural medicine

Kennedy, E. & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *Beliefs and attitudes towards complementary and alternative medicine*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Social Media Use and Mental Health in College Students: A Correlational Study to Predict the Effect of Social Media Use on Mental Health

Madilyn Lovell, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & James Benjamin, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

We conducted a correlational study to examine the relationship between social media use and mental health in college students. The purpose of this research was to explore how the frequency and type of social media engagement influence self-esteem, social comparison, and overall emotional well-being. We hypothesized that increased social media use would be associated with lower self-esteem and poorer mental health outcomes. Undergraduate students from the University of Arkansas–Fort Smith completed a Likert-style survey assessing social media use, self-esteem, social comparison, and general mental health. The results suggested that students who reported higher daily social media use and greater tendencies toward upward comparison experienced increased levels of anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms, along with lower overall self-esteem. A moderate negative correlation was observed between total social media use and mental health scores. These findings highlight the importance of promoting mindful online engagement and mental health awareness among college students.

Lovell, M., Barrett, R., & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Social media use and mental health in college students: A correlational study to predict the effect of social media use on mental health*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Power Dynamic of Greek Life and Non-Greek Life Students at UAFS

Braxton Martin, James Benjamin, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the differences in perceived power dynamics between friend groups in a Greek life organization (e.g., sorority, fraternity) and friend groups who are not in a Greek life organization. Recent research has entailed the development and validation of a perceived power scale (Kim & May, 2025), but no known research has applied this scale in the context of registered student organizations like fraternities and sororities. This research is looking to determine if being friends with people in Greek life and/or being in Greek life (e.g., hanging out with the people in that chapter) is associated with lower levels of perceived social power and perceived personal power. If my hypothesis is supported, then future research could evaluate whether perceived power is associated with self-efficacy and confidence in succeeding after finishing college.

Keywords: Greek life, non-Greek life, power dynamics, college students

Martin, B., Benjamin, J., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *Power dynamic of Greek life and non-Greek life students at UAFS*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Exploring the Benefits of Campus Engagement Among Former Foster Care College Students

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ABSTRACT

We hypothesized that participants who engage frequently in campus activities will report lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to participants who show low or no engagement. Ten participants between the ages of 18 and 21 enrolled at the University of Arkansas–Fort Smith were recruited for this study. An online self-developed survey was administered to measure participants' frequency of campus engagement and foster care experience. The survey also utilized the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale–21 (DASS-21) to measure participants' depression, anxiety, and stress status in the last seven days. No participants reported experience in the foster care system. Results did not support the hypothesis or show any association between the frequency of campus engagement and participants' levels of depression, anxiety, or stress. The study aimed to explore campus engagement as a potential protective factor for young adults who have experienced the foster care system, an understudied population facing substantially high academic and emotional risks.

Meyer, S. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Exploring the benefits of campus engagement among former foster care college students*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

The Relationship Between Sleep and Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has found that sleep is associated with a variety of cognitive activities, such as attention, learning, and thinking. This study investigates the associations between sleep and academic performance in undergraduate college students. Its purpose is to figure out the extent of the relationship as the underlying associations are still unclear. The main focus of this study is to understand the impact sleep can have on academic performance, so college students have a better understand on what to prioritize. I hypothesize that the data will conclude that sleep duration and quality will have a significant impact on academic performance. Potential participants will be recruited via email and will be asked to fill out a survey. All participants will respond to the same survey about sleep quality, sleep duration, sleep consistency, and academic performance. Potential implications will be discussed, as well as the possibility of future research that expands upon this topic.

Keywords: academic performance, college students, sleep

Monjaras, E.O., Benjamin, J., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *The relationship between sleep and academic performance*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

College Athlete Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to see how Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and support systems influence athletic performance, academic success, and mental health among college athletes. It will focus on professors' perceptions and students' well-being, and how these views will shape participation in physical education. The goal is to see if supportive environments can help athletes stay motivated, enjoy physical activity, and feel better mentally. A survey will be sent to college athletes at the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith to gather their experiences with motivation, support, and well-being. The study hypothesizes that when SDT is applied to physical education, students will show higher motivation and improved mental health. While there are no results available yet, this research hopes to show how professor support and motivational strategies can make a positive impact on student-athletes' lives. Findings could help improve teaching practices and support systems in college sports and education.

Keywords: motivation, athletic performance, self-determination, mental health

Becker, K., Barrett, R., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *College athlete motivation*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

The Long-Term Impact of Parent-Child Rough-and-Tumble Play on Self-Esteem and Confidence

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine whether young adults (ages 18–25) report higher self-esteem and self-confidence if their parents engaged them in regular rough-and-tumble play (RTP) during childhood. RTP is defined as playful, cooperative physical activities such as wrestling, chasing, or tickling that involve both excitement and mutual enjoyment. These forms of play are believed to promote social competence, emotional regulation, and independence. The research question guiding this study is: Does early parent–child RTP predict greater self-esteem and self-confidence in young adulthood? It is hypothesized that individuals who experienced frequent and positive RTP interactions with their parents will demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence compared to those with limited or no RTP experiences. This research aims to highlight the potential long-term developmental benefits of physical play in early childhood and its contribution to healthy emotional and social functioning in adulthood.

Keywords: confidence development, leadership skills, rough-and-tumble play, self-esteem

Owen, M., Benjamin, J., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *The long-term impact of parent-child rough-and-tumble play on self-esteem and confidence*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Does Harm Reduction Really Work? Correlations Between Harm Reduction and Helping the American Public Health Crisis

Bethany Petrucci & James Benjamin, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated whether education has a positive impact on harm reduction knowledge. A total of 493 participants completed an initial survey assessing their understanding of harm reduction practices, reviewed educational material about harm reduction, and then completed the same survey again. It was hypothesized that exposure to harm reduction education would increase participants' knowledge and awareness. The results supported this hypothesis, showing that participants demonstrated higher levels of understanding after reviewing the educational information. These findings indicate that education is positively correlated with harm reduction knowledge and suggests that educational interventions may play an important role in promoting safer behaviors and improving public health outcomes.

Petrucci, B. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Does harm reduction really work? Correlations between harm reduction and helping the American public health crisis.* Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

The Use of Social Media in Youth and Its Effects on Adult Mental Health

Kaydon Riley, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & James Benjamin, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

This study talks about how the use of social media in childhood could have lasting effects, whether negative or positive on mental health as we age into adulthood. In this study, we talk about the different ways social media is used in childhood, how these things can be dangerous or harmful. We then will look at adult mental health trends and decide if there is any correlation between the two items. Previous research shows that there is some correlation between social media and increased suicide rates in adolescents. This study aims to find out if this correlation still exists in adulthood. A survey was sent out with 50 people participating. The study finds that this correlation seems to lessen as participants age.

Riley, K., Barrett, R., & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *The use of social media in youth and its effects on adult mental health*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

The Effects of Mental Visualization on Perceived Athletic Performance

Christian Shelton, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

Previous psychological research has shown that mental imagery and visualization can positively impact motivation, confidence, and athletic performance. Visualization involves mentally rehearsing a task before physically performing it, which may enhance focus and accuracy through improved cognitive preparedness. Although many studies have explored the effects of long-term mental imagery training on athletic performance, fewer have examined the impact of short, guided visualization sessions immediately before a physical task. The present study aims to investigate whether engaging in a brief mental visualization exercise before shooting free throws in basketball affects participants' perceived performance. It is hypothesized that participants who complete the visualization task will report higher confidence and perceived success compared to those who do not. Data will be collected through an in-person experiment conducted in the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith Recreation and Wellness Center (RAWC), where one group of participants will complete a mental visualization task before shooting free throws, while the other group (control group) will shoot the same number of free throws but will not take part in the mental visualization exercise. Results may provide insight into how brief cognitive strategies enhance athletic performance and self-perception.

Keywords: mental imagery, visualization, perceived performance

Shelton, C., Barrett, R., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *The effects of mental visualization on perceived athletic performance*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Word Completion Task: Measuring Aggressive Cognition

Allen Stevens & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

Research was done to assess whether the validity of the Aggressive Word Completion Task (AWCT). Multiple studies were conducted to assess the effect that priming has on aggressive cognition with violent music and violent video games. The main idea is that previous exposure to violent content can increase violent cognition that can be measured in the amount of violent words produced in an otherwise neutral stimulus. The results showed that participants exposed to violent video games and violent music generated more aggressive cognition. There are objections to the data that claims that the researchers are guilty of circular reasoning. This would make the mathematical conclusions based on the research invalid. The findings suggest uncertainty around the effectiveness of the (AWCT). The conclusion is that more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of the (AWCT).

Stevens, A. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Word completion task: Measuring aggressive cognition*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Academic Success and Stress in College

Felicity Suggs, James Benjamin, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

College students face various stressors—academic pressure, financial strain, and social challenges—that can impact mental health and academic performance. Studies suggest there are a number of factors that point towards stress and anxiety having a significant effect on academic success. For instance, the pressure of too much work to do in very little time, the fear of failing, or the expectations of parents or teachers can affect how a student performs in the class. Academic success is the letter grade or percentage one gets in their class, as well as their overall grade point average (GPA). For the study, academic stress will be defined as the score obtained on the Perceived Academic Stress (PAS) Scale, which assesses factors such as academic expectations, workload, and examination pressure. The purpose of the study is to explore the impact of stress on academic success on the students of the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith (UAFS) population. I hypothesized that there is a significantly negative correlation between stress and the academic success of college students. As stress increases, academic success decreases. A survey will be conducted, in which potential participants will be invited to take part through a centralized survey distribution system. All participants will respond to the same survey questions about stress related to academics. The implications and importance of this study will be discussed, as well as future research.

Keywords: mental health, academic success, academic stress, college students

Suggs, F., Benjamin, J., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *Academic success and stress in college*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

What Impact Does Social Media Have on Sleep Quality and Academic Performance?

Raeghan Weddle & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

We conducted a study to examine whether increased daily social media use is associated with poorer sleep quality and lower academic performance among college students. Twenty-five university students completed a twenty-item survey assessing frequency and duration of social media use, sleep habits, and self-reported grade point averages. Participants who reported heavier social media use, particularly before bedtime, also reported shorter sleep durations, greater difficulty falling asleep, and higher levels of fatigue. However, despite these sleep disturbances, many of these students maintained relatively high grade point averages. The results only partially supported the hypothesis, indicating that while excessive social media use may negatively affect sleep quality, its impact on academic performance may be less pronounced than anticipated. These findings suggest that students may be able to compensate for poor sleep through other academic strategies, though continued high levels of social media use could pose long-term risks to well-being and learning outcomes.

Weddle, R. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *What impact does social media have on sleep quality and academic performance?* Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

The Relationship Between Pets and Mental Health

Hannah Williams, Rita L. Barrett, Ph.D., & Stephen Berry, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

Previous research indicated that pets have a positive impact on mental health and emotional well-being. Pets have been shown to lower stress levels and increase happiness. For instance, individuals will have emotional support animals to assist with daily life. Also, some therapy offices keep therapy dogs for comfort. With that being said, research is limited to this topic in a sample of college students. Therefore, the present study aims to understand the relationship between pets and mental health in university students. I hypothesized that pets do boost emotional well-being and lessen stress and negative emotions. Participants will be selected via surveys in a centralized survey distribution system. The surveys ask questions related to demographics, pet ownership, and mental health. There will be two groups of participants based on who owns a pet and who does not. From there, results will be analyzed and discussed, along with implications and future research.

Keywords: pets, mental health, stress, emotional well-being

Williams, H., Barrett, R., & Berry, S. (2025, November 20) *The relationship between pets and mental health*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Existing Correlations Between Exercise and Mental Health Symptoms in Firefighters

Kasey Williams & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

It is a widely known fact that firefighters interact with high levels of stress and that firefighters are required to maintain a certain level of fitness to engage in the work required of them. This research is being conducted to determine if there is a correlation between exercise that may be engaged in by firefighters and mental health symptoms that they may experience, specifically: symptoms of anxiety and depression. This study hypothesizes that there is a positive correlation between exercise and anxiety and depression and that anxiety and depression are minimized by exercise. One-hundred and forty-six firefighters were surveyed on whether they exercise, how often they exercise if they do so, their age, what type of exercise they perform, if they struggle with depression and/or anxiety and how these mental health difficulties are impacted by the exercise that they engage in, if they do so. The data will likely show that there is a positive correlation between depression and/or anxiety, and the frequency and intensity of depression and anxiety is minimized by the exercise that is performed by the firefighters surveyed. Further, more specific investigation is needed to obtain a more complete understanding of how mental health difficulties can be minimized, for firefighters and whether exercise is an effective way of managing mental health symptoms.

Williams, K. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Existing correlations between exercise and mental health symptoms in firefighters*. Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

Outcomes of ADHD and Comorbidities

Alyssa Winters & James Benjamin, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

We conducted an experiment to determine if those that experience symptoms of ADHD tend to experience more depression and anxiety compared to those that do not show significant signs of ADHD. In this experiment we also ask participants about their substance use habits and familial vs nonfamilial relationships to determine if those that show significant ADHD symptoms tend to use substances such as cannabis, alcohol, nicotine, and amphetamines at a higher rate and if they have poorer familial relationships compared to those without significant ADHD symptoms present. We had 26 participants complete a 5-part survey that includes the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale developed by Kessler et al. (2005), Beck Depression Inventory developed by Beck et al. (1996), GAD-7 developed by Spritzer et al. (2006) to measure anxiety levels, substance use scales used by Sigfusdottir et al. (2008) and the quality of relationships was measured based on a study conducted by Fischer and Barkley (2006). The study that ours is based on was conducted by Gudjonsson et al. (2011) which found that those with ADHD show higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance use. We found that those that score within diagnostic range of the Self-Report ADHD Scale experienced higher rates of depression and anxiety plus having poorer familial relationships and higher rates of substance use compared to those that did not show significant ADHD symptoms. The study that ours is based on was conducted by Gudjonsson et al. (2011) which found that those with ADHD show higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance use.

Winters, A. & Benjamin, J. (2025, November 20) *Outcomes of ADHD and comorbidities.* Paper presented at the Student Research session of the 15th Annual Psychology Symposium, University of Arkansas – Fort Smith, Fort Smith AR.

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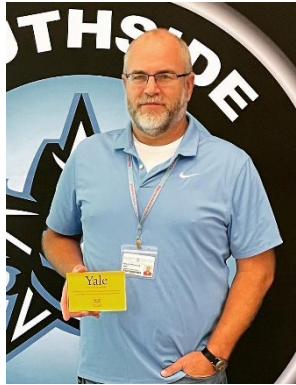
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