

August 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

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students,

Welcome and welcome back to the Arnold School! I hope you had a chance to recharge over the summer and are ready for an exciting fall semester.

The other night at dinner, my son Dylan asked me, "Why do you always seem to have more questions than answers when you talk about work?" It made me laugh because he was right. In research, leadership, or life, I may know a little bit about a lot of things and that typically leads to more questions. That's one of the things I love most about being in public health.

This summer brought plenty of examples of what makes our research community so special and resilient. Last month, just as one of our research teams was making great progress on an NIH grant proposal, the funding opportunity decided to retire before we could submit. In real time, while we were

reviewing the funding announcement on one monitor and finishing up the Specific Aims page and proposal outline on another, the opportunity simply expired. Fortunately, resilience and collaborative spirit are two super strengths of this team and we are already adapting our plans.

It's also the everyday experiences that strengthen our connections as a community. Whether it was our lunch bunch getting caught in a summer downpour and laughing our way back to the office, or our students continuing the long-running tradition of sending me photos of campus squirrels because they know I'm not a squirrel enthusiast ever since one tried to jump into my coffee cup outside the Russell House shortly after we moved here, these connections make the Arnold School such a wonderful place to be.

The squirrel photos got me thinking (somewhat reluctantly, of course). Maybe there is something researchers can learn from them after all. They are naturally inquisitive, always exploring and gathering what they need for what comes next. Curiosity does the same for us, leading to new ideas and better questions. While our curious squirrel is making a guest appearance in this newsletter, we are not replacing our Hedgehog Model! The two creatures actually complement each other quite well. Curiosity encourages us to explore what is possible while the Hedgehog Model helps us focus that curiosity on where our strengths and opportunities align and where we can make the greatest impact.

This year brings a full slate of opportunities to learn and grow together. We were very excited to kick off PH GLIDE this month and welcome our inaugural cohort of faculty into a program designed to support their growth as public health leaders. From professional development workshops and research seminars to grant support and programs like PH GLIDE, we will provide resources that help investigators and students at every stage of the research journey. Please scroll through the newsletter for upcoming events and reminders.

Students, we look forward to featuring your research through our poster contest and helping connect you with faculty members' research labs through our matching program.

As we begin another academic year, I hope we continue to ask questions and support one another through any unexpected storms. Thank you for being part of the Arnold School research community and congratulations on another remarkable year of research impact highlighted in this newsletter. As we look ahead, perhaps "Wings Up", a phrase that captures the spirit of PH GLIDE, will become more than my email sign-off. Let it be a reminder for us all to stay curious and help each other soar.

Wings Up!

Daniela

On behalf of the ASPH Office of Research Team



UPDATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM OUR OFFICE

So far in **FY2027**, the ASPH has...

24

Grant Awards

\$7.1M

in Research Funding

43

Publications

Congratulations to the following ASPH faculty/staff who received new grant awards in the month of July!

Abigail Hogan	Lauren Workman
Alexander McLain	Leila Larson
Alyssa Clay-Gilmour	Lisa Fitton
Bo Cai	Marta Bornstein
Chih-Hsiang (Jason) Yang	Melissa Nolan
Elizabeth Crouch	Nandita Perumal
Eric Warren Vejerano	Nansi Boghossian
Fanghui Shi	Nicole Hair
James Hebert	Stella Self
Jiajia Zhang	Xueying Yang
Jihong Liu	

- **Final numbers from FY 2026** - The ASPH wrapped FY2026 with a total of **\$44.4M** in research funding, **665** publications, and **257** grant awards.
- **Publications** - The ASPH had 54 new publications in [June](#) and 43 new publications in [July](#)
- **Pull Up a Chair** - As part of the *Voices in Leadership* initiative, Dr. Ashish Joshi, Dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Memphis, will be visiting the ASPH for **Pull Up a Chair** - a new conversation-based leadership series designed to bring together leaders in different roles across administrators, faculty, staff, and community partners. Join us on **October 14 from 2:00-4:00 PM** to hear from Dr. Joshi and Dean Sabo-Atwood at the Pastides Alumni Center.
- **Research Advisory Council (RAC) membership updates** - We have several faculty rotating both in and out of the RAC in summer 2026. Thank you to everyone who has served as a part of the RAC; your expertise helps broaden the ASPH's research impact and scope.
 - Exiting RAC members: Michael Beets (EXSC), Alex McClain (EPI/BIO), Jessica Klusek (COMD), Jan Ostermann (HSPM), and Myriam Torres (Consortium for Latino Health Studies)
 - New RAC members: Mufaro Kanyangarara (EPI/BIO), Stella Self (EPI/BIO), Eric Vejerano (ENHS), and Nicholas Yell (Rural Health Research Center)
 - New RAC subcommittee focused on research cores: Mohammed Baalousha (ENHS), Devin Bowes (ENHS), Claire Fisher (Dean's Office, ASPH Lab Manager), Pam Gillam (CARE), Andi Jilling (ENHS), Laura Langan (ENHS), Alex McLain (EPI/BIO), Nabil Natafqi (Patient Engagement Studio and HSPM), Melissa Nolan (EPI/BIO and Institute for Infectious Disease Translational Research), and Sean Norman (ENHS)
- **Propel Research Mentorship Program** - Congratulations to the following ASPH faculty who were accepted into the Propel research Mentorship Program for AY 2026-2027!
 - NSF track: Yaser Merrikhi (COMD), Beniamino Hadj-Amar (EPI/BIO), Laura Langan (ENHS), Kirsten Overdahl (ENHS)
 - NIH track: Valerie Flax (HPEB), Chijoke Anyaso-Samuel (EPI/BIO), Meisam Arjmandi (COMD)
- **Upcoming Magellan Grant Deadline** - The Magellan Scholar Grant deadline for fall applications is October 7, 2026. This grant supports undergraduate research projects across all campuses and disciplines. For more information, visit the Office of Undergraduate Research [website](#).
- **NIH Updates**
 - The NIH is replacing letters of support with letters of collaboration. With the implementation of Forms J in FY2027, the NIH will no longer allow letters of support but will instead require letters of collaboration to document relationships with individuals

not identified in the application as senior/key personnel or other contributors. For full details, click [here](#).

- Both the NIH and the NSF recently enacted significant changes to their requirements for Data Management and Sharing Plans. Join Stacy Winchester, Research Data Librarian, to learn how to navigate the new NIH DMS Plan template and/or the new NSF DMS Plan web forms submitted via research.gov.
 - **NIH:** Register to attend a session on [August 26 at 1:10 p.m.](#) or [September 10 at 10:05 a.m.](#)
 - **NSF:** Register to attend a session on [August 27 at 1:15 p.m.](#)

STUDENT RESEARCH POSTER CONTEST

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 certificate and a gift card. Open to all undergraduate and graduate students within the Arnold School of Public Health.



Link: <https://tinyurl.com/5aeb7ysu>
Or use the QR code to upload your submission!

Fall 2026 - Spring 2027



OFFICE OF RESEARCH STAFF SPOTLIGHT: ALLY HUCEK

GRADUATE ASSISTANT

Ally Hucek joined the Office of Research in fall 2024 and serves as the Graduate Student Office Associate. In this role, she manages the school's "Poster of the Month" competition by coordinating submissions, facilitating the review process, and highlighting exceptional student research. She also compiles and tracks the Arnold School's monthly publications, reviewing citations to confirm faculty authorship and institutional affiliations while maintaining records for reporting and analysis. Beyond her administrative responsibilities within the OoR, Ally also serves as a Graduate Research Assistant on projects focused on Alzheimer's disease and dementia, healthy aging, research collaboration and mentorship, and cancer prevention. She is pursuing her Ph.D. in the Department of Health Promotion, Education and Behavior, where her dissertation explores ways to address social isolation among older adults in primary care settings.

One of Ally's favorite parts of her role is celebrating the accomplishments of Arnold School students through the Poster of the Month competition. "It's always exciting to see the innovative work that undergraduate and graduate students across the Arnold School of Public Health are doing," she shared. Outside of work, Ally enjoys spending time with her five-year-old Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Henry, taking him on walks along the Riverwalk and to the dog park. Henry also makes some guest appearances in the office and on Zoom calls. She has also recently discovered a love for pickleball and is looking forward to joining a league this fall.

The OoR is so grateful to have Ally as part of the team. Thank you for all that you do, Ally!

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.

- If you would like resume help prior to submitting your request, email Olivia Burnitz (rutledgo@mailbox.sc.edu) to set up an appointment.

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

A HEDGEHOG STORY: THE JILLING LAB

Hedgehog Fun Fact: Hedgehogs are resistant to many types of venom, and have even been known to eat small snakes and scorpions.

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 team at the Jilling Lab to reflect on their "why" using this model. Here's what they had to say.



THE JILLING LAB

When environmental health comes to mind, air and water often receive much of the attention. [The Jilling Lab](#), led by Dr. Andrea Jilling, is making the case that soil deserves a place in that conversation,

too. The team studies how fine scale interactions among clay minerals, microbes, and plants drive larger scale soil functions, such as carbon sequestration and soil fertility. Through lab, growth chamber, and field experiments, their work bridges fundamental and applied research in order to support healthy and climate-resilient ecosystems.

What are we passionate about?

For the Jilling Lab, soil is much more than the ground plants grow in. It is a complex living system where minerals, microbes, plants, nutrients, and human activity continually interact. Soil degradation and environmental contaminants can have consequences for human and ecosystem health, while healthier soils have the potential to store more carbon, support productive agriculture, and contribute to climate resilience.

The broad reach of these impacts gives the lab a unique position within the Arnold School. Soil science has historically been closely associated with agriculture and plant science, while environmental health has often focused more heavily on air and water. The Jilling Lab brings those worlds together, exploring soil through an environmental health lens and helping expand the conversation about connections between the environment and human health.

What can we be the best at?

The team studies interactions among clay minerals, microorganisms, and plants to understand how they influence much larger processes, including soil fertility and carbon storage. By combining laboratory, growth chamber, and field experiments, researchers can investigate the basic mechanisms at work while also considering what those discoveries mean outside the lab.

One area of particular interest is challenging long-held assumptions about how organic matter behaves in soil. Mineral-associated organic matter has traditionally been viewed as a relatively stable reservoir of nutrients. The lab's research is helping reveal a more dynamic picture.

To investigate those processes, researchers use techniques including stable isotope tracing, which allows them to follow nutrients as they move among plants, microbes, soil, and the atmosphere. The lab is also particularly associated with organic matter fractionation (separating soil organic matter according to characteristics such as particle size or density). Together, these approaches help researchers capture some of the complexity that can be lost when soil is treated as a single, uniform material.

Ultimately, that detailed look underground can lead to better estimates of something with much broader implications: how soils store carbon and supply nutrients.

What sustains and supports our research?

Support from the National Science Foundation and the United States Department of Agriculture allows the Jilling Lab to pursue questions at the intersection of soil science, agriculture, and environmental change.

Better understanding how soils function can ultimately provide useful information for farmers, land managers, policymakers, and communities making decisions about natural resource management.

Insights gained from studying processes at the microscopic level have the potential to contribute to more sustainable land management and resource stewardship.

If captured in a single sentence, the group's Hedgehog Concept is:

"We study the overlooked, dynamic processes that influence soil carbon and nutrient cycling, turning that understanding into practical guidance that helps farmers, policymakers, and communities build healthier, more climate resilient soils."



ASPH SPOTLIGHT: CENTER FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH ALIGNMENT (CCHA)

The CCHA recently published a new article entitled *Amplifying Community Voices Through a Community Health Worker-Led Model for Authentic Community Engagement*. Click [here](#) to read the full text, and visit the CCHA [website](#) to learn more about their work.



UPCOMING EVENTS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

2026 Research Core Fair

September 18, 2026

Pastides Alumni Center

Find more information and register [here](#).

South Carolina Research Administration Conference - "Building Expertise, Strengthening Community"

September 24-25, 2026 at Russell House

Find more info [here](#).

Pull Up A Chair - Dr. Ashish Joshi, Dean and Distinguished Professor of the School of Public Health, University of Memphis

October 14, 2:00-4:00 PM

Pastides Alumni Center

OFFICE OF RESEARCH MEETINGS

Brewing Success - Business/Grant/HR Manager Breakfast

October 9 and December 11, 9:00-10:00 AM

DISC 503 (Office of Research Suite)

Chew on This - Business/Grant/HR Manager Brown Bag Lunch and Learn

August 31 and November 9, 1:15-2:30 PM

PHRC 319

Research Advisory Council Meetings

September 30, 9:30-11:30 AM, DISC 331

December 17, 1-2:30 PM, DISC 259 (with center directors)

LEWIS-BURKE ASSOCIATES

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

[September 23](#) from 9:30-10:30 AM, [December 7](#) from 11:00 AM-12:00 PM, [March 24](#) from 9:30-10:30 AM, [June 23](#) from 9:30-10:30 AM

Click date for meeting link.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS AND RESOURCES FROM UNIVERSITY OFFICES

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 **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 office** has created resources to help with the new requirements for the NIH Common Forms. Check out the [step-by-step guide](#) for linking your ORCID iD with eRA Commons, My NCBI, and SciNcv. There are also [on-demand videos](#) available to help walk you through the steps outlined in the guide.
- **Research and Grant Development Services** has guidance available on how to apply for [limited submissions](#). Limited submission opportunities are often relayed in [RESDEV emails](#) from the VPR's office.
- **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.
- **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.

- **USC Libraries** has launched an AI-focused newsletter for the USC community. [AI updates for USC researchers](#) is a concise digest of recent developments in AI, curated by [Heather Heckman](#). Subscribe (click the Subscribe button in the upper right of the page) to receive it directly in your inbox.
- **USC Libraries** now offers access to **Candid Search** (formerly called Foundation Directory) an enhanced fundraising and grant platform that builds upon the capabilities of Foundation Directory. This platform offers more comprehensive resources for planning, research, and implementation. USC Columbia-affiliated users can access [Candid Search](#) directly or through the Libraries' [database collection](#).



Inaugural PH GLIDE cohort, Dean Sabo-Attwood, and GLIDE team at the program kickoff!

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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