

CASCon Program

February 4th, 2026

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Schedule at a Glance

Session	Rm.E257	Rm. E148	Rm. E149	Rm. E153	Rm. E253
2- 2:55 p.m.	<p>Forgotten Catholic Writers in Modern Literature</p> <p>Format: Multiple Presentations</p> <p>Moderator: Callie Tabor</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Michelle Loris 2. Callie Tabor 3. June-Ann Greeley 4. Brent Little 	<p>Behind Walls and Within Minds: Understanding Bias and Well-Being</p> <p>Format: Multiple Presentations</p> <p>Moderator: Katie Kroeper</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Katie Kroeper 2. Pamela Valera 3. Marylena Mantas-Kourounis 4. Todd Matthews 5. Michael Vale 	<p>Balancing Acts: Energy, Environment and Ecology in a Changing World</p> <p>Format: Multiple Presentations</p> <p>Moderator: LaTina Steele</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. LaTina Steele 2. Jo-Marie Kasinak 3. Barbara Pierce 4. Kristen Savell 5. Ashley Stoehr, 6. Jonathan R. Hudak 	<p>Ethics of the Archive at SHU: Collections, Challenges and Conversations</p> <p>Format: Blitz Session</p> <p>Moderator: Bethany Wade</p> <p>Presenters</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emily Bryan 2. Michelle Loris 3. Jonathan Najarian 4. Kevin Gledhill 5. Ashley Morin 6. Joseph Alicastro 7. Nidhi Shrivastava 8. Abby Bender 9. Jeffrey Orrico 10. Bethany Wade 	<p>Exploring the Impact of Federal Policy</p>
	3- 3:55 p.m.	<p>Qualitative Research Ethics with Vulnerable/Protected Populations</p> <p>Format: Discussion</p> <p>Moderator: Jonix Owino</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jonix Owino 2. Tricia Lewis 3. Bethany Van Brown 4. Caroline Comerford 	<p>Women's Anger in Contemporary Writing and Film</p> <p>Format: Multiple Presentations</p> <p>Moderator: Abby Bender</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abby Bender 2. June-Ann Greeley 3. Michelle Loris 4. Nidhi Shrivastava 	<p>Minds in Motion: Mental Health, Learning and Well-Being Across Contexts</p> <p>Format: Multiple Presentations</p> <p>Moderator: Lauren Bryant</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dawn Melzer, Deirdre Yeater & Barbara Pierce 2. Lauren Bryant 3. Lily Deking & Ben Collins 4. Pamela Valera 	<p>From Molecules to Minds: Exploring Adaptation, Connection and the Nature of Being</p> <p>Format: Blitz Talks</p> <p>Moderator: Ashley Stoehr</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ashley Stoehr 2. Alyssa Woronik 3. Emily Levy 4. Tom Terleph 5. Adrienne Crowell

Session	Rm. E148	Rm. E149	Rm. E153	Rm. E257	Rm. E253
4- 4:55 p.m.	Responsible True Crime? Sensationalism, Armchair Detectives and Ethics	Creative Scholarship and Collaboration	Echoes of Society: Art, Advocacy and the Future of the Human Condition	From Quantum States to Catalytic Rates	Introduction to Reacting Pedagogy: Playing Monumental Consequence
	Format: Discussion	Format: Multiple Presentations	Format: Multiple Presentations	Format: Multiple Presentations	Format: Short Game
	Moderator: Caroline Comerford	Moderator: Andrew Miller	Moderator: Michael Ventimiglia	Moderator: Emily Mane	Moderator: Jenny Strandberg
	Presenters: 1. Caroline Comerford 2. Bethany Van Brown 3. Analisa Gagnon 4. Colleen Butler-Sweet	Presenters: 1. Sara Ross 2. Nathan Lewis 3. Cara Erdheim Kilgallen	Presenters: 1. Mike Ventimiglia 2. Stephanie Carnes, Janelle Bradshaw-Bryan & Sharlene Kereleja 3. Alexa Dicken	Presenters: 1. Emily Mane 2. Marlina Slamet 3. Todd J. Sullivan 4. Rodney Versace	Presenters: 1. Jenny Strandberg 2. David Luesink

Session 1 (2-2:55 p.m.)

Forgotten Catholic Writers in Modern Literature

Michelle Loris (Lorism@sacredheart.edu)

English; Catholic Studies

Myles Connolley's Mr. Blue—Who Gives Away a Million Dollars?!

Mr. Blue is a unique modern man who believes that money is merely the exchange for the good. Like Francis of Assisi, he will give away all that he has to create love in the world. He is a counter force to our world of ambition, material acquisition, recognition and power. But is he a fool?

Callie Tabor (taborc@sacredheart.edu)

Catholic Studies

Elizabeth Jennings and the Mountains of the Mind

Early in her career, English poet Elizabeth Jennings (1926-2001) garnered critical success, earning prestigious literary awards and becoming one of the best-selling poets of her generation in the U.K. Yet, by her late life she had come to be regarded by the British press and many literary critics as a religious eccentric—one newspaper gave her the cruel nickname, “the bag lady of the sonnets.” After a series of mental breakdowns in her mid-thirties, including three suicide attempts, Jennings remained mentally fragile for the rest of her life, hospitalized at points for mental and physical illnesses. The stigmatization of Jennings’ mental health crises obscured an appreciation for her poems about the “mountains of the mind.” Jennings’ poems offer a spiritual and emotional resource for navigating “the inward war,” putting poetic and theological language to experiences of depression and other mental illness.

Brent Little (littleb3@sacredheart.edu)

Catholic Studies

How do we disagree in community? Mary Gordon's *The Company of Women*

Sometimes people hear the term “Catholic novel,” and they mistakenly believe it is a novel that strives to convince people to convert to Catholicism. In reality, many Catholic novels ask critical and often provocative questions without providing easy answers. Mary Gordon’s *The Company of Women* is one such novel, for it depicts characters who live in community but often have conflicting values and beliefs. In the story, a traditional Catholic worldview collides with the evolving political and sexual norms of the 1960s and 1970s America. Yet the novel also encourages us to consider how to live in community with each other despite sharp religious disagreement.

June-Ann Greeley (greeleyj@sacredheart.edu)

English

'The Awful Grace of Mystery': Creature and Creator in the Poetry of Josephine Jacobsen

Josephine Jacobsen (1908-2003) was a Canadian-American poet whose 11 collections of poetry garnered her numerous accolades and awards, including her appointment in 1971 as the 21st Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (now, simply Poet Laureate of the United States). A devout Catholic, she infused her poetry with spiritual musings on the existential anxieties and doubts (her “awful grace of mystery”) of modern life, and so her poems reflect on the beauty and blunders of creation, the glories **and** darkness in modern (American) society and the challenges of realizing the spiritual in a world burdened with violence, despair and utter mortality.

Yet now, in the first quarter of the 21st century, Josephine Jacobsen's poetry seems to have been largely forgotten (except by poets who read poetry), and so this paper will be an initial effort to (re) introduce Jacobsen to the popular canon of modern Catholic writers.

Behind Walls and Within Minds: Understanding Bias and Well-Being

Katie Kroeper, Pamela Valera, Marylena Mantas-Kourounis, Todd Matthews & Michael Vale
Psychology

Rethinking Academic Warning Messages: Supporting the Sense of Belonging, Capability and Autonomy of Students Navigating Academic Challenges

College students who receive academic warnings, compared to similarly performing peers who do not, leave college at higher rates. This is, in part, because traditional warnings sharpen the three psychological questions that struggling students wrestle with: Do I belong here, am I capable and am I respected here. Across three experiments and one field intervention, we redesigned SHU academic warning notifications to offer up more adaptive answers to students' questions about belonging, capability and dignity, and then compared these revised messages to traditional warnings. Overwhelmingly, students preferred revised notifications, anticipating more positive feelings (e.g., hope, determination), fewer negative feelings (e.g., shame, guilt), and a greater likelihood of seeking support (e.g., meeting with a professor/adviser, using tutoring services). Encouraged by these promising results, we rolled out the revised notification at our institution and assessed its impact on academic performance and retention. We will discuss these results, as well as how our iterative revision process unfolded, stumbling blocks we encountered implementing change across multiple institutional areas, and our plans for continued improvement.

Pamela Valera (valerap@sacredheart.edu) & **Fabiola Millien-Faustin '24**
Social Work

Securing the Mind Behind Walls: Mental Health First Aid Training for Correctional Professionals

Mental health first aid is a new evidence-based practice provided to correctional officers to explore how the training would reduce the chances of suicide and mental illness in correctional spaces. This study employed a quantitative pretest design to assess correctional officers' baseline knowledge, beliefs, and confidence related to mental health and substance use before participating in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. A pretest survey was distributed to all professional correctional officers at the participating correctional facility. Survey items measured knowledge of mental health and substance use, attitudes toward providing support, perceived confidence in responding to crises and burnout levels across personal, work-related and incarcerated people-related domains. Following survey completion, several cohorts of correctional officers participated in standardized MHFA training sessions. We will discuss the results and explore how these baseline findings will help evaluate how MHFA influences their ability to support colleagues facing mental health and substance use challenges.

Marylena Mantas-Kourounis (mantas-kourounise@sacredheart.edu) & **Todd Matthews**
Political Science & Global Affairs; Sociology, Criminology & Criminal Justice
Trust in Higher Education Among Generation Z

Trust in institutions has been steadily declining in the United States over the past few decades. Historically low levels of public confidence in recent years coincide with the emergence of a new generation (Gen Z). To what extent does this new generation trust higher education? What factors aid or impede the degree to which members of Gen Z trust higher education to foster skills and dispositions to resolve contemporary challenges related to sustainability and social justice? Understanding the degree of trust exhibited by this generation at a relatively early point in their public lives is particularly important given that they will be coming of age and taking on increasing leadership and responsibility well into the middle part of the 21st century. Our paper reports initial findings and discusses implications based on data from an original, nationally representative survey.

Michael Vale (valem@sacredheart.edu)

Psychology

Bias Across the Lifespan: An Overview in Minority Stress and Ageism in Psychological Research

The purpose of this presentation is to highlight current research projects underway in the Sexuality, Minoritized Identities, and Lifespan Experiences (SMILEs) Lab that examine how stigma negatively affects people across the lifespan. This presentation will look at two ongoing projects addressing ageism, or stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination based on age. The first investigates how language used to describe adults aged 65 and older can reinforce ageist attitudes. The second evaluates how frequently individuals encounter ageism in their daily lives. Finally, this presentation will highlight the recent work examining minority stress among sexual minorities (lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults). Minority stress refers to identity-specific stressors such as microaggressions, the coming-out process and internalized stigma. This portion of the presentation will describe how age and birth cohort (e.g., Gen Z vs. Baby Boomers) shape minority stress experiences.

Balancing Acts: Energy, Environment and Ecology in a Changing World

LaTina Steele (steelel@sacredheart.edu)

Biology

Marshes to the Max: Approaches to Maximize Marsh Restoration Success

Salt marshes are crucial coastal ecosystems that protect coastlines against erosion and provide nursery grounds and habitat for numerous species. Unfortunately, these critical habitats have suffered global declines due to human activities. Although restoration can help recover lost ecosystem services, restored marshes often differ from natural marshes in structure and function. Understanding restored and natural marsh dynamics in a warming world is essential for maintaining healthy and sustainable coastal communities. I have been collaborating with faculty from the Biology Department and other institutions to develop methods that maximize marsh restoration success in the face of climate change. This year, my colleagues in the biology department and I have included undergraduates on a project expanding an existing living shoreline. This expansion incorporates a new design that could allow for adaptive management to dampen wave energy and protect an eroding marsh and new marsh plantings. When students participate in this work, they gain valuable experience in the field and the lab and build an understanding of how

ecological data can be applied to enhance coastal resilience and directly benefit coastal communities.

Jo-Marie Kasinak (kasinakj@sacredheart.edu)

Biology

Comparing Temporal Patterns of Horseshoe Crab Parasite Loads in Long Island Sound

The American horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) is an ecologically and economically important species that lives along the Eastern coast of the United States. Horseshoe crabs in high densities serve as a foundational species, increasing local biodiversity by providing food to many other organisms including endangered shore birds and economically important fish species. The population of horseshoe crabs in the Long Island Sound has been declining in recent decades due to overharvesting, and loss of suitable spawning habitat. Additionally, horseshoe crabs are susceptible to gill parasites such as the limulus leech (*Bdelloura candida*) which may be negatively impacting their populations. Project Limulus, a long-term research effort out of Sacred Heart University employed citizen scientists and student interns to study horseshoe crabs along the Connecticut coast. Data from 2021, 2023 and 2024 crabs were analyzed to determine what factors influence parasite loads over time and if parasites could be impacting the horseshoe crab population overall. In addition to parasite load, sex, size and nesting beach were also recorded for each crab. This data, while preliminary, has meaningful implications for horseshoe crab conservation and management in CT.

Barbara Pierce (pierceb@sacredheart.edu)

Biology

Persnickety Snackers: Why Migrating Birds Are So Choosy About the Food They Eat

Migratory birds are incredible endurance athletes that exhibit natural doping mechanisms. They can fly for days without eating or drinking while exercising more intensely and for longer durations than the world's best human athletes. This talk will discuss how being choosy about the food they eat impacts a bird's migration and which foods are best to help them along their way.

Kristen Savell (savellk@sacredheart.edu), **Ashley Stoehr & Jonathan R. Hudak**

Biology; Physical Therapy & Human Movement Science

Making Molehills out of Mountains: Limb Segment Length, Metabolic Efficiency & Human Thermoregulation

Thermoregulation is understood to be a primary influence on ecogeographic variation in human limb proportions. However, theoretical human and live animal models indicate that proportionally shorter distal segments in lower limbs may confer an energetic advantage when traversing sloped environments, suggesting that postcranial variation may also be shaped by the demands of slope-walking. We examine the effect of lower limb proportions on cost of transport (CoT) in a sample of healthy, adult subjects. VO₂ consumption (mL/kg/min) was collected at steady state over a two-minute trial, and the distance covered was used to determine CoT at four slopes. Pearson correlations and linear regression models were used to determine the impact of crural index (CI), stature-standardized tibial and femoral length, and ankle dorsiflexion range of motion on slope-specific CoTs. Our results suggest that further exploration of the energetic cost and biomechanics of slope-walking may nuance our understanding of the global distribution of human postcranial variation.

Blitz Talks: Ethics of the Archive at SHU: Collections, Challenges and Conversations

Emily Bryan (bryane@sacredheart.edu)

English

Michelle Loris (lorism@sacredheart.edu)

English; Catholic Studies

Jonathan Najarian (najarianj2@sacredheart.edu)

English

Kevin Gledhill (gledhillk@sacredheart.edu)

History

Ashley Morin (morina4@sacredheart.edu)

History

Joseph Alicastro (alicaastroj@sacredheart.edu)

Communication & Media

Nidhi Shrivastava (shrivastavan@sacredheart.edu)

English

Abby Bender (bendera5@sacredheart.edu)

English; Irish Studies

Jeffrey Orrico (orricoj@sacredheart.edu)

Library

Bethany Wade (wadeb2@sacredheart.edu)

History

Sacred Heart University is home to a growing range of distinctive archival collections that support research, teaching and community engagement across disciplines. Highlights include the Gloria Naylor archive—featuring manuscripts, correspondence and materials from one of the most influential African-American novelists in U.S. literature; the Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society collection, rich in cultural history and migration records; the Sikorsky archive, documenting a century of aviation innovation; and the NBC Peacock North collection, offering a unique window into broadcast journalism and media history. SHU is also becoming a regional access point for The 1947 Partition Archive, expanding opportunities for faculty and students to engage with oral histories and personal narratives from one of the largest mass migrations of the 20th century. Together, these

collections illustrate SHU's expanding potential as a hub for interdisciplinary scholarship, experiential learning and community-engaged research.

Session 2 (3-3:55 p.m.)

Qualitative Research Ethics with Vulnerable/Protected Populations

Jonix Owino (owinoj@sacredheart.edu)

Psychology

Tricia Lewis (lewisp@sacredheart.edu)

Health Sciences

Bethany Van Brown (vanbrownb@sacredheart.edu)

Sociology, Criminology & Criminal Justice

Caroline Comerford (comerfordc@sacredheart.edu)

Sociology, Criminology & Criminal Justice

Conducting qualitative research with vulnerable and protected populations requires an ethical framework that is rigorous and sensitive to the lived realities of those most impacted by social, structural and interpersonal inequalities. This panel brings together scholars whose work spans diverse but interconnected areas of vulnerability, including disaster-affected communities; perpetrators of violent serial crime, including serial homicide and serial killers; people experiencing housing insecurity; and older refugees navigating mental well-being and integration. Together, their work illustrates the ethical complexities that emerge across all stages of qualitative inquiry (e.g., recruitment, informed consent, data collection, analysis and dissemination), when working with populations requiring heightened ethical care. Drawing from these varied contexts, the panel explores strategies for fostering trust, ensuring participant safety and mitigating power imbalances inherent in researcher-participant relationships. Topics include navigating institutional review processes, employing culturally responsive and trauma-informed methodologies, and managing the ethical tensions between protecting participants and amplifying marginalized voices. The discussion also addresses the practical and emotional labor researchers carry, along with the importance of sustained community engagement and reciprocal benefit. By integrating insights from criminology, disaster research, housing insecurity and refugee studies, this panel moves beyond procedural ethics to emphasize relational and justice-oriented approaches. Attendees will gain practical guidance and emerging frameworks for conducting ethical qualitative research that honors participants' dignity, autonomy and agency. Ultimately, the panel emphasizes researchers' responsibility to engage in work that not only minimizes harm but also promotes equity, care and ethical accountability within marginalized communities.

Women's Anger in Contemporary Writing and Film

Abby Bender (bendera5@sacredheart.edu)

English

Angry Irish Mothers

The newest accounts of Irish motherhood across a range of genres include something that was absent or suppressed in most earlier versions: anger. In this paper, I consider how anger appears in new texts about motherhood in Ireland—anger about individual and national history, the isolations of parenting and the injuries to the body. Jessica Traynor's 2022 poetry collection *Pit Lullabies*, Alice Kinsella's 2023 memoir *Milk: On Motherhood and Madness*, and Claire Kilroy's 2023 novel *Soldier, Sailor* are some of the most recent texts to examine—and, implicitly, correct—earlier ideas about Irish motherhood and how it might be expressed in literature.

June-Ann Greeley (greeleyj@sacredheart.edu)

English

The Fury of Faith: Anger and Solace in the Conversion Poetry of Mary Karr

Mary Karr is an award-winning poet, essayist and professor of literature at Syracuse University who, by her own account, astonished herself at the age of 40 by converting, first from a brittle atheism to a profound belief in God, and then, even more inexplicably, from a rural Texas evangelical Christianity to a densely spiritual Catholicism. Two of her more recent books of poetry, *Sinners Welcome* and *Tropic of Squalor*, both of which she wrote after her conversion, record very honestly her tumultuous relationship, not with the Catholic faith itself, but with the Catholic Church and some of its more provocative mandates and directives. As her poetry reveals, and this paper will explore, Karr swings from gratitude and joy to anger and frustration in her fraught relationship with an institution—and those who control it—that itself does not seem to know quite what to do with contemporary women in its midst, or how to enfold them authentically into its community.

Michelle Loris (Lorism@sacredheart.edu)

English; Catholic Studies

The Color Purple: The Power of Anger to Heal

In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, love and anger lead to Celie's recovery.

Nidhi Shrivastava (shrivastavan@sacredheart.edu)

English

Revisiting Feminist Horror, Revenge and Rape: A Look at Anvita Dutt Guptan's *Bulbul* (2020)

I explore the representation of feminist anger in Anvita Dutta's film *Bulbul* (2020). *Bulbul* is a feminist reimagining of chudail (female demon witch) myth and calls attention to sexual violence and child marriages in 19th-century Bengal. *Bulbul* transforms into a demon after her brutal rape, then returns to her village to murder rapists and perpetrators to demand justice and better treatment for women. Through the examination of this film, I argue that the concept of “evil sexuality” is complex and nuanced. *Bulbul* reimagines the figure of chudail as a supernatural feminist vigilante. While we cannot overlook. *Bulbul* is one of the earliest responses in post #MeToo era when feminist filmmakers in India began to respond to the ongoing crisis of rape culture that continues to marginalize rape victim-survivors in the country.

Minds in Motion: Mental Health, Learning and Well-Being Across Contexts

Dawn Melzer (melzerd365@sacredheart.edu), **Deirdre Yeater,** & **Barbara Pierce**
Psychology; Biology

Paws and Reflect: Do Therapy Dogs Lower Stress and Boost Self-Efficacy in Humans?

Stress and self-doubt are common challenges in today's world. Communities and schools alike are seeking creative, low-cost ways to support well-being. One promising approach is the use of therapy dogs. This talk will highlight research showing how even brief interactions with therapy dogs can reduce stress and boost self-efficacy in high school and college students, offering insights into the powerful role dogs can play in promoting mental health and resilience, in and outside of school settings. The talk will also showcase Sacred Heart University's service dog training program and ongoing studies in the Canine Cognition Lab.

Lauren Bryant (bryantl3@sacredheart.edu)

Psychology

Brainwaves Unplugged: From the Laboratory to the Classroom

Electroencephalography (EEG) is a noninvasive neuroscience technique that measures electrical brain activity across various rhythms/frequencies. For example, the mu rhythm activates during action observation and execution and has been theorized to support various social cognitive functions (e.g., imitation)—however, these associations remain relatively understudied, especially in infants. We examined whether 6-month-olds' mu rhythm desynchronization (MRD) is associated with their imitation. Consistent with our hypotheses, preliminary analyses found that infants with stronger MRD during action observation performed more actions on an imitation task than infants with weaker MRD. This study represents just one of many research applications of EEG, though very few students get first-hand experience with this technique. For this reason, we are also exploring how a low-cost, portable EEG can be integrated into classroom settings. In addition to our research findings, this presentation will also review students' experiences using this neuroscience technique.

Lily Deking & Ben Collins (collinsb3@sacredheart.edu)

Biology

Circadian Clock Regulation of Learning and Memory

We all have an internal circadian clock that regulates many aspects of our behavior and physiology, including our cognition. As the circadian clock also regulates when we sleep, it is unclear if our clock helps us learn by promoting sleep at the appropriate time (and therefore relieving tiredness) or through a direct, positive impact on neurons involved in cognition. This question can be addressed in the fruit fly, *Drosophila melanogaster*, where just four neurons which contain a circadian clock regulate a daily rhythm of memory acquisition and promote sleep. We use genetic tools to manipulate the electrical activity and neurotransmitter release from these clock neurons to determine whether they are directly regulating memory acquisition, or instead indirectly increase cognition and learning through the promotion of sleep.

Pamela Valera (valerap@sacredheart.edu) & **Corey Tolliver**

Social Work

Locked In, Left Out: Climate Change and the Hidden Frontline in Corrections

Extreme weather has continued to get worse across the United States, raising challenges about the working and living conditions of correctional officers who work in facilities that are vulnerable to climate control. This exploratory study investigates the perceived impact of extreme weather, including heat waves, severe cold, flooding, hurricanes and poor air quality, specifically on correctional officers' physical safety, psychological well-being, job performance and facility operations. Using a national survey distributed to correctional officers across the United States, the study aimed to identify emerging patterns of risk, adaptation and unmet institutional needs within correctional environments. This research examined how environmental stressors interacted with occupational demands to influence officer stress, burnout and perceptions of workplace safety. As an emerging field of inquiry, we'll discuss how this study highlights the need for climate-responsive correction policy, improved infrastructure planning and mental health-informed approaches to correctional workforce support.

Blitz Talks: From Molecules to Minds: Exploring Adaptation, Connection and the Nature of Being

Ashley Stoehr (stoehra@sacredheart.edu)

Biology

Crabby or Calm, Fishy or Fine? Measuring Lactate & Stress in Aquatic Animals

Lactate is a metabolic byproduct that increases when animals experience stress or switch to anaerobic metabolism. Measuring lactate can therefore serve as an indicator of how organisms respond to environmental and social stressors. This study examines lactate levels in crabs and fish to better understand stress physiology in aquatic animals. In crabs, lactate will be measured directly from blood samples to compare individuals found in natural aggregations with those kept in isolation. These comparisons will help determine whether social interactions influence physiological stress. In parallel, a new protocol will be developed to measure lactate directly from the muscle tissue of fish using a handheld lactate meter. This portable approach allows for rapid, nonlaboratory assessment of stress, which can be especially useful during fieldwork or after capture. Together, these projects aim to evaluate how species with different body structures and behaviors regulate stress and to test the effectiveness of field-ready lactate measurement techniques.

Alyssa Woronik (woronika@sacredheart.edu)

Biology

Decoding our Directions: How investigating DNA Sequences Leads to an Understanding of Physical Forms

DNA is the instruction manual that is used to build organisms and keep them running throughout their lives. A main question in biology is how the DNA sequence (genotype) impacts an organism's observable characteristics (phenotype) and how variation in the genotype leads to variation in the phenotype. Our lab currently works with several different organisms, ranging from microscopic worms to horses, to gain insights into how changes in DNA impact the phenotype.

Emily Levy (levye2@sacredheart.edu), **Alexandria Lovasi '25**, **Brianna Nieves '26**, **Vitalina Pivtorak '25**, **Lena Seerosh '26**, **Liliana Sosnowski '26**, **Cassandra Vallon '26**, & **Kate Vincent '27**

Biology

You Are What You Eat: Effects of Food Supplementation on Native and Invasive Backyard Birds

Environmental factors during an organism's early life can cause dramatic long-term effects. While these early-life effects have long been documented, we lack an integrative and comparative understanding of how early-life environments get 'under the skin' to affect traits like behavior, morphology, physiology and fitness. Food availability is a particularly interesting early-life factor because all organisms must allocate energy toward the body's many developing systems, and limited energy results in developmental trade-offs. To assess the trade-offs associated with food availability, my research group will conduct a comparative field experiment in native versus invasive birds that tests the effects of food supplementation on nestling behavior, growth, physiology and survival. We hypothesize that native and invasive species will experience a release from energy constraints when supplemented with extra food, as evidenced by gains in all traits. We also hypothesize that invasive species will benefit more from food supplementation compared to native species, indicative of the success of invasive species across diverse and changing habitats. To test these hypotheses, we established control and food-supplemented nests of wild Eastern bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) and house sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). Current results will be discussed, as well as observations about how integrative and comparative experiments of wild animals will advance our understanding of the wide-ranging phenotypes affected by food availability, and how evolution has shaped these responses across species.

Tom Terleph (terlept@sacredheart.edu)

Biology

Gibbon Vocal Behavior

Gibbons are small Asian apes that produce elaborate songs, including duets that are sung by mated pairs. The male portion of duet song includes species-specific song phrases; and differences between species also exist in the timing of phrase delivery relative to their mate's song. Khao Yai National Park, Thailand, contains a small area where the ranges of two gibbon species overlap. In this location, White-handed gibbons (*Hylobates lar*) and Pileated gibbons (*Hylobates pileatus*) sometimes pair with each other, sing mixed-species duets and may mate to produce hybrid offspring. My song analyses of mixed species pairs and their offspring show that, upon reaching adulthood and finding a mate, hybrid males produce song phrases with features that are intermediate between the two parent species, as well as intermediate in the timing of coordinating song delivery with their mate. These hybrid characteristics may influence duet quality and thus potential reproductive success of the hybrid animals.

Adrienne Crowell (crowella2@sacredheart.edu)

Psychology

Coping With Threat: How Self-Affirmation and Self-Compassion Shape Our Responses

In this blitz session, Dr. Crowell will introduce her lab's current research on how people cope with threats to the self. She will highlight two related lines of work: studies using self-affirmation, which encourages people to reflect on personally important values, and studies using self-compassion, which involves practicing kindness toward oneself, recognizing shared humanity, and responding to setbacks with mindfulness. The discussion will explore how these approaches reduce defensiveness, and how their effectiveness depends on personality traits such as narcissism.

Session 3 (4-4:55 p.m.)

Responsible True Crime? Sensationalism, Armchair Detectives and Ethics

Caroline Comerford (comerfordc@sacredheart.edu)

Sociology, Criminology, & Criminal Justice

Bethany Van Brown (vanbrownb@sacredheart.edu)

Sociology, Criminology, & Criminal Justice

Analisa Gagnon (gagnona2@sacredheart.edu)

Sociology, Criminology, & Criminal Justice

Colleen Butler-Sweet (butler-sweetc@sacredheart.edu)

Sociology, Criminology, & Criminal Justice

Public opinions surveys tell us that 84% of respondents consume true crime through various media (Naseer and Aubin, 2024). While the genre is popular, many have pointed to the sensationalism, the potential dangers of ‘armchair detectives’ (vigilante justice) and the overall ethics of true crime. How can we explain our culture’s fascination with true crime? What might our consumption of true crime be doing to our collective thinking about crime and the criminal justice system? Is this fascination a result of our desire to escape the more mundane if still disturbing transgressions of everyday life or is it perhaps a reflection of a collective disbelief in psychological or sociological explanations for crime and a return to Puritan explanation of human evil? (Doherty, 2022). Using a detailed survey instrument, we will explore why it’s important to consider media depictions of crime and criminals, including, how a culture’s changing relationship to “real life” crime narratives can help us understand the complex role criminality plays in defining a culture. What do they tell us about our perception of society? What do they tell us about how we conceive social justice and punishment? What implications might the social construction of crime have on policy?

Creative Scholarship and Collaboration

Sara Ross (rosss2@sacredheart.edu)

Communication and Media

Process, Production, Participation: Writing and Directing a Short Narrative Film with a Student Crew

Creating a narrative film is a time-consuming labor of love that requires creativity, collaboration, dogged persistence and the complex coordination of resources through the phases of pre-production, production and post-production. While entirely student run films are the norm at the undergraduate and graduate levels of film instruction, crewing on a faculty led shoot provides students access to another level of professional practice analogous to working in a faculty

mentor's lab in the sciences. This paper explores the process through a case study of the production of the short film *Whiskey: The Musical*.

Nathan Lewis (lewisn1963@sacredheart.edu)

Art & Design

Off With His Head: Decapitation and Democracy

This presentation will offer thoughts on recent creative work exploring the severed head as a theme that intersects contemporary and historical politics, biblical narratives and art history.

Cara Erdheim Kilgallen (Erdheimc@sacredheart.edu)

English

Creative Scholarship and Collaboration

Scholarship in the humanities, particularly my field of English literature, has involved less collaboration with students in the past; that is, until now. In the natural and social sciences, faculty and students often conduct joint research projects; these collaborative efforts are now influencing fields like English literature and academic writing. This presentation focuses on how students become engaged with my research on the literature of humor and sports. Through my own narrative scholarship, which essentially means argument and analysis via storytelling, I involve undergraduates of all majors, from English and the arts to business and the health professions, -in my writing. On the flip side, students' own creative writing and research insightfully inform my own work. Creativity and collaboration are interconnected, I argue, so this talk will illustrate such an interconnection.

Echoes of Society: Art, Advocacy and the Future of the Human Condition

Mike Ventimiglia (ventimigliam@sacredheart.edu)

Philosophy

Pink Floyd's *The Wall* and the Allure of 21st century Fascism

On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump was sworn in as president of the United States for a second time. Many have pointed to evidence of his fascist rhetoric and tendencies. We no longer need to scour biographies, historical scholarship and philosophical analysis from the 20th century to begin to understand the appeal of something like fascism. We can witness this in our own time as substantial populations in the United States and around the world register a conscious or unconscious willingness to court this flavor of authoritarianism. This state of affairs warrants a return to Pink Floyd's *The Wall*--the album and accompanying film tracing the journey of its protagonist into psychological isolation and eventual fascist delusion and fantasy—to reflect on the appeal and psychology of fascism. This presentation blends observations by established authorities such as Hannah Arendt, Umberto Eco and Robert Paxton with insights gleaned from *The Wall* to reflect on the conditions and allure of fascism as they manifest themselves in the 21st century.

Stephanie Carnes (carness@sacredheart.edu), **Sharlene Kerelejza**, & **Janelle Bradshaw Bryan**

Social Work

Exploring the Impact of Federal Policy Changes on Social Workers, Social Work Students and Social Work Supervisors

Our presentation offers findings related to the recent qualitative study we conducted with master's of social work students, social work practicum supervisors and social workers in SHU community partner agencies and organizations. The primary objective for this study was to explore the impact of recent federal policy changes on the "doing" of social work, as experienced by students, their supervisors and social worker colleagues in the field. Specifically, we asked participants to reflect on their experiences of psychological and somatic stress related to policy changes, as well as the types of support these individuals desired from their agencies, SHU and the National Association of Social Workers.

Alexa Dicken (dickena@sacredheart.edu)

English

Posthuman Motherhood in *Klara and the Sun*

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* introduces the question of what distinguishes humans from technology as the characters prepare to replace a beloved child with an AI version. The novel is told from the perspective of Klara, an "artificial friend," who befriends a young, chronically ill girl named Josie. Although it is explained that Klara's role is to keep Josie from becoming lonely in her social isolation, as the story progresses, it is revealed that Klara was chosen by Josie's mother to replace Josie if Josie succumbs to her illness. Throughout the novel, Josie's mother is responsible for many decisions that integrate technology into Josie's life with dramatic effects on her identity, health and presumed death. While Klara's attempt to replace Josie is the focus of the novel, Josie herself embodies a posthuman identity as a product of genetic alteration, an intervention that is the cause of her life-threatening illness. From the moment Josie's mother asks Klara to "learn Josie," the characters in this story assume that Klara will make an adequate replacement for Josie. Klara remains confident that she can indeed accomplish this task, and Josie herself makes suggestions for how Klara should be treated in her absence. Although Josie recovers and Klara never embodies Josie's identity, the preparation for this replacement raises issues of identity, disability and ultimately, whether we are any different from technology at all. In this essay, I will use examples from *Klara and the Sun* to demonstrate the question of technological integration in the family unit. I will apply cyborg theory and disability theory to examine the implications of Klara's and Josie's identities as distinct individuals, and I will examine a mother's role in making life-altering decisions for their children in a posthuman landscape.

From Quantum States to Catalytic Rates

Emily Mane (manee@sacredheart.edu)

Chemistry

Synthesis and Characterization of Pyridine Alkoxide-Ligated Transition Metal Complexes

The pyridine alkoxide ligand, "pyalk," is an important structure in organometallic chemistry and has been ligated to several transition metals, most notably iridium and copper. These metal complexes have been remarkably active in water oxidation catalysis, which is important for the development of alternative energy technologies. Despite its activity and relatively simple structure, the potential of pyalk-derived ligands has not been fully explored. The synthesis of a novel suite of pyalk ligands and pyalk-supported metal complexes may enable the further development of highly efficient and sustainable first-row transition metal catalysts. These ligands include steric and electronic variations so that structure-activity relationships in catalysis can be explored.

Marlina Slamet (slametm@sacredheart.edu)

Physics

Fundamental Theoretical Difference in Ground-state Spectra of 2-electron Systems bound by Coulomb Potential vs. Harmonic Potential

The Coulomb potential systems considered are the natural Helium atom and Hydrogen molecule. The 'artificial' (man-made) Harmonic potential bound systems are the 2D semiconductor quantum dot in a magnetic field, the 3D Hooke's atom and the 3D Hooke's molecule. Experiment shows, and theory confirms, the ground state (characterized by zero node in the wave function, and single shell in radial probability density) of natural systems is solely a singlet state. We prove that for the "artificial" systems, there is another ground state besides the expected ground singlet state: it is a ground triplet state. The proof is arrived at by derivation of the exact, analytical and correlated wave function solutions of the corresponding Schrodinger-Pauli & Schrodinger equations for the ground singlet and triplet states. These solutions are well-behaved, and satisfy the requisite Pauli principle of antisymmetry, the Wave Function Identity, parity, parity about each point of electron-electron coalescence and the electron-electron coalescence constraint. The structure of the electron density for the ground singlet and triplet states of each system is typical of the Wigner regime (high electron-correlation), with the electron-interaction energy being much greater than the kinetic energy.

Todd Sullivan (sullivant33@sacredheart.edu), **Sebastian Ottaviani**, **Kirit Dhanjal**, **Briant Johnson**, **Olivia Lattka**, **Paris Sonnenberg**, **Farah Mahmood**, & **Joseph Audie**

Chemistry

Virtual Screening of Different Beta-Lactamases Enzymes and ClpP Protease Enzymes from Staphylococcus Aureus to Identify Pharmaceutical Hits

Antibiotic resistance is a major global threat, killing millions annually and jeopardizing modern medicine because of bacteria that evolve to resist drugs designed to treat them. Beta-lactamases are enzymes produced by bacteria that afford multiresistance to beta-lactam antibiotics. Beta-lactamase confers antibiotic resistance by changing the antibiotics' structure. We are also investigating a protease ClpP (Caseinolytic peptidase P) that is in *S. aureus* maintaining protein homeostasis. The allosteric sites of both enzymes are also being investigated. Here, we describe the use of virtual screens with multiple criteria and different crystal structures for identifying novel beta-lactamase and protease ClpP inhibitors. Utilizing molecular operating environment (MOE) as the software for our virtual screens, our virtual screen model evaluates compounds that can be purchased for less than \$100, therefore they can eventually be evaluated in vitro and in vivo. The virtual screen model that we employ uses multiple poses of the virtual compounds so we can evaluate them via multiple criteria. Two different models of the active site are utilized. Then an excel Pivot table is used to identify the duplicates with the logic, being the more times a virtual compound appears with a good score it may be of interest to test in vitro. We also use the MOE filter tool to reveal compounds with the highest score. ADME studies are being performed on our top theoretical pharmaceutical hits. We have identified ractopamine and a rexinoid inhibitor, both repurposed drugs, as a 50 μ M inhibitor in vitro against beta-lactamase. We think a novel method of identifying pharmaceutical hits has been revealed. The hope is to treat the patient with a Beta-lactamase inhibitor and then use the the normal penicillin like drug. ClpP protease is a new drug target, and we are hoping to discover novel inhibitors. Preliminary results appear encouraging,

providing hope that novel drug candidates will be identified and that our computational workflow will prove useful on other pharmaceutical targets.

Rodney Versace (versacer@sacredheart.edu) & Sunghee Lee

Chemistry

Computational Studies of the Anion Effect on Water Permeability of DOPC Membranes in the Presence and Absence of Cholesterol

The study of water permeability can be used to obtain a deeper understanding of the process of homeostasis, which is responsible for the maintenance of stable physiological conditions in the human body. The presence of specific ions strongly affects some physicochemical properties of biological membranes which are also sensitive to the passive permeation of water. In this study, we present water permeability data from simulations to study the effect of two different anions (Cl⁻ and SCN⁻) at two different salt concentrations (0.1 and 0.5 M), upon a bilayer containing 1,2-dioleoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine (DOPC), in the presence and absence of cholesterol. Our computational methods include classical molecular dynamics (MD) simulations followed by the calculation of the potential of mean force (PMF) and water diffusivity in the bilayer. Our results will be compared with experimental data obtained from droplet interface bilayer experiments. Our findings will further illuminate the understanding of bilayer interfaces between aqueous solutions in an ionic environment and biological membranes at the molecular level.

Introduction to Reacting Pedagogy: Playing Monumental Consequence

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Philosophy

David Luesink (luesinkd@sacredheart.edu)

History

Can university learning be a game? Join us for a session of the game Monumental Consequence, a role-playing game that puts students in charge with active learning and a flipped classroom. In this game you will be debating the question: "Is art worth dying for?" Participants will assume the roles of villagers in the fictional town of La Ville, where an invading army has seized control of the town's centuries-old church. The game invites players to reflect on the cultural value of art, historical objects and monumental structures. Players will learn to articulate their views, persuade others, negotiate and collaborate. More broadly, we invite participants to explore the principles of how similar role-based simulations can enrich teaching across a range of disciplines, especially in longer games where students engage deeply with core texts, primary sources and big ideas.