

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA  
**COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL &  
COMMUNITY SCIENCES**

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*2023-2024 Annual Report*

UNIVERSITY of  
SOUTH FLORIDA





# PROMOTING *Well-Being*

The College of Behavioral and Community Sciences (CBCS) continues to break new ground through combining knowledge gained through the behavioral sciences with knowledge gained from the community.

Serving nearly 3,000 students with 7 undergraduate, 13 masters, and 7 doctoral programs housed in 6 academic departments/schools, the college aims for nothing less than to be among the most influential resources for behavioral and community sciences in the region, nation, and world. Through research and education, we focus on some of society's most challenging issues. Most notably, our college's researchers are addressing the mental health needs of our communities, creating powerful tools to combat human trafficking, training future substance misuse researchers, and improving quality of life at all stages.



**98%**

first-time-in-college  
freshman retention rate for  
full-time students

**90%**

first-time-in-college  
second-year retention rate  
for full-time students

**72%**

of full-time students  
graduate in four years.

**97%**

of students graduate  
without excess hours.

**1,108**

degrees awarded in 2023-  
2024, including 697  
undergraduate degrees and  
411 graduate degrees

**\$32M+**

in annual contract and  
grant funding

**8**

faculty members have  
been named American  
Association for the  
Advancement of Science  
Fellows for their  
outstanding contributions  
to research since 2018.



# COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL & COMMUNITY SCIENCES

## DID YOU KNOW?



Two programs, social work and speech-language pathology, jumped multiple spots in the U.S. News & World Report's 2024 Best Graduate Schools rankings. Social work moved up 11 spots in the rankings, from 94 to 83, and speech-language pathology moved up three spots, from 55 to 52. Several other programs are also ranked in the top 50: criminology (#18), rehabilitation and mental health counseling (#46), and audiology (#22).



The Master of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy program earned accreditation from the national accrediting body for the field of marriage and family therapy in May 2024.



With a 91.3% first-time pass rate, the Applied Behavior Analysis program's Registered Behavior Technician training program achieved the second-highest pass rate in the country for 2023 according to the Behavior Analyst Certification Board.



The School of Social Work explored the powerful stories of social workers, students, and social work scholars who have made an outstanding impact on communities far and wide through a podcast.



In what has become an annual university-wide event, USF students took to the stage for a third year to share their lived experiences with mental illness and substance use disorders. The production called This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF aims to reduce stigma by empowering students to share their stories.



The Lifelong Learners of USF student organization was recognized as the Student Organization Program of the Year during USF's 2024 Celebration of Leadership Awards. This distinction honors a student organization that positively contributes to the growth of USF's community through creative approaches to reach a diverse student body.



Molly Urnek reviews content in the Mental Health and Wellness in the Workplace course.

## BEHAVIORAL & MENTAL HEALTH

### Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce leads statewide initiative to address shortage of mental health professionals

The state of Florida selected CBCS as home of the Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce. The new center will enhance recruitment and retention efforts and expand pathways to behavioral health professions. The creation of the Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce and the \$5 million in recurring state funds provided to operate it were included in the Live Healthy legislation package signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis in March. The legislation also creates a new category of teaching hospitals dedicated to advancing behavioral health care. In partnership with USF, Tampa General Hospital was selected to be one of four hospitals throughout the state to receive the "behavioral health teaching hospital" designation.

### Thousands enrolled during first year of USF's mental health in the workplace course

More than 4,500 professionals from some of the nation's top companies, such as Microsoft, Amazon, and Johnson & Johnson, enrolled in the first year of USF's Mental Health and Wellness in the Workplace course. The free course developed by CBCS in collaboration with the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay empowers business leaders to build healthy and engaged teams by teaching them how to approach common challenges related to mental and behavioral health and addiction in the workplace and provides insight on how to support employees. A diverse group of participants have taken part in the course, with initial registrants representing 69 countries, all 50 states, and every branch of the U.S. military.

Led by faculty and industry experts, sessions in the Mental Health and Wellness in the Workplace course feature executive coaches, intervention specialists, and individuals who share personal experiences related to their own mental health. The course remains free to the public, self-paced, and 100% online, and continues to grow, welcoming an average of 50 new students each month.

### Interdisciplinary project to diversify the school-based mental health services workforce

In response to the challenges of increased mental health needs, including those resulting from traumatic events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, community violence, and adverse childhood experiences, faculty members from the Department of Child and Family Studies and the School of Social Work launched a project that will enhance the pipeline of behavior analysts and social workers in schools.

Project MABAS, which stands for Mental Health Applied Behavior Analysis Social Work, is a 5-year, \$3.9 million grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Forty USF graduate students enrolled in the applied behavior analysis or social work programs will provide integrated behavioral and mental health services in local high-needs school districts, helping improve social-emotional, behavioral, and educational outcomes.

*The average employed American spends more time working than any other activity aside from sleeping, which makes the workplace an important space for addressing mental health and a space that is severely impacted by issues related to mental health, behavioral health, and addiction.*

*- Julie Serovich, PhD*





Former associate deans and executive directors of FMHI attend the event alongside CBCS Dean Julie Serovich, PhD.



Dean Serovich smiles with Kim and David de la Parte, Esq.



Tom Massey, PhD, recognizes Kimberly Menendez, MS, with the Bob Friedman Endowed Scholarship Award at the event.

## Florida Mental Health Institute marks 50 years

The Louis de La Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI) commemorated 50 years of excellence in mental health research this year. When FMHI was founded in 1974, its mission was to "improve lives of people with mental, addictive, and development disorders through research, training, and education," and in the five decades since, the institute has made a remarkable impact on mental health initiatives across the state and nationwide. Today, FMHI continues to address complex social problems through its research, consultation, and training. FMHI partners with local and state government leaders and citizens in developing and implementing policy and increasing awareness of public health issues, leads training programs, and supports local community mental health initiatives. As part of the 50th anniversary celebration, past and current leaders of the institute gathered with more than 150 guests, and David de la Parte, Esq, spoke about his father, Louis de la Parte, for whom the institute is named, and his legacy.

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

### Human trafficking research lab receives federal and state support

The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Risk to Resilience Research Lab on the USF St. Petersburg campus received nearly \$3 million from the 2024 federal spending package and \$750,000 in the 2024-25 state budget. Part of the funds will go toward the development of the Bridging Resources and Information Gaps in Human Trafficking (BRIGHT) Network platform, an online resource that streamlines efforts to connect victims of human trafficking with organizations and resources in the state. In addition, funds will support the development and operation of a statewide human trafficking data repository called TIPSTR that will assist law-enforcement human trafficking investigations, address gaps in victim services, and provide a better understanding of the magnitude and trends of human trafficking across Florida and over time.

Earlier in the year, as part of Senate Bill 7064, the TIP Lab was designated as the official statewide repository for data related to human trafficking. The lab is appointed with collecting and analyzing statewide data and evaluating the effectiveness of state-funded initiatives to combat trafficking. It will also work with law enforcement and state agencies to report data on human trafficking investigations and prosecutions.

### BRIGHT Network launches new platform, connecting human trafficking victims to critical resources in the community

More than one hundred anti-trafficking professionals came together at the USF St. Petersburg campus in May to officially launch the BRIGHT Network, an online platform that helps victims of human trafficking escape their situations by connecting them with organizations and resources in their community. The BRIGHT Network, developed by researchers at USF in close collaboration with anti-trafficking professionals and survivors, is an online, vetted, secure resource referral network for those who provide services to victims of trafficking. The centralized platform allows professionals in anti-trafficking organizations to track, coordinate, and provide resources such as health care and safe housing to survivors. Law enforcement, non-profit organizations, and social workers can access the user-friendly technology as they seek to assist victims of labor and sex trafficking.

*By creating and expanding these tools, we will be better able to combat and reduce this illegal activity in Florida while providing essential resources to survivors when they need it most.*  
- Joan Reid, PhD, LMHC, CRC

Joan Reid, PhD, LMHC, CRC, speaks alongside Shelly Wagers, PhD, to a group of anti-trafficking professionals at the launch of USF's BRIGHT Network held on the USF St. Petersburg campus.

## SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

### Summer Research Institute at FMHI trains top undergraduate scholars from across the country

FMHI welcomed a group of scholars in the Summer Research Institute (SRI@FMHI), which has trained undergraduate students for nearly two decades. The 11-week summer research program brought some of the most promising undergraduates from universities across the country to USF to work alongside mentors and hone their research skills in areas related to substance use and co-occurring disorders. Seventy-five percent of the SRI@FMHI program's more than 200 alums have enrolled in advanced graduate programs.

### START program increases the diversity of substance misuse research workforce

Scientific Training in Addiction Research Techniques (START), a year-long comprehensive research education program led by Department of Mental Health Law and Policy Assistant Professor Micah E. Johnson, PhD, continues to create a pipeline of substance misuse clinical researchers. These scientists are trained in the analysis and dissemination of data from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development study – the largest long-term study of brain development and child health in the United States. This project will create a generation of highly trained scientists equipped with the tools and support systems needed to address the major public health challenges of the future.



SRI@FMHI scholars and mentors gather for Scholar Research Day.



The SMART Lab cohort and Micah Johnson, PhD, celebrate at a banquet.







Michelle Arnold, PhD, AuD, places headphones on a patient in the USF Hearing Clinic.

## OLDER ADULTS

### USF earns 'age-friendly university' designation through efforts of aging studies faculty

In a significant move to address societal aging and the unique needs and contributions of older adults, USF has been named an “age-friendly university” by the Age-Friendly University Global Network. Kathy Black, PhD, a professor on the USF Sarasota-Manatee campus, led the effort. The network encompasses more than 100 universities worldwide and is dedicated to promoting intergenerational learning, career development, and participation in educational and research programs.

An Age Friendly University advisory committee will ensure the university's research agenda is informed by the needs of an aging society and promotes public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults. The work will also help enhance students’ understanding of the richness that comes with aging.

### Researchers find that hearing aids slow cognitive decline in the largest-ever test of hearing intervention to delay dementia

A USF-designed hearing intervention is at the center of a national study that shows hearing aids can slow cognitive decline by 50 percent. Through the Aging and Cognitive Health Evaluation in Elders (ACHIEVE) study, researchers provided older adults a hearing toolkit, which included hearing aids, self-management tools, and ongoing instruction and counseling with an audiologist to "make listening easier for the brain." This allowed participants to remain more socially and physically active, which contributes to mental and emotional wellbeing, while helping mitigate other negative aspects of aging, such as inactivity, isolation, anxiety, and depression.

The overall ACHIEVE study was led by researchers at Johns Hopkins and seven additional contributing institutions.

A team of researchers from USF led the hearing intervention provided in the study. From the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, Theresa H. Chisolm, PhD, professor and vice provost for strategic planning, performance and accountability, and Michelle Arnold, AuD, PhD, assistant professor, collaborated with Victoria Sanchez, AuD, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Otolaryngology in the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine.

### Aging studies faculty partner with 211 Tampa Bay Cares to help older adults with disaster preparedness

Teaming up with 211 Tampa Bay Cares, faculty in the School of Aging Studies produced a series of important videos to encourage older adults to prepare for disasters – hurricanes in particular. The series of brief videos provides expert advice from professionals in emergency management and from Alzheimer’s Association staff who share specific guidance to caregivers of persons with dementia. The videos are based on the research of Lindsay Peterson, PhD, a research assistant professor, with funding from the Retirement Research Foundation. Her co-investigators were Sara Hackett, PhD, Debra Dobbs, PhD, and William Haley, PhD.

**66 Aging is a unifying construct. It touches every sector, every industry and every one of us.**

– Kathy Black, PhD

**66 In such a divided world that we live in, hearing loss is pretty universal. Everybody can agree that being able to talk to people and hear what they say is an important issue.**

– Michelle Arnold, PhD, AuD

## CHILDREN & SCHOOLS

### Rightpath faculty work to enhance the quality of early education programs

Nearly 150,000 children each year receive early education services through Florida’s Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program. With a \$1.8M contract from the Florida Department of Education, faculty from the Department of Child and Family Studies and the Rightpath Research and Innovation Center will create a quality rating system for programs that accept VPK vouchers. The quality rating system will empower parents to make informed decisions about their child’s education. It will also inform targeted allocation of professional development resources to those who need it most.

### Researchers train behavioral coaches to assist students at risk of school failure

Researchers will develop and evaluate the feasibility and potential outcomes of a virtual Prevent-Teach-Reinforce (PTR) coaching model to train school-based professionals to become behavioral coaches, equipping them with the necessary skills to guide individualized behavior support teams through the PTR process. The focus will be on children who are at the highest risk of school failure due to persistent challenging behavior. This project is funded by a 4-year, \$2 million research grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences.

### New funding will continue efforts to build positive school culture

The Department of Child and Family Studies will continue its collaboration with the University of Oregon’s Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The award comes from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. More than \$21 million in new funding will help the center continue its longstanding mission of supporting all states and U.S. territories in building positive and affirming learning environments within their school for five more years. Over the past 25 years, the center has established itself as a leader in the field of education, working together with state and local agencies to improve social, emotional, academic, and behavioral outcomes for all students.



READ MORE : [USF.EDU/CBCS](https://usf.edu/cbcs)





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4202 E Fowler Ave,  
Tampa, FL 33620  
[usf.edu/cbcs](https://usf.edu/cbcs)