

HEALTHY PEOPLE ▲ HEALTHY FAMILIES ▲ HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

# SYNERGIES

COLLEGE OF HEALTH

Winter 2025–26



## Strategy, Innovation, Collaboration

We're working together to create  
a healthier, more sustainable future.



**Oregon State**  
University



**COH Administrative Team.** *Front row:* Allison Myers, associate dean for Extension and engagement. Doris Cancel-Tirado, associate dean for student services and well-being. Marilyn Thompson, school head, School of Human Development and Family Sciences. Megan MacDonald, school head, School of Exercise, Sport, and Health Sciences. *Middle row:* Marc Norcross, associate dean for strategy and administration. Debbie Craig, dean. Perry Hystad, associate dean for research. *Back row:* Laurel Kincl, associate dean for academic and faculty affairs. Peggy Dolcini, school head, School of Nutrition and Public Health.

# DEAN'S MESSAGE

**WHAT A WARM WELCOME I HAVE RECEIVED** from so many people across the College of Health community, OSU and beyond! Thanks to faculty, staff, students and donors, I have enjoyed a lovely start here at Oregon State University.

I'm stepping into big shoes, but my path has been smoothed by the hard work of the college administrative team and interim dean Rick Settersten.

As a former dean, I understand the job ahead and am committed to serving the faculty, staff, students, alumni and donors who represent this outstanding, forward-looking college. During my short time here, I've witnessed nothing but dedication, passion and an innovative approach to meeting challenges head-on.

## HERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT MAKE ME OPTIMISTIC FOR THE FUTURE:

- 1. We are continuing to develop excellent degree programs at all levels** — minors, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees — online and on campus.
- 2. Through our four research centers of excellence,** we're tackling critical issues with communities locally and globally and creating hands-on learning opportunities for students.
- 3. Perry Hystad is our new associate dean for research,** building on a solid foundation put in place by Marie Harvey, who successfully held the role for 14 years.
- 4. We have fiscal challenges ahead, but all units are working together to streamline efforts** while maintaining the highest quality programs possible.
- 5. We are re-envisioning our Health Extension programs** to meet the health and well-being needs of Oregonians after significant federal funding declines.

**THIS COLLEGE HAS A LOT TO BE PROUD OF,** and I'm honored to be part of a strong, collaborative team that thinks strategically and is committed to our mission. I look forward to an exciting future as we implement our strategic plan and work together toward achieving health and well-being for all.

Sincerely,

**Debbie Craig, PhD, AT-R**  
Dean, College of Health

# CONTENTS

## 4

### Collaborative Leadership

After a successful athletic training career and serving as dean at the University of Alaska, Dean **Debbie Craig** is ready to lead her team to success.

## 6

### Strategic Blueprint

A new strategic plan is guiding the college and keeping leadership focused on what matters: A commitment to learners, impactful research, and partnerships rooted in community.

## 7

### Curriculum Innovation

Faculty are coming together to reimagine the college's curriculum — including new courses, programs and options online and on campus.

## 8

### Groundbreaking Leadership in Athletic Training History

Many have heard the name, but few know the story. Get to know OSU's first athletic trainer and a force behind the AT academic program, **William "Ropes" Robertson**.

## 10

### Leading Edge Research

COH researchers are pursuing important, timely research on environmental impacts on health, health promotion and disease prevention, integrated health, health and well-being of children and youth, and AI's influence on health.

## 14

### Community Engagement

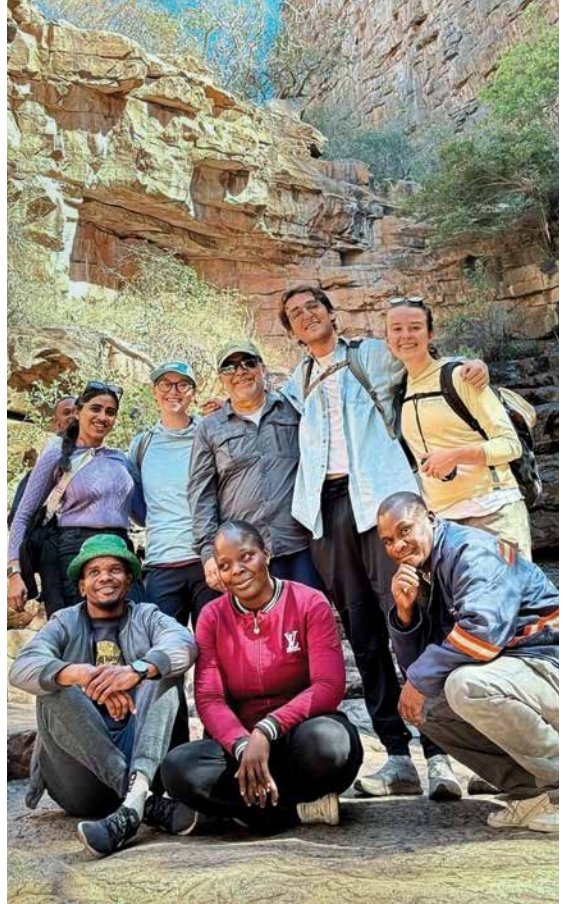
From mentoring to internships and other educational opportunities, students are using their heads and hearts to create meaningful, community-based experiences.

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### Magazine Contributors

Kathryn Stroppel, MA | writer, editor  
Michael Flordelis, BS '24 | photographer  
Mary Susan Weldon, PhD | designer

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Professor **Sunil Khanna** (top row, center) takes a minute to appreciate Botswana's beauty with students participating in the Botswana Global Health Initiative, supported by Bob and Sara Rothschild. The initiative works to develop sustainable solutions to health challenges facing families and communities in Botswana and globally. Sunil is director of the Center for Global Health.

| Learn more at [health.oregonstate.edu/gh/botswana](https://health.oregonstate.edu/gh/botswana).

## MISSION

Through integrated education, research and outreach, we advance scientific discovery and implementation of ideas to improve population health and prepare the next generation of globally minded public health and human sciences professionals. As part of a land grant university, we connect our science to the policies and practices in communities to increase people's quality of life and capacity to thrive.

## VISION

Lifelong health and well-being for every person, every family and every community in Oregon, the nation and world.



# NEW DEAN GETS A RUNNING START

## MEET DEAN DEBBIE CRAIG

BY KATHRYN STROPPEL

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“Be kind during challenging times and recognize that everyone’s doing their best.”

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**AS THE ELEVENTH PERSON TO BE NAMED DEAN OF THE COLLEGE SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1889, DEBBIE CRAIG, PHD, AT-R,** joins a long line, nine to be exact, of women holding the title.\*

From Margaret Comstock Snell and Ava Milam Clark to Kinsey Green and Tammy Bray, the list is impressive, and each left their mark.

Debbie hopes her own legacy will be to “right the ship.” Uniquely poised as the college’s first dean-slash-athletic-trainer, she has begun to tackle financial issues and improve efficiency using an approach that derives from her AT training: Diagnose a problem, break it down, and know your team and their skills.

“People not only have different learning styles, but also different intelligences,” she says. “It’s important to listen so that you get to know someone and how their brain organizes ideas, and how they see and work through problems. Doing so helps me be a better leader and support those I’m leading. The more varied the talent is in your team, the better your team.”

Like the women deans who came before her, and especially in the male-dominated field of athletic training, Debbie learned early on that confidence is key.

“Because I am a woman, self-confidence is imperative to be successful,” she says. “If not, I’d get eaten alive. I’ve needed to be strong from the get-go, and that has served me well.”

Throughout her career, she’s learned to appreciate the responsibility she has for others and the whole organization; thoroughly assess situations; be decisive and transparent; respect others and the culture; stay calm in difficult situations; create buy-in; be confident in the strength of her team; expect the unexpected; and most importantly, be kind.

In Alaska, Debbie became known for asking for kindness during challenging times and recognizing that everyone’s doing their best.

\*Does not include interim deans. For a full list of college deans, visit [beav.es/x37](http://beav.es/x37).

# A career committed to health and education

“So many people were appreciative of that, and being kind is one thing I hope people feel from me.”

In Debbie’s world, strength doesn’t equal force, actions speak louder than words, and respect is earned, including her own.

“Respect shouldn’t come from my title. It’s something you earn. I hope people feel that there is a sense of respect flowing in both directions in every conversation.”

## LOOK, LISTEN, FEEL

If you’ve ever been through CPR training, you know that when you first get to a scene you look, listen and feel to assess the situation.

“I’m kind of doing that right now,” Debbie says. “I’m on a really steep learning curve in terms of cultures and programs. It’s easy to come in and see the structure of the college you’re going to lead. It’s a different thing to understand the culture of each nuanced program.”

In addition, she’s focusing on efficiency, challenging historical ways of doing things, and working to implement the strategic plan and identify ways to measure its success.

“We have a great plan that’s been approved and published. And now the leadership team is rolling up its sleeves to get it organized in an actionable way. The plan is well thought out, and I think it’s really in lockstep with *Prosperity Widely Shared*, so I’m excited about that cohesion.”

Also making her job easier is the people who surround her, who make her optimistic for the future.

“The quality of the faculty and staff here is amazing, and our leadership team has been incredibly helpful in getting me oriented and engaged in some decision-making conversations. They’re really talented, and they bring different talents to the team, so I’m very excited. I think with this leadership team and the level of understanding of where our challenges are we’re getting off to a running start already with being able to make some positive changes.”

Change is one thing the college is well-versed in managing, and Debbie acknowledges that leadership and structural changes, in addition to financial challenges and curriculum and program changes, create a need for long-term stability.

“I really hope to be here in a calming, kind sense while helping the college get to a stable, fiscally sustainable, modern place. I think it’s completely doable, and I think we’ve got the right people to do it — people who are ready to do it. It’s hard to do, but I’m absolutely convinced we’ll get there.”

## EDUCATION

- **BS, Physical Education.** California State University, Chico, 1987
- **MS, Athletic Training.** University of Arizona, 1990
- **PhD, Higher Education Leadership.** Colorado State University, Fort Collins, 2002

## EXPERIENCE

**University of Alaska, Anchorage, 2022-2025**

- Dean, College of Health

**Northern Arizona University, 2003-2022**

- Assistant professor, athletic training; clinical coordinator; program director
- Associate dean of the College of Health and Human Services

**Colorado State University, 2001-2003**

- Adjunct professor

**Clinical Athletic Trainer, 1984-2001**

- NCAA college division 1, community college, high school

## RESEARCH

- Brain physiology of how we learn, knee injuries, concussions



## THE COLLEGE'S 2025-30 STRATEGIC PLAN, HEALTH + WELL-BEING FOR ALL,

means what it says and provides a roadmap to get there. Achieving health equity is threaded throughout every goal, action and tactic, whether its research, teaching or engaging in communities. Every person, every family and every community matters.

Although its name is broad and inclusive, the path toward achieving it is specific and meaningful.

“I can’t think of a better vision and theme for a strategic plan than *Health and Well-Being For All*,” says Dean Debbie Craig.

“What could be more important than working to ensure that all people on this planet are healthy and thriving?”

Read the complete plan at [beav.es/xUS](http://beav.es/xUS).

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## THREE GOALS

- 1 **Advance research and generate innovative discoveries to improve health and well-being for all.**
    - Environmental impacts on human health
    - Health promotion and disease prevention
    - Health and well-being of children and youth
  - 2 **Ensure that every student learns, thrives and graduates.**
  - 3 **Create collaborations with communities and government, education and industry to improve the health and well-being of their members and constituents.**
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## FOUR ACTIONS

- 1 **Build and cultivate research.**
    - Increase annual research expenditures to \$40 million.
  - 2 **Increase student enrollment** in undergraduate and graduate courses and programs.
    - Increase online-only enrollment by 200%.
    - Increase Corvallis enrollment by 8% per year.
  - 3 **Increase retention and graduation of all students.**
    - Increase first-year retention to 92%.
    - Increase six-year graduation rate to 80%.
    - Equalize six-year graduation rates of underrepresented minority groups, Pell recipients and first-generation students relative to students who are not.
  - 4 **Build and strengthen external partnerships** to increase research translation and educational opportunities.
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## BELIEVE IT! CAMPAIGN PRIORITIES

- 1 **Advance student success through scholarships and experiential learning funds.**
  - 2 **Expand advising and mentoring resources.**
  - 3 **Establish new endowed professorship and chair positions.**
  - 4 **Donate program funds to support college strategic plan priorities.**
  - 5 **Give to college research centers or give seed funding to help access research grants.**
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## Punk, horror and Taylor Swift?

COH Associate Professor **Sam Logan** teaches Honors College classes on punk, horror and Taylor Swift, examining themes of LGBTQ+ violence and AI through “zines,” a DIY, hands-on approach to co-created learning.

Sam says the zines represent each student’s individuality and counter some of the challenges presented by generative AI, which includes student engagement.

Learn more about Sam and his courses at [beav.es/xUk](https://beav.es/xUk).

# CURRICULUM INNOVATION

**SINCE 2023, THE INTERDISCIPLINARY, EIGHT-MEMBER “ELEVATION” TEAM** has been strategically refreshing and elevating the college’s curriculum and teaching. In an effort to increase enrollment and expose students to the college’s academic programs, the team explored compelling courses intended for the university’s new Core Education curriculum that launched this fall. The team continues to work to support and enhance teaching practices and student engagement across the college and university.

New and updated courses launched from this work include timely and relevant topics such as:

- Disease Detectives
- Unpacking Life Expectancy in the U.S.
- Professionalism and Leadership in Public Health
- Contemporary Families in the U.S.
- Emotional Well-Being: From Self to Society
- Pursue Your Career in Healthcare
- Power and Privilege in Sport
- Food and Culture
- Bridging the Gap: Science Communication and Health Literacy

In addition to exploring new courses and enhanced teaching practices, other changes include modernizing undergraduate programs, adding new academic programs, and leaning into online options. For instance, an advanced dietetics MS option soon will be offered via OSU Ecampus.

The following new degree and degree options are being offered for the first time in fall 2025:

- Online Healthcare Administration BS degree
- Online Human Services bachelor’s option
- Applied Behavioral Health master’s option

The team also plans to establish a more robust presence in the Honors College, with the goal of offering the necessary coursework for students to graduate with both Honors College and COH degrees.

“I am very proud of our programs. Faculty really leaned in to create meaningful, modern programs and courses for today’s students,” says **Laurel Kincl**, associate dean for academic and faculty affairs. “They’ve gotten creative as well as strategic to meet the needs of students and increase the university’s and college’s relevancy and stability.”

# “ROPES”

## OSU’s legendary athletic trainer

### WILLIAM ROBERTSON CO-LED CREATION OF AT’S ACADEMIC PROGRAM

BY KATHRYN STROPPEL



**IF YOU’RE A LONGTIME FOLLOWER OF BEAVER ATHLETICS**, there’s a good chance you’ve heard of someone called “Ropes.” You may even have seen his photo in Gill Coliseum. But just who is this Ropes, who has achieved an almost mythical status at OSU? How did he get that name? And what does he have to do with the College of Health?

William (Bill) “Ropes” Barr Robertson, 1915–1980, dedicated his 34-year career to athletic training at Oregon State. In addition to serving as OSU’s first athletic trainer, he was instrumental in creating the athletic training education program now housed in the COH. OSU graduate, BS ’80, and the newest inductee into the National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) Hall of Fame, **Katie Walsh Flanagan**, MS, EdD, LAT, ATC, remembers Ropes as being larger than life.

“He was a big, but very quiet man. When he spoke, people listened. He had a tremendous sense of humor. He was also very kind and championed behind the scenes. He taught by example, and nothing — I mean nothing — bothered him on the field or court. I learned to trust my training, that the patient athlete is to be protected, and that our job is to find a safe way for athletes to participate in sport.”

Bill loved the outdoors and first came to OSU as a forestry major in 1937, where he became known for his performances on KOAC Radio’s “Foresters in Action.”

His talent for performing would eventually become as renowned as his care. After he became OSU’s first and only athletic trainer, he was affectionately called “the poet laureate of the training room,” and his rendition of “Casey at the bat” is the stuff of legends.

**Robert Kersey**, BS ’81, the first OSU graduate to be inducted into the NATA Hall of Fame, met Ropes in 1975 as a freshman athletic training student and remembers this rendition on multiple occasions, especially people’s smiles as Ropes “painted a picture with his words.” He also remembers Ropes’s quiet, light-hearted humor, gentle way, and contagious kindness and empathy. “I was extremely fortunate to learn from a man with such a heart for others,” he says.

#### “ROPES” IS BORN

Before he began his long career at OSU, Ropes answered the call to duty, and he was later honored with a Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his service. From 1942–45, he served in the 10th Mountain Division and was known for his mountain climbing prowess and for wearing rope-soled shoes. While serving in Italy, he was given the moniker “Rope-Sole,” which was abbreviated to “Ropes” shortly after he joined OSU in 1946.

The nickname is credited to Bill’s war-buddy Gene Winters.

According to Ropes’s wife, Mary, Gene strolled



into Ropes’s office and said, “How are ya doing, Ropes?” She said the athletes in the room loved the name, and it was what Ropes went by until his death.

That fateful day happened during his 34th year as head athletic trainer, after he had blazed a trail in athletic training and served for many years as one of the few professional trainers in collegiate sports.

For his efforts, he was chosen to serve as the athletic trainer for the U.S. Track and Field Team that participated in the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 1964, and he went on the Oregon Universities Rugby Tour of England and Wales not long after. In 1967, he toured Southeast Asia with the Special Services branch of the Army to instruct soldiers in athletic training and preventive medicine. He also served as trainer for the state high school Shrine game in Portland for 18 years.

In 1968, he was inducted into the “Helms Foundation Hall of Fame” for athletic trainers, which is now the National Athletic Trainers’ Association Hall of Fame. He also continued mountain climbing, scaling Mt. Hood 25 times and visiting his beloved Mt. Rainier whenever he could.

In 1972, he and **Dick Irvin** created OSU’s academic athletic training program. This program was among the first 15 in the country to be approved by NATA, and Dick served as its inaugural director.

In 1980, Ropes had an “apparent heart attack” and died doing what he loved most — caring for athletes.

### REMEMBERING AN OSU ICON

Ropes’s memorial service was held at Gill Coliseum, and 400 people, including OSU alum **Dick Fosbury**, came from as far away as Hawaii to honor “one of Oregon State’s great human beings.” The governor declared the day “Bill Robertson Day.”

“He was just a guy you always thought of when you thought of Oregon State. He’d give you his opinion on what should or shouldn’t be done, and he’d give you a good boot in the pants if you needed that, too,” said former basketball standout **Mel Counts**.

Ropes’s son, Bill Robertson Jr., described growing up in a home that was never locked, and where a variety of people would drop by at any time.

“I can’t tell you what an incredible life it was,” he said. “There was so much love and so much warmth.”

*“Rope-Sole, what a trainer. Rope-Sole, what a friend. Rope-Sole, what a father. Rope-Sole, what a hell of a man.”*

Editor’s note: In an effort to preserve and honor Ropes’s memory and contributions, we dug into OSU’s archives and talked with Bill’s daughter, Nancy Kramer, who honors her father by serving as chair of the 10th Mountain Division Foundation. We’ve done our best to provide an honest account. For a more complete story on Ropes, with additional details, quotes and photos, visit [health.oregonstate.edu/ropes](http://health.oregonstate.edu/ropes).



Perry Hystad

# Innovation, solutions and impact

## SHAPING THE NEXT ERA OF RESEARCH IN THE COLLEGE OF HEALTH

BY KATHRYN STROPPEL

**HEALTH FOR ALL BEGINS WITH RESEARCH,** and research begins with curiosity — and questions. What impacts our health and well-being? How might we mitigate negative impacts? What do we understand, and what do we have yet to learn?

These research questions eventually lead to big ideas and big solutions that promote the public good, positively contribute to our economy, create reliable knowledge, help us make sense of our world and make better decisions, drive progress and personal development, verify facts, advance our society, improve the quality of our lives, and power innovation. It's also core to training future scientists, health providers and educators.

What research gets done, how it's done, and who pays for it also pose big questions. In response, a new picture of research is developing across the college, driven by multilayered and complex factors. On the one hand is new leadership, including a new dean and new associate dean for research, as well as a new college strategic plan. On the other hand are significant federal funding cuts to Medicaid, environmental protections,

grants, education and the college's Extension Family and Community Health program. The loss of \$9.5 million from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program education (SNAP-Ed) is about three quarters of FCH's annual operating budget.

Layer on growing societal needs, such as tackling climate-related impacts, and this plethora of change and challenges demands that leaders sharpen their focus to create a strategic, diversified approach that prioritizes translating research into real-world impact.

"We've been doing this work, but now we need to accelerate, be more purposeful and make sure our science benefits

those in greatest need," says Professor **Perry Hystad**, who began his role as associate dean for research in September 2025. **Marie Harvey**, OSU Distinguished Professor of Public Health, most recently held that position and has been honored with the 2025 Discovery Award from the Medical Research Foundation.

Perry brings a distinguished record of interdisciplinary research to the role, paired with extensive leadership experience. With over \$23 million in research funding and more than

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**"Our research has never  
been more vital."**

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– Perry Hystad



Marie Harvey

Molly Kile

Matt Boziger

Jessica Gorman

160 peer-reviewed publications, his research strengthens the college's and university's strategic research priorities, particularly climate science and environmental impacts on human health. He also has built strong partnerships with global and local agencies to translate science into meaningful policy and health outcomes.

He frames his vision for college research in three words: Innovation, solutions and impact.

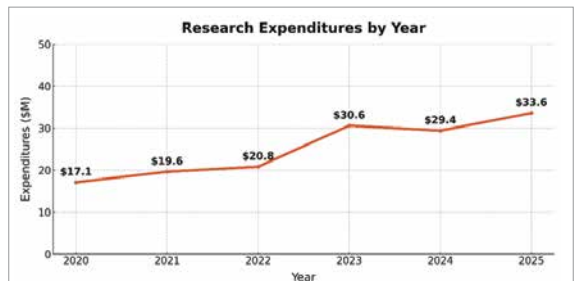
- **INNOVATION:** Expanding interdisciplinary research and embracing data science, AI, and novel methodologies to tackle pressing health challenges.
- **SOLUTIONS:** Ensuring discoveries lead to evidence-based interventions, policies and practices that improve lives.
- **IMPACT:** Accelerating translation so that individuals, families and communities, particularly those most in need, directly benefit from college research.

“This is an extremely important time for research in our college,” Perry says. “Our research has never been more vital — whether we’re addressing health inequities in Oregon, preparing for climate-related challenges, or harnessing new technologies to improve health. Over the next decade, we need to be more intentional, integrated and impactful.”

*Following is a Q&A with Perry on research goals, how college research complements the university's strategic plan, Prosperity Widely Shared, and more.*

### HOW WILL THE COLLEGE REACH ITS \$40 MILLION GOAL FOR RESEARCH EXPENDITURES BY 2030?

Research expenditures last year totaled \$33.6 million, though the loss of several federal contracts and grants will create a large, short-term dip.



#### Annual research awards

The COH received 75 new awards in FY 2025 and racked up \$33.6 million in research expenditures, placing it fourth among OSU's colleges in research dollars.

Currently, about 58% of our funding comes from federal sources, so reaching \$40 million by 2030 will require us to diversify. To do this, we will expand engagement with foundations, philanthropic partners and industry, in addition to sustaining our strong federal portfolio. The

college's diverse research strengths are attractive to these funding sources and deliver a clear return on investment: Healthier individuals, children, families and communities. This goal is ambitious but achievable.

### HOW DOES THE COLLEGE HELP ADVANCE THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH GOALS?

Our multidisciplinary research contributes to the university's goal of building international research distinction in areas of competitive advantage, particularly climate science and related solutions, and integrated health and biotechnology.

Integrated health is about seeing health not in silos, but as the product of the complex interactions of biology, behavior, environment and community. The college is uniquely positioned to lead and anchor OSU's research in this area.

Our faculty already exemplify this approach. Across human development and family sciences, nutrition, kinesiology, and public health, we span the full continuum — from molecular and nutritional sciences to human behavior and movement, and from epidemiology and AI to OSU Extension partnerships and policy translation. This breadth allows us to generate new discoveries and ensure they are implemented in ways that reduce disparities and improve health for people throughout Oregon and beyond.

### WHAT MAKES COLLEGE OF HEALTH RESEARCH SPECIAL AT OREGON STATE?

What sets our research apart is its direct connection to people's lives. Whether it's studying how wildfire smoke affects asthma, how nutrition can help prevent chronic disease, or how social policies shape family well-being, our discoveries can improve health and well-being for all people.

The college also houses four centers that fuel its strategic research engine. We're looking forward to celebrating the 15-year anniversaries of the Hallie E. Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families and the Moore Family Center for Whole Grain Foods, Nutrition and Preventive Health in 2026. The Center for

Healthy Aging Research celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2025, and the Center for Global Health celebrated 10 years in 2024.

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS AI IS BEING USED IN HEALTH RESEARCH?

Artificial intelligence is an area we must embrace to increase our research productivity and ensure that we train the next generation of scientists. In the college, faculty and students are already using AI to model environmental exposures such as noise, air pollution and greenspace; analyze social media to track health misinformation and its spread; and mine large health datasets to uncover new patterns and opportunities for prevention. With the new Huang Collaborative Innovation Complex supercomputer, we have a powerful resource that will allow us to scale these efforts for even greater impact.

Importantly, the fields of AI and data science are evolving at an extraordinary pace. Our priority is to equip faculty and students with the skills to harness these tools, effectively and responsibly, while positioning the college as a leader in applying AI to advance health and well-being.

### DESCRIBE THE CURRENT RESEARCH LANDSCAPE AND WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

Even with significant funding uncertainty at the federal level, the research community is coming together to form new collaborations, share resources and find creative ways to keep research moving forward. I'm also encouraged by the foundations, donors and industry partners who are stepping up to support our work.

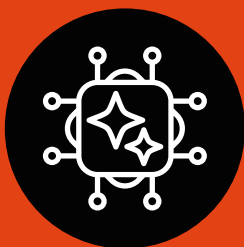
At OSU, we're fortunate to be at a world-class public research university where research is central to our mission. This provides protected time and space for faculty to pursue consequential science. These commitments matter now more than ever. They allow faculty to keep asking hard questions, mentor students and solve pressing problems even when external funding isn't available.

| Follow our research on Bluesky 

# RESEARCH DRIVEN BY HEALTH + WELL-BEING FOR ALL AND PROSPERITY WIDELY SHARED

One of the college's goals in its strategic plan, *Health + Well-Being for All*, is to generate innovative discoveries primarily driven by three strategic areas of expertise: Environmental impacts on human health, health promotion and disease prevention, and health and well-being of children and youth. Below are examples of each.

1



**Environmental impacts on human health:** Predicting noise levels using AI

Assistant Professor

**Matthew Bozigar** collaborated with students to study the health impacts of urban noise in Portland to inform public health policies and strategies. By designing a new deep learning model, they are able to predict noise levels throughout the city.

2



**Health promotion and disease prevention:** Designing inclusive cancer care

Led by Associate Professor **Jessica Gorman**, COH researchers are partnering with younger adults, LGBTQ+ people and rural residents to improve cancer care and support. By listening to lived experiences and building trust, the team designs inclusive programs that address real-life barriers and help survivors heal and thrive after treatment.

3



**Health and well-being of children and youth:** Protecting children from harmful exposures

Professors **Molly Kile** and **Megan McClelland** lead the ASPIRE Center, a children's environmental health center that works to reduce harmful environmental exposures impacting children and translate key health research findings to relevant stakeholders.

Learn more at [health.oregonstate.edu/aspire](https://health.oregonstate.edu/aspire)



# Students tackle issues big and small to improve community health and well-being

BY KATHRYN STROPPEL

**COLLEGE OF HEALTH STUDENTS ARE STRONGLY COMMITTED** to the health and well-being of their communities, and through internships, research, volunteering and more, they use their heads and hearts not only to learn but also to contribute to the greater good.

These experiences help students engage with the community and learn about potential careers, as well as critically think about issues impacting health and well-being. Past projects have included supporting a soccer tournament and family weekend, including health screenings and service connections to the Latino community; and regional health assessments and improvement planning through the Benton County Health Department.

Other community-based projects include examining partnerships between local public health authorities and matched county jails, developing and evaluating a Lunch and Learn Series for community-based organizations, and conducting analyses on heat-related emergency department visits and hospitalizations through the Oregon Health Authority.

Students also volunteer within their local community. Members of the HDFS club often support Corvallis's Vina Moses, whose mission is to help people navigate difficult times while

building community resilience and overall well-being. The Healthy Aging Club recently raised money so that Samaritan Village, a housing community for lower-income adults 62+, could purchase an accessible van.

OSU-Cascades and Honors College student **Margaret Martin** gained community experience through research on the intersection of homelessness and public health. Pre-therapy and allied health student **Abigail Roth** taught a human anatomy and physiology lab course as an intern in the OSU Cadaver Lab.

In July, as part of a two-credit course, high-achieving undergraduates got hands-on policy experience by visiting the Oregon Legislature, attending meetings with elected officials and participating in advocacy training.

“I think we have a responsibility as a university and as faculty to train students to think critically about the issues of the day,” says Associate Professor **David Rothwell**, the Knudson Endowed Chair in Family Policy. “I want more students in other schools and colleges to see that whatever field you’re studying, there’s a policy connected to it, whether that’s AI and technology, microplastics or marine offshore energy. We all have a role to play in making society a better place.”

# When young and old come together, they spark *magic*

## MULTIGENERATIONAL INTERNSHIP PROJECT BUILDS BRIDGES, CREATES JOY

BY KATHRYN STROPPEL

**HDFS UNDERGRADUATE AND FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT CINDY NGUYEN, '25**, was challenged to create a community project to complete her human services internship. As an intern at the Corvallis Caring Place, supporting older adults with daily living activities and promoting their independence, a couple of things became clear: Many residents didn't have a lot of visitors, and they enjoyed spending time with kids.

An idea was born. Cindy decided to bring residents together with preschool students at OSU's Child Development Center to create a memorable moment for residents and children alike, grow a stronger sense of connection between the generations, and help each learn and share life experiences.

In May 2025, she did just that with the help of the Corvallis Caring Place's Crystal Well, human services internship coordinator **Tasha Randall**, and OSU Child Development Center Director **Kathleen McDonnell**.

"I think Cindy's event highlights one of the really valuable aspects of an internship, which is that students can get hands-on experience planning and organizing events that enhance the well-being of the clients served at their internship site," Tasha says. "This sort of real-world experience is valuable for helping students prepare for their future careers. It also allows them to contribute



in meaningful ways to local agencies and their clients, which is something that students who are interested in human service careers find especially rewarding."

Cindy — who along with the children brought flowers to residents, made friendship bracelets, sang songs and played with balloons — says the experience exceeded her expectations.

"It went so, so well, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity," says Cindy, who graduated in 2025 with a degree in Human Development and Family Sciences with a human services option, a medical humanities certificate, and minors in psychology and music performance.

"It was amazing to see residents feel so joyful," she says. "I am so happy the event was a huge success, and I hope that it will become a yearly tradition."

Cindy has been accepted to graduate school, and her career goal is to become a medical social worker.

"I've always been interested in advocating for justice for patients in having rights to their own healthcare needs, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. This career would allow me to make a direct impact on the patient not only for their medical needs, but also their social, emotional and psychological well-being."

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## It's nearly time to break out the party hats! **BIG ANNIVERSARIES** to celebrate next year!

Two of our four research centers are turning 15 in 2026: the **Hallie E. Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families** and the **Moore Family Center for Whole Grain Foods, Nutrition and Preventive Health**.

The **OSU Child Development Center**, which helps children get the best start in life, will be celebrating a major milestone — 100 years of research, training and service on OSU's Corvallis campus!

*Celebrations are being planned and will be announced in the new year.*



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