performance
COLLEGE of HEALTH & HUMAN PERFORMANCE | 2019–2020

for the gator good
advancing how we LIVE, WORK, and PLAY

UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
Performance Magazine is also available online at: HHP.UFL.EDU
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COVER: Devon Nash (right), an athletic training graduate student, works with Lowell Brito, a junior majoring in dance, during a dance wellness clinic — a collaboration between HHP’s Athletic Training Program and the School of Theatre and Dance in the College of the Arts.

INSIDE COVER: Local elementary school students visit the Florida Gym for National Biomechanics Day, held annually in April. In conjunction with the Wertheim College of Engineering, UF students and faculty rotate the budding scientists through stations focused on fluid mechanics, computer modeling and balance.

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For nearly 75 years, our college has been grounded in a commitment to serve the greater good. While our college’s name has changed over the years, our roots have stayed the same. HHP provides nationally and internationally recognized education and research programs. HHP focuses on helping people protect, maintain and improve their health, fitness and quality of life. We are committed to winning the battle against addiction, improving life for those suffering from neurological, cardiovascular and muscular diseases, and spanning cultural divides through tourism and sport. HHP remains dedicated to advancing the way that we live, work, and play.

Our departments are made up of faculty who support an increasing on-campus and online student enrollment. We now count a total of 78 faculty among our ranks. We have grown to nine disciplines housed in four departments with Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management and Sport Management becoming independent departments this year. Above all, we rely on the support and dedication of our more than 20,000 alumni to maintain this momentum.

In this issue of Performance, we focus on the greater good — sharing stories about path-breaking research, amazing students, outstanding faculty and alumni.

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Michael Reid
Dean
New faculty and staff join HHP
This year, HHP welcomed 24 new faculty and staff to HHP. In total, HHP brought on 10 new faculty, five in applied physiology and kinesiology (APK), two in health education and behavior (HEB), and two in tourism, hospitality and event management (THEM).

NEW FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS:
• Julia Choi, Ph.D., Assistant Professor APK; Prior to HHP: University of Massachusetts Amherst
• Anna Gardner, Ph.D., Lecturer APK; Prior to HHP: UF College of Medicine
• Benjamin Gordon, Ph.D., Lecturer APK; Prior to HHP: Radford University (VA)
• Ronald Gromoll, Visiting Lecturer THEM; Prior to HHP: Numerous positions in tourism and hospitality
• Ashlee Hoffman-Ossiboff, Ph.D., Professor and Chair HEB; Prior to HHP: UF College of Medicine
• Annamarie Sisson, Lecturer THEM; Prior to HHP: Kansas State University
• Ashley Smuder, Ph.D., Assistant Professor APK; Prior to HHP: University of South Carolina
• Shahab Vahdat, Ph.D., Assistant Professor APK; Prior to HHP: Stanford University

It’s Great to Be a Florida Gator! This fall, UF became #7 in U.S. News & World Report public university rankings. For the third consecutive year, UF appears in the top-10 rankings of national public universities. UF’s quest to become a top-10 public research institution officially began in 2013 with the state’s support to achieve top status. Since then, UF has hired additional faculty to lower class size and improve the student-faculty ratio. This summer, UF reported that the College of Medicine has successfully hired 24 new faculty members who have the expertise to positively promote and advance the athletic training profession.

Congratulations to Chuck Fessler Jr., pictured right, who recently joined the Department of Applied Physiology and Kinesiology, is a full-time professor. This program develops outstanding clinical professionals who have the expertise to positively promote and advance the athletic training profession.

New Online Programs Launch
The newly formed Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management (THEM) recently launched the Master of Science in Tourism and Recreation Management with a specialization in hospitality business management online. In addition, the Master of Science in Applied Physiology and Kinesiology online program launched in the spring. All four departments in HHP now have online master’s degree offerings in addition to their residential master’s programs, increasing the reach and depth of The Gator Nation. Next fall, THEM begins an online bachelor’s degree in tourism.

New Doctor of Athletic Training (DAT) program now enrolling
The program, housed in the Department of Applied Physiology and Kinesiology, is the first fully residential DAT in the U.S. The program develops outstanding clinical professionals who have the expertise to positively promote and advance the athletic training profession.

Congratulations to students Afefil Felice and Emily Wong, who recently joined the College of Journalism & Communications. HHP co-hosted its fifth annual UF Campaign for Charities Paper Airplane Contest judged by “Head Ball Coach” Steve Spurrier, pictured right. The annual giving campaign raises money for charitable organizations serving Alachua County. Awards provided by generous alumni and community members were given for airplanes deemed most creative and those thrown the farthest. The winners for the most creative plane, co-designed by HHP students Joon Lee and Emily Wong, participated in an international study at 17 MRI centers in the U.S., Austria and Germany, a research team led by David Vallancourt, Ph.D. At the conference, a paper was presented on an innovative method of analyzing differences in brain activity during sports.

HHP Gators Give
In recognition of their outstanding contributions to sports medicine and the exercise sciences, recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in the physiology and biochemistry of exercise, Dr. Powers has published more than 250 research articles, books and book chapters, and his work has been cited roughly 30,000 times.

Chris J. Hass, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Applied Physiology and Kinesiology, was appointed a fellow of the American Society of Biomechanics. He is one of two fellows nominated for the 2019 cohort and is recognized for his professional achievement, leadership and service as a top member of the ASB.

Celebrating International Educators and Scholars
HHP and UF celebrated its global presence during “International Educators Week.” Yong Jae Ko, Ph.D., SPM professor, received a senior faculty award. Joon Sung Lee, Ph.D., SPM assistant professor, received a junior faculty award. Additionally, Jessica Pascoe, HEB senior, received the Diane Fisher Award, and Mal Jasin Kok, APK doctoral student, received the Research Abroad Doctoral Student Award.

Congratulations to Scott Powers, Ph.D., for receiving the 2019 American College of Sports Medicine Honor Award. This award recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to sports medicine and the exercise sciences. Recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in the physiology and biochemistry of exercise, Dr. Powers has published more than 250 research articles, books and book chapters, and his work has been cited roughly 30,000 times.

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We Are Family — Continuing a tradition that started in 2006, HHP celebrated its 13th annual potluck-style Thanksgiving luncheon and food drive. The event, organized by Tracey Phillips, director of finance, and Allison Jabe Novak, accounting specialist, brought in 1,118 food donations to the UF Field & Fork Food Pantry. Faculty, staff and students enjoyed a smorgasbord of food, played games and awarded prizes to the best desserts.

Welcome to the Grand Guard
Myra Combs Kohler and Robert Krause (pictured right) returned to campus following their graduation in 1969! Each fall, UF and HHP celebrates the 50th anniversary of graduates by inducting them into the UF Grand Guard.

Neo Gebru, a Ph.D. student in health behavior, chaired the third annual Diversity Graduate Research Symposium with the goal of showcasing the outstanding quality and diversity of graduate-level research at UF. The UF Black Graduate Student Organization and HHP co-sponsored the campus-wide event which included poster presentations and speakers.

New Mowery Awards Support Innovative Research
Thanks to the generosity of Art Mowery, BSESS ’91 DMD ’96, and Kim Mowery, BSESS ’96 DMD ’01, four interdisciplinary research projects were awarded funding. The inaugural gift enabled faculty to collect critical pilot data for competitive research proposals that generate extramural funding for the college, and more importantly, support advances in research that lead to significant discoveries in human wellness. Award recipients included Meredith Berry, Ph.D., and Danielle Jake-Schiffman, Ph.D., for their study on the use of aerobic exercise to combat the opioid epidemic; Elisabeth Barton, Ph.D. and Whitney Stoppel, Ph.D., for their research on re-engineered growth factor forms; Leonardo Ferreira, Ph.D., for his research into the treatment of skeletal muscle dysfunction; and exercise intolerance in heart failure; and Terence Ryan, Ph.D., for his study of the mechanisms of muscle dysfunction in chronic kidney disease. The Mowery Awards for Innovative Research allow scientists to take risks in new areas that lead to new discoveries.

Alumni Author — Jim Mackie, BSPE ’74, recently wrote and published, “Just Another Smelly Foot - The History of Athletic Training and Gatorland at the University of Florida.” The book, available on Amazon, features a history of athletic training and sports medicine at UF, including Dr. Robert Cade’s memoirs related to the invention of Gatorade. Proceeds from the book support Gator Athletics alumni.

Congratulations to Nicolas Applýrs JP, HSE ’05, of Miramar, FL for earning the Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from PCOM (Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine) Georgia. He will continue his training in an internship rotation at Larkin Community Hospital Palm Springs in Hialeah, FL.

HHP Scholarship Convocation recognized more than 100 scholarship recipients. Many thanks to our outstanding students and donors for their scholarship and support. This was the second year in a row the college has been able to provide more than 100 awards to deserving students.

Congratulations to Holly Moses, Ph.D., lecturer and internship coordinator in health education and behavior, who was a winner at the UF Career Influencer Awards hosted by the Career Connections Center. HHP was also represented by Doug DeMichele, Ed.D., master lecturer, internship and undergraduate coordinator in sport management and Craig Schmitt, Ph.D., director of engaged learning and outreach in tourism, hospitality and event management, both of whom earned nominations.

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H HP is always looking for good news to share about our alumni, faculty, staff and students in future editions and on social media. Submit your news at HHP.UF EDU/COMMUNICATIONS

Contact Danielle Alichea Brown for more info: (352) 294-1624 | dalicea@ufl.edu
For many Americans, obesity is a life-long struggle. According to the National Institutes of Health, more than one-third of all Americans suffer from obesity, and another one-third are overweight. To fight this crisis, the American Heart Association and the United States Preventive Services Task Force recommend that adults with obesity join behavioral weight-loss treatments.

Unfortunately, even with these recommendations, adult obesity rates continue to rise in the United States. Although they are widely available, any sort of weight-loss intervention is being tried by only 10 percent of Americans. But researchers at the College of Health & Human Performance have experimented with a tool that could help break down treatment barriers and steer individuals toward a healthy weight.

Key components of the tool included food, exercise and program suggestions to encourage participants to enroll with one of the offered treatments. According to McVay, certain barriers to weight loss can prevent individuals from normally seeking out weight-loss programs. Not knowing how to cook, a lack of money or even food cravings can discourage patients from initiating treatments.

“Participants found our tool to be a source of motivation,” McVay said. “By personalizing the intervention, we allowed them to work through these pros and cons to reach their own decision on if they should enroll.”

Patients rated the tool as easy to use and informative, McVay said. Not only did the majority of participants who used the intervention continue to complete a follow-up assessment, but it also convinced patients to seek out their program options. According to McVay, weight-loss treatment was initiated by nearly two-thirds of participants who used the mobilization tool. If used in addition to regular visits to a health care provider, the intervention shows huge potential as a new, cost-effective way to approach weight loss.

“Our aim was to help others see the value in programs they could select to reach their weight loss goals,” McVay said. “People often don’t understand the benefits of weight-loss tools. With this approach, we may soon see an increase in both treatment initiation and weight loss from patients themselves.”

Like most research projects, McVay and her team’s research into weight-loss interventions is just beginning. Continued investigation could lead to a revolution in how physicians address the obesity crisis nationwide.
"If you can visualize it, we can make it better." This is what associate professor of applied physiology and kinesiology Stephen Coombes, Ph.D., hopes that his research into movement pain will eventually be able to accomplish.

According to Dr. Coombes, pain typically develops as a way to protect the body from injury. Most pain goes away after an injury heals, but chronic pain develops when the body’s response to an injury lasts much longer than it should.

Chronic pain plagues over 100 million Americans, nearly half of the nation’s population. This pain is often very difficult to treat and can lead to depression and other negative mental health outcomes.

"Normally, pain tells us to do protective actions for our bodies, like temporarily resting," Coombes said. "With chronic pain, our body is telling us to do something that may not be logical, like not getting out of bed for weeks or months."

Coombes became interested in pain research during his undergraduate studies and was always interested in how various factors contribute to pain when we move. During the course of his career, he became curious if there was a way that health care providers could learn more about the pain that their patients feel.

"As of now, there isn’t really a way to verify if something hurts," Coombes said. "The only way to know if someone feels pain is to ask them directly."

Doctors currently take this approach when dealing with patients, he said. But Coombes and his team are working in their lab to determine how changes in the brain could help health care providers visualize pain during movement.

The lab is attempting to use brain biomarkers as a way to visualize chronic pain. According to Coombes, measuring the brain’s responses during movement-triggered chronic pain could provide a biological indicator, evidence that a patient’s pain exists.

"We know this pain is real, we just don’t have evidence of it from a biological basis," Coombes said. "Either the pain is coming from somewhere else, or we don’t have the right ‘camera’ to capture it."

According to Coombes, previous clinical trials that used this stimulation showed potential to ease chronic back pain, but it remains unclear why this treatment is effective.

"We’re not sure why it works at the moment," said Coombes. "But the interactions of this treatment’s signals with the brain may help us explain where this pain comes from in the first place."

Coombes and his team believe that further research could speed the development of treatment options that could not only help patients express what they are feeling, but also ease their pain.

"You can’t move without a brain," Coombes said. "If we can find a way to put the brain and how we move together, we might be able to shine a light on this phenomenon."
Lori Pennington-Gray, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management, worked with a team of researchers to discover if travelers take preventative actions to reduce their likelihood of "risk." According to Dr. Pennington-Gray, "risk" includes food-borne illnesses or norovirus, and any other unexpected accidents which can impact the travel experience. "It’s often things we are not expecting and typically do not plan for," she said.

In two separate experiments, Pennington-Gray and her team of researchers tested cruise line customers’ responses to crisis communication messages and travel behaviors used to protect individuals abroad from "risk." "When people go abroad, they may have heightened concerns for specific risks. These heightened concerns typically come from increased media exposure or feedback received from sources such as family, friends, social media influencers or other sources," said Pennington-Gray. “We wanted to examine if certain attributes increased their likelihood to avoid these situations.”

In a risk perception study, the team constructed a model which determined the likelihood that travelers would adopt recommended protective behaviors to help prevent norovirus infections. Based on an online panel of 240 American frequent travelers, respondents were given web-based surveys and asked for the likelihood that they would adopt protective behaviors. Participants were asked about their knowledge of the virus and then randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups. Once assigned, they were exposed to different scenarios of norovirus infections on cruise ships in order to determine the different levels of risk associated with each.

Each group received a crisis statement to simulate how a cruise line would attempt to manage the situation. "Passengers" who had greater levels of risk perception were more likely to engage in protective behaviors against norovirus, especially in scenarios where the cruise line communicated the instructions clearly. Despite their high levels of risk perception, these individuals were also the most likely to take a cruise.

According to Pennington-Gray, this group was the most likely to seek information which would help to keep themselves safe. Although this relationship may appear to be common knowledge, these risk management strategies are not frequently used among tourists.

“Between 12 to 34 percent of the population use these protective behaviors such as washing hands regularly and using sanitizer,” Pennington-Gray said. “That’s far lower than the average person might expect, and it really shows where ground needs to be gained.”

In her team’s second study, a selection of people who had experience with foodborne illness were surveyed. A total of 2,113 food travelers who vacationed outside the United States were given questions which evaluated their concerns about food safety. Her team found that individuals who had already been exposed to food illness situations were more likely to behave cautiously when they traveled. Surprisingly, these “passengers” did not choose to skip out on cruises. Instead, they often engaged in “risk-averse” behavior such as increasing attention to their food choices, avoiding particularly “risk” foods or requesting well prepared meats.

“Risk-averse” behavior is when we choose to take steps to protect ourselves before and during travel. Pennington-Gray said. “This includes reading about food safety before cruising, avoiding fresh fruit on deck and drinking water from a non-tap source.”

According to Pennington-Gray, even knowing someone close to you who experienced these symptoms can have an influence. Having a close friend or colleague who has fallen ill can predict whether someone sought out “risk-averse” behaviors.

The team’s research into cruise ship crisis communication revealed that travelers are generally concerned with their own safety but don’t always take the necessary steps to be protected against potential threats. However, researchers hope that increasing available information will motivate passengers to take matters into their own hands.

“The main takeaway from this research is that we can take responsibility for our own safety,” Pennington-Gray said. “There are a number of messages which are not tourism specific which have been developed for the general population. Being aware of these messages may help us keep our peace of mind during our vacation.”

TIPS FOR AVOIDING RISK ON A CRUISE

Avoid fresh fruits, particularly those which are not peeled

Be aware of travel safety alerts prior to departure

Don’t order undercooked meats

Drink water from a non-tap source

Use hand sanitizer generously + wash hands regularly

ON AN EVEN KEEL

by KYLE CHAMBERS

studying the impact of risk perception and crisis communication on travel behavior
As a cancer survivor and a witness to the struggles of others his age, HHP student Francisco Marchi was moved to tell the stories of young, palliative-care patients — to honor and highlight what matters most to them and their loved ones. His nonprofit foundation creates short films where the patient can be at the center of their own heroic tale.

Francisco Marchi was just 19-years-old when he was diagnosed with diffuse large B-cell lymphoma in 2015. After a long and grueling treatment period facing the most common type of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, the senior APK major emerged victorious in his battle with blood cancer.

“That whole process was what sparked my curiosity,” Marchi said. “I knew immediately that I wanted to get into medical research; I wanted to learn more about what made me sick.”

After entering remission, Marchi traveled to Boston where he began studying the very same disease that had left him bedridden for over a year. He became a research fellow at Harvard Medical School, fulfilling his lifelong goal to become a medical researcher before finishing his undergraduate studies. But his desire to work in a lab began to fade after having another close encounter with cancer, this time from a much different perspective.

In 2018, Marchi observed his most memorable patient in a clinical setting: his mirror image in age who was battling a similarly aggressive blood cancer. He was introduced to Megan Kardatzke while studying the same disease that she was diagnosed with.

“I still remember her like it was yesterday,” Marchi said. “There was certain energy about her, she could captivate an entire room.”

A talented model, frequent gamer and aspiring anesthesiologist, Kardatzke battled acute myeloid leukemia (AML) at just 22-years-old.
The Jacksonville native was nearing the end of her battle with AML when Marchi had the idea to do the unthinkable, he picked up a camera.

“After going through the motions with research, I knew it wasn’t for me. I wanted to be involved in something that would take me closer to patients,” Marchi said. “That’s when I knew that telling their stories on camera, making sure that they would never be forgotten, that would be the best thing that I could do.”

Marchi had no prior experience with photography, but he followed instructional YouTube videos to learn how to shoot photos, edit video and capture Kardatzke’s experience with AML treatment. Following the insistence of Kardatzke’s mother and Kardatzke herself, Marchi captured her final days.

“When I first saw her near the end of her life, I told myself that maybe filming her wasn’t the way to go based on her appearance, even if she was willing to tell her story,” said Marchi. “But after I talked with her mom and saw how much that this project meant to her, I realized that what something as simple as a video could do.”

Her smile. Her laugh. Her unique energy and spirit. These were all memorialized on film for her close family to enjoy. While Kardatzke did lose her battle with cancer, Marchi said that her inspiring story motivated him to expand his project into something more.

“I still think about her everyday,” said Marchi. “After shooting her video, I knew that this is where I needed to be.”

Kardatzke’s video story marked the birth of Marchi’s personal filmmaking project and foundation, Heroes of Medicine (HOM). Since 2019, Marchi has recorded 10 patient videos, four from Massachusetts General Hospital and six from UF Health Shands. Five of his patient videos, in addition to four contemporary medical topic discussions with health care physicians, can be found on the foundation’s website (heroesofmedicine.org).

Named for the tremendous courage and resilience displayed by its participants, HOM is an effort made entirely for pediatric patients, not the public. Most patients are eager to participate once they learn about the opportunity, he said.

“The entire experience is for them. Speaking from experience, once you’re in a hospital ward, you often feel alone, forgotten,” Marchi said. “You get to feel like a movie star for a few hours, it’s a distraction that feels really meaningful.”

Marchi’s videos are entirely patient directed. Patients request that Marchi record a variety of subjects including family time, laughter and sometimes a personal interview discussing their experience with the disease that put them in the hospital.

According to Marchi, he chooses to interview teens and kids because of their shared connection. He enjoys filming “those who didn’t have a life yet” because they remind him of the resilience and bravery he saw from fellow patients during his own treatment.

Once their video is completed, patients are given the option to have their video remain private for family only or release it to the public. Marchi said the sense of meaning and fulfillment provided by the videos motivates many patients to share their film with the public.

“This environment being a sad one is a misconception, it’s a meaningful one,” said Marchi. “When patients watch their video after being filmed, they’re not seeing their disease. They’re seeing themselves as an actor in their own personal movie. It’s a powerful transformation.”

Marchi runs HOM alone, performing all camera work and patient interviews himself. The project partners with volunteers from UF’s Streetlight program to identify patients who would be willing to share their stories.

Unlike other hospital video projects, Marchi does not film patients as a stranger. Instead, he builds a relationship with his interview subjects before asking if they would be willing to be on camera.

“I love being able to learn more about patients and finding out what makes them ‘them,’” Marchi said. “Really connecting and starting a friendship helps you understand more about their experience, even before you get behind the camera.”

This past summer, Marchi secured 501(c)(3) status for Heroes of Medicine, making the project its own official nonprofit foundation. Today, HOM operates as a third-party entity within Shands Hospital, meeting guidelines for ethical filming set by the hospital under HIPAA.

At UF following a successful transfer from Santa Fe College, Marchi plans to balance HOM with his coursework and aims to release a new video every month.

Keeping in line with his love for direct patient interaction, Marchi plans to launch the College of Journalism and Communications’ first doctoral program in science communication next fall. His long-term goal is to pursue HOM full-time after finding a steady source of donations for the foundation.

But the exercise science senior hopes that as his foundation expands, it will be able to help others learn and grow from featured experiences.

“I hope that they reflect – reflect on the strength and sacrifice shown by these amazing people,” Marchi said. “These videos are a look not only into the human condition, but a look into the soul of a hero.”
Known worldwide as a clutch performer in the men’s triple jump, Christian Taylor, two-time Olympic gold medalist and four-time World Champion, will soon add a Bachelor of Science degree in the online sport management program to his long list of accomplishments.

“I think completing this [sport management] degree is one of the proudest moments in my life and will be a large contributing factor to the success of my career moving forward.”

Taylor originally started out in the on-campus sport management program, but as his professional career took off, he found it difficult to continue. “The online program was the only way I could get my degree. This avenue enabled me to reach my lifelong dream. With all of the traveling I do to compete, I used to have to factor in the time difference when completing assignments, taking a test or meeting with groups to work on projects,” said Taylor.

“I think completing this [sport management] degree is one of the proudest moments in my life and will be a large contributing factor to the success of my career moving forward,” reflected Taylor.

Taylor grew up with a passion for all sports and eventually found his niche in track and field. “There is definitely an athletic spirit in my family. My dad was a tennis player, my sister was a track and field athlete at the University of Kentucky, and my cousin played football at Arizona State,” said Taylor.

Recruited back in 2008 by the UF Track and Field team, Taylor quickly established himself as one of the nation’s best triple jumpers. When asked what drew him to UF, Taylor answered, “I believe Gainesville is a unique city, it has a special energy that brings you in and makes you feel like family. I also came to school at a very exciting time—the basketball and football team had both won national titles, and the city was buzzing with excitement.”

With his trademark focus, Taylor had his eyes set on Doha 2019 in the fall where he won his fourth World Championship. He hopes to go on to compete in the Tokyo Summer Olympics. “God willing, I will make the team for the 2020 Olympics. The U.S. team is extremely tough, and I will never make the assumption that the spot is mine. I have to go out there and fight for it. If I am able to make the team, my focus will be on setting the world record, setting the Olympic record, and bringing home the gold medal. I genuinely believe I am capable of completing the task, but only time will tell.”

When Taylor isn’t competing, he is reaching out to kids via the Classroom Champions program, which is co-founded by another HHP Gator great, Steve Mesler (Bobsled Olympic gold medal winner). The mentorship program connects athletes with thousands of underserved kids across the U.S. and Canada. Taylor remarked, “It has been the greatest thing I’ve done since becoming a professional athlete. It’s just an added bonus that I get to impact and inspire the next generation as a Gator.”

Taylor is currently in Vienna, Austria, where he is completing his internship with Maschkan and Kux Sports Consulting. He thanks Dr. Doug DeMichele and his academic advisor, Paul Higgerson, for their flexibility and understanding as he works toward graduation. He is immensely grateful to his athletic advisor, Tim Adyt, who helped to keep him on track through the years and distance.
Sometimes life throws you curve balls, and Sally Darlin (BSESS ’88, BHSPT ’90) wasn’t ready for the one that was thrown her way. In 2018, Darlin’s husband unexpectedly passed away — after 28 years together, Darlin’s partner was gone.

A fellow physical therapist and friend, Luann Tammany, PT, asked Darlin to join her on a trip to Kathmandu, Nepal, to trek a portion of the Mount Everest trail and to meet a young girl that Tammany sponsors in a boarding school. “She thought it would be a healing trip for me,” Darlin explained. “I said, ‘Sure!’ I really had no hesitation about going.”

Darlin met up with Tammany and their Sherpa guide and arranged a helicopter flight to start the hike in the Everest region. “We were handed a card with some safety tips, and the helicopter took off while I was still putting on my seatbelt!” Darlin exclaimed. “The feeling of flying over a mountain top to then see down the other side of the mountain as you fly over is amazing. I was nervous for a minute, but our Sherpa said, ‘Don’t worry. When it’s your time to go, it’s your time to go!’”

Once they landed safely on the side of a hill, they grabbed their bags to start their trek along the mountain side. The trail wound through small shops and cobblestone streets scattered with giant rocks that reminded Darlin of trails back in North Carolina that she and her family hiked. They even caught a glimpse of the Dudh Kosi, or the Milk River, which had a milky blue-green color.

“We didn’t plan to hike to the mountain, but we did hike 45 miles in five days on the same trail that everyone must take if hiking Mount Everest.” She explained. “When you spend five to six days walking and hiking through nature in such beautiful scenery, you can’t help but feel inspired, healed and one with the universe.”

Toward the end of their hiking trip, their group took a helicopter ride that landed close to base camp, which sits at 17,600 feet. They flew over glaciers and rivers of ice and were able to see the 12-mile long Khumbu Glacier.

Darlin’s Everest adventure was topped off with a trip to Chautara, Nepal, to visit orphanages and boarding schools where she and Tammany were greeted by about 75 locals. They were led through the poverty stricken town — still reeling from an earthquake — and down a narrow path along the mountain side to the boarding school that was missing its third floor. The students were happy to meet Darlin and Tammany and performed a two-hour long show with dancing, singing and speeches about empowering women.

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Darlin was able to sponsor a 13-year-old girl from a remote village to support her through school, as Nepal has a problem of human trafficking, and getting these young girls in school is one way to decrease the risk of exploitation.

“It is amazing to see what the owner of the boarding school and the sponsors are doing to have a positive impact on the lives of so many young girls and boys,” Darlin said. She and Tammany were able to visit three additional boarding schools, bringing backpacks and school supplies to the children.

“It would be neat for my son and daughter to see the orphanages and boarding schools and get a further appreciation for all that so many of us take for granted,” Darlin said. “We live our lives with an ‘attitude of gratitude’ and this trip further instilled the belief that this is the way we should live our lives.”

Back in the U.S., she started the Darlin Family Scholarship fund to support HHP students who also have an interest in pursuing a degree in physical therapy. “I have always wanted to ‘give back’ in some way and the opportunity to support students... was the perfect way to do so.”
“Imagine if Muhammed Ali back in the day had a Twitter account — that would be amazing.”

ETAN THOMAS, retired NBA player

This fall, HHP co-hosted the Wasdin Speaker Series focused on “Sport, Social Justice and the Media.” The town hall featured 17 prominent athletes and speakers — ranging from three-time Olympian Michelle Carter to New York Times best-selling author Nathan Whitaker — to discuss how black athletes establish and use their influence through their relationship with the media.

“Imagine if Muhammed Ali back in the day had a Twitter account — that would be amazing,” said Etan Thomas, retired NBA player. Thomas went on to say that there’s so much power in the athlete’s voice. He encourages younger athletes to find their voice to make change.

The town hall was sponsored by UF alumni Susie and Tom Wasdin and was co-hosted with The Undefeated, ESPN’s platform for exploring the intersection of race, sports and culture. The College of Journalism and Communications and the Levin College of Law were also co-hosts of the event.

The audience included UF students, as well as local middle and high school athletes, students and coaches.

A special edition of The Undefeated’s digital roundtable was recorded during the event. The roundtables and other event segments can be watched at hhp.ufl.edu/townhall.

SPORT, SOCIAL JUSTICE + THE MEDIA

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**Robert Everett**
BS Sport Management and Business, 2020

Where are you from? Brooksville, FL

What's your favorite campus or Gainesville spot? My favorite spot has to be the skyboxes in the stadium.

What's your favorite pastime? Playing sports for sure.

If you could visit any era in time, when would you choose? I'd honestly probably stay here because I don't know what I'd do without AC and other basic necessities.

What advice would you give your freshman self? Enjoy every moment you have in college because it goes by way quicker than you could ever imagine.

In the future, I plan to... Do great things in whichever field I end up. Whether it's sport management or business, I know that because of my experiences in HHP, I will be prepared to step on the job and make a difference.

**Shawna Gray**
BS Tourism, Event and Recreation Management, 2020

Where are you from? Crawfordville, FL.

What's your favorite pastime? Listening to music, watching TV, or performing with my improv troupe, Theatre Strike Force.

What's your favorite campus or Gainesville spot? I used to love sitting at the Racquet Club Dining Center next to the Student Rec gym to people watch while studying and listening to the music. Now I feel the Reitz Union game room has become my new go-to study spot.

What advice would you give your freshman self? Know that everything will work out. Yes you will stress and yes you will feel the weight of the world, but that is part of growing up. Embrace the struggles and grow from them.

In the future, I plan to... Travel and gain experience anyway I can. Experience does not only come from the classroom or internships. It comes from interactions and putting yourself out there.

**Alexia McCants**
BS Health Education and Behavior, 2021

Where were you born? Born in Washington D.C., raised in Upper Marlboro, Maryland

What is your favorite thing about UF? How passionate every person on this campus is for succeeding and being all they can be. It motivates me every day to push harder.

What advice would you give your freshman self? Don't be scared to step out of your comfort zone. I really had to push myself to explore new opportunities and meet new people. However, the switch didn't flip on until my sophomore year. Had I done this earlier, who knows where I would be!

When did you first become a Gator? I first became a Gator when I was walking through the Plaza of the Americas on my first ever UF tour. In that moment, I felt like I had found my home away from home, which to me is one of the most important aspects of college.

In the future, I plan to... become a physical therapist practicing in Texas!

**Brian Tran**
BS Applied Physiology and Kinesiology, 2020

Where are you from? Tampa, FL.

What is your favorite Gator tradition? My favorite Gator tradition is Krishna. The $5 lunch for all you can eat and even a Tupperware of it home is a deal that just can't be beat.

What's your favorite campus or Gainesville spot? My favorite study area is the Health Science Library. My favorite restaurant is La Tienda. Lucky's is the best grocery store in Florida.

What advice would you give your freshman self? I would encourage him to explore UF more. You are entering a new environment and a new section of your life — take this chance to figure out things that you enjoy. Whether it's trying out different student organizations, joining a sports team, researching, etc., there is always something to take away. Even if you don't like it, at least you can check that off your list instead of regretting what you didn't try.

In the future, I plan to... pursue a career in medicine and have the opportunity to have a job that allows me to help others and put a smile on their face.

**“HHP has provided me with the knowledge to succeed in my field and the professional experience opportunities that will give me the ability to thrive wherever I end up.”**

**“HHP has given me the tools and resources to proceed into the future with confidence and endless opportunities to gain relevant experience within my field.”**

**“Through the help of the awesome advisors, teachers, and students within this college, I am constantly bettering myself and getting closer to my dreams!”**

**“The professors [at HHP] are genuinely passionate in their subjects and equally so in helping students learn and succeed.”**

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HHP by the numbers

HHP students are...

- 40% Racially/Ethnically Diverse
- 61% Women
- 87% Florida Residents

HHP has seen a 23% increase in degrees awarded over the past five years.

HHP has 21,000+ alumni worldwide.

1 in 5 number of HHP students enrolled in one of the college’s online degree programs.

$8,000,000+ in sponsored awards put toward ground-breaking research in HHP last year.

34% Percentage of HHP students who applied and were accepted to medical schools.

2019 2021

51 75

Help us celebrate the College of Health & Human Performance’s 75th anniversary in 2021 by making a planned gift that will strengthen our college and influence generations to come. Our goal is to reach 75 planned gifts by the time of our college’s 75th anniversary in 2021 — WE’RE OVER HALFWAY THERE!

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— U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT 2020

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