

CELEBRATE *biology*



**2026 Research Conference
& Scholarship Recognition**
April 20 - May 1, 2026

**DEPARTMENT OF
BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES**



EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY™

Welcome

By attending this event, you acknowledge and agree that photography, audio, and video recording may occur. These recordings may be used for promotional purposes, including sharing on our social media channels. If you prefer to limit use of recordings of yourself, please inform our secretary or department chair within 48 hours of the event date.



DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES



EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY™

Research Day Program at a Glance

- 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m

Oral presentations in Room 2080 Life Sciences
Moderated by E. Peterson

- 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m

Oral presentations in Room 2080 Life Sciences
Moderated by E. Peterson

Molecular based oral presentations in Room 2040
Moderated by T. Canam

- 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m

Poster Session in 2nd Floor Hallway and Bridge
Life Sciences Building

**Judges will announce category
winners at the close of the program**

Help yourself to drinks and tacos in Room 2011 Life Sciences



Our students are worth celebrating.

The Department of Biological Sciences maintains an active student research program that welcomes biological sciences majors and students enrolled in pre-health professions programs. A faculty-mentored student research project is an excellent way to prepare for a career, graduate school, and the pre-health professions. Today, we proudly boast our students and their research endeavors.

We also recognize the 60+ students who were selected for college and departmental scholarships and awards. Thanks to our donors, Biological Sciences along with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is able to share nearly \$80,000 with these exceptional students this academic year.

At EIU, students surpass their own expectations and in Biological Sciences, we celebrate and honor them every chance we get. Thank you for joining us today to applaud them, as well.

Step Up for Panthers. Step Up for Biological Sciences.

Wednesday, April 22nd is EIU Giving Day! This annual event is designed to bring together the EIU community to make a concentrated impact. More than ever before, the Department of Biological Sciences at EIU extends an earnest invitation to provide immediate, direct support to stabilize funding, strengthen departmental resources, and to help assure future Panthers receive the same wonderful experience that you had at EIU.

Your contribution today will help to address urgent equipment and vehicle needs, fund scholarships, and provide our students with resources for research and scholarly activity. Our department has set a small Giving Day goal of \$100,000 and one new research truck or van. Use the QR code to access the EIU giving page, or stop in the office to speak with someone between 9am and 4pm today.



Thank you....in advance.





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25-26 Scholarship Recipients

GARRETT WILKERSON
TRISTAN WILLIAMS
ELIZABETH ZIEMER
KAMRYN STURDY
GRACIE LEMMON
ISABELLA-ROSE GONZALZALES

EVA APODECA
SAVANNA BROWN
HOLLY KEATING
WILL JONES
VEDANT PATEL
TANNER BISHOP
DENISE PROCOPIO
KAYLA REYES MORALES

LIZ STOCK
CHARNYL MCFARLAND
CHLOE PRUITT
JUANITA MHLANGA

KATIE KREMER
CANDACE SCHOMAKER
BRIANNA BOYT
ASHLYN DENNEY

JEMMA BOOTH
ZACH STOUT
ANDREW BRINKSCHROEDER
LIZBETH RAMOS
AKIZIA AGUILAR
CAROLINE LUCAS

CAITLYN WATTLEWORTH
KATIE CLATFELTER
MIKAILA EK

BIANCA FUGNITTI
NIA ROGERS

DAMAJIA DANIELS
KYLIE GORDON

EVA EDWARDS
RYLEE ELMENDORF

AUBREY HERENDEEN
LUCIA VILLALOBOS
THOMAS TOWLE

MADDIE THOMASON
NOAH JAMES
MILLA HELTON
WHITLEY WOOD



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Kudos. Applause. Congrats.



DEAN'S LIST ~ BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES STUDENTS

Addison Murphy	Emily Sheppard	Logan Siuts
Adelia Sandifer	Emma Keith	Lyric Johnson
Alexys Drake	Evey Mason	Mackenzie Ewing
Allie Percy	Grace Eggers	Makalah Simpson
Andrew Brinkschroeder	Gracie Lemmon	Mariam Nizami
Annemarie Johnson	Grant Feiner	Mario Nunez
Ashay Hopkins	Hadley Hendrickson	Mikhayla Ward
Ashlyn Denney	Hannah Ricketts	Molly Hughes
Ava Hartman	Isaac Kocher	Mweshi Sampa
Bianca Fugnitti	Isabella Earll	Nicholas Poston
Brenda Torres	Isai Morales	Nina Drzymkowski
Brittany Black	Jackson Ulm	Nolan Anderson
Brook Ozier	Jackson Williams	Nuttanicha Moree
Brooklyn Groppe	Jalyne Long	Olivia Bansley
Bryce Burnett	Jasey Shanholtzer	Olivia Thostenson
Caitlyn Wattleworth	Jazmyn Kubas	Onyinye Umealajekwu
Camille Johnson	Jemma Booth	Piper Klinghammer
Caroline Lucas	Jerod Ruffner	Robin Cooper
Carolyn Cronin	Jordyn Veach	Rylee Elmendorf
Cela Kupferer	Juanita Mhlanga	Savannah Zimmerman
Chinenyenwa Okolie	Kaitlyn Ward	Shannon Cooper
Chloe Pruitt	Kallee Steinkamp	Shiloh Frederick
Colleen Bauer	Katherine Kopshever	Silas Hortenstine
David Griswold	Katherine Quick	Sophie Cerveny
Elizabeth Stock	Katie Clatfelter	Sydney Kinder
Ella Radke	Katie Kremer	Thomas Sims
Ellere Repp	Kylie Gordon	Vedant Patel
Emilee Halford	Le Thanh Truc Phan	Victor Buehler
Logan Dennis	Leslie Ingrid Teutou Ngajeu	Zachary Stout

RESEARCH & CREATIVE ACTIVITY AWARD RECIPIENTS

Ryan Maynard, Shaley Klumker, Olivia Wertman, Taryn Tarquin, Alexis Gerber, Jeanette Bovard, Danielle Shubat, Hansini Gamage Don

LEWIS HANFORD TIFFANY BOTANY RESEARCH AWARD RECIPIENTS

Jean Michael Rincon Rojas, Destiny Smith, Bennu Foxberries,

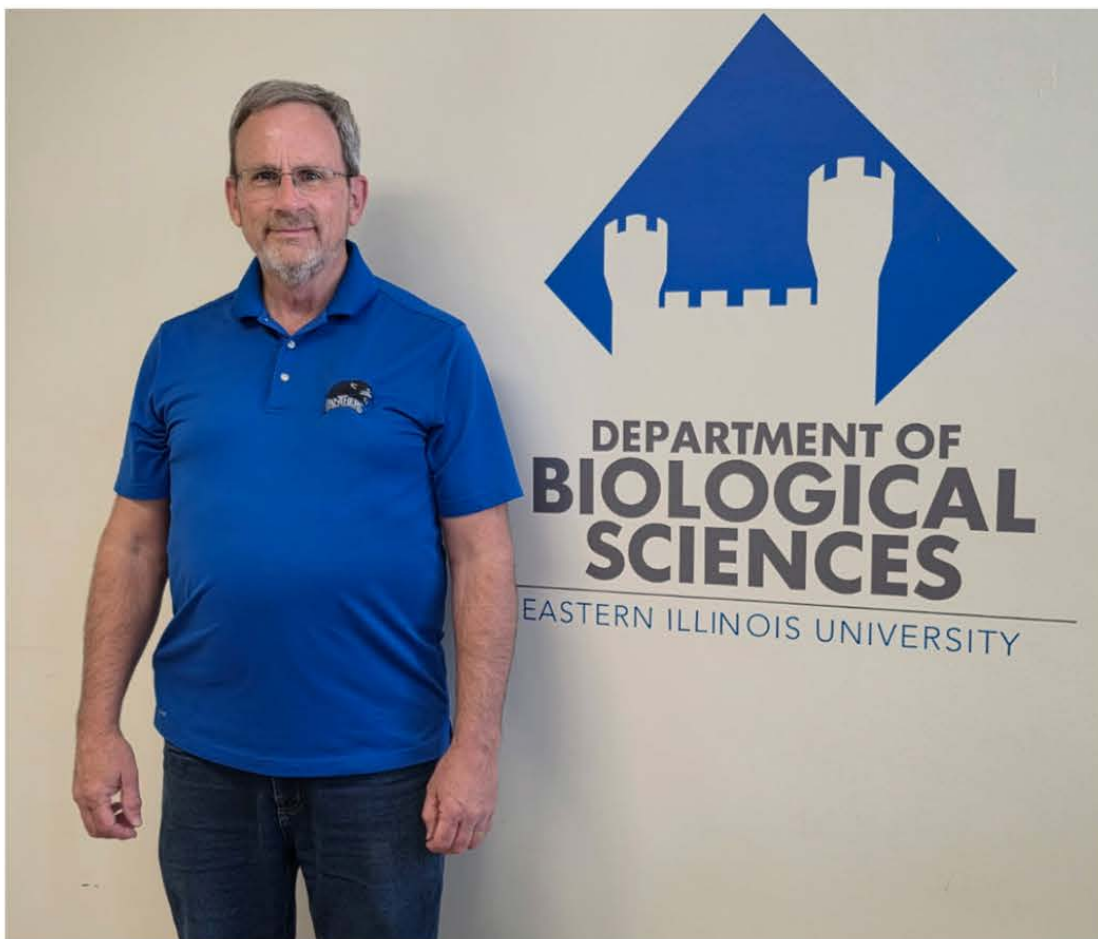
ISAS UNDERGRAD RESEARCH GRANT

Tori Agans

BSURG FALL 2025

Liz Stock

Onyinye (Kindness) Umealajekwu



Dear Esteemed Colleagues, Guests and Participants:

On behalf of the BIO Student Research Day Committee,

Welcome to the Department of Biological Sciences' component of EIU's first annual Student Research Day.

We are excited to showcase the broad range of faculty-mentored research being conducted by our students, both at undergraduate and graduate levels. We have some 33 students presenting during oral and/or poster sessions, representing a broad range of research efforts of fourteen faculty members (including two of our colleagues from the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry who are mentoring Biological Sciences majors).

Faculty-mentored research is a vital aspect of our program and develops student's skills in critical thinking, experimental design, data analysis, and presentations, as well as provide excellent credentials for the next steps in career paths.

We encourage you to interact with our student presenters and learn something new in the world of biology.

Thank you for your support!

Gary A. Bulla, Ph.D.

Professor and Student Research Day Committee Chair



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Research Day Policies

To ensure a positive and productive experience for all attendees, we kindly ask you to adhere to the following policies:

CODE OF CONDUCT

We are committed to providing a harassment-free conference experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, religion (or lack thereof), or technology choices.

We do not tolerate harassment of conference participants in any form. Sexual language and imagery are not appropriate for any conference venue, including talks, workshops, parties, Twitter/X, and other online media.

Participants violating these rules may be sanctioned or expelled from the conference without a refund at the discretion of the conference organizers.

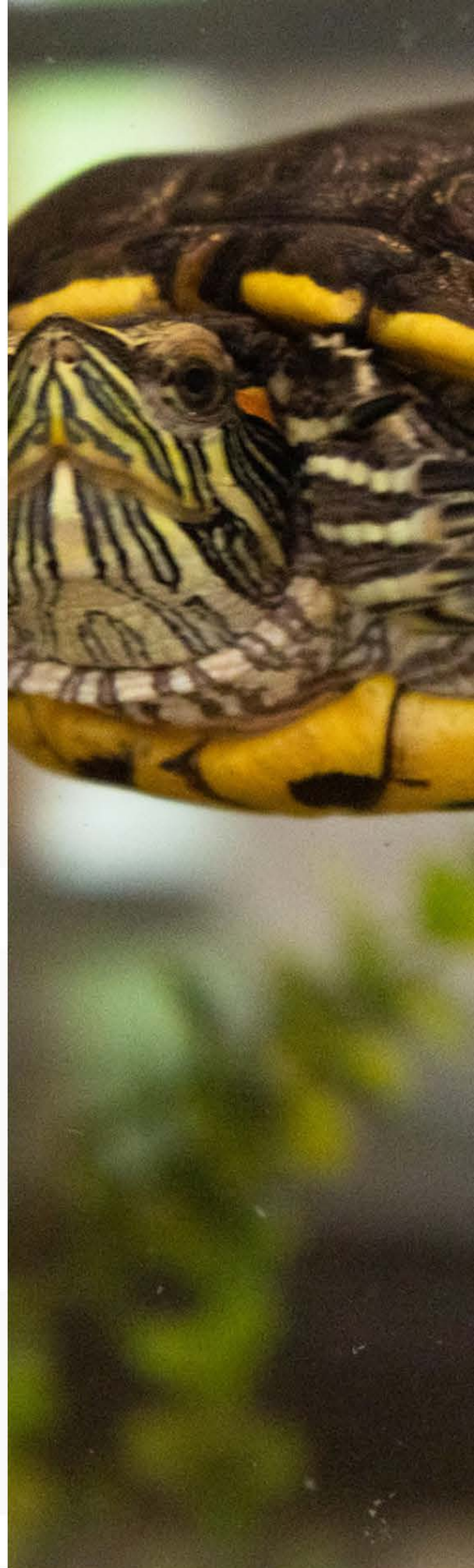
PHOTOGRAPHY AND RECORDING POLICY

- Photography, audio, and video recording are permitted for personal, non-commercial use only.
- Please be respectful when taking photos or videos and avoid disrupting sessions or blocking other attendees' views.
- Do not photograph or record presentation slides marked as confidential.
- Moderators have the right to request that their sessions not be recorded or photographed.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

We encourage sharing your conference experience on social media using the official hashtag #eiubiosci. However, please:

- Be respectful of speakers' requests regarding sharing of their content.
- Do not share others' personal information without their explicit consent.
- Avoid sharing any confidential or sensitive information presented during the program.





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Oral Research Presentations

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m

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ORAL PRESENTATIONS
ORGANISMAL BIOLOGY

Room 2080 Life Sciences Building

JEANETTE BOVARD

MENTOR: EDEN EFFERT-FANTA, PH.D.

DANIELLE SHUBAT

MENTOR: EDEN EFFERT-FANTA, PH.D.

SAOIRSE KOESTER

MENTOR: ELLIOTT ZIEMAN, PH.D.

ANNA BROWN

MENTOR: ROBERT COLOMBO, PH.D.

1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m

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ORAL PRESENTATIONS
ORGANISMAL BIOLOGY

Room 2080 Life Sciences Building

RYAN MAYNARD

MENTOR: ROBERT COLOMBO, PH.D.

TARYN TARQUIN

MENTOR: EDEN EFFERT-FANTA, PH.D.

ALEXIS GERBER

MENTOR: EDEN EFFERT-FANTA, PH.D.

SHALEY KLUMKER

MENTOR: EDEN EFFERT-FANTA, PH.D.

1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m

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ORAL PRESENTATIONS
MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

Room 2040 Life Sciences Building

ELIZABETH STOCK

MENTOR: ELLIOTT ZIEMAN, PH.D.

JENNIFER TEIBOWEI

MENTOR: MICHAEL BECK, PH.D.

JAYLA SINGLETON

MENTOR: MICHAEL BECK, PH.D.

Oral presentations are presented by both undergraduates and master's candidates in biological sciences. See moderators Tom Canam and Elizabeth Peterson during the sessions should issues or questions arise.



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POSTER PRESENTATIONS
FLOOR 2 ~ LIFE SCIENCES

Poster Session Information



ADDISON MURPHY

POSTER POSITION #1

FACULTY MENTOR: EFFERT-FANTA

Parasite loads of bluntnose minnow (*Pimephales notatus*) and northern hog sucker (*Hypentelium nigricans*) following a fertilizer spill in east central Illinois



AMYIAH WATKINS

POSTER POSITION #2

FACULTY MENTOR: RAHMATI ISHKA

Investigating the effects of salt on lignification in tomato cultivars



ANDREW BRINKSCHROEDER

POSTER POSITION #3

FACULTY MENTOR: CARLSWARD

Floral anatomy of *Scaphosepalum*



ANNELEISE BUCHTER

POSTER POSITION #4

FACULTY MENTOR: OLUOCH

Evaluating the *COX1* gene of the blood feeding *Culex restuans*



APRIL DOSSETT

POSTER POSITION #5

FACULTY MENTOR: PETERSON

The effects of urbanization on raccoon maternal behavior and kit Independence



AVA LAY

POSTER POSITION #6

FACULTY MENTOR: HENSCHEN

The effects of early life stress on infection later in life in house finches



BRIA LAKE
& GARRETT WILKERSON

POSTER POSITION #7

FACULTY MENTOR: CARLSWARD

Comparing human and AI research on desiccation tolerance in seedless plants





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POSTER PRESENTATIONS
FLOOR 2 ~ LIFE SCIENCES

Poster Session Information



DESTINY SMITH

POSTER POSITION #8

FACULTY MENTOR: LIU

Speciation mechanisms of *Antistrophes* spp. gall wasps (Cynipidae) associated with *Silphium laciniatum* (Asteraceae)



DONOVAN DAVIS

POSTER POSITION #9

FACULTY MENTOR: HENSCHEN

How does social hierarchy affect chronic stress in group-living birds? Influence of social rank on individual corticosterone dynamics



HANSINI GAMAGE DON

POSTER POSITION #10

FACULTY MENTOR: PERIYANNAN

Investigation of bacterial biofilm formation mechanisms



HOLLY KEATING

POSTER POSITION #11

FACULTY MENTOR: PETERSON

Determining a way to attract American badgers (*Taxidea taxus*) to camera traps using olfactory attractants



JALYNE LONG

POSTER POSITION #12

FACULTY MENTOR: HENSCHEN

Can circulating triglycerides be used to predict the outcome of an infection?



JEAN MICHAEL RINCON ROJAS
& JEANETTE BOVARD

POSTER POSITION #13

FACULTY MENTOR: MEINERS

AM-induced variation in species' trait responses in *Helianthus*



JULIA JOHNSON

POSTER POSITION #14

FACULTY MENTOR: PETERSON

Using individual identification to determine how personality influences trappability of bobcats





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POSTER PRESENTATIONS
FLOOR 2 ~ LIFE SCIENCES

Poster Session Information



LOGAN DENNIS

POSTER POSITION #15

FACULTY MENTOR: HENSCHEN

Is blood parasite load related to the ornament size of male common yellowthroats?



MIKAILA EK

POSTER POSITION #16

FACULTY MENTOR: PETERSON

Examining mammalian visitation rates to a novel object at urban and non-urban sites throughout Central Illinois



MIKHAYLA WARD

POSTER POSITION #17

FACULTY MENTOR: OLUOCH

PCR of *Anopheles* Mosquitoes



MILLA HELTON

POSTER POSITION #18

FACULTY MENTOR: HENSCHEN

Population differences in corticosterone during molt in a wild songbird



NOLAN BURDETT

POSTER POSITION #19

FACULTY MENTOR: PETERSON

Behavioral variation between urban and non-urban coyotes (*Canis latrans*) in Central Illinois



ONYINYE (KINDNESS) UMEALAJEKWU

POSTER POSITION #20

FACULTY MENTOR: BULLA

Reactivation of liver function through genomic modification



REBECCA (TORI) AGANS

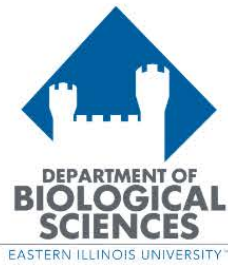
POSTER POSITION #21

FACULTY MENTOR: BECK

Development of fluorescence-based assays to assess cancer drug activation by CES2

notes...





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**Thank you for joining us
in support of our student research efforts**

