



Pictured: Associate Professor Rika Uchida and students in the J-Term MUS 126, "From Debussy to Ravel: French Composers and the Paris Conservatoire" stand in front of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. More photos from our J-term experiences below!

A Note From the Dean

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back to campus! I hope you had a restful and rejuvenating winter break filled with the people and activities that bring you joy. I am excited to see the campus come alive again—students bustling in our hallways and classrooms, office doors open, and colleagues reconnecting.

I loved seeing photos from the various J-Term travel seminars led by our faculty. Check out the stories on our College social media channels! These truly are unique, life-shaping opportunities for students. And to those who taught courses on campus or online over J-Term—thank you for your extra effort and dedication. I look forward to hearing about your highlights from the last few weeks.

Over break, we finalized several faculty hires for our Qingdao programs. The first semester with Drake faculty teaching in Qingdao was a tremendous success! Our colleagues from Biology and Data Analytics—Alimoor Reza, Nanci Ross, Lan Zhou and Lu Zhang—did a fantastic job bringing a Drake education to our first cohort of Qingdao students. They will share more about their experiences in the next few weeks and mentor faculty preparing to teach in Qingdao this spring. Deb Christensen and our newest hire, Syed Quudus, will join the faculty cohort traveling to Qingdao in late February. My sincere thanks to everyone who helped get this partnership off to such a strong start.

January has been a busy month for the College. We have been preparing for the internal website migration (thank you to all the staff supporting this effort!), working on staffing and resource planning for the fall semester, and attended the Board of Trustees meeting. In the world of recruitment, we are entering a busy season of admitted student events on campus and across the Midwest. As you know, it is the personal interactions with faculty and staff—your warmth, expertise, and enthusiasm—that help students choose Drake. The numbers look promising so far; let’s keep that momentum going as we build a strong first-year class for fall 2026.

The spring semester always begins at full speed, with events, due dates, and major tasks coming all at once. I hope your first class meetings have gone smoothly. Please reach out to the dean’s office with any questions or requests for support. I hope this newsletter helps you stay up to date on what’s happening in the College.

Here’s to a great semester ahead! Thank you for your incredible work and commitment to our students and to the College of Arts and Sciences.

Warmly,



Jesmine Jervand

Upcoming Deadlines and Important Dates

Date	Event/Activity
Monday, February 2	Last day to submit proposal to A&S curriculum committee for new course, course change, course removal for inclusion in fall 2026 course schedule and catalog.
Wednesday, February 4	J-term final grades due by 10:00am
Sunday, February 15	First, third, fourth and fifth-year tenure-track faculty reviews (PAEs) due to the Dean, from Dept. Chairs

Sunday, February 15	Tenured faculty evaluations (PAEs) due to the Dean, from Dept. Chairs
Sunday, February 15	Nominations for A&S Outstanding Teacher of Year Award are due
Tuesday, February 17	Nominations for the Sheslow Prize for Distinguished Leadership are due
Friday, February 20	Summer and Fall 2026 schedules are due to the Dean's Office by 4:30pm
Thursday, February 26	Nominations for the Edward C. Truman Award for Outstanding Student in the Humanities are due
Friday, February 27	All Faculty and Staff Meeting, 2:00-4:00pm, Cowles Library Reading Room
Friday, February 27	Last day to submit proposal to A&S Cabinet changes to an existing major/minor/concentration program (in advance of March meeting)

[Access the Full College of A&S and University Calendar 2025-26 Here](#)

[Academic Calendar](#) [University Events Calendar](#)

College of Arts & Sciences

Harmon Fine Arts Center
1310 25th Street
Des Moines, IA 50311

Phone: [515-271-3939](tel:515-271-3939)

Email: ask.as@drake.edu



Faculty Awards

Call for Nominations: Ellis and Nelle Levitt Distinguished Professorship

Nominations for three new Ellis and Nelle Levitt Distinguished Professors at Drake University are now being accepted. This prestigious honor recognizes exceptional faculty for their teaching excellence (in class and/or mentoring through experiential learning), scholarly contributions, consulting activities, leadership, and service to the university's mission.

Eligibility: Any full professor at Drake University.

Award Details:

The professorships begin July 1, 2026.
The awardee receives an annual salary supplement of \$5,000.
Use of the 'Ellis and Nelle Levitt Distinguished Professor' title.
Initial appointment is for five years, with a performance review in year five.

Nomination Process:

Submit a nomination letter and current CV to your Dean by **February 13, 2026**.
Self-nominations are welcome.

Deans will forward recommendations to Deputy Provost Jimmy Senteza , who will convene a faculty committee to review nominations and make recommendations to the Provost, President, and Board of Trustees.

Call for Nominations: Arts & Sciences Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award

We are now accepting nominations for the prestigious [Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award](#). The award is announced at the Arts and Sciences Honors and Awards Ceremony (**save the date: Thursday, April 16**).

NOMINATIONS FOR THE AWARD ARE DUE FEBRUARY 15. We ask that you identify a full-time tenure/tenure-track A&S faculty member who you feel best exemplifies excellence in teaching and who has completed at least three years of service at Drake.

TO NOMINATE: [Submit](#) professor's name, name of the nominator, and a detailed statement of nomination (one to two pages) indicating what makes the nominee an excellent teacher by February 15.
(https://drake.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bdQ1XYeXQhRSIhP)



Faculty Development Corner

Join us for an A&S Mentoring Breakfast on February 13

Tenure-track and early career faculty are invited to participate in an A&S faculty mentoring breakfast on **Friday, February 13 from 9:00 AM-10:30 AM in Johansen Student Center, 130**. A breakfast buffet and plentiful coffee/tea will be provided (mentors welcome!) The theme of this event will be "Developing Your Scholarly/Creative Work Trajectory at Drake" and will be hosted by Associate Dean **Jill Allen**. We encourage you to submit additional questions in advance, through this [registration form](#). Please RSVP by February 6 and reach out directly to Jennifer.cooper@drake.edu with any dietary restrictions or needs.

https://drake.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2a95AUOsoUTFa5g

Reminder: Fall 2026 FYS Call for Proposals due February 2

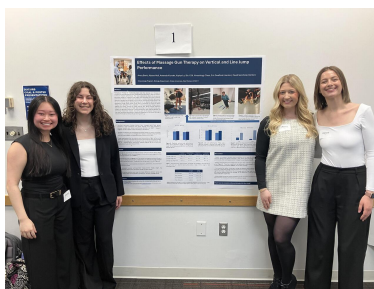
The Provost's Office invites proposals for the Fall 2026 First-Year Seminars (FYS). As a cornerstone of our first-year experience, the FYS provides a structured, welcoming environment where students begin building

academic confidence, habits, and sense of belonging that will carry them through their Drake journey. These seminars provide incoming students with transformative opportunities to connect with faculty, peers, and ideas in meaningful and developmentally supportive ways.

To propose an FYS for next fall, please complete [the Qualtrics proposal form](#) before Monday, February 2, 2026. Faculty intending to offer a Fall 2026 FYS will be expected to attend a one-day workshop in May 2026. To facilitate collaboration among sections, meeting times for all FYS classes will be 12:30 PM – 1:45 PM Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday.

If you have any questions as you complete the proposal, contact **Bret Sikkink** (bret.sikkink@drake.edu) in the [Center for Teaching & Learning](#).

Save the Date! Drake University Conference on Undergraduate Research in the Sciences (DUCURS)



Date: Thursday, April 16, 2026, ~12:30-4:30 PM Location: Olmsted Parents Hall & Conference Rooms

Join us for an afternoon to celebrate our students' research accomplishments! DUCURS provides a platform for students to share their faculty-mentored research projects as oral and poster presentations, engage with the Drake academic community, and connect with fellow researchers and professionals.

Details on abstract submission, registration, and the event schedule will be posted on the [DUSCI website](#).

Mark your calendars – we look forward to seeing you there!



Sponsored Programs Seeks Your Input!

The SPARC Office wants to learn more about the exciting research and creative work happening across campus!

By filling out our short SPARC Profile Form, you'll help us better understand your research interests and areas of expertise, allowing us to more effectively connect you with targeted grant and funding opportunities.

It only takes a few minutes to complete! Click the link or scan the QR code to get started: [SPARC Profile Form](#)

Your input helps us support your success, thank you for partnering with SPARC to advance research and creative scholarship at Drake! [Preston Miller](#), [Lori Byrd](#)



Center for Teaching and Learning 3rd Fridays: Upcoming Events

Friday, February 20, 2026 (varied locations)

- **Books for Breakfast 9:30-10:30 AM**, Mars Cafe
Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Sciences of Learning, James Lang (2021; Ch 7).
- **Research Talk 11:30 AM**, Science Connector Building Room 101
In collaboration with the Drake Undergraduate Science Collaborative Institute (DUSCI), Dr. **Andrea Van Wyk** will discuss her research on active learning in chemistry in her presentation, "Bridging Research and Practice: Using Chemistry Education Research to Design Authentic STEM Laboratory Experiences"
- **Campus Conversation 12:45 PM**, Collier-Scripps Hall, Room 301
In collaboration with the Center for Humanities, Dr. **Gesine Gerhard** will give a presentation on her research entitled "Why the Humanities Matter to: the Taste of Power in 1930s Germany"
- **Writing Club 12:30-2:00 PM**, Medbury Hall
Join Faculty and staff colleagues working on scholarship projects in Medbury 221 from 12:30 to 2:00 PM every Friday. All writing is welcome!
- **Happy Hour Social, 2:00- 4:00 PM**, Faculty Lounge

Free Generative AI Lunch Club Events

Drake professors Dr. **Chris Porter** and Dr. **Chris Snider** will host four virtual AI Lunch Club sessions starting February 9 designed to help professionals, students, and curious learners understand and apply the latest generative AI tools.

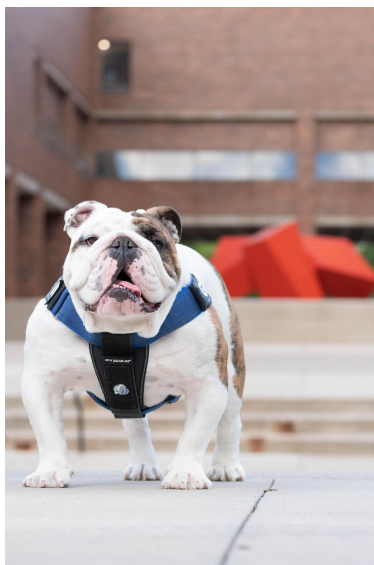
All Drake faculty, staff, students and alumni are encouraged to sign up and share these events. There are sessions for beginners and advanced users of generative AI.

Feb. 9, 2026 – [Getting Started with Generative AI](#)

Feb. 16, 2026 – [Gemini, Nano Banana and NotebookLM](#)

Feb. 23, 2026 – [Building Microsoft Copilot Agents](#)

March 4, 2026 – [Vibe coding with Claude, ChatGPT and Lovable](#)



Arts & Sciences Council News

Upcoming Faculty Vote

Please watch for an email on Thursday, January 29 to vote on the following three changes to Council structure that were approved by A&S Council in fall 2025. Per the [College of Arts & Sciences Handbook](#), approval of these changes requires a majority vote of the Arts and Sciences faculty. Please reach out to our [elected Council members](#) with questions. **Voting will close on February 6 at 4:30 PM**

- In elections for A&S Council members, at-large faculty representatives must be tenured. Divisional representatives can be tenured or untenured. *[This change values input on Council from both pre-tenure and tenured faculty and ensures there are enough tenured faculty on Council who can share institutional knowledge and serve in Council leadership positions.]*
- The chair of the Academic Integrity Committee does not need to be a member of Council and does not need to report to Council. *[This change will increase the pool of faculty who can serve as chair of the Academic Integrity Committee. Similar to the college's Promotion & Tenure Committee, the Academic Integrity Committee's confidential activities are not reported to Council.]*
- Remove the Technology Planning Committee as a standing college committee. *[Some of the Technology Committee charges in the handbook are obsolete and there's redundancy between the college and university technology committee. In place of a standing Technology Committee, an as-needed ad hoc committee can tackle college tech-related initiatives.]*



Welcoming Dr. Benjamin Valpey as Assistant Professor of Computer Science

Welcome to Dr. **Benjamin Valpey**, who has joined the Computer Science department this semester as Assistant Professor! Dr. Valpey graduated with a Bachelor's of Science in Computer Science, Mathematics, and Data Analytics from Drake University in 2019, received his Master's and just last month finished his PhD in Computer Science from University of Rochester.

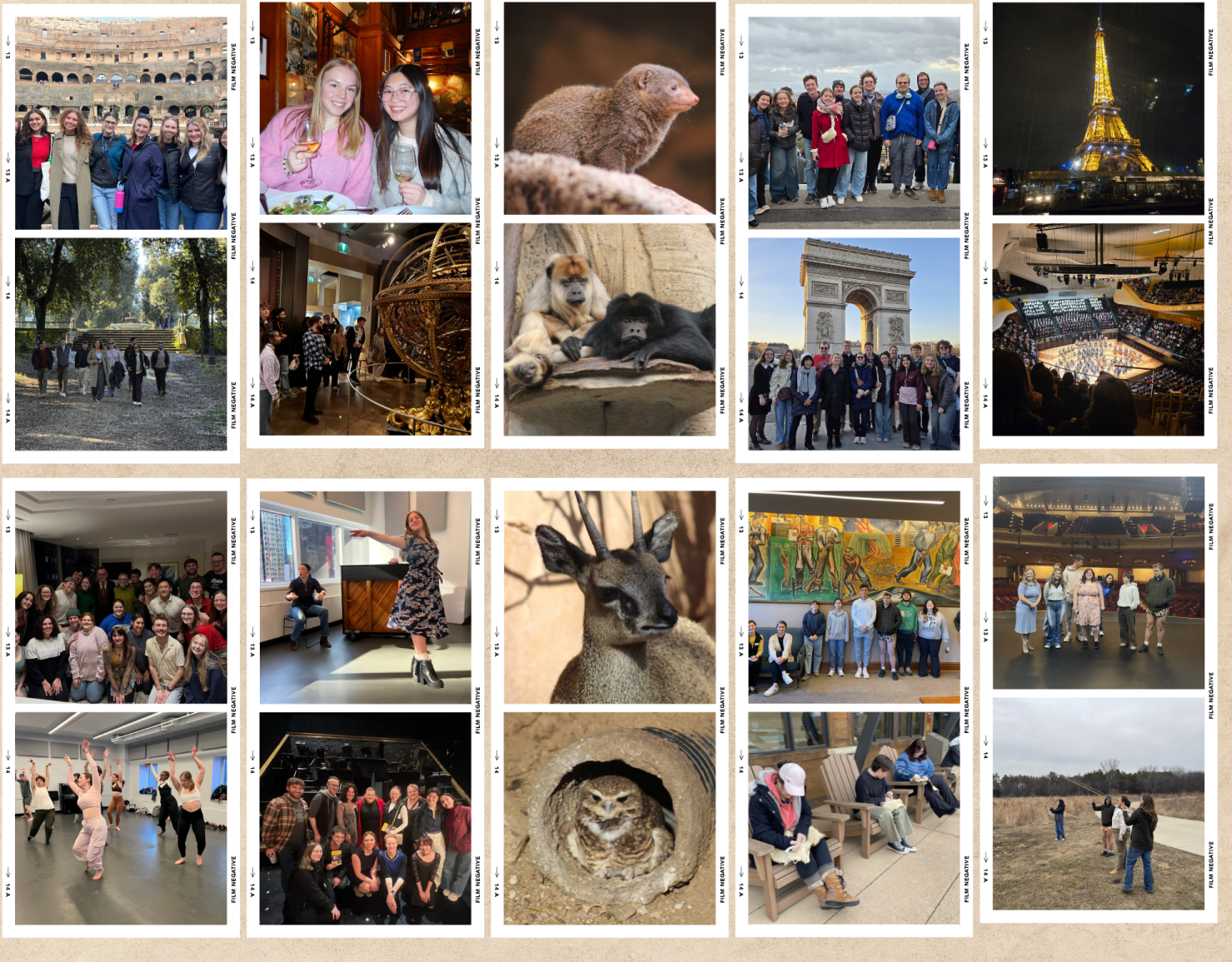
Dr. Valpey studies the semantics of programming languages for the purpose of program verification and specializes in GPUs. In 2025, his work on formalizing the semantics of Tensor Cores—the hardware units responsible for GPUs' dominance in training AI models—received best paper at *NASA Formal Methods*. Teaching Software Engineering as an adjunct instructor at Drake since Spring 2025, he strives to create an engaging environment that excites students by showing them all the cool things they can do with what they've learned!

Fun Fact: Benji is enthralled by our judicial system: in his free time, he likes to listen to oral arguments for Supreme Court cases as though they were podcasts.

Around the World and Back Again: J-Term Seminar Highlights

Arts and Sciences students were all over the globe this January for our J-Term Travel seminars. Some highlights shared with our social media team are below. Click on the link to see posts on Instagram.

- Upper left quadrant: Professor **Deb Christensen** and Professor **Adina Kilpatrick** and their students in the travel seminar [BIO 145 Art & Anatomy in Renaissance Italy](#)
- Middle section: [ENSS 128 Zoo Design and Management](#), taught by Dr. **Keith Summerville**, Professor Emeritus Dr. **Michael Renner** and Dr. **Emilee Hart**
- Upper right quadrant: [MUS 160 From Debussy to Ravel: French Composers and the Paris Conservatory](#) taught by Dr. **Rika Uchida** and Dr. **Jennifer Wohlenhaus-Bloomberg**
- Lower Left quadrant: [THEA 102 Auditioning in New York City](#) with Professors **Erik Meixelsperger** and **Erin Degner**.
- Lower right quadrant: [HIST 105 Midwestern History](#) with Associate Professor of History **Amahia Mallea**



Celebrating A&S Highlights



Drake University's **Vince Kenney, DMA**, Director of Bands and Associate Professor of Music, was featured as a

clinician at the The Midwest Clinic in Chicago, one of the world's premier music education conferences. Alongside Jacqui Meunier and Brad Genevro, Dr. Kenney presented *Learning to Listen: Recording Projects for Large Ensembles*, a clinic focused on using recording projects to strengthen ensemble listening, musicianship, and collaborative learning.

An active conductor, performer, and educator, **Dr. Kenney** leads the Drake Wind Symphony and is a nationally recognized advocate for music technology and interdisciplinary collaboration. He is a contributing author to *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band* (GIA), Music Director of the Des Moines Metro Concert Band, and owner of VOCE Custom Recording, bringing professional recording expertise into both educational and performance settings.



Congratulations to Assistant Professor of Art History Dr. **Sascha Crasnow** who has written a chapter in the upcoming publication *Art and Feminisms: Histories, Methods, and Legacies* entitled, "*Intersectional transfeminism as methodology in global contemporary art history.*" The book is scheduled for publication on January 30, 2026 by Routledge.



Congratulations to
Evan Scherrer,
Ujan RoyBandyopadhyay,
and **Nicholas Haisler!**

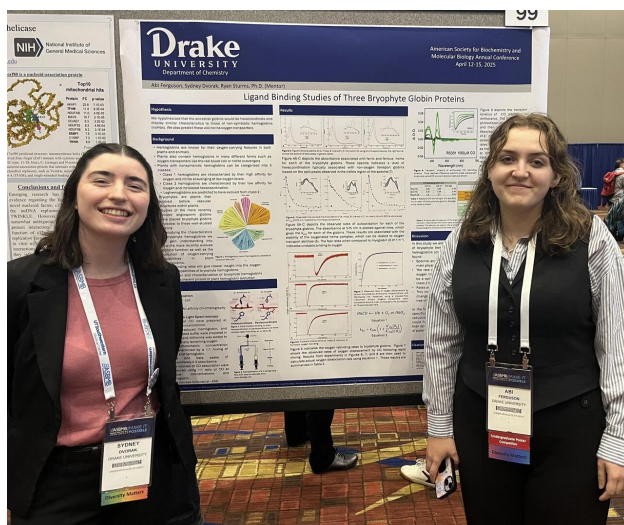


Won **first place** at the
Iowa State University site

Ranked **7th** out of **84** registered teams
in the **2025 ICPC North America
North Central Regional Contest**

Associate Professor **Adam Case**'s team of Drake computer science students (**Evan Scherrer, Ujan RoyBandyopadhyay, and Nicholas Haisler**) won first place at the Iowa State University site competition of the *International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) - North Central North America (NCNA) Regional Contest*. The contest is held at multiple locations, and in addition to winning first place at their site, the team placed 7th out of 84 registered teams in the region. Because of their performance, Evan, Ujan, and Nicholas qualified to

compete in the *ICPC North America Championship (NAC)* in Orlando, Florida, which will take place this March. Congratulations to Dr. Case and team!



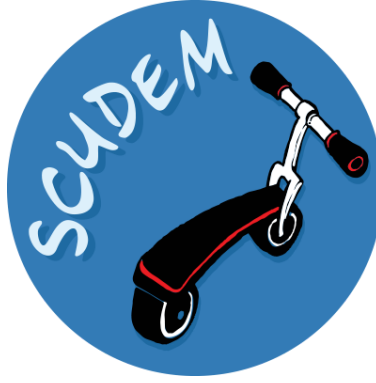
Congratulations to Assistant Professor **Ryan Sturms** and Drake University Sustainability Coordinator **Sydney Dvorak** (BS '25) on the publication of their article, "[Oxygen Binding Kinetics and Coordination States of Hemoglobins from Early Land Plants](#)" in *ACS Omega*, Vol. 10, Issue 48, November 2025. Dvorak is pictured here with **Abi Ferguson** presenting the research at the 2025 American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) national conference in Chicago.



Associate Professor of Music & Director of Orchestral Studies Dr. **Héctor Agüero** has been appointed as the new conductor of the Des Moines Youth Symphony and to serve as the first holder of The Joseph Giunta Conductor Chair.

Dr. Agüero remarked, "I am humbled to follow Maestro Joseph Giunta after his 28-year legacy of inspiring Central Iowa's young musicians. I look forward to building on his remarkable work and furthering the organization's mission to create extraordinary musical experiences, innovative programming, and outstanding educational opportunities for our community."

Congratulations, Héctor!



Congratulations to Drake students **Ayden Bockholt**, **Sean Chen**, and **Xander Kwa**, who participated in *SCUDEM X* this November and received the designation of *Outstanding*, the highest possible, placing them in the top 25-30% of all participants! Assistant Professor of Mathematics **Andrew Becklin** serves as the faculty mentor for this group.

SCUDEM is an international competition in differential equations modeling where teams spend one month setting up and analyzing their own model to tackle one of three provided prompts and then making a video discussing their findings. The Drake team tackled a problem which required them to model cosmic dust, which is studied to gain insight into how matter is distributed; you can [check out the team's submission here!](#)



Congratulations to Professor of Kinesiology **David Senchina** and Drake alumna **Madison Bunton** (BS, Biology SP25) on the publication of their article, "Comparing Reaction Time Testing using Traditional Methods versus a Portable Interactive Light System" in the *International Journal of Research in Exercise Physiology*.

The research, completed by Bunton in partial fulfillment of her biology degree thesis, was partially supported by the *Cliff G Rea endowment for undergraduate research*. Dr. David Senchina is the inaugural Chairholder of the Clifford G. Rea endowed Chair in Biology. [You can download the article here.](#)



Student Support Corner

Welcome to the spring semester. Please remember to **welcome your new and returning advisees** to Drake (or back to Drake). There are over 30 entering first year and transfer Arts & Sciences students beginning this spring. If you were assigned a new advisee(s), you received an email with their name(s).

Please be sure to **complete enrollment validation**. The process of validation removes students who do not attend/validate their enrollment on the first day of class, without making prior arrangements with you. The accurate validation of courses is tied to a variety of financial aid and billing processes. To submit validation: MyDrake > Self-Service > Teaching and Grading > Enrollment Validation. And, while validation is important, **so too is letting our office know if a student disappears post-validation**. Students who stop out need to be removed from the term and the University needs to have an accurate accounting of where students are, if they are on campus.

J-term 2026 GRADES: Grades for J-term courses are due before **10 AM on Wednesday, Feb 4**. You can view this due date and other important dates, by visiting [Important Dates | Drake University](#).

Course Ready Reminders

In preparation for your classes this Spring, please find below information you can share with your students enrolled in the program.

- Course material pickup details: [One page PowerPoint](#).
- Suggested [syllabus](#) content for course material pickup.
- As always, students can access their digital content [here](#)

Visit the [Course Ready site](#) for more information and FAQ's.

Upcoming Starfish Events

Responsible Reporting, Title IX and Starfish Resources, Friday, Feb 6, 12:00 – 1:00 PM, Ernst Boardroom (Johansen Student Center, Rm 350)

Join other Arts & Sciences faculty in a session led by **Samantha Nordstrom**, Title IX Coordinator and EEO Specialist and **Lynne Cornelius**, Associate Dean of Students. Pursuant to Drake's Sexual Harassment Policy, all mandatory reporters are required to notify the Title IX Office when they know or reasonably suspect that a student may be experiencing/has experienced sexual misconduct. Attend to learn more about why Drake has adopted this reporting structure and get advice on how to navigate this important duty as well as learn how Starfish can help you report students of concern. RSVP [here](#).

Starfish Session, Friday, Mar 6, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM, FAC 304

Whether you're a Starfish novice or experienced user, join the Arts & Sciences Student Support Team for a session on making the most of Starfish. This session, led by **Alina Grimm** and **Mary Beth Holtey**, will cover how to use Starfish to support students. From using filters, downloading reports or viewing the notes of other campus partners to inform your work with students, learn how Starfish can help you make the most of your advising time. RSVP [here](#).



Career Services Update from Rebecca Muntz, Assistant Director and Liaison to Arts and Sciences



Unexpected Journeys: Arts & Sciences Alumni Networking Event - Thursday, March 26

Please encourage Arts & Sciences students to attend *Unexpected Journeys* on **Thursday, March 26, from 5:00–7:00 PM** in **Johansen Student Center 50 (Fisher-Stelter Hall)**. This alumni networking event gives students the opportunity to hear from Arts & Sciences alumni about the unexpected paths their careers have taken, gain practical insights from their experiences, and connect with alumni during informal, table-based conversations.



Anthropology/Sociology Internship Fair - Thursday, Feb 26

Faculty and staff are invited to share the **Anthropology/Sociology Internship Fair** with students on **Wednesday, February 26, from 3:30–4:30 PM** in the **Medbury Honors Lounge**. This event connects Anthropology and Sociology students with local organizations offering internship and volunteer opportunities aligned with career exploration and experiential learning.



Upcoming Events



Richard Black International Juried Print Exhibition

Opening Reception and Award Ceremony
Anderson Gallery
Feb 5, 5:00 PM-7:00 PM

Join us for the inaugural Richard Black International Juried Print Exhibition at the Anderson Gallery. With a theme of transformation through print, selected works explore the boundaries of the printmaking medium. The exhibition was juried by **Raluca Iancu** and **Sang Lee**. Artists include Erika Adams, Ben Anderson, Jared Barbick, Keith Buswell, Sage Dawson, Natalie Deam, Cal Froikin, Arron Foster, Alejandro Guerrero, Travis Janssen, Mary Jones, Anita Maksimiuk, Aya Naoe, Malgorzata Oakes, Nathan Pietrykowski, Miguel Rivera, Linda Lucía Santana, Jennifer Scheuer, Dan Starling, Jami Taback, Craig Volesky, M Robyn Wall, and April Zhu.

An opening reception and award ceremony will be held on February 5 from 5:00-7:00 PM in the Anderson Gallery, with the awards at 6:00 PM. The exhibition will run through March 13, 2026.



Center for Humanities Campus Conversation

Collier-Scripps Hall, Room 301
Friday, February 20, 12:45 PM

Dr. Gesine Gerhard, Dean of the College and Professor of History

Why the Humanities Matter to: the Taste of Power in 1930s Germany



DUSCI Research Colloquium

Science Connector Building Room 101
Friday, February 20, 11:30am-12:15pm

Dr. Andrea Van Wyk, Assistant Professor of Chemistry

Bridging Research and Practice: Using Chemistry Education Research to Design Authentic STEM Laboratory Experiences

Description: Significant evidence points to the rich benefits that students receive when they engage in undergraduate research experiences. Students gain valuable transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork which are the skills employers, graduate schools, and professional skills most desire in college graduates. It is well documented, however, that there is a skills gap where STEM graduates are leaving college without these necessary skills – calling for a careful examination of STEM curriculum and the ways we

are preparing the next generation. This talk will investigate how we use tools and research from the discipline-based educational research fields to transform STEM curriculum.

Tag A&S on Your Social Media!



Please tag Arts & Sciences in your social media posts so we can share what you're up to. When you create your post, add @DrakeUArtSci to tag us in Facebook, and @drakeartsci in Instagram.

In partnership with UCM, we would love to spotlight faculty, students, staff, and alumni and feature your programs through the College of A&S accounts: please send your suggestions to jennifer.cooper@drake.edu. Thanks!

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