



College of Arts and Sciences

*Appalachian Center and
Appalachian Studies Program*

SPRING 2026





Class of 2026 – Graduating Seniors



Christian Beauman

Christian is graduating with a major in Biology and a minor in Appalachian Studies.

His biggest takeaway from the program is learning about the depth of history and culture in Appalachia. This knowledge will continue to aid him throughout his career to be the best doctor he can for his community.

This fall Christian will be attending the University of Louisville School of Medicine.



Lauryn Davis

Major: Food Biosciences

Minor: Appalachian Studies and
Agricultural Economics



Jillian Freeman



Jillian is graduating with a degree in Architecture and minor in Appalachian Studies.

Jillian's biggest takeaway is that current issues Appalachians are facing can be solved with design. There is a need to understand the culture and history of a community and highlight their voice before making decisions for them. Jillian will be attending the University of Tennessee to earn a Master's degree in architecture.

Adrianna Johnson

Major: Sociology

Minor: Appalachian Studies

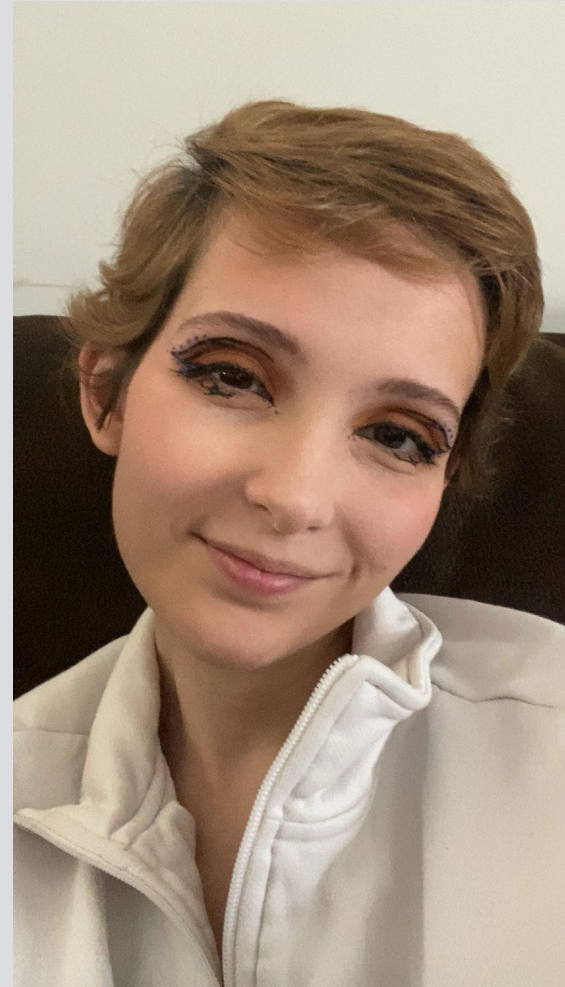


Ren Kelley

Ren Kelley is graduating with his Bachelors in Social Work, and certificate in Appalachian Studies.

Ren worked with the App Center as an AppalachiaCorps Intern. His biggest takeaway from his time in the Appalachian Studies Program is that community cares for all, but in order for there to be a community, each person has to build it and contribute.

Ren's next steps will include serving Appalachia through social work.



Anna Spradling



Anna is am receiving thier B.A. in anthropology with a minor in Appalachian studies.

Anna's big takeaway from my coursework in the Appalachian Studies program is that community is such an essential aspect for resilience in the region and also that Appalachia is relevant and important in so many aspects of life, from cultural heritage and storytelling to environmental and economic issues.

After graduation, Hannah is continuing my studies and plan to receive a master's degree in library and information science.

Natalie Williams



Natalie Williams is from Elizabethtown, Kentucky and is receiving a dual degree/BA in English and Gender and Women's studies with minors in Vocal Music Performance and Appalachian studies.

Her biggest takeaway from working in the Appalachian studies program is the Appalachian studies research she was able to do as part of the Gaines Center for the Humanities fellowship, where she completed research coupled with a creative project under the advising of dr. Chelsea Brislin, dr. Revell Carr, and dr. Carol Mason. Her thesis is titled, "I know what you're thinking when you hear the way I talk – the Appalachian activism of Gunning, Ritchie, and Goodman", and is focused on the contributions of women and LGBTQ musicians to Appalachian protest music from the 1930s to the present – and was able to utilize knowledge from Appalachian studies courses and available materials from Appalshop and the special collections library.

She is so grateful for the Appalachian Center for these opportunities for growth and research. After graduation, she will return to work at the Governors' Scholars program as head RA for the program at Centre college this summer, and after is hoping to pursue a career in education.



Class of 2026 – Graduate Students & Appalachian Studies Graduate Certificate Grads



Matthew Chaney, JD

Matthew Chaney will be graduating with a Juris Doctor and a Graduate Certificate in Appalachian Studies. His biggest takeaway from working in the Appalachian Studies Program has been the development of a deeper appreciation for his home.

Matthew will be working for a Federal Magistrate Judge in London, KY following graduation.



Aleksandra Craine, PhD

Aleksandra Craine is graduating with a PhD in Geography. She served as a teaching assistant and instructor for APP 200 in the academic year 2025-2026. Her time at the Appalachian Center has taught this California transplant much of what she knows about Appalachia, and the amazing, brilliant community of Appalachian scholars at UK and in the region.

After graduating Aleksandra will begin a Visiting Assistant Professor position at Centre College. She will continue living in Lexington.



R. Paulo D'Amato, PhD

R. Paulo D'Amato is graduating with a PhD in History. Appalachian Studies never failed to remind Paolo why he chose to research his home region's history. The powerful community at the Appalachian Center continually reminds him of the power of scholarship and community to bring positive change, while giving him hope that his own contributions can do the same.

Paolo will continue to work after graduation at the Kentucky Historical Society for a brief period of time. He wishes to publish articles out of his dissertation, *Uneven Water*, as soon as possible to share his research with the Appalachian Studies Community.



Micah Lynn, MA

Micah Lynn is graduating from his master's degree in History. His masters research investigates Black armed resistance to racial violence in Kentucky. He is going to Emory to pursue his PhD in History, where he will research memory of racial violence in the South. He gives special thanks to Dr. Kathryn Engle and Dr. Kathryn Newfont. Along with organizers and scholars across Eastern KY, they helped him understand the place his community remembrance work holds in a larger movement for racial reconciliation in Kentucky.



Chris Miller, PhD



After a long career as an Artifact Curator and Associate Director in the Berea College Appalachian Center, Chris returned to school to earn his PhD in communication with a specialization in information science. His research explores what happens when students encounter material objects, especially Appalachian-related objects, as sources of information in classroom activities.

Chris is grateful to the UK Appalachian Center, its staff, and its faculty for being a support on that journey. You helped him learn to navigate the system, you gave him great advice, and you provided a comfortable place to stop in and hang out prior to attending a class.

Chris is continuing in his longstanding roles at Berea College and looking forward to new opportunities created by his experiences at UK.



Michelle Roberts, PhD

Michelle Roberts is graduating with a PhD in Anthropology. As a medical anthropologist, she studies issues of health equity related to disability, healthcare, and caregiving in rural Appalachia.

Michelle is grateful to have been part of the Graduate Appalachian Research Community (GARC) for the past five years. She also completed the Graduate Certificate in Appalachian Studies. The Appalachian Center has been a second home on campus. She wants to thank all the folks of the App Center for their dedication to community, and for giving her one.

After graduation, Michelle will continue research with people with disabilities as a postdoctoral fellow at Virginia Commonwealth University in the NIDILRR Advanced Rehabilitation Research Training (ARRT) Program in Neurorehabilitation.



Hannah Sanford, MPH

Hannah Sanford is graduating with a Masters in Public Health and a Graduate Certificate in Appalachian Studies

Hannah's biggest takeaway from being part of the Appalachian Studies Program and the Appalachian Center is understanding just how strong and rich the culture is and how important it is to listen and share people's real stories.

Hannah has accepted a job with the Kentucky Department for Public Health as an epidemiologist.



Lora Smith

Laura Smith is a writer and cultural organizer from Appalachian Kentucky. Her work focuses on the politics and performance of contested community memory, imagined geographies, grief, ecology, climate issues, and Appalachian futurism. Smith's creative nonfiction, longform journalism, and poetry has appeared in *The Oxford American*, *Bon Appétit*, *Untelling*, NPR's *The Salt*, and elsewhere. She is a co-editor and contributor to the Appalachian foodways collection, *"The Food We Eat, The Stories We Tell: Contemporary Appalachian Tables"* (Ohio University Press, 2019). In addition to her writing, Lora has been engaged with social justice movements and worked at nonprofits and foundations serving the Central Appalachian region for over 20-years.



Smith's engagement with the Graduate Certificate in Appalachian Studies has helped inform her writing and situate it within the broader context of Appalachian scholarship available to artists, researchers, and activists. She is currently a M.F.A. candidate at the University of Kentucky and will graduate in Spring 2027. After graduation she hopes to use her degree to teach or enter a career in publishing.



Dr. Jane Jensen



Congratulations on retirement!

Jane has been a longtime supporter of the Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program. Jane served as the local arrangements chair for the 2020 ASA conference (RIP) to be held at UK and has served in a variety of roles on Appalachian Center committees. Jane has mentored many education students as they completed research in the region.

Thank you Dr. Jensen for all your work with the center and in the region!

Spring 2026 Awards & Recognitions



Ally Moseley

Winner, ResCon Best
Poster Presentation for
“SAFE ROADS Policy and
Public Opinion: A
Qualitative Analysis of
Community Discourse”

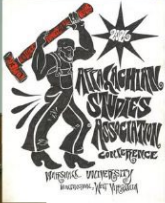


Seth Garcia



Carl A. Ross
Student Paper Award

**2026
WINNERS**



Carl A. Ross
Student Paper Award

Graduate Student Paper
WINNER



Seth Garcia
Troubled Waters: Tourism, Slavery,
and Appalachia as an Internal
Colony



Zada Komara



Shaunna Scott & Kathryn Engle, Eds. Toward Just Transitions

Finalist, Weatherford Award
in Nonfiction

Finalist, Cultural
Anthropology and Sociology
category for the 2026 Prose
Awards

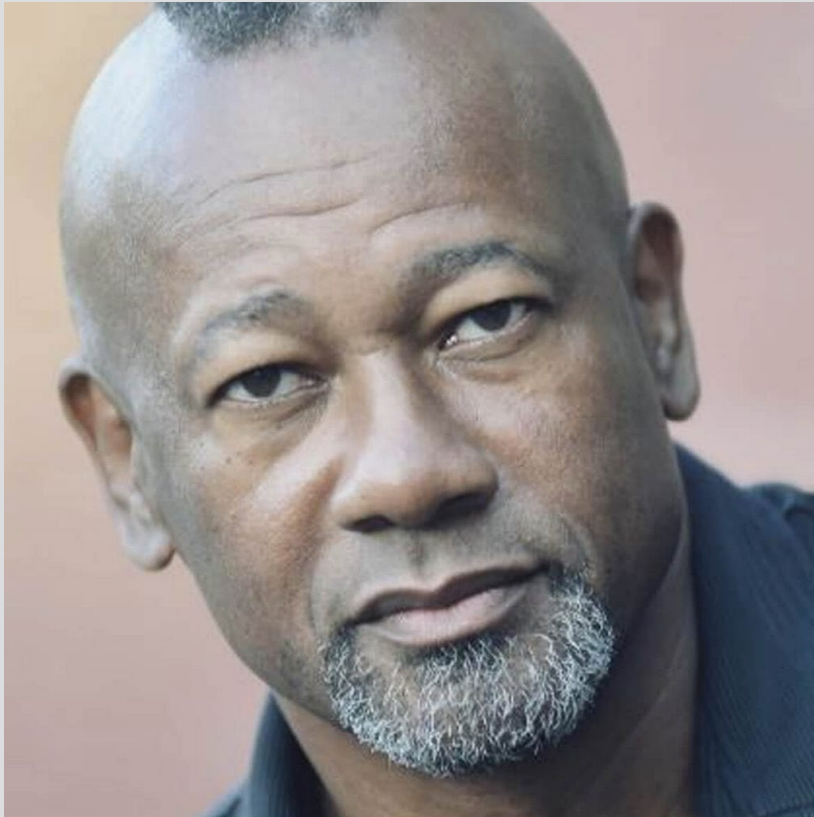


Crystal Wilkinson



UK Libraries
Medallion for
Intellectual
Achievement

Frank X Walker



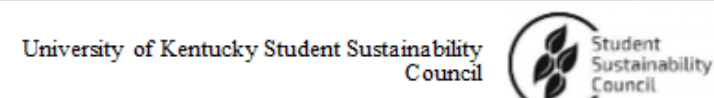
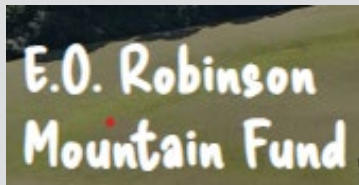
2026 Endowed
Professorship
Awardee

C.R. “Bud” Lezius
Professorship in the
Arts

Thank you from AppalachiaCorps



Congratulations to the Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program
for securing funding from the
E.O. Robinson Mountain Fund, Tracy Farmer Institute for Sustainability and
the Environment, and the University of Kentucky Student Sustainability
Council in support of the AppalachiaCorps Internship Program!



Spring 2026 Events

Office of Undergraduate Research

RESEARCH EXPO

2.2.26

Discover Research Opportunities
Network with UK Research Faculty + Staff

11:00 - 1:00
Monday
FEB. 2, 2026
Gatton Student Center
Social Staircase

More Information:
our.uky.edu/expo

APPALACHIAN BOOK CLUB

THURSDAY | 26 FEB | 11AM - 12PM

APPALACHIAN CENTER, 624 MAXWELTON CT

"IT'S GRANDPA'S LAND: SETTLER PROPERTY, HETEROPATRIARCHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS" BY KANDICE GROSSMAN, AARON PADGETT, AND REBECCA SCOTT

In *Deviant Hollers: Queering Appalachian Ecologies for a Sustainable Future*, available via UK Libraries

WITH A GUEST VISIT FROM DR. PADGETT!

DEVIAN HOLLERS

INVOLVEMENT FAIR

STOP BY FOR FREE COFFEE & LEARN HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Join Us!
THURSDAY JANUARY 22ND

GATTON STUDENT CENTER
GRAND BALLROOMS & SOCIAL STAIRCASE
12 - 3 P.M.

Student Organizations and Activities

APPALACHIA CORPS

PREPARING APPALACHIAN LEADERS OF TOMORROW

APPALACHIA CORPS INTERNSHIP INFO SESSIONS

VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM

The AppalachiaCorps program is currently accepting student inquiries regarding Summer 2026 placements. Please submit an Inquiry form on our website and attend an info session.

THU	→	JANUARY 29 @ 4:30PM
THU	→	FEBRUARY 12 @ 4:30PM
THU	→	FEBRUARY 26 @ 4:30PM
THU	→	MARCH 26 @ 4:30PM
THU	→	APRIL 2 @ 4:30PM

AppalachiaCorps is a student internship program through the UK Appalachian Center that pairs students with opportunities for experiential learning in eastern Kentucky and the greater Appalachian region. AppalachiaCorps serves a three-fold purpose:

- providing students with unique work and learning opportunities
- strengthening UK's and grant commitment to the Appalachian region
- building capacity and networks of relationships between Appalachian organizations

appalachiancenter.as.uky.edu/appcorps

College of Arts and Sciences

SHARING WORK ON APPALACHIA IN PROGRESS

JOIN US AT THE UK APPALACHIAN CENTER OR VIA ZOOM
12:30-2:00
Lunch Provided

November 18, 2025

Megan Hall, Sociology, "Interlocking Disasters: A Western North Carolina Case Study"

Dan Hayes, Rural Physician Leadership Program, "Development of a Low-Cost 3D-Printed Two-Point Discrimination Tool"

December 2, 2025

Holden Dillman, Social Work, "RITE to Belong: Phenomenological Insights into Self-Esteem, Identity, and Support Among Appalachian SGM Youth"

Jimmy Robinson, Sociology, "Collaboration and Control: Some Insights on 'Let's Grow Together'"

January 20, 2026

Nicole Marks, Anthropology, "And the Creek Don't Rise: Disasters, Climate, and Resiliency in Appalachia"

Zachary Hackworth, Forestry & Natural Resources, "Tuning a Generalized Ray-Tracing Forest Light Simulator for Kentucky Forests"

February 17, 2026

Morgan Gilbert, Arts Administration, "Berea College's Fireside Weaving Program"

Paolo D'Amato, History, "Solving Half of the Problem: The Kentucky Water Pollution Control Commission"

appalachiancenter.as.uky.edu

College of Arts and Sciences
Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program

COFFEE HOUR

JOIN US FOR A WARM DRINK AND A SWEET TREAT!

Appalachian Center
624 Maxwelton Ct.
and Via Zoom

THURSDAYS
10 AM

JANUARY 15TH
JANUARY 29TH
FEBRUARY 12TH
FEBRUARY 26TH
MARCH 12TH
MARCH 26TH
APRIL 9TH
APRIL 23RD

College of Arts and Sciences
Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program

Curiosity Fair

to explore your curiosity!

SAVE THE DATE!

Monday, March 30
Gatton Student Center
4 - 6 pm

RSVP now!

Student Success

Shifting Power in Rural America: Conversations on Just Transitions

with Panelists:

**John Gaventa, Gabe Schwartzman, Loka Ashwood,
Shaunna Scott & Kathryn Engle**

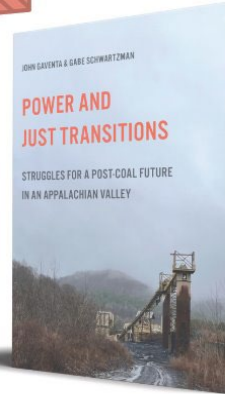
Tuesday, April 21st

Jacobs Science Building, Rm 321

4:00-5:30 Panel Discussion

5:30-6:30 Reception Featuring Local Foods

Rural communities across the Appalachian region face new challenges and possibilities as a result of changing economic and political landscapes. Join MacArthur Fellows John Gaventa and Loka Ashwood in conversation with Gabe Schwartzman (UT), Shaunna Scott (UK emeritus), and Kathryn Engle (UK) for a discussion about just transitions and post-coal economies in the Appalachian region and beyond.



**College of Arts
and Sciences**
Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program
Graduate Appalachian Research Community
Committee on Social Theory
Department of Geography
Department of Sociology



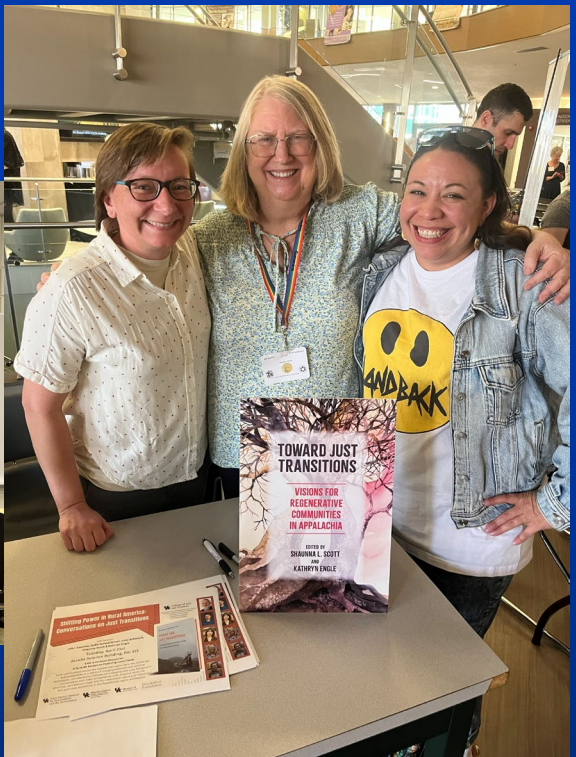
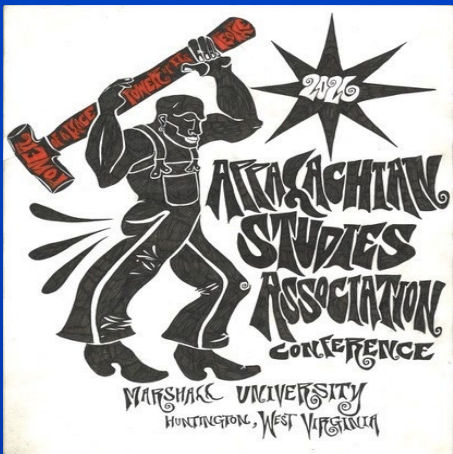
Tracy Farmer Institute
for Sustainability
and the Environment

Martin-Gatton
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
The Food Connection

Research
Society Climate Connection

MacArthur
Foundation





**15TH ANNUAL
APPALACHIAN RESEARCH
+ ARTS SYMPOSIUM**

HOSTED BY THE GRADUATE
APPALACHIAN RESEARCH
COMMUNITY

**University of
Kentucky**
February 28, 2026

theme
interdependent
possibilities

register,
submit a
presentation,
& learn more

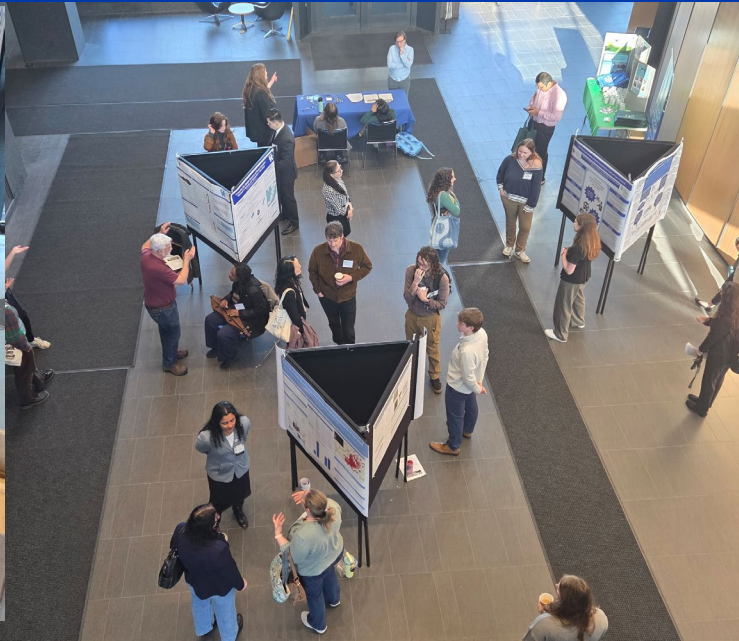


<https://bit.ly/garcsymp>

keynote
Dr. Abby Mack
Assistant Professor of
Anthropology, UK
*Hopesick: Reckoning
with Care, Community,
and Recovery in
Central Appalachia*



 College of Arts and Sciences
 Gaines Center for the Humanities
 Center for Health, Engagement and Transformation





UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

JAMES S. BROWN GRADUATE STUDENT AWARD FOR RESEARCH ON APPALACHIA

 College of Arts
and Sciences
*Appalachian Center and
Appalachian Studies Program*

2026 James S. Brown Graduate Student Award for Research on Appalachia Awardees

Nicole Marks. "And the creek don't rise: Disasters, Climate, and Resiliency in Appalachia." Department of Anthropology, College of Arts & Sciences.

Kelli Lemaster. "A Sense of Place: Place-Based Inquiry in Appalachian Social Studies Classrooms." Department of Teaching & Learning, College of Education.

Michelle Rutherford. "Teaching pedagogies and strategies in middle and high school bluegrass music ensembles: A multiple case study of music teacher perspectives in Appalachia." Department of Music Education, College of Fine Arts.

Julianne Bowling. "A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Academic Disparities in Central Appalachia." Department of Psychology, College of Arts & Sciences.

Morgan Gilbert. "Contemporary Ancestors: Leadership Evolution and Cultural Capital in Berea College's Fireside Weaving" Student Craft Weaving Program." Department of Arts Administration, College of Fine Arts.

Ally Moseley. "Rainbow Roads Aren't Just for Mario Kart: Visibility, Belonging, and Queer Voices in Kentucky's SAFE ROADS Debate." College of Social Work.

Arshiya Jeelani. "Mary Jane in the Mountains: Marijuana Production and Eradication in Eastern Kentucky, 1980-2002." Department of History, College of Arts & Sciences.

Courtney Martin. "Understanding How Youth Think About Cancer: A Cross-Sectional Analysis Exploring Cancer Knowledge and Risk-Perceptions among High School Students in Rural Appalachia." Department of Kinesiology & Health Promotion, College of Education.



ELLER AND BILLINGS RESEARCH AWARD



2026 Eller & Billings Research Award Winners

Tania Rojas Carbajal. "Spatiotemporal Effects of Surface Coal Mining on Bird Occupancy in Appalachia." Department of Biology, College of Arts & Sciences.

Holden Dillman. "We Are Here: National and Appalachian Accounts of Youth-to-Adulthood Mental Health and Well-Being Among Sexual and Gender Minority Emerging and Early Adults." College of Social Work.

Tara Littlefield. "Linking Population Genetics, Demography, and Restoration to Guide Translocation and Recovery of the White Fringeless Orchid (*Platanthera integrilabia*) in the Appalachian Region." Department of Forestry & Natural Resources, Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment.

Emelia Harris. "Relationships Between Water Quality Indicators and Flooding in Southeastern Kentucky." Department of Earth & Environmental Sciences, College of Arts & Sciences.

Thank you!

Thanks to all our faculty, staff, and students for a wonderful academic year!

