



SPU HONORS

The SPU Honors Research Symposium is an academic conference where graduates present their independent Honors Research Projects in the context of the liberal arts learning at the heart of the Honors BA degree.

MAY 16, 2026 OTTO MILLER HALL

6th Annual

SPU

HONORS

RESEARCH

SYMPOSIUM

The 2026 Honors Research Symposium is supported by the Cultivating Character in Classrooms Grant, funded by Wake Forest University and the Lilly Endowment

SPU HONORS RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

May 16, 2026

Overview: Schedule of Events

9:30 am Arrival and Refreshments OMH Lobby
10:00 am **Welcome and Opening Remarks** OMH 109 Lecture Hall

10:30-12:00 Morning CONCURRENT PANEL SESSION

Panel #1 OMH 118

Social and Political Power Structures Across Borders

Alexis Gillam, Emily Haan, Ani Segall

Panel #2 OMH 119

Borders, Words, and Water: The Politics of Belonging

Joel Wong, AJ Setala, Brooke Vanden Berg

Panel #3 OMH 124

Crafting a Solution for Flourishing: Exploring the Stages of the Development Process

Sadie Apuron, Hannah Venable, Jasmine Bowles, Josephine Partridge

Panel #4 OMH 126

Feeding the System: Cellular Signaling, Hypothalamic Control, Ultra-Processed Foods, and Diabetes Ethics

Brittney Hartshorn, Bella Lisenby, Cole Hutchinson, Makayla Bogle

Panel #5 OMH 127

Music, Muscles and Meaning: An Exploration of Self-Concept

Miandria Erickson, Elizabeth Vance, Madison Porter, Kingston Christie

12:00 pm **All-Honors Luncheon** OMH Lobby

1:30-3:00 Afternoon CONCURRENT PANEL SESSION

Panel #6 OMH 118

So, you think you can ~~dance~~ create? Mapping the Methods of Making

Max Vance, Holly Walworth, Christina Ocampo Valdez

Panel #7 OMH 119

Formation of Knowledge: Optimizing Learning in Humans and Machines

Joshua Fechete, Garrett Egger, Ethan Erickson

Panel #8 OMH 124

Your Body Remembers: Systemic Strain and its Impact on Living

Ava Fitzenrider, Eva Newkirk, Neena Marcus, Marcin Janczak

Panel #9 OMH 126

Beyond Scripture: Interpreting Religious Narratives and Symbols through Artistic, Historical and Literary Lenses

Brock Quant, Ella Beth Sessions, Elisabeth Edmonds, Rhiannon Kuns

3:00 **Honors Class of 2026 Award Celebration** OMH 109 Lecture Hall
All-Honors Dessert Reception to Follow OMH Lobby

Honors Research Symposium 2026

Seattle Pacific University
Detailed Schedule



Arrival and Refreshments

9:30 am – 10:00 am

Otto Miller Hall Lobby

Welcome and Opening Remarks

10:00 am – 10:30 am

Dr. Joshua Tom, Honors Director
OMH 109 Lecture Hall

Morning Concurrent Session

10:30 am -12:00 pm

Panel #1

Location: OMH 118

Social and Political Power Structures Across Borders

This session interrogates how individuals, institutions, and countries engage with structures typically participated in without question: corporate governance, international law, and constitutional rights. Promoting human flourishing requires the dismantling of dehumanizing systems, which necessitates critical reflection on how policy, lived experience, and power structures shape opportunities for individuals and communities worldwide.

Panelists:

Alexis Gillam

Honors Research Project Title:

The Anatomy of Corporate Fraud: How Institutional Determinants Shape Governance and Enforcement Across Borders

Emily Haan

Honors Research Project Title:

"Certain" Unalienable Rights: Christian Nationalism and Beliefs About Freedom of Speech

Ani Segall

Honors Research Project Title:

Political, Legal & Ethical Implications of the United Nations Resolution 1441 & it's Resulting Iraq War

Panel #2

Location: OMH 119

Borders, Words, and Water: The Politics of Belonging

Who decides if we belong in the place we are in? This panel examines how power structures affect the relationships between individuals, communities, and the environment. Angles of discussion include how government migration programs limit developing countries, language as a site of (de)humanization, and ways to implement tools of integrated sustainability on a local level.

Panelists:

Joel Wong

Honors Research Project Title:

Beyond Brain Drain: H-1B Visas, Innovation, and Human Flourishing

AJ Setala

Honors Research Project Title:

Unheard Voices: Language and Humanity in Memoirs of Immigration from Latin America to the United States

Brooke Vanden Berg

Honors Research Project Title:

Fluid Identities: Using Seattle's Diverse Water Narratives to Shape Cultural Values and Adaptive Conservation Strategies.

Crafting a Solution for Flourishing: Exploring the Stages of the Development Process

Through exploring the process of ideation, justification, revision and implementation, this panel brings together unique perspectives from healthcare, business education, behavioral science and the performing arts. We will explore how tools can be applied to improve human flourishing, consider criteria for choosing and developing such tools, and how to practically and ethically apply them. We will examine how each discipline informs the questions we ask when seeking to improve the way we create and use tools as artists, scientists and teachers.

Panelists:

Sadie Apuron

Honors Research Project Title:

Missed Calls Matter: Using Technology to Reduce Social Isolation in Aging Populations

Hannah Venable

Honors Research Project Title:

Another Group Project? Exploring the Motivations and Design of the Undergraduate Business Group Project

Jasmine Bowles

Honors Project Research Title:

Testing the Christian University Belonging Scale: Target population feedback and its effect on reliability and validity

Josephine Partridge

Honors Project Research Title:

From Story to Stage: A Journey in Pursuit of Virtuous Leadership and Artistic Intentionality Through Student Directing a Full Play Production at University Level Theatre

Feeding the System: Cellular Signaling, Hypothalamic Control, Ultra-Processed Foods, and Diabetes Ethics

Understanding how biological systems regulate development, metabolism, and disease requires the integration of molecular, physiological, and societal scales. This panel brings together interdisciplinary research exploring different mechanisms of regulation that shape organismal outcomes from early development to chronic disease. This highlights how processes ranging from genetic regulation to brain function and environmental influences govern how organisms maintain balance. This integrative perspective underscores that to be human is to exist and be shaped by a network of regulatory systems all around us, some of which we have a choice in, but also some that have been socially or biologically predestined.

Panelists:

Brittney Hartshorn

Honors Research Project Title:

Characterization of a co-regulator of gene expression in tardigrades

Bella Lisenby

Honors Research Project Title:

Dorsomedial hypothalamic astrocytes regulate feeding behavior and metabolism

Cole Hutchinson

Honors Project Research Title:

The Rise in Type 2 Diabetes Linked to Ultra-Processed Foods

Makayla Bogle

Honors Project Research Title:

Efficacy and Equity in Type 2 Diabetes Care: Comparing GLP-1 Therapy and Dietary Interventions Through Clinical, Social, and Ethical Lenses

Music, Muscles and Meaning: An Exploration of Self-Concept

Self-image is a deeply human experience, formed by complex interactions, community, and inward reflection. Our panel discusses discomfort and self-conceptualization of identity through the fields of psychology, studio-art, music therapy, kinesiology, and theology. Together, we explore how people come to know themselves and what happens when that self-understanding begins to change.

Panelists:**Miandria Erickson**

Honors Research Project Title:

The Importance of Socialization: Family, School, Peer, and Media Influence on White Identity Development

Elizabeth Vance

Honors Research Project Title:

Music Therapy for the Treatment of Body Image Dissatisfaction: Implications For Future Practice

Madison Porter

Honors Project Research Title:

Ever-Present: Exposing The Complex Emotions We Try To Hide

Kingston Christie

Honors Project Research Title:

Working Out Your Self-Image: Strength, Self-Esteem, and Human Flourishing

All-Honors Luncheon**12:00 pm -1:15 pm****Otto Miller Hall Lobby**

Afternoon Concurrent Session

1:30 pm -3:00

Panel #6

Location: OMH 118

So, you think you can ~~dance~~ create? Mapping the Methods of Making

By surveying the diverse worlds of music, condensed matter physics, and cellular biology, this panel bridges the gap between creation methods and final outcomes. More often than not, people neglect the importance of the process, despite the fact that the outcome relies on it. The panelists will explain how they adapted to unexpected changes through iterative learning in the context of music compositional process, atomically thin materials, and immune cell characterization.

Panelists:

Max Vance

Honors Research Project Title:

Musical Expression: How do we as composers and performers use the tools of music in such a way to realize our creative endeavors and communicate them to others?

Holly Walworth

Honors Research Project Title:

Fabrication of Two-Dimensional Optoelectrical Devices

Christina Ocampo Valdez

Honors Research Project Title:

Identifying Modulators of Stable KLRG1+IL7Ra+ Memory T-Cell

Panel #7

Location: OMH 119

Formation of Knowledge: Optimizing Learning in Humans and Machines

This panel investigates how changing variables across learning methods can shape desired behaviors in human or machine subjects. We construct our own experiments for empirical data collection, which build on top of existing research in our respective fields. Using our collected data, we attempt to find optimal ways to improve learned behaviors, whether in natural language models, reinforcement learning agents, or human exercise.

Panelists:

Joshua Fechete

Honors Research Project Title:

Optimizing Gated RNNs

Garrett Egger

Honors Research Project Title:

Learning muscle movements: How observational learning impacts exercise efficiency

Ethan Erickson

Honors Research Project Title:

Shaping Emergent Competitive and Cooperative Behaviors in Multi-Agent General-Sum Games

Your Body Remembers: Systemic Strain and its Impact on Living

This panel explores how themes of trauma, societal constructs, and workplace demands alter the mind and body. Through the lenses of nurses, lawyers, and sedentary workers, we discuss how one's capacity to be human changes under conditions of stress.

Panelists:**Ava Fitzenrider**

Honors Research Project Title:

Slouching Towards Inefficiency? The Cardiometabolic and Cognitive Costs of Poor Posture

Eva Newkirk

Honors Research Project Title:

Behind the Bar: Empathy Burnout's Impact on Lawyers' Competency

Neena Marcus

Honors Research Project Title:

Whiny Women: How Medical Gaslighting Becomes Medical Trauma

Marcin Janczak

Honors Research Project Title:

It's (NOT) Raining Men: Exploring the Themes Surrounding Low Male Presence in Pediatric Nursing

Beyond Scripture: Interpreting Religious Narratives and Symbols through Artistic, Historical and Literary Lenses

This panel explores how religious themes are invented, interpreted and utilized with an eye towards historical change, contemporary applicability and creative expression. In considering both personal and historical acts of interpretation across various religious traditions through the lenses of literary study, feminist thought, and artistic expression, the work displayed here demonstrates the role our political, cultural and doctrinal contexts play in shaping how we approach and understand religious narratives and symbols.

Panelists:**Brock Quant**

Honors Research Project Title:

Imagining Karbala: 'Ashura Symbolism in the Iranian Feminist Literary Imagination, 1969-1988

Ella Beth Sessions

Honors Research Project Title:

Ammonihah's Allegory of Damnation: "Fire and Brimstone" in The Book of Mormon and Doctrine & Covenants

Elisabeth Edmonds

Honors Research Project Title:

Her Body Broken: Wrestling and Reconciling with Judges 19 Through a Feminist Lens

Rhiannon Kuns

Honors Research Project Title:

[De/Re]construction: On the Communion of Nature and the Divine

HONORS Class of 2026 AWARD CELEBRATION

3:00 pm

Otto Miller 109 Lecture Hall

Dessert Reception to Follow

OMH Lobby