



2022

HEALTH SCIENCES

ALUMNI AND STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS AND AWARDS



Jacey Koo '23

A Health Sciences major and a Burnett Honors Scholar, Jacey Koo was one of 26 top students honored with UCF's most prestigious award, the Order of Pegasus, at the 2022 induction ceremony. Reflecting on what this award meant to her, Jacey said, "It means a lot to be recognized for my efforts. No accomplishments come without sacrifice, especially an honor such as this one."

Having scored at the 100th percentile of Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) examinees, Jacey plans to attend medical school following her Spring 2023 graduation. For those preparing for similar exams, Jacey offers the following advice, "Take as many practice tests as you can in an environment that resembles the actual testing conditions. For example, when taking my practice tests, I wore a mask and used a wet-erase board like the one required by my testing facility. Doing so will make you feel more comfortable come test day."

When Jacey is not studying, volunteering or working on her thesis research, she enjoys artistic outlets such as drawing custom graphite portraits and playing instruments. She currently serves as a piano accompanist for the Children's Choir of Saint Andrew's Chapel and continues volunteering at Shepherd's Hope and the Dr. Phillips Center.

Student Spotlight



It means a lot to be recognized for my efforts. No accomplishments come without sacrifice.

JACEY KOO '23

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

2022 Order of Pegasus Inductee



Daniel Gollins '08

At least a decade before becoming President of Texas Children's Pediatrics and Texas Children's Urgent Care (the largest pediatric primary care group in the U.S.), Daniel Gollins was a UCF Knight. As a Health Sciences major, he aspired to be a physical therapist, but as he progressed through the program, his longstanding interest in numbers and data analytics blossomed. When asked about navigating these converging interests, Daniel stated, "Being a Health Sciences major offered flexible coursework that confirmed my desire to be involved in healthcare and enabled me to pivot when I realized that direct patient care wasn't for me." After graduating with his bachelor's in Health Sciences, Daniel pursued a Master's in Health Services Administration -- making him a dual Knight.

When asked what makes a great hospital executive, he said, "It all starts with appreciating the people on your team." Despite managing over 1,500 employees and 80 locations spread throughout Houston and Austin, Daniel makes an effort to round at each location several times a year. Daniel states, "Being a leader is not about your title but rather how you support your team and empower them. Every member of our team is a leader. My role is to ensure they have what they need to care for our families."

Alumni Spotlight



Being a leader is not about your title but rather how you support your team and empower them. Every member of our team is a leader. My role is to ensure they have what they need to care for our families.

Daniel Gollins '08

Health Sciences

President, Texas Children's Pediatrics and Texas Children's Urgent Care



Stephanie Oliveira '22

Stephanie Oliveira is a senior majoring in Health Sciences and minoring in Medical Sociology. A dedicated, passionate and high-achieving Knight, Stephanie is one of 26 UCF students to be inducted into UCF's most prestigious award - the Order of Pegasus. This award recognizes recipients' exemplary performance academically, as well as their outstanding contributions to university involvement, leadership and community service. Speaking on what this honor meant to her, Stephanie said, "It means the world to me. It has reassured me that the most impactful thing I can do for my community is to continue following my passions and being myself."

Stephanie serves on the Executive Board of International Medical Outreach, a nonprofit providing medical services to impoverished communities across the globe. She also assists her peers as a Biology Teaching Assistant, and she is completing an Honors in the Major Thesis on blood-based biomarkers of traumatic brain injuries. When asked what advice she would give other students who want to get involved on campus, Stephanie said, "Push yourself to be comfortable in uncomfortable positions. The sheer size of UCF can be intimidating, but if you put yourself out there, it can become your single greatest resource."

Student Spotlight



Push yourself to be comfortable in uncomfortable positions. The sheer size of UCF can be intimidating, but if you put yourself out there, it can become your single greatest resource.

STEPHANIE OLIVEIRA '22

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

2022 Order of Pegasus Inductee



Brett Knowles '22

Health Sciences senior, Brett Knowles, enlisted in the United States Navy shortly after graduating from high school. During his eight years of decorated service, Brett was stationed across the globe including places like Guam and Bahrain, an island in the Persian Gulf.

As a Petty Officer Second Class, Brett was responsible for the transport of missiles, mines and torpedoes between ships and shorelines. During his last six months of service, Brett worked alongside Navy corpsmen to support various medical operations. It was there that he discovered his interest in medicine. Drawing parallels to both fields, Brett states, "In the military, we can't touch-let alone operate--life-threatening equipment or procedures until we prove that we are truly qualified. Like medical professionals, I spent countless hours studying and demonstrating that I could apply this new knowledge practically. Having gone through this process, I gained a greater appreciation for the preparation it takes to be a skilled professional regardless of whether you work in a civilian or military setting."

Following his honorable discharge, Brett earned an AA from Eastern Florida State College while working as a medical assistant at a neurosurgery practice. Post-graduation, Brett plans to become a physician assistant.

Student Spotlight



Don't ever be scared to try something new. At one point, every medical professional—even the neurosurgeon I worked for—did not know proximal from distal. We all start as beginners.

BRETT KNOWLES '22

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track) United States Navy Veteran



Heather Misner '07

Heather Misner, a class of 2007 Health Sciences graduate, spent over a decade leading public health efforts as Director of Preparedness for the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, an organization representing all 50 state public health agencies in the U.S. In this role, Heather managed federally funded initiatives to combat infectious diseases such as H1N1, Zika, Ebola, and more recently, COVID-19. As a Health Sciences alum, Heather states, "The comprehensiveness of my coursework prepared me to sit at the table and effectively collaborate with clinicians and public health professionals."

Speaking on her proudest moments in public health, Heather cites a paper that she and her team published on the U.S. response to Ebola that played an important role in improving future responses to infectious disease threats like COVID-19. Despite Heather's success in public health, her desire to become a clinician began to grow later in her career. Recently, she made the decision to return to school to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in preparation for pursuing a career as a nurse practitioner. When asked about transitioning to a different career, Heather states, "If you feel strongly about changing course, go for it. It's never too late to pursue your passions."

Alumni Spotlight



The comprehensiveness of my coursework prepared me to sit at the table and effectively collaborate with clinicians and public health professionals.

HEATHER MISNER '07

Health Sciences

Former Director, Preparedness Assoc of State & Territorial Health Officials (Currently pursuing a nursing degree)



Victoria Orindas '22

Victoria Orindas, a Health Sciences senior, moved from the Republic of Moldova to Florida shortly after her 16th birthday. Although fluent in Russian, Romanian and French, Victoria had yet to conquer English and acclimate to a new high school. For college, Victoria says she was drawn to UCF because of its commitment to inclusion and authenticity. "I knew I could embrace my roots and create my own story at UCF with unconditional support." That's exactly what she did -- forge an incredible record of leadership to multiple organizations and eventually earn the Founders' Day Award and induction into the Order of Pegasus. One of her favorite roles was serving as a Teaching Assistant and Learning Guide for international students. Reflecting on her involvement she says, "Because of my background, I understand the challenges that come with transitioning to the U.S. Helping students overcome the same hurdles I've faced brings me great joy."

Victoria found her calling while working as a certified nursing assistant at an assisted living facility. "Even though I was only 18 at the time, everything clicked. I enjoyed getting to know the patients, learning from their life experiences and helping them. Eventually, I knew I wanted to dedicate my life to caring for this population as a geriatrician."

Student Spotlight



I understand the challenges that come with transitioning to the US. Helping students overcome the same hurdles I've faced brings me great joy."

VICTORIA ORINDAS '22

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

2022 Order of Pegasus Inductee & Founders' Day Honoree



Jaden LeGate '22

Jaden LeGate, a Fall 2022 Health Sciences graduate, describes his graduation month as "bittersweet." Jaden says, "My time at UCF has been truly unforgettable. While I'm excited to take the next step in my life, I'm going to miss all the wonderful professors and classmates I've worked with along the way."

For Jaden, that next step will be applying to medical school, a goal he has had since he was a young child. Describing the origins of his medical ambitions, Jaden states, "My interest in medicine began as soon as I was old enough to grasp a family member's medical condition." As a young boy, Jaden accompanied his family member on medical visits for treatment of a congenital condition. "After witnessing the impact that medicine had on our family, I knew becoming a physician was the path for me."

While a Knight, Jaden served as Vice President of Recruitment for 4EverKnights, conducted research on cardiometabolic disease outcomes and worked as an emergency room medical scribe. This October, Jaden's contributions were recognized at the UCF Alumni Shining Knights Awards Ceremony where he was honored with the Distinguished Student Award. Reflecting on his accomplishments as a Knight, he says, "I owe everything to my family and parenting. I'm forever thankful for them."

Alumni Spotlight



After witnessing the impact that medicine had on our family, I knew becoming a physician was the path for me."

JADEN LEGATE '22

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)
2022 Shining Knights Awardee



2023

HEALTH SCIENCES

ALUMNI AND STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS AND AWARDS



Danielle Saunders '20

Watching "House" was the spark that led Health Sciences alum (2020), Danielle Saunders, to where she is today. "It started with a last-minute decision to apply to UCF, and it is one of the best decisions I made." Although she was interested in a medically related career, she didn't know which path to pursue. Two courses set her on her path – Epidemiology and Research Methods. "I was totally unfamiliar with epidemiology and research until I took these courses."

Reflecting on her time at UCF, Danielle emphasized the importance of perseverance. "I failed a chemistry course and almost changed my major, but I took it again and passed." Her advice: "Don't be afraid to fail, and don't make decisions based on fear - sometimes you just don't realize how capable you are."

A 2023 graduate of the University of Florida's Master of Public Health program with a concentration in Epidemiology, Danielle says the Health Sciences courses she took helped her with grad school.

Danielle's career aspirations are to make substantial research contributions and to impact the health outcomes and quality of life of vulnerable populations. Accepting a position as a Research Coordinator at UF is her first step toward this goal. Ultimately, she hopes to work as a public health officer with the U.S. Air Force.

Alumni Spotlight



"Don't be afraid to fail, and don't make decisions based on fear, because sometimes you just don't realize how capable you are."

DANIELLE SAUNDERS '20

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

University of Florida Master of Public Health '23 (Epidemiology concentration)



Angela Jarman '23

Angela Jarman, a Health Sciences senior who works at Orlando Health's Level 1 Trauma Center, likens the medical professionals she works with to the Marvel movie characters she loves. Recalling her first experience working as a certified surgical technologist in the operating room, Angela says, "The patient came in with a gunshot wound to the chest, and the surgeon quickly went into action to save the patient's life. That was worthy of superhero status to me." Angela says her job and coursework have been critical in preparing her for a career as a surgeon.

In addition to balancing a full-time job and course load, Angela served as the Vice President of the African American Biomedical Sciences Organization. For students like her that work and attend school full-time, Angela says, "It's your future, so you have to take charge of it."

Angela saved and used her resources wisely enough to become a homeowner, so in her free time she likes doing home improvement projects like installing flooring, repairing stairs and paving the driveway. "It reminds me of orthopedic surgery because they use some of the same drills and handsaws."

When thinking about graduation, Angela says, "It's been a long journey, but when the time comes, I'll tell myself congratulations and move on to the next step."

Student Spotlight



It's your future, so you have to take charge of it.

ANGELA JARMAN '23

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

Certified Surgical Technologist and Aspiring Surgeon



Jayla Mercer '22

Jayla Mercer is on her way to making her childhood dream of becoming a dentist come true. After commuting two hours a day to attend classes at UCF, Jayla graduated magna cum laude with her bachelor's in Health Sciences in May '22 and started at the University of Florida's dental school program in Fall '23. She also is the recipient of the competitive full-ride Health Professions Scholarship Program and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army. By the time she graduates, she'll be a Captain!

Jayla credits her success to a supportive family, the preparation she received by completing the Health Sciences major, her involvement with the Pre-Dental Student Association (PDSA), hard work, and her mantra, "Don't stop now, you've made it this far."

In considering advice she would give to students pursuing careers in healthcare, she recommends searching for ways to get clinical exposure early on and belonging to organizations that match your interests. "I know students who were in their senior year when they were first exposed to dentistry and realized they didn't like it," Jayla said. "Also, for me, belonging to PDSA was invaluable."

About her journey in dental school Jayla says, "I think about it every day. Every morning I wake up, and I can't believe I made my dream come true."

Alumni Spotlight



Don't stop now, you've made it this far.

JAYLA MERCER '22

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

2nd Lieutenant - US Army and University of Florida's College of Dentistry



Nahomy Nelson '23

Nahomy Nelson, Health Sciences alumna (2023) and now graduate student at Boston's New England College of Optometry (NECO), didn't always have a clear vision of her future. What changed that was a volunteer experience at the 2022 Special Olympics. "This was my first experience learning about optometry," said Nelson. "Working alongside Doctors of Optometry, seeing them invest their time to complete vision checks for a special needs population, and being exposed to the equipment and innovative technologies used for eye exams got me hooked."

After receiving acceptances from all 5 optometry programs where she applied, Nahomy is now on her way to a promising future as an optometrist. When asked about why she chose NECO she said, "Their program helped heighten my interest in community health and serving special needs populations because I want to give back to others."

Nahomy says she can't stress enough how important it is to get involved in volunteer activities and organizations and to network with others. Aside from working as an optometry tech, Nahomy served as a mentor to girls of color as part of Crown to Crown and the mentorship director for the International Medical Outreach Team, completed a research project, and served as an undergraduate teaching assistant for Health Sciences.

Alumni Spotlight



Give back to others.

IMO – everyone needs something.

NAHOMY NELSON '23

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

New England College of Optometry '27



Calvin MacDonald '24

Calvin MacDonald, a Health Sciences major and Burnett Medical Scholar, is already helping to shape the future of medicine through his work as a student assistant for Limbitless Solutions. "Limbitless makes aesthetic 3D-printed prosthetics that combine art and STEM. Engineers design how the arms work, and artists paint the arms in beautiful colors so kids with limb differences are proud of their personalized prosthetic."

Calvin also works on the development of electromyography (EMG) controlled wheelchairs for individuals who have a nervous system disease that causes loss of muscle control. Using an EMG controller device that transmits signals from the temporalis muscle, the main muscle used to chew food, individuals who have lost muscle control can signal their wheelchair to turn left or right according to how hard they clench their jaw.

About his research, Calvin says, "I've learned that through others you can achieve basically anything. Getting other perspectives can help you see things you wouldn't have thought of, which is critical to success." On why he's pursuing a medical career he says, "I want to feel like I'm doing something that matters every day I go to work. I also thrive on new things, so the constant advances based on medical research makes medicine ideal for me."

Student Spotlight



I want to feel like I'm doing something that matters every day I go to work.

CALVIN MACDONALD '24

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

Burnett Medical Scholar and Student Assistant at Limbitless Solutions



Sydney Martinez '23

UCF 2023 Founders' Day Award recipient, Sydney Martinez, is not one to let moss grow under her feet. An avid volunteer, Sydney's volunteer highlights include raising awareness about bone marrow donation as President of the UCF chapter of Be the Match; serving as the UCF Vice President of the American Red Cross where she and her peers do community projects like installing free home fire alarms; assisting with patient care at Grace Medical Home as a Certified Nursing Assistant volunteer; and serving on the UCF President's Leadership Council.

Sydney was appointed to the Red Cross National Youth Council in 2023. One of only 13 representatives from across the U.S., Sydney and her peers oversee initiatives that support the work of 100,000 Red Cross youth volunteers nationwide. Reflecting on these experiences, Sydney said, "Early on, I felt unqualified because I didn't think I had the experience I needed, but I realized that believing in yourself and giving each experience all that you have builds confidence and opens new doors."

Asked about her choice of UCF, Sydney said, "I grew up next to UCF and performed at UCF football games as a competitive baton twirler, so I knew it was where I wanted to be. Being selected for the UCF majorette team was a dream come true – I couldn't be happier."

Student Spotlight



Half the battle is believing in yourself.

SYDNEY MARTINEZ '23

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

UCF Founders' Day Award Recipient and President of UCF's Be the Match



Eugenio Reina '23

A health scare in high school inspired Health Sciences senior, Eugenio Reina, to pursue a career in medicine. "I had intense pain in my leg that impacted my sleep, weight and movement. After seeing countless doctors, a remarkable physician changed my life and diagnosed me with intra-articular osteoid osteoma, a rare benign bone tumor that was easily treated." This experience cemented Eugenio's drive to become the type of physician who can diagnose difficult and complex conditions and is a "compassionate listener."

A diehard fan of UCF and the Health Sciences major, Eugenio speaks enthusiastically about what he's learned in classes and how it ties into his research and community service. His research experiences include analyzing data from a national database for his honors thesis and working as a clinical research coordinator for a research center. He also worked on a NIH-funded clinical trial evaluating the use of a skin biopsy to distinguish between Alzheimer's dementia and another type of dementia. Recognizing the emotional burden of this disease on Alzheimer's caregivers, he serves as a support group facilitator for Spanish-speaking caregivers through the Alzheimer's Association. For balance, Eugenio enjoys intramural and club sports and spending time with those close to him.

Student Spotlight



Never give up – instead, give it your best.

EUGENIO REINA '23

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

Clinical Research Coordinator at N1 Research and aspiring physician



Samantha Migliore '24

An intern on the Clinical Research Team at Limbitless Solutions, Health Sciences junior Samantha Migliore collaborates with a team of interns and professionals on projects related to this nonprofit's mission of creating personalized, lightweight prosthetic arms with enhanced functionality for children. One of her first team projects resulted in an abstract accepted for presentation at a bioethics conference in Seattle. Reflecting on her internship with Limbitless Solutions, Samantha, who aims to become a physical therapist said, "I know that some Doctor of Physical Therapy programs include a research aspect, and I am confident that my experience at Limbitless and the courses I have taken at UCF have prepared me to jump right in."

Samantha also volunteers with Hearts for the Homeless and Orlando Health. "First-hand experiences like measuring blood pressure, doing research, and working alongside physical therapists and therapy aides really helps you nail down what you learned in class. But keep in mind, everyone's journey is different - how you get there isn't a set path."

A proud Knight, Samantha is happy with her decision to major in Health Sciences stating, "Health Sciences gives you a broader perspective on healthcare and human health compared to other majors."

Student Spotlight



Everyone's journey is different – how you get there isn't a set path.

SAMANTHA MIGLIORE '24

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

Clinical Research Intern at Limbitless Solutions



Nettey Baddo '24

A firm believer in the adage "you are what you eat," Health Sciences preclinical major Nettey Baddoo found inspiration for his honors undergraduate thesis research from the nutrition courses he took and outside readings.

Under the guidance of his faculty mentor, Nettey is conducting a systematic review and meta-analysis to investigate the extent to which calorie restriction and fasting can improve the efficacy of cancer treatments and quality of life. For students thinking about getting involved in research, Nettey recommends to first complete workshops offered by the Office of Undergraduate Research. "Showing prospective research mentors that you have done some preliminary exploration on your own is a great way to show interest and initiative," says Nettey. Among the many things Nettey learned through his research experience is the importance of being open to different perspectives and ideas from those who have more experience.

An aspiring physician, Nettey joined the American Medical Student Association and engaged in medically related endeavors such as serving as a scribe at Advent Health. "Being a scribe was insightful. I got to witness multiple aspects of what physicians do firsthand and to learn about each patient's medical history," says Nettey. "I loved it."

Student Spotlight



Enjoy the journey.

NETTEY BADDOO '24

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

Honors Undergraduate Thesis Student



Cecilia Bui '23

For Cecilia Bui, an aspiring physician, it was a human nutrition course at UCF that led her to switch her major from Biology to Health Sciences. "I loved the instructor's passion, and I enjoyed hearing her relate course content to her experience working as a registered dietitian nutritionist. It gave the course an extra spark."

Whether it's serving as a peer research coach or teaching assistant, completing an honors undergraduate thesis, traveling on her own to complete a summer study abroad experience in Korea, or writing crowd-sourced reviews, Cecilia follows a simple rule: "Define your passions, and dive right into them."

A first-generation student born to parents who emigrated from Vietnam, Cecilia has embraced opportunities that allow her to give back to the Vietnamese community. Volunteering as a medical assistant for a clinic that serves Vietnamese patients has provided her with a great way to achieve this goal. Reflecting on this experience, Cecilia says, "I am grateful for the sacrifices my parents made for me, so giving my time to this community is my way of paying it forward."

When asked about her feelings as graduation approaches she says, "I tend to focus on what I haven't done, but when I reflect on my time at UCF, I realize I've accomplished a lot."

Student Spotlight



Define your passions, and dive right into them.

CECILIA BUI '23

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

Honors Undergraduate Thesis Student and Peer Research Coach



Taina Torres-McBean '24

For Taina Torres-McBean, attending UCF was a no-brainer. She grew up living less than 10 minutes from main campus, and her mother is a UCF Knight alumna. As a student majoring in Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical track), Taina served as an Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (UTA) for Applied Health Research Methods, a required senior-level course. "Being a UTA is one of my most memorable experiences at UCF. I provided mentorship and guidance to my peers with the goal of helping them succeed in the course."

After the challenges of COVID, Taina decided to try and make the most of her undergraduate experience. "I was like, you know what? Even though life is hard, I need to figure out a way to feel fulfilled. I had no real experience aside from attending classes and studying. I knew being a UTA could really benefit me. So, I guess you could say, helping others helped me to succeed."

When asked how being a UTA might help her as she pursues a career in medicine, Taina says, "I've become more empathetic and patient in this experience. I know I'll need to talk with people experiencing difficult situations. Being a UTA also increased my confidence in my ability to help others, which feels great."

Student Spotlight



Helping others helped me to succeed!

TAINA TORRES-MCBEAN '24

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant for Applied Health Research Methods



Damontie Graham '21

Health Sciences alumna and student during the COVID-19 years, Damontie Graham ('21), didn't let the pandemic slow her journey into public health. A 2023 graduate of George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health in Washington DC, Damontie is on a mission to help reduce the incidence of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality in the U.S. "My introduction to public health was the Epidemiology in Chronic Diseases course I took at UCF. This course subsequently inspired me to choose maternal and child health as the focus of my research proposal for Applied Health Research Methods. After that, I was hooked."

When asked about her experience as a Health Sciences undergraduate, Damontie said, "Learning that there are other ways to impact health outside of hospital-based care got me interested in public health and the preventative side of medicine." To students seeking to work in healthcare, Damontie offers this advice: "Find where your heart is happy and work there." Damontie's next goal is to obtain a CDC Informatics Fellowship. "I know that I can use the resources at the CDC to implement programs that can help pregnant women, especially those at high risk, have successful pregnancy outcomes."

Alumni Spotlight



Find where your heart is happy and work there.

DAMONTIE GRAHAM '21

Health Sciences (Pre-Clinical Track)

Masters of Public Health at George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health



2022

HEALTH SCIENCES RECIPIENTS OF PRESTIGIOUS UCF AWARDS

Founder's Day Award

Victoria Orindas

Order of Pegasus

Austin Eason
Jacey Koo
Stephanie Oliveira
Victoria Orindas

2023

HEALTH SCIENCES RECIPIENTS OF PRESTIGIOUS UCF AWARDS

Founder's Day Award

Sydney Martinez

Order of Pegasus

Shea McLinden





chps.ucf.edu/healthsciences