

Department of Earth and Environment Newsletter

Spring
2026
Vol. 3,
Issue 1

*INNOVATE.
ELEVATE.
BE
UNSTOPPABLE*

**COLLEGE OF
ARTS, SCIENCE &
EDUCATION**

11200 SW 8th Street,
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Miami, FL 33199

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

As we wrap up the 2025-2026 academic year, we take this opportunity to reflect on the tremendous work and accomplishments of our students, faculty, and alumni in the Department of Earth & Environment (E&E).

This year has been marked by dedication, creativity, and impact across all areas of our mission. Our students have continued to excel, in the classroom, in research and creative activities, and through internships and service experiences that connect academic learning with real-world environmental challenges. Their achievements, leadership, and resilience inspire us every day and reaffirm the strength of our academic programs and mentoring culture.

Our faculty have demonstrated outstanding commitment to scholarly excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration, and student success. Through innovative teaching, impactful research, community engagement, and service at the departmental, university, and national levels, they continue to elevate E&E's role as a leader in environmental and earth sciences.

This academic year also marked an important moment of transition for our department. Last fall, we celebrated the retirements of Dr Gren Draper and Dr Hugh Willoughby. We were deeply saddened by the passing of Drs Draper and Haggerty, whose legacies will remain an enduring part of our department and the FIU community. This spring, we also recognize the retirements of Dr Jim Riach and Dr Andrew Macfarlane, following decades of dedicated service to Earth & Environment. We are profoundly grateful for the collective contributions, leadership, and mentorship of these colleagues, which have shaped generations of students and strengthened our department over many years.

None of this progress would be possible without the collaborative spirit that defines E&E. From research symposia and Earth Day activities to faculty governance, student organizations, and community partnerships, this year reflects what we can achieve when we work together toward shared goals.

We are also proud of our alumni, whose contributions across public agencies, private industry, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions showcase the reach and relevance of an E&E education. Their success and continued engagement with the department strengthen our growing network and provide invaluable mentorship and inspiration for current students.

At the same time, we are excited to welcome, and continue welcoming, new faculty members as we build on this strong foundation and keep the momentum going in our teaching, research, and service mission.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

As we look ahead, we remain committed to fostering an inclusive, supportive, and forward-thinking department. Thank you to everyone who contributed to making this academic year a success.

With appreciation,
Amir A. Khoddamzadeh, Ph.D.

Chair & Associate Professor, Department of Earth and Environment
Florida International University (FIU)

Photograph from the Earth Week Celebration held on April 17th at the FIU Nature Preserve.

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Graduate Student Notes Graduations—Spring 2026



Back Row (Right to left): Barbara Nogueira Souza Costa, Ping Zhu, Neptune Srimal, Haiyan Jiang, Hong Liu, Tatiana Goana, Cara Rockwell, Kateel Shetty, **Dr Moses Kiwanuka**, Maruthi Sridhar Balaji Bhaskar, **Dr Cody Eggenberger**, Amir Khoddamzadeh. Front Row (Right to left): Assefa Melesse, Jesse Blanchard, René Price, Mahadev Bhat



Pictured: Wei Huang, Haiyan Jiang, Hong Liu, Jesse Blanchard, Assefa Melesse, Kateel Shetty, Mahadev Bhat, Neptune Srimal.



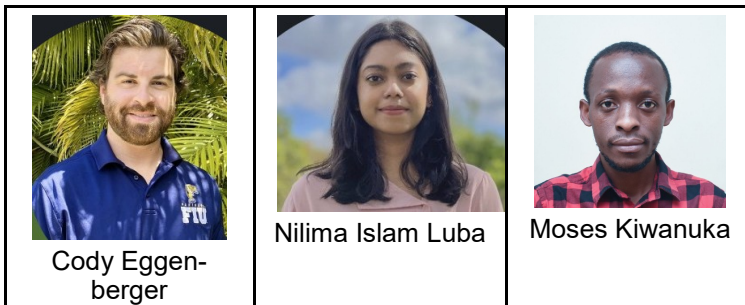
Pictured: Neptune Srimal, Mahadev Bhat, Ping Zhu, Len Scinto, Cara Rockwell, Mike Sukop, Amir Khoddamzadeh.

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Graduate Student Notes

Graduations Spring 2026 (Cont.)

Congratulations to our Spring 2026 PhD graduates.



Master of Science
Cendan, Luis—Env. Studies
Sosa, Brandon—Env. Studies
Tapia, Carlos—Env. Studies
Islam, Tania—Geosciences
Belbase, Priyanka—Geosciences
Shanko, Alemayehu D—Geosciences
Espina, Valeria—Geosciences
Garcia, Denise—Geosciences

Graduations Fall 2025



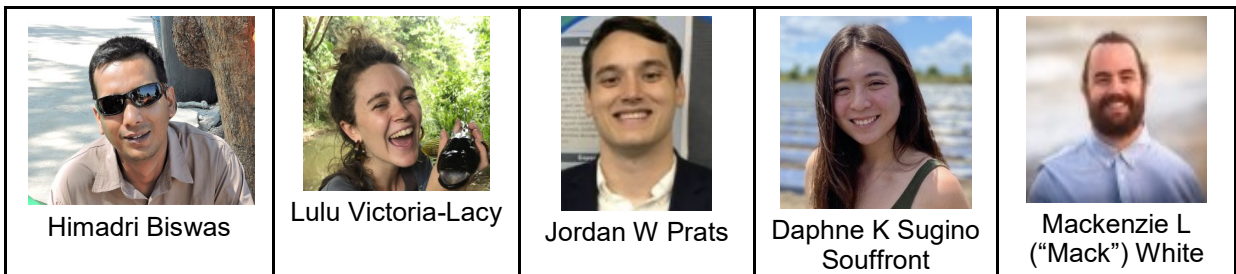
Back row (Right to left): Kateel Shetty, Cara Rockwell, Michael Heithaus, Robert Burgman, Jesse Blanchard, Anna Fache, Maruthi Sridhar Balaji Bhaskar, **Jordan Prats**, Elizabeth Anderson, **Daphne Sugino Souffront**, Amir Khoddamzadeh, Front row (Right to left): Mahadev Bhat, René Price, Mike Ross, Jay Jayachandran, **Himadri Biswas**

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Graduate Student Notes

Graduations Fall 2025 (Cont.)

Congratulations to our Fall 2025 PhD graduates.



Master of Science	
Orihuela, Johanset—Geosciences	Sharma, Anurag—Geosciences
Distrubell, Andy—Env. Studies	Torres Parada, Jose—M Geosciences
Leal, Penelope A—Env. Studies	Williams, Latonya—Env. Studies
Kataraihya, Dafrosa J—Geosciences	Polidora, Danielle N—Env. Studies

FIU Professional Science Master's in Environmental...
 252 followers
 11h · 🌱

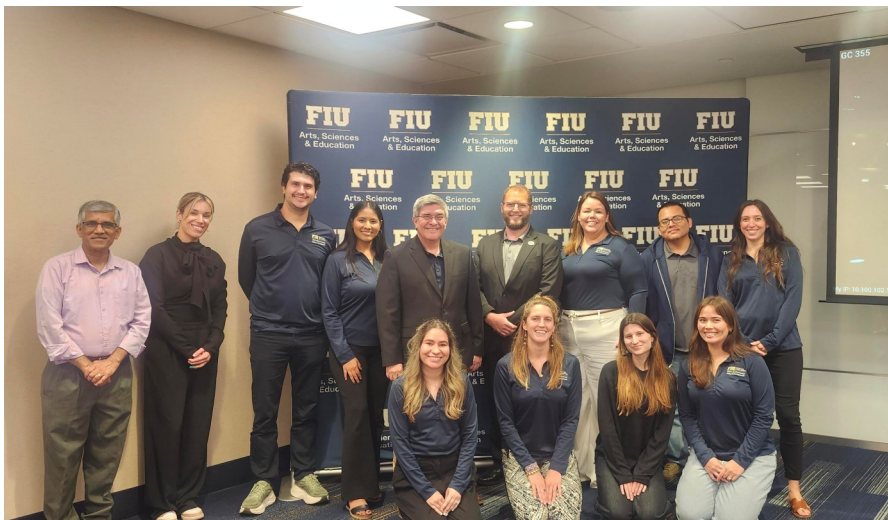
100% alumni employment doesn't happen by accident. ✓

Industry leaders from the Everglades Foundation, Langan, DERM, Deering Estate, FWC, FDOT, The Seminole Tribe, and the City of Miami Beach joined us at the International Center for Tropical Botany to optimize our PSMEPM curriculum.

Thanks to all who contributed!

We're aligning education with industry needs to ensure our graduates remain the most employable in Florida! 🌱👉

#FIU #PSMEPM #GreenJobs #EnvironmentalPolicy #CareerReady



Left to right. Back row: Mahadev Bhat, Anna Fache, Harley Guerra, Elise Banea, Oscar Saenz, Jesse Blanchard, Amanda Caparro, Jorge Ramirez, Maria Eugenia Costa. Front row: Claudia Lopez Gonzales, Imarra-Bella Thorpe, Lauren Lopez, Jocelyn Mendoza.

MS Env. Policy & Management (ESM) - Professional Science Masters (PSM)
Caparro, Amanda J
Guerra, Harley M
Ramirez, Jorge A
Lopez Gonzalez, Claudia M
Banea, Elise M
Costa, Maria E
Thorpe, Imara Bella P
Mendoza, Jocelyn
Lopez, Lauren M

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Current Graduate Student Activities

Graduate Student Appreciation Week



As part of Graduate Student Appreciation Week, we invited faculty to take a moment to recognize and celebrate our graduate students.

Earth and Environment Students recently awarded UGS awards:

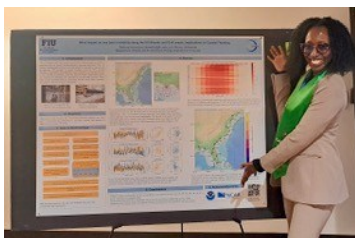
Awards

Dissertation Fellowship Awardees:

- Juan Lozano Velasquez - Dissertation Fellowship (DF) for the Summer and Fall, 2026
- Lauren De Vito - Dissertation Fellowship (DF) for the Summer and Fall, 2026

Dissertation Evidence Acquisition Fellowship Awardees:

- Aujeeta Shehrin Razzaque - Doctoral Evidence Acquisition (DEA) Fellowship for the Summer 2026 term



Dafrosa Kataraihya, a PhD candidate in the Geodesy Lab in the Department of Earth and Environment, has been recognized among only five graduate students from Florida International University (FIU) nominated for induction into the prestigious Bouchet Graduate Honor Society (BGHS) at the 22nd Annual Yale Bouchet Conference on Graduate Education, held in New Haven, Connecticut, on April 10–11, 2026. This highly selective honor celebrates scholars who embody the Bouchet pillars of Character, Leadership, Advocacy, Scholarship, and Service. The BGHS is a highly selective national honor and has recognized 1547 scholars since its founding in 2006. With membership granted only through nomination and approval by the National Steering Committee, this distinction highlights Dafrosa's exceptional promise as a scholar and her outstanding contributions to research, leadership, and service.

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Current Graduate Student Activities

Awards (Cont.)



Marie Isabelle Dubois (doctoral student) received the Dennis Carpenter Memorial Fellowship at the Dade County AGRI Council Fellowship Award event. Congratulations to Mari and Dr. Kateel Shetty.



Our recent graduates shined at the 2026 CASE Student Academic Achievement & Service Awards Ceremony, earning recognition across multiple categories.

Outstanding Graduate Academic Achievement Award: **Milagros Muñoz Salas, Dr Moses Kiwanuka, and Melody Carrión Nunez**, Outstanding Undergraduate Academic Achievement Award: **Katelyn Smith**, Best Dissertation Award: **Dr Daphne Sungio Souffront**, Exemplary Service Award: **Kiara Taibi-Briz**.

Congratulations to all of the award recipients and to the faculty advisors who supported them in achieving these well-deserved honors. Your collective efforts continue to exemplify the excellence, scholarship, and service that define Earth & Environment. See more on [LinkedIn](#).



Congratulations to doctoral candidate, **Daniel A. Tucker**, on being selected as a Catherine H. Beattie Fellow in #ConservationHorticulture by The Garden Club of America's Center for Plant Conservation! Learn more about the details on [LinkedIn](#).

The American Society for Horticultural Science featured Daniel in the [Graduate Student Spotlight](#) series.

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Current Graduate Student Activities (Cont.)

Graduate Symposium Winners

The Department held its 2026 Graduate Research Symposium on Friday, March 13, 2026 in the MARC Pavilion. Symposium organizers and award winners are pictured below.

		
<p>Mehnaz Ashraf, Symposium Lead Coordinator</p>	<p>Oluwatosin Orimolade, Symposium Moderator</p>	<p>Patrick Ben Emoi Otema, Symposium Moderator</p>
		
<p>Divya Sree Govada, Symposium Moderator</p>	<p>Lael Licht, Symposium Moderator</p>	<p>Luana Antunes Alexandre, Symposium Moderator</p>
		
<p>Milagros Munoz Salas, Best TA – ENVST</p>	<p>Jose Torres Parada, Best TA - GEO</p>	<p>Sana Awan, Best TA - ENVST</p>

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Current Graduate Student Activities (Cont.)

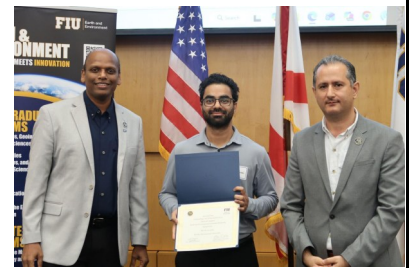
Graduate Symposium Winners (Cont.)



Lauren Emer, Best TA - GEO



Marie Dubois, Oral -PhD- Third Place



Anurag Sharma, Oral -PhD- Second Place



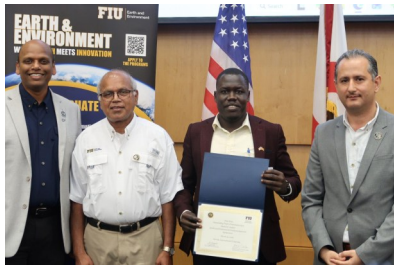
Blaire Klieman, Oral -PhD- First Place



Nicholas Kilonzo, Poster-PhD- Third Place



Sarah Tillem, Poster-PhD- Second Place



Patrick Ben Emoi Otema, Post-er-PhD- First Place



Biplov Oli, Poster-PhD- Special Mention



Leel Licht, Poster-PhD- Special Mention

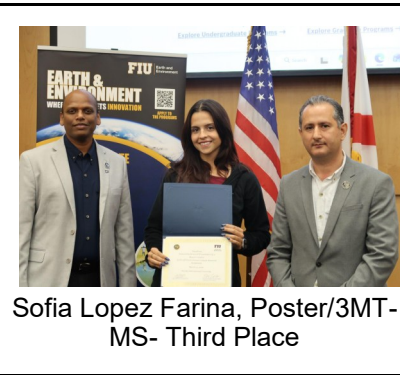
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Current Graduate Student Activities (Cont.)

Graduate Symposium Winners (Cont.)



Dafrosa Kataraihya, Oral-3MT-
PhD-First Place



Sofia Lopez Farina, Poster/3MT-
MS- Third Place



Demonica Brown, Poster/3MT-
MS- Second Place

Not pictured: Oscar Mendoza, who earned second place in Poster/3MT-MS, and **Alan Gumbs Jurado**, recognized as Best TA for Environmental Studies. Congratulations to all of our graduate students! Learn more about the details on [LinkedIn](#).

Other Graduate Student Items



Daphne Sugino Souffront, Graduate Student Researcher, FIU & Lion Farms and **Samantha Perez**, Student, Environmental Studies - Agricultural Sciences, FIU & Lion Farms participated in the Tuesday Times Roundtable session titled "[Building Soil & Community: Regenerative Farming for Generations](#)" from the Office of Global Learning Initiatives.



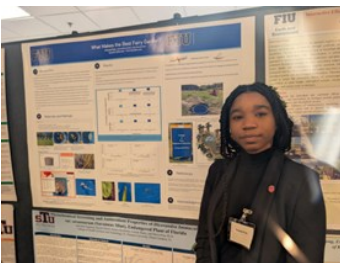
Meet the new PSM-EPM Work industry ambassador committee. These are industry professionals advising new curriculum development for the Environmental Policy & Management (EPM) - Professional Science Masters (PSM) degree.

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Other Graduate Student Items (Cont.)



The E & E department hosted the **Agroecology Symposium** in April, bringing together faculty, students, and collaborators to showcase research, experiential learning activities, and community engaged scholarship. The focus of the symposium this year was **Urban Agriculture**, featuring a panel of experts and practitioners.



The fairy garden project is student research. One of the founders of the Living Lab, Evansia Polo, worked with **Dr Jesse Blanchard** to design an organic passive mosquito biocontrol system that could be worked into the landscape of any public facility. The ultimate goal is to control mosquito populations by encouraging the growth of native mosquito predators. For the CASE Living Lab, the most effective design will be installed in a meditation space, which will be open to the whole FIU community, to sustainably encourage whole-system well-

ness and build campus resilience.

Watch for our annual list of Publications including Students in the Fall 2026 newsletter!

Undergraduate Student Notes

Graduations—Congratulations to all!

Bachelors of Science—Fall 2025	
Molina Fletcher, Andre M—Env. Studies	Roemmich, Julian D—Env. Studies
Aguila, Camila—Env. Studies	Davis, Katherine E—Env. Studies
Garcia, Melanie—Geosciences	Pena, Joselyn M—Env. Studies
Blount, Ian C—Env. Studies	Anthony, Davia—Env. Studies
De Boehmler, Jordan—Env. Studies	Reyes, Brenden—Env. Studies

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Undergraduate Student Notes (Cont.)

Graduations (Con't)

Bachelor of Science—Spring 2026	
Chandrasekaran, Melanie J—Geosciences	Moreno, Angelo J—Env. Studies
Lorenzo, Miguel A—Geosciences	Tedrow, Olivia J—Env. Studies - BS
De Souza Marin, Anita—Env. Studies	Mackenzie, Faith R—Env. Studies
Rodriguez, Christian A—Env. Studies	Arguello, Miguel A—Env. Studies
Lagro, Chase B—Env. Studies	Gomez, Xiomara A—Env. Studies
Irizarry, Jonathan D—Env. Studies	Villamil, Victoria H—Envir. Studies
Tapay, Giselle—Env. Studies	Morales, Dylan C—Env. Studies
Barcelos, Caio—Env. Studies	Fortin, Alex—Env. Studies
Verona, Leonardo J—Env. Studies	Nixon, Willow—Env. Studies



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Undergraduate Student Notes (Cont.)

Graduations (Con't)

BA Sustainability and the Environment-Fall 2025		
Campo, Christian N	Atkinson, Aneika A	Torres, Tatiana L
Jansen, Angelina	Odneal, Carley M	Sanchez, Dylan M
Morris, Madison E	Cajina, Milena N	Acevedo Zarraga, Patricio
Murray, Melissa M	Burba, Michael J	Mikhalochkina, Anastasia
Brown, David	Thornton, Jillian	Dykeman, Abigail J
Greenberg, Kaitlyn	Lopez, Frances	Santiago, Gabriella E
BA Sustainability and the Environment-Spring 2026		
Romero, Ivy	Aseff, Manuela E	Betancourt, John
Smith, Katelyn F	Smith, Lauryn	Montiel, Alexander M
Russell, Clare S	Ballarin, Zoe T	Cabrera, Aniela N
Lopez Farina, Sofia V	Verde, Guillermo P	Henry, Susan A
Urbina, Cielo E	Barrios, Diego	Schmid, Nicholas H
San Roman, Alejandro	Kinnison, Whitney G	BerriosAnna
Bustamante, Paloma	Clairsinvil, Ismaelia	Kaczmarek, Leela S
Carrera, Angel M	Haller, Lauren R	Martinez, Isabella M
Minor in Environmental Studies		
Debbaudt, Michelle G		

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Undergraduate Student Notes (Cont.)

WxChallenge FIU Winners Fall 2025	WxChallenge FIU Winners Spring 2026
Savannah, GA - Rigo Olivera (graduate student)	Houston, TX - Marcus Gordon (undergraduate student)
Glasgow, MT - Oscar Mendoza (graduate student)	Elkins, WV - Logan Martinez (undergraduate student)
Concord, NH - Chase Allbritton (undergraduate student)	Flagstaff, AZ - Chase Allbritton (undergraduate student)
Juneau, AK - Michael Jones (undergraduate student)	Des Moines, IA - Kailey Mckenzie (undergraduate student)
Reno, NV- Jose Vina (graduate student)	Buffalo, NY - Valeria Espina (graduate student)



Special mention for **Chase Allbritton** who competed in the wild-card section of the national tournament! Congratulations to everyone. Very well done!



A love letter to class field trips

Posted by Brooke Johnson | Published on February 16, 2026

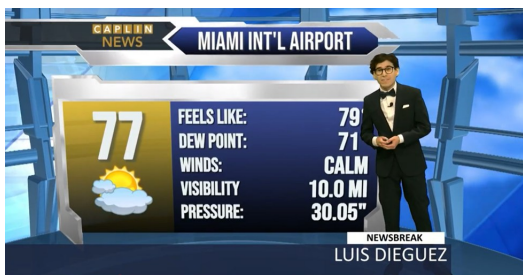
The **Ecology of South Florida Lab** course managed by **Seema Sah** and taught by E & E **graduate students** was mentioned in the FIU College of Communication, Architecture + The Arts article titled "[A love letter to class field trips](#)". Great job to Seema Sah and our graduate students for making an impact for all FIU students!



MAST@FIU students enrolled in Global Environment and Society installed a new art piece entitled "Connected by Impact" as an educational commentary on how humanity is primarily connected through the impact of our global waste epidemic. This will be on display in the CASE Living Lab for the foreseeable future.

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Undergraduate Student Notes (Cont.)



History was made on April 17th for the FIU Meteorology program! A weathercast was done on the FIU Caplin News by FIU Meteorology graduate **Luis Dieguez**, who did a great job.

Here is the YouTube link to the historic first weathercast, including the introduction from the student newscasters: https://youtu.be/f7Z7R7ngwuE?si=V_aoAIWkMxbO5iXc

In addition, here is a short article detailing the significance of it with respect to Caplin News and FIU's atmospheric science program and listing some of the people who made it happen, including **Robert Burgman**:

<https://caplinnews.fiu.edu/caplin-news-fiu-weather/>

Two more weathercasts will be scheduled in May. A summer schedule will be determined and then the goal is for weather on the Caplin News 5 days a week in the fall.

Geology Club



Sedimentology and Stratigraphy class and The Geology Club along with **Tatiana Goana**, **Xavier Comas**, and **Rodolfo Rego** conducted field activities, operated a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) and explored the various outcrops of the Miami Limestone at [The Montgomery Botanical Center](#). Without a doubt, the Geology Club at FIU rocks!

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Undergraduate Student Notes (Cont.)

Garden Club



The Garden Club was very active this semester! They coordinated a transplantation workshop, where students learned to plant in garden beds and volunteered at the Dumond Conservancy helping with the maintenance and planting plants to feed the monkeys. Way to go Garden Club!

Meteorology Club



The Meteorology Club conducted several on- and off-campus events to spread the word about how important weather is to our community. They toured the Hurricane Center and participated in the National Hurricane Conference in Orlando. Congrats to the club for a wonderful semester

Alumni Notes

We love to hear from our Alumni! Please send us an update, current photos, etc., and keep in touch! You can use this [link](#) to get us your contact information; please share it with your classmates and friends that we may have lost track of and might not be receiving this newsletter.

In the end, we could use some donations from you. Please visit <https://case.fiu.edu/earth-environment/give/> to help us out.



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Alumni Notes (Cont.)



Dr Anna Wachnicka (PhD Geosciences, 2009) is a Principal Scientist in the Ecosystem Restoration Division at the South Florida Water Management District. Her work focuses on evaluating aquatic ecosystem responses to water management, climate variability, and historical hydrologic alterations across both short- and long-term time scales.

In her current role, she leads research initiatives on harmful algal blooms and mitigation strategies in Lake Okeechobee. She also directs complex, interdisciplinary ecological monitoring programs, including Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Eco-Risk Assessments, supporting science-based operational decision-making for coastal and inland water systems influenced by interacting natural and anthropogenic drivers.

Dr. Wachnicka began her career at the Southeast Environmental Research Center at Florida International University, where she served as an Associate Research Faculty leading water quality and ecosystem assessment studies in Biscayne Bay, Florida Bay, Dry Tortugas-Marquesas Keys, as well as a National Park Condition Assessment in U.S. Virgin Islands National Parks. She also worked as a Senior Research Associate and a National Academies of Sciences/National Research Council Fellow at NOAA in Miami, where her research examined the impacts of coastal canal discharges and 2017 hurricanes on water quality in Biscayne Bay.

A dedicated educator, Dr. Wachnicka has taught Oceanography and Introduction to Earth Sciences courses at both Florida International University and Miami Dade College and has mentored many graduate students and other early-career scientists.



2012 MS graduate **Amaryllis Cotto** is interviewed in A NOVA/PBS special on Rain bombs: [Rain Bombs | Full Documentary | NOVA | PBS](#). You can check in on Amaryllis at instagram, too: https://www.instagram.com/a_hurricanehunter/

Recently graduated PhD Student **Julian Alwakeel** (Summer 2025) received a position as Hydrologist with the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

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Alumni Notes (Cont.)



2023 PhD graduate and now Postdoctoral Researcher **Jazmin Locke-Rodriguez** was featured on the widely heard *Yale Climate Connections* 2-minute podcast where she discusses how [floating gardens can help clean polluted water](#).



Dr Locke-Rodriguez also conducted a floating wetlands workshop at the Living Lab at FIU's [Biscayne Bay Campus](#) (BBC) on April 3rd as a part of her USDA post doc fellowship on Productive Floating Wetlands. The workshop aimed to train local practitioners on the benefits of floating wetlands and how to install them.



Geoscience alumni hosted an information session for our current students discussing the importance of licensure and professional certification. They imparted their wisdom on the application process and discussed ways to prepare for the exam. A special thanks to our alumni for giving back to the department!

Faculty Notes

Awards



These awards recognize the fantastic work and impact our faculty have within the community and abroad. Congratulations! Very well deserved honors! Learn more about the details on [LinkedIn](#).

2nd Faculty Celebrating Impact: Faculty Excellence event!

Transformative Research Impact: Paulo Olivas, Hong Liu, and Wei Huang.
Distinguished Awards, Fellowships & Honor: Mahadev Bhat and Krish Jayachandran.
Patents and Books: Amir Khoddamzadeh.

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Faculty Notes (Cont.)

Awards (Cont.)



Maruthi Sridhar Balaji Bhaskar, Professor in the Department of Earth and Environment, has been awarded a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award to South Africa for the 2026–2027 academic year. As a Fulbright U.S. Scholar, Dr Bhaskar will conduct advanced research in Remote Sensing and Geoinformatics for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security, focusing on improving methods to monitor soil quality, crop cover, and land degradation at field and landscape scales. His research integrates field sampling, satellite imagery, and geospatial modeling to map soil nutrient concentrations and support sustainable agricultural practices in South Africa. In addition to his research activities, Dr Bhaskar will teach courses and lead workshops in GIS, Remote Sensing, Precision Agriculture, and Environmental Science at the University of Pretoria, University of Venda, and University of Limpopo. These educational efforts will train students and faculty in applying geospatial technologies to address critical challenges in land management and food security. This project strengthens international collaboration between U.S. and South African institutions, advances sustainable land management strategies, and contributes to long-term food security goals. Dr Bhaskar previously served as a Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Uganda (2018–2019) and as a Fulbright U.S. Specialist to Azerbaijan (2025), reflecting his sustained commitment to global academic collaboration.

Congratulations to Dr Bashkar!



Mahadev Bhat has been selected for the Fulbright–Nehru U.S. Scholar Award for the 2026–27 academic year. As part of this prestigious fellowship, Dr. Bhat will conduct research on community-based and culturally rooted forest conservation strategies in India. The project aims to assess the ecosystem services provided by a range of forest management systems—including community-managed, privately managed, and sacred forests—and to develop a policy roadmap that integrates traditional ecological knowledge into sustainable forest management practices. Dr Bhat’s work will involve field research and focus group discussions with scholars, forest ecologists,

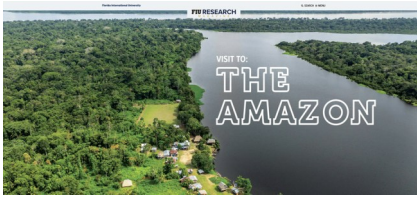
and restoration practitioners at the College of Forestry, Sirsi (COFS); the Indian Institute of Technology, Dharwad (IITD); and the Nature Environment and Wildlife Society, Kolkata (NEWS). In addition, he will offer short courses at COFS and IITD and conduct a capacity-building workshop at NEWS in the Sundarbans, with a focus on ecosystem services valuation. Through these activities, Dr Bhat will compare and contrast restoration experiences from the Florida Everglades and India’s Sundarbans—two globally significant biodiversity hotspots—advancing cross-regional insights into sustainable ecosystem management.

Congratulations to Dr Bhat!

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Other Faculty Items

Documentaries and Press



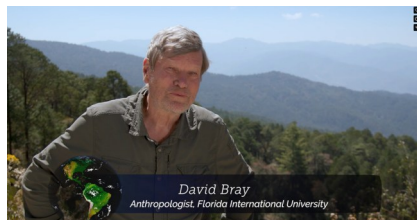
FIU Research Magazine covered the [Amazon River work](#) of Earth and Environment faculty **Elizabeth Anderson**, **Paulo Olivas**, and **Clinton Jenkins**, along with postdoctoral researchers **Juliana Laufer** and **Fiorella Briceño**, graduate researchers **LuLu Victoria-Lacy**, **Tania Romero Bautista**, and **Juan Sebastian Lozano**, and research assistant **Juan Cruz**.



In an accompanying piece, **Paulo Olivas** is featured in a very nice 2-minute mini-documentary film on the Amazon that you can watch here: [FIU's Amazon RiverScapes Initiative | The River That Sustains Millions \(Trailer\)](#)



Tiffany Troxler appears in *Facing the Future: South Florida vs Climate Change* - A WLRN Original Production. The hour-long film follows the people, projects, and ideas shaping how our region responds to a changing environment by looking at a year (2024) in the life of communities, scientists, and leaders working on climate resilience. You can watch the film here: [Facing the Future: South Florida vs Climate Change - A WLRN Original Production](#)



David Bray, E&E Emeritus Professor is featured in the PBS series *In the Americas* in the episode "YMAN 1206: Oaxaca's Indigenous Guardians of the High Forests", which looks at sustainable forestry in Oaxaca, Mexico.

You can watch it on Vimeo here [YMAN 1206 OAXACA'S INDIGENOUS GUARDIANS OF THE HIGH FORESTS | Videos & Movies on Vimeo](#) and it will be distributed nationally to PBS stations soon.



Stephen Leatherman was interviewed for an article titled "[Mark Zuckerberg's new Miami mansion sits at climate change ground zero](#)" highlighted in Fast Company Magazine.

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Other Faculty Items (Cont.)

Documentaries and Press



FIU FIU Foundation
 Foundation 2,773 followers
 6d · Edited

🌍 This Earth Day, we're taking a closer look at the people behind the research shaping a more sustainable future.

Amir Ali Khoddamzadeh, Ph.D., chair of FIU's Department of Earth and Environment, shares what drew him to this work, why it matters now, and how FIU is helping communities better understand and respond to environmental change.

... **Amir Khoddamzadeh** was interviewed by the [FIU foundation](#) on the importance of educating the community during Earth Week.



Mike Sukop was interviewed for the following Miami Herald story on groundwater contamination: Miznazi, A. (2026, April 9). [A nearby gas station leaked decades ago. This Miami home is still paying the price](#) (Photo Illustration by Susan Merriam/Miami Herald)



René Price's son, Robert (Robbie) Fourqurean, works as a Policy Advisor on Energy and Climate at the British Embassy in Washington DC. King Charles III visited Shenandoah National Park to commemorate the US 250th anniversary and to celebrate the US and UK national park systems.

Knowing that the Eurasian and American tectonic plates were once connected until their rifting and the opening up of the North Atlantic Ocean about 200 million years ago, Robbie had the brilliant idea of exchanging rocks from the Scottish Highlands and a rock from the Appalachian Mountains. He thought Shenandoah National Park would be a beautiful

place to exchange the rocks.

Each rock is a Granite. The one from the Scottish Highlands was quarried and engraved, while the one from the Appalachian Mountains is a rugged rock picked from the ground surface and supported by a piece of an American Chestnut Tree and adorned with a plaque.

The King's speech to congress contained the words: "As we look toward the next 250 years, we must also reflect on our shared responsibility to safeguard nature, our most precious and irreplaceable asset," he said. "Millennia before our nations existed, before any border drawn, the mountains of Scotland and Appalachia were one; a single, continuous range, forged in the ancient collision of continents."

Thanks to René Price for her contributions to this article.

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Other Faculty Items (Cont.)

College of Arts and Sciences Committee Appointments

We are happy to share that the following individuals have been selected for various CASE committees and representational roles.

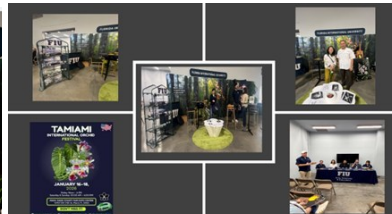
- Tiffany Troxler** - Faculty Senate
- Ping Zhu** - CASE Election Committee
- Hong Liu** - Faculty alternate senator
- Dean Whitman** - Faculty alternate senator

Thanks to everyone serving and representing the department at this level!

Faculty featured in FIU News



Amir Khoddamzadeh was featured in an [FIU News article](#) discussing the impacts of rising seas on the cabbage palm — or *Sabal palmetto*. He takes a closer look at how these challenges affect young seedlings of cabbage palms and proposes a simple solution that could help stave off catastrophic damage.



[FIU News](#) covered the contributions from **Amir Khoddamzadeh**, chair of Earth & Environment and **Hong Liu** at this year's Tamiami International Orchid Festival. They both conducted classes discussing Conservation

Horticulture and the Secrets Behind a Gorgeous Hybrid Phalaenopsis. Thank you for representing our department at this event!

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Transitions



Distinguished Research Professor **Stephen Haggerty** passed away on January 2, 2026. The Department held a memorial on January 9, 2006. Haggerty was born in South Africa in 1938, graduated from the Royal School of Mines in Economic Geology in 1964, and received his PhD from the University of London in 1968. He did post-doctoral work under a Carnegie Fellowship at the Geophysical Laboratory in Washington, D.C., and went to the University of Massachusetts as a professor in 1971. He came to FIU in 2002.

Steve was a world-renowned diamond expert — arguably the world’s top diamond expert — and he tackled complex problems including “blood” diamonds, where he supported White House efforts in the early 2000s to stamp out lucrative guns-for-gems trade that financed brutal civil wars in Africa, by endeavoring to “fingerprint” diamond origins.

Professor Haggerty was also a key member of the team that studied the first moon rocks to be returned to Earth by Apollo 11 astronauts beginning in 1969 and as a member of the Lunar Sample Analysis Planning Team (1973-1976). There is a mineral — Haggertyite — named after him: <https://www.mindat.org/min-6984.html>. Steve was a Fellow of the Mineralogical Society of America (1980), a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union (1992), and a Fellow of the Geological Society of America (2008). He was the Daly Distinguished Lecturer for the American Geophysical Union in 1997.

You can find a small compilation of photos and documents here <https://photos.app.goo.gl/YaHtJKEHbrP2hjSWA> and one of many articles here <https://www.miningweekly.com/article/diamond-legend-steve-haggerty-has-died-2026-01-05>.



Professor **Grenville Draper** passed away on January 6, 2026. He was born in Leeds, Yorkshire, UK in 1950. He graduated with honors from Cambridge University in 1973, earned his MSc in structural geology from Imperial College, London in 1974 and his PhD from the University of the West Indies, Jamaica in 1979. He began his career at FIU in 1978 in the former Department of Physical Sciences which in 1984 evolved into the Departments of Chemistry, Physics and Geology. He was chair of the Geology Department between 1991 and 1994. In addition to service to diverse departmental committees through the years (budget, curriculum, library), Professor Draper also served in numerous College and University-wide committees (faculty Senate 1996-1998), University sabbatical leave Committee (1997) and left lasting impacts on the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education through his contributions to the Tenure and Promotion Committee, where he served for over five years, and through his service as Associate Director of the College Liberal Studies Program for four years.

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Transitions (Cont.)

He was a Fellow of the University Honors College and was recipient of the State of Florida Teaching Incentive Award (1996) and The State of Florida Professional Excellence Program Award (1999). In 1979, he was elected a Fellow of The Geological Society (i.e., THE REAL Geological Society (of London), as he always reminded us in his humorous way).

Dr. Draper taught introductory geology and structural geology/tectonics to generations of FIU students. Professor Draper's expertise was in tectonics and structural geology (rock deformation), with particular interests in high-pressure, low temperature metamorphic terranes of the Caribbean and their role in the plate tectonic evolution of that part of the world. He is credited with the first discovery of such blueschist/eclogite rocks in Jamaica and Hispaniola.

When Dr Draper joined FIU in 1978, he was one of only two geology faculty helping to build this STEM unit that reached full-fledged department status with 15 faculty and a robust PhD program in 1993. At FIU he worked in the field with the late Dr John Lewis from George Washington University together with Dr Fred Nagle of the University of Miami on collaborative NSF grants to study the geology of the Dominican Republic where he met his future wife, Carmen. In the academic year 1999-2000 he spent his sabbatical leave as "Catedrático Visitante" in the Department of Geology, Universidad de Salamanca, Spain. Throughout his career he was very active in the Standing Committee of the Caribbean Geological Conference series which took place in the Caribbean area every three years and co-edited the Proceedings of the 12th Caribbean Geological Conference, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, 1989. He served as Program Chairman (1982-1983), and President (1984-1985) of the Miami Geological Society.

There is a photo album here: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/i8V5FNkA7DmAMio5A> Thanks to **Florentin Maurasse** for his contributions to this article.



Teaching Professor **James R. Riach** is retiring at the end of the Spring 2026 semester. He earned his PhD in Anthropology at the University of Georgia in 2001, his MA in Comparative Sociology from FIU in 1995, and his BS in Environmental Sciences from FIU in 1989. He joined what was then the Environmental Studies Department in 2006 as a visiting lecturer in 2006 and became a lecturer in 2008. He was a founder of FIU's Global Indigenous Forum: <https://indigenous.fiu.edu/about-us/founders/>

His research and teaching interests include the interconnections between ecosystem health and human well-being, with a focus on the Amazon and South Florida regions. His work combines multiple theories and methodologies from anthropology, epidemiology, medicine, ecology, and geography. He also specializes in traditional health knowledge and ethnobotany of native people in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon. He has worked on health and environmental projects among indigenous rainforest cultures including the Cayapas and the Siona-Secoya of Ecuador and the Aguaruna and Yagua of Peru. As a member of Project Amazonas, Inc., a humanitarian and environmental research and education non-profit organization, he has helped develop integrated strategies to address health, conservation, and development needs in the Peruvian Amazon.

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Transitions (Cont.)



Associate Professor **Andrew Macfarlane** is also retiring at the end of the Spring 2026 semester. He earned his PhD from Harvard in 1989 and his Honors BSc from Oregon State University in 1983. He arrived at FIU and joined our former Geology department in 1991. Dr Macfarlane studies processes that form metal ore deposits in the context of regional geologic evolution. Research in Peru centered on clarifying how Andean metal deposits form and where the ore metals come from. Regional studies of lead isotopes revealed four distinct lead isotopic provinces in the central Andes of Peru, eastern Bolivia, northern Argentina and Chile. Following the establishment of a new mass spectrometry laboratory in the department, subsequent research investigated the isotopic systematics of ores and important crustal elements of the Andes, Central America and the Caribbean. Dr Macfarlane also conducted research into the sources of metals in pre-Colombian artifacts from the Andean Altiplano, northern Chile, southern Mexico and Ecuador. Lead isotope data reveal how metallurgical technology developed and spread in the Western Hemisphere. Studies of the geochemistry of Precambrian weathering profiles contributed to constraining the oxygen content of the early earth's atmosphere

Latest News

Earth and Environment is working to fill several faculty positions including:

- Tenure Track Faculty position in Environmental Finance and Risk Management.
- Assistant/Associate Professor Position in Applied Conservation Biology
- Assistant Teaching Professor in Geosciences
- Assistant Teaching Professor in Environmental Policy

We look forward to welcoming our new colleagues when they arrive!

Community Outreach



Dr. **Krish Jayachandran**, Dr. **Mahadev Bhat**, **Lauren Emer**, **Kylie Gil**, **Kiara Taibi-Biz**, and **Sana Awan** participated in the 2026 [Sustainability & Health Fair](#) held at TERRA Environmental Research Institute. Thank you to everyone who helped with this event!

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Community Outreach (Cont.)



The Earth and Environment department celebrated Earth Day this year by hosting a spectacular event at the FIU Nature Preserve. Florida Artists Hall of Fame inductee [Xavier Cortada](#) headlined the event. Thank you to everyone who made this event possible. Learn more about the details on [LinkedIn](#).



Eco Fair @ Robert Morgan SH

Pictured: Julio Soto Jr and Kevin Arias

Kiara Taibi-Briz, Julio Soto Jr and Kevin Arias attended the EcoFair hosted at Robert Morgan High School where they introduced their students to pathways in agriculture and geoscience offered by FIU.



Pictured: Kiara Taibi-Briz and



Jesse Blanchard and Rodolfo Rego interacted with students from Broward College during the Broward Eco Fair held on April 22nd. Pictured here is Professor Rego guiding a student through a 360 Tour which helps prospective students learn about our programs in Earth and Environment.



The Earth Day event held on April 22, 2026, at Coconut Grove Elementary School included four hands-on stations focused on sustainability and plant science, led by **Dr Bárbara Nogueira Costa**. Students planted snap bean seeds, learned about composting, explored plant tissue culture to conserve endangered species, observed soil samples, and used a SPAD chlorophyll meter to assess plant health.

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Community Outreach (Cont.)



Pictured: Dean Heithaus

The paintings are a celebration of the growing and evolving relationship between the Miccosukee tribe of Florida and FIU, triggered by our new affiliation agreement and our first official intern run through it last summer as part of the PSMEPM program. The artist, Imara-Bella Thorpe began the project while here, and completed it after graduation. While it was not an FIU endeavor per-se, it was done for and in recognition of FIU*MTof. They are on display in the MMC library until

the end of May, at which point they will enter general circulation as part of the permanent Frost Museum collection. Congratulations to Dr. Jesse Blanchard and his team for tirelessly working to get this partnership with the Miccosukee Tribe of Indian completed.

SEMINAR

The Department's robust seminar program was led by **Len Scinto** this Spring semester. Check out the talks and join us at 3:30 on Friday afternoons when you can. You can see prior semester seminars on our [YouTube Channel](#); please join the channel!

Date	Name	Institution	Presentation Title/Subject
Jan 16	Dr. Alexandre Per-essin	Postdoctoral Associate, E&E, FIU	"Connectivity and migration through river systems and professional pathways".
Jan 23	Dr. Roberto Lucchini	Environmental Health Sciences, FIU	"The Amazon exposome: Mercury, micro-plastics, agrochemicals, and climate stressors across the life course" .
Jan 30	Dr. Tal Ezer	Professor of Ocean and Earth Sciences, Center for Coastal Physical Oceanography, Old Dominion Univ.	"The interaction between climate change, hurricanes, the Gulf Stream, and the coast" .

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SEMINAR (CONT.)

Date	Name	Institution	Presentation Title
Feb 06	FIU Organic Garden Alumni – Thelma Velez, Director, Organic Farming Research Foundation; – Erich Dautel, Senior Arborist, Florida Power and Light; – Ian Wogan, President, Treesources; –Stephany Alvarez-Ventura, Sr. Director, Development, FIU		“Nineteen years of the organic garden (Panel Discussion)”.
Feb 13	Dr. Pankaj Kumar	Adjunct Professor, Miami Dade College	“Pollination ecology of the North American endemic moccasin orchid”.
Feb 20	Dr. Ali Ghahremaninezhad	Miami Engineering Endowed Professor, Dept. of Civil and Architectural Engineering, University of Miami	“Nature-based materials for resilient infrastructure”.
Mar 06	Dr. Samira Daroub	Everglades Research and Education Center, University of Florida.	“Best management practices in the Everglades Agricultural Area: Success stories and lessons learned”.
Mar 20	Dr. Christopher Landsea	Chief, Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch, NOAA	“Opportunities of Applied Hurricane Research in the Midst of National Hurricane Center Forecasting Operations”.
Mar 27	Dr. Terry Sharik	Michigan Tech Emeritus professor	“A half-century of recovery efforts for the endangered Virginia round-leaf Birch (Betula uber)”
Apr 03	Dr. Sam Goldberg	Geomorphologist, Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric and Earth Sciences, University of Miami.	“Remote sensing reveals drivers of 85 years of Everglades landscape change”.
Apr 10	Dr. Gabe Lara	Natural Resource Economist – Hazen and Sawyer.	“The effects of arsenic standards on birth outcomes in California?”.
Apr 17	Xavier Cortada	Eco Artist – Earth Day Event.	“Universities as engines of climate awareness and civic engagement”.

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Learn about the [history of the Earth and Environment Department](#) by watching this presentation by Dr. Florentin Maurrasse and Dr. Joel Henin.

Certificates

Environmental Finance and Risk Management (Spring 2026)	Smith, Katelyn F	Moreno, Angelo J
Jamal Julien	De Souza Marin, Anita	Barcelos, Caio
Alan Gumbs Jurado	Russell, Clare S	Lagro, Chase B
Daniel Parras	Barcelos, Caio	Agroecology (Fall 2025)
Adyan Rios	Estevez, Maria-Fernanda	Reyes, Brenden
Veronica Prelaz	Lopez Farina, Sofia V	Pena, Joselyn M
Md Tanvir Hossain	San Roman, Alejandro	Campo, Christian N
Agroecology (Spring 2026)	Biodiversity Conserv Mgmt (Spring 2026)	Biodiversity Conserv Mgmt (Fall 2025)
Romero, Ivy	Garzon Enciso, Daniella	Pena, Joselyn M

Editor's Note

FIU's Earth and Environment Newsletter is published in the Spring and Fall semesters as two annual Issues. Publication began with Volume 1, Issue 1 in Spring 2024. This issue is the first Issue of Volume 3.

Past E&E Newsletters can be accessed via the following links:

[Department Newsletter V2 No 2: Fall 2025](#)

[Department Newsletter V2 No 1: Spring 2025](#)

[Department Newsletter V1 No 2: Fall 2024](#)

[Department Newsletter V1 No 1: Spring 2024](#)