Spring 2026 | Speech-Language Pathology Newsletter

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Articulator

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Letter FROM THE EDITORS

Emma Maley '28 and Kayla Montemarano '28

Thank you for taking the time to read Misericordia University's annual Speech-Language Pathology Department newsletter, *The Articulator!* It brings us great joy to share the accomplishments of our faculty, alumni, and students. As we look back on the past year, we do so with deep pride and gratitude for the growth, hard work, and support that continue to shape our department community.

Throughout 2026, the department celebrated many meaningful accomplishments. In this edition, we are proud to highlight students who earned scholarships, participated in international volunteer experiences that made a lasting impact, and applaud the achievements of our chapter of the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association (NSSLHA). This newsletter also shines a light on ongoing research conducted by alumnae, recent renovations to our home in Passan Hall, and the staff members who make a difference in students' lives each day. We celebrate students who balance academic and athletic commitments and the strong sense of connection and belonging that makes the speech-language pathology department such a special place.

We feel truly grateful to be part of Misericordia University's Speech-Language Pathology Department, where the support of professors, mentors, students, and alumni is felt so deeply.



We extend heartfelt thanks to the undergraduate and graduate students who helped gather information and write articles, the professors who generously shared their knowledge, and the many dedicated members of this program who continue to go above and beyond.

We hope the 2026 newsletter reflects our sincere appreciation for Misericordia University and for the department we are so fortunate to call home. Thank you for your continued support and interest in our work.

A Familiar Face Returns: Welcoming Dr. Nicholas Barone to Misericordia

by Brenna Field

SOME RETURNS CARRY EXTRA MEANING



This year, Misericordia University welcomed back **Dr. Nicholas Barone**, not simply as a faculty member, but as someone whose own story began here. As he starts his 11th year of teaching, Dr. Barone returns to the campus where he first grew into the profession, bringing with him years of experience, deep expertise, and a clear commitment to student learning.

For Misericordia, his return feels deeply fitting.

Dr. Barone earned his master's degree from Misericordia University in 2011 before completing his Ph.D. at James Madison University in 2015. From there, he built an impressive academic career at the University of Virginia and Central Michigan University, developing expertise in motor speech disorders, dysphagia, and voice and resonance. He is also a Certified Estill Master Trainer with specialized training in endoscopic evaluation of swallowing and voice, adding even more depth to the knowledge he brings back to campus.

But Dr. Barone's impact reaches beyond the classroom. He also leads the Neurophysiology of Communication, Swallowing, and Cognition Lab, where his research focuses on how the brain supports communication. His current work explores the effects of animal assisted therapy on language and cognitive engagement using functional near infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS). It is the kind of research that blends innovation with real human connection, reflecting both scientific curiosity and clinical purpose.

What makes his return especially meaningful is the reason behind it. Dr. Barone has shared that coming back to Misericordia felt natural because of the culture and sense of community that helped shape him early in his career. That connection clearly stayed with him. As an alumnus of the Speech-Language Pathology program, he also seems to embody one of **Dr. Glen Tellis's** lasting principles: "Know why you are doing what you are doing."

That says a great deal about the kind of teacher he hopes to be.

At the center of Dr. Barone's work is a genuine investment in students and their growth. He cares deeply about creating a learning environment that feels supportive, low stress, and meaningful, a place where curiosity is welcomed and students can build confidence in their clinical skills. For him, teaching is not only about sharing knowledge. It is about helping students find their footing, develop their judgment, and grow into thoughtful, capable clinicians.

Misericordia welcomes Dr. Barone back to the community that first launched his journey. His return brings not only knowledge and experience, but also a sense of continuity, pride, and possibility. For students preparing to enter the profession, that kind of mentorship matters.

His return is a reminder that sometimes the strongest mentors are the ones who know exactly what this program can mean because they began here, too.

A New Feel in Passan Hall

Something feels different in Passan Hall, and it is not just the renovated walls.

In Misericordia University's Speech-Language Pathology Department, the recent updates have changed more than the appearance of the space. They have changed the way it feels to walk through it. There is more movement, more energy, and more room for connection. For clients and caregivers, these spaces feel more welcoming and engaging. For students, they offer new ways to learn that are hands-on, practical, and closely connected to the people they will one day serve.







That feeling comes through immediately in the expanded Literacy Adventure Lab. Long known as a place where children and young adults build literacy skills, the lab now supports clients ages 8 to 22 while also introducing a kindergarten readiness program focused on rhyming, letter identification, and syllable awareness. With laptops funded through a grant from the PA Broadband Development Authority and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, student clinicians can project games and stories onto the walls, turning sessions into something more active and inviting. The lab is also preparing to expand services for autistic learners through the Phonics Faces program and a new pragmatic online group for teens and young adults with autism.

Just nearby, the new Sensory Motor Gym brings a different kind of energy. It is a place where communication can grow through movement, play, and exploration. With swings, climbing structures, a crash pit, and sensory materials, the gym gives children with sensory-motor challenges opportunities to build communication, social interaction, and self-regulation in ways that feel natural and joyful. It is the kind of space that reminds everyone that growth does not always happen at a desk or around a table.

In another part of Passan Hall, SLP CONNECT offers something quieter but just as meaningful. Designed to feel more like a living room and kitchen than a traditional clinic, it supports individuals with neurological disorders and the caregivers who stand beside them. The space encourages conversation, shared activities, and connection, both in person and virtually. It also gives students the chance to learn in an environment that reflects real life, where communication and care are woven into everyday moments.

The renovated Communication in Healthcare and Assistive Technology Lab, or CHAT Lab, adds another dimension to that mission. There, students gain hands-on experience with advanced software and AAC tools while engaging with research tied to real clinical needs, including aphasia, caregiver experiences, mild traumatic brain injury, and social connection.

These changes are about more than new equipment or renovated rooms. They reflect a deeper commitment to creating spaces where people feel seen, supported, and encouraged to grow. Passan Hall has always been a place of learning. Now, it feels even more like a place of discovery, connection, and belonging.

Beyond the Meetings: MU NSSLHA's Award Winning Year of Service and Leadership

by Makenna Callear

If there was one thing Misericordia University's National Student Speech-Language-Hearing Association (NSSLHA) chapter proved this year, it is that a student organization can do far more than hold meetings. Under the leadership of **Lauren Dowd**, **Gabriella Dobek**, **Olivia Lidle**, and **Olivia Peleschak**, NSSLHA transformed the academic year into a series of meaningful projects that extended far beyond campus, supporting local organizations, encouraging student involvement, and giving back to the community in lasting ways.

From the start of the fall semester, the chapter set an energetic and service driven tone. Members raised funds for Brighter Journeys, volunteered at The Arc of Luzerne County's Monster Mash Bash, organized a clothing fundraiser to support the fifth year students' trip to Belize, and wrote heartfelt holiday cards for residents at a local personal care home. Each initiative reflected NSSLHA's commitment to compassion, outreach, and professional responsibility.

NSSLHA's impact was not limited to local efforts. Demonstrating its dedication to the profession at a national level, the chapter donated $500 to the ASHA Foundation, supporting programs that advance research, education, and access to communication services.

Beyond fundraising and service, the chapter focused on helping students envision their future paths in speech language pathology. One fall highlight was a research panel that introduced students to the many labs housed in Passan Hall, including the Stuttering/Fluency, EEG/Fluency Plus, Literacy, Voice, C.H.A.T./SLP CONNECT, Learning, CommuniQuest, and Dysphagia Labs. For students curious about research, the panel offered an inside look at ongoing projects, opportunities to meet lab members, and exposure to the breadth of work within the department.

That momentum carried into the spring semester. NSSLHA organized a book drive benefiting the Literacy Lab, supporting its mission to promote literacy and a love of reading in children. The chapter also took part in Archie's After Hours, a collaborative campus wide event that brought student organizations together. This year's shared activity, bracelet making, created another opportunity for students to connect and build community.



One of the most meaningful additions was a new Executive Board initiative for freshman members. Rather than waiting until later in their college careers to step into leadership roles, underclassmen were invited to learn officer responsibilities early by assisting with one of NSSLHA's signature events, the annual Benefit Concert. This experience provided valuable insight into leadership while strengthening continuity within the organization.

The Benefit Concert itself remained a major highlight of the year. In partnership with the Misericordia University Dance Ensemble,

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Student-Athletes in SLP: Strength, Discipline, and Drive

by Margaret Koester

For most college athletes, the day starts with practice and ends with class. For Misericordia University's Speech-Language Pathology student-athletes, that is only half the story.

They move from practices to presentations, from competition to clinic preparation, from long workouts to long nights of studying. It is a demanding balance, one that requires stamina, focus, and a level of discipline that goes far beyond either athletics or academics alone. Yet for students in Misericordia's SLP program, that challenge has become part of what makes them stand out.



Junior **Kiersten Ann Tinio** knows that rhythm well. Since her freshman year, she has balanced the demands of Misericordia's softball team with the rigorous coursework and clinical expectations of the SLP program. Rather than viewing those two worlds as separate, Tinio sees them as deeply connected.

"Playing on a softball team has strengthened my ability to collaborate effectively with others," she shared. "On the field, success depends on clear communication, trust, and understanding each teammate's weaknesses. These are skills that directly translate to the clinic."

That connection says a great deal. On the softball field, communication has to be quick, clear, and purposeful. In the clinic, those same qualities matter just as much. Teamwork, trust, flexibility, and the ability to respond in the moment are not only athletic strengths. They are the foundation of strong clinical practice.



Freshman **Kristen Silipena**, a member of the swim team, is building those same habits early in her college experience. While adjusting to the demands of both athletics and a challenging major, she has already found a routine that helps her stay grounded.

"My go-to strategy is to get all my work done after practices and classes," she explained. "I start with what's due soonest, and once I'm caught up, I allow myself time to relax."

It is a simple strategy, but it reflects something bigger. Student-athletes do not have the luxury of waiting for the "perfect time" to get things done. They learn to manage pressure, organize their time, and keep moving even when the schedule feels packed. Those habits shape not only successful athletes, but also strong students and future professionals.

That is what makes student-athletes in speech-language pathology stand out. They are not only balancing two demanding roles, but they are also learning how resilience, discipline, and adaptability carry from practice to the classroom and into the clinic.

Students like Tinio and Silipena show that success is often built in the space between responsibilities, in the quiet determination it takes to leave practice and head straight into the next challenge.

At Misericordia, these student-athletes are doing more than keeping up. They are setting the pace.

Student Voice on Capitol Hill: Advocacy in Action

by Brooke Price

One student. One voice. Real impact. This year, a Misericordia University student stepped onto Capitol Hill to help shape the future of speech language pathology and audiology through advocacy and education.

Each year, the American Speech Language Hearing Association, through ASHA PAC, hosts Capitol Hill Day, bringing speech language pathologists, audiologists, and students to Washington, D.C., to meet with lawmakers and show how legislation directly affects clinicians and the people they serve.

Amanda Prinzi, a junior at Misericordia, was selected to attend this year's event and proudly served as the only student representative from Pennsylvania. One of approximately 300 advocates in attendance, Amanda participated in five meetings with legislative aides and lobbyists representing members of the House and Senate. Her role was to provide a student and human perspective on key policy issues impacting the profession.

A major focus of Amanda's advocacy was permanent telehealth coverage for speech language pathology and audiology services. She explained how telehealth ensures access for underserved populations, especially individuals who would otherwise need to travel hours for brief therapy sessions or go without services entirely. With current telehealth provisions set to expire in January 2026, the need for permanent coverage is increasingly urgent.

Amanda also discussed other critical legislative priorities, including the IDEA Full Funding Act and the Medicare Patient Access and Practice Stabilization Act, emphasizing how policy decisions affect access, continuity of care, and long term outcomes across the lifespan. "Investing in kids is investing in society," she noted when discussing the importance of IDEA funding.



One of the most meaningful parts of the experience for Amanda was educating lawmakers about the SLP profession itself. Many lobbyists were unfamiliar with the scope of speech language pathology, and Amanda welcomed the chance to explain what SLPs do and why their services matter. Being treated as a knowledgeable advocate rather than "just a student" made the experience especially empowering.

Capitol Hill Day was a reminder that advocacy is not separate from the profession. It is part of it. Through voices like Amanda's, students can help drive change, support clients, and shape a more accessible future for speech language pathology and audiology.

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Dance Team, and the Performing Arts Training Academy, NSSLHA helped raise funds for SLP CONNECT, a community outreach program that supports caregivers and loved ones affected by stroke, aphasia, dementia, and other neurodegenerative conditions. The event exemplified how the chapter consistently connects service with purpose.

The year's efforts reveal a chapter that was not simply busy, but intentional. Through strong leadership, collaboration, and sustained commitment, Misericordia University's NSSLHA chapter turned an ordinary academic year into one defined by service, connection, and impact. That dedication was recognized at the 2026 Pennsylvania Speech Language Hearing Association (PSHA) Convention, where Misericordia NSSLHA was named 2026 Chapter of the Year, a fitting honor for a chapter whose work reached far beyond campus and into the heart of the community.

From Misericordia to Oxford

by Kayla Montemarano and Margaret Koester

Traveling abroad is exciting. Presenting research there is something else entirely.

In September 2025, six students from Misericordia University's Speech Language Pathology Department traveled to England to attend the 14th Oxford Stuttering and Cluttering Conference, joining researchers, clinicians, and leaders in the field from around the world. For these students, the trip was about far more than visiting Oxford. It was a chance to step into an international conversation, share the work they had helped build, and see firsthand that their research could matter far beyond campus.

The students, **Megan Aaron '26**, **Ava Laukaitis '27**, **Emma Maley '27**, **Kayla Montemarano '27**, **Margaret Koester '27**, and **Lauren Dowd '28**, are members of **Dr. Glen Tellis's** fluency team and **Dr. Kathleen Scaler Scott's** fluency plus research team. They brought research shaped by both creativity and clinical purpose, rooted in questions that matter to people who stutter and clutter and to the clinicians who support them.

At the conference, the students presented research focused on the use of virtual reality in fluency therapy, including its effects on stuttering and cluttering, differences in physiological stress markers across virtual reality scenarios, and a scale measuring client readiness to change as applied to cluttering. These were not small classroom assignments or practice presentations. They were professional presentations delivered in a setting where serious ideas were exchanged and where students had the opportunity to contribute to the future of the field.

That experience carried real weight. Presenting research internationally can be intimidating, especially for students still early in their professional journeys. But it also creates the kind of moment that stays with a person. It asks students to trust what they know, speak with confidence, and recognize that they belong in important professional spaces.

For Lauren Dowd, the trip opened the door to a broader understanding of the field. She reflected, "It was an amazing opportunity in which I learned so much about the community of people who stutter and the different approaches that are applicable to this area of study." Her words speak not only to what the students presented, but also to what they gained through listening, learning, and being part of a larger professional community.



Emma Maley described the experience as both challenging and rewarding. Presenting internationally, she shared, was nerve-wracking but deeply fulfilling. "I feel honored to have been able to show others what we have been researching," she said, adding that exploring Oxford with her research team made the trip feel like a once-in-a-lifetime experience. That mix of professional growth and shared experience helped make the trip memorable in ways that reached beyond the conference itself.

Experiences like this do more than strengthen a résumé. They build confidence, deepen professional identity, and remind students that their work belongs in conversations that shape the profession. For these six students, Oxford was not simply a destination. It was proof that the work begun at Misericordia can carry all the way to the international stage.

Malta
The Research Opportunity of a Lifetime

by Emma Maley

One moment, they were graduate students in Misericordia's research labs. The next, they were in Malta, presenting their work to an international audience.

That was the reality this past August for **Sara Lombardi**, **Alexandra Long**, **Michaela Raub**, and **Kara Thourot**, four Misericordia University graduate students who, along with Professor Erin Roberts, were accepted to attend the International Association of Communication Sciences and Disorders research conference. For these students, the trip was more than travel. It was a chance to present their work on a global stage and see how far their research could reach.



Sara Lombardi, Michaela Raub, and Kara Thourot are members of Professor **Erin Roberts**' Learning Lab. Alexandra Long is part of **Dr. Cari Tellis**' Voice Team and helped bring attention to the conference opportunity. They represented Misericordia as presenters, researchers, and ambassadors for the speech-language pathology program.

At the conference, they delivered multiple oral presentations on topics, including brain activity, voice therapy, the psychosocial effects of communication disorders, and the use of technology in therapy, including Kebbi the robot. These were professional presentations shared with clinicians, researchers, and scholars from around the world.

The experience was both challenging and empowering. Michaela said presenting and discussing their findings with leaders in the field made her realize she "truly had a seat at the table." Sara reflected that "all of my experiences and learning at Misericordia truly paid off." Alexandra added that being prepared to discuss research with professionals in the field felt deeply rewarding.

The trip also offered unforgettable moments beyond the conference, from Malta's historic streets and local cuisine to a boating excursion that involved jellyfish and quickly became part of the trip's story. Kara described Malta as a "new and invaluable experience," one that allowed her to engage in meaningful conversations, learn from professionals around the world, and gain a broader perspective on the field.

When asked why they chose research, the students pointed to the opportunities it creates. Sara encouraged others to "just do it," while reminding students that research is a process. Michaela urged students to stay open to new experiences and to take advantage of every opportunity to learn.

Their journey to Malta was more than a memorable trip. It showed how research can build confidence and open doors for students.

Misericordia Faculty Share SLP CONNECT Program on International Stage

Not every international presentation begins with a plane ticket. Sometimes, it begins with meaningful work close to home, work strong enough to reach far beyond it.

In October 2025, **Dr. Chitrali Mamlekar**, **Dr. Kathleen Scaler Scott**, and **Melissa Alunni** brought Misericordia University's work in dementia care to an international audience when they presented virtually at the 6th Edition of Innovations and State of the Art in Alzheimer's and Dementia (ISAD), a global conference based in Berlin, Germany. Though they joined remotely, their message traveled far: dementia care must include not only treatment and support, but also communication, connection, and community.

Their oral presentation, "Community Based Dementia Care Initiative," focused on SLP CONNECT, a program designed to support individuals with neurological conditions, including dementia, as well as the caregivers who support them. In a field often centered on diagnosis, decline, and disease progression, SLP CONNECT offers something equally important but sometimes overlooked: a space for meaningful interaction, shared support, and improved quality of life.

What made their presentation stand out was its focus on the human side of dementia care. Rather than stopping at diagnosis and decline, SLP CONNECT highlights conversation, caregiver involvement, social connection, and community-based support.

That message resonated within the larger focus of ISAD 2025, which brought together international researchers, clinicians, and healthcare professionals to explore advancements in Alzheimer's disease and other neurodegenerative disorders. By presenting in this setting, the Misericordia team had the opportunity to show how speech-language pathology plays an important role in dementia care, especially when communication and caregiver well-being are treated as central, not secondary, concerns.

Their participation showed that work being developed at Misericordia has relevance well beyond the local community. Even in a virtual format, the team became part of an international conversation about what dementia care can and should look like. Through SLP CONNECT, faculty are helping bring greater attention to communication, support, and human connection in dementia care.

Misericordia University can take great pride in Dr. Mamlekar, Dr. Scaler Scott, and Melissa Alunni for sharing this work on a global platform and for helping expand the conversation around dementia care in ways that are both practical and deeply human.

Stories on the Walls: Alumni Transform Misericordia's New Literacy Clinic



What happens when creativity, community, and a love of literacy come together? At Misericordia University's Speech Language Pathology Department, the answer is a newly renovated literacy clinic brought to life by vibrant murals, meaningful messages, and the generosity of dedicated alumni.

As part of recent renovations and expansions, the department introduced a new literacy clinic led by Dr. Kathleen Scaler Scott, designed to better serve clients who need literacy interventions. To make the space both welcoming and inspiring, three alumni, **Sarah Nelson '15**, **Emily Stokes '15**, and **Heather Arnold '14**, returned to campus to leave their mark in a truly unforgettable way.

During an intensive 22 hour work weekend, the former students teamed up with Dr. Scaler Scott to transform the literacy lab into an immersive learning environment. Each corner of the clinic now features hand painted murals representing the different age groups it serves, creating a space that feels playful, motivating, and comforting all at once.

The reading corners, designed for the youngest learners, burst with familiar favorites such as *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, Dr. Seuss's *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*, and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.* These murals invite early readers to explore language in a joyful and engaging way.

For school age students and beyond, the writing and book conversation areas feature characters from *Junie B. Jones*, *Harry Potter*, and *Artemis Fowl*, along with inspirational messages that encourage clients to focus on growth over time.

The clinic's library area offers a cozy, stress free environment for readers of all ages. Murals inspired by *Goodnight Moon*, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, and *Matilda* surround a calming bubble tube, making the space especially inviting for children who may need extra sensory support.

Today, Stokes works in inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, Nelson specializes in working with adults who have sustained brain injuries, and Arnold serves students in school settings. Despite their varied professional paths, all three alumni shared the same motivation for returning to Misericordia: gratitude.

"It was an easy yes," Arnold said when asked about contributing to the project. The group valued the opportunity to give back to the department that supported them and prepared them to become confident, capable clinicians. They also enjoyed seeing firsthand the department's growth, new technology, and continued commitment to excellence.

The Misericordia University Speech Language Pathology Department is deeply grateful for alumni who give back in such creative, visionary ways. Thanks to their efforts, clinicians and clients alike will enjoy a literacy clinic where stories truly come alive, on the walls and beyond.

Excellence Recognized: SLP Students and Faculty Earn State and International Honors

Big ideas. Meaningful research. Recognition that reached far beyond campus.

This year, Misericordia University's Speech-Language Pathology Department earned attention on both state and international stages for scholarship that is timely, innovative, and deeply connected to clinical practice.

At the PSHA 2026 Convention, students and faculty made a total of 24 poster and oral presentations. One of these posters earned Meritorious Status for its work on using Roblox in speech therapy for children who stutter. The project reflected an innovative approach to therapy by connecting intervention to the digital spaces many children already know and enjoy. Behind this recognition was the same pattern: students and faculty working together on questions that are current, practical, and impossible to ignore. Their work is imaginative, relevant, and grounded in clinical care.



That same spirit of innovation was recognized internationally.

At the 12th Asia Pacific International Conference on Speech, Language, and Hearing (APSSLH) in Bangkok, Thailand, **Dr. Glen Tellis** presented two research papers and received the Silver Award, placing second out of 54 oral presentations, for his presentation on immersive virtual reality in stuttering therapy. He also presented research on the neural and autonomic responses to self-disclosure in people who stutter, adding another important dimension to the department's growing research profile.

These honors reflect more than a successful year of presentations. They point to a department culture built on bold ideas, strong mentorship, and meaningful student involvement in scholarship.

At Misericordia, research is not just something students observe. It is something they help create.

This year made one thing clear: Misericordia's Speech-Language Pathology Department is building momentum, earning recognition, and making its mark.

From valedictorian to clinician-researcher, one student's journey reflects curiosity, compassion, and a deep commitment to the field



Some students stand out for their grades. Others for their clinical skill or research involvement. **Kara Thourot** has distinguished herself in all three.

Named valedictorian of the Class of 2025 and earning a perfect 4.0 GPA, Kara has built a record of achievement that reflects far more than academic success. Faculty describe her as a student driven by genuine curiosity, someone who consistently asked thoughtful questions, made connections across concepts, and pushed herself to understand not just what to do, but why it matters.

That mindset carried into every stage of her clinical training. Across placements in Misericordia's Speech-Language and Hearing Center, private practice, school settings, rehabilitation, and international service, Kara worked with clients across the lifespan in areas including language, literacy, articulation, phonology, AAC, fluency, voice, cognition, and swallowing.

At the private practice, she managed a caseload of 22 clients ranging from infancy through older adulthood in a fast-paced outpatient setting. There, she demonstrated strong clinical judgment, thoughtful intervention planning, and the ability to transition effectively between pediatric and adult clients. Faculty noted that by the midpoint of her graduate training, she was already functioning with a level of independence and professional judgment that often develops much later.

Kara's growth also extended beyond traditional clinical settings. During Misericordia's service-learning trip to Belize, she helped provide education, treatment, and resources in speech, language, hearing, cognition, fluency, and swallowing in schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and open clinics. Reflecting on the experience, Kara shared that the people of Belize showed her what resilience really looks like and reminded her that access to care should never be taken for granted.

In addition to her clinical work, Kara has built an impressive record in research. Since her sophomore year, she has contributed to projects involving socially assistive robotics, artificial intelligence in speech-language pathology, gestalt language processing, trends in clinical and academic performance, and functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) Her work has been presented at state, national, and international conferences, including PSHA, ASHA, VGTVG, the Oxford Dysfluency Conference, and the IALP World Congress in Malta.

Kara Thourot's journey reflects the kind of student Misericordia is proud to celebrate: intellectually curious, clinically thoughtful, and deeply committed to the people at the heart of the profession. At the 2026 PSHA Convention, her hard work was recognized when she was selected as a recipient of the Von Drach Memorial Scholarship, awarded to an outstanding student from one of Pennsylvania's 25 schools. This is a fitting honor for a student whose path has been defined by excellence, service and purpose. Even with these accomplishments, Kara has remained grounded in gratitude.

In her acceptance speech for the Von Drach Memorial Scholarship, she thanked faculty, supervisors, classmates, fieldwork mentors, and her research team for helping shape her growth as both a person and future clinician. She spoke eloquently about the value of collaboration, mentorship, and the opportunities Misericordia provided her through research and service.
Along the way, Kara also served as a lab assistant and peer tutor, supporting other students while balancing the demands of coursework, clinical placements, and professional presentations.

SLP Student Earns Prestigious Junior Investigator Award

By Emma Maley

Some students wait for opportunities to come their way. **Olivia Olley** has been chasing them from the start.

Now a fifth-year student, Olivia is completing her clinical rotation in an inpatient hospital setting, where she works primarily with adults with dysphagia, dementia, and aphasia. Even while managing the demands of clinical work, she has continued to build an impressive record of research, scholarship, and service.

Olivia joined **Dr. Chitrali Mamlekar's** Communication in Healthcare and Assistive Technology (CHAT) Lab during her freshman year. Since then, she has explored a wide range of topics that are both innovative and clinically meaningful, including augmentative and alternative communication in primary progressive aphasia, artificial intelligence in speech therapy, caregiver experiences in primary progressive aphasia care, and robotics in speech therapy.

Most recently, Olivia received the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) award for her thesis, *Communicating with Individuals with Aphasia: Caregiver Perspectives.* This highly competitive honor supports junior investigators by funding attendance at the Academy of Aphasia and participation in the Aphasia Young Investigator Fellowship, including conference registration and travel support of up to $2,000.

Olivia described the moment with genuine excitement. "I was super excited! I remember touring Misericordia University and listening to the admissions guide talk about speech-language pathology students who traveled to present at an international conference. I then made it my goal to present at an international conference while at Misericordia, and this award helped me achieve that goal!"

That excitement reflects something larger. Olivia's research experiences have helped shape her not only as a student, but also as a future clinician. By joining the CHAT Lab early in her college career, she gained hands-on experience working with individuals with primary progressive aphasia and their caregivers. That experience helped her build confidence in her clinical abilities as early as her sophomore year.

Looking ahead, Olivia hopes to pursue



a doctoral degree and continue gaining experience across a variety of settings. She is especially interested in working with adults with neurologically based disorders, individuals who use AAC, and children with special needs. Her advice to students considering research is direct and encouraging: "Just do it. It's a great opportunity to build a network in the speech-language pathology community by attending and presenting at conferences. It's also a good way to learn more about the topics you're most interested in and gain specialized experience."

Olivia's story is one of initiative, curiosity, and saying yes to meaningful opportunities. Her path has already brought pride to Misericordia's Speech-Language Pathology Department, and it is clearly still unfolding.

Student Research Spotlight: SLP SURF Scholars Advance the Field

For three Misericordia University students, summer was not a pause. It was a launch point.

Through Misericordia's 2026 Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program, **Ava Laukaitis**, **Alexandra Rogers**, and **Victoria Slusark** completed research projects tied to timely clinical issues in speech-language pathology.

Under the mentorship of **Dr. Glen Tellis**, Ava Laukaitis studied psychophysiological responses to virtual reality speech scenarios in people who stutter and typically fluent speakers. Her project examined how virtual speaking environments may trigger stress responses by looking at autonomic nervous system activity, offering insight into what speakers experience internally during communication pressure. Ava shared that the project deepened her understanding of fluency disorders and strengthened her appreciation for the support of faculty and staff.

Working with **Dr. Chitrali Mamlekar**, **Alexandra Rogers** explored how physicians communicate with people with aphasia. After identifying a gap in the literature and completing an extensive review of existing research, Alex began preparing to interview physicians about their experiences, challenges, and communication strategies. Her work addresses an important clinical need, as aphasia can make medical encounters frustrating, confusing, and isolating. Alex especially valued the collaborative nature of the project and looks forward to continuing the work.

Under the mentorship of Professor **Erin Roberts**, Victoria Slusark examined the skills and traits clinicians need for effective real-world practice. Her study found strong agreement among Misericordia graduate students and 286 ASHA-accredited programs on the value of compassion and empathy, critical thinking, and communication skills, while anxiety and curiosity were rated as less central. The project later expanded to include clinical supervisors, and the findings were presented at the 2026 PSHA Conference.



These projects highlight undergraduate scholars addressing real clinical questions through research on virtual reality and fluency, physician communication and aphasia, and the professional traits that shape effective practice. The Speech-Language Pathology Department recognizes these SURF scholars for the dedication, curiosity, and vision they brought to their work.

No Commute Required: A Graduate Experience That Crosses Borders

by Emma Maley



Graduate school often brings to mind busy hallways, classrooms, and long days spent on campus. For **Chelsea Chua**, that experience begins in Toronto, Canada. As a first-year graduate student in Misericordia University's online Speech-Language Pathology program, Chelsea represents something bigger than distance. She reflects the expanding reach of a program that is making high-quality graduate education possible far beyond northeastern Pennsylvania.

Chelsea came to Misericordia with a background in neuroscience and linguistics, but finding the right program was about more than academics alone. She wanted a place where she felt supported, understood, and confident that her path into speech-language pathology would be taken seriously. From the beginning, that is what she found. During the application process, she connected with **Dr. Chitrali Mamlekar** and members of the administrative team, and that early encouragement helped shape her decision. As Chelsea shared, "I felt very supported while applying, especially because they had connections with people I worked with in Canada." That kind of support made the process feel personal rather than distant.

That reassurance mattered, especially as Chelsea considered the logistics of completing a graduate program from another country. One of her early concerns was whether she would need to relocate for clinical placements. Learning that Misericordia works to secure placements within students' own geographic areas made the program feel not only welcoming, but possible. It allowed her to see a future in the program without having to leave the life she had built in Canada.

Chelsea has also found that the online format offers the flexibility she needs to manage a demanding schedule. While balancing two jobs, she has been able to stay on track academically and continue moving toward her professional goals. But for her, the value of the program goes beyond flexibility alone. She has felt supported by faculty, connected to classmates, and engaged in a learning environment that feels personal despite the distance. Through virtual collaboration, communication with professors, and relationships with her cohort, the program has felt like a real community.

Chelsea's story highlights something important about Misericordia's online Speech-Language Pathology program. It is not simply bringing courses online. It is opening doors for students who may be far from campus but still want a rigorous, supportive, and connected graduate experience. From Toronto, Chelsea is showing what that can look like, and her journey is a reminder that sometimes the strongest connections are not limited by borders.

Redefining Communication Care: Faculty Research That Changes Practice

By Camille Wierzbicki

Faculty scholarship does more than add to the literature. It changes how clinicians think, how they diagnose, and how they support people with communication disorders every day. Recent work by **Dr. Kathleen Scaler Scott**, **Dr. Nicholas A. Barone**, and **Dr. Chitrali R. Mamlekar** shows just how wide that impact can be, spanning fluency disorders, voice science, and aphasia treatment.

Dr. Kathleen Scaler Scott's Fall 2025 chapter, *Stuttering and Cluttering in Neurodegenerative Disorders, published in Communication Disorders in Neurodegenerative Diseases* by Oxford University Press, takes on an area that remains underexplored but deeply relevant to clinical practice. The chapter examines how fluency disorders present in conditions such as Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, primary progressive aphasia, multiple sclerosis, COVID-19, and other medical etiologies. Invited because of her well-established expertise in fluency disorders, Dr. Scaler Scott also brought a meaningful personal lens to the work, shaped by her experience as a caregiver for a family member with dementia and her involvement with SLP CONNECT. One of the chapter's most important contributions is its guidance for distinguishing among developmental, neurogenic, psychogenic, and drug-induced stuttering, a distinction that directly affects diagnosis and treatment planning. It also reviews the current research while drawing attention to where the field still has more to learn, especially in relation to cluttering in neurodegenerative populations.

Dr. Nicholas A. Barone's forthcoming article, *Using Traditional Voice Terminology Creates Challenges for Performers and Voice Professionals*, asks an important question hiding in plain sight: Do clinicians, teachers, and performers actually mean the same thing when they use familiar voice terms? Co-authored with **Lily Grassel** of Central Michigan University, the article was accepted in December 2025 and is scheduled for publication in May 2026 in *Folia Phoniatricia et Logopaedica*. The study grew from a student-led research project inspired by University of Virginia student **Melanie Turner**, whose background in singing sparked questions about how terms such as *light, dark, forward, backward* are taught and interpreted. By analyzing how singers defined and produced these qualities, and how experts evaluated them, the study found that these commonly used terms are far less consistent than many assume. That lack of shared meaning can create real problems for performers and for individuals with voice disorders. The findings also point to the value of models such as Estill, which connect voice quality to anatomy and physiology while still leaving room for descriptive imagery.

A third publication shifts the focus to aphasia treatment and the growing potential of AAC. Dr. Chitrali R. Mamlekar is a co-author of the 2025 *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology tutorial, Promoting Augmentative and Alternative Communication–Induced Language Recovery in Chronic Aphasia (PAIL-RcA): Theoretical Construct, Method, Protocol, and Treatment Resources.* The tutorial offers a practical, step-by-step guide for using augmentative and alternative communication not just to compensate for communication breakdowns, but also to promote language recovery in people with chronic aphasia. Grounded in neuroplasticity and intersystemic

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reorganization, the article challenges the long-standing belief that AAC is only for basic wants and needs or that it stands apart from restorative treatment. Instead, it presents AAC as a dual-purpose tool, one that can support communication while also helping rebuild language. With data sheets, cueing hierarchies, prompt guides, and family handouts, the tutorial translates theory into resources clinicians can use in real settings.

These publications show faculty scholarship at its best: thoughtful, clinically relevant, and capable of moving the profession forward. Whether clarifying how fluency disorders appear in neurodegenerative disease, questioning the language used in voice instruction, or reimagining how AAC can support recovery in aphasia, this work reflects a shared commitment to better practice and better outcomes for people with communication disorders.

Expanding Our Global Impact: Belize Service Trip 2026 and Beyond

by Adina Rosenthal and Erin Roberts

It began as a service trip, but it became something much more lasting.

In January 2026, faculty and students from Misericordia University, Alvernia University, and the University of Pittsburgh traveled to Belize for an interdisciplinary service-learning experience that brought together speech-language pathology, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. Over five working days, they partnered with schools, hospitals, clinics, and community organizations in Belize City, San Ignacio, and Orange Walk, providing educational programming and therapeutic services for children and adults.

But the heart of the experience was never just in the number of sites visited or services provided. It was in the people. Students and faculty worked closely with families, educators, healthcare professionals, and community members, gaining a deeper understanding of what care looks like when resources are limited but compassion is abundant. What they encountered in Belize challenged them, grounded them, and reminded them that meaningful service begins with listening.

The experience also invited participants to learn from Belize far beyond the clinic. Through visits to the Xunantunich Mayan ruins, ancient caves, wildlife sites, and guided nature experiences, as well as conversations with a Belizean educator about the country's culture and challenges, students were reminded that learning moves in both directions. Belize was not simply a place to serve. It was a place to learn, reflect, and grow.

For many students, the trip left a deep and lasting impression. **Kara Thourot** reflected, "The people of Belize showed me what resilience really looks like. Watching families travel hours to wait patiently for care and then greet us with such overwhelming gratitude reminded me that access is never something to take for granted." Her words capture what made the experience so powerful. Students were not only building clinical skills, but also witnessing resilience, trust, and generosity firsthand.

Sara Lombardi described the trip as "a whirlwind of education, collaboration, and compassion," adding that what she learned from the people of Belize and from other rehabilitation disciplines would shape her clinical insight for the rest of her career. **Sarah Hardy** expressed a similarly meaningful takeaway: "Communication is not just language, it is connection. What stood out most was how deeply the people of Belize cared for their entire community, always showing up for one another with compassion and heart."

What makes this initiative especially meaningful is that it did not end when the trip was over. In the months that followed, faculty continued the partnership through virtual education sessions with Belize's Ministry of Education for parents of children with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental delays. Additional outreach included Facebook Live sessions with The Inspiration Center on speech and language development, autism, and communication support. Plans are also moving forward for further school-based training and fluency-focused services.

As **Elizabeth Burney** shared, "Working within the different communities showed me the importance of teamwork, not only with PTs and OTs, but with the families and communities themselves. This experience will stay with me forever." Her words capture the lasting impact of the trip. The Belize initiative has become more than a travel experience. It is an ongoing partnership built on trust, learning, collaboration, and respect.



Letter from the Chair

GLEN TELLIS, PH.D.
PROFESSOR AND DEPARTMENT CHAIR



Welcome to the 17th edition of our department newsletter. As we celebrate the 23rd year of Misericordia University's Speech-Language Pathology program, this issue offers a meaningful look at the people, partnerships, and accomplishments that continue to define our department. Across these pages, there is much to celebrate, from student and faculty research to clinical innovation, service, advocacy, and community support.

This was a remarkable year for scholarship. Our students and faculty earned recognition at the PSHA convention, reflecting the creativity and clinical relevance of the work taking place in our program. That spirit of inquiry also reached the international stage. Our department was represented in Bangkok, Oxford, Berlin, and Malta. These opportunities continue to show our students that their work matters not only here, but across the profession.

Our students also continued to distinguish themselves through research and academic excellence. This year's newsletter highlights SURF scholars and their summer research projects. We also celebrate **Olivia Olley**, recipient of a prestigious NIDCD Junior Investigator Award, and **Kara Thourot**, valedictorian of the Class of 2025 and recipient of the **Von Drach Memorial Scholarship**. Their accomplishments reflect the curiosity, hard work, and mentorship that define our department.

Service remained central to who we are. In Belize, faculty and students joined colleagues for an interdisciplinary service-learning experience that provided educational programming and therapeutic support in schools, hospitals, clinics, and community organizations. We were also pleased to see **Amanda Prinzi** represent both Misericordia and Pennsylvania at ASHA Capitol Hill Day, where she advocated for telehealth and other legislative priorities affecting access to care.

There was much to recognize in student leadership and campus life. Our NSSLHA chapter had an outstanding year of service, fundraising, outreach, and leadership development, culminating in recognition with the Chapter Honors Award at the 2026 PSHA Convention. We also continue to see the reach of our program expand through our online graduate students, including those completing their studies from outside the United States.

Our Speech-Language and Hearing Center continues to grow in exciting ways through the renovated spaces in Passan Hall. The expanded Literacy Adventure Lab, new Sensory Motor Gym, renovated CHAT Lab, and welcoming SLP CONNECT space are helping us better serve children, adults, and caregivers while giving students rich hands-on learning experiences. These changes reflect a clinic that is growing not only in size, but in warmth, creativity, and impact.

This year also brought the welcome return of **Dr. Nicholas Barone**, a Misericordia alumnus whose experience in teaching, clinical practice, and research adds tremendous strength to our department. His return is a reminder of the lasting connection so many of our graduates feel to this program and community.

None of these accomplishments would be possible without the dedication of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, clinical educators, and community partners. I also want to extend heartfelt thanks to the generous funders and donors who continue to support our mission and help our clinics and programs thrive. We are deeply grateful for the support of all individual donors; donors to the SLP Connect Program and the SLP Service Program; and EITC Contributors: Clear Springs Insurance Company, Fidelity Bank, J.P. Mascaro & Sons, M&T Bank, Memco Realty, PPL Electric Utilities, and Weis Markets. Their generosity has helped expand clinical resources, strengthen student learning, and enhance the services we provide to our community. Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to **Dr. Kathleen Scaler Scott**, the faculty mentor for this edition of the newsletter. Her tireless mentorship of and dedication to the students made this publication possible. Without her guidance and support, this newsletter could not have come to fruition

Thank you for your continued support of our department, our clinic, and our students. I hope this newsletter gives you a strong sense of the energy, care, and momentum that continue to define Misericordia Speech-Language Pathology.

Glen Tellis, Ph.D.

Professor and Department Chair

Thank you

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING FOR GIVING GENEROUSLY TO THE SLP DEPARTMENT:

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We would like to thank all who donated to the SLP CONNECT program, serving those with dementia, aphasia and other cognitive challenges and their caregivers.

We would like to thank all who donated to the Service Trip to Belize, enabling our students to engage in interprofessional service delivery to an underserved country.

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YOU CAN GIVE A GIFT IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

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