

Sarah Verdecia-Zabala

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EDUCATION

University of Florida

August 2022 - May 2026

Bachelor of Science in Psychology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences — GPA: 3.67/4.0

Honors: Summa Cum Laude, Honors in Psychology

Languages: English and Spanish

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Social-Cognitive and Affective Development Lab

March 2024 - Present

Undergraduate Research Assistant/Paid Lab Manager

Gainesville, FL

Principal Investigator: Natalie Ebner, Ph.D.

- Oversees participant recruitment, screening and scheduling, data management, and is certified to perform venipuncture for the Flicker Study
- Conducted research on the effects of a clinical intranasal oxytocin treatment on systemic inflammation in older adults
- Composed and presented a poster aiming to characterize the role of intranasal oxytocin on the link between pain and stress in older adults

North Central Florida Society for Neuroscience Conference

November 2025 - February 2026

Abstract and Registration Committee Member

Gainesville, FL

- Coordinated abstract acceptances and poster session assignment notifications for over 100 applicants
- Designed and organized updated conference name tags
- Greeted keynote speakers, research panelists, and poster presenters upon their arrival at the conference

Spacial Cognition and Navigational Neuroscience Lab

January 2024 - April 2025

Paid Undergraduate Research Assistant

Gainesville, FL

Principal Investigator: Steven Weisberg, Ph.D.

- Directed a project researching aging adults, spatial navigation techniques, and likelihood of risk-taking
- Trained three research assistants through the recruiting, scheduling, and research session process
- Managed spreadsheets containing over 250 participants

PROFESSIONAL & SHADOWING EXPERIENCE

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences & Beyond 120

April 2025 - May 2026

Student Ambassador

Gainesville, FL

- Represented the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at convocation and the Beyond120 open house
- Hosted information sessions for students interested in pre-health, pre-law, and experiential learning opportunities such as study abroad, research, and internships
- Enhanced the visibility of college resources through tabling, career workshops, and social media

Freshman Leadership Council

September 2022 - May 2025

Vice Chair of Membership/Director of Membership/Council Member

Gainesville, FL

- Oversaw weekly attendance and monthly well-being check-ins for over 50 Council Members

- Connected with and invited over 20 speakers per year to discuss professional development, personal growth, and leadership at weekly general body meetings
- Partnered with Take Stock in Children to execute a youth leadership summit for nearly 30 students

Shadowing at UFHealth

January 2025 - September 2025

Pediatric Neurology Observer, Dr. Steven Parrish Winesett, M.D.

Gainesville, FL

- Shadowed Dr. Winesett and colleagues in clinic, in the operating room, and while completing rounds on hospital floors
- Learned about common types of epilepsy in children and their genetic or immunity-related causes
- Examined patient electroencephalograms, MRI scans, and CT scans for seizure-related abnormalities

Shadowing at Sarasota Memorial Hospital

December 2023

Radiologist Observer

Sarasota, FL

- Invited to shadow a musculoskeletal radiologist, an interventional radiologist, and a body radiologist
- Observed the analysis of over 50 mammograms, CT scans, MRI scans, ultrasounds, and PET scans
- Learned about interventional procedures such as embolizations, catheter placements, and ablations

PRESENTATIONS

Research Conferences

- **Verdecia-Zabala, S.**, Wright, K. A., Feifel, D., Mendez, A., & Ebner, N.C. (May, 2026). *The effects of chronic intranasal oxytocin on systemic inflammation in aging*. Poster at the Florida Consortium on the Neurobiology of Cognition in Tallahassee, Florida, USA.
- **Verdecia-Zabala, S.**, Wright, K. A., Feifel, D., Mendez, A., & Ebner, N.C. (March, 2026). *The effects of chronic intranasal oxytocin on systemic inflammation in aging*. Poster at the Florida Undergraduate Research Conference in Jacksonville, Florida, USA.
- **Verdecia-Zabala, S.**, Wright, K. A., Feifel, D., Mendez, A., & Ebner, N.C. (March, 2026). *The effects of chronic intranasal oxytocin on systemic inflammation in aging*. Poster at the Florida Undergraduate Research Conference in Jacksonville, Florida, USA.
- **Verdecia-Zabala, S.**, Wright, K. A., Feifel, D., Mendez, A., & Ebner, N.C. (April, 2026). *The effects of chronic intranasal oxytocin on systemic inflammation in aging*. Poster at the University of Florida Undergraduate Research Symposium in Gainesville, Florida, USA.
- **Verdecia-Zabala, S.**, Wright, K. A., Feifel, D., Mendez, A., & Ebner, N.C. (April, 2026). *The effects of chronic intranasal oxytocin on systemic inflammation in aging*. Poster at the Psychology Graduate Student Organization Undergraduate Poster Forum in Gainesville, Florida, USA.
- **Verdecia-Zabala, S.**, Wright, K., Polk, R., Lin, T., Krol, K., Perkeybile, A., Connelly, J., & Ebner, N.C. (April, 2025). *The effects of chronic intranasal oxytocin in aging: A modulation of pain and stress*. Poster at the Psychology Graduate Student Organization Undergraduate Poster Forum in Gainesville, Florida, USA.

Invited Presentations

Systemic Inflammation in Aging: Treatment Potential of Oxytocin

Fall 2025

University of Florida, Department of Psychology

Undergraduate Mentee Research Talk Series

Mentored by: **Kylie Wright**, Ph.D.

Invited by: Dr. Lisa Scott

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Streetlight at UF Health Shands Hospital

June 2024-Present

Volunteer/Shift Captain

Gainesville, FL

- Provide peer-to-peer support for patients aged 13-30 that suffer from conditions such as cancer, cystic fibrosis, organ transplantation, burns, sickle cell anemia, and various autoimmune diseases
- Cultivate patient identities and psychosocial resilience through one-on-one visitations, patient art galleries and yearbooks, program-wide video game tournaments, and end-of-life gatherings
- Support and mentor volunteers on my shift through the curation of informative PowerPoint presentations, on-shift volunteer shadowing, and attendance tracking

HCA North Florida Hospital

January 2024 - June 2024

Volunteer

Gainesville, FL

- Greeted patients, families, and staff in the neuroscience and oncology inpatient care units
- Interacted with patients by ensuring comfort, locating wheelchairs, and answering questions
- Sanitized high-contact areas, fold linens, restock supplies, and ensure patient rooms are clean

UF Early Childhood Collaboratory

October 2023 - May 2024

Volunteer

Gainesville, FL

- Supervised a classroom of children aged 2-3 years
- Assisted the teacher in conducting classroom activities, monitored the children's safety when performing outdoor activities, and fostered engagement and curiosity

Kids Count of Alachua County

January 2023 - November 2023

Volunteer Tutor

Gainesville, FL

- Instructed 1st to 5th grade students in sessions ranging from letter pronunciation to reading short novels
- Provided after-school homework assistance in topics such as English and mathematics

Awards & Certifications

Summa Cum Laude

May 2026

Committee Chair: Natalie Ebner, Ph.D.

- Title: The effects of chronic intranasal oxytocin on systemic inflammation in aging
- Awarded following successful completion of an honors thesis paper and defense with a unanimous faculty vote

University Scholars Program

April 2025 - May 2026

- Capstone project involving the completion of a publishable research paper and a research poster presentation

- Awarded \$1,750 for personal use and \$500 to support research endeavors

Excellence in Member Engagement Recipient—Freshman Leadership Council **April 2024**

UF Student Activities & Involvement Awards

- Award recognizing a student organization that fosters community within, nurtures members for future endeavors, and promotes connection to university resources

Phlebotomy Certification **October 2024**

American Medical Certification Association (AMCA)

- Completed the Veritas Nursing Academy Phlebotomy Technician instructional program
- Passed the 100-question AMCA Phlebotomy Technician Certification Exam

Bright Futures Scholarship **August 2022 - May 2026**

- Florida Academic Scholarship
- Awarded 100% tuition and fees for 4 years

Machen Florida Opportunity Scholarship **August 2022 - May 2026**

- Mentorship and support program for low-income, first-generation students
- Awarded a 100% grant and scholarship package up to financial need