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Friends of IMPROVment®,

With a new semester comes additional exciting opportunities to grow and move together. In this newsletter we highlight two of our amazing graduate student assistants, Devyn Battaglia and Hannah Menaker, who work in our community class and assist on the IGROOVE study. Read more about them below.

Also below is info about an exciting [Arts on Prescription](#) conference in Charlotte, where I'll teach an IMPROVment® workshop on Oct 7th. Then, on October 8th, I'll head to Thessaloniki, Greece to share another IMPROVment® workshop at the First International Meeting of Arts Prescribing in Healthcare. You can read [more about that conference here](#).

Our community class continues on Tuesdays at 2:30 at the Generations Center, so come dance with us.

And as always, if you or someone you know might be interested in participating in the IGROOVE study, please send them our way! [Info here](#).

Take care, and as summer fades, I hope you enjoy the colors and beauty that the fall season brings.

Best,

Christina Soriano
Founder/Executive Director of IMPROVment®
improvement.wfu.edu

Arts on Prescription

2024 Creative Aging Symposium

Arts on Prescription

October 8, 2024
9am-4pm
\$50 per person

Register by September 28 at
<https://form.jotform.com/242334470354149>



Holiday Inn Charlotte University
8520 University Executive Park Dr
Charlotte, NC 28262



Medicine Wheel by Ray Silva,
Laguna-Pueblo artist and
Brenda Silva, Haliwa-Saponi
artist.

Sometimes known as the Sacred Hoop, the Medicine Wheel has been used by generations of various Native American tribes for health and healing. It embodies the Four Directions, as well as Father Sky, Mother Earth, and Spirit Tree—all of which symbolize dimensions of health and the cycles of life.

Arts on Prescription Conference

October 8, 2024, 9am-4pm

The [Arts on Prescription](#) conference on "social prescribing" is the first of its kind in North Carolina—bringing arts and healthcare representatives together to learn about this practice which is developing worldwide. Christina Soriano will lead an IMPROVment® movement experience and discussion at **10:30am**.

Please join Christina in Charlotte at the Arts on Prescription Symposium!
Registration info below:

[Register here](#)

Welcome, new researchers!



Devyn Battaglia

Hi Devyn! Tell us a little about yourself.

Although I am going on my 6th year in North Carolina, I am originally from New Jersey where I grew up dancing since the age of three. In undergrad I studied exercise science and dance science at Elon University, where I was also on the competitive dance team for four years. I always knew I wanted to keep dance in my life in some way, but being a part of Elon's team and getting to meet so many amazing people who shared my passion for dance even further inspired me to continue to seek outlets to connect with dance communities. I am currently a graduate student at Wake Forest University in my second year of pursuing my master's in Health and Exercise Science. The research done at Wake in this department especially has given me opportunities to impact people's lives in ways I didn't even know existed, and really shown me the value of using exercise as medicine.

**Why are you drawn to the work we do in our research?
How do you see growing in this work as a scientist and a dancer?**

When I found out I had the opportunity to work on a health focused clinical trial centered around dance at Wake I thought it was almost too good to be true. I have always wanted to find ways to combine my interests in dance and science, and IGROOVE has been the perfect chance to see that come to life. I enjoy working with people, especially the older population who participate in this study, and am always excited to witness the way these dance classes can boost their moods and turn their days around. Rarely ever do we hear anything but praise as the participants file out of class, and to see dance not only making others happy but also improving their health is a truly awesome experience. Working with IGROOVE has given me better skills in communicating with participants from the research side, and also insight into the many avenues there are to take with using dance and other arts to impact those around us.

What is your favorite IMPROVment® experience or exercise so far?

The best part about IMPROVment® is undoubtedly the personal touch each class member gets to add. Dancing can be intimidating, but the non judgmental environment fostered in the IMPROVment® classes is key to allowing everyone

comfortable to try new things and experiment. I think it would be hard for anyone to walk out of an IMPROVment® class not feeling better than they did when they walked in, and that has to do with both the physical and mental release that dance allows.

Devyn leading a class for the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority of Winston-Salem, at their community day



Hi Hannah! Tell us a little about yourself.

At three years old I was exposed to the wonderful world of dance through Mommy and Me classes. What started as an activity to help get out my extra energy became a life-long passion. I continued dancing as an undergraduate student at Wake Forest University, where I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with minors in Dance and Spanish. I am currently at WFU Graduate School of Arts and Sciences working toward a master's in biomedical science. I am originally from Charlotte, NC but live in Pfafftown now.

Why are you drawn to the work we do in our research? How do you see growing in this work as a scientist and a dancer?

As my personal goals have evolved, so has my relationship with dance. In high school, I aspired to be a professional ballet dancer and approached my training with the seriousness of a job. In college, dance became a creative outlet and a way to escape from academics. Now, I view dance as a way to connect with others and enhance both my mental and physical health. This latest evolution is what attracted me to the IGROOVE study—the idea that dance can help maintain health as we age. Initially, I found research intimidating, but my involvement in the study has helped dismantle my mental barriers. For future projects, I am eager to dive right into the work.

What is your favorite IMPROVment® experience or exercise so far?

I can't help but smile while in an IMPROVment® class. It is so fun to get out of my head and into my body for 45 minutes during the day. The atmosphere of the class is so welcoming and non-judgmental; everyone is free to be themselves. One of my favorite exercises in the class is *Pass the Energy*. One person generates movement as the rest of the group follows along. I love seeing people's personalities come out through their movement choices.

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