

the  
**RAM  
REPORT**

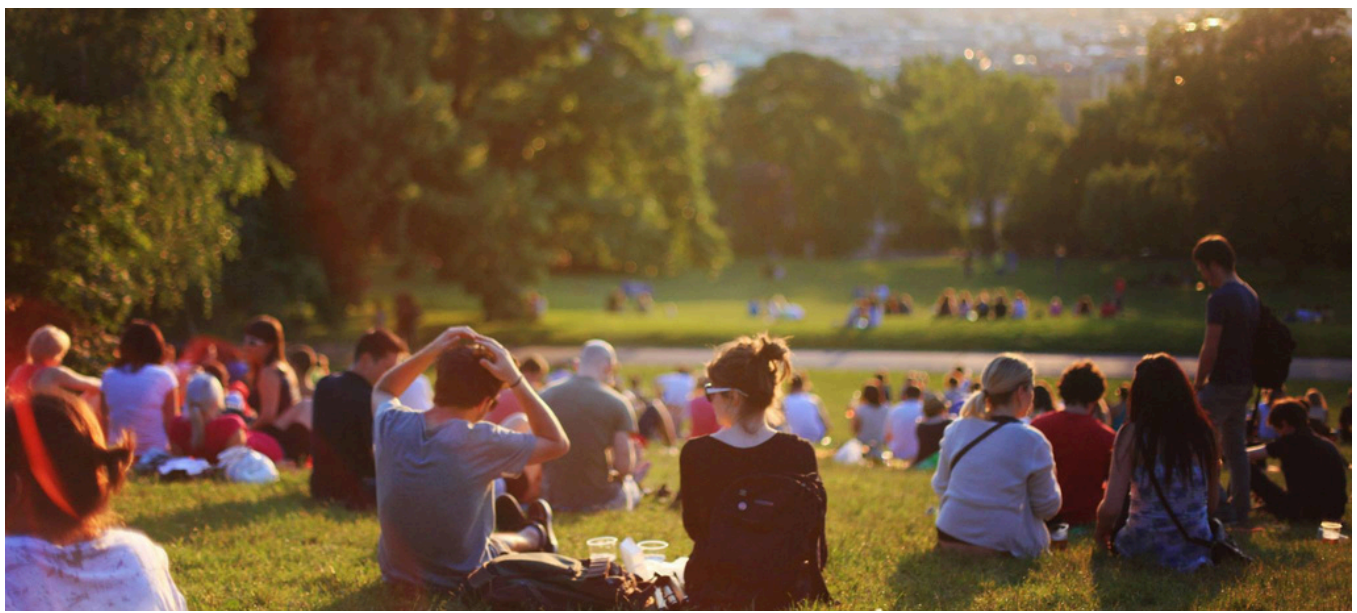
*Spring 2024*



Rho Alpha Mu

Community  
*and*  
Counseling





## RAM REPORT SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER

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# MEET THE EDITORIAL STAFF

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*Saiber Shaikh*

*Editor in Chief*

**Saiber Shaikh** is a second-year doctoral student and the Lead Herr Clinic Supervisor at the Penn State's Counselor Education program. She loves all things art and dabbles in writing, painting, cooking, photography from time to time. When she is not busy, she loves connecting with people, staring at flowers, and watching dog videos on the internet.



*Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos*

*Associate Editor*

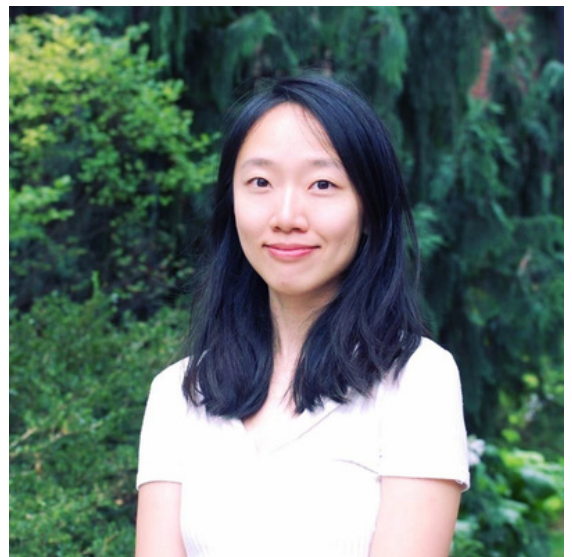
**Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos** is a first-year student in Penn State's Counselor and Education Ph.D. program. She is passionate about working with marginalized populations to eliminate mental health stigmas held by BIPOC and Latino communities through trauma-informed and decolonized care. In her free time, she enjoys walking, practicing yoga, solving jigsaw puzzles, and going to the movies.



*Nikki Weng*

*Assistant Editor*

**Nikki Weng** is a first-year master's student in Penn State's Counselor Education program. During her free time, she can usually be found walking, reading, cooking, painting, volunteering and wishing she had a cat.



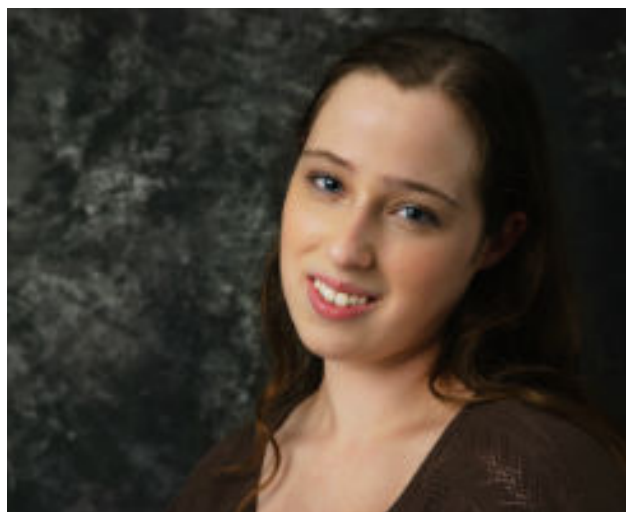
## Alumni Spotlight :

### Dr. K. Lynn Pierce, Ph.D., LPC, CRC, ACS

pierce\_k03@mercer.edu

#### Q. What year did you graduate and what was your emphasis area?

I graduated in 2022 Counselor Education and Supervision (Specialty area of Rehabilitation Counseling)



#### Q. Where do you currently work and what are some of your job duties/responsibilities?

I am currently at Mercer University. I am an assistant professor and the doctoral program coordinator, so I teach and run the PhD program. Right now I teach three classes a semester, and they're a mix of clinical mental health counseling and core classes (especially career counseling), rehabilitation classes including medical aspects, and classes for the doctoral students. I also advise doctoral students and oversee processes such as comprehensive exams and doctoral interviews.

#### Q. What advice/insight can you offer current students in the program?

The program can move so quickly, just breathe and really take it all in and try as best you can to be present. There won't ever be another time you have so many levels of supervision and support. It will be hard in the future unless you're intentional in building it to feel like you have the same kind of community, so take advantage of it now. It's also a great time to take some chances or try new things and build up experiences. Especially for doctoral students, this might also mean moving a little more slowly through the program to get as much as you can out of the experience.



## Alumni Spotlight :

### Dr. K. Lynn Pierce, Ph.D., LPC, CRC, ACS

pierce\_k03@mercer.edu

#### *Q. In what ways has your experience at PSU prepared you for the profession?*

I got so much invaluable experience. Due to my GA placement in Student Disability Services, I was able to work on licensure and my CRC, in addition to my ACS during the program. The faculty are well respected, and I've stayed connected with some of them after my program in scholarly collaborations. Now, as a doctoral program coordinator, I'm grateful for having been in a program I think is a great model and that informs my thinking about the mark I want to leave on the program I coordinate. My mentors at PSU were the kind of mentors I aspire to be, and that especially has inspired me to always push to do better for myself, my colleagues, and my students.

#### *Q. What do you do for self-care??*

The I love being outside and I live in a beautiful area with a lot of green spaces. I also do equine supported counseling and I've ridden horses most of my life, so you can often find me at the stable. I took up crocheting during the pandemic lockdowns- I bought Woobles kits and highly recommend them! So I normally have a project bag with me either purely for fun or I am involved with a project that makes octopuses for preemies in NICUs. This has been great for justifying buying lots of really fun, bright colors of yarn I wouldn't otherwise use.

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# The Importance of Validation in the Counseling Relationship

CASSANDRA KAM

After finishing my first semester in the doctoral program, I was looking forward to winter break and a time to relax and recover. Namely, I was looking forward to catching up on sleep, which was something that I had chosen to forego to meet my deadlines. The day after final examinations concluded, I woke to the sound of furniture dragging in the middle of the night. I went back to sleep, thinking it was a one-time incident. This was the beginning of what would be nightly noise disturbances for the next seven weeks, starting as early as 11:00 pm and ending as late as 4:00 am. The sounds emanating from the apartment above mine included banging, scraping, stomping, and grinding. I politely asked my upstairs neighbors to be quieter during the nighttime hours and received a very nasty response.

Since I live in the White Course apartments, Residence Life advised me to contact the Residence Assistant on duty whenever there were disturbances. I went through three different RAs, who heard the noises and informed me that they would assist me but ended up forwarding my complaints to the next person on duty. There was no follow-through or resolution, so I requested to talk to the Residence Life Coordinator. As a full-time staff member, he was not obligated to return to work until after the semester started.

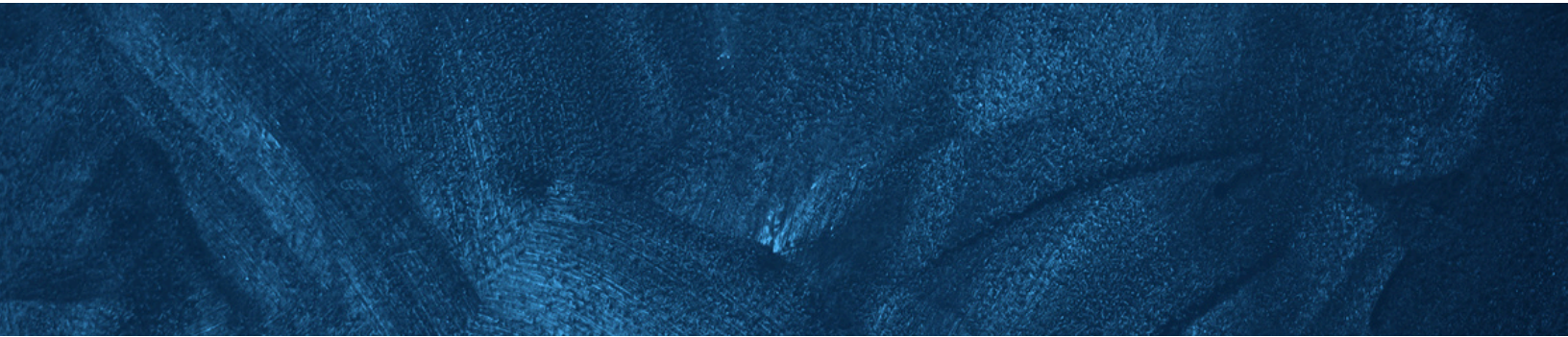
On the advice of one of the RAs, I began making recordings and sent them to the RLC. I sent four different recordings in total and was told that the sounds were likely caused by something other than the neighbors: a squirrel in the drainpipe, the

water heater, the wind. The RLC said that he had never had any problems with my neighbors and that I was the only person the building who complained. He advised me to call the RAs if the situation was “extreme”.

At this point, I was averaging three to four hours of sleep a night. I tried many ways to get restful sleep but was unsuccessful. Earplugs did not dampen the sound enough and I also felt vibrations that woke me. I purchased active noise-cancelling earbuds and set up the Bluetooth function to play white noise at the same time. I left my heater on all night with the hope that there would be additional background noise. I pushed back my bedtime to midnight or 1:00 am to minimize the amount of time I would be encountering noise while sleeping. I began spending more time outside of my apartment and was basically only home to take a shower or change my clothing. I began looking for another apartment and was chagrined that community housing was all rented out for Summer and Fall 2024.

None of these interventions helped me. I began feeling the stress of not sleeping and was exhausted and irritable. I no longer socialized with my cohort since I was no longer good company. I stopped cooking since I had no energy to purchase groceries and prepare meals; my finances and health suffered as I began buying ready-made meals only. I began trying to get any amount of sleep that I could in the daytime hours. I almost missed one of my





classes as a result.

Weeks went by without hearing any responses or follow up and I requested my concerns be escalated to a higher administrator. I received the same responses as I had before and notified the administrator that I would be filing a complaint with the university. The RLC then proposed conducting an experiment to validate what I was hearing. He stood in my apartment while a coworker went to the upstairs apartment to simulate normal daily activities, such as pulling out a chair to sit down. The sounds that he heard were exactly what I experienced each night for the past seven weeks. He was so shocked that he had his colleague repeat the process, then had them switch roles to obtain another person's perspective. They both said that the sound was obnoxiously loud, and they could feel the vibrations in the room.

The good news for me was that someone finally believed what I had been saying for weeks on end. The bad news was that the infrastructure of the building amplified sounds so much that the upstairs neighbors would not even be able to walk without it sounding like someone deliberately stomping. The RLC said he would work with his supervisor and the White Course staff to relocate me to another unit on an upper floor where I was not below anyone else. At the time of this writing, the plan is to have me move during spring break.

I felt as if a great weight had been lifted and I

nearly cried out of relief. I had started to think that I was imagining things and worried that I was having late-onset schizophrenia with auditory hallucinations. While I realize that spring break is several weeks away and that the nightly sounds will continue, the fact that Residence Life was finally taking my concerns seriously and working towards a solution, I feel as if I can endure for a little while longer.

Having someone acknowledge my concerns and recognize them as valid reassured me that my feelings were important. Being validated rather than dismissed gave me hope that my problem could be solved and that someone cared. It did not change the fact that I would not be able to for several more weeks, but I could see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel.

Therefore, the purpose of my story is to reinforce the importance of validating the client. Whatever the client is experiencing, it is real to them. When the counselor dismisses the client's concerns, the counselor disempowers the client. The client will have self-doubts and not trust their thoughts or judgements. The counselor's invalidation also reinforces experiences that the client may have had with a parent or other role model. The counselor will fail to establish rapport with the client, who may stop attending sessions (Teyber & Teyber, 2017).

It is a part of the ACA Code of Ethics that counselors practice beneficence and work for the good of the client by promoting their mental health and well-being (American Counseling Association,

2014). By dismissing the client's concerns, the counselor is harming to the client, which is in violation of the professional value of nonmaleficence (American Counseling Association, 2014). In cases where the client might be reporting a perilous or urgent issue, the counselor's disregard or disbelief of the client's presenting concerns could constitute client abandonment and neglect or counselor impairment. The worst-case scenario could be that the client may present imminent danger to themselves or others, with potentially fatal consequences.

To validate the client, counselors have access to several techniques (Swank & Barrio Minton, 2022; Teyber & Teyber, 2017):

*Restating or paraphrasing.* The counselor restates what the client has said in different words. The counselor can determine if they captured the essence of the client's message. This allows the client the opportunity to correct the counselor's understanding and to elaborate further.

*Reflecting.* The counselor shares with the client what they heard, including affect, body language and other non-verbal cues. This shows the counselor is attending to the client; the client may not be aware of their behaviors or feelings until the counselor brings them to the client's attention.

*Summarizing.* The counselor states what they think is the essence of the client's concern. The

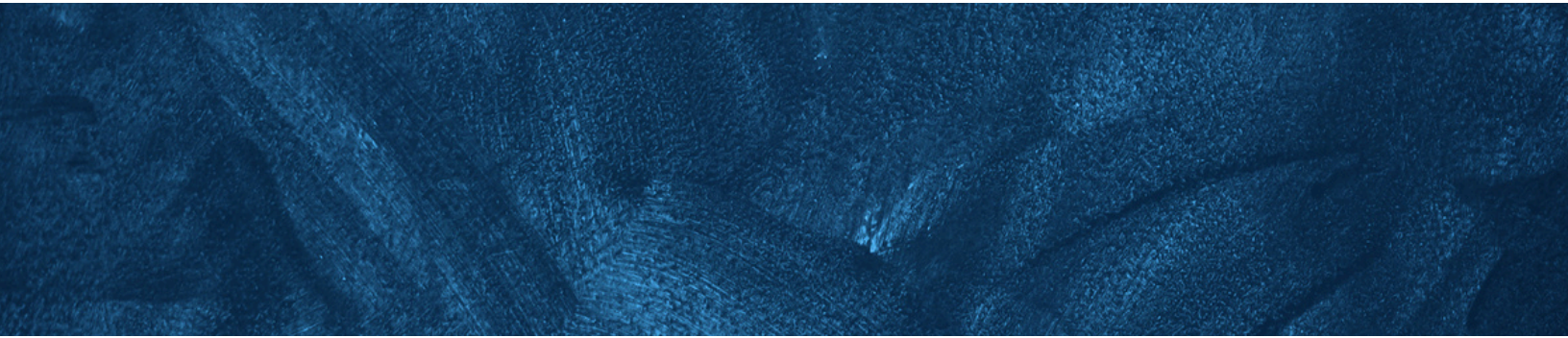
counselor demonstrates understanding, thus helping to establish trust.

*Clarification.* The counselor asks the client questions to ensure that the counselor understands what the client said or to obtain more detailed information. The counselor should be cautious that the tone does not come across as questioning or disagreeing with the client, which will damage the working relationship.

In showing empathy, counselors should refrain from certain phrases such as "I understand", "That's normal", or "I know how you feel". These statements are overly broad and downplay the client's concerns, and do not account for the client's context-specific situation (Teyber & Teyber, 2017). Additionally, if counselors choose to share their own experiences through appropriate self-disclosure as a means of relating to the client, they should exercise caution, as clients may perceive the comparison as competition or minimization (Swank & Barrio Minton, 2022).

Lastly, counselors should ask clients what they would like to have happen regarding their concerns (Teyber & Teyber, 2016). Sometimes, counselors are quick to look for solutions or to identify patterns or themes in the client's life. However, each client may have a different agenda for coming to counseling, whether it be to solve the problem, to have a safe place to talk, to find shelter from a stressful situation, etc. As





counselors, we are charged with assisting clients to exercise autonomy (American Counseling Association, 2014) and the client ultimately decides upon the counseling goals unless they are an imminent danger to themselves or to others.

The cornerstone of the counseling relationship is fostering rapport (Teyber & Teyber, 2017). To do so, the counselor must create an environment in which the client feels safe enough to be vulnerable and to trust the counselor with what might be some of their deepest secrets. Since trust can be fragile, the counselor must demonstrate that they are receptive and actively working to assist the client. By validating the client, both regarding content and affect, the counselor shows the client that they hear and honor the client. Once the client feels validated, then the counselor and the client can work collaboratively. A client who does not feel validated may become reserved, withdrawn or stop coming to counseling, which nullifies the purpose of counseling altogether.

I am pleased to share that my living situation has improved significantly. On the first day of spring break, I moved to a second-floor unit and am now enjoying a restful sleep. As I begin to regain energy, my mood has improved, and I have the mental and physical strength to start practicing healthier habits and behaviors. I never appreciated how valuable sleep was until I did not have it. This experience reinforced for me how critical validating the client is in the counseling process. While my journey was exhausting and aggravating, it gave me the opportunity to

understand and appreciate the client's perspective. As I continue to work with clients, I will do my best to honor the client and validate their concerns. Being unheard and unseen was one of the worst feelings that I have experienced, and I would never wish this on anyone else. Should I ever forget or have doubts about the importance of client validation, I only have to recall my own experiences.

**References available upon request.**

# Inspiring a collective professional counselor identity and community through intentional advocacy

SAIBER SHAIKH

As counselors and counselor educators, we live in a globalized society where counselors occupy many diverse identities within the community. We want to promote an inclusive environment based on some of the important values of our profession such as honoring diversity. Chi Sigma Iota ([CSI]. 2013) strategic plan emphasizes the need for a strong professional identity at the international level. Hence protecting and promoting our professional identity is an ongoing process that involves not only individual-level pride and acknowledgment, but also global awareness and advertisement.

With the goal of empowering individuals from marginalized communities, and becoming a more inclusive profession, counselor educators should aim to open doors to our profession so that folx feel welcomed to join our profession. With an inviting attitude and openness, our field will be enriched by counselors with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. But for this to happen, we need to make people aware of all the unique ways counseling is different from other helping professions. Our values, code of conduct, and approach need to be more common knowledge.

To nurture the commitment to empowering diverse individuals and groups, it is important for counselor educators to pay attention to the future of counseling: our counselors-in-training. Research on counselors-in-training professional identity development should also focus on their awareness and identification to the “Professional Counselor” identity. Professional identity

development in counselors can be defined as the “successful integration of personal attributes and professional training in the context of a professional community” (Gibson et al. 2010, pp. 23–24) There is an idea that individuals in the counseling field have all adapted the idea of being a “professional counselor” due to our licensure, or role that we hold in professional spaces or what accreditation and associations our programs may subscribe too. And even with the current push through major associations such as Chi Sigma Iota, National Board of Certified Counselors, American Counseling Association, Association of Counselor Education and Supervision towards a collective professional counselor identity, we are forgetting the very real confusion that graduates feel as they start their program (Myers, Sweeny, & White, 2002). When we think of diversity, we also need to look at the professional diversity that counseling as a profession invite including non-traditional college students, foreign-born counselors, individuals opting into a career change, and undergraduates from other majors among others.

Most foreign-born counselors may not have been exposed to being a “professional counselor” due to the varying nature of accreditation within different countries, and the lack of information on these distinctions between helping professions and the career trajectory and roles. Outside of the United States (US), counseling is still largely a part of psychology studies. An example of such is participants in a professional identity





development study (Attia, 2021) noted that they were not even aware of Counselor Education as its own separate field from Counseling Psychology. This addresses an important aspect of advocacy for counselor educators that we need to advertise and make our profession known in the global community. Even in the US, many students in a CACREP-accredited master's level program may come from a psychology-based undergraduate or a human services major. Nontraditional students may not be aware of the professional identity and differences between Counseling and other professions within their career prospects. Intentional tasks are needed to expand outreach efforts in recognizing and advertising our professional identity. With the Counseling Compact (National Center for Interstate Compact, 2023) well underway and its impact being felt by many, it is now more than ever that we promote and protect our professional identity as Counselors.

Some factors that can assist in the acknowledgement of one's own professional denomination is the inclusion of professional identity seminars in any CACREP- accredited program. Within the core CACREP courses, introducing the history and struggles of our counseling identity, and what it means now to be a Professional Counselor can inspire future counselors' aspirations. Utilizing scholarship from our profession in the curriculum (Barrio Minton, 2023), encouraging advocacy not only for our clients but also for our profession (Hartwig

Moorhead et al., 2023), introducing professional associations early in the counseling curriculum, encouraging attendance to counseling conferences, inducing reflective practices of our professional identity in core CACREP courses, and mentorship through program but also through local and national organization can also be helpful. The new 2024 CACREP (2023) standards note the inclusion of leadership as part of internship hours which can encourage graduate students to start associating themselves with their counseling professional identity. Perhaps outreach efforts can even be made to undergraduate programs that are starting to get accredited. Leadership opportunities will allow students to engage in professional service outside of academics and interact with others in the field. As Hartwig Moorhead and colleagues (2023) noted in their position paper, getting involved on local, state, and national levels is an important aspect of belonging to a professional community. A sense of belonging and community will only strengthen our collective professional identity through means of deliberate professional socialization.

Dr. Barrio Minton (2023) noted in her keynote speech at ACES 2023, that the path forward is to promote our counseling identity but also push forward for a transdisciplinary approach. Utilizing the already diverse students that are invited in our program, our approach can be transdisciplinary and yet encourage a more collective identity as professional counselors. So



even if they recognize themselves as mental health counselors, substance use counselors, school counselors, rehabilitation counselors, or career counselors – they are still professional counselors. They still belong to the diverse community of counselors. Celebrating the professional diversity that our profession commands and still advocating for our collective identity is the progress we need to achieve.

Our role as Professional Counselors is now to affirm our own professional identity in as many spaces as we can. This can be something as small as an email signature or LinkedIn post, to personal websites and office plaques. It has become important to raise our voices and advocate for who we are as a profession. We are obligated to follow ethical standards as our profession evolves to be more inclusive. Our professional identity not only protects our livelihood but also the way we function in our society. Additionally, as counselor advocates and educators, we are tasked with helping counselors-in-training to intentionally reflect on the historical trajectory of our profession and discern their role within it. Lastly, we bear the responsibility as members of this community to advocate for our profession as opportunities arise within our personal and professional lives.

**References available upon request.**



# CSI HIGHLIGHTS - SPRING 2024



## **Exec Board:**

### **Co-Presidents:**

**Alex Rabb and Rachel Notestine**

**Vice President of Community Development: Chloe Kang**

**Vice President of Professional Development: Jaylin Frierson**

**Secretary: Jhanvi Sharma**

**Treasurer: Debbie Chen**



THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

**RHO ALPHA MU CHAPTER OF  
CHI SIGMA IOTA**

COUNSELING ACADEMIC & PROFESSIONAL  
HONOR SOCIETY

CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO OUR

### **INITIATION CEREMONY**

COST: \$14/PERSON (GUESTS ARE WELCOME)  
INCLUDES ENTRY, DINNER, AND A GOOD TIME!  
(FREE FOR NEW INITIATES)

FRIDAY **12** APRIL  
2024

6:00 - 8:00PM  
103ABC BANK OF AMERICA CAREER  
SERVICES

GUEST SPEAKER: DR. JESSICA HENRY

RSVP BY EOD  
THURSDAY, APRIL 4TH, 2024  
SCAN QR CODE



# CSI EVENTS - SPRING 2024

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CSI Fundraising is hosting a

## Bring in Spring Carnation Sale!

Send a carnation (or a few) to someone you appreciate within the CNED program.

**Order here!**



**Orders are due  
Friday, March 1st!**



## NCE Q&A SESSION

 **FEB 23 @7PM**

Join us for a live Q&A session dedicated to the National Counselor Examination (NCE). Gain insights, study strategies, and answers to your burning questions!

CSI Mentorship Committee

## CSI Wellness and Social Chairs invite you to our Game & Trivia Night



- Food & Beverages provided!
- Bring your friends
- Celebrate being halfway through the semester!

**Trivia Prizes!**  
there will be a selection of gift cards for our Trivia winners



**DETAILS**  
105 Rackley Building  
7:00 pm - 10:30 pm  
Friday March 15th, 2024



# Departmental Highlights

## CONGRATULATIONS TO EVERYONE WHO...

### Passed another program milestone:

#### Dissertation Defense

Dr. Joy Gray  
Dr. Aazi Ahmadi  
Dr. Sarah Roundtree  
Dr. Jess Gerthe

#### Dissertation Proposal

Meaghan O'Shaughnessy

#### Comprehensive Exam

Ravza Aksoy Nur Eren

### Recognized by Professional Association

#### Awards

Ashleigh Johnson - Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Association Graduate Student Award.

Aazi Ahmadi - ACA Glen E. Hubele National Graduate Student Award.

Saiber Shaikh - Editorial Fellow for the Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision.

### Memberships

Saiber Shaikh - NARACES Graduate Student Representative 2024-26

### Presented at a conference:

#### KCA at ACA

Mihee Woo  
Fan Fan

#### AHC

Saiber Shaikh

### PSU College of Education

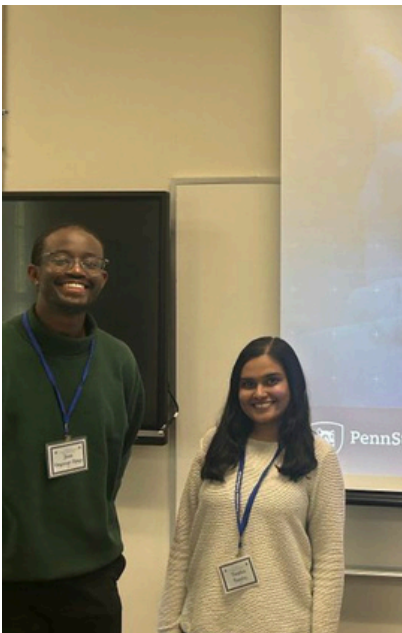
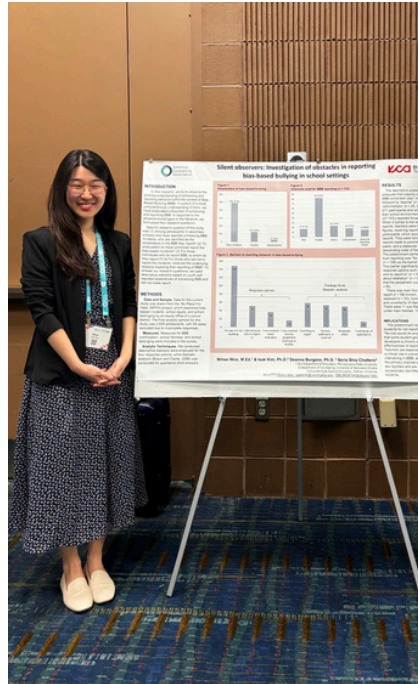
Mihee Woo

### CSI PA Statewide Conference

Linh Le  
Cassandra Kam  
Jhanvi Sharma, Lucy Kim, & Chloe Kang  
Katherine Bai  
Deepika Nantha  
Jesse Onyango-Opiyo  
Nikki Weng  
Saiber Shaikh, Norah Alharbi, Ravza Aksoy  
Nur Eren & Mona Ali Zaib

PLEASE REACH OUT TO YOUR COLLEAGUES TO  
PERSONALLY CONGRATULATE THEM!







# MEET THE AUTHORS

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**Cassandra Kam** (she/her/hers) is in her first year at Penn State University pursuing her doctoral studies in Counseling Education. Cassandra's research interests are in transition-aged youth with IDD, veterans, vocational rehabilitation and mental health. Cassandra has worked as a state and federal vocational rehabilitation counselor, a Medicaid Waiver services manager, ADA/504 disability rights coordinator and clinical mental health counselor. Cassandra is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, a National Certified Counselor and a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (Hawaii). Cassandra also serves on the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness council for the Hawaii Disability Rights Center. When she is not working on research, Cassandra enjoys traveling, reading, martial arts, music and attempting to learn sewing and other needlecraft.

**Saiber Shaikh** (she/her/hers) is a second-year doctoral student at the Penn State's Counselor Education program. She earned her master's degree from Purdue University Northwest in Clinical Mental Health Counseling with specific focus on Expressive Arts based therapy and Addictions Counseling. She also has another master's from University of Mumbai in Applied Psychology with specialization in Counseling Psychology. She is currently the Lead Clinic Supervisor at the on campus mental health clinic called the Edwin L. Herr Clinic that helps support master and doctoral level counselors-in-training. Her research interest includes imposter phenomenon, GenAI in Higher Ed, Counselors-in-Training professional development and wellbeing, and meme culture. In her free time, she loves connecting with people, staring at flowers, and watching cat and dog videos on the internet.

