

# THE RAM REPORT

SPRING 2025

# THE FUTURE OF COUNSELING

RHO ALPHA MU





CHI SIGMA IOTA RAM REPORT  
SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

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# MEET THE EDITORIAL STAFF

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*Saiber Shaikh*

*Editor in Chief*

**Saiber Shaikh** is a third-year doctoral candidate at the Penn State's Counselor Education program. Her scholarly interest includes professional identity development and learning of counselors in training, GenAI in Higher Education, social media and meme culture. 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 second-year student in Penn State's Counselor Education Ph.D. program. She is passionate about working with marginalized populations to eradicate mental health stigmas held by BIPOC and Latine/x/o communities through trauma-informed and decolonized care. In her free time, she enjoys walking, practicing yoga, solving jigsaw puzzles, and going to the movies.

# MEET THE EDITORIAL STAFF

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*Courtney Dixon*  
*Assistant Editor*

**Courtney Dixon** is a first-year doctoral student at Penn State's counselor education program as well as a supervisor at the Herr Clinic on campus. A creative at heart, you will often find her doodling, dancing, crocheting, or playing Sims. For self-care, she enjoys a hot cup of tea or driving and singing along to her favorite songs (mostly One Direction).



*Andrew Nadermann*  
*Assistant Editor*

**Andrew Nadermann** (he/him) is a first-year doctoral student, looking to research college student substance use and impacts on overall health and wellness. He completed his master's degree in Counselor Education at Penn State in 2022. Andrew has many interests, ranging from watching and playing sports, including e-sports, helping to run an adult recreational volleyball league and community, politics, board games, and Dungeons and Dragons. Andrew's main life focus right now are his two favorite humans, Zoe (4) and Calvin (2).



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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Dear Readers,

After three remarkable years with RAM Report, including two years serving as Editor-in-Chief, the time has come for me to announce my departure. This newsletter has been an incredible journey and will forever hold a special place in my heart. I'm pleased to share that I'll continue my involvement as Emeritus Editor for the next year, providing guidance from behind the scenes, while passing the torch to Scarlett, who I'm confident will lead this publication to new heights.

The past four issues, including this one, have embodied my vision for what a student-run newsletter should be. With each publication, I've had the privilege of refining and strengthening this vision. None of this would have been possible without our exceptional editorial team and faculty advisors, whose dedication and talent have been the backbone of our success.

I take immense pride in what we've accomplished together, with our efforts recently recognized through the CSI Outstanding Newsletter Award 2025. This acknowledgment from the Chi Sigma Iota stands as a testament to our collective commitment to excellence.

While parting ways is bittersweet, I carry forward invaluable lessons that will guide me through future endeavors and new roles. Thank you for allowing me to serve this community and celebrating it.

With gratitude,

*Saiber Shaikh*

RAM Report  
Editor-in-Chief (2023-2025)





Chi Sigma Iota Counseling  
Academic and Professional Honor Society  
International

**OUTSTANDING CHAPTER  
NEWSLETTER AWARD**

*Presented to*

*Rho Alpha Mu Chapter*

The Pennsylvania State University

In Recognition of an  
Outstanding Chapter Newsletter

2024-2025

# Beyond Myths and Stereotypes: Understanding the Impact of the Racialization on Asian Americans' Mental Health Experiences

SHYRUN KARANDIKAR

Although Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the U.S. their experiences remain understudied, contributing to the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes, limiting the development of inclusive policies, and perpetuating their marginalization in conversations about race, equity, and social justice (Kim et. al., 2021). Asian and Asian American history, voices, and imagery are often excluded from the larger contexts of racism, socioeconomic and educational disparities, cultural identity, research, and policy as it is most often consolidated into the Black-White paradigm, which generalizes the lens of anti-Black racism to all racially minoritized groups (Harpalani, 2024; Kumagai & Ly, 2021).

Acknowledging the impact of exclusion, racism, and xenophobia as critical formative factors of the Asian American experience is significant to acquiring a holistic understanding of the Asian American cultural identity, collective consciousness, and contemporary challenges (Lu, 2024). While this article speaks specifically to the Asian American experience, it is important to acknowledge the additional nuance in the experiences of Asian international individuals. The terminology *Asian* and *Asian American* is used with the intention to recognize that the broader Asian experience significantly informs and shapes the cultural identity, values, and challenges faced by Asian American communities. However, this distinction also recognizes that the impact of the topics discussed here may differ between Asian and Asian American populations, even when there are similarities in their experiences. This article

contends that the persistence of racialized narratives has profoundly impacted the psychological well-being of Americans of Asian origin and poses that the counseling profession must advance by adopting culturally responsive, historically informed, individualized approaches to effectively support Asian American mental health needs.

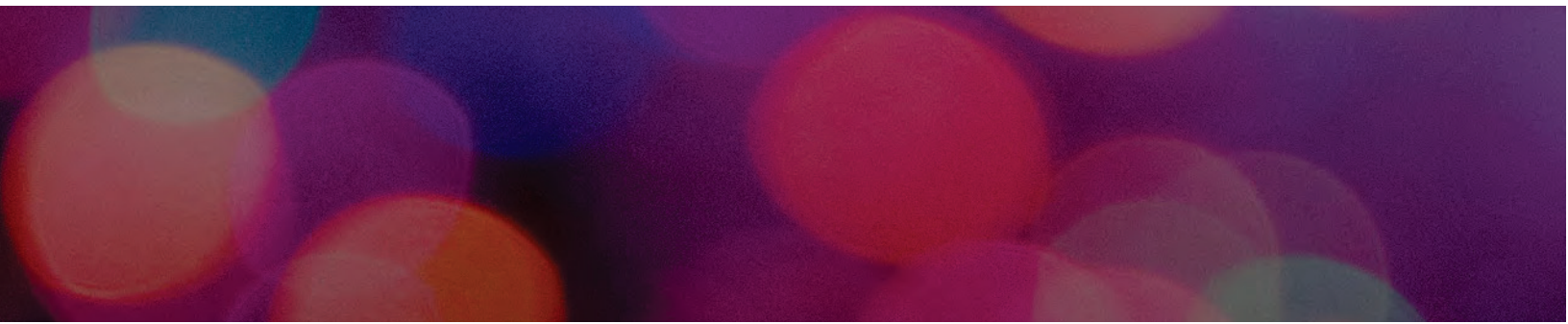
The terminology *Asian* itself has become problematic in that Asian and Asian American people have been generalized to a monolithic group (Lu, 2024), failing to capture the unique histories, cultures, traditions, languages, and other significant characteristics of all the subgroups. More than 48 countries, 6 regional groups, and numerous ethnicities are represented by the *Asian* racial grouping (Niles et. al., 2022). While the usage of the term is normalized, it is important to remember the significance and the initial role of racialization in the social creation of this term to refer to individuals who have origins in the continent of Asia as a means to separate and discriminate against Asian people from the dominant majority (Au, 2022). The eventual acceptance of the usage of *Asian* as a racial identifier and category was due to the conceptualization of a conscious political strategy during the civil rights movement to reclaim the term to unify individuals of Asian descent into a larger collective to gain visibility and power to fight for equity and justice (Mora & Okamoto, 2020). However, the term has been co-opted in ways that obscure the vast diversity among various Asian origins, furthering the perception of Asian people

as a monolith group, and ignoring critical differences in various Asian ethnic groups lived experiences (Lu, 2024).

Reclamation of the Asian identity in the context of the United States and collective unity has been complicated by the persistence of stereotypes, not only perpetuated by the dominant majority but also upheld by other racially minoritized groups and internalized within the Asian community. The model minority myth associated with Asian identities in America positively stereotypes Asian Americans as universally successful with limitless upward mobility, fostering the misconception that they do not face racial barriers or discrimination and have equal access to opportunities (Rajagopal & Durkee, 2024). This narrative is harmful to Asian Americans, as internalizing such messages can negatively affect their self-perception and mental health status due to the pressure to uphold unrealistic and unsustainable standards (Kim et. al., 2021). This internalization may contribute to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations, especially when experiencing intense academic and familial expectations (Kim et. al., 2021; Nguyen & Tran, 2023). These pressures can manifest as self-deprecating self-concepts, diminished self-confidence, and a pervasive fear of failure exacerbated by discouragement of help-seeking behaviors and reinforcement of psychological distress (Nguyen et. al., 2024; Nguyen & Tran, 2023). The myth, furthermore, suggests that mental health issues within the Asian American community are an exception, deviant from the

norm, hence fostering the belief that, even if they are struggling, they do not need resources or support (Kim et. al., 2021; Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Rajagopal & Durkee, 2024).

The term *model minority* was coined to offer a counter-narrative to support racist perceptions of other racial minorities (Niles et. al., 2022). The model minority myth is an example of the middleman minority notion, a tool that exploits Asian Americans as a buffer group in a power struggle defined by the Black-White paradigm, placing Asian Americans in a racial bind between White people and other racially minoritized populations to uphold the values of racial hierarchy and White supremacy (Harpalani, 2024; Kumagai & Ly, 2021). Triangulating Asian Americans as *superior foreigners* in contrast to Black and African Americans as *inferior insiders* fueled hostility between Asian Americans and other racially minoritized communities on the superior/inferior racial dimension (Harpalani, 2024). Asian Americans were villainized as the *yellow peril*, portrayed as a threat to American society, as Asian Americans are not considered as a part of *their group* (Dhingra, 2021; Poon et al., 2016). Their success was often attributed to their hard work, insinuating that other groups were not as diligent, and painting the picture that Asian Americans were unaffected by adversity due to their superior work ethic. This dynamic reinforced the model minority myth among racially marginalized communities, and Asian Americans as the subjugators, labeling other racially minoritized populations as inferior (Harpalani, 2024). In educational and employment



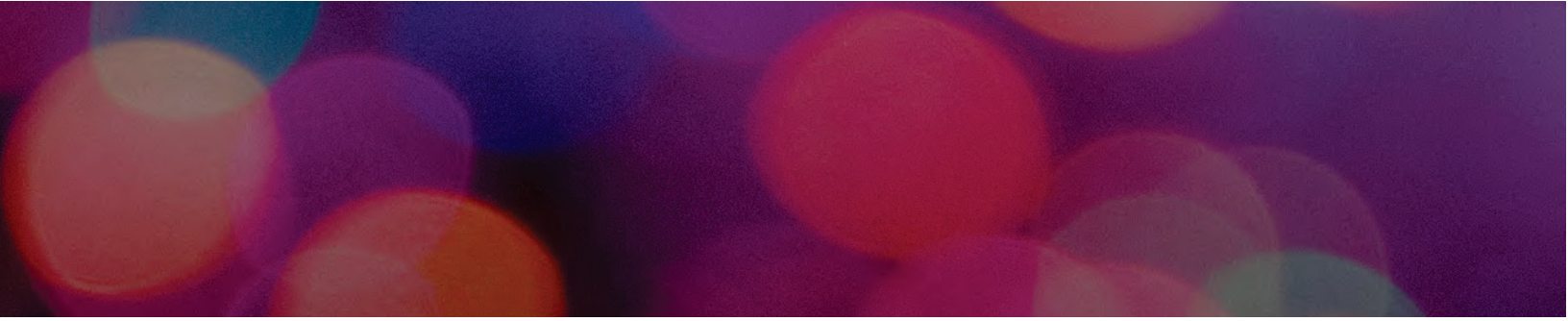
settings, Asian Americans were used as the model to reinforce deficit thinking to explain performance of all other racially minoritized communities (Dhingra, 2021; Harpalani, 2024; Kumagai & Ly, 2021). Simultaneously, Asian Americans were cast as “perpetual foreigners” or “outsiders” in the insider/outsider racial dimension, as a means of civil ostracization, proposing the perpetuation of Asian American’s foreignness regardless of their citizenship status or level of integration to exclude Asian Americans for full participation in the American political and social life (Mora & Okamoto, 2020).

The myths of *yellow peril* and the *perpetual foreigner* have long fueled anti-Asian rhetoric and contributed to the experience of Asian hate (Reny & Barreto, 2022). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a surge in anti-Asian hate crimes, reflecting a larger, ongoing pattern of violence against Asian Americans (Reny & Barreto, 2020), with numerous racialized attacks occurring over the years and a persistent lack of accountability. This pattern of discrimination is further amplified through social media, where various platforms have mobilized humor to dehumanize, silence, and discriminate against Asian people with the creation of *yellow peril* memes and harmful audio-visual parodies typecasting Asian people (Matamoros-Fernández et. al., 2022). As a result, this widespread racialization is a significant predictor of identity conflict, diminished sense of belonging, and strong associations with lower levels of hope and life satisfaction among Asian Americans (Huynh et.

al., 2011).

As culturally responsive counselors, it becomes increasingly important to recognize the historically rooted trauma perpetuated by the normalized stereotyping of Asian and Asian American individuals (Kim et. al., 2021; Lu, 2024; Reny & Barreto, 2022). Without an understanding of these nuanced experiences, practitioners risk perpetuating harmful assumptions in their clinical work. These assumptions may lead counselors to minimize or overlook symptoms of anxiety, depression, intergenerational trauma, and other critical factors, resulting in misdiagnosis or inadequate support (Rajagopal & Durkee, 2024; Huynh et. al., 2011; Kim et al., 2021). These harmful assumptions often manifest in counseling in the belief that an Asian American client is inherently high-achieving, emotionally reserved, or free of significant psychological distress (Rajagopal & Durkee, 2024). Such assumptions, even if unintentional, can silence clients' real experiences and discourage open dialogue in therapeutic settings.

To continue to advance the field of counseling, professionals must actively work to dismantle monolithic racial frameworks and embrace a more inclusive, empathetic approach that acknowledges the cultural specificity and diverse lived experiences of Asian American clients (Kim et. al., 2021; Nguyen et. al, 2024; Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Rajagopal & Durkee, 2024). This involves engaging with current research on Asian American mental health but recognizing the need for more



research and disaggregated data, seeking supervision or consultation when working with culturally unfamiliar populations, and critically reflecting on their own biases (Kim et. al., 2021). By doing so, counselors can deliver tailored, culturally responsive therapy for Asian American clients to help ensure more equitable and effective mental health support in an increasingly diverse society.

*References available upon request.*

# Reflections from the CSI PA Statewide Conference Planning Committee

COURTNEY DIXON

The 13th Annual Chi Sigma Iota Pennsylvania Statewide Conference came back to Penn State, its original host, this year. The theme was “The Future of Counseling: Innovative Approaches for a Changing World,” highlighting the importance of addressing the ever-changing needs of clients and communities. Hosted at the Penn Stater Hotel, a crew of faculty, master’s students, and doctoral students collaborated to make the event a roaring success, with over 120 attendees and more than 40 sessions offered. Dr. Jennifer Hanna, one of the CSI faculty advisors, noted, “Credit for the conference’s success goes to the Ph.D. and M.Ed. students on the Conference Planning Committee who developed a vision, put this into action, and were on the ground to make the day run smoothly. Their work exemplified the importance of action in shaping the future we hope for and positioning counseling professionals as leaders.”

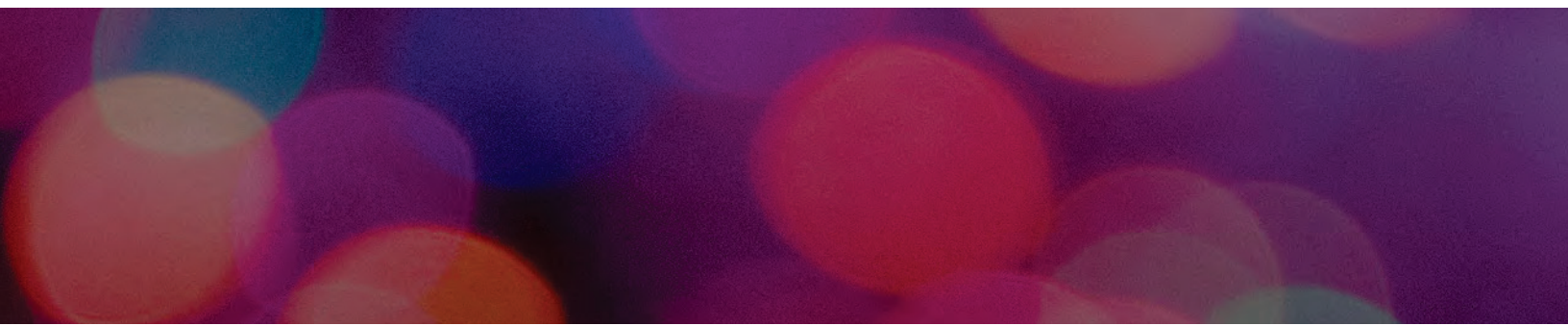
Penn State’s very own Dr. Byrd-Badjie was the keynote speaker; she provided a moving keynote speech about how inclusion is innovative, encouraging counselors and counselor educators to seek out ways of healing and teaching from marginalized communities that might not be part of the traditional “old guard” of psychological theories but are just as meaningful and healing.

Among those leaders was Shyrun Karandikar, a master’s student who served as co-chair of scheduling and the program. Regarding her experience, she shared, “My role was all about bringing structure and clarity to a complex, moving puzzle.” From coordinating speaker schedules to balancing aesthetics and budget, Shy gained a

deeper appreciation for the small details that create meaningful experiences. The planning process may not always have gone as planned, but Shy emphasized that teamwork and collaboration propelled the team forward to an excellent event. She shared that she was “grateful to work with a flexible, communicative team that truly embodied the collaborative spirit, especially [her] co-chair counterpart, Kaylee! Managing last-minute changes was undoubtedly stressful, but what could have been a major disruption turned into a defining team moment. Everyone stepped up to fill in the gaps, contributed creative solutions, and collaborated seamlessly ensuring the experience remained high-quality despite the behind-the-scenes challenges.”

As CSI treasurer, master’s student Debbie Chen managed and organized funds for the conference. However, as she noted, “the process wasn’t just about finances. It was about creating access and building trust.” Debbie shared how impactful her participation in the conference planning committee was for not only her, but also conference attendees who reported feeling grateful to engage with other mental health professionals and counseling students about centering inclusion during a tumultuous time. Debbie shared, “One impactful

moment was receiving feedback from attendees who felt empowered and seen in a space centering identity, inclusion, and mental health. That reminded me that our meticulous behind-the-scenes efforts, emails, paperwork, and quote comparison, translate into meaningful, healing community engagement.” In addition to the



meaningful contribution she made to the community, Debbie shared how her experience provided some practical experience with leadership in community engagement events. When asked about advice she might provide to students interested in such a leadership role, she underscored the importance of communication with teammates. She stated, “Lean into collaboration, stay flexible, and give yourself grace during stressful moments. You’ll gain more than just event planning skills, you’ll build community, confidence, and a deeper understanding of how advocacy happens through logistics and shared commitment.”

Doctoral student Andrew Nadermann served as the co-chair of the proposal review committee. In this role, he supported the development of the heart of the conference: the presentations. He was careful to collaborate with his team to ensure that the presentations reflected both rigor and relevance. About his role, he noted, “It was a lot of up-front work, which once done, meant that we could focus efforts on supporting other aspects of the conference planning.” Like his peers, Shy and Debbie, Andrew also connected this experience to valuable experiences he might have in his future career, particularly related to collaborating with a team. He stated, “I found this experience to be valuable as it mirrors what future planning/coordination/collaboration efforts might look like throughout my career. As a group, we valued diligence, thoroughness, and representing CSI RAM as well as PSU well. I’m proud of what we pulled off, and anticipate relying on this experience in future endeavors.”

The CSI Conference offered opportunities for faculty and students alike to present and share their diverse wealth of knowledge to encourage innovations in the counseling field. The conference also served as a professional development opportunity for those who were involved in its meticulous planning, highlighting not just the conference but also the rich experience of the journey to get there. Each committee member emphasized the personal and professional growth that emerged from their involvement, and they encouraged others to jump in, even without prior experience. “Don’t be afraid to take on a leadership role,” advised Debbie, “even if it feels intimidating at first—you’ll grow into it.” Andrew echoed that spirit: “Just roll your sleeves up and be willing to get dirty, and you’re likely to find strong meaning in the work you do.” For Shy, the rewards were clear: “The work is challenging, yes, but the rewards—in growth, connection, and pride—are more than worth it.”

# RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT

DR. BRANDY HENRY

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Brandy Henry is an Assistant Professor of Education (RHS) for the College of Education at Penn State. Dr. Henry is a clinician scientist who uses years of practice experience to inform her research that aims to improve behavioral health, particularly for criminalized populations. Her work primarily focuses on substance use/mental health disorders and associated infectious diseases.

In her research, Dr. Henry documents incarceration's social determinants and health disparities among criminalized populations, focusing on trauma, mental health, and substance use disorders. She uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, including in-depth interviews, latent class analysis and structural equation modeling. She also has expertise in substance use disorder services quality measurement and implementation science including related to organizational supports for screening, assessment, and referral to substance use, mental health & HIV treatment in juvenile justice systems and costing of behavioral health interventions.

Dr. Henry is affiliated with the Consortium on Substance Use and Addiction and the Restorative Justice Initiative. She is interested in serving on dissertation committees. You can reach her at [BrandyHenry@psu.edu](mailto:BrandyHenry@psu.edu)

## COURTNEY DIXON | 1ST-YEAR DOCTORAL STUDENT

Over the last several months, I've been visiting a space in the Hub known as "Flourish Penn State," a relatively new initiative launched by Health Promotion and Wellness (HPW). During the winter months, the space located in Hub 102 provided me with a private space and a light box to get extra light when the sunshine was scarce. Moreover, it is always quiet in Hub 102, with comfortable seating,



dim lighting, and countless tools for self-care. I have spent countless hours basking in pseudo-sunlight and doing homework in peace and quiet (despite the Hub being a loud, boisterous location on campus!). The space offers Buddha boards, sand trays, and meditation cushions, among other tools, to support student wellness. The space also has a table of useful resources offered by HPW, such as dietary services or substance use supports, and more.

It is one of the most well-kept secrets on campus, in my opinion, and I couldn't help but share it with you all! Their hours are 8 - 5 p.m. Monday - Friday. I strongly encourage you to check it out (especially in the winter time!). If you're interested in learning more about this resource, please see this article in [Onward State!](#)

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**SPANDAN GHEVRIYA | 1ST-YEAR MASTER STUDENT**

## ***“Knot today, stress!”***

I first learned how to knit to participate in my high school’s inter-house knitting competition. Little did I know it would become a calming practice that helps me slow down and fully immerse myself in the present moment. I’m far from a pro at knitting or crocheting, but there’s something incredibly soothing about working through repeated patterns – a quiet rhythm that brings me peace. Aside from the occasional finger cramp, it’s an activity I genuinely look forward to. My favorite part? Being able to gift and share a piece of my love with friends and family through something handmade and heartfelt.



# RAM CSI UPDATES



## CSI RAM Incoming Executive Board (25-26)

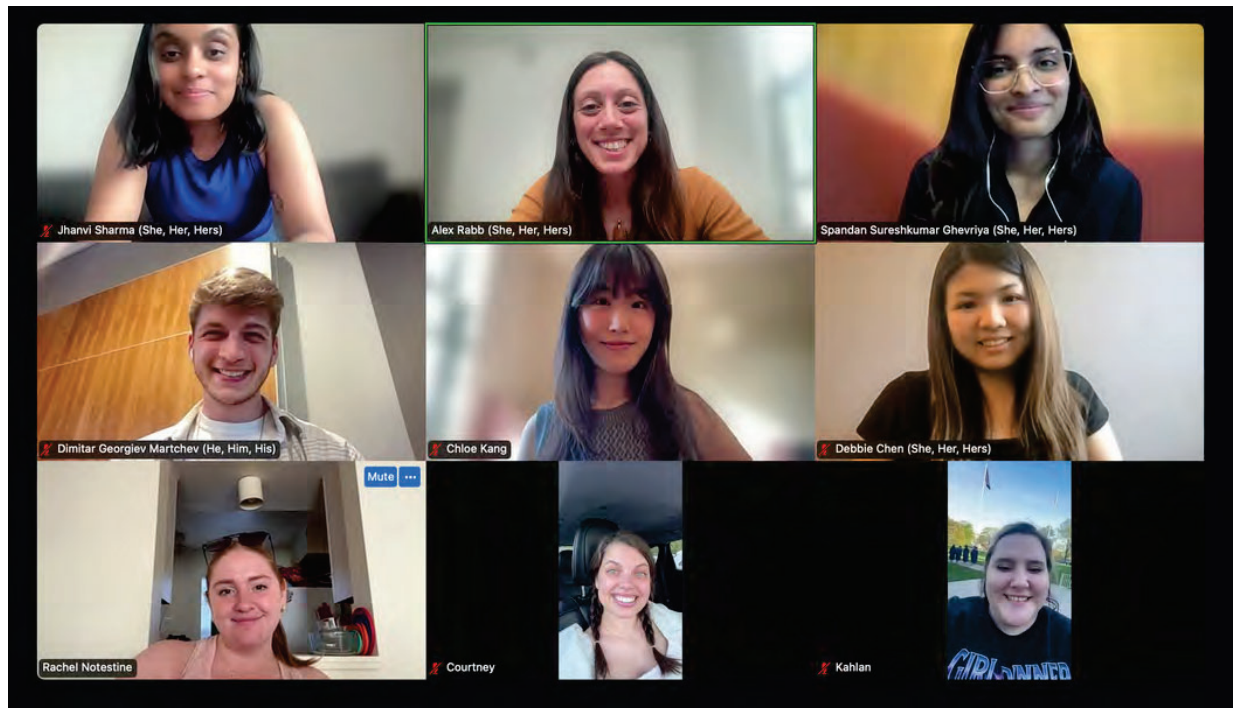
**President:** Spandan Ghevriya

**Vice President:** Gabby Reilly

**Secretary:** Mariam Dembele

**Treasurer:** Dimitar Martchev

Pictured L-R, Spandan, Mariam, Gabby, Dimitar.



## CSI General Body Meeting Spring 2025



**CNED Students at the Hooding Ceremony 2025**



**CNED Students at the Pinning Ceremony 2025**



# Departmental Highlights

## CONGRATULATIONS!!!

### Dissertation Defense

Dr. Mihee Woo  
Dr. Dominic Augustin  
Dr. Ashleigh Johnson  
Dr. Dasol Hwang

### Recognized by Professional Association

ACES Graduate Student Representative  
Saiber Shaikh

PacRim Scholarship Recipient  
Vanessa Englehart

PSU Student Ambassador  
Jaylin Frierson

2025 Ardeth and Norman Frisbey International Student Award  
Saiber Shaikh

### Publication

**Shaikh, S. (2025)** We are in this together: being imperfect in the counseling room. In C. Williams & T. Mikolon (Eds). The Making of a Mental Health Professional: Inspirational, Motivational, and Humorous Stories of Challenges, Victories, and Wisdom. Cognella.

# DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

*Congratulations to everyone who*

**Passed program milestones :**

## **Dissertation Proposal**

Saiber Shaikh

Fan Fan

Sungwon Yoon- Lee

Paris Pruitt

Ravza Nur Aksoy Eren

## **Qualifying Exams**

Cassandra Kam

Xin Zhou

Vanessa Englehart

Linh Le

Andrew Nadermann

# Departmental Highlights

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**CONGRATULATIONS TO EVERYONE WHO..**

**Presented at a conference:**

## CSI PA Conference

Courtney Dixon

Ana Ayala Cantu

Kaylee Van Gent

Shyrun Karandikar

Saiber Shaikh

Alex Rabb

Deshna Nagar

Kahlan Ciardullo

Hunter Anthony

Debbie Chan

Shirley Lin

Jhanvi Sharma

Andrew Nadermann

Dasol Hwang

Hyunjy Kim

Chloe Kang

Spandan Ghevriya

Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos

Brandon Crockford

Dimitar Martchev

Gabby Reilly

Adanech Strauss

Suzuka Yamane

## American College Counseling Association 2025

Courtney Dixon & Ana Ayala Cantu

Shyrun Karandikar & Saiber Shaikh

Jesse Onyango-Opiyo &

Mariam Dembele

## PRA 2025

Shyrun Karandikar & Kahlan Ciardullo

Jinwon Suh

## PA Training and Technical Assistance Network Conference

Vanessa Englehart

## PA School Counselors Association

Hunter Anthony, Jaylin Frierson

Jesse Onyango-Opiyo

## AERA 2025

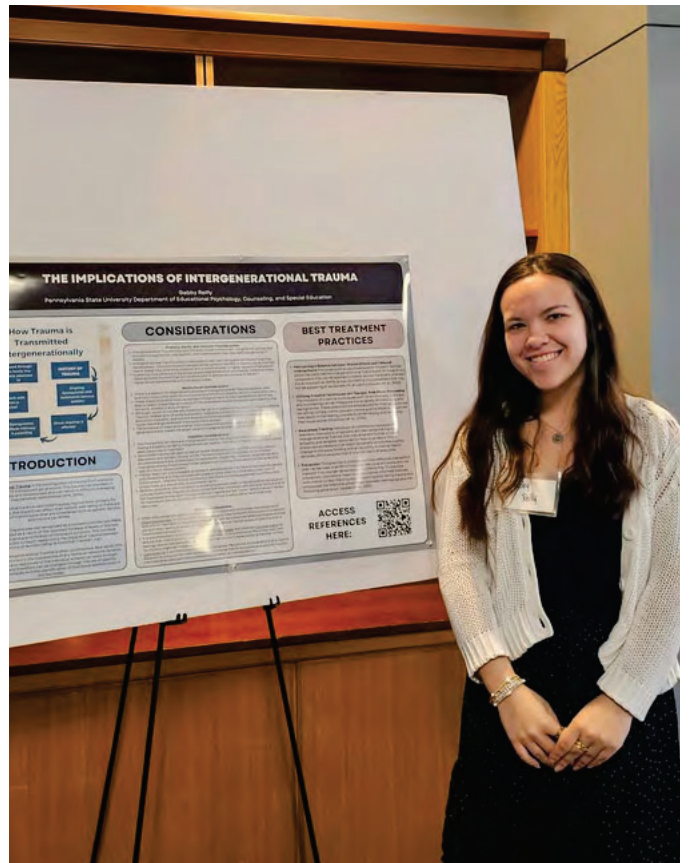
Cassandra Kam

## 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Pacific Rim International Conference

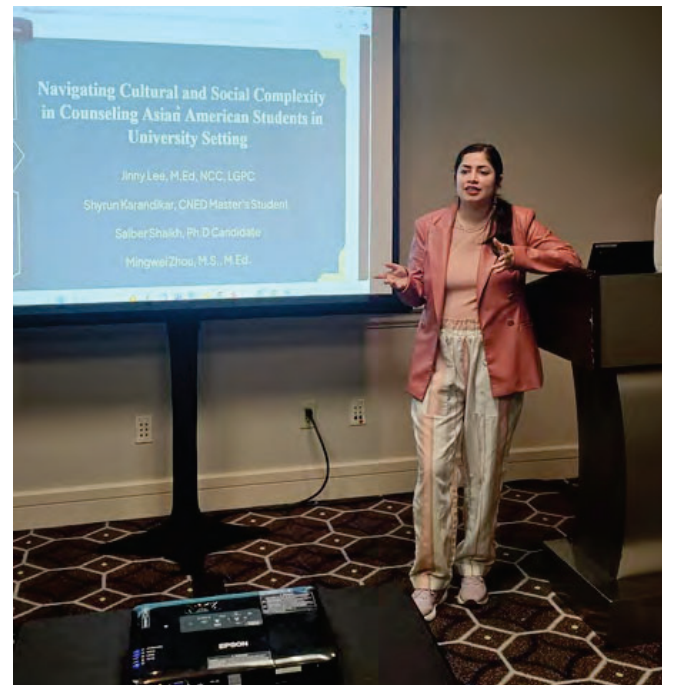
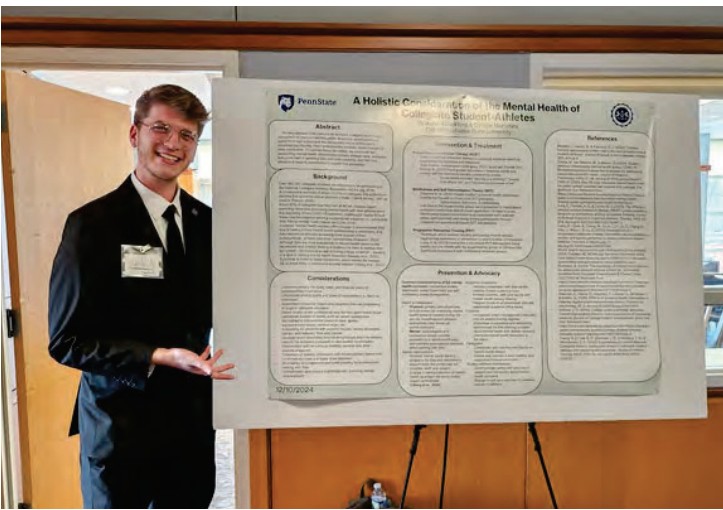
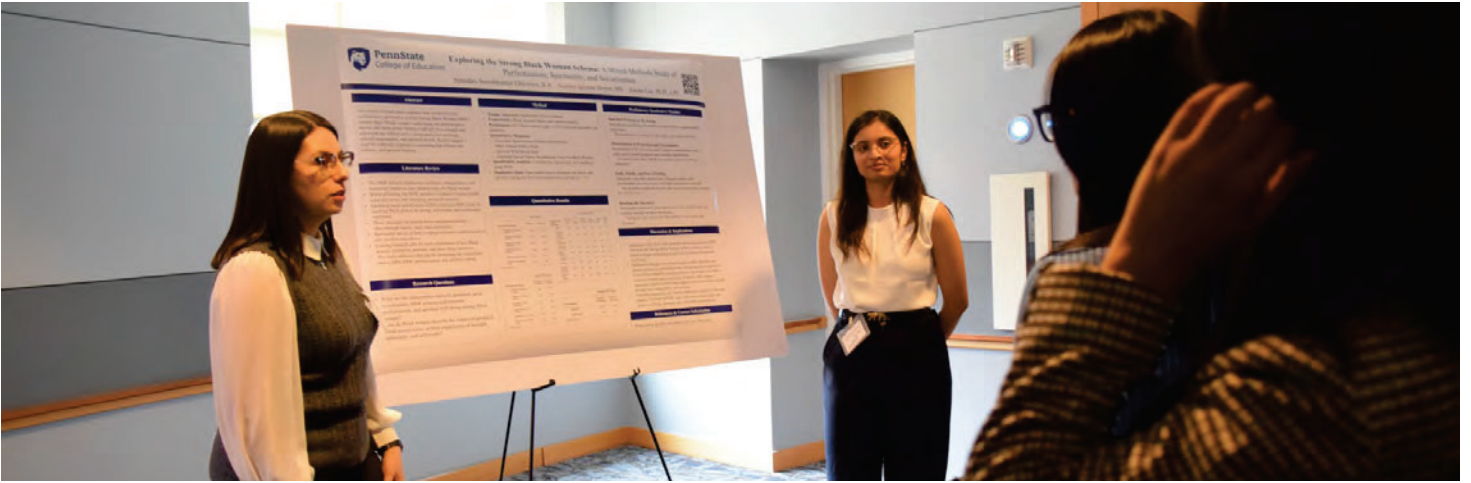
Vanessa Englehart

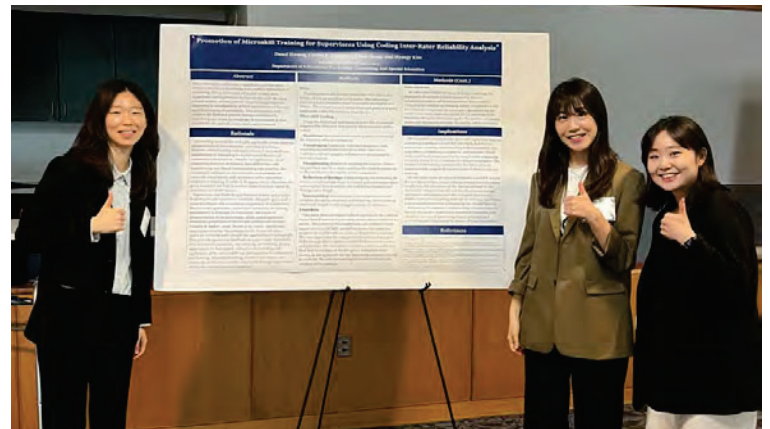
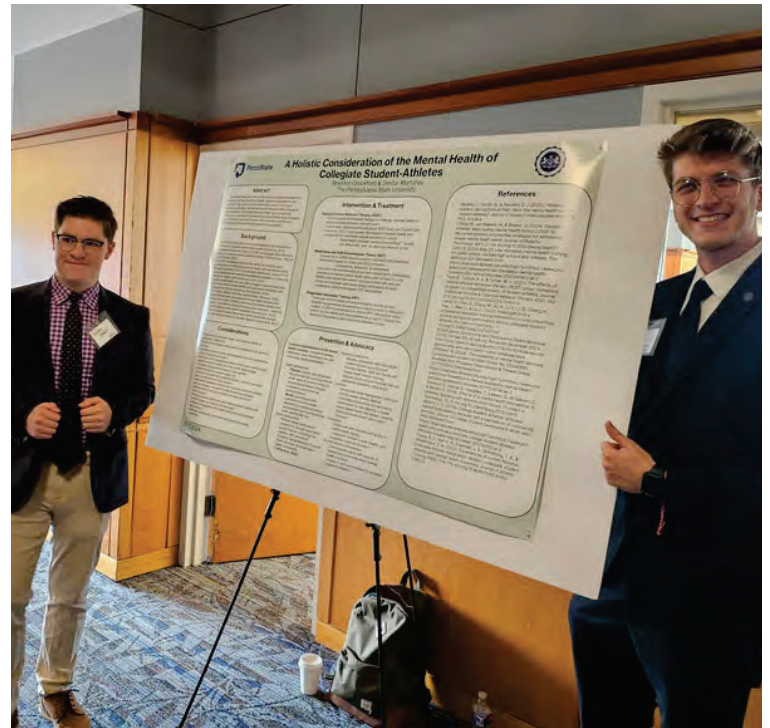
# Please see below for the pictures from these events



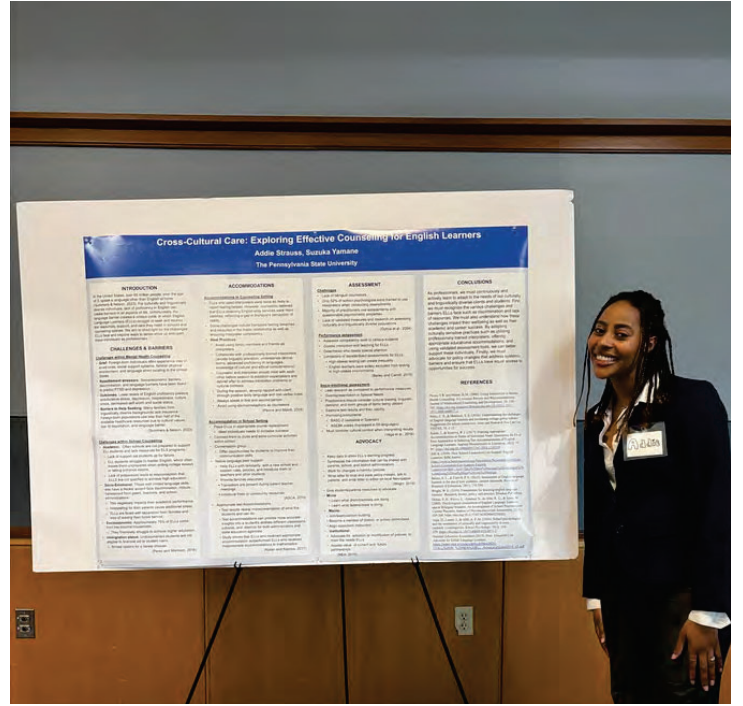
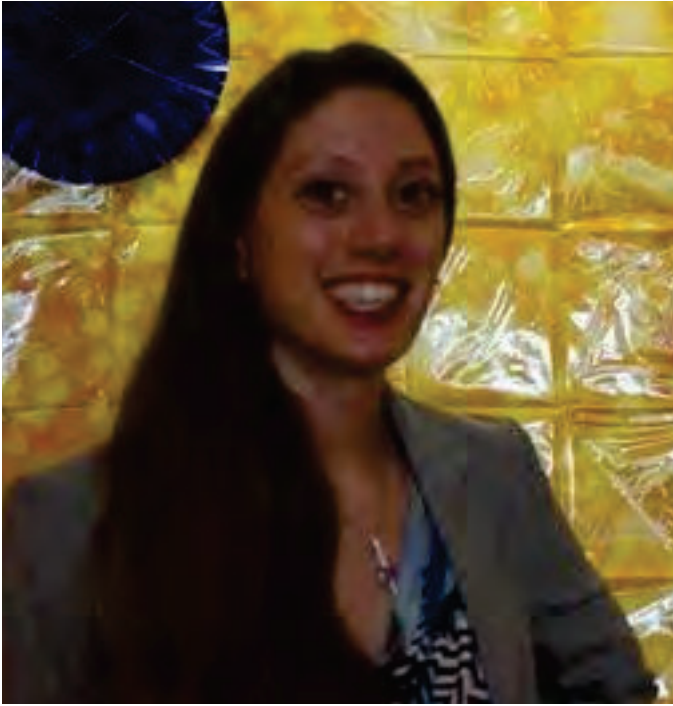














## **Penn State represented at American College Counseling Association (Jan 30 -Feb 2, 2025) at New Orleans**





**Penn State represented at CSI PA Statewide Conference  
in State College (April 13th, 2025)**



Penn State  
Conference  
Planning  
Committee

# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

*Congratulations to our awesome faculty*

**Dr. Janice Byrd-Badjie**  
received the Social Justice  
Award by the NARACES



**Dr. Elizabeth Prosek**  
received the Extended  
Research Award by ACA

# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

*Congratulations to our awesome faculty*



The National Association for Rehabilitation, Research, Policy,  
and Education Rehabilitation presented

**Dr. Pia Smal** with the Rehabilitation Educator Award  
and

**Dr. Liza Conyers** with the Researcher Award

# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

*Congratulations to our awesome faculty*

**Dr. Carlos Zalaquett** presented at an event for the Upsilon Beta CSI chapter, entirely in Spanish, about how to support Spanish-speaking counselors!

Dr. Zalaquett believed this event to be a “historical landmark presentation,” and participants reported having full hearts and deep gratitude to Dr Zalaquett for his time and the wisdom he shared.

**HABLAS ESPAÑOL?**  
 Te invitamos a una charla con el Dr. Zalaquett con el tema:  
**Cómo Apoyar a los Consejeros Clínicos de la Salud Mental - Recursos y Supervisión**  
 You are invited to a conversation with Dr. Zalaquett on the topic:  
**How to support Spanish Speaking Clinical Mental Health Counselors - Resources and Supervision**

**Dr. Carlos Zalaquett**  
 “You must lift as you climb”

Carlos P. Zalaquett is a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education at The Pennsylvania State University.

Dr. Zalaquett is an internationally recognized expert on therapeutic outcomes assessment, mental health, counseling, psychotherapy, diversity, social justice, education, biofeedback and neurofeedback; and has conducted workshops and lectures in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Japan, México, Perú and Singapore.

**FREE VIRTUAL EVENT**

Friday, March 21st  
 At 6 PM - 8 PM

# Alumni Spotlight :

## Shannon Shoemaker, Ph.D., LMHC, LCPC, NCC.

**Q. If you could summarize your experience at the counselor educator program at Penn State in one word, which would you choose and why?**

*Enlightening* is one word, but paradigm-shifting would be a phrase that would better describe my experience in the program. I understood the framework and models for counseling generally on one level, but entering a doctoral program deepened that understanding. It taught me to think differently, zooming out to incorporate a wider-lens in conceptualizations all around. This has helped me not only in counselor education and supervision, but in all areas of my life. The ability to think more broadly has helped me be more critical and problem-solve better. The research emphasis also was purposefully selected, and the ability to build my dissertation writing into each class along the way helped me to finish the program strong. I am so grateful I went to Penn State!



**Q. Tell us about your emphasis area. In what ways did your experience at Penn State prepare you for your professional life?**

My emphasis area was the incorporation of counseling around the globe. Understanding how mental health is perceived in different cultural contexts was vital for me to develop a truly cross-cultural counseling approach. I wanted to ensure that I could work effectively with clients from diverse backgrounds and equip future counselors with the tools to do the same. Since graduation, I've continued to prioritize this global perspective in my practice and teaching, focusing on how cultural values and norms influence mental health perceptions and treatment across various regions. This emphasis has been central to my work as a counselor educator, helping me prepare students to address the needs of an increasingly diverse client base.

Additionally, I found a niche in sex and couple's counseling that was unforeseen, but has been so rewarding both personally and professionally! In my private practice, I specialize in sex and relationship therapy, helping couples and individuals navigate the complexities of intimacy, communication, and connection. My work focuses on fostering healthy relationships by addressing emotional and sexual challenges, empowering clients to build stronger, more fulfilling partnerships. I draw on evidence-based practices and an understanding of how cultural norms influence relational dynamics, ensuring that each client's unique background is considered in the therapeutic process. This work is deeply rewarding, as it allows me to support clients in one of the most vital aspects of their lives—intimate relationships.

# Alumni Spotlight :

## Shannon Shoemaker, Ph.D., LMHC, LCPC, NCC.

### Q. In what ways did your experience at Penn State prepare you for your professional life?

Penn State's program deeply prepared me to be a counselor educator by emphasizing critical thinking and a holistic approach to client conceptualization. This included looking at the whole client, understanding their systems, and how their environments and relationships impact their mental health. The program also encouraged significant self-reflection and personal growth, helping me work through my own personal issues so they wouldn't interfere with my counseling practice. This foundation has been essential in my ability to guide future counselors with a clear, unbiased, and comprehensive perspective.

### Q. What is your current position and your daily activities and responsibilities?

As an associate professor at Hood College, my days are wonderfully diverse and extremely busy. My responsibilities range from teaching and research, to program evaluation planning and curriculum development. I'm always moving from zooming out to the wider lens of understanding a program at the systemic level, to zooming in to understanding a specific student's personal development needs. My teaching responsibilities form a significant part of my work. With a teaching load of 21 credits a year, I'm often in the classroom, sharing knowledge and experiences with our graduate students. It's a part of my job that I find incredibly rewarding - watching students grow and develop into skilled counselors is truly gratifying and important for the profession and overall client care.

Outside the classroom, my role as doctoral program director involves a lot of behind-the-scenes work. I worked on developing our curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of students and standards of the profession. I also play a key role in student admissions, always on the lookout for promising candidates who will thrive in our program. One of my current projects is running a faculty search in our program. It's an exciting opportunity to bring fresh perspectives and expertise to our team. As the placement coordinator for our school counseling specialty, I also work closely with students to help them secure internships and jobs, leveraging my professional network to create opportunities for them.

My responsibilities extend beyond our college, too. I serve as a journal editor, which keeps me at the cutting edge of research in our field. I'm also the past-president of the Association of Counseling Sexology and Sexual Wellness, a role that allows me to contribute to the broader counseling community.

On campus, I'm involved in several committees, including one focused on restructuring our institution. It's challenging work, but it's exciting to have a hand in shaping the future of Hood College.

Balancing all these responsibilities can be demanding, but it's also incredibly fulfilling. Each day brings new challenges and opportunities, whether I'm mentoring a student, reviewing a groundbreaking article, or collaborating with colleagues on program improvements. It's a dynamic role that allows me to contribute to the field of counseling education in multiple ways, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our students and the clients they'll serve in the future.

# Alumni Spotlight :

## Shannon Shoemaker, Ph.D., LMHC, LCPC, NCC.

### Q. What is one piece of advice you wish you could have received as a student that you would like to pass on to current students?

One piece of advice I wish I had received as a student, and which I now consistently pass on to my current students, is this: Work on yourself and understand that your personality is a powerful tool in the counseling session.

Your personality isn't something to suppress or hide in a counseling session. Instead, it's an instrument you can learn to play skillfully. Just like a musician adjusts the volume and tone of their instrument, you can learn to modulate your personality traits to best serve your clients.

There will be times when you need to amplify certain aspects of your personality - perhaps your warmth, your assertiveness, or your sense of humor. Other times, you'll need to tone down certain traits to create space for your client. The key is developing the self-awareness to know when to do what.

This doesn't mean being inauthentic. Rather, it's about being flexible and intentional with how you present yourself. It's about understanding your strengths and potential blind spots, and continuously working on personal growth.

So, my advice to current students is this: Invest time in self-reflection and personal development. Understand your personality traits, your values, your biases. Learn how these aspects of yourself can be assets in therapy, and also recognize when they might get in the way. Develop the ability to consciously choose how to use your personality in each unique therapeutic relationship.

Remember, in counseling, you are the instrument of change. The more finely tuned that instrument is, the more effective you'll be in helping your clients. This journey of self-discovery and growth is challenging, but it's also incredibly rewarding - both personally and professionally.

### Q. If you could give your younger counselor self one piece of advice in the form of a fortune cookie, what would it say, and why?

*"Your personality is your superpower - learn to wield it wisely."*

I would say this for all of the above reasons- learning how to wield it and the consequences of understanding moving in either directions.

# Alumni Spotlight :

## Shannon Shoemaker, Ph.D., LMHC, LCPC, NCC.

### **Q. What practices do you employ in your professional life that make you a global counselor?**

In my own journey as a counselor educator, my doctoral program's focus on the internationalization of counseling has deeply shaped my approach to being a global counselor. This foundation continues to influence how I teach, research, and practice today. I consistently work to help students understand that counseling isn't just about applying Western approaches universally, but rather about recognizing and integrating diverse cultural perspectives and healing traditions. Through my research and teaching, I emphasize how counseling practices vary across different cultural contexts and the importance of adapting our approaches accordingly. This commitment to global counseling manifests in how I structure my courses, incorporating international perspectives and encouraging students to think beyond their cultural assumptions. As someone who studied the internationalization of counseling, I've learned that being a global counselor means remaining humble about our own cultural limitations while staying curious about different worldviews and approaches to mental health and wellness. This perspective enriches both our professional practice and our ability to serve an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

### **Q. If you could have one superpower to use in counselor education, what would it be, and how do you think it would help your students? OR If you could have one superpower to use in your counseling sessions, what would it be, and how do you think it would help your clients?**

If I could have one superpower in counselor education, it would be the ability to give students direct insight into their own "counselor self" - like a magical mirror that would let them see themselves in action from multiple perspectives. This power would show them not just how they appear to clients, but also reveal their unique strengths, blind spots, and the authentic personality traits they bring to the therapeutic relationship. Imagine being able to help students instantly understand how their natural warmth creates safety for clients, or how their quick wit can be both an asset and a potential distraction. This superpower would accelerate that crucial journey of self-awareness that typically takes years to develop. It would help students recognize sooner rather than later that their personality isn't something to suppress in pursuit of some idealized "professional counselor" image, but rather a powerful tool they can learn to modulate and use intentionally. Most importantly, this superpower would give students the confidence to trust themselves earlier in their development, while still maintaining the humility to keep growing and learning. It would be like fast-forwarding through years of supervision and self-reflection, giving them a head start on becoming their most effective therapeutic selves.

# Alumni Spotlight :

## Shannon Shoemaker, Ph.D., LMHC, LCPC, NCC.

### **Q. Self-care is a relevant concept that, as counselors, we frequently strive for. How do you balance work, self-care, and your personal life? Any helpful tips for students?**

Balancing work, self-care, and personal life as a faculty member and a private-practice owner can be quite challenging. I often find that prioritization is key. It's essential to carve out time for self-care, even amidst a busy schedule. For me, this includes engaging in activities like quilting, reading, and hiking. Spending time in nature helps me recharge, and being a mom allows me to find joy in everyday moments.

For students, I recommend setting boundaries and making self-care a non-negotiable part of your routine. Schedule time for activities you enjoy, and don't hesitate to unplug from work when needed. It's also important to learn to be okay with unfinished tasks; perfectionism can be a significant barrier to your well-being. Remember, self-care isn't selfish; it's a crucial component of maintaining your effectiveness as a counselor. Prioritizing these aspects can lead to a more balanced and fulfilling life.

### **Q. What is your proudest achievement outside of your career?**

When asked about my proudest achievement outside of my career, my answer is simple: my daughter. While I've earned degrees, publications, and leadership roles in counselor education, nothing compares to the joy and pride of being a parent. Watching her grow and develop brings a fulfillment that surpasses any professional accomplishment. It's also enriched my perspective as a counselor educator, though my proudest moments aren't found in any CV – they're in the daily privilege of being her parent.

### **Q. A resource (book, podcast, speech) that you think every counseling student should definitely engage with?**

When students ask me about essential resources, they're often expecting me to recommend a dense theoretical text or a scholarly journal. Instead, I always tell them to watch Bob Newhart's "Stop It" comedy sketch. This brief comedy skit, where Newhart plays a therapist whose only intervention is telling his client to "STOP IT!" might seem like an odd choice for professional development. But that's exactly why it's so valuable. It brilliantly satirizes our field while teaching an invaluable lesson about maintaining perspective and humor in our work.

I recommend this video because it reminds us of something crucial that often gets lost in the serious business of becoming a counselor: the importance of levity. We spend so much time learning theories, mastering techniques, and dealing with heavy emotional content that we can sometimes forget that humor and lightness have their place in therapy too.

Don't get me wrong – therapy is serious work. We're dealing with people's lives, traumas, and deepest struggles. But taking ourselves too seriously can actually hinder our effectiveness. When we become too rigid or solemn about our role, we risk losing the human connection that makes therapy work.

# Alumni Spotlight :

## Shannon Shoemaker, Ph.D., LMHC, LCPC, NCC.

The "Stop It" sketch serves as a humorous reminder that sometimes we overcomplicate things. While we certainly need more than just telling clients to "stop it," the video helps us remember to keep things in perspective. It's a wonderful tool for breaking tension in counseling classes and starting important discussions about therapeutic approaches and counselor identity.

Every time I watch it, it reminds me to loosen up a bit and bring my authentic self – including my sense of humor – into my work. It's become a touchstone for me in maintaining balance between professionalism and personality, between serious therapeutic work and the lighter moments that can make therapy more accessible and human.

So yes, read your textbooks and journal articles, but don't forget to watch Bob Newhart saying "STOP IT!" It might just teach you as much about being an effective counselor as some of your more traditional resources. The Bob Newhart "stop it" video clip found here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhQGzeiYS\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhQGzeiYS_Q)

### **Q. What else would you like to share with our current students about yourself, the program, or what the future holds for them?**

The future of counseling will require adaptability and continuous learning. You'll need to stay current with new research and approaches, but don't let that intimidate you. The foundation you're building in this program will serve you well. Remember, none of us – even those of us teaching you now – have all the answers. We're all growing and learning together in this field.

Most importantly, be patient with yourself. Development as a counselor is a journey, not a destination. Some days you'll feel incredibly competent, others you'll question everything you know – and that's perfectly normal. Trust the process, stay curious, and keep growing.

The future holds amazing opportunities for our profession. Mental health awareness is increasing, access to care is expanding, and the importance of our work is being recognized more than ever. You're entering the field at a pivotal time, and I'm excited to see how each of you will contribute to shaping its future.

# Alumni Spotlight : Elisabeth James, M.Ed., LPC

(Interview by Deshna Nagar)

**Q. If you could summarize your experience at the counselor educator program at Penn State in one word, which would you choose and why?**

E: When I think about it, what the program taught me, part of me wants to lean towards "prepared." The other part wants to say, "exhausting." It's a lot. It's a lot. But I was just talking to Dr. Nadermann's class yesterday, and it's a really extensive program, but it really made me feel prepared for the work I am doing. "Educated" is another one, learning about multicultural counseling and the important tools to use in sessions, session structures and the guidance. So, a lot of words come to mind, but I think if I had to choose just one, it might be "prepared." Yeah, and also, support. "Supported."



Ahh there's so many but I felt really supported by my supervisors and teachers and the program. Dr. Chatters was one that I had class with, and then I came to this job and worked with her, and also Dr. K, and Dr. Nadermann. There are people that care about you as a person in that program, right? Not every teacher can care about everyone and be their person. But if you're looking for someone who has your back, there are people and professors in the program that do that

D: Yeah, there's definitely professors who really care and you can feel it

E: Yeah, absolutely. And whenever they care, it matters so much; it means so much more. I did my program 2019 to 2021, so we had my first semester and then went into COVID. So, 2020 and then internship was online. All this stuff was online. So I met Dr. Chatters and Dr. K for Internship class. It was the first time I met them, and also said goodbye to them online.

D: Yeah, the COVID batch really got hit hard.

E: Yeah. And I feel more comfortable with telehealth. I feel that with COVID, we made it work. It was on Zoom, and I had a GA at the time, so I was doing that and teaching for my GA for Human Development and Family Studies. And I was just constantly on the computer, counseling kids for the schools, in the partnership learning, taking classes and for my GA. So while it was more manageable---I didn't have to drive anywhere---I was still chained to my desk from nine to nine.

# Alumni Spotlight :

## Elisabeth James, M.Ed., LPC

**Q. So tell us about your emphasis area, and in what ways did your experience at Penn State prepare you for your professional life? I think you answered this a little bit, but maybe you want to highlight something.**

E: Yeah. 2019-2021, I chose the emphasis of Clinical Mental Health in Schools and Communities. At the time, it was separate from Rehab. But originally, going into the program, I didn't know if I wanted to do school counseling or private practice. And so I felt like it was more versatile, being able to do other things. And then as I started learning about helping clients and helping them think of themselves, and I thought, "I want to be in private practice." Therapists help clients to dig deeper and learn the root of their problems and

E: challenges. But I also really wished it was in a school setting, and so the whole time in the program I was like, "I want to be a therapist in the schools." And I was told "That's not a thing". So I thought, "But I think it should be, and I want to." With COVID, there was a crack in the system. "Let's put a therapist in schools." And then I got in as the first ever Mental Health Clinician for the district in 2021. I graduated in May of 2021 and started this job in August of 2021. I was working closely with Dr. Chatters and Dr. K, so I would say that the program really helped me know my ethical duties and guidelines at that time. Because there is not a Mental Health Clinician in every school district, it's a very foreign path. So they would try to say, "Oh, you're a school counselor, you don't need to take notes like that." Or "you're not an LSW, you can do this." But in reality, I thought "No---I know how I'm gonna take my notes. I know the importance of confidentiality. I know all of this stuff. And as an LPC, I can't tell you client information just because I'm in a school." So knowing the legality behind the profession, really helped me keep firm boundaries whenever it came to people trying to say, "You're just like the other people." Because, no, I'm not. Anyway, I kept on yapping and I forgot your question.

D: Oh, I think you answered it. It was how your degree prepared you for your professional life.

E: I would definitely say it helped with the legal, ethical side and also, self-reflection was huge for me in that program. The Group's class, and taking Group with classmates, learning about myself, I wish there was more. I wish that it was a program-long thing, because I learned things about myself that I would never have learned unless someone kind of said, "Hey, you are a rescuer, you know?" And I thought, "Oh, my God, what do you mean?" So it was really cool to know how I was perceived, and learn about that, and then be able to reflect on it and change it. And it was hard. And it's stuff that I needed to hear. So there was a lot of self-reflection and introspection that also came in the program.

D: Yeah, I think that can also make it more exhausting, because, while you're learning how to help clients, you're also discovering all these things about yourself, and it's eye-opening.

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## Elisabeth James, M.Ed., LPC

E: I'm the problem. Yeah, definitely I think that the program is hard, especially because it's those two years and that summer and plus reflecting on yourself plus a GA if you have one it is a lot, and I almost wish I spread it out into three years but I got it done

D: Yep, you did.

E: And I can't say I want to go back

### Q. Would you rather fight one horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses? Why?

E: Probably the big one. A big horse-sized duck.

Well, 100 is a lot. I feel like that's kind of the job I live every day. 100 duck-sized horses. "Hey, Miss James, Miss James, Miss James, come here". They never stop. So just give me one.

### Q. If you could make anything a sport in which you personally have a hidden talent, what would it be?

E: Oooh. I don't really have a lot of hidden talents. But if I could make a sport out of something that I just like to do, totally do like a one-minute binge watching TV could be a sport. I love a good TV show, and sitting on the couch and just episode, episode, episode, and just, it's my favorite thing to do on the weekends or after a long day at work.

D: Yeah, what's the most recent thing you've been watching?

E: I love *Love is Blind* on Netflix. It has been a good binge, depending on the time and what I need. Sometimes binge *Bluey*, the children's dog show. Yeah, it's just everything solved in an episode. If it's a rough day, it was that. But yeah, I would say probably *Love is Blind* was the most recent thing I binged.

D: Yeah, I need to watch it. A lot of my friends recommended it.

E: Oh yeah. It's so juicy. It's mindless, you know, you can just sit back and it's their life. Now's a good time to watch it, because you have all the episodes and the reunion. So before, it was like they set up for a week later, then for more than a week later, the reunion, so a month of waiting.

D: Yeah, it's also just good to be mindless after being so mindful all week.

### Q. What is your current position and your daily activities and responsibilities?

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## Elisabeth James, M.Ed., LPC

E: I'm a Mental Health Clinician at State College Area High School. I also have my LPC as of March 2024. So day-to-day, I am meeting with students for sessions and being a part of team meetings about mental health and student needs. I'm a co-advisor to the Mental Health Matters Club, which meets on Tuesdays after school, where we plan and execute school-wide initiatives. I would say I have a 40-hour work week. I probably interact with between 20-30 kids a week. You know, six of those are my client load right now, but other ones are walk-ins who just say, "Hey, Miss James, can I talk to you about this?" I just got an appointment request because of the election outcome. "I don't know how to talk about this---my family." I've never met this kid before, but they found me, and asked, "Can I talk to you?" And I said, "Yes, absolutely." So there are different levels of support that I offer for kids, teachers and school and consultation. But I would also say that about 10 hours of my week that I'm in meetings, making changes with policy procedures, and getting kids access to services.

D: So a lot of walk-ins, but also advocacy and providing resources.

E: Yeah, and I love the versatility of my job. Just yesterday, I was back-to-back with kids all day long. And two of them were clients, but two of them were ones that were not clients but needed support. Then four of them were ones I do check-ins with and then a couple other ones were just quick stop-ins, so I like being able to have variety, and also, I get paid regardless. That's something in private practice that I was always worried about---if I don't have a client in front of me, I'm not getting paid. And here I can sit with clients or do documentation, and I'm still getting paid the same amount.

### **Q. What is one piece of advice you wish you could have received as a student that you would like to pass on to current students?**

E: There's a lot. The program is hard, so the thing I want to say to them is, you do the best you can with the time, energy, space, and capacity, within your role for the moment. Really, it's the idea that we don't do everything we can all the time. What can you do with the client in that session? Period. What can you do as a student when you're in that class? Period. We can't give it our all, all the time. So how do you make the most of it and do what you have for your capacity in your role? That's something that I really had to learn. Because you care so much about clients, and you care so much about all the things. But I have a hat where I'm a Mental Health Clinician. I've got another hat when I'm LPC in session. I got a hat when I'm an advisor, and those hats can come off and stay at the office. And also, I can't do everything all the time, all at once, and I can't be on call for kids. I'm here. When I'm here, I'm here. I'm giving it my all, but I'm doing the most I can in my role, in the capacity I have, the time that I have, and the energy I have to give.

D: This reminds me of something my friend told me once. So he said, I always aim to give everything a solid 75% because you just can't give everything your full.

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## Elisabeth James, M.Ed., LPC

E: Yeah. And people always say, "Give it 110%." You don't have a 110%. Working with kids is very humbling and grounding. But their English teacher expects 100% of them, and their football coach expects 100% and their math teacher. And I'm like, "You can't give 100% to everybody. You'll have nothing left." So how do you give 10 here and 20 there, or 10 here and 5 there?

### **Q. Self-care is a relevant concept that, as counselors, we frequently strive for. How do you balance work, self-care, and your personal life?**

E: I treat myself. I love getting my nails done, so I'll go and I get them done. Sometimes it's a little extra coffee or an energy drink that, you know? "Oh, I'm so tired, and I'm just gonna treat myself with this." I even hate the word self-care. It's such a trigger word, too. It's like self-care, be self-care. How do you take care of yourself? And following what I said in the last question about how to give all that I can give in the moment, and then with the time and energy I have and the capacity I have to give it. So if I've got the client in front of me, they're getting 100% of me while I'm in that role, you know. But then I also have a designated workspace like this. The work I do here is the work I do here, and I don't take it home. So if I'm staying here until six to get notes done, I would rather stay here and get them done than have those vibes at my house. Some people are opposite. They're might say, "Oh my gosh, when I'm home doing work I'm way better." But with COVID, it scarred me. Home was work, and work was home, and it was dinner, and I really enjoy having an office and working at the office. I bring my computer home in case of emergencies, but I rarely open it, because that's my time. And again, if I stay here until six because I have stuff to do, then I stay here until six. But I don't do it at home unless I have to.

D: That makes sense, yeah.

E: So, there are space boundaries and also mental boundaries in my head, and reminding myself that people make choices. And no matter how much I want kids and people and things to happen, at the end of the day, people choose, and I can't change that.

D: So being flexible.

E: Yeah, being flexible, cautiously flexible. Oh, that's a good one. Being cautiously flexible.

Deshna: I like that.

E: Yeah, right, yeah, I would say that I used to be super like "You want me, you got me. What can I do?" Like, my door would be open. Kids would just come in, in and out, in and out, in and out. And I had to put boundaries there. And I'd be here until seven because I had to get all my stuff done, because I was just with kids, and they weren't on my caseload because I was just too flexible. Being too flexible can be a bad thing,

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## Elisabeth James, M.Ed., LPC

E: so learning when to say no, learning that it's okay to shut my door, learning that it's okay to go to the bathroom and eat lunch, which I'm not very good at, I'm not gonna lie, but finding ways to fill your cup that's not just something like, take a nap or have a bath. You need things that really work for you; that's self-care. For example, usually I match my cup that I have to my shirt, and today I didn't have a shirt to match my cup, but that coordination makes me happy. Generally, just being around kids makes me happy. So finding things to fill your cup is how I also to do self-care, and of course, being cautiously flexible.

D: That's really cute---the shirt and the bottle.

E: Yeah. Kids know, they're like, "Oh, I see what you did there." I can't go to Starbucks every day, so I gotta do something. It's an emotional support thing. I need it in my hand.

### **Q. A resource (book, podcast, speech) that you think every counseling student should definitely engage with?**

E: Oh my gosh, there are so many, so many things to even think about within the realm of self-care. Is it self-care tips? Or is it, you know, being-a-counselor kind of tips? Is it crisis-support tips? Is it dealing-with-teenagers types of tips? When I think about all the types of resources out there, and it might sound silly, but I truly believe that every counselor needs to watch *Inside Out*. We have a social worker here who has never watched it. Yet I had the thought that, "I incorporate that movie in almost every session I have." I think there are so many beautiful messages in there, like IFS, parts theory, etc. And then there's also DBT, showing how both can exist at the same time. Have you seen *Inside Out*?

D: Yeah

E: The core memories that are all multicolored, right? Both can exist, and it's okay. Also, talking to your anxious parts and how they come up. I think everybody should have to watch that movie. I think it should be a requirement of the program.

D: Maybe I should re-watch it, because I watched it, I think, four years ago. I didn't see it from a counselor lens.

E: Oh yeah, it's so good. And then *Inside Out* *Twos* out.

D: I know, I know. A lot of my friends thought they really butchered the second part. So I didn't watch it.

When I look at it as a student or a non-counselor, I really liked it. But whenever I look at it as a therapist-lens, they could've done so much more.

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## Elisabeth James, M.Ed., LPC

D: That's exactly what they said.

E: Yeah. So it is a good watch, because anxiety really shows. And I get that everyone's really mad at anxiety, which I also think is important, because most of us, when we have that anxiety, we get pissed at ourselves. We think, "Why am I like this?" But also, I wish they showed a little bit more coping skills. They mixed anxiety and panic disorder a little. Riley, the little girl, was having a panic attack, and I wish her parents had been come in and said, "All right, you know, let's take some deep breaths together." Modeling. How to help people calm down. So, I think they missed a little bit of opportunity. However, it is a children's movie, so they can't do too much.

### Q. What is your proudest achievement outside of your career?

E: Honestly, I am so proud to be the first hired Mental Health Clinician for the district. I'm really proud of that. I feel honored when I can say that. It's not boasting or bragging. There are so many things within my role that I'm proud of--- there are so many kids that say, "I wouldn't be alive if you didn't help me." And they're also a huge thing I'm very, very proud of, helping kids learn about themselves. I'm so proud of them for that too. And also for the district. I was one of the people that really pushed us to do the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale as part of our suicide protocol, which was implemented last year, finally. I'm proud of that. We need policy and procedure, so I'm getting to make systemic change, impact kids, save kids' lives, change the system, all through being able to hold this role. I'm proud of myself for that. I'm proud to be able to say that, and I feel honored to be able to be the first Mental Health Clinician of the district.

D: Yeah. Those do sound like really significant achievements. Also, being able to see the firsthand impact you have, like bigger changes in the system.

E: Yeah, yeah. When I was talking in Dr. Nadermann's class yesterday, I was just there talking about my role and one of the students said, "Thank you for being where you are, because I could have used someone like you." I thought, "Yeah, me too!" I got into this role because my mom worked at the high school, and whenever I was in school, sometimes I just had a rough day, and I needed a hug from my mom. And I knew I wanted to be that safe place for kids. So yesterday, my door was open when it could be and I just had kids pouring in crying, asking for hugs, and they said, "I feel so much better after just talking you for five minutes." That's the impact.

D: Yeah, that's all you need sometimes---five minutes with someone who understands.

Yep. And so my role originally, they wanted me to just be for therapy, and I was came back and said, "No, I need to be more than that. I need to be part of this community." So that's how I got involved with the walk-in

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E: kids and the scheduled appointment kids, and my clients, but sitting at all these different tables. Our school and our principal really support mental health initiatives, so we've created a mental health summit, which is my baby, that happens on the day before winter break and the day before spring break. And through that, we do a two-hour delayed schedule so all academics get cut short, and for two hours we spend the morning together, connecting, collaborating, watching movies like Inside Out, drinking hot cocoa, playing games, etc. It's just all about connection and supporting each other. 2,400 kids and 300 faculty members, all connecting.

**Q. Our theme last year was global counselor and it's still a relevant topic today. What makes you a counselor for the global world, or what practices do you employ in your professional life that make you a global counselor?**

E: Part of what makes me a global counselor would be the training. I work with a lot of kids from different ethnicities, SES levels, and experiences. I'm involved with mental health, but I am also a part of Literary Voice, which is a cultural celebration for students of color. That involves meeting people where they are, incorporating multicultural counseling skills, and trauma informed care. While they don't always go together, sometimes they go hand in hand. Equity is important. More so than equality. Everyone needs their bar at a certain place that's best for them. Any kid that comes into my room, I let them know, like they're the expert on them. I'm here to be a reflection, not to tell them who they are, what they should think or have opinions about, but instead to help them help themselves. The outreach and the connections that I have with kids across all levels and demographics, and being a safe place for all is what makes me a global counselor.

**Elisabeth's website is here: <https://sites.google.com/scasd.org/elisabethjames/about-me>**

# MEET THE AUTHORS



**Shyrun Karandikar, B.A** is a second year master's student in the Counselor Education master's program at Penn State University where she serves as a counselor-in-training at the Herr Clinic and in partnership with the Department of Educational Equity while concurrently serving as the graduate assistant for the R-VOICE center and a crisis interventional specialist at a local non-profit. She is focused on working with minority, disabled, and underserved populations to provide culturally competent and equitable mental health support, aiming to address disparities, promote wellness within these communities, and integrate counseling practices into healthcare settings to ensure comprehensive and accessible mental health services.



**Courtney Dixon** (she/her/hers) is a first-year doctoral student at Penn State's Counselor Education program. Courtney earned a master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Johns Hopkins University in 2021, and she is a licensed clinical professional counselor (LCPC) in the state of Maryland. Currently, she is the lead clinic supervisor at Penn State's master's and doctoral training clinic, the Dr. Edwin L. Herr Clinic, and her research interests include the development of counselors-in-training use of training clinics within counselor education, identity development in emerging adults, trauma, and trauma training for entry-level counselors. On the rare occasion that Courtney is not working on her doctoral studies, you will typically find her dancing working on a hobby art project, or playing a cozy video game.

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**Spandan Ghevriya** (she/her/hers) is a student in the M.Ed. Counselor Education program with an emphasis on Clinical Mental Health and Rehabilitation Counseling in Schools and Communities. As an international student, person of color, and growing up as an immigrant, she's seen how vital strong support systems can be. These experiences fuel her passion for working with children and families who are navigating trauma, transition, or systemic challenges.

**Deshna Nagar** is a second-year master's student in Penn State's Counselor Education program. She is also an intern at Centre Volunteers in Medicine and a Graduate Assistant at WPSU. Outside of her studies, you'll find her watching horror movies, soaking up nature, creating art, listening to music, and embracing her inner drama queen.

