

THE RAM REPORT



FALL 2025

BREAKING THE SILENCE: CRITICAL VOICES IN COUNSELING



RHO ALPHA MU



CHI SIGMA IOTA RAM REPORT FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

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MEET THE EDITORIAL STAFF

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Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos

Editor in Chief

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.



Courtney Dixon

Associate Editor

Courtney Dixon (she/her) is a second-year doctoral student at Penn State's counselor education program as well as the lead clinic 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

Associate Editor

Andrew Nadermann (he/him) is a second-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 and Calvin



Decolonizing Counselor Education: From Individualism to Reciprocity

KAYLEE VAN GENT

One of the most important parts of critical practice as a counselor education doctoral student has been recognizing the epistemological and axiological foundations of counseling. Counselor education is rooted in Western values of wellness and healing and is housed in educational systems embedded in White Western thought (Heinecke & Beach, 2020; Sue et al., 2024; Washington et al., 2025). Because of this foundation, counselor education tends to promote values of individualism while pathologizing collectivism (Sue et al., 2024), limit diverse thinking through narrow educational assessments (Green & Malcolm, 2023), and continues to define self-care and wellness as an individual responsibility rather than a community responsibility (DeVooght & Neuer Colburn, 2024). Through critical analysis and systemic changes, counselor education can move beyond White, colonized cultural norms to become a practice of healing and liberation (Gorritz, 2024; Washington et al., 2025). While we hope for liberation, the epistemological and axiological foundations in Whiteness shape our daily realities as students and educators.

My experience as a teaching intern has made these dynamics particularly visible. There is an inherent contradiction in teaching students to critically examine White Western counseling theories and models while simultaneously grading and evaluating students on how well they can reproduce them. Critical viewpoints help us to identify these contradictions and to identify the power imbalances that are embedded in our field, yet the academic structures we work in are not

equipped to support transformational or decolonizing practices. The tension that comes from systemic awareness with a limited space for action is where I see the impact of decolonizing methods within critical methodology. Where critical methods help us to see the power imbalances, decolonizing methods invite us to imagine a new system focused on relationality and reciprocity rather than production and individualism.

To understand the system of counselor education, it is important to examine how colonial logic continues to shape higher education more broadly. One of the clearest examples is the way education has become a mirror of corporate and capitalist systems (Giroux, 2002; Spinrad et al., 2022). With university leadership making exorbitant salaries, professors working in burnout-heavy provider roles, programs and certifications functioning as commodities, and students positioned as consumers, education in the United States has become a highly successful business. Within this system, burnout, disconnection, and transactional relationships are inevitable outcomes. In counselor education, there are inherent discrepancies as corporate logic is applied to a human-centered field. Students and faculty are often told to prioritize wellness, while being held to impossible standards of publication, scholarship, and unpaid labor. Most counseling programs advertise a cohort model to increase community but continue foster competition through scarcity by not having enough Graduate Assistantships (GA), research opportunities, or faculty support. Students are encouraged to

remain critical of traditional pedagogy and to gain systemic awareness, yet the National Counselor Exam (NCE), professional counseling dispositions, and program evaluations continue to standardize evaluations based on White, Western cultural norms. In the gap between liberation-oriented views and compliance-driven practice, students are left navigating the contradictions of a system that claims decolonization while functioning through corporate norms

Yet, within this exploitative system, I've seen moments of reciprocity that disrupt corporate logic. Professors giving grace on assignment, reorienting classes to meet students' needs, and cohorts supporting each other in meaningful ways serve as resistance to the colonized view of education. The RAM Report at Penn State, for example, offers a student-led space where counseling students can publish their work and participate in the co-creation of knowledge outside traditional academic gatekeeping. By centering student's voices as they contribute to the counseling field, it disrupts current models of knowledge production in counselor education. These moments remind me that transformation is possible and that we can imagine alternatives to transactional models of learning.

Imagining alternatives while navigating the very real constraints of academia can feel overwhelming. As students, we have limited access to institutional power. We cannot control our accrediting body, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs

(CACREP), university policies, or the larger academic structure.

However, we can control our relationships with education, with one another, and with our professors. Decolonizing methodologies expand our critical analyses. If critical methods help us see the system, decolonizing methods help us imagine beyond it. Decolonizing methods invite us to consider what counselor education could be if it were grounded not in individualism and production, but in relationality and reciprocity.

To imagine this new way forward, I turn to Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2024) description of the indigenous concept of the gift economy. Kimmerer writes, "The currency in a gift economy is relationship, which is expressed as gratitude, as interdependence, and as ongoing cycles of reciprocity" (p. 33). The serviceberry offers its fruit freely and in abundance, not in exchange for payment, but as part of a reciprocal cycle in which soil, sunlight, and rain sustain the tree, and animals and humans help disperse its seeds; nothing is hoarded or wasted. Through this parable, Kimmerer (2024) teaches us that "all flourishing is mutual" (p.72).

Gift economies stand in clear contrast to the scarcity-based logic of the capitalist systems seen in education. In academia, scarcity is a large motivator. The scarcity of graduate assistantships, future jobs, research opportunities, conference slots, and mentorship all fuel the fear that there will not be enough.

The fear of scarcity drives competition, which is often affirmed within academia. As students, we are praised for individual achievements rather than collective care. There is not a spot on our CV for how we showed up for our cohort members when they were struggling. Our contribution to the health of our community is not evaluated in our yearly reviews. While capitalist systems motivate through the fear of not having enough, gift economies motivate through the promise of abundance (Kimmerer, 2024). Moving towards valuing reciprocity and resisting the scarcity mindset requires some degree of unlearning that there is not enough recognition, success or belonging to go around. What would happen if we began to orient our counseling programs toward this model? What if education were considered a gift rather than a product?

Reframing education as a gift shifts our responsibilities. When we view education as a product, we evaluate it according to what we believe we paid for. An overworked professor who doesn't meet our expectations becomes a defective product, program support staff get treated poorly because we're unhappy with a service, or peers become threats to our future opportunities. But when education is understood as a gift, it opens the door to gratitude rather than evaluation. With gratitude comes accountability, or what Kimmerer (2024) describes as the responsibility to keep the gift alive. Through receiving the gift of education, accumulation of knowledge becomes greater potential for dissemination.

While fully adopting the gift economy within our program is not immediately possible, we can introduce small, daily practices of gratitude and reciprocity that work against the capitalist logic of education. An example of a more formal gift economy is the mentorship program through Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) at Penn State, which pairs master's and doctoral students with advanced students in a formal mentorship relationship. Mentorship recognizes that we have been given education, experience, and knowledge, and now we are offering that to someone else. Informal examples of gift economies that I've seen in our program appear as professors choosing to come to campus and leave their door open to invite connection, students volunteering time to meet with applicants, or peers swapping feedback on manuscripts. Cohort models have enormous potential for gift economies through solidarity and cooperation, where members recognize the gifts they've been given and in turn use them to support their peers.

Embracing the gift economy doesn't mean we ignore the inequities that exist within education. People of color, women, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, and students and faculty from other marginalized groups often face barriers to success within educational systems (DeVooght & Neuer Colburn, 2024; Green & Malcom, 2023). Mentorship may be a way to address inequalities by fostering more formalized gift economies in higher education to better support marginalized faculty and students (DeVooght & Neuer Colburn, 2024; Oller et al., 2021).

The gift economy rejects the manufactured scarcity that fuels competition and individualism in higher education by distributing resources based on need rather than power and privilege. Within higher education, a gift economy might center the needs of those who have been historically excluded by prioritizing marginalized folks in grant funding and ensuring salary equality, mentorships to support wellness and career advancement, and research and leadership opportunities. Finally, practicing gratitude invites us to hold both truths, that the system of education is inequitable, and we all have received gifts, which call us to responsibility (Kimmerer, 2024). For example, at Penn State, we study at one of the most well-resourced universities in the country. This privilege is due, in part, to the land theft of the Erie, Lenape, Shawnee, Susquehannock, and Wahzhazhe Nations. Through our education, we have access to journals, research, leaders in our field, and financial supports that many counseling students at other universities do not. While our positionalities differ, we each have something to offer our community.

Within cohorts, we can create environments of mutual recognition and appreciation. We can come to class with gratitude for the knowledge, experience, and presence that our peers offer us. We can share resources freely, help to reveal hidden curriculum, and lend support to peers who are struggling. We can recognize the efforts of support staff who work tirelessly to keep our program organized and functioning by advocating for fair pay and regular, public gratitude for their

work. Finally, we can appreciate the labor of our professors, who navigate programmatic standards, unjust institution standards, heavy workloads, and are still striving to show up for their students as advisors, educators, and mentors. Students might nominate professors who have been impactful for awards, advocate for equal respect and pay for non-tenure line professors and create regular habits of expressing gratitude for their work.

Decolonization is not an individual act; it is a collective daily practice. While education can often feel overwhelming and isolating, Kimmerer (2024) reminds us that through engaging with education as a gift, we can begin to reorient our system from individualism to reciprocity. Rather than purchasing our education, we accept the gift of education, spurring us on to gratitude, accountability, and reciprocity. How have you been given the gift of education, and how will you keep that gift alive?

References available upon request.

On Behalf of the CSI Rho Alpha Mu 25-26 Executive Board

**SPANDAN GHEVRIYA, GABRIELLE REILL, DIMITAR
MARTCHEV, MARIAM DEMBELE, & COURTNEY DIXON**

We are excited for you to meet the executive board members of the Rho Alpha Mu (RAM) Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) for the 2025-2026 term! CSI is the international honor society for counseling students, counselor educators, and professional counselors, and RAM is our chapter at Penn State. Active members of RAM are second-year master students, doctoral students, and educators in the Counselor Education program. In this article, the CSI RAM executive board members reflect on their roles, highlight significant initiatives from this semester, and share their aspirations for strengthening engagement and professional development for future events.

Chapter President - Spandan Ghevriya

Running to be a CSI RAM executive board member was not part of my initial plan. However, when I received a nomination, I recognized an unexpected opportunity to step into a leadership role within an academic and professional honor society that supports my peers. Accepting that nomination has been one of the most rewarding decisions I have made. Working with the board to plan and execute events such as the Welcome Event, Mentor/Mentee Program, and PhD Panel has allowed me to grow not only as a leader, but also as a collaborator. It is great to see how motivated our team becomes to create something meaningful and memorable for our members.

Out of all our projects so far, my favorite has been the Counselor Education (CNED) Merchandise Design Contest. This was a fundraising initiative in collaboration with Collegiate Pride to produce

hoodies, t-shirts, and crewnecks designed by a CNED student. The proceeds will be used to fund future CSI RAM programs. It was wonderful to watch CNED students come together to design logos, vote for their favorites, and ultimately order a piece of merchandise that will connect our cohort forever. Watching the community engage so enthusiastically reminded me how even a simple project can strengthen belonging and pride within our department.

Looking ahead, I hope to continue collaborating with the team to facilitate events that serve the needs and interests of CSI RAM members. Specifically, our Mentor/Mentee Program has already been a meaningful success, creating a space for both mentors and mentees to connect, support one another, and grow professionally. This program paired CNED students who were interested in having a mentor with students who were interested in serving as mentors. This program connected both doctoral and master's students and seeing these relationships develop has been a highlight of my role. I am excited to further contribute to initiatives that strengthen connection, leadership, and belonging within our CSI RAM chapter.

Chapter Vice President - Gabby Reilly

I have the honor of serving as the Vice President of the Rho Alpha Mu chapter of Chi Sigma Iota. After spending a year in the program and getting a chance to see and participate in all of the programs and initiatives from the previous board, I

knew that I wanted to be a part of the executive board to support students in the program in building a supportive community and navigating their own professional identities.

Without a doubt, the Mentor/Mentee Program has been my favorite part of serving on the board. This is a program that the chapter has done before and having been a mentee to a doctoral student last year, I was excited to be able to serve as a mentor and help students in the new cohort navigate the program. I also looked forward to the chance to intentionally pair each student based on their current and future goals, which was an impactful way to foster connection within both the Master's and Doctoral programs, and even now, getting to check in on all of the pairs and hear how their connections and relationships have developed has been a meaningful part of this role.

Looking forward, I hope to see our chapter of Chi Sigma Iota lean into building community and promoting development, which can look like creating spaces for students in the program to have opportunities to connect with each other and discuss and build their identities as counselors-in-training. I hope this chapter is more than just something to list on our CVs or resumes and instead becomes a part of our program experience where we can learn, grow, and develop both personally and professionally. Being a member of this chapter and getting to serve on the executive board has truly been such a large part of my experience in this program as this role has allowed me to develop personally and professionally

through the chance to intentionally pour back into the larger CNED community.

Chapter Treasurer - Dimitar Martchev

Representing CSI RAM as the chapter's Treasurer has been a growth-fostering journey for me. There are a lot more logistical and numerical components than I understood at the onset of my role acceptance, so I made sure to take time to become familiar with as much as I could. Despite the challenge, I find myself collaborating and sharing ideas with my fellow executive board members on most chapter operations regardless of financial involvement, and I believe that serves as a testimony to how much I want to see our chapter grow and flourish. This is my first time holding the responsibility of financial management in an organization, and I could not have done as much as I have without the support of the past and current CSI Executive Board (in addition to the numerous how-to guides that Penn State Student Affairs provides).

If I had to pick a favorite project that our team has accomplished so far, it would have to be the CNED Merchandise Design Contest. The team and I really wanted to take the annual merchandise sale to the next level, and we were happy to see how well the design contest was received. Furthermore, the winning design voted on by the majority of the membership promoted the message that we are all in this program for similar reasons, which was beautiful to see. I am looking forward to dispersing the merchandise to

those who purchased and witnessing our counseling community come together with pride.

Chapter Secretary - Mariam Dembele

I have the pleasure of serving as Secretary for the Rho Alpha Mu chapter. When I first entered the Counselor Education master's program in 2024, I was very closed off from my cohort but eager to find community. Joining the CSI Executive Board has allowed me to strengthen my professional identity while also becoming part of the community and contributing to CSI's mission of leadership and supporting counseling students. With such a fantastic team this year, the collaboration and execution of our visions for this academic year have been amazing.

My favorite initiative so far has been the PhD Panel event in October 2025. The purpose of this event was to expose master-level students who are interested in pursuing a PhD in Counselor Education by having a panel of current doctoral students of different years share about their experiences, advice, and challenges that helped to demystify the PhD journey. It is meaningful when the master's students and doctoral students interact with each other, as there are rarely opportunities to interact outside of classroom and supervision settings.

As we continue through this academic year, I hope that we can continue to create more spaces where master's and doctoral students can engage with each other. We rarely have structured spaces to

connect across program levels, and the PhD panel event has shown how valuable these interactions can be for everyone involved. I am hopeful that the Rho Alpha Mu chapter will continue fostering these relationships and strengthening community.

Doctoral Student Liaison - Courtney Dixon

I really enjoy working with the CSI executive board as the doctoral liaison! Historically, this role has been more consultative, but this year I have been able to really engage in a meaningful, hands-on way (and it certainly helps that the team is such a great group!). I have been directly involved in planning and executing events, even taking the lead on the PhD Panel event, as well as supporting the organization of the mentorship program. This position enables me to keep an ear toward the interests and needs of doctoral students and making that connection when planning events or brainstorming initiatives with the executive board. Also, I can lean into the experiences of doctoral students to support our CNED community at large.

This semester, one of my favorite initiatives was the PhD Panel. At this event, four doctoral students in CNED shared their insights and experiences with interested master's students, including information about the application and interview processes, as well as the experience of being in a PhD program in general. As a doctoral student, I do not always get to connect with master's students, so organizing and participating in this event was fun as we built some new



connections and relationships. Overall, this is my favorite part of being involved with CSI: building relationships and connecting with brilliant peers and colleagues in new and meaningful ways with the central goal of building up our CNED community.

SELF-CARE CORNER

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HOW WE FEEL: A JOURNAL FOR YOUR WELLBEING REBEKAH GRMELA, 1ST-YEAR MASTER'S STUDENT

For CNED students and professionals who are oriented toward supporting the mental health of others, it is often a challenge to find the time to prioritize your own emotional wellbeing as you balance the commitments of graduate coursework, clients, research, homework and more. While an incredible practice, finding the time to sit down and journal about your feelings can feel like a heavy lift when prioritizing your to-dos with a limited amount of time. Enter a helpful tool that sits in your pocket and prompts you to reflect, while also learning about your mental health trends and enhancing your wellbeing: How We Feel (2022).

How We Feel (2022) was developed by scientists, inspired by the work of Dr. Marc Beckett and Yale University's Center for Emotional Intelligence, to help people better track and understand their emotions. This free app securely protects your data and allows you opportunities to check-in regularly and assess how you are feeling in the moment. Aesthetically beautiful, this easy-to-use app has you choose from four quadrants of energy (positive high energy/low energy and negative high energy/low energy), then drill down to 30+ words to describe how you're feeling based on Brackett's Mood Meter and RULER Approach, an evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. You can set the frequency for the app prompts, and also create tags that name trends in your emotions, such as who you are with, your physical location, and what you are doing at the time of that feeling. The tool also allows you (if time allows!) to share a short journal entry, or, create unique feelings that are specific to the individual. So, what do we do with all of this data?

This is the best part. How We Feel (2022) allows you to dive into your feelings over all time, monthly, weekly, daily, by energy, or by trending tag (are you always cranky in the morning, or often sluggish when you're working in your living room?). You can identify your overall emotions by day, and if given permission, correlate this with your phone's Health Kit to sync physical and biological correlations with your mood, such as menstrual cycle, sleep patterns, exercise, and even the weather and temperature. I've personally tested this app since May 2025, and with 200+ check-ins, it may not take a genius to determine I'm a better mood when it's 65 degrees vs. 95 degrees, but, it has been interesting to see trends in my mental health based on who I'm spending time with, the amount of caffeine I've had that day, and more.

Lastly, while How We Feel (2022) is an excellent self-reflection tool, it is also a helpful way to share status updates with close friends or loved ones, and direct the information gathered about your mental health toward free tools and practices to self-regulate such as sound patterns, guided breathing, affirming quotes, reframing tools, creativity videos and more. Download today if you're interested in learning more about how you feel.

References available upon request.

RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT

DR. JAVIER F. CASADO PÉREZ

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Dr. Javier F. Casado Pérez is thrilled to announce an emerging community-engaged research project on intercultural relationship counseling. The project aims to further understand cultural repair for intercultural romantic partners and establish best practices by recruiting a practitioner advisory group, conducting systematic literature review, and recruiting relationship counseling professionals, counselor educators, and researchers. Dr. Casado Pérez invites

students interested in relationship counseling research to reach out. Additionally, they are conducting qualitative inquiry with faculty of Color on bystander intervention on workplace bias in the academy. Data collection has nearly concluded, and students interested in institutional life research or qualitative data analysis are invited to contact them at jfc207@psu.edu.

Selected Publications:

Casado Pérez, J. F. & Aksoy, R. N. (2025). "I should be able to live my best life:" On making meaning of academic survival. *Journal of Higher Education*. Advanced online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2025.2577621>

RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT

DR. JAVIER F. CASADO PÉREZ

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Casado Pérez, J. F. (2025). The critical methodology of my academic survival: A personal narrative autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2025.2539374>

Casado Pérez, J. F. & Le, L. T. T. (2025). On the epistemic exclusion of counselor educators of Color. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 53(2), 66-77. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12321>

RAM CSI EVENTS - FALL 2025



CSI hosted a welcome event before the start of the Fall semester to provide information about the mentorship program for both prospective mentors and mentees.

CHI SIGMA IOTA
JOIN OUR FIRST BOARD MEETING!
 Wednesday | Oct 15 | 7PM - 8PM | Zoom



Updates on upcoming events and announcement of new CSI merchandise!



Come share your voice and ideas for future events!



For CNED merchandise, CSI hosted a design contest. Students, faculty, and staff voted for the design of their choosing, which is shown below, and designed by a CNED student!



Discover the Ph.D. Journey:
 Join the Conversation, Share Your Story

CHI SIGMA IOTA PRESENTS ...

PHD PANEL

ZOOM LINK

FRIDAY OCT 31, 2025 AT 3 PM

HYBRID: ZOOM & CEDAR 124

Whether you are in the Ph.D. program already or considering a Ph.D., this is your chance to connect and inspire. Current and former doctoral students are invited to share their stories, the challenges, the growth, and the “why” behind their journey to guide and encourage future scholars in Counselor Education.

Departmental Highlights

CONGRATULATIONS TO EVERYONE WHO...

Presented at a conference:

AARC

Fan Fan
Saiber Shaikh
Jinny Lee
Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos
Andrew Nadermann

DCDT

Cassandra Kam
Vanessa Englehart

ACES

Courtney Dixon
Xin Zou
Ana Ayala Cantu
Kaylee Van Gent
Linh Le
Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos
Sheba Antony
Amber Johnson
Nainika Hira
Janet Fu
Divine Lipscomb
Saiber Shaikh
SungWon Yoon-Lee
Jinwon Suh
Mihee Woo

Please see below for pictures from these events!

Penn State represented at ACES 2025 in Philadelphia, PA. (October 8th-12th, 2025)







Departmental Highlights

CONGRATULATIONS!!!



Recognized by Professional Association

NARACES Outstanding Graduate Student Award
Saiber Shaikh

ACES Student Grant
Saiber Shaikh

Publication

Fisher, M. H., **Englehart, V. C.**, **Kam, C. Y.**, Norwine, L. E., Patino, K. M., Patterson, A., Rodríguez, M., Bouck, E. C., Sung, C., & Taylor, J. (2024). Successful transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities and extensive support needs. To appear in J. P. Bakken (Ed.), *Handbook for Educating Students with Disabilities: Implications and Strategies*. Springer.

DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Congratulations to everyone who

Passed program milestones:

Comprehensive Exams

Vanessa Englehart
Scarlett Iglesias Hoyos
Cassandra Kam
Linh Le
Deepika Nantha
Jinwon Suh

Qualifying Exams

Ana Ayala Cantu
Courtney Dixon
Maria Elfrida
Andrew Nadermann
Kaylee Van Gent



Alumni Spotlight :

Bagmi Das, Ph.D., LMFT

Dr. Bagmi Das is an Associate Professor of Counseling and Human Development at the George Washington University. Her expertise is in the fields of trauma intervention, family therapy, and multicultural and social justice development in counselors in training (CITs). Specifically, her research agenda focuses on psychosocial adjustment, trauma, and resilience in immigrant and refugee populations. Trained in marriage and family therapy, Dr. Das brings a systems lens to all research, with a particular interest in building community healing and resilience through the research itself. Currently, Dr. Das is working with doctoral students and community members to build the research base around support for new immigrants and refugees in the DC Metro area. Simultaneously, Dr. Das is working to build curriculum and texts to support counselors intending to work with these populations.



Cohort: My cohort is still my cohort. The cohort experience in the doctoral program provided me the camaraderie, social connection, and challenge I needed to grow in that time. I may not maintain consistent communication with all of my cohort, but I appreciate and respect their contributions to the field.

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

Cohort: My cohort is still my cohort. The cohort experience in the doctoral program provided me the camaraderie, social connection, and challenge I needed to grow in that time. I may not maintain consistent communication with all of my cohort, but I appreciate and respect their contributions to the field.

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

My research focuses on immigrant and refugee populations, exploring trauma, post traumatic growth, and healing in these populations. Professionally, I have been working at the same university since I graduated. I was fortunate to gain a tenure-track position and have therefore had some stability as I gained footing as both a scholar and educator.

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

Penn State prepared me for the reality of academia. Through speaking with faculty, formal and informal mentorship, and being actively involved in Career Services and GPSA (Graduate & Professional Student Association), I was well-informed by the time I entered academia and knew how to negotiate for and then prioritize my time. At Penn State I also met both faculty and doctoral students I continue collaborating with.

Alumni Spotlight :

Bagmi Das, Ph.D., LMFT

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

I am an Associate Professor at a Research 1 PWI. I am also the Co-Director of our Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. I organize my days at the beginning of each semester and dedicate my time depending on my teaching schedule. I try to split it so that I have 1 day dedicated to research, 1.5 days dedicated to teaching and service, respectively, and leave Fridays for clinical work, which includes seeing clients and watching student videos. My ideal research days usually include writing or editing papers in the morning, reading student research work midday, and then research admin tasks (sending emails, coding, etc) in the afternoon. Teaching days include course prep, grading, and other admin tasks. Service days vary depending on the time of year. Right now (December), I am mostly coordinating professional development plans, interviewing applicants, reviewing applications, and responding to emails. While this seems like a lot of moving parts, I organize these with a "Sunday Meeting" in which I spend 30 minutes of my Sunday triaging tasks and allotting time to work during the week by setting these as appointments on my Google Calendar. I go to campus about 2-3x/week for my classes and in-person meetings. The rest of the time, I work from my home office, which allows me to take breaks between tasks.

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?

Collaborate! I am not sure why this was not emphasized, given the cohort-nature of many programs, but collaborating with your peers will pay off in dividends as you all progress in your careers. I know many students look to collaborate with faculty, and I invite you to also look to your peers because they are likely knowledgeable in areas you are not and, together, you will be able to forge some new paths in counseling. Plus- they are as invested as you are in publishing, so you are both motivated to get it done!

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?

Ask for help. I think I have gotten more out of this field, both clinically and scholarly, when I ask for help rather than when I offer it. When I have a plan and know that I could use some help with an area I am not familiar with, I ask for help. I then build relationships, create pathways for others to publish, and get to be accountable to another person to get work done. As a faculty member, I love when students ask me for help on something and I can provide something useful for them, for instance when students have a topic of research they are interested in and want to develop research inquiry.

Alumni Spotlight :

Bagmi Das, Ph.D., LMFT

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?

I am certainly not the best at this, but I think two things really help me prioritize my wellbeing. One is limiting my tasks and learning to say "no." One way I have grown in this area is by using my calendar diligently and setting boundaries on requests by limiting my availability for both meetings and tasks. The second thing that helps is having people, pets, and hobbies, that force me away from my computer and out of my head.

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

My family. I am the oldest daughter of immigrants and am constantly impressed with my family of origin, my sisters' achievements and contributions to the world and my parents' evolution and openness to progressive worldviews. I am also a wife and I am a mother to a multiracial three year old and I am constantly proud of his ability to self-regulate, communicate with others, and approach the world with curiosity.

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

"But What will People Say?" by Sahaj Kohli

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

Counseling, as a field is growing, and it's even more important that you understand your "why" as you enter the field. There are so many ways to help people. You have to understand what you want to put into and get out of the career ahead.

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?

Being a "clinic sprite." In this case: I would be able to optimize clinical space for client growth and supervision space for CI growth. Coming from a cultural background of ayurveda and yoga, I believe strongly in the power of the mind-body conversation. I'd like to be able to create ideal clinic environments to nurture growth for each individual client and CI.

MEET THE AUTHORS



Kaylee Van Gent (she/they) is a 2nd year PhD student at Penn State University, pursuing a degree in counselor education. Her research interests are in examining and dismantling the culture of Whiteness in counseling and mental health care as well as in religious/spiritual abuse and manipulation. Kaylee is a licensed associate professional counselor (LAPC) and a national certified counselor (NCC) and has worked as a therapist in a variety of settings. Outside of work and school, Kaylee enjoys spending time being in nature hiking and paddleboarding, reading, and hanging out with her friends.

Spandan Ghevriya (she/her/hers) is a second-year student in the M.Ed. Counselor Education program. She is an intern at the State College Area School District and WorkLink at Penn State. She is also the current Chapter President for Chi Sigma Iota Rho Alpha Mu. 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. In her free time, Spandan enjoys knitting/crocheting, or going on walks with friends.



MEET THE AUTHORS

Originally from Savannah, GA, **Gabby Reilly** is a second-year master's student in the Counselor Education Program with an emphasis in School Counseling. She currently interns at Penns Valley Area JR./SR. High School. She is the current Vice President for the Rho Alpha Mu Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota and a Graduate Ambassador for the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association.



Mariam Dembele is a 2nd-year counseling student and serves as secretary of the Rho Alpha Mu chapter. She is passionate about advocacy, professional identity development, and supporting meaningful engagement within the counseling community.

MEET THE AUTHORS



Dimitar Martchev (he/him/his) is a second-year master's student in Penn State's Counselor Education program. He is also working as an extern at University Park's Counseling and Psychological Services center. As a Bulgarian American, he has grappled with the lived experience as a bicultural individual and understands the importance of a social third space. His goal is to continue the work of bolstering the mental health of collegiate students beyond his graduation. Outside of the counseling space, you can find him kicking back with some video games and trying to level up his culinary skills.

Rebekah Grmela (she/her) is a master's student in the Counselor Education (CNE) program at Penn State, specializing in Clinical Mental Health and Rehabilitation Counseling. She brings over a decade of experience supporting government agencies, nonprofits, and mission-driven organizations through strategic communications, community engagement, and equity-centered practices. Clinically, Rebekah is particularly interested in working with families, couples, and broader relational systems, with a focus on how identity, belonging, and systemic factors shape individual and collective well-being.

