

Pitt School of Social Work

PhD Candidates on the Job Market

FALL 2024



University of
Pittsburgh

School of
Social Work



Dear colleagues,

As University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work PhD Program Director, I am proud to introduce our fall 2024 doctoral candidates who are entering the job market.

Pitt School of Social Work is committed to our mission of preparing courageous leaders to transform social work practice, policy, research, and education in a community-engaged and inclusive environment. Our faculty and students develop collaborative partnerships to understand, prevent, and ameliorate complex social problems with innovative approaches that promote social justice. The school's vision statement to transform — our world, our future, ourselves — cannot be accomplished without centering anti-racism as an essential and non-negotiable commitment for our school, and our doctoral students embody that commitment.

The four students featured here would be a strong addition to any institution's research, teaching, community engagement, and social justice work.

We hope you reach out with any questions, and please be sure to visit us at CSWE and SSWR to meet our candidates and learn more about our doctoral program.

Sara Goodkind, PhD
Program Director, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work



Cecily D. Davis

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Racial Socialization
- Racial Discrimination, Stress/Trauma, and Coping
- School Social Work/Social Work Services
- Research-to-practice/Community-engaged scholarship
- Mixed Methods Design

DISSERTATION TITLE:

How Caregivers' Racial Identity Relates in Preparing Adolescents to Deal with Racial Discrimination

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE:

Chair: James Huguley, Ed.D
Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Sara Goodkind, PhD
Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Lori Delale-O'Connor, PhD
Associate Professor at the University of Pittsburgh
Center for Urban Education

Victor Jr. Figuereo, PhD LCSW
Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Cecily Davis, BSW, MSW (she/her) is focused on eliminating anti-Black racism through her scholarship, teaching, and practice. Her research agenda includes projects supporting Black children's racial identity development, anti-racist practices, and improving schools' racial climates. Using critical theories, Cecily is working to (1) understand the essential components of how Black parents most effectively socialize their children around issues of racial bias; and (2) translate optimal Black youth development and anti-racist methods into practice.

Cecily has extensive micro, mezzo and macro social work practice working with and on behalf of Black communities, families, and children. With 14 years of practice experience, Cecily specializes in developing and sustaining collaborative partnerships with non-profit and for-profit organizations, schools/government agencies, and nationally funded research projects. Through these organizations, Cecily established program development, grant management, leadership, community engagement, and research skills.

Cecily's research is directly informed by her professional experiences working with Black communities, and from that vantage point she has examined racial socialization and how antiracist social work education can address the racism deeply entrenched in social work practice across settings and contexts. She is committed to supporting social work students' development as they engage in eradicating racism and utilize our common core of theories, skills, and code of ethics. Cecily seeks to understand the successful practices Black parents employ in supporting children dealing with racial discrimination.



Bianca De Bellis

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Trauma-affected youth
- Trauma-informed restorative practices
- Student-teacher relationships
- K-12 mental health access and supports

DISSERTATION TITLE:

Empowering Trauma-Affected Youth: The Transformative Potential of Trauma-Informed Restorative Practices on Student Mental Health, Academic, and Behavioral Outcomes

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE:

Chair: James Huguley, Ed.D
Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Rachel Vaughn-Coaxum, PhD
Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh
Department of Psychiatry

Sara Goodkind, PhD
Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Deborah Moon, PhD
Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Bianca De Bellis, LCSW, M.Ed, (she/her) focuses her scholarship on creating safer educational environments for students with trauma histories. As an expert in both trauma-responsive interventions and restorative practices in schools, she is dedicated to bridging the gap that too often exists between these approaches. Bianca serves as co-principal investigator and co-lead intervention designer for the Developing Relational, Emotional, and Adaptive Minds (DREAMs) program, a novel trauma intervention embedded within a restorative framework. DREAMs integrates principles from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Dialectical Behavior Therapy to address the unique needs of trauma-affected youth, who are often overlooked in traditional restorative models. Additionally, Bianca is a co-investigator on the Just Discipline project, a large-scale restorative practice intervention study operating in more than 15 schools and serving over 5,000 students in Greater Pittsburgh.

Bianca's research is informed by her extensive practice experience, including six years of clinical therapy, four years of school social work, and eight years as a Special Educator. While working in schools, Bianca witnessed how trauma-affected youth were disproportionately subject to exclusion, which was further exacerbated by intersections with racism and poverty. To this end, she transitioned from teacher to school social worker where she supported the development of a restorative school community, provided counseling, crisis intervention, and restorative mediations. Most significantly, she led the implementation of a school-wide mental health curriculum within a restorative paradigm to support students holistically through social-emotional interventions and restorative justice. Bianca continues to facilitate staff trainings on suicide prevention, trauma-informed education practices, and restorative justice.



C. Bailey Nichols

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Holistic healthcare
- Spirituality education
- Social work field placements
- Congregational social work
- Academic partnerships with spiritual/religious organizations
- Social work student classroom engagement

DISSERTATION TITLE:

Conversations about Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Practicum: A Mixed Methods Dissertation

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE:

Chair: Helen E. Petracchi, PhD
Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Rafael J. Engel, PhD
Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Dr. Victor J. Figueroa PhD, LCSW
Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Kimberly S. Moore, PhD
Clinical Assistant Professor, Yeshiva
University Wurzweiler School of Social Work

C. Bailey Nichols, MSW, LSW (she/her) is driven to enhance social work practice and education through research, mentorship, teaching and service. Her primary research interest involves the incorporation of religion and spirituality in social work practice and education to improve social work providers' cultural competence. She is both the primary designer and implementer of an evaluation for a pilot project which trains congregation members to serve as helping professionals within African American congregations to improve access to resources and mental health services. Bailey aspires to promote spiritually and religiously competent practice through her research and to foster critical thinking and enthusiasm for social work education among her students. Bailey's mixed-methods dissertation explores discussions that social work students have with their field instructors related to religion and spirituality.

Bailey's love for research grew both in her undergrad and the years that followed. After receiving her bachelor's degree in 2013, she worked in various roles for four years within a community organization in Wilmington, Delaware which provided services for youth and families through after-school programs, summer camps, private schools, and job training programs. In addition to finishing her dissertation, Bailey will use the final year of her program to pursue part-time practice experience as a social worker in a non-profit school. She looks forward to finding a position that will enable her to use her research, teaching, practice, and administrative skills to strengthen social service provision and education



Emil K. Smith

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Transgender and Gender Diverse Health Equity
- Disordered Eating and Weight Stigma
- Integrated Primary Care
- Healthcare Delivery
- Anti-Carceral Social Work Practice

DISSERTATION TITLE:

Trans-Affirming Primary Care Providers' Perspectives on Eating Disorder Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE:

Co-Chair: Rachel E. Gartner, PhD
Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

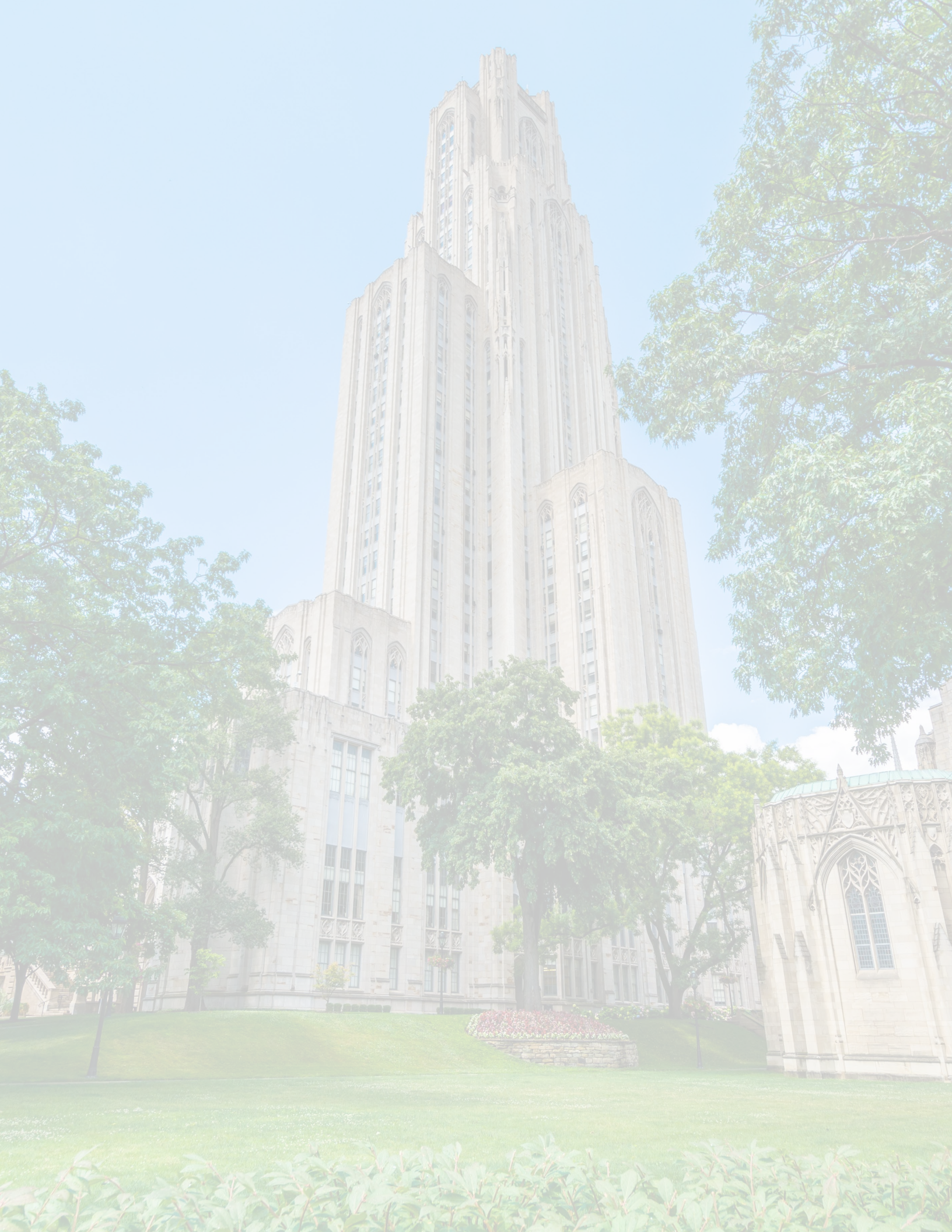
Co-Chair: Daniel Rosen, PhD
Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Erin Harrop, PhD
Assistant Professor, University of Denver
School of Social Work

Sara Goodkind, PhD
Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Emil K. Smith, MSW, LCSW (they/them) is devoted to advancing health equity for transgender and gender diverse (trans) populations. Their research centers community engagement throughout all stages of the research process to improve the healthcare experiences of trans adults. Emil's research is informed by their clinical experience in primary care, outpatient, and intensive outpatient mental health settings. Inspired by disability justice and anti-carceral mental health advocacy, Emil seeks to transform clinical practice to enable the healthcare system to better serve trans communities. Emil's long-term goals are to (1) develop community-driven multi-level interventions to optimize healthcare delivery for trans adults with eating disorders and (2) build interventions to support primary care providers who serve trans populations. Their dissertation engages qualitative interviews to investigate trans-affirming PCPs' experiences identifying, addressing, and managing eating disorders and their perspectives on how to improve care for trans adults with EDs. This work builds on their prior research with trans adults with eating disorders about their experiences in primary care. Emil's dissertation is supported by the University of Pittsburgh's Clinical and Translational Science Institute's TL1 fellowship.

Emil has diverse teaching experience, and has taught at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional level in a range of topics related to clinical practice from conducting crisis assessments to sex and sexuality. They are committed to advancing anti-carceral social work practice, and have developed and disseminated a collaborative, trauma-informed, model for teaching suicide assessment to social work students.





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