

Meet the Faculty & Staff

The School of
Social Work
Southern Miss

2024

The University of Southern Mississippi



Laura Achter

Visiting Instructor | LMSW

Laura Achter received her BSW and MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. Her professional background includes working as: a mental health clinician with Pine Belt Mental Health Care Services, a Family Preservation Specialist with Child Protective Services, a child welfare social worker, a therapeutic foster care specialist, and an intensive in-home specialist with Mississippi Children's Home Services/Canopy. Further, she served in the Mississippi Air National Guard for 32 years. She started in the military as an enlisted airman and was later commissioned as an officer. She has served as a Medical Service Supervisor, an Equal Opportunity Officer, and a Base Inspector General.



Karen Aderer

Lecturer | LMSW

Karen Aderer received her BS in psychology, MSW, and a Certificate in Non-Profit Management from the University of Southern Mississippi. She has worked in numerous child advocacy settings, including as the District Social Worker for the Bay-Waveland School District, program services manager for an emergency children's shelter, CPS foster parent, and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). She has served on the boards of CASA of Hancock County and Common Cause Mississippi, volunteered as a Legal Protest Observer for the Mississippi Center for Justice, and co-created two programs aimed at decreasing social isolation in local nursing homes. She has also supervised many Davis Democracy Fellows in voter registration and education projects on campus. Her interests include: cultural humility, anti-racism, human rights, voter registration and education, and successful aging.



Kasey Autman

Adjunct Instructor | MSW, LCSW, CCTP, C-DBT

Kasey Autman is originally from Monticello, Mississippi. She earned a BA in sociology with an emphasis in social work from Tougaloo College in 2012 and an MSW from Jackson State in 2014. After graduation, she helped to open both a geropsychiatry in-patient unit and a geropsychiatry intensive-outpatient unit, where she served as the program manager and primary therapist. She currently serves as the social worker for a six million dollar federal grant that provides substance abuse treatment for people who otherwise cannot access services due to finances and/or location. Her interests include mental health, substance use disorders, trauma, and personality disorders.



Alvin Baker

Adjunct Instructor | LCSW

Alvin Baker was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and grew up on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. He earned his BS in psychology and his MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. After earning his BS, Baker provided in-home family counseling for 7 years. Upon obtaining his MSW, he worked for 2 years with USM's MIHDP program before becoming the first full-time Mental Wellness Coordinator for USM's Gulf Park campus. Baker has also worked part-time in private practice and is currently in the process of setting up his own private practice. Now a USM employee and Baker serves as an adjunct instructor. His interests include mental health, clinical social work, and teaching.



Michael Benjamin-Robinson

Adjunct Instructor | DSW, LCSW-BACS

Michael L. Benjamin-Robinson is a public health practitioner with over 25 years of social services experience. He is a motivational speaker, trainer, grant writer, and highly skilled facilitator. He is the CEO and Clinical Director at BACH Therapeutic Counseling Service, a private practice counseling. He employs an eclectic counseling approach, utilizing evidence-based therapies and theories such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Attachment Theory, Mindfulness, and Social Support. Benjamin-Robinson is a former Vice-President of the New Orleans Association of Black Social Workers, a member of the 100 Black Men of Greater New Orleans, and an advisory board member for Emory University's COMPASS Initiative. He is also a public health adjunct at Xavier University of Louisiana and has adjunct at his alma maters: Southern University at New Orleans and Tulane University's Schools of Social Work.



Michelle Brazeal

Associate Director, MSW Coordinator, & Assistant Professor | Ph.D., LCSW

Michelle Brazeal received her MSW and Ph.D. from the University of Alabama. She previously taught at the University of Alabama and Middle Tennessee State University. Her research focuses on the intersection of physical and mental health. She is interested in exploring pedagogy in higher education and ways to utilize technology to improve learning. Her practice experience has included: providing outpatient and residential mental health services to children and transitional age young adults, providing outpatient addictions treatment, and providing social work services in primary care. As an administrator, she has developed transitional age group homes and integrated health programs. She has assisted in developing a juvenile drug court and a jail diversion program.



Tara Butzlaff

Wraparound Specialist | LCSW

Tara Butzlaff earned her undergraduate degree in international studies and Spanish, and her Master of Social Work degree from the University of Southern Mississippi. Her professional experience includes working as the CommUNITY Cares Clinician at Pine Belt Mental Healthcare Resources, a Child Protection Specialist for the Mississippi Department of Human Services, and a Counselor for at-risk youth at Camp Shelby's Youth Challenge Academy. Butzlaff became an LCSW in 2014 and is currently employed at the Mississippi Wraparound Institute (MWI) as a Wraparound Specialist. Her interests include mental health, children and families, holistic wellness, and Southern Miss (To The Top!).



Melissa Coker

Program Manager

Melissa Coker is a Lumberton, MS native and received her Bachelor of Science degree in business administration with a minor in accounting. She began working at the University of Southern Mississippi in July of 1998. Coker became the USM School of Social Work's Finance and Administration Specialist in 2000 and stayed in that position for 23 plus years. During her time in that role, she supervised the School's Graduate Assistants and managed its financial and hiring procedures. Throughout her work at USM, Coker has served as President and as committee chair of the Association of Office Professionals, as Faculty Senate Bookkeeper, and as Staff Representative on the College of Education and Human Sciences Dean's Advisory Council. Currently, Coker works as the Program Manager for the Mississippi Wraparound Institute.



Melody Davisson

Student Support Specialist & Instructor | LMSW

Melody Davisson is a Hattiesburg native and received her BSW from Southern Mississippi in 2017. She continued her studies at the University of Alabama where she completed her MSW in 2019. While in school, she interned at SouthernCare Hospice. This internship motivated her to start her career as a medical social worker for a local hospice company. She joined the USM Social Work faculty in 2021. She presented alongside Dr. Kolbo, Mrs. Lahasky, and Lauren Smith at the 2023 NASW Conference. Additionally, she was accepted into the ACUE Faculty Development Institute's Effective Teaching Practices program for Fall 2023. She is currently working to obtain her LCSW.



Emily Goff Dixon

Adjunct Instructor | LCSW, LICSW

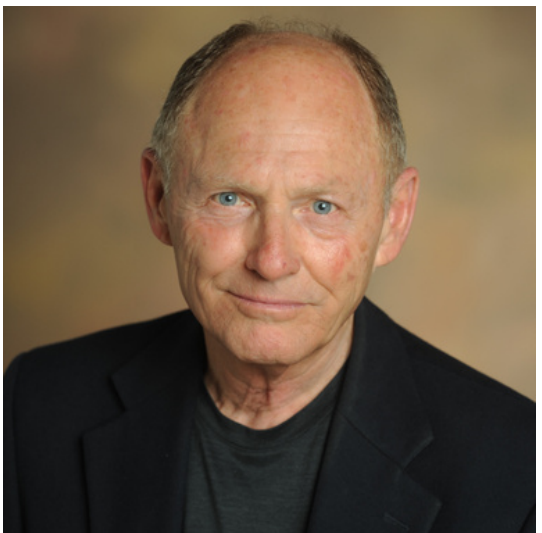
Emily Dixon recently returned to Hurley, MS on the Gulf Coast. She received her B.S. in public policy with a concentration in nonprofit leadership from Georgia State University in 2012 and her MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2016. Initially working as a Forensic Interviewer for Kids Hub Child Advocacy Center, Dixon then transitioned into medical social work at Forrest General Hospital in Hattiesburg, MS. After receiving her LCSW, she became Project Director for an Integrative Health grant sponsored by Forrest Health and the USM School of Social Work. In 2022, Dixon moved back to the Coast where she currently works as a Hospice Social Worker for Hospice of Life through Singing River Health System. She is currently licensed to practice social work in both Mississippi and Alabama. Dixon is very passionate about social determinates of health, healthcare disparities and injustice, and integrative health.



Krystal Draughn

Adjunct Professor | LCSW

Krystal Draughn teaches advanced practice with children and families. She received her BS in communications and her MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. She has worked as a children's case manager for a community mental health system. For 16 years, she worked at Pine Grove Behavioral Health with addiction and eating disorders in adults and adolescents in residential settings, performing individual, group, and family therapy. While at Pine Grove, she also served as a field instructor. Draughn currently works at Hattiesburg Clinic in a clinical outpatient setting and has been in this position for 12 years. She conducts individual, marriage, and family therapy with children, adolescents, and adults. She currently maintains an EMDR certification.



Michael Forster

Professor Emeritus | Ph.D., MSW

A New Orleans native, Michael Forster obtained his BA from Louisiana State University, his MA and Ph.D. from University of Massachusetts, and MSW from University of Illinois. For 14 years in Chicago, IL, he served in various roles at a private practice that focused on child and family welfare. Forster currently serves on several nonprofit boards, including the Mississippi Public Health Institution and the Hattiesburg chapter of USA Dance Incorporated. He co-founded the Family Network Partnership, a community-based youth and family services agency in Hattiesburg. He has also been the author/co-author of 60+ academic publications, and has been the co-principal investigator of \$15M+ in externally funded grants and contracts. He has been with the USM School of Social Work since 1994.



Debbie Graham

Lecturer Emeritus | LCSW

Debbie Graham is from Greenwood, MS and now lives in Hattiesburg, MS. She earned her MSW at the University of Southern Mississippi. She has over 17 years of clinical social work experience and has worked in the areas of mental health and addiction. Graham has served as a clinical social worker at Pine Grove Behavioral Health and Addiction Services. At the School of Social Work, she has taught foundation practice, advanced assessment, diagnoses and treatment (mental health/addiction), and theory. Her approach to social work practice is relational, strength-based, and person-centered. Graham's interests include addiction assessment and treatment, PTSD, and mental health access and addiction treatment policies.



Portia Granger

Adjunct Professor | DSW, LCSW-S

Portia Granger is from Clarksdale, MS. She currently serves as the Associate Director of Sports Counseling and Performance for the University of Southern Mississippi Athletics. Granger additionally serves as an adjunct professor in the School of Social Work, as well as the social work intern supervisor for USM Student Counseling Services. She attended USM as a track and field athlete while obtaining her BS in psychology and MSW degrees. She completed her DSW degree at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Granger's interests include disparities in access to health care and mental wellness services for underserved populations, cultural competence, and advocacy, holistic, and integrated service.



Kelly Harmon

Adjunct Professor | LCSW

Kelly Harmon is an LCSW licensed to practice in Mississippi. She earned her MSW degree from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2009 after receiving her BS in psychology and sociology from Tulane University in 2006. She has worked with adolescents and adults in long-term and short-term residential facilities, school settings, and primary care settings. Additionally, she has provided intensive-outpatient therapy in home settings. Harmon is a National Certified Trauma-Focused Therapist, a Certified Addictions Therapist (CAT), and a Certified Leader and Trainer of the Seven Challenges addiction program for adolescents. Harmon serves as an LCSW supervisor and loves helping social workers on their journey to becoming LCSWs.



Riley Herrin

ACCESS Grant Supervisor | MSW, LCSW

Riley Herrin earned her BA in criminal justice and MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. Herrin has worked with survivors of sexual abuse and various forms of child abuse since 2010. She currently serves as the Direct Service Coordinator at Kids Hub Child Advocacy Center where she oversees staff and day to day operations. Herrin is the lead forensic interviewer at her agency and provides supervision to other interviewers in the state of Mississippi. She is a national and state forensic interview trainer with Zero Abuse Project and Child Advocacy Centers of Mississippi. Outside of her role at Kids Hub CAC, Herrin serves as the social work supervisor on the ACCESS Grant for the School of Psychology. Recently, she began contracting with a local private practice, providing mental health services during her free time.



Kimberly Hogan

Assistant Professor | Ph.D., LMSW, MA

Kimberly Hogan received her Ph.D. and MSW from Arizona State University. She is the co-founder and the current co-director of the USM Center for Human Trafficking Research and Training (CHRT). She is a member of the Mississippi Human Trafficking Council, and chairs their training subcommittee. Hogan's research focuses on the prevention, detection, identification, and treatment of domestic minor and adult human trafficking. She has worked closely with the U.S. Department of Justice, National Criminal Justice Training Center, AMBER Alert, New Orleans District Attorney's Office, Navajo Nation, Las Vegas Rape Crisis Center, City of Phoenix Starfish Place, Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution, Starfish Mentoring Programs, and the Phoenix and Las Vegas Metropolitan VICE Units.



Jenine Housewright

Adjunct Instructor & Program Director | LMSW

Jenine Housewright is a Petal, MS native. She received her MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2018. Housewright has been a Golden Eagle for more than 20 years, with the majority of that time in the School of Social Work. She has worked for several years in the working in the School of Social Work's Field Office, coordinating field placements for students and assisting field agencies and faculty. Now, Housewright serves as an adjunct instructor and the Program Director of the Forrest General Integrated Health grant with the School of Social Work.



Susan Hrostowski

Professor | Ph.D., LMSW, MA

Susan Hrostowski is a social justice advocate who has spent her career working to address policy issues related to race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Her research focuses on resilience in late life, LGBTQ+ issues, and public policy on HIV. Additionally, Hrostowski is an Episcopal priest and serves on the Diocese of Mississippi Commission on Ministry with LGBTQ+ People. Her interests include aging, HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ+ issues, resilience, social justice, social welfare policy, and theology.



Tamara Hurst

Associate Professor | Ph.D., LCSW

Tamara Hurst has extensive experience as a forensic social worker and forensic interviewer. She currently serves on the Mississippi Human Trafficking Council and chairs its Strategic Planning and Trafficking Protocol committee. She is the principal investigator for the federally funded SOAR to Health and Wellness Demonstration Program, which works to develop human trafficking response protocols and a continuum of care in nine southeastern Mississippi counties. She also co-chairs USM's Center for Human Trafficking Research and Training. Her interests include human trafficking response systems, child maltreatment prevention, and identification of child maltreatment and exploitation.



Amy Jackson

Adjunct Instructor | LCSW, MSW

Amy Jackson has over 10 years of experience in the social work field across various settings (schools, mental health, children and families, and medical). Jackson has clinical experience providing individual and family therapy, as well as trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy. Jackson attained her Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work degrees from the University of Southern Mississippi. Jackson currently works as a Medical Social Worker at a local hospital, serves as a member of the Sexual Assault Response Team (S.A.R.T.) for the Pine Belt, an Adjunct Instructor for the School of Social Work, as well as a Field Instructor.



Tegi Jenkins-Rimmer

Adjunct Instructor | LMSW

Tegi Jenkins-Rimmer is a native of Jackson, MS. She is a two-time graduate from the University of Southern Mississippi School of Social Work. She has worked at the University of Southern Mississippi for over four years and serves as an advocate for historically underserved communities. She is passionate about diversity, equity, inclusion, and student development. She currently serves as the Co-Chair for the Strategizing Toward Racial Inclusion Diversity and Equity (S.T.R.I.D.E.) Committee. Her interests include cultural competence, equity for oppressed and underserved populations, social justice, and human rights.



Valerie Joiner

Adjunct Instructor | DSW, LCSW

Valerie Joiner received her undergraduate degree from the University of Southern Mississippi. She obtained both her MSW and DSW degrees from Tulane University in New Orleans. Joiner has over 19 years of experience working with individuals in the areas of trauma, mental health, substance use, and medical social work. Joiner is a medical social worker at the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System. She is the owner of Magnolia Bloom Counseling, LLC in Biloxi, MS, and also serves as Vice-Chair of the MS Board of Examiners for Social Work and Marriage and Family Therapists. She has published peer-reviewed research related to trauma therapy for adolescents and has conducted program evaluations for non-profit agencies.



Jerome Kolbo

Director & Professor | Ph.D., ACSW

Jerome Kolbo is the Director of the School of Social Work. He came to USM in 1997 after working five years at WVU. Dr. Kolbo is the PI of the Title IV-E Education and Training Project for the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. Along with representatives from the state's seven other public Institutions of Higher Education, Dr. Kolbo leads the Mississippi Academic Partnerships (MAP) for MDCPS. This is one of several innovative Workforce Development Initiatives intended to serve the most vulnerable and at-risk populations within our state.



Rachel Lahasky

BSW Coordinator & Instructor | LCSW, MSW

Rachel Lahasky is from New Orleans, Louisiana. She obtained her undergraduate degree and MSW from Louisiana State University. Lahasky has a professional background in school-based social work. She worked as a school-based therapist in both Louisiana and Delaware and served students diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disorders. Additionally, she has a medical social work background and worked in the medical social services department at Forrest General Hospital in Hattiesburg, MS. She has been a part of the School of Social Work since 2014. Her interests include adolescents, grief and bereavement, medical social work, and animal assisted therapy.



Joohee Lee

Professor | Ph.D., MSW

Joohee Lee was born and raised in South Korea and moved to the U.S. in 1998. She earned her MSW from the University of South Carolina and obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. She joined the USM faculty in 2006. The areas of her research include geriatric workforce enhancement and mental and behavioral health among diverse populations, including older adults who are vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness, people with chronic health conditions, people exposed to traumatic events, children, and racial/ethnic minorities. Her studies have focused on the roles of psychological and community resilience and social support on mental and behavioral health among these populations. She has produced numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and conference presentations related to these areas. She has served as a faculty advisor for many students for their research and presentations at various conferences.



Toni Lewis

Adjunct Instructor | MSW

Toni Lewis is a native of Jackson, Mississippi. She received her Bachelor of Social Work from Jackson State University and her Master of Social Work from the University of Alabama. Lewis has worked in child welfare, child mental health, hospice, medical social social work, and crisis management. She is passionate about strengthening and preserving families and communities. Her interests include child welfare, family and children, mental health, and trauma.



Kara Lowe

Simulation Space Project Manager | MSW

Kara Lowe is the Project Manager for USM's Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) Simulation Spaces. This project is funded under a statewide child advocacy grant which was disbursed to universities across Mississippi to enhance student and community knowledge in the area of child maltreatment. Lowe obtained her bachelor's in public relations from both Jones College and USM in 2021, and her master's in social work from USM in 2023. Lowe gained experience working with children and families when providing therapeutic services through the ACCESS grant. She has worked at a local Child Advocacy Center, learning statewide protocols and policies in the area of child maltreatment. Today, Lowe uses the skills she has gained in the past six years of her educational development to provide knowledge to students through research-based child advocacy simulations.



Shaquita Mallett

Adjunct Instructor | LCSW

Shaquita Mallett received her BSW and MSW from Jackson State University. She has a certificate in Crisis Informed Care from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology and a certificate in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health from Georgetown University. Her social work career began as a case manager for a social service agency providing emergency food, clothing, financial assistance, household items and other essentials to families in need. She was also a case manager for an Intermediate Care Facility for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She later joined the Canopy Children's Solutions Team. She currently serves as the Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Support Services with the Department of Child Protection Services. Her clinical experience includes providing individual, family and group psychotherapy, case management, wrap around, crisis intervention and clinical supervision.



Elizabeth McDowell

Program Director | LMSW

Elizabeth McDowell is a certified Wraparound local coach and trainer through the National Wraparound Implementation Center (NWIC). She currently works as the Mississippi Wraparound Institute Program Director and has been in this position since 2013. McDowell earned her undergraduate degree in psychology and her MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. McDowell's professional experience includes working as a case manager and school-based clinician at Pine Belt Mental Healthcare Resources. She was also a Mississippi Youth Program's Around the Clock (MYPAC) therapist and MYPAC Supervisor at Canopy Children's Solutions (formerly Mississippi Children's Home Services).



Tanise McInnis

Adjunct Instructor | DSW, LCSW, Ed.S., BC-TMH

Tanise McInnis is from Ocean Springs, MS. She earned her MSW and BSW from the University of Southern Mississippi, and her DSW from Simmons College. McInnis has experience working with different populations including family, children, and veterans. She has worked as a social services assistant for family and children, a school social worker, clinical mental health therapist, social work supervisor, contract nursing home coordinator, and a CEO/clinical director. She is the CEO of Present Empowering Minds Counseling and Consultant Services, LLC. She has worked in her community with Saturday Spectrum as a facilitator to the Caregiver Support Group. McInnis has several publications and has made numerous podcast appearances.



Erica Morgan

Assistant Teaching Professor | DSW, LCSW

Erica Morgan was born and raised in New Orleans, LA. She earned her MSW from Louisiana State University and has been an LCSW since 2000. She earned her DSW degree from Tulane University in 2021 after more than 25 years in the field. She has worked in traditional outpatient and residential settings in public mental health, private practice, private hospitals, non-profits, and telehealth. She served for 10 years as a board member and 2 years as Vice-President for the St. Tammany Outreach for the Prevention of Suicide (STOPS). She is currently Vice-President of Action Youth and Community Resources in southeast Louisiana for which she has served as grant writer and coordinator of the PEERS(R) program. She completed two studies during her doctoral program that set the foundation for future research in suicidology and adolescent and young adult mental health.



Catherine Poehling

Assistant Professor | DSW, MS, LCSW, CCTP-II

Catherine Poehling is a reproductive justice scholar and mental health clinician with over 20 years of experience working with diverse populations. She has extensive experience providing clinical services, supervision, and training. Her current research focuses on the uptake and satisfaction of telehealth and mail-based reproductive health services and maternal mental health. Her areas of interest include reproductive justice, health equity, social determinants of health (SDOH), clinical interventions and supervision.



Denise Brown-Rouse

Field Coordinator & Instructor | LCSW

Denise Brown-Rouse resides in Carriere, Mississippi. She holds an undergraduate degree and MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. After college, she was employed for over 17 years by the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Family and Children Services Division. During her tenure, she served as a child welfare caseworker, supervisor, USM Field Instructor and Training Director. Following CPS, she was a school social worker with the Pearl River Central School District (PRCSD). For 12 years at PRCSD, she served as the mental health provider, Special Education related-service provider, TIER behavior specialist, USM Field Instructor, and team leader for the Pearl River Central Middle School's Positive Behavior Intervention and Support Team. Her current interests are focused on social workers in library systems to ensure equal access to services, and on developing workforce initiatives for social work interns in Mississippi.



Stephanie Schindler

Adjunct Instructor | LCSW

Stephanie Schindler holds an undergraduate and master's degree in social work from the University of Southern Mississippi. Schindler has 21 years of experience in the field of social work including roles with the Department of Human Services, Department of Mental Health, community grant projects, and hospital settings. For the last 17 years, she has served at Memorial Health System in various roles. She holds the current position of Behavioral Health Core Faculty (BHCF) for the Graduate Medical Education program at Memorial Health System. As the BHCF, she is responsible for the administrative and educational activities within Family Medicine, developing and implementing the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education required wellness curriculum. She provides general training and counseling for the residents in the program.



Diana M. Smith

Instructor | LCSW

Diana Smith received her BSW and MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. She received her LCSW while at Edgewood Children's Center in St. Louis, MO. After obtaining her LCSW, Smith worked as a clinical therapist at a wilderness camp for adolescents in the juvenile justice system in Atlanta, GA. She has received specialized training in Moral Reconciliation Therapy and has the distinction of being a CBT Diplomate. She returned to Hattiesburg in 2005 and joined the staff at Pine Grove Behavioral Health and Addiction Services, where she spent the next 16 years working with multiple populations in both inpatient and outpatient settings. For the past seven years, she served as the Director of Inpatient Therapy Services at Pine Grove.



Rhonda Smith

Assistant Teaching Professor | DSW, LCSW

Rhonda Smith received her undergraduate degree in psychology and her MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. She earned her Doctorate in Social Work from the University of Tennessee – Knoxville. She has been working with individuals with mental illness for the past 17 years, first as a case manager at Pine Belt Mental Healthcare Resources and then at Westway Behavioral Health as a clinician in the in-patient facility. After receiving her LCSW, she transitioned into private psychotherapy practice at South Central Behavioral Health in Laurel, MS. Her doctoral research focused on Mississippi's Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) effectiveness on continued mental health care, and the systems involved in providing treatment to individuals with severe mental illness.

Patricia Southerland

*Center for Human Trafficking Research and Training,
SOARing Grant | Ph.D.*

Patricia Southerland completed her doctorate degree in criminal justice at USM. Her research interests include law enforcement training, human trafficking, victimization, policy evaluation, and correlates of domestic/urban gun violence. She is a state certified law enforcement officer and has worked as a practitioner within multiple areas of the criminal justice system over the past decade. She has obtained professional experience in special areas such as human trafficking operations/investigations, policing, courts, and community corrections. She currently serves as the Director of Operations, Law Enforcement TTA Specialist for the SOAR Demonstration Program under the School of Social Work - Center for Human Trafficking Research and Training. Her interests include law enforcement training, human trafficking, gun violence, the intersection between public health and public safety, and policy evaluation.

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Anita Tart

Administrative Specialist

A native of Hattiesburg, MS, Anita Tart obtained her Bachelors in Science degree in business management from William Carey University. Tart has been serving in the behavioral health field for ten years and has worked at both Southeast Mississippi Rural Health Initiative and Canopy Children's Solutions. Throughout her academic and professional careers, Tart has been recognized for her leadership capabilities and dedicated service to those in her community. She is looking forward to getting to know and assisting the faculty, staff, and students within the School of Social Work!



Kimberly Wheaton

Adjunct Professor | LCSW

Kimberly Wheaton–Middleton is a native of Jackson, MS. She earned a Master of Science in Leadership from Belhaven University and an MSW from Jackson State University. She currently serves as the Deputy Commissioner of Child Wellbeing and Permanency at the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. Wheaton has numerous professional accomplishments that include being instrumental in implementing the MS Family Centered Practice Model. She strives to always lead from a position of integrity, compassion, and service. Wheaton is committed to enhancing her own competence, as well we investing in the next generation of competent social workers.



Casey Williams

Adjunct Instructor | MSW

Casey Williams is from Nettleton, Mississippi and currently lives in Petal, MS. He earned his BSW and MSW from the University of Mississippi. He has worked in the field of Child Welfare for the past 13 years. He currently serves as the Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Wellbeing and Permanency with the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. His current role provides oversight to Foster Care and Adoption within the MS Child Welfare system. He previously served as an Instructor with the University of Mississippi School of Social Work for three years. He received certification and extensive training as a Trust Based Relational Intervention practitioner. His interests include child welfare, trauma, leadership in large systems, and higher education.



Courtney Williams

Program Director | MSW

Courtney Williams received her BSW and MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi and has over 20 years' experience in Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services. Williams leads the state of Mississippi as the first and only Program Director for the Mississippi Person Centered Practices Institute. Her passion lies in coaching direct care providers on how to support people with disabilities, creating plans of care, and consulting agencies on establishing foundations of support at all levels of the organization. Williams is a Nationally Certified Person Centered Thinking Trainer, Mentor, and Plan Facilitator with The Learning Community, and is an Ambassador for Charting the LifeCourse with Nexus National Network.



Ashley Woodard

Adjunct Professor | LCSW-BACS

Ashley Woodard is a board-approved clinical supervisor with over 12 years of post-master's social work practice experience. She earned her BSW from Southeastern Louisiana University and entered an Advanced Standing MSW Program at Louisiana State University. She is a member of the NASW, CSWE, and is involved in groups for Field Coordinators of Social Work Programs. She is currently an instructor and the Field Coordinator for the Social Work Program at Southeastern Louisiana University, as well as the Chair of the Social Work Program's Community Advisory Board. Additionally, she is an adjunct instructor for the Health Systems Management Program at Southeastern Louisiana University.



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