



# Scholars, Educators, Leaders

**PhD in Social Work  
Upcoming Graduates  
2023-2024**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**TENNESSEE**  
KNOXVILLE

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK



Fall 2023

Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to introduce you to the upcoming graduates of the PhD Program at the University of Tennessee College of Social Work.

Our students are trained in rigorous research methods and innovative pedagogy. They are eager and ready to serve as the newest scholars, educators, and emerging leaders in our profession.

At the University of Tennessee, we are proud of our scholarship grounded in community needs, with an eye to intersectional oppression, social impact and social change. Our students' research interests reflect these values and—as their biographies and curriculum vitae attest—include a deep commitment to improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable groups in society.

It would be my pleasure to connect you with any of our upcoming graduates or to provide you with additional information.

Please contact me at (865) 974-3802 or [geely@utk.edu](mailto:geely@utk.edu).

With warm regards,

Gretchen E. Ely, PhD, MSW  
Professor, PhD Program Director



Bachelor of Social Work, Asbury University  
Master of Social Work, University of Tennessee

**Dissertation:**  
**Measuring Vulnerability in the Community of the Unhoused with Validity and Reliability—Equity in Measurement and Resource Allocation.**

**Research Interests:**

- The Community of the Unhoused and Housing Insecure - Equity in Resource Provision
- Social Responses to Environmental Change with an Emphasis on Health Equity and Wellbeing
- Clinical Strategies and Self-Compassion for Direct Practitioners
- Abolition and Reformatory Justice

*"To effect lasting social change, we must be willing, with consistency, to leave our offices and data sheets. To quote Audre Lorde, 'We cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools.' We are in need of new tools, and they will not be found behind the paywall or within the beautifully constructed brick-and-mortar – they are not here, but out there. Societal transformation will come from equitable collaboration with stakeholders and subject-matter experts within the communities we purport to serve."*

## AMANDA FACKLER

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Amanda Fackler is passionate about community-based participatory research and citizen science as a method for transformative social change. Her strong background combines doctoral training in social welfare theory, research theory, and policy with clinical practice in government medical settings and case management within the non-profit sector. She employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Fackler's dissertation focuses on the construct of vulnerability and how the assessment of vulnerability relates to the distribution of resources within the community of the unhoused and housing insecure. Her research is informed by critical race theory, intersectionality, social determinants of health, and feminist theory. Using a mixed-methods analysis, she seeks to understand the bias of current assessment tools, the nature of limited resource allocation, and the experiences of service providers and service recipients. Second to her dissertation research, Fackler is particularly interested in how the changing climate affects marginalized and vulnerable populations with a focus on health equity, well-being, and advocacy.

Central to feminist pedagogy, Fackler focuses on decentralizing power, co-creating knowledge, and encouraging students to take ownership of their learning experience. She has taught at both the master's and bachelor's levels in both online and face-to-face environments. Incorporating her lived experience and research, Fackler is passionate about preparing future social workers to meet the demands of the profession while holding a high standard for their health and mental well-being.



Bachelor of Social Work, Huntington University  
Master of Social Work, The University of Southern  
Mississippi

#### **Dissertation:**

**Reconceptualizing Teacher Support: Predicting  
Teacher Wellbeing through Convergent Macro  
Economic Factors and Intra-Personal  
Characteristics**

#### **Research Interests:**

- Teacher Wellbeing in K-12 Education
- School Social Work
- Mental and Behavioral Health
- Social-Emotional Learning

*"A society grows great when old men [all people] plant  
trees in whose shade they shall never sit."*

– Greek Proverb

## **ANNA O'DELL**

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Anna O'Dell is passionate about social work and education, valuing a critical reflection, whole-person approach to research and teaching. While infusing humor into daily interactions, O'Dell strives to lead by example through ethical conduct pursuing personal and professional areas of growth.

Through previous clinical experience as a school-based therapist, O'Dell further developed a desire to support public school teachers utilizing an asset-based, wellbeing framework. She has worked as a research assistant on state funded projects about mental health access in schools and increasing capacity of mental health professionals in K-12 education. In her dissertation, O'Dell focuses on the impact of teacher wellbeing on their intention to leave the profession and how economic factors impact teacher turnover intention and wellbeing. O'Dell views research through a cooperative and integrated lens, and she believes that teamwork provides opportunities to create more sustainable change in the communities social workers serve.

In conjunction with supporting teachers, O'Dell also enjoys teaching, centering classroom learning around self-awareness, expanding perspectives, and real-world application through an equity-minded and dignity focused framework. She creates a community of collaboration and care within her classroom that invites students to be themselves and fully engage while learning about social work practice. O'Dell exemplifies the expectations required of her students through requesting and incorporating their frequent feedback. She has experience teaching independently at the MSW level online and in-person.

O'Dell prioritizes thoughtful engagement, empowerment, and empathy in service within social work academia and clinical practice. She has served, represented, and advocated for PhD students in multiple roles while maintaining membership within two social work practice organizations. O'Dell is committed to investing in students, the community, and the profession.



Bachelor of Arts in Psychology; Minor in Social Work, Auburn University  
Master's in Social Work, Tulane University

**Dissertation:**  
**Examining Readiness for End-of-Life Care Discussions, Perceived Level of Spiritual Support and Implementation of Faith-Based Health Programs in Predominantly Black Christian Churches**

**Research Interests:**

- Health care disparities and access
- End-of-life care
- Minority healthcare
- Aging and Gerontology

*"As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence."*

## CHESNEY WARD

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Chesney Ward is an aging and gerontology scholar with a passion for aging research in African American, minority, and rural communities. She has eight years of post-MSW experience working in hospice and healthcare settings. Ward holds a clinical license in the state of Tennessee.

Ward's dissertation focuses on end-of-life planning in Black and African American communities from a faith-based perspective. Using a mixed-methods analysis, she will explore the perspectives of pastoral support and faith on formal end-of-life planning and the completion of advance directives. Ward has graduate level teaching experience in the DSW and MSW programs. As an invited guest lecturer, she has frequently shared her expertise on hospice and health disparities both within and outside of UTK. She is also a mentor for the Coalition of Black Social Workers. She strives to provide both theoretical and practical experience in the classroom to prepare students for working with vulnerable populations.

Ward was one of the UTK recipients of the Southeastern Conference (SEC) Emerging Scholars Award for the 2023-2024 academic year. In summer 2023, she completed the Intensive Mentoring Workshop for Advanced Doctoral Students program, which was hosted by the University of Michigan Center for Urban African American Research and the Program for Research on Black Americans.

Ward was accepted into the fall 2023 interdisciplinary national cohort for the Visiting Future Faculty Program (VITAL) at the University at Buffalo. She is dedicated to service and maintaining connections with the community. She has served as a mentor for the Coalition of Black Social Workers and is a member of the NASW TN chapter's Leadership Team which ensures that topics and CE opportunities relevant to practice and scholarship are offered to Tennessee's social workers.



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