

Pitt School of Social Work PhD Candidates on the Job Market

Fall 2025



University of
Pittsburgh®

School of Social Work

A Message from the Doctoral Program Director Sara Goodkind



Dear colleagues,

As University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work PhD Program Director, I am proud to introduce our Fall 2025 PhD 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. We develop scholars who conduct critical, rigorous, and boundary-pushing research that is grounded in community and lived experience, challenges oppressive systems, advances just policies and practice, and contributes to collective well-being. Our faculty and students develop collaborative partnerships to understand, prevent, and ameliorate complex social problems, as well as to promote thriving individuals, families, and communities. 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 five 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 PhD program.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sara Goodkind".

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



Sommer Blair

Email: sommer.blair@pitt.edu

Webpage for Sommer Blair



Research Interests:

- White racial socialization and critical consciousness
- Community-based interventions and participatory design
- Whiteness and institutional accountability
- Parenting and family-based racial equity work
- Inclusive pedagogy in social work education

Dissertation Title: *The Parenting for Racial Equity Project (PREP): The Creation, Motivation, and Implementation of a White Racial Socialization Intervention*

Dissertation Committee:

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

Suzanne Pritzker, PhD
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and
Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

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

Scott Seider, Ed.D
Professor, Boston College
School of Education and Human Development

Sommer C. Blair, MSW, LISW-CP, is a community-engaged scholar, clinical social worker, and racial justice practitioner whose work explores how White families understand and interrupt systemic racism through parenting, education, and institutional transformation. Her research aims to bridge theory and application in producing translational tools that support anti-racist practice in homes, schools, and other care systems. Her scholarship draws from critical consciousness theory, racial socialization, and community-based participatory methods, with multiple first-author publications on whiteness and inclusive pedagogy in social work.

Notably, Sommer is the founder and principal investigator of the Parenting for Racial Equity Project (PREP), a first-of-its-kind, grant-awarded community-based intervention designed to support White caregivers raising critically conscious children. Her dissertation study centers on PREP's development, implementation, and impact, with plans to expand the intervention for social work professionals and equity-focused organizations. Her work has been featured on NPR and adapted by institutions seeking meaningful tools for family engagement and identity development.

Sommer's teaching is grounded in transparency, trauma-informed pedagogy, and real-time reflection. She has taught across the BSW and MSW curriculum, with current responsibilities as lead instructor for a clinical MSW course on group and family work. Her classroom practice is deeply informed by her background in child welfare, clinical therapy, and foster care, and sustained engagement with community partners and clients.

Amanda Cruce

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Webpage [for Amanda Cruce](#)



Research Interests:

- Well-being & Flourishing
- Social Welfare Policy
- Human Centered Design
- Implementation Science
- Consumer Engagement in Child Welfare Evaluation and Reform
- Experiences in Foster Care for Marginalized Populations
- Community-Based Participatory Research

Dissertation Title: *Beyond Safety and Permanency: Assessing Flourishing for Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care*

Dissertation Committee:

Chair: Betsy Farmer, PhD
Dean, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

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

Mary Elizabeth Rautkis, PhD
Research Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Robert Coulter, PhD
Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh
Behavioral and Community Health Sciences and Pediatrics, and Clinical & Translational Science

Amanda Cruce, MSW, LCSW, draws on over two decades of clinical practice and lived experience as a foster parent to inform her research, which centers on elevating the voices of those directly impacted by child welfare systems. A major motivation for returning to academia was the need to more fully include service consumers in research, evaluation, and advocacy to drive meaningful change.

Amanda's dissertation work extends current conceptualizations of well-being among those with multiple systems involvement to examine how flourishing can be conceptualized and measured, particularly those with marginalized identities, including sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth. She has extensive experience conducting both qualitative and quantitative policy- and evaluation-oriented research.

Before her doctoral studies, Amanda worked extensively in child welfare reform and advocacy. She focused on LGBTQ+ inclusion, normalcy standards, and increasing the engagement of foster, birth, and kin caregivers. She has worked at the local, state, and national levels, including participation in the White House Convening on Developmentally Appropriate Services for Children, Youth, and Young Adults in Foster Care.

Committed to equity, accountability, and systems change, Amanda's academic work bridges community engaged research, interdisciplinary scholarship, and transformative teaching. Her work has been published in leading journals including *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* and *Research on Social Work Practice*. She is also an experienced educator and active clinician. She integrates all these experiences to ground her scholarship and teaching in the real-world implications of policy and practice across micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Cecily D. Davis

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Webpage for Cecily D. Davis



Research Interests:

- Racial Socialization in family and professional contexts
- African American family dynamics
- School Social Work/Social Work Services
- Research-to-practice/Community-engaged scholarship
- Mixed Methods Design

Dissertation Title: *Predicting Preparation for Bias Usage and Outcomes in Black Families: The Role of Caregivers' Experiences and Racial Identity on Equipping Adolescents to Address Racial Discrimination*

Dissertation Committee:

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

Sara Goodkind, PhD
Professor and Doctoral Program Director,
School of Social Work

Lori Delale-O'Connor, PhD
Associate Professor at the University of
Pittsburgh Center for Urban Education and
Associate Chair of the Department of
Educational Foundations, Organizations, and
Policy, School of Education

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

Cecily D. Davis, BSW, MSW is a research-to-practice scholar focused on engaging in supporting positive racial identity development and antiracist practices through scientific inquiry, teaching, service, community-engaged research, and collaboration. Cecily is working to advance the field of racial socialization studies in terms of (1) understanding the most essential components of how Black parents effectively socialize their children around issues of racial bias; and (2) how we can develop and implement practice interventions that translate new knowledge into optimal Black youth development.

Cecily has extensive micro, mezzo and macro social work practice working with and on behalf of Black communities, families, and children. With 16 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 initiatives. Through these efforts, Cecily has established a strong repertoire of expertise in the areas of intervention development, grant management, organizational leadership, community engagement, and a range of empirical methodologies.

Cecily's research and professional experience working with Black communities will inform future work., and from that vantage point Beloved has examined how social work education can redress its own deeply entrenched racialized structures across classroom and field learning contexts. Cecily is committed to building anti-racist praxis with social work students as they engage in eradicating racism in ways that utilize our profession's common core of theories, skills, and code of ethics.

Tess Schleitwiler

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Webpage for Tess Schleitwiler



Research Interests:

- Social Welfare History
- Surveillance & Regulation of Adolescent Sexuality
- Gendered Juvenile Justice Involvement
- Feminist Praxis
- Intersection of Public Policy & Social Work Interventions
- Interdisciplinary Scholarship

Dissertation Title: *Traditional Family Values? Social Workers' Positionality and Sexual Morality Discourse in the Progressive Era*

Dissertation Committee:

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

Leah Jacobs, PhD
Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

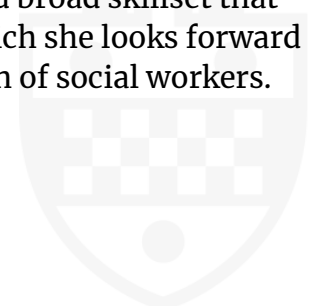
Jeffrey Shook, PhD
Professor, University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Mari Webel, PhD
Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh
Department of History

Tess Schleitwiler, MSW, PhD Candidate is a macro social work practitioner and interdisciplinary scholar. She is engaged in research exploring the intersections of public policy and social work practice.

Her dissertation research uses historical methods to understand and address contemporary social work challenges. Specifically, it investigates how public narratives and interventions put forth by early social workers have evolved and continue to influence both social work and society's views of female sexuality. In the process, this research seeks to address the academy's erasure of early social workers' sexuality, give new light to the role of social work discourse in curtailing sexuality, and demonstrate the centrality of positionality in historical social work scholarship. This work lays the foundation for future research examining the experiences of young women impacted by early social work interventions, as well as investigations into how contemporary social workers think about girls' sexuality, engage in micro and macro practice with young women, and conceptualize effective public policy.

Tess' research is inspired by her six years of practice experience in state government, electoral and community organizing, and healthcare policy research. Her diverse experiences in macro practice settings have cultivated a unique perspective and broad skillset that exemplify social work's range, which she looks forward to sharing with the next generation of social workers.



Emil Smith

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Webpage for Emil Smith



Research Interests:

- Integrated Primary Care
- Health Equity
- Eating Disorders and Disordered Eating
- Relational Crisis Intervention
- Intervention Development and Implementation Science
- Collaborative Methodologies and Co-Design
- Critical Theory

Dissertation Title: *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 N. Harrop, PhD
Assistant Professor, University of Denver
Graduate School of Social Work

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

Emil K. Smith, PhD, MSW, LCSW is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Clinical Research and Education. Informed by nearly a decade of post-MSW practice experience, Emil's research investigates how health systems can better care for marginalized populations experiencing stigmatized mental health concerns. Emil is currently developing an intervention prototype to support integrated primary care teams to prevent, identify, and manage eating disorders. Their broader scholarship also investigates social work's role in suicide intervention and reducing weight stigma. Their work has been published in leading journals such as *Social Science and Medicine* and *American Psychologist*.

Emil's qualitative dissertation, supported by an NIH TL1 predoctoral fellowship, was informed by their prior research with trans primary care patients with eating disorders. Through interviewing trans-affirming primary care providers from across the U.S., this study revealed how barriers, including limited eating disorder knowledge, scarce integrated supports, and few viable eating disorder treatment referral options, contributed to primary care providers' feelings of discomfort, isolation, and avoidance regarding eating disorders. Additionally, it examined primary care providers' roles in mitigating the adverse health impacts of the current sociopolitical climate.

Since 2018, Emil has taught students across clinical settings (e.g., addictions treatment, hospitals, primary care) and academic environments (undergraduate, graduate and fellowship programs). They are committed to advancing critical and inclusive social work pedagogy that cultivates social workers who are client-centered and driven to recognize and advocate against systemic injustice.



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