

# CHE CONNECTIONS

THE ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING & HIGHER EDUCATION

## CHAIR'S CORNER

Dear Alumni and Friends,

We are excited to share this second issue of CHE Connections, your link to the Department of Counseling and Higher Education. Over the past year, we've faced challenges but also celebrated many achievements. Our department enrollment remains strong, with a thriving cohort in our Clinical Mental Health track, as well as in the Higher Education and Community College (HECC) program—the online extension of College Student Affairs. We are also proud to have an increasingly global reach, with international students from Azerbaijan, Dominica, Ghana, and Turkmenistan enriching our community.

Our faculty's dedication is evident both inside and outside the classroom, earning recognition for their outstanding contributions in teaching, service, research, and mentorship. A highlight of the year was the Counseling program's designation as a Graduate Program of Excellence, a well-deserved recognition of the exceptional work of our faculty and students. As we move forward, I look forward to staying engaged with you—our valued alumni and friends. Your insights and experiences help us continue to grow and adapt to meet the needs of our students. Please stay connected, and know that your support is always appreciated!



Dr. Catherine Polydore,  
Department Chair

## DR. RICHARD ROBERTS RETIRES AFTER 27 YEARS



Dr. Richard (Rick)  
Roberts, Professor and  
former chair

After nearly three decades of dedicated service, Dr. Richard (Rick) Roberts is bidding farewell to the Department of Counseling and Higher Education. Dr. Roberts joined EIU as department chair in 1997 and served in this role until the summer of 2022. Under his steady leadership, CHE reached numerous milestones, including multiple name changes, program expansions, and the establishment of the multi-million-dollar Paul Ward Endowment—an incredible legacy that will continue to benefit students for years to come.

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## CHE FACULTY AND ALUMNI CONTINUES WORK ON SIX-FIGURE GRANT



Dr. Danessa Carter, a 2012 graduate and assistant professor in Clinical Mental Health Counseling

In Fall 2023, Dr. Danessa Carter (Clinical Mental Health Counseling) was awarded a two-year, \$223,280 grant from the Lumpkin Family Foundation to expand mental health outreach in rural Coles County. This initiative aims to educate the community about available mental health resources, teach coping skills, and reduce stigma surrounding mental health care.

As part of the project, graduate students deliver 45- to 60-minute presentations that include a pre- and post-test, a verbal presentation, and a free self-care bag for each participant. The results so far have been encouraging—data from the pre- and post-tests indicate a measurable increase in participants' knowledge and awareness of mental health resources and coping strategies.

This impactful initiative will continue through Summer 2025, making a lasting difference in the community while providing valuable hands-on experience for our graduate students. Congratulations to Dr. Carter on this outstanding achievement!

## GLORIA LEITSCHUH AWARD SEES FIRST RECIPIENTS



Payton Turk & Madeline Hemrich (SP25)

The Gloria Leitschuh Counseling Award supports students in the Clinical Counseling program. Established in the Spring of 2023, by Dr. Gloria Leitschuh, a former faculty in CHE for 26 years, 1994 to 2020. She taught Clinical Counseling courses including Basic skills, Diagnostics, Cross cultural counseling, and Practicum. She supervised Interns and served as the coordinator of Practicum and Internship. The Gloria Leitschuh Counseling Award provides support to clinical mental health counseling students for internship, tuition, and/or professional development. Payton Turk and Madeline Hemrich (SP25), were the first recipients.

## ROBERTS RETIRES CONT'D

Reflecting on his time at EIU, Dr. Roberts shared, "I am fortunate to have worked with such talented faculty, students, and staff." His impact on our department and the broader EIU community is immeasurable, and his presence will be deeply missed. Dr. Roberts' last day will be June 30, 2025. Please join us in expressing our deepest gratitude for his years of service and in wishing him all the best in this next chapter! Thank you, Dr. Roberts!





# STUDENT & FACULTY ACHIEVEMENT

## DIVERSIFYING HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY IN ILLINOIS (DFI) FELLOWS SCHOLARS



Four CHE students were recipients of the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois (DFI) Fellowship. An Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) initiative, the DFI serves to increase the number of traditionally under-represented full-time faculty and staff at universities and colleges through providing financial assistance to well deserving graduate and doctoral students. Each recipient was awarded an amount between \$16,000 - \$17,500 for the academic year.

*Photos - Top left to bottom right: Luis Paniagua (CSA), Samaria Rosenthal (SC), Josiah Moodie(SC), Brianna Townsend(CMHC)*

## COUNSELING STUDENTS SECURE HAMAND AWARD



Tyler Davis, Clinical, SP 24    Rebekah Magee, School, SP24

Inductees were selected from the 2024 Class of Distinguished Graduate Students and embody the highest ideals of engaged graduate study. Since Mrs. Hamand's passing in 2011, daughters Drs. Carol Stephens and Wendy Venet have continued their family's legacy of supporting graduate education at EIU.

Tyler Davis (clinical counseling) and Rebekah Magee (school counseling) secured the prestigious Hamand Scholar Awards in the spring 2024 semester. Established in 2010 by Martha Hamand in memory of her husband, EIU's first Graduate School dean, the Hamand Society of Graduate Scholars honors graduate students who exemplify excellence in scholarship and service. Inductees were selected from the 2024 Class of Distinguished Graduate Students and embody the highest

## BEHIND EVERY GREAT STUDENT IS AN AMAZING MENTOR....



Angela Yoder, Ph.D.  
Professor



Heidi Larson, Ph.D.  
Professor



Danessa Carter, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor

Dr Carter and Dr Larson were the recipients of EIUs Achievement and Contribution Award (ACA) in service and teaching, respectively. Dr. Yoder and Dr. Larson received the EIU Student Impact Grant for Faculty Mentors. This supports faculty who actively engage students in

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## PLAY THERAPY CONFERENCE

The Department of Counseling and Higher Education, held its fourth annual Play Therapy Conference on Friday, November 8, 2024. Internationally recognized expert Eliana Gil, Ph.D., RPT-S, ATR delivered an engaging presentation on the therapeutic power of play and its transformative use with children and teens impacted by trauma. The conference brought together a community of over 150 current students, alumni, and clinicians, making it a tremendous success. Dr. Gil, a renowned authority in trauma recovery, is the senior partner of the Gil Institute for Trauma Recovery and Education in Fairfax, Virginia. Her insights and expertise continue to inspire and empower professionals dedicated to supporting people through play therapy. For more information on Gil Institute for Trauma Recovery and Education please visit: <https://www.gilinstitute.com/>





# ALUMNI THROUGHOUT THE YEARS



Debbi Smith,  
Guidance and Counseling, 1988

Debbi Smith, a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, earned both her Bachelor of Science in Sociology (1985) and Master of Science in Education (1988) from Eastern Illinois University. With a deep commitment to children's mental health, Debbi began her career in a psychiatric hospital, where she specialized in treatment protocols for children with Reactive Attachment Disorder. Notably, she established the facility's first Play Therapy program, laying the foundation for more developmentally responsive care.

Her career continued with the development and direction of a group home serving pre-adolescent youth in the DCFS system. She then became Clinical Director at Centerpoint Behavioral Health Center in Champaign, where she expanded outpatient and crisis services for children and adolescents. In partnership with DCFS, she led initiatives such as Intensive Therapeutic Services (ITS) and Screening, Assessment, and Support Services (SASS).

Debbi concluded her distinguished 37-year career in mental health as the Executive Director of the Community and Residential Services Authority (CRSA). In this statewide leadership role, she coordinated efforts to serve children with the most severe mental health needs. Her work included close collaboration with legislators, state agencies, and the Governor's office, culminating in her co-authorship of the landmark Children's Mental Health Act. Throughout her career, Debbi has been a tireless advocate for children and families. Her visionary leadership and unwavering dedication have left a lasting impact on systems of care and on the countless lives she has touched.



Kasey Evans, CSA, 2015

Hendrix College has named Kasey Evans its new Vice President for Enrollment following an extensive nationwide search. Evans will join the Hendrix staff in March. Originally from Tennessee, Evans currently serves as Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions at Illinois Wesleyan University. She brings with her more than a decade of experience working in higher education. A first-generation college graduate, Evans holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English-Writing from Illinois Wesleyan University. She later earned a Master of Science degree in College Student Affairs from Eastern Illinois University. Her career experience includes roles of progressive leadership responsibility at Eastern Illinois University and Illinois Wesleyan University in college admissions and other capacities.

**Want to be in our next issue?**  
**Contact us at [che@eiu.edu](mailto:che@eiu.edu)**

# ALUMNI THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

## CHE ALUMNI RECEIVES COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ALUMNI REWARDS



From left: Debbi Smith (Counseling, 1988), Emmanuel Ayiku (CSA, 2020), Dr. Catherine Polydore (Department Chair), Jennifer Waller (Counseling, 1995) and Sierra Hollenbeck (CSA, 2020).



Dr. Chuck Eberly Wallace pictured with Dr. Catherine Polydore (Department Chair) to the right and Jennifer Waller to the left.

Four CHE alumni received awards at the College of Education Alumni Awards in the fall. Emmanuel Ayiku and Sierra Hollenbeck received the Rising Star Award. These awards are given to alumni within 10 years of their graduation who are making a significant contribution in their field or career. Debbi Smith and Jennifer Waller received the Lifetime Achievement Award, given to alumni who are living role models in their disciplines and have attained distinguished professional success and prominence.

## COLLEGE OF EDUCATION THESIS OF EXCELLENCE



Jacob Mueller  
CSA, SP 24

Jacob Muller (SP24) received the EIU College of Education Master's Thesis of Excellence Awards for the 2023-2024, respectively. Muller's thesis focused on understanding how academic faculty perceive student-athletes at a midsized Midwestern Division-I university. This qualitative study explored the factors that shape these perceptions, including faculty members' exposure to student-athletes outside the classroom, their awareness of the demands placed on student-athletes, and the visibility of student-athletes on campus. The findings showed that faculty tend to have more positive perceptions when they better understand the challenges student-athletes face and when they interact with them in academic settings. Interestingly, the study also found that female student-athletes and those on smaller, non-

revenue-generating teams were often viewed more positively than their male or high-profile team counterparts. This research highlights the importance of communication and collaboration between faculty and student-athletes to promote academic support and mutual understanding.



# THE YEAR IN SNIPPETS

## MS IN CLINICAL COUNSELING NAMED A GRADUATE PROGRAM OF EXCELLENCE!



We're excited to share that our MS in Clinical Counseling program has been recognized as an EIU Graduate Program of Excellence—an honor reflecting our academic rigor, student success, and commitment to wellness and diversity. Over the previous four years, our students have excelled through research, conferences, and community engagement, while faculty continue to lead with innovation and impact.

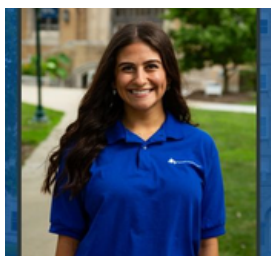
The program supports flexible learning for diverse students, promotes mental health and peer connection, and remains dedicated to preparing ethical, effective counselors. With \$7,500 in Excellence Funds, we'll enhance student development through increased GA support, guest speakers, and research opportunities. Thank you, alumni, for being part of our journey. Your continued support and involvement inspire the next generation of counselors!

## FACULTY MENTORING CONT'D

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high-impact practices. These practices include collaborative research projects with student co-authors, public presentations of research or creative works, partnerships with local schools or community organizations, and initiatives that bring external recognition to EIU. Designed to foster meaningful mentorship and visibility, this grant empowers faculty to create opportunities that elevate student learning and engagement beyond the classroom.

## STUDENT EXCELLENCE



Sloane Sivek was a recipient of the Graduate Student Advisory Council (GSAC) Scholarship.

Sloane Sivek, Clinical, SP24



Alex Warrick, CSA



Alissa Sutton, CSA

Alex and Alissa's dedication to volunteerism and community engagement won them the Lella Cox Schaaf College Student Affairs Fund Award.



Alex Warrick & Megan Morecraft, CSA

Alex and Megan received the Graduate Assistant of the Year Award for 2024 from the Division of Student Affairs!



Jake Denney-Carlisle, SC

Jake demonstrated excellence in securing the Toni R. Tollerud School Counseling grant. The grant supports a school counseling project based in Illinois, with the expectation that its results will be submitted for publication in a relevant professional journal and/or proposed for presentation at a professional counseling conference—locally, statewide, regionally, or nationally.

# THE YEAR IN SNIPPETS

## CSA FACULTY PRESENT AT INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM IN BEIJING

October 2024 was a great month for two CSA faculty members. Dr. Dianne Timm and Dr. Jon Coleman were invited by the University of Science and Technology in Beijing, China, to speak at the 2024 International Symposium on Student Affairs. Dr. Timm discussed how student affairs professionals design and create meaningful educational environments for students using Strange and Banning's Four Frames, while Dr. Coleman spoke about the importance of closing the Assessment Loop of Student Affairs Programs & Services.

Visiting Beijing and meeting with faculty and the Vice President of Student Affairs at the University of Science and Technology was an incredible opportunity to exchange insights on common issues, programming priorities, and challenges facing students today—both domestically and internationally.

In addition to Dr. Timm and Dr. Coleman, one of our alumnae,  
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Dr. Patty Martinez





# MEET THE 2024 ALUMNI

## CHE'S NEWEST ALUMNI

### School Counseling

Brown Kitty  
Cater Alicia  
Ceader Tory  
Cozzolino Renee  
Jansen Abby  
Hendricks Samenna 'Menna'  
Homeyer Ethan  
Horton Grace  
Hyatt Josey  
Kollross Molly  
Lee Min  
Licon Hannah  
Loera Dani  
Magee Rebekah  
Tansy Matthew  
Wright Delani

### Clinical Mental Health Counseling

Arnold Dydra  
Brewer Amanda  
Cunningham Chelsy  
Davis Tyler  
Hayes Norriana  
Karimu Lois  
King Gabe  
McKee Camryn  
Sivek Sloane  
Tawiah-Sarpong Boatemaa  
Thomas Chavionne  
Wellbaum Hannah  
Xu Jessica-Yang  
Langley Kelsey

### College Student Affairs

Figueroa Chas  
Weaver Lillian "Lilly"  
Durbin Amanda  
Tserenova Alexandra  
Comer Taylor  
Toulon Attainea

## FACULTY PRESENT IN CHINA CONT'D

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Patricia Martinez, who currently serves as the Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs and Director of Division Operations at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, also attended and spoke on divisional assessment efforts. Additional U.S. presenters represented the University of Tulsa and the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Throughout the symposium, important discussions took place during breaks and meals, focusing on the mental health concerns of students, as well as cultural appreciation and values. No matter where we work in higher education, we all share the goal of improving the educational experiences of college students.



Dr Dianne Timm & Dr. Jon Coleman

# GIVE BACK



CHE strives to support students and meet them where they are. This means keeping up to date on the latest technology in the field, helping them forge those professional relationships, and sometimes this means helping them with financial emergencies that may arise. To do this, we rely on the kind donations from alumni like you.

To donate, please use the following link: <https://www.eiu.edu/giving.php>  
Remember to set the destination to "Counseling/College Student Affairs" and feel free to choose your cause by typing it in the "Special Instructions" box.