


**2023–2024  
PH.D. PROGRAM**

# Forthcoming Graduates



Fall 2023

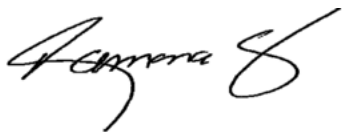
Dear Colleagues:

We are proud to introduce five outstanding soon-to-be Ph.D. social work graduates from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Stefani, Hayden, Alexandria, Sarah and Claire. They are game changers on every level, each prepared for independent scholarship, having received a wealth of research experiences with mentorship from our faculty.

As you review their CVs and get to know their work, you'll note their achievements in publishing, grantsmanship, training and teaching. Each is prepared to join your faculty and make immediate contributions, confronting the world's toughest challenges in the classroom and through scholarship, and service.

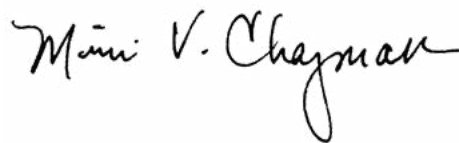
Please contact us if you have questions we can answer—and contact these graduates if you are looking for dynamic new faculty members for your team!

With best wishes,




**RAMONA DENBY-BRINSON**

Dean, UNC School of Social Work  
Wallace H. Kuralt, Sr. Distinguished  
Professor of Public Welfare Policy  
and Administration



**MIMI V. CHAPMAN**

Associate Dean for Doctoral Education  
Frank A. Daniels Distinguished Professor  
for Human Service Policy Information





## Stefani Baca-Atlas, MSW

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### TO VIEW A CV, PLEASE VISIT:

[ssw.unc.edu/employees/stefani-baca-atlas/](https://ssw.unc.edu/employees/stefani-baca-atlas/)

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Structural Racism
- Health In-/Equity
- Violence and Exploitation
- Critical Theories
- Equity in Doctoral Education

Stefani N. Baca-Atlas is a doctoral candidate at the UNC School of Social Work. Her dissertation is tentatively titled “Exploring structural racism as a determinant of violence against women” (chair: Dr. Trenette Clark Goings). Baca-Atlas is an interprofessional researcher who uses critical social work and public health frameworks to examine political and ideological contributors to unjust and inequitable outcomes among minoritized populations. She has co-authored several peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on topics related to sexual violence, trauma, substance use and HIV treatment, and determinants of health. Additionally, she has collaborated with colleagues at UNC and on the Communications Subcommittee of the Society of Social Work Research (SSWR) Doctoral Committee (2020–2022) to publish popular articles and present at refereed conferences on equity in doctoral education. Baca-Atlas provides training on intimate partner violence, human trafficking and trauma-informed care, and she is a Mental Health First Aid trainer. Baca-Atlas received an MSW with a dual concentration in clinical social work and community action and social policy from the University of Maryland Baltimore and a BA in psychology from Arizona State University.



## Hayden Dawes, MSW BM

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### TO VIEW A CV, PLEASE VISIT:

[ssw.unc.edu/employees/hayden-dawes/](http://ssw.unc.edu/employees/hayden-dawes/)

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

- LGBTQIA+ Mental Health
- BIPOC Mental Health
- Substance Use Disorders
- Mental Health and Behavioral Health Systems Research

Hayden Dawes (he/him) is a doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His work promotes the mental health and social well-being of LGBTQ+ People of Color by improving mental health services, systems, and policies. Hayden's dissertation is a mixed-methods online intervention study that centers around understanding self-permission and using #RadicalPermission to empower LGBTQ+ individuals of color. Hayden's scholarly work is informed by his more than eight years of experience as a clinical social worker within multiple sectors, including community mental health/substance abuse, veterans' health, and private practice. He teaches practice and research courses and regularly provides professional development lectures on mental health equity for LGBTQ+ People of Color and the foundational skills of cultural humility. In 2020, Hayden became a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Health Policy Research Scholar, a competitive, prestigious nationwide fellowship to support and develop the next generation of scholars committed to health equity. Hayden currently serves on the executive council of the American Academy of Psychotherapists and has previously been a board member of the North Carolina Society for Clinical Social Work.



## RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Food Insecurity
- Mental Health
- BIPOC Communities
- Youth
- Nutrition Policy

## Alexandria Forte, MSW

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Alexandria Forte, MSW, is a doctoral candidate at UNC School of Social Work. Alex is a member of the prestigious Royster Society of Fellows at The Graduate School at UNC. Her research focuses on the impact of food insecurity on the health and well-being of marginalized groups including BIPOC families, and youth. Since 2021 she has worked as a research assistant with Dr. Iheoma Iruka, Director of Equity Research Action Coalition (ERAC), as project manager for the Forty Acres and a Mule (FA3M) study. FA3M is based in the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at Carolina. The project focuses on the cultural wealth and resilience of Black families. That team is evaluating the effectiveness of a national parent education program addressing race-based trauma and positive racial identity formation. Alex has also worked as a graduate research assistant with Drs. Lisa Zerden and Brianna Lombardi on healthcare workforce research efforts demonstrating the importance of social work in healthcare and on the health outcomes of patients. Alexandria has had extensive experience on teams using qualitative and quantitative methods.

After completing her MSW, Alexandria developed a community-based program for minoritized youth interested in joining the health care workforce. While case-managing students and their families, their own health disparities were striking, specifically, the access to healthy food. This work has fueled her research interest in understanding the experience of food insecurity and its impacts on the overall physical and mental health of minoritized youth.



## Sarah Godoy, MSW

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### TO VIEW A CV, PLEASE VISIT:

[ssw.unc.edu/employees/sarah-godoy/](https://ssw.unc.edu/employees/sarah-godoy/)

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Commercial sexual exploitation
- Human trafficking
- Child and family well-being
- Gender-based violence
- Adolescent health

Sarah M. Godoy is a doctoral candidate and Royster Fellow in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on factors that contribute to the commercial sexual exploitation of preadolescents, adolescents, and adults and their intersections with child welfare, legal, and healthcare systems as well as technology. Her experience on multiple research teams has led to a broad research portfolio that includes gender-based violence among gender diverse populations; medical mistrust among Black women living with HIV; impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on essential workers of color; treatment experiences among people with eating disorders, including African Americans with type-2 diabetes; and dismantling inequities for minoritized groups in academia. She is passionate about using participatory research strategies to engage communities with lived experience and service providers. Her aim is to center their voices and perspectives in research.



## Claire McNellan, MPH

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[ssw.unc.edu/employees/claire-r-mcnellan/](https://ssw.unc.edu/employees/claire-r-mcnellan/)

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Child- and family-serving systems
- State responses to child maltreatment
- Maternal/child health disparities
- Public health surveillance

Claire R. McNellan is a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work. Her program of research uses theory-driven, quantitative methods to study child- and family-serving systems, state responses to child maltreatment, and maternal/child health disparities. She is committed to developing and using empirical evidence as a tool for systemic change that advances equity.

Claire's current work with the Children's Data Network uses population-based, linked administrative records routinely collected by social welfare institutions to understand the outcomes and trajectories of families that encounter them. Her research is informed by interdisciplinary training and work with large datasets at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Public Health Foundation of India, National Court Appointed Special Advocates/Guardians ad Litem Association for Children, and the Global Center for Integrated Health of Women, Adolescents, and Children.



If you have questions about our 2023–2024  
Ph.D. graduates, please contact

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