

Chera Jo Chassati Watts

314 Park Hall | University of Georgia | Athens, GA
cheraw@uga.edu - (706) 936-5937

EDUCATION

- Doctoral Student, University of Georgia Department of Religion & Institute for African American Studies, 4.0 GPA, Athens, GA, Dissertation Director: Carolyn Jones Medine, intended May 2026.
- MA in Religion, Graduate Certificate in African American Studies, 3.97 GPA, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, Thesis Director: Carolyn Jones Medine, Title: "Elliptical Practice: Womanist Buddhist Thought in the Works of Alice Walker," May 2022.
- BS in Psychology, Minor in Child & Family Development, Cum Laude, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, December 2010.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- **Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant, Institute for African American Studies, University of Georgia**, Athens, GA, Fall 2019-Present, includes: administrative support to the IAAS Director, Associate Director, Faculty, & Academic Advisor, managing all website edits and content creation using Drupal, coordinating student engagement events throughout each semester, promoting courses and IAAS activities using in-person or digital methods, supervising 1 FWS student worker, and undergraduate curriculum planning. Also, in Spring 2023, served as TA for RELI/AFAM 2005, "Introduction to African American Religious Thought," for 32 undergraduate students.
- **Graduate Research Assistant, Graduate School xPD Summer Internship Program, University of Georgia**, Athens, GA, June – July 2023, under the direction of Dr. Barbara McCaskill, included: remote work supporting initiatives of the Penn Center National Historic Landmark District and Willson Center for Humanities & Arts partnership under the Culture and Community Grant funded by the Mellon Foundation. Specific projects: archival research (on-site with UGA libraries & digital through several archives) regarding Sam Doyle, a native of St. Helena Island and Penn School alum, to inform an exhibition featuring Doyle's self-taught artistry which opened in August 2023 on the Penn campus and PR/marketing consulting for Penn Center initiatives, including meeting LUCE Foundation specifications for the Sam Doyle Exhibition booklet.
- **Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Georgia-Oxford University Study Away Program**, June 2020 (pivoted online due to COVID-19) & June 2022 (in-person). 2022 trip extended over 17 days. Included: 18 program participants, several day-long excursions throughout the UK (London, Bath, Stratford, & others), and intentional on-site academic & residential support for the program participants residing together in the UGA Oxford Centre at Banbury Road.
- **Academic Advisor in Residence, Franklin Residential College (FRC)**, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, Fall 2017-May 2022 (5 Academic Years). Included intentional student academic support for nearly 100 residents studying the arts & sciences and residing in Rutherford Hall; also included: budget planning & coordinating across 3 program budgets, meetings with campus and community partners, coordinating a student leadership executive board, website edits using Drupal, and facilitating 5-10 monthly academic, service, and social programs.
- **Co-Facilitator, Weekend Academic and Service Experiential Learning Overnight Trip for the Franklin Residential College**, UGA Marine Institute & Hog Hammock Community at Sapelo Island, Georgia, Fall Breaks 2018, 2019, & 2021. Included: transportation logistics, liaising with campus and community partners, organizing student activities for the 24 program participants, and budget planning for this 3-day and 2-night overnight academic and service enrichment trip.

PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

- In production: Medine, Carolyn J. & Watts, Chera Jo, "Alice Walker," *Oxford Bibliographies in "African American Studies,"* New York: Oxford University Press, 2024.
- Watts, Chera Jo, "An Ongoing Womanist Buddhist Project: Reading Between the Times," *Literature*, Special Edition: "Spirituality, Identity, and Resistance in African American Literature," edited by Carolyn Jones Medine, 2022. [Link](#).

PEER REVIEWED BOOK CHAPTERS

- Forthcoming book chapter in the *The Routledge Companion to Toni Morrison*, co-authored with Chanara Andrews-Bickers, anticipated 2025. Working title: "A Case Study in Mutual (Re)Creation: A Collaborative Approach to Understanding the Lives, Literature, and Lessons of Toni Morrison and James Baldwin," which draws upon archival research among the Morrison and Baldwin letters, their fictional writing, public appearances, and other public historical documents.

ADDITIONAL SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS

- McCaskill, Barbara, Watts, Chera Jo, & Williams, Ashley, compilers. *A World Within Worlds: The Visionary Art of Sam Doyle*, Exhibition Booklet, September 23 – December 22, 2023, York W. Bailey Museum, Penn Center National Historic Landmark District, St. Helena Island, SC.
- Watts, Chera Jo, "Graduate Student Member Spotlights: Blog for SBCS, Chera Jo Watts," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 2023. DOI: 10.1353/bcs.2023.a907587.
- Watts, Chera Jo, *Elliptical Practice: Womanist Buddhist Thought in Selected Works by Alice Walker*, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2022. [Link](#).

COURSES TAUGHT

- **University of Georgia, Graduate Teaching Assistant, RELI/AFAM 2005, "Introduction to African American Religious Thought."** Course themes included: slavery and its legacies in the United States, Howard Thurman, Christianity, Black liberation theology, Malcolm X, Nation of Islam, bell hooks, love ethic, reverend angel Kyodo williams, African American Buddhists, Womanism and Black Feminism, 32 undergraduate students, Spring 2023.

SELECTED AWARDS & HONORS

- University of Georgia, Graduate School Dean's Award, Spring 2023, \$3000.
- University of Georgia, Institute for African American Studies Lee Roy B. Giles Award Runner-up, Spring 2023, \$150.
- University of Georgia First Graduate Student Award Winner, honoring contribution & experiences of First-Generation students, November 2021.
- University of Georgia, Blue Key Honor Society Member, inducted Fall 2021.
- Georgia Association for Women in Higher Education Louise McBee Award Nominee, January 2021.
- University of Georgia Career Center Acknowledgement for Contributing Greatly to Student Success, 2015-2022.
- University of Georgia, Division of Academic Enhancement Outstanding Staff Member of the Year Award Nominee, 2018.
- TRiO/McNair Student Support Services "Beyond the Call of Duty" Award, 2019.
- University of Georgia Academic Advisor of the Year Nominee, 2016, 2017, & 2018.
- University of Georgia Costa Rica Academic Advisor Trip Award Winner, October 2015, included an all-inclusive week-long site tour of the UGA Costa Rica campus, meetings with students & community members, and several educational workshops.
- University of Georgia Training and Development Diversity & Inclusion Certificate, 2014.
- University of Georgia Training and Development Certificate in Academic Advising, 2014.

- Undergraduate scholarships: HOPE Scholarship Recipient, Academic Competitiveness Grant, Dean's List, Georgia Governor's Scholarship, Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship, Georgia Power Scholarship, 2007-2010.
- Pepperell High School Valedictorian, 2007.

GRANTS

- University of Georgia, Graduate Student Domestic Travel Grant, \$550, June 2023.
- Franklin College Curriculum Diversity Enhancement Grant, \$100, Acknowledgement Award, University of Georgia Franklin College Dean's Office, January 2023.
- Student Responses to *But Some of US are BRAVE*, \$250, Grant Recipient, University of Georgia Institute for Women's Studies, Spring 2023.
- Franklin Residential College Community Garden Pilot Program, \$3000, Grant Supervisor, University of Georgia Office of Sustainability, Spring 2021.

INVITED TALKS & PANELS

- Invited Talk, Presentation on the *Rest is Resistance* Book Club from a duo-ethnographic approach, co-presenter: Sha'Mira Covington, University of Georgia Institute for Women's Studies Symposium, February 2023, Athens, GA.
- Invited Speaker, "But Some of Us are Sad: Exploring Sisterhood as Salvation in Graduate Education" Roundtable, University of Georgia Institute for Women's Studies Symposium, February 2023, Athens, GA.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & PANELS

- Panelist, On "bell hooks' Love Ethic: Body, Practice, and Homeplace," 2023 bell hooks symposium, Berea College, intended June 2023.
- Doctoral Student Panelist, University of Georgia Department of Religion Professionalization Panel, January 2023.
- Presentation on the *Hood Feminism* Book Club from a duo-ethnographic approach, co-presenter: Sha'Mira Covington, Southern Humanities Council Conference, January 2022, Memphis, TN.
- Presentation on the Black Lives Matter in the Time of COVID Book Club in Franklin Residential College, co-presented with Sha'Mira Covington, Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR), Virtual Conference hosted by University of Florida, March 2021.
- Panelist, Black Lives Matter in the Time of COVID Panel, Southeastern Women's Studies Association (SEWSA) Virtual Conference, March 2021.
- Panelist, Concerning the Work of Toni Morrison, Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR) Conference in Athens, GA, February 2020.
- Panelist, First-Generation Students & Practitioners, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Brown Bag Luncheon Series, February 2020.
- Panelist, Experienced Academic Advisors, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference, December 2019.
- Experiential Learning: The Undergraduate Research Experience, co-presented with Dr. Mark Farmer from Department of Cellular Biology, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference, November 2015.

ADDITIONAL SCHOLARLY EXPERIENCE

- Archival research in special collections such as Russell Special Collections at the University of Georgia, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture digital archive, Princeton University Special Collections, The Low Country Digital Library, and UNC-Chapel Hill University Libraries.
- Executive Associate for Digital Services, Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI, February 2020-Present.

WORKSHOPS FACILITATED

- *Rest is Resistance* Book Club, partnership among the Institute for African American Studies & Institute for Women's Studies at The University of Georgia, also supported by the Franklin College Dean's Office, co-facilitated with Sha'Mira Covington and inspired by decolonizing teaching and learning practices, January-March 2023, 25 participants.
- *Hood Feminism* Book Club, partnership among the Franklin Residential College, Institute for African American Studies, and Department of Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors Diversity in Fashion Grant, co-facilitated with Sha'Mira Covington, inspired by Womanist Buddhist pedagogy and trauma-informed teaching practices, August-September 2021, 30 participants.
- Black Lives Matter Book Club, partnership among the Franklin Residential College and the Institute for African American Studies, co-facilitated with Sha'Mira Covington, inspired by Womanist Buddhist pedagogy and trauma-informed teaching practices, November 2020, 12 participants.

ACADEMIC ADVISING PRESENTATIONS & WORKSHOPS

- "In the Know: Preparing for your Academic Advising Appointment" Presentation for Need-Based Scholarship Recipients, University of Georgia, 2018.
- Coca-Cola First-Generation Scholars Presentation, University of Georgia, 2017.
- "50 Things to Do with a Science Degree" Collaborative Presentation with Career Center, University of Georgia, 2015-2018.
- New Departmental Advisor Training Sessions, Franklin College of Arts & Sciences, University of Georgia, 2015-2016.
- "Finding Undergraduate Research" Interactive Workshops for Students, University of Georgia, 2016-2018.

MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Black Women's Studies Association, Member, 2023-Present.
- American Academy of Religion, Member, 2023-Present.
- Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, Member, 2020-Present.
- Southeastern Women's Studies Association, Member, 2021-Present.
- Southern Humanities Council, Member, 2021-Present.

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

- Coordinator, Department of Religion Graduate Student Professionalization Panel, January 2023, University of Georgia.
- Member, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference Planning Committee, 2017.

ACADEMIC ADVISING EXPERIENCE

- Coordinator of Scholars Initiatives in the Division of Academic Enhancement, University of Georgia, 2018-2019.
- Academic Advisor in the Franklin College Graduation Certification Office, University of Georgia, 2016-2018.
- Academic Advisor in the Division of Biological Sciences, University of Georgia, 2014-2016.

RECENT COMMUNITY SERVICE

- Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery (local African American cemetery) clean-up, Fall 2017-Present.
- Kindermarket Community Bi-annual Sale at Athens YMCA, Fall 2015-Present.
- Athens Area Humane Society, Fall 2018-Spring 2020.
- Sweet Olive Farm Service, Fall 2018-Present.
- University of Georgia Campus Trash Clean-up, Fall 2017-Present.

CURRENT RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Ongoing: African American Womanist thought & practice (focusing on Alice Walker); American Buddhist Studies; Black Feminism and Womanism; Love as active teaching practice & Love ethic (in the spirit of bell hooks); Decolonizing teaching strategies, learning Practices, & modes of being in the world while acknowledging intersectional identities, perspectives, and experiences.
- In progress project: archival research drawing from the Russell Special Collections Library concerning the Institute for African American Studies at The University of Georgia. Concerned with its history, funding sources, lineage, and evolution to its present status. This case study approach sets the UGA IAAS within the broad historical context for similar programs and structures operating within the United States higher education system.