



FSU

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

DOCTORAL PROGRAM GUIDE

CSW.FSU.EDU





WHY FSU? WHY THE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK?

Florida State University (FSU) is a nationally recognized, student-centric institution that takes pride in offering challenging, yet invigorating academic programs, open communication with students and opportunities to assume leadership roles that help them develop leadership skills. On FSU's main campus, there are 17 colleges offering more than 300 undergraduate, graduate, professional and doctorate programs.

FSU RANKS AMONG THE

TOP 25 PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

BY U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

- **No. 8 Best Value College** among public colleges and universities (*U.S. News & World Report*)
- **Best National Universities for Veterans**
No. 30 overall and **No. 23 among public universities** (*U.S. News & World Report*)
- **No. 36 Social Work Program in the Nation** (*U.S. News & World Report*)
- **Top 25 Among Public Universities (No. 22)** (*U.S. News & World Report*)

Our Program

Since 1974 the doctoral program at the FSU College of Social Work has built its national reputation by guiding scholars toward excellence. Students are challenged with excellent research and teaching opportunities that prepare them for careers as leaders in education and research.

The doctoral program emphasizes training in research methods and adult pedagogy. Students participate in experiential learning in systematic methods of inquiry that foster independence in research and scholarship, particularly in qualitative and quantitative research including intervention research.

Students are guided by our outstanding faculty members who have expertise in a wide variety of substantive and methodological areas. Faculty have rigorous expectations of students and are dedicated to the ethical principles of social work research and practice.

Faculty are committed to fostering a transformative experience for our students, guiding them to a future where they enjoy successful careers in academia as accomplished researchers and educators.

“The FSU College of Social Work doctoral program offers rigorous training in translational research that makes an important impact in the real world. Of our graduates over the last 5 years, 63% have earned tenure track positions and 21% have earned research positions (other than tenure-track) at universities across the country, where they make impressive contributions to their communities and the field of social work.”



Dr. Stephen Tripodi

Doctoral Program Director, Professor | stripodi@fsu.edu



PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES



15 Doctoral Publications

2024-2025

14 Collaborative Publications

2024-2025



30+

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AREAS REPRESENTED AMONG FACULTY



43 Doctoral Presentations

AT NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES 2024-2025

Our PhD Graduate Across Campus

2 FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE

1 FSU COLLEGE OF MEDICINE



The College of Social Work houses several institutes, centers and initiatives engaged in translational research and evidence-based practice and outreach.

CFC

Stoops Center for Communities, Families and Children

FICW

Florida Institute for Child Welfare

IJRD

Institute for Justice Research and Development

IQCS

Institute for Quality Children Services

ITRS

Institute for Trauma and Resilience Studies

Maura's Voice

Maura's Voice Research Fund

MDC

Multidisciplinary Evaluation and Consulting Center

College of Social Work faculty and students are involved with interdisciplinary and intercollegiate research and projects. Some partners on campus include:

- FSU Center for Population Sciences for Health Empowerment
- Florida Center for Reading Research



FACULTY PROFILE



Dr. Kristy Anderson Assistant Professor

Kristy Anderson is an assistant professor in the College of Social Work. Dr. Anderson's research focuses on social policies and the financial insecurity of children and adults on the autism spectrum. Her research works across the lifespan and explores the prevalence, distribution and determinants of economic hardship among people with autism. She also emphasizes on identifying factors that influence disparate health outcomes and social determinants across the life course, particularly on Medicaid and anti-poverty programs.

In 2024, Dr. Anderson received a \$110K+ grant from the Health Resources Services Administration to conduct an Autism Secondary Data Analysis on the economic and healthcare impacts of the pandemic on autistic adolescents and their families. These families face higher levels of social and economic burdens and this study aimed to understand the mechanisms underlying health disparities and how the pandemic impacted these disparities. She led her team of researchers from the FSU College of Social Work and Drexel Autism Institute to analyze the context-specific effects of social context/background and income on families with autistic adolescents.

A manuscript on "The Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Autistic Children and Their Families" in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* was also cited as a significant research contribution in the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee's Summary of Advances in 2024.

She has served as a mentor with the Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health Scholar's Program, which provides seed funding for early career researchers. She is also passionate about mentoring and collaborative research collaborations and has supervised directed individualized study courses for undergraduate students interested in autism research. Her teaching experience includes courses related to research methods and disability studies courses.



FACULTY PROFILE



Dr. Gashay Malaku Tefera Assistant Professor

Gashaye Tefera is an assistant professor whose research focuses on healthcare access, health disparities, and the mental health of immigrants, refugees, internally displaced people, international students, Indigenous populations and other underserved communities.

He explores the social determinants of health as well as the barriers and facilitators that impact healthcare access. His research aims to develop evidence-based, contextually relevant interventions that enhance healthcare access and utilization while promoting mental well-being.

Dr. Tefera is deeply committed to international social work research and education that advances global health and facilitates the exchange of best practices across countries. His international experience spans three continents—Africa, Europe, and North America—bringing a unique global perspective to his work.

African immigrant women are among the least likely to access proper healthcare and face disproportionately high rates of late-stage diagnosis. A first-of-its-kind, the identified key themes underlying the challenges Ethiopian immigrant women face when trying to access healthcare services in the United States.

Dr. Tefera's dedication to international social work research translates to extensive research collaborations around the world including interdisciplinary faculty and student researchers. His teaching agenda focuses on global health equity, social determinants of health, migration and displacement, and qualitative research methods. Dr. Tefera actively integrates real-world research into the classroom, fostering critical inquiry and preparing students for culturally responsive social work practice in an increasingly globalized world.



STUDENT HIGHLIGHT

“ The College of Social Work offers a unique and empowering space to realize your full potential and offers you a place to shine while uncovering insights about your passion project. ”



Michaé Cain
Doctoral Candidate

The doctoral program at the FSU College of Social Work is a fertile ground for exceptional scholarship, professional growth, and personal transformation. It challenged me to become the best version of myself, not only intellectually but also as an ethical leader and practitioner in the field.

When I was considering programs to apply to, several factors were important to me. First was faculty alignment. The FSU College of Social Work boasts a wide array of world-class faculty members who aligned with my research interests. Second, the college had a gamut of associated centers and institutes that aligned with my areas of interest and could offer rich, practical research experiences. Third, support was very important to me. I felt like this was an environment where I could thrive as a woman who was Jamaican, international, and a first-generation high school and college graduate. It was evident that the college valued investing in students academically, professionally, and financially.

As a graduate research assistant with the Florida Institute of Child Welfare and co-investigator on multiple projects, I have been deeply involved in interdisciplinary research that addresses critical issues in child welfare education and workforce development. These collaborations have allowed me to contribute to curriculum evaluation initiatives, qualitative and quantitative analyses, and the dissemination of findings through peer-reviewed publications and presentations at national conferences including the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

The most impactful and rewarding experiences during my time in the program have been those connected to my work with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare (FICW). These opportunities have allowed me to contribute in meaningful ways to broader collaborative efforts aimed at strengthening Florida's child welfare system. Among these experiences, the most formative has been my involvement as a team member on the Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF), a comprehensive 3.5-year, statewide study focused on understanding and improving the child welfare workforce.

The College of Social Work offers a unique and empowering space to realize your full potential and offers you a place to shine while uncovering insights about your passion project. As we say in the Jamaican vernacular, “a yah so nice,” which means this is the place to be.



STUDENT HIGHLIGHT



“

For any potential scholar that wants to have hands on and practical experience in translational research that is genuinely making an impact, I highly encourage exploring the doctoral program at the FSU College of Social Work.

”

Lauren Herod Doctoral Student

When I entered the joint MSW/MPA program, I knew that my goal was to improve the systems and processes involved in providing services to vulnerable individuals, and particularly to those who have been impacted by sexual violence and other forms of interpersonal victimization. Early on in that program, I realized that through research, I could work to better understand the needs of these individuals and help to design better service approaches. I was fortunate enough to work as a research assistant for the Institute for Justice Research and Development, which helped me understand the impact that translational work could have on communities while also improving our knowledge base.

My goal was always to pursue a doctoral degree after working in the field for two years post-graduation from my master's degrees. I extensively explored the options for doctoral education and spoke with many incredible faculty members in our field about what pursuing my degree at their institution would look like. But ultimately, the spirit of collaboration and challenge I saw at Florida State kept drawing me back to my alma mater for my terminal degree. I had firsthand experience of how the faculty would both support and push me to achieve my goals and felt incredibly confident that I would only continue to be fostered in the doctoral program.

Since joining the program in 2022, I have been incredibly fortunate to collaborate with students and faculty members across a variety of system-impacting work. I have had the opportunity to lead project teams and present across the United States on meaningful work related to trauma programming in jails. In my work with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare, I have been able to lead research projects with specialized faculty using innovative policy analysis and contribute to work impacting policy decisions made for the Child Welfare Workforce. Through collaborations, analytical work, and independent research, these opportunities have allowed me to continue to grow as a scholar, both in my methodology and approach to innovative inquiry.

The doctoral program has not always been easy, but the balance of support and challenge has been critical to my journey as a scholar. While the coursework helped solidify my methodological understanding and technical skills, the mentorship and leadership opportunities that the college has provided are the things that will have the most lasting impact. For any potential scholar that wants to have hands-on and practical experience in translational research that is genuinely making an impact, I highly encourage exploring the doctoral program at the FSU College of Social Work.



RECENT GRADUATE FEATURE

“ Graduates leave with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to enter academic ready to make an impact from day one. ”



Dr. Esaa Muhammad Sabti Samarah
Assistant Professor
University of Arkansas Little Rock
PhD 2025, MSW 2019

As a social worker in direct practice within the child welfare system, I often felt like I was trying to fix the plane while flying it. I knew I wanted to make a broader impact but didn't know how to influence change at the systems level. That's when I decided to return to Florida State University to pursue my doctoral degree.

When I entered the program, my research interests focused on preventing child displacement and child maltreatment—and in many ways, they still do. However, my coursework helped me refine that focus to a specific point on the child welfare continuum: the judgment and decision-making processes of child welfare professionals. My long-term goal is to improve the quality of decision-making in child welfare to prevent unnecessary displacement and reduce prevent child maltreatment.

The research and collaboration opportunities at FSU were nothing short of incredible. Faculty members were consistently open to collaboration and generous with their time. The program follows an apprenticeship model that supports students as they grow into independent scholars. I had the opportunity to contribute to numerous projects, starting as a graduate assistant and eventually leading my own studies with the support of faculty mentors.

The most transformative part of my doctoral experience was learning to think critically about where the field of social work is today and where it needs to go in the future. The College of Social Work provided me with a rigorous, well-rounded education in research and scholarship.

I am currently an assistant professor at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Social Work. I was fortunate to begin my tenure-track position while still a doctoral candidate, which speaks volumes about the strength of the doctoral program at the FSU College of Social Work. Graduates leave the program equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to enter academia ready to make an impact from day one.



ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



“ The mentorship from faculty is next level. From availability to ongoing mentoring, faculty are always willing to support students. ”

Dr. Taylor Dowdy-Hazlett
Assistant Professor
University of Kentucky
PhD 2022

My time at the FSU College of Social Work prepared me for my current role to conceptualize and manage multiple projects, apply for and receive funding and successfully disseminate findings through presentations and publications.

The mentoring from faculty is next level. From availability to ongoing mentoring, faculty are always willing to support students. There was no shortage of opportunities to work with faculty, and I was able to find many opportunities to get vast experience in different types of projects.

The stipend was higher and for a longer duration than many other programs. There were also more opportunities to gain additional funding outside the initial research assistantship. I had many opportunities for collaboration throughout my time and beyond at FSU.

While in the program, I worked for four years in my research assistantship with Dr. Shamra Boel-Studt. My work with Dr. Boel-Studt greatly informed my research trajectory and methodological expertise in child welfare. My research interests developed over time to focus on the well-being of youth in foster care, specifically exploring different raining, programs and interventions that positively impact youth and those who care for them.

Several faculty knew of my interest in trauma treatment, and I was invited to join a research team with Dr. Tanya Renn to explore a group therapy treatment for youth in schools. During this project, I was interested in seeing how the intervention could be adapted to fit youth in foster care. Dr. Renn and I applied for a grant to explore this work. To date, this project has been funded twice and we are currently exploring the next funding opportunity.

I also sought work with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare. I was hired as a research assistant on a program evaluation research project. This collaboration led to funding support for my dissertation and several grants funded even after graduation. The faculty and support at Florida State shaped me into the scholar I am today.



ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT

“ When you leave FSU you will forever be part of the network, which is vast and spans widely across many universities. ”



Dr. Annelisa Mennicke
Associate Professor
University of North Carolina -
Charlotte
PhD 2015, MSW 2011

I was drawn to the College of Social Work for my doctoral degree because of the fantastic faculty doing important research. I knew that if I attended FSU, I would be treated kindly and be presented with numerous opportunities to grow my research acumen.

The FSU College of Social Work felt like a family to me. There are so many good human beings there to care about you as a person, your work and contributing to the profession. During my time at FSU, I was fortunate to collaborate with many faculty members and other students. I got to see different mentoring styles, approaches to research and topic areas. This helped me to identify how I wanted to be as an independent scholar.

One of my most memorable experiences for me was being trusted by Dr. Stephen Tripodi to project manage his randomized control trial of Seeking Safety for incarcerated women. This position allowed me to see the project through from start to finish and really developed my project coordination skills - invaluable for an independent scholar.

As a violence prevention researcher, I focus on using effective interventions to help marginalized communities. As an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, I have also co-founded and am assistant director of research at the UNC Charlotte Violence Prevention Center. My time at FSU prepared me to do community-engaged research, develop writing skills and become a savvy grant writer.

I forged lifelong connections with students enrolled in the doctoral program with me, leading to meaningful research collaborations and friendships. When you leave FSU you will forever be part of the network, which is vast and spans widely across many universities.



Class of 2024 PhD Students



ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

For the application and complete details on the Ph.D. admissions requirements, please visit csw.fsu.edu.

1. A master's degree from a graduate school of social work (MSW) with a Grade Point Average of at least 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale). The school must be accredited by the Council on Social Work Education.
2. Transcripts from all previous undergraduate and graduate academic work; "Good standing" status at the last school attended.
 - All internationally earned degrees must receive a SpanTran or other NACES approved credential evaluation.
3. An official Graduate Record Examination (GRE General Test). The GRE may be waived for students based on criteria available at csw.fsu.edu/phdadmissions.
4. For International Applicants, evidence of English language proficiency is required as demonstrated by an acceptable score on the following tests:
 - Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) – internet-based or paper-based test
 - International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
 - Pearson Test of English (PTE)
 - Cambridge C1 Advanced Level
 - Michigan Language Assessment
5. Resume/Curriculum Vitae
6. Statement of Purpose
7. Writing Sample
8. Letters of Recommendation (minimum: 3)

CONNECT WITH US!



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