THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
College of Social Work

Social Work PhD Candidates

Spring 2025

socialwork.utah.edu/phd

PhD Candidates

Mariah Cowell Mercier, MSW

mariah.cowell@utah.edu
Curriculum Vitae

Dissertation: "A Community Violence Intervention as a Mechanism for Community Reinvestment: A Mixed Methods Evaluation and Exploration of Implementation Determinants and Outcomes"

Mariah Cowell Mercier, MSW, is a PhD Candidate and Research Analyst at the College of Social Work at the University of Utah in the Utah Criminal Justice Center. Her program of research focuses on diverting individuals from criminal legal system involvement and overall divestment from carceral settings. Her scholarship focuses on redefining public safety by exploring community-driven, non-punitive approaches to addressing harm and promoting reinvestment. She uses mixed methods approaches, interdisciplinary collaboration, and integrates community-engaged strategies to support sustainable social change. Prior to her doctoral studies, Mariah worked with interdisciplinary research teams at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the School of Social Work and the School of Social Medicine. Her work experience focused on implementing and evaluating interventions on mental health and health disparities within the criminal legal system. She earned her BSW from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and her MSW from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

Aundrea Dilanchian, MSW

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Curriculum Vitae

Dissertation: "Re-imagining Place and Space: An Exploration of School Social Workers' Responses to the Impact of Historical Redlining on Education Equity in Salt Lake City, Utah"

Aundrea is a doctoral candidate at the University of Utah interested in examining how neighborhoods influence access to educational resources and the quality of education available to students. Her dissertation research focuses on understanding how the legacy of systemic inequalities shapes educational outcomes, with an emphasis on how the neighborhood environment affects both resource allocation and opportunities for K-12 students. At the University of Utah's College of Social Work, Aundrea serves as a Graduate Research Assistant, supporting faculty on various academic projects and research objectives. She co-developed and taught two MSW courses in the School Social Work Career Path—School Social Work Macro Skills and School Social Work Micro Skills—and also taught a range of courses within the College's BSW program.

PhD Candidates

Myra Garcia, LCSW

myragarcia8@gmail.com
Curriculum Vitae

Dissertation: "Navigating Intra-Group Colorism: A Qualitative Study on Distress, Coping and Resistance among Afro and Indigenous Latine"

Myra Garcia, LCSW and Ph.D. candidate in Social Work at the University of Utah, is dedicated to impactful research that centers community-oriented practices. Her primary research interests focus on the mental health effects of white supremacy, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of Afro and Indigenous Latine populations. Her dissertation examines the dynamics of intragroup colorism within these communities, exploring both the harm caused and the unique ways individuals resist and respond to these pressures. Myra's approach prioritizes highlighting the strengths and resilience of communities, allowing them to define themselves beyond deficit-based narratives. Through her work, she aims to foster collaborative, strength-centered research that uplifts community voices and drives change in mental health and social work practices.

Whitney Howey, LCSW

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Curriculum Vitae

Dissertation: "Judicial Engagement in Child Welfare Court"

Whitney Howey is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Utah, College of Social Work. She earned her master's degree in social work from Utah State University in 2017. Whitney's research focuses on improving engagement with children, parents, and families involved in the child welfare court system.

PhD Candidates

Devon Musson Rose, LCSW

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Curriculum Vitae

Dissertation: "Early childhood suicidal thoughts and behaviors: Theoretical and provider perspectives"

Devon Musson Rose, LCSW is a PhD candidate at the University of Utah's College of Social Work. Her research, teaching, and mentorship is informed by over 17 years of clinical practice and organizational leadership. Devon's research interests focus broadly on using trauma informed care and interventions to improve the well-being of young children, ages birth to 7 years, whose voices are often marginalized or overlooked, and the families and service providers who care for them. Her dissertation research, funded by a College of Social Work dissertation seed grant, focuses on examining gaps in the understanding and treatment of suicidal thoughts and behaviors (STB) among young children, up to age 7 years, which is recognized as the strongest predictor of suicide among school age children. Devon currently has ten peer-reviewed manuscripts published (two as lead author), two under review (one as lead author), and two in process, as well as 9 peer reviewed national presentations, 4 invited presentations, and numerous invited community presentations on research findings. Devon was awarded the university wide Utah Teaching Assistantship to fund her development and teaching of an infant and early childhood mental health advanced practice elective for the College of Social Work during the 2024/25 academic year. Devon hails from North Carolina and enjoys spending time in the outdoors and traveling with her family.

Mackaully L. Parada, MSW, LCSW

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Curriculum Vitae

Dissertation Topic Explores: Stress, family functioning, youth wellbeing, and early substance initiation

Mackaully is committed to advancing public health through innovative research that drives meaningful, systemic change. Her primary research interests around social determinants of health, child welfare and development, family functioning, and toxic stress stem from her experience as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in the medical setting. Her clinical practice with patients across the lifespan fueled a passion for data-driven research and health-focused intervention/prevention programming, leading to several publications in prominent academic journals. She has also explored secondary research interests in social work pedagogy and the intersection of religion/spirituality and social work, resulting in collaborations with renowned leaders of the profession, journal publications, conference presentations, and a co-authored book chapter. While earning her PhD, Mackaully was awarded a prestigious Graduate Research Fellowship and she was featured in the university's Student Innovation Report, which recognizes students who are undergoing particularly innovative and impactful projects. Her teaching experience spans clinical and practice courses at both undergraduate and master's levels. Overall, Mackaully aims to propel the social work profession forward, using her research to shape both policy and practice while empowering the next generation of social workers in higher education.

PhD Candidates

Kara Patin, LCSW

karapatin@gmail.com

Curriculum Vitae

Dissertation: "Equity in resilience research and psychometrics"

Kara Patin is a licensed clinical social worker and PhD candidate in social work. She serves as the Program Director at Trauma-Informed Utah, where she leads statewide training and strategic program development initiatives. She is a recipient of the APA's Interdisciplinary Minority Fellowship, and her research interests include trauma, building trauma-informed organizations, and resilience.