

School of Education
2024 Distinguished
**Alumni
Awards**

April 3, 2024



Welcome Pitt Education Alumni!

The School of Education has one of the largest alumni networks at the University of Pittsburgh, with more than 32,000 alumni in nearly 90 countries around the world. Together, we support the well-being of students, families, and communities through our collective work across teaching, learning, health, and human development.

Stay engaged with the school:

- Join Pitt Commons to network with your peers and support current students at commons.pitt.edu.
- Update your contact information on the alumni section of the Pitt Education website so we can stay in touch.
- Support the school by making a philanthropic gift.

Contact Michael Haas, director of development and alumni affairs, at mbh26@pitt.edu or 412-648-1789.

Order of Events

5:30-6:30 p.m. Reception

Buffet dinner and refreshments will be served.

6:30-8 p.m. Awards Ceremony

Opening Remarks

Robert Scherrer, EdD

President, School of Education Alumni Society

Presentation of the Awards

Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher, PhD

Interim Renée and Richard Goldman Dean,

School of Education

Robert Scherrer, EdD

Scholarship Recognition

Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher

8 p.m. Event Concludes

Featured Presenters



Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher, PhD

Interim Renée and Richard Goldman Dean and Professor, Pitt School of Education

An accomplished scholar, Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher's work focuses on equitable participation in higher education; transfer, access, and retention policies; minoritized student populations in marginalized institutional contexts; and racial equity and campus climate in postsecondary education pathways. Prior to her tenure as interim dean, Zamani-Gallaher served as the associate dean for equity, justice, and strategic partnerships in the School of Education. In this role, she advanced the school-wide strategy for equitable partnerships, which included partnering with colleagues to further deepen teaching excellence, strengthen programmatic offerings, and reimagine the school's ongoing engagements. As a researcher, Zamani-Gallaher has amassed more than \$10.4 million in external funding on projects aimed at improving the field of higher education. In addition to her work at Pitt, Zamani-Gallaher is a leader in a variety of professional organizations. She is executive director of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges and president-elect of the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Zamani-Gallaher holds a PhD in educational organization and leadership from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and an MS in general experimental psychology and a BS in psychology from Western Illinois University.



Robert Scherrer, EdD

President, Pitt School of Education Alumni Society

Robert Scherrer (EdD '09) is president of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education Alumni Society. He is executive director of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, a regional education services agency serving the greater Pittsburgh area. In this role, he has developed and implemented a new strategic plan and supported school entities throughout the region. Previously, he was superintendent of the North Allegheny School District and a principal at Pittsburgh Allderdice High School and the Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy, both in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Scherrer earned his Superintendent's Letter of Eligibility and EdD in administrative and policy studies from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. He also holds a BS in business education, an MEd in business education, and Principal's Certification from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.



Award Categories

The Distinguished Alumni Awards Ceremony is held annually to celebrate the accomplishments of the outstanding alumni and students of the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. We are proud to recognize our school community with the following awards:

Distinguished Student Leadership Award

Outstanding Alumni EdD Dissertation Award

Outstanding Alumni PhD Dissertation Award

Departmental Distinguished Alumni Award: Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy

Departmental Distinguished Alumni Award: Health and Human Development

Departmental Distinguished Alumni Award: Teaching, Learning, and Leading

Distinguished Early Career Award

Distinguished Pre K-12 Educator Award

Distinguished Alumni Award





Distinguished Student Leadership Award



Hillary Chelednik

PhD in Learning Sciences and Policy, University of Pittsburgh

As a graduate student researcher and PhD student in the Learning Sciences and Policy program in the School of Education, Hillary Chelednik's research interests include asset-based discipline integration, equitable instruction, relational teaching, and student collaboration. Her dissertation is an education research design study focused on asset-based integrated instruction in K-8 classrooms. At Pitt, Chelednik has served as a co-developer and teaching assistant in a Freedom Seminar on Environmental Justice and STEM Pedagogies and as an instructor of Mathematics Instruction for Young Learners. She is the co-president of the Council of Graduate Students in Education and previously served as co-chair of the organization's Grants Committee and Conference Committee. A former elementary and middle school teacher, grade-level chair, and professional development facilitator, Chelednik holds a master's degree in teaching, learning, and advocacy with a concentration in curriculum instruction from the College of Charleston.



Hannah G. Goldstein

PhD in Education Policy, University of Pittsburgh

Hannah G. Goldstein is a third-year doctoral student in the Education Policy program at the School of Education. She holds a BA in environmental science from University of Colorado at Boulder and an MA in secondary science education, specializing in biology, from Brooklyn College. Prior to her doctoral studies, Goldstein spent two years as an English teacher at an elementary school in Suncheon, South Korea, and four years as a biology and environmental science teacher at a large, public high school in Brooklyn, New York. She currently works as a graduate student researcher on a project that partners researchers and state leaders with the goal of working toward multilingual learner equity. Goldstein is committed to the transformation of inequitable structures that exist in public education and is motivated to explore the role of researchers, partnership, and cross-system collaboration in the pursuit of democratic change in education. Goldstein is the co-president of the Council of Graduate Students in Education and previously served two years as co-chair of the organization's Grants Committee.



Outstanding Alumni EdD Dissertation Award



Joanna Mittereder (UPJ BS '84, MSW '86, EdD '23)
Care Manager, Student Affairs, University of Pittsburgh

In addition to her role as care manager in the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh, Joanna Mittereder is a field instructor in the School of Social Work, a First at Pitt mentor to first-generation students, and serves on the Campus Crisis Response Team and Campus Event and Support Response Team. She earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from Pitt-Johnstown where she was a first-generation student. Mittereder is a licensed social worker whose practice settings have included community mental health, employee assistance programs, health and wellness, adoption services, and higher education. Mittereder's EdD dissertation research focused on supporting adopted students in the college setting. Her work bridges research from adoption practice, social work, and student affairs to celebrate and support adopted students. Mittereder is a member of the School of Social Work Alumni Council and teaches continuing education courses to professional social workers. She serves as an advisory board member for a local nonprofit, Angel's Place. She is also the very proud mother of three young adult children.



Outstanding Alumni PhD Dissertation Award



Alberto Guzman-Alvarez (MA '18, PhD '23)
Research Data Scientist, American Institutes for Research

Alberto Guzman-Alvarez is a research data scientist at the American Institutes for Research, specializing in quasi-experimental research design and quantitative methodology. Guzman-Alvarez's applied work focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of education policies and interventions, particularly those related to college access for first-generation and historically marginalized students. He has published work in such leading academic journals as *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* and the *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*. His research has also been covered by media outlets, including *Forbes*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *Brookings*. Guzman-Alvarez has been recognized with the Equity and Inclusion Fellowship by the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management. He holds a PhD in learning sciences and policy from the School of Education, where he was a National Academy of Education/Spencer Dissertation Fellow. Additionally, he earned an MA in research methodology from the University of Pittsburgh and a BS in psychology from the University of California, Davis.



Jenay F.E. Willis (PhD '23)

Postdoctoral Fellow, Race & Reconciliation Initiative at Texas Christian University

Jenay F.E. Willis is the postdoctoral fellow for the Race & Reconciliation Initiative at Texas Christian University. She holds a dual bachelor's degree in sociology and criminal justice from Georgia College & State University, an MA in higher and postsecondary education from Teachers College - Columbia University, and a PhD in higher education from the University of Pittsburgh. While at Pitt, Willis was the School of Education's graduate student representative for the University Council on Graduate Studies. She worked collaboratively with the faculty in the higher education program and worked on numerous research projects with her advisor, Darris Means, to support rural education efforts. Additionally, she was a member of the Pan-African Graduate & Professional Student Union. These commitments were instrumental in shaping her career professionally as a researcher, educator, and servant leader. Her identity as a Southern Black woman from rural Georgia has informed much of her research. Willis is a community-driven researcher who highlights individuals and communities from historically marginalized backgrounds, specifically rural Black students and communities, in which she centers the lives and experiences of these populations through a shared power approach.



Departmental Distinguished Alumni Awards



Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy

Dawna M. Jones (MEd '09)

Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs for Identity Centers and Community Development, Duke University

Dawna M. Jones is a dedicated educator, student affairs professional, social worker, and community advocate. She has worked in multiple higher education roles including housing and residential life, multicultural and first-generation student support, crisis and case management, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and fixed-term leadership faculty. As a leader who values service to her profession and community, Jones gives back to the higher education field by serving as a faculty member in the Higher Education Case Management Association's foundations program and is an active member in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. She has served her local community as board chair of the Chapel Hill Housing Advisory Board, president emeritus of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP, and NEXT30 board member with the Southern Environmental Law Center. In addition to her master's degree in higher education management from the University of Pittsburgh, Jones holds a BA in Sociology from Penn State University, a master's in social work from West Chester University, and PhD in transformative leadership for civic and community engagement from North Carolina A&T State University.



Health and Human Development

Robyn Tedder (BS '09)

Education Consultant and Founder, Candor and Co Consulting

Robyn Tedder is an education consultant who works with early childhood stakeholders to help them strategically develop and implement programming that improves the lives of young children and families. Tedder began her career as a kindergarten teacher with Teach for America in Atlanta. Her work experiences include tenure with Teach for America, Atlanta Public Schools, as well as positions with The Atlanta Speech School's Rollins Center for Language and Literacy, Danya International Inc., Purpose Built Schools Atlanta, and the YMCA of Metro Atlanta. Tedder has helped her programs to increase family engagement, strengthen community outreach strategies, redesign early childhood workforce development programming and operationalize program frameworks. As the founder of Candor and Co Consulting, she works closely with philanthropists and nonprofit leaders across the U.S. to develop strategies and programming that improves the lives of young children and families. Tedder is a certified Georgia Educator and a Gates Millennium Scholar who holds an MEd in early childhood education from Georgia State University and a BS in applied developmental psychology from the University of Pittsburgh.



Teaching, Learning, and Leading

Ryan D. Hardesty (BA '08, MAT '09)

Teacher, Highland Middle School

Ryan Hardesty is a seventh-grade ancient world history and eighth-grade United States history teacher at Highland Middle School in the Blackhawk School District located in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. Hardesty reassuringly challenges his students to set personal goals and reach their highest potential by providing engaging and rigorous opportunities in the classroom. He works tirelessly to build connections with his students and encourage them on their educational journey. Hardesty was named the 2023-2024 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year and received a 2023 Award for Teaching Excellence from the National Education Association Foundation. Since receiving the award, he now speaks about his teaching experiences at various school districts, colleges and universities, and professional conferences throughout Pennsylvania. Hardesty earned both his Bachelor of Arts in history and political science and his Master of Arts in teaching from the University of Pittsburgh.



Distinguished Early Career Award



Emiola Oriola Jr. (BS '13, EdD '22)

Director, Office of Inclusion and Belonging, University of Pittsburgh

As inaugural Director of the Office of Inclusion and Belonging at the University of Pittsburgh, Emiola Oriola Jr. builds bridges and creates spaces for dialogue and belonging across campus, develops new pathways for addressing inequities for minoritized students, and represents the department and University on DEI/belonging and interfaith matters. His overall objective is to help all students and campus and community members to make Pitt feel like a home away from home for themselves and for one another. Oriola received his bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Pittsburgh, his master's degree in theology and ministry from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and his EdD in out-of-school learning from the University of Pittsburgh. His research focuses on experiential learning, global perspectives, belonging, and building significant learning skills in students through intentional exposure, communal dialogue, and creative expression. Oriola sees himself as a scholar-practitioner, storyteller, and lover of people who strives to proactively, creatively, and intentionally meet people where they are and build unity in diversity wherever he goes.



Distinguished Pre K-12 Educator Award



Shannon Finley-Cressler (BA '11, MAT '12)

Spanish Educator, Fox Chapel Area High School

Shannon Finley-Cressler is a dynamic educator and leader with more than a decade of experience in foreign language education. She earned a bachelor's degree in Spanish and Africana studies and a master's degree in secondary foreign language education from the University of Pittsburgh. As a preK-12 Spanish teacher for various school districts in the Pittsburgh area, including Pittsburgh Public Schools, Franklin Regional School District, and Woodland Hills School District, she has demonstrated her commitment to providing high-quality education and support to her students. Outside of the classroom, Finley-Cressler is deeply involved in her community, serving as a board member of Earthen Vessels Outreach, performing with the Shona Sharif African Dance and Drum Ensemble, and being an active member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Additionally, she volunteers for the Pitt African American Alumni Council and mentors students through Panthers Forward. Finley-Cressler is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in education with an emphasis on administrative leadership at Point Park University.



Distinguished Alumni Award



Phyllis A. Jones (BS '82, MEd '87)

Teacher, Coach, and Community Leader

Throughout her 39-year career as a scholar, educator, and coach, Phyllis A. Jones has served Pittsburgh Public Schools' Westinghouse Academy 6-12, the Girls Basketball team, and all students with pride and distinction. At Westinghouse, Jones positively impacted more than 3,000 students by helping them reach their full potential, choose different life pathways, and write narratives of hope amidst a sea of challenge and tragedy. Under her leadership as head coach, the Westinghouse Girls Basketball team has won nearly 40% of all city league championships in the last 27 years. Many of Jones' former players were inspired to become coaches, educators, or leaders in their own communities, and more than 60 received athletic or academic scholarships in college. Beyond coaching, Jones has published several academic articles as a scholar-educator, and she uses research to build her classroom and athletic philosophy. Jones has received numerous accolades for her work, including being named National Coach of the Year by the Women's Sports Foundation, being inducted into the Western Chapter of the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame, and receiving a proclamation from Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey in 2022. Jones participates in community and religious service as a deaconess at Rodman Street Baptist Church, former board member of Youth Enrichment Services (YES), Inc., project lead for the YES Fun Fitness Involving Sports and Health program, and leader of a "Summer Study for Success" independent study program for teens interested in careers in health, physical education, and athletic administration. A family-oriented individual who leads with family first, Jones is the wife of D. Floyd Jones and mother of three daughters, Carmin, Denise, and Melinda, and grandmother of Cassidy Jones.

Scholarships and Fellowships

Thanks to the generous support of our alumni and friends, our School of Education can provide financial support for future leaders in education.

Adelaide G. Heverly-Welge Scholarship Fund

Aimee Chesler Fredette Memorial Award
Alice Jones Drew Endowment for Student Resources

Anna Hall Broady Endowed Scholarship in the School of Education

Annette Crantz Briskman Endowed Scholarship in the School of Education

Bobbie Andrea Gaunt Endowed Scholarship in the School of Education

Carol F. Hershey Memorial Scholarship Fund

The Caroline Urban Alleman Endowed Fund

David Weinberger Endowment

Deborah J. Aaron, PhD Endowed Fund

Dr. Charles Hayes, Jr. and Silvia Hayes Endowed Fund for Graduate Study

Dr. Christina J. Groark Community Engagement Award

Dr. Clara Barnes Jenkins Scholarship in memory of Dr. William H.E. Johnson

Dr. James and Rebecca Mauch Endowment for Student Research

Dr. Jerlean E. Daniel Book Award

Dr. Lillian M. Fehr Endowment

Dr. Margaret J. Wilson Endowed Student Resource Fund in the School of Education

Dr. Maxine G. Roberts Scholarship

Dr. Michael and H. Joan Radvansky Scholarship

Earl and Anna Broady Foundation Scholarship

Eartha L. Williams Endowed Fund

Edson Boyd Powell Scholarship for Educational Administration

Eli-Sar Graf Foundation Scholarship

The Equity and Justice Spirit Award Fund

Ernest B. Dorow Endowed Scholarship Fund

Ethel B. Feldman Scholarship

Ethel Henderson Luckhardt Scholarship

Eva K. Thomas Endowed Scholarship Fund for the School of Education

The Goldman Grit Award: A Fund for Students Who Have Grit and Drive in Education

Harry C. Luebbe Jr. Endowed Scholarship Fund

Helen S. Faison Scholarship Fund

J. Orville Wood Scholarship

James E. Rohr Family Fellowship

Janet Dague Kraus Memorial Fund

Jean M. Slack Scholarship

John R. Bender Endowed Scholarship

June and William Mullins Endowment

The Karen and Ned VanderVen
Professional Development Fund

Karl C. H. Oermann and Kenneth F. Metz
Endowed Scholarship

The Katherine George Eberly Endowed
Scholarship Fund

Kathleen N. Holleran Endowed Fund for
Student Resources

Laughlin Endowed Fund in the School of
Education

Lesgold Family Endowed Scholarship

The Linck Memorial Scholarship Fund in
Education

Lois Lyden Zord and The Honorable
Joseph Zord, Jr. Endowed Scholarship in
the School of Education

Margaret M. Greenawalt Memorial
Scholarship

Mary O. Saltsman Scholarship Fund

Mima Bozzi Endowed Student Resource
Fund

The Natalie A. Kaplan and The Honorable
Lawrence W. Kaplan Student Resource
Fund

Neil Parham Endowed Student Resource
Fund

Paul H. Masoner Scholarship

Peter C. and Rita Blasek Bennett Endowed
Scholarship in the School of Education

Philmena Bianchi Adamson Endowed
Fund for Student Resources

Regis J. Larkin Endowed Fund

Richard N. and Bernadette C. Jakicic
Student Recognition Fund

Rita M. Bean Endowed Student Resource
Fund

Samuel N. Francis and Richard
Wynn Scholarship for Educational
Administration

Sarah F. and Elizabeth Graf Fund

School of Education Centennial Student
Resource Fund

Schurman Family Education Fund

Sekey Sisters Fund

Sherry Berkowitz Memorial Award

Stephen M. Koziol Endowment for
Student Research

Sturdevant Family Endowed Scholarship
Fund for Early Childhood Education

Teresa Sirianni Amelio Student Resource
Fund

Tyrene Livingston Memorial Student
Resource Fund

Urban Educator Endowment

Walter A. McCullough Quasi Endowment

The Walter Barnes Sr. & Stella G. Barnes
Scholarship Fund

Warren Shepler Endowment Fund

Weimann Family Teaching Scholarship
Fund

Wesley H. Carlson and Marian
Davis-Carlson Fund

William A. Yeager Fellowship

Wilma Nagy Ventmiller Endowed Fund

➤ Our Mission-Vision

The following statement is the mission-vision of the School of Education. It encapsulates what we do, what we believe, and who we continually seek to become as members of the school community.

“ We ignite learning. We strive for well-being for all. We teach. We commit to student, family, and community success. We commit to educational equity. We advocate. We work for justice. We cultivate relationships. We forge engaged partnerships. We collaborate. We learn with and from communities. We innovate and agitate. We pursue and produce knowledge. We research. We disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures. We approach learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development. We address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning. We shape practice and policy. We teach with and for dignity. We think. We dream. We lead with integrity. We are the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh.”

