



Annual Report

2024 - 2025

Master of Education in Counselor Education
Student Affairs

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Program Faculty



Dr. Michelle Boettcher

Michelle Boettcher, Ph.D., is a Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs, and her research focuses on senses of belonging and community in the context of higher education. Dr. Boettcher completed her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University, M.Ed. in student affairs from the University of Arkansas, and B.S. in history from Iowa State University. Prior to her position at Clemson University, Dr. Boettcher was Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Judicial Affairs at Iowa State for seven years, and in residence life/housing at Iowa State University, Ohio University, the University of Cincinnati, and the University of Arkansas and in academic affairs at Dartmouth College.



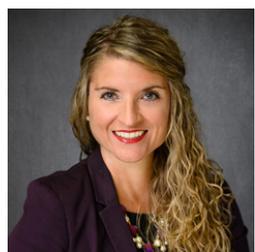
Dr. Tony Cawthon

Tony Cawthon, Ph.D., is an Alumni Distinguished Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs, and his research focuses on identity development, inclusion and multicultural issues, and career development. He has a Ph.D. from Mississippi State in Counselor Education/Student Affairs, and a MA and BA from the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Prior to beginning his faculty career at Clemson University, he worked as a Student Affairs administrator in housing for over 15 years at Clemson University, Mississippi State University, and the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Tony is also active in a number of professional associations. Within ACPA, he served on the Governing Board as the Director of Research and Scholarship, and within ACUHO-I he served as the Knowledge Enhancement Director. He is a past editor of the *College Student Affairs Journal* and the *Journal of College and University Student Housing*. He is currently serving as Executive Director the Southern Association for College Student Affairs.



Dr. Rachel Wagner

Rachel Wagner, Ed.D., is an Associate Professor in Higher Education and Student Affairs in the department of Educational and Organizational Leadership at Clemson University. Rachel has presented on gender, anti-racist, and social justice education at universities around the country. The goal of her research is to understand how post-secondary environments can support human flourishing. Specifically, her scholarship centers critical and emancipatory perspectives of equity and social justice in higher education through two primary areas of inquiry: (1) gender aware and expansive practice in higher education, and (2) social justice approaches to student affairs practice. Rachel co-chaired the Knowledge Community on Men and Masculinities for the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators from 2006-2009. She received the Harry Cannon Outstanding Professional Award (2014) and the Outstanding Research Award (2015) from ACPA's Coalition on Men and Masculinities, and she recently completed a two-year term as the coalition's Emerging Scholar-in-Residence. Rachel has published on the intersection of gender and disability, gender inclusive housing practices, and men's experiences in diversity education



Dr. Sonja Ardoin

Sonja Ardoin, Ph.D., is a learner, educator, facilitator, and author. Proud of her rural hometown of Vidrine, Louisiana, her working-class, Cajun roots, and her first-generation college student to Ph.D. journey, Sonja holds degrees from LSU, Florida State, and NC State. She considers herself a scholar-practitioner of higher education; she served as an administrator for 10 years before shifting to the faculty in 2015. Currently serving as an Associate Professor of higher education and student affairs at Clemson University, Sonja studies social class identity, rurality, first-generation college students, and career preparation and pathways in higher education and student affairs. Sonja has over 65 academic publications, including six books. She stays engaged in the broader field through ACPA, AFLV, ASHE, FirstGen Forward, LeaderShape, NASPA, SACSA, and several journal editorial boards. Learn more about Sonja's work at www.sonjaardoin.com.



Dr. Darris Means

Hailing from South Carolina, Dr. Darris R. Means is a Professor of Educational Leadership and Dean's Fellow for Rural Education. Prior to becoming a faculty member, he was an administrator for a college access program, Elon University's Elon Academy, working with high school and college students from low-income families and/or students with no family history of college to support their postsecondary education enrollment, persistence, and graduation. His research focuses on two areas: (a) pathways to careers in STEM and medicine for rural students and Black students and (b) postsecondary education access and success for rural students, Black students, first-generation college students, and students from low-income backgrounds. Darris' research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the Spencer Foundation, and his scholarship appears in *Review of Higher Education*, *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *Innovative Higher Education*, and *Journal of College Student Development*. He has also co-edited two books focused on equity and justice in higher education. He is currently the President-Elect Designate for the National Rural Education Association.

A Letter from the Faculty

History and Background

In subsequent years, this section should be much shorter, but as this is the program's first annual report, I thought providing some history and context was important. From research conducted in the Clemson archives, the first mention of a concentration in Student Affairs within the Counselor Education program was in 1967. At that time, there were three concentrations comprising the Master of Education in Counselor Education Degree: Community Counseling (later to be renamed Clinical Mental Health Counseling), School Counseling, and Student Affairs. The larger program was primarily designed to educate, train, and license counselors.

Situated within Counselor Education, the student affairs concentration was the smallest of the three concentrations in terms of enrollment, with classes of about 10 students. As for the curriculum, students in all three programs took a common core of counseling classes (8 later reduced to 5), including Counseling Theory, Developing Counseling Skills, Group Counseling, and Multicultural Counseling. Students then took specialization courses in their respective concentrations. At this time, the program was a 48-hour credit program.

As we were part of the Counselor Education program, when seeking CACREP accreditation, the School of Education leadership decided all three programs would seek this accreditation, and all three were awarded this accreditation. The student affairs program continued with this accreditation until about 2015, when new CACREP requirements shifted program hours to 48 to 60. At that time, the College of Education and Faculty decided to only seek accreditation for the Clinical Mental Health and School Counseling concentrations, not the Student Affairs concentration, as by this time most student affairs programs nationally were withdrawing from CACREP due to its strong counseling focus for training licensed counselors.

Origin and Evolution of the Program

The hiring of Dr. Barbara Griffin in 1986 as the primary faculty coordinating this program increased the visibility of the program by redesigning the curriculum to reflect a student affairs emphasis. Trained as a professional licensed counselor, Barbara saw the need for student affairs professionals working on college campuses to ensure student success. Much of the early success of this program was due to Barbara's commitment and dedication.

I (Dr. Tony Cawthon) was hired in 1997 as the first full-time faculty member devoted to the student affairs concentration. Barbara had laid an excellent foundation for me to be successful. Under her guidance, I was able to grow the program in size and scope. Revisions to the curriculum were made to better prepare and educate student affairs professionals equipped with basic counseling skills, not student affairs professionals who planned to be licensed counselors. These changes included changing the focus and name of three of the counseling courses to reflect the ACPA/NASPA language, i.e., Counseling Theory and Counseling Skills became Advising and Supporting, and Multicultural Counseling became Social Justice and Inclusion, while also dropping two of the required counseling courses and adding courses on Legal Issues and Diversity Issues.

Where Are We Today

Currently, there are 55 students enrolled in the program. Our current cohorts are made up of 24 students in the incoming class, 26 in the second-year class, and five full-time employees. The program received about 250 applications for this year. For fall 2025, a total of 50 students were offered academic admission (34 domestic and 16 international). Of those denied, 264 were international applicants and five were domestic applicants. Students were denied admission primarily based on experiences in higher education as student leaders or student affairs work.

In the past, we would receive more than 120 domestic student applications or more each year. The number of domestic student applications this year (similar to numbers across the post-pandemic years) illustrates the previous point that domestic applications are down significantly. Our numbers at Clemson are reflective of the national trend in similar programs.

The current program is 42 credits with three experiential learning opportunities (one practicum and two internships). On exit surveys, students consistently cite practicum and internship experiences as critically important to their learning and preparation to work in and around higher education. Many other programs require only one field experience in addition to an assistantship. Our dedication to multiple field experiences allows students to work in different functional areas or at different types of institutions as they prepare for full-time employment.

This program remains a strong one for many reasons, but three stand out. First, we have an outstanding alumni base with over 900 graduates. We regularly engage and communicate with them. Alumni are invited to participate in class panels, to guest lecture in courses, and to mentor current students. In addition, each spring, the resumes of the graduating cohort are distributed across the network for potential job assistance. Alumni consistently direct students to our program every year. For example, last year in the Introduction class, I asked how many of the 26 students were referred to Clemson by an alum. More than 2/3 of the class raised their hand.

The second primary strength of our program is our students. This high-touch program offers many signature events, and all of them are either coordinated by students or students are integral to the program's success. For example, students took the lead in coordinating, and they play key roles in the following projects: the Hooding Ceremony, the Practicum and Internship Fair, the Department Newsletter, this Annual Report, and the Clemson University Graduate Assistantship Requirement and Selection (CUGARS) process. Much of our success would not have happened without our students' commitment to service to our program and to Clemson University.

Finally, we have strong, committed faculty and dedicated staff partners. Our program is high-touch, where faculty engage both in and out of the classroom with students. As a faculty, we are committed to student success, and upon graduation, we continue mentoring and offering guidance to students. We each bring practitioner experience into our faculty roles to inform our teaching. We are also each part of an extensive network that goes beyond program alumni to include our past work partners, professional organization roles and relationships, and scholarly partnerships. All these experiences enhance the experience of students in our program.

Additionally, our campus partners are crucial to our programmatic success. In addition to assistantships and field experiences in student and academic affairs and other units on campus, our partners help coordinate CUGARS, visit classrooms as guest lecturers, offer financial support for the initiatives that make our program unique, and collaborate with us in a variety of other ways based on emerging needs and goals. We are proud that our program continues to be strong, and we are especially proud that we were able to build an incoming class of 24, when programs nationwide are seeing a decline in students.

A Look Ahead

Higher education is in the midst of tremendous change and - at times - turmoil. Our Student Affairs program is navigating the same. Many students do not want to work in higher education. Anti-DEI sentiments, the poor entry-level pay, long and non-traditional hours, and COVID-19-related fallout are all factors in the changing Student Affairs climate. Enrollment in student affairs and higher education programs today is facing a national crisis.

This crisis is being played out with schools eliminating or putting on hold admissions to their program. Programs around the country are seeing significant drops in applications from domestic students, with increasingly high applications from international students (particularly from Ghana and Nigeria). Some programs have tried to save themselves by focusing on enrolling international students, but to do so, programs must be 100% online. This compromises the experiential aspect of the program (assistantships, practica, and internships). Additionally, online programs are also experiencing challenges in enrolling students.

However, despite these challenges, we have confidence in our ability to continue to build on our past success. Our students contribute more than 8,700 work hours to higher education through their field experiences each year (most of that on the Clemson campus). This does not count the 20-28 hours they each work in their assistantships every week. At an institution with a goal of "providing the number one student experience," these front-line staff are essential to achieving this, and they are instrumental in Clemson University's consistently high rankings by students and alumni (for example, earning an A+ in Student Life by Niche in the fall of 2024).

Alumni of our program go on to work in and around higher education in the U.S. and internationally. We also have several alumni who stay at Clemson and continue to work on campus in areas such as Career Services, ClemsonHome, the Center for Student Leadership and Engagement, Fraternity and Sorority Life, and many others.

It is our hope that this annual report reflects the scope of the outstanding work being done by our graduate students to help ensure that Clemson offers the number one student experience!

- Student Affairs and Higher Education Faculty

Program Outcomes

*Graduates of the Master of Education in
Counselor Education Student Affairs program
will be:*

Informed practitioners who apply research and scholarship to individual contexts and broader learning environments.

Active practitioners who engage in service and professional development at the campus, local, state, national, and international levels.

Introspective practitioners who make ethical and critical decisions in pursuit of just and equitable experiences and environments.

Collaborative practitioners who create, implement, and support equitable opportunities and environments to address emerging issues in community with others.

Graduating Cohort

*Wentson University
Wentson, South Carolina*

2024-2025 Graduating Class at a Glance

63,335

Graduate Assistantship
Hours Completed

26

Graduating
Students



Practicum
Hours
Completed

1,875

5,375

Internship
Hours
Completed



1,768

Volunteer
Hours
Completed

\$6,625

in Grants &
Scholarships



30

Publications/
Academic
Podcasts

11

Conference
Presentations

Data was pulled from a Qualtrics form students completed in EDSA 8060: Student Affairs Issues

Professional Organization Involvement



Chloe Dragos served as ACPA Graduate Students and New Professionals Social Media Coordinator



Andrew Seifert served on the AFA Annual Meeting Graduate Staff



Charles Hawes served as SACSA's Conference Assessment Coordinator



Connor Weir served as SACSA's Presidential Scholar and the annual Conference Logistics Coordinator



Benjamin Dadzie served as a SACSA Graduate Student Ambassador



ASSOCIATION FOR
Orientation • Transition • Retention
IN HIGHER EDUCATION



Camryn Hubbard was a member of the SCACE Conference Committee



Ashley Schmidt served as the NIRSA South Carolina State Student Representative



Conference Presentations



Benjamin Dadzie

"Moving Towards a Globalized Educational Paradigm in Higher Education and Student Affairs Programs"

SACSA Conference, 2024
ACPA Convention, 2025



Kamariah Hammonds

"It Begins in You"

Leader in You Summit
Clemson University, 2023



Connor Weir (right)

Case Study Competition

Awarded Best Problem-Solving Award
with first-year, Ashe Ballew
NODA Conference, 2024



Kaylanii Mertin

"Employing Generational Wealth: Scalable Strategies for Supervising Effective Multi-Generational Teams" (Panel Member)

NASPA Annual Conference, 2025



Charles Hawes IV (left)

Public Policy Case Study Competition
NASPA Conference, 2024



Lia Fiore

"Demystifying the Hidden Curriculum: Mastering the Magic of Internship Preparation for First-Generation and Low-Income Students"
SoACE Conference, 2024

"Man Versus Machine: A Comparison of Human-Generated and ChatGPT-Generated Cover Letters"
CEIA Conference, 2025

Supporting the No. 1 Student Experience

Bailey Chariker

College of Behavioral,
Social, and Health Sciences
Academic Advising
Graduate Assistant



I have had the privilege of serving as the Graduate Assistant for Academic Advising in the College of Behavioral, Social, and Health Sciences at Clemson University for the past two years. In this position, I have been able to provide Graduation Planning appointments for students. During these meetings, I assist students in outlining their long-term goals and ensuring they meet any professional school requirements. One student had a dream of being accepted into the Nursing Program at Clemson. Together, we carefully developed a graduation plan to meet all the necessary requirements. Recently, they were accepted into the program and expressed their gratitude for the guidance I provided to help them reach this milestone.

This interaction is important to me because it allowed me to form a strong relationship with the student and understand their career goals. It showed me how to be intentional with students and to curate effective plans to meet their academic goals and needs. This has motivated me to strengthen my skills in student development and attention to detail.

In my role, I have been able to supervise Supplemental Instruction Leaders and Community of Practice (COP) Leaders. COP Leaders are former SI leaders who have stepped up into a mentorship role for SI leaders. These students take their experience as SI leaders and use it to assist new and returning SI leaders with their transition into the role and their continued professional development. We recently finished interviews to replace two COP leaders for the next academic year, and both students selected for the position are SI leaders whom I have supervised in the past year. When I began supervising them, they were starting their second year in the role, but I could see that they could still grow. Using one-on-ones and evaluations, I was able to help them grow in their leadership roles and help to better prepare them to move into the next step of COP leader. I am proud of the work that they have put in, and I am so excited for them to take a step toward more leadership and know they will do amazing in the role!

Alan Elgin

Graduate Assistant for
Supplemental Instruction and
Academic Support - Bridge to
Clemson



Lia Fiore

Assistant Director of
Undergraduate Off-Campus
Internships



In my full-time job, I have created and now run an internship prep program for first-generation and low-income students called Tigers on Track. In our pilot cohort, I had a student with whom I worked a lot, 1:1 to transform her traditional psychology student résumé to a résumé more suited for the fashion industry, which she wanted to go into. After workshoping her résumé, building a portfolio, and helping her learn how to leverage her transferable skills, she was able to secure a fashion internship in LA. This experience is very meaningful to me because I could see the direct impact of the effort I put in. The experience was also made possible by the stipend she got from the program and a grant the CCPD offered, so that was another way we saw the impact of our efforts. The student was able to gain hands-on experience in a relevant industry that she is able to talk about on her résumé and in interviews, which has led her to pursue new and exciting opportunities.

2024-2025 Graduates



Lauren Bender
Management Rotational
Program Associate
Capital One



Kamariah Hammonds
Assistant Director of
Inclusion & Multicultural
Engagement
*Lewis and Clark
University*



Kaylanii Mertin
Residence Director
Siena College



Sarah Berchtold
Residence Director
*University of
Massachusetts
Amherst*



Charles Hawes IV
Conduct Officer
*Washington State
University*



Grace Miller
Assistant Director of
Fraternity and Sorority
Life
*Washington and Lee
University*



Lauren Burd
Peer-Assisted
Learning Program
Manager
Clemson University



Miguel Hornedo
Assistant Director for
the United Front
Multicultural Commons
University of San Diego



Rachel Mustin
College of Arts
& Humanities
Assistant Director
of Student Services
Clemson University



Bailey Chariker
Student Affairs
Program Coordinator
University of Florida



Allen Geiger III
Residence Life
Coordinator
*University of
South Carolina*



Hali Sanders
Assistant Director of
Career Development
Clemson University



Benjamin Dadzie
Residence Life
Coordinator
University of Iowa



Camryn Hubbard
Career Development
Coach
*University of
South Carolina*



Ashley Schmidt
Assistant Director of
Sport Programs
Clemson University



Chloe Dragos
Assistant Director of
Fraternity and Sorority
Life
*Western Carolina
University*



True-Allah Liles
Class of 2025
Clemson University



Andrew Seifert
Assistant Director
of Facilities
*Alpha Sigma Phi
Fraternity*



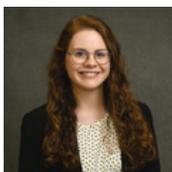
Alan Elgin
Resident Director
Duquesne University



Jacob Maddox
Assistant Director
for Programming
Creighton University



Abigail Sylvester
Fraternity and
Sorority
Life Specialist
*Northeastern
University*



Lia Fiore
Assistant Director
of Undergraduate
Off-Campus
Internships
Clemson University



Richard Manu
Coordinator of
Residence Life
*Appalachian State
University*



Connor Weir
Orientation Services
Program Coordinator
University of Iowa



Sydney Flader
Coordinator for
Campus Engagement
*University of
Tennessee
Knoxville*



**Alejandro Mejia-
Tejada**
Class of 2025
Clemson University



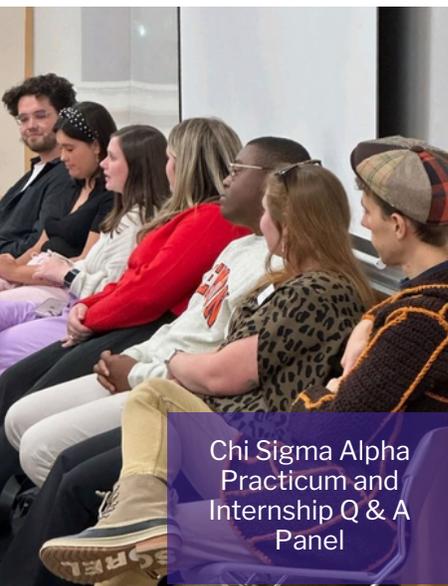
Program Events



Practicum and Internship Fair

Students in the graduate program must complete at least two field experiences. These include a 75-hour practicum and a 125-hour internship. Students are expected to secure their own practicum and internship placements, either on or off campus. To support this process, a Practicum and Internship Fair is held in conjunction with the EDSA 8030 Introduction to Student Affairs course. Thirty-one host sites from five institutions participated, and a total of 26 students attended and connected with potential placement sites.

In preparation for the fair, the Chi Sigma Alpha Honor Society developed a Canvas page to help students explore their options. It featured information from various host sites, including supervisor introduction videos, job descriptions, expected work hours, and contact information. Students also received a planning and reflection guide to support goal setting and preparation. Additionally, Chi Sigma Alpha second years organized and hosted a Practicum and Internship Panel, where they shared their experiences and answered questions from peers.



CU-GARS



Clemson University Graduate Assistant Recruitment and Selection (CU-GARS) is a collaborative effort to identify, market, and facilitate filling approved assistantships for prospective students seeking to enroll in the M.Ed. Student Affairs program. While the interview weekend occurs in February, the Coordinating Committee's work begins in August with graduate student-led subcommittees in October to deliver the No. 1 experience for prospective students and hiring departments across the institution. The program would like to thank the following individuals for their work to make CU-GARS a success.

CU-GARS Planning Committee

Professional Staff

Leasa Evinger, Amy Gamble, Yolande Graham, Julia Dingle Robinson, Kristin Walker-Donnelly

Graduate Interns

Sydney Flader, Jacob Maddox

Events

Piper Carroll, Connor Weir, Molly Yonker

SPA

Tyler Brown, Chloe Dragos, Ashley Sanfacon

Chi Sigma Alpha

Grace Miller

On-Campus Experience

Tori Braren, Jake Czaplicki, Jayme Snyder, Savanna Vest

Virtual Experience

Grace Miller, Skylar Walder

Assessment

Tyler Brown, Celeste Kapalin

PAW Pal

Benjamin, Dadzie, Alan Elgin, Kiarra Vacek



Opening Session

Upon arrival, candidates are welcomed with dinner and words of encouragement in the Almeda Jacks Ballroom. The evening featured remarks from Dr. Kristin Walker-Donnelly, a message from alumna Ti-Ana Pyatt, and student leaders from SPA and Chi Sigma Alpha. The night closed with choose-your-own-adventure socials, helping candidates begin building relationships and connections.



Hospitality Room

The hospitality room served as a welcoming space throughout the in-person experience. The room was stocked with snacks and breakfast items, and it provided candidates and interviewers a comfortable place to relax between activities. Current students and faculty members visited the space, using it as an opportunity to answer questions, offer insight, and build informal connections with candidates.



Student Socials

Social events offered ways for candidates to engage with current students and peers in an informal setting. Thursday evening included options like Dance Night and coloring activities, while Friday night featured a taco bar and game night. These moments gave candidates a glimpse into the strong sense of connection and belonging that defines life in the graduate program and the Clemson Family.





Student Speakers

Throughout the weekend, current graduate students played a key role in shaping the candidate experience. Camryn Hubbard (Clemson '22, '25) spoke about finding a mentor who introduced her to the field of higher education. Her story, like many shared during the weekend, offered an honest and relatable glimpse into the paths that lead students to Clemson and student affairs.



Faculty Panel

On Saturday morning, faculty members Dr. Tony Cawthon, Dr. Michelle Boettcher, and Dr. Sonja Ardoin participated in a panel discussion facilitated by second-year student Connor Weir. Professors shared their insights on academic expectations, student support, and the collaborative nature of the program. The session gave candidates a valuable opportunity to learn about the academic side of graduate life at Clemson.



Closing Session

The weekend concluded with a breakfast in the President's Suite at Memorial Stadium. Candidates received guidance on next steps, learned about involvement opportunities, and engaged with student leaders. The program closed with "There's Something in These Hills," a Clemson traditions session featuring Central Spirit, reflections from current students, and photos with the Tiger.



CLEMSON® UNIVERSITY GRADUATE ASSISTANT RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Data sheet created by Dr. Kristin Walker-Donnelly

Numbers and Voices

25	13	310	42	243	40
Assistantships for Fall 2025 Cohort	Hiring Departments	Academic Applications	Candidates	Interviews	Student Volunteers
<i>14 in the Division of Student Affairs</i>	<i>3 in the Division of Student Affairs</i>	<i>271 international applicants</i>	<i>29 in-person & 13 virtual</i>	<i>183 in-person & 60 virtual</i>	<i>2 Interns</i>

Top 3 Reasons Candidates Applied to Clemson

1. Tuition Remission and Meets Career Goals (**tied**)
2. Assistantship/Field Experience Opportunities
3. Academic Curriculum

Ranked Clemson # 1
Pre-CU-GARS

28/40

Top 3 Factors Influencing Ranking Assistantships of Interest

1. Job Responsibilities
2. Feeling/Information Gained During the Interview
3. Perceived Office Culture and Level of Student Interaction (**tied**)

Ranked Clemson # 1
Post-CU-GARS

27/32

94.4%

(N=36)

Candidates who strongly agreed or agreed with their overall interview experience was positive

100%

(N=13)

Candidates who strongly agreed or agreed they received timely and consistent support

“Thank all of you for your hard work ensuring that CUGARS 2025 was a roaring success. It was the best yet, and each year I wonder how we will top last year, yet we always improve on the candidate’s experience. I heard so many great comments from candidates as well as from employers on the process and how great it was. Thank you for allowing your staff to coordinate this process. Their leadership, especially Kristin’s, is essential to the success of our recruiting, outstanding graduate students and achieving the number one student experience.”

– **Dr. Tony W. Cawthon, Faculty**

“The students made this happen, and it shows in the trust the program has in them, the culture of accommodation and care, organization, and communication. The communications and activities of the weekend told us exactly what to expect from the program and what would be expected of us to make the most of the M.Ed. experience. From my many conversations with other candidates and where else they were considering to go, Clemson’s recruitment efforts appeared to be head and shoulders above other programs.” – **Candidate**

“I couldn’t have asked for a better weekend. I knew as soon as I was leaving that Clemson is exactly where I need to be. Thank you to all of the staff and students who made this possible!” – **Candidate**

“Thank you for planning such a truly great event. Your hard work does not go unnoticed!” – **Supervisor**

Example Continuous Improvement Opportunities 2026

- Adjust academic application essay questions and deadline
- Implement proactive recruiting and communication strategy from the faculty
- Continue exploring effective, manageable ways to interview and engage international applicants

Hooding Ceremony

Each May, the Chi Sigma Alpha Honor Society coordinates the Hooding Ceremony to celebrate graduates of Clemson University's M.Ed. in Student Affairs program. The ceremony marks the formal conferral of academic hoods, symbolizing the transition from graduate student to professional. Faculty members present each graduate with their hood in front of peers, family, and mentors—offering a moment of recognition for the hard work and dedication required to complete the program.

The ceremony also highlights the historical roots of the academic hood, a tradition dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries in European universities. Once a practical garment for cold libraries, the hood has become a symbol of scholarship, with colors and styles representing academic disciplines and degrees. In addition to hooding, three awards were presented. These recognitions reflect the values of the student affairs profession and the strength of the Clemson graduate community.

The Outstanding Professional Award, presented by Chi Sigma Alpha, honors a faculty or staff member who exemplifies the organization's pillars of academics, research, and service. The recipient is selected through nominations submitted by current members.

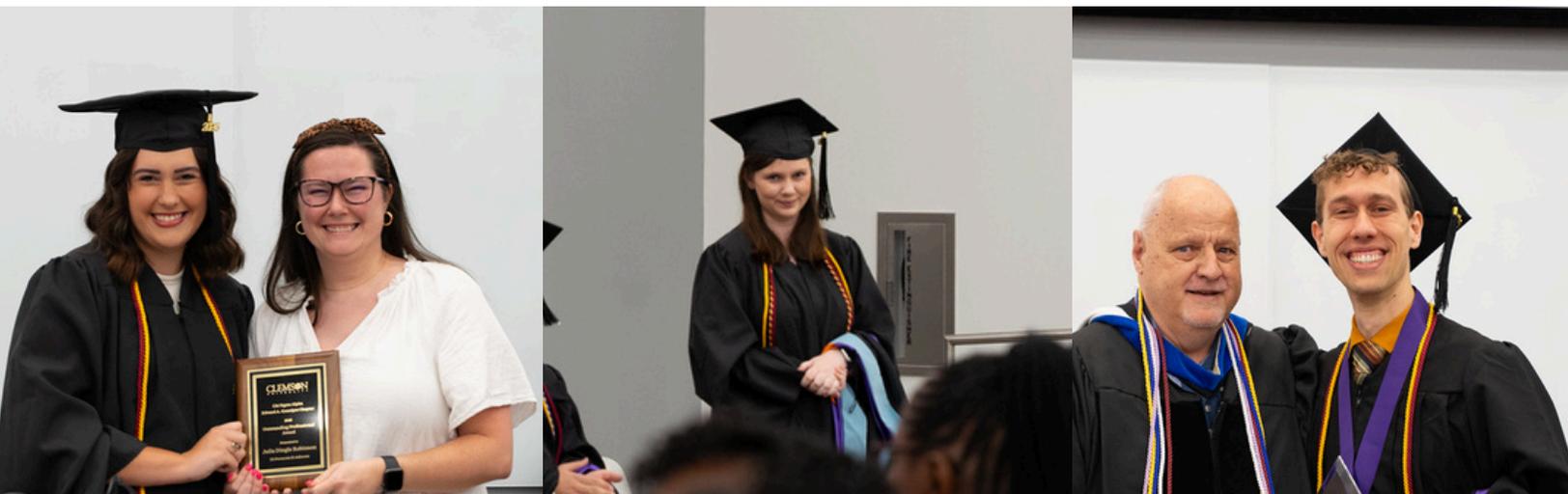
The Student Personnel Association Outstanding Member of the Year Award recognizes a graduating member who has demonstrated consistent involvement, innovation, and dedication to the success and growth of SPA throughout their time in the program.

The Outstanding Graduate Student Award, sponsored by the national chapter of Chi Sigma Alpha, is awarded to a graduate student who has shown excellence in academics, research, and contributions to the student affairs profession. This recipient is selected through a peer vote and faculty input.

Chi Sigma Alpha's
Outstanding Professional
Julia Dingle Robinson

SPA's Outstanding Member of
the Year
Sydney Flader

Outstanding Graduate
Student Award
Charles Hawes IV





Student Organizations



Chi Sigma Alpha

Chi Sigma Alpha is the distinguished Student Affairs honor society dedicated to advancing the pillars of Academics, Research, and Service to the Profession. Clemson University proudly hosts the Edward A. Grandpre chapter, the second-oldest and longest continually active chapter of Chi Sigma Alpha. The society brings together graduate students committed to excellence in scholarship, professional development, and meaningful service within the Student Affairs field. Members benefit from opportunities to engage with faculty mentors, participate in research, and contribute to initiatives that strengthen the university community and the profession at large. Chi Sigma Alpha emphasizes the importance of servant leadership and commitment to the Student Affairs profession. Through active engagement in academics, research, and service, members of Chi Sigma Alpha develop the skills and connections necessary to excel as future leaders in higher education and related fields.



Throughout the year, the chapter engaged in a variety of activities, including educational panels, social gatherings, and professional development opportunities. Highlights were regularly shared through the chapter's Instagram account (@cuchisigmaalpha), which offered a glimpse into member milestones, conference participation, and campus involvement.



Not pictured: Alan Elgin, Delta Delta Class

Chi Sigma Alpha

Gamma Gamma Class



Grace Miller
President



Jacob Maddox
*Director of
Internal Affairs*



Kaylanii Mertin
*Director of
External Affairs*



Charles Hawes IV
*Director of
Membership
Involvement*



Sydney Flader
Member



True Liles
Member

Delta Delta Class



Ashe Ballew
President



Skylar Walder
*Director of
Internal Affairs*



Kiarra Vacek
*Director of
External Affairs*



Savanna Vest
*Director of
Membership
Involvement*



Elise Blackburn
Member



Alan Elgin
Member



Matthew Inman
Member



Celeste Kapalin
Member



Molly Yonker
Member



Student Personnel Association (SPA)

The Student Personnel Association (SPA) serves as the primary professional and community-building organization for graduate students in the Student Affairs program at Clemson University. All students in the program are considered members upon enrollment, with opportunities to engage at varying levels. SPA promotes growth and connection in the field of Higher Education through student-led initiatives, professional development, and collaboration with faculty, staff, alumni, and peers. Throughout the year, SPA hosts a variety of events—from social gatherings like game nights and creative activities, to more structured experiences such as virtual networking with other graduate programs and a podcast series that explores topics relevant to the profession.

In addition to community-building, SPA offers involvement in signature programs like the Alumni Mentor Program (AMP), which connects current students with program graduates for mentorship and support. SPA also maintains an active social media presence (@clem_spa), where the organization highlights events, member takeovers, and important updates. Led by an executive board of current students, SPA encourages collaboration, leadership, and intentional engagement with the student affairs community. As reflected in the words of 2025 President, Tyler Brown, the heart of SPA lies in the people who bring it to life—those who are committed to supporting one another and contributing to a culture of care and connection within the program.



SPA

2024 Executive Board



Sydney Flader
President



Alan Elgin
*Vice President of
Administration*



Chloe Dragos
*Vice President of
Communication*



Sarah Berchtold
*Vice President of
Events*



Miguel Hornedo
*Vice President of
Professional Development*



Camryn Hubbard
Transition Co-Chair



Averie Johnson
Transition Co-Chair

2025 Executive Board



Tyler Brown
President



Ethan Dent
*Vice President of
Administration*



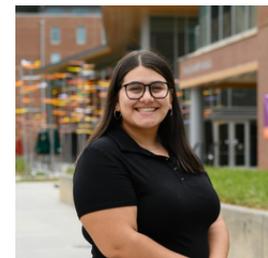
Ashley Sanfacon
*Vice President of
Communication*



Celeste Kapalin
Vice President of Events



Matthew Inman
*Vice President of
Professional Development*



Hailey Duarte
Transition Chair

SPA Events



Back to School Pool Party
August 2024



Clemson vs. Stanford Baseball Tailgate
April 2025



College Football Championship Watch Party
January 2025



SPA Swap Social
September 2024



Wild West Murder Mystery Party
July 2024



First Years vs. Second Years Kickball Game
March 2025



Clemson vs. Citadel Football Tailgate
November 2024

Honors and Awards



Tony W. Cawthon Professional Development Fund

Each year, alumni of the Student Affairs graduate program have the opportunity to donate to the Tony W. Cawthon Professional Development Fund. This fund provides financial assistance for students seeking professional development experiences. Recipients are selected by program faculty based on submitted applications. Because many graduate assistantships have limited funding for professional development, this fund offers an important alternative for students to access impactful growth opportunities.



Benjamin Dadzie (2025)

"Thanks to this generous support, I had the incredible opportunity to present a poster on globalizing higher education and student affairs programs at SACSA, focusing on how institutions can integrate international perspectives into student affairs curricula and professional training. Engaging with scholars and practitioners who share a passion for this work was both inspiring and affirming of my research interests. I am deeply grateful for the Tony W. Cawthon Travel Fund and the impact it has had on my professional development."



Charles Hawes IV (2025)

"Not only did NASPA provide actionable insights on conflict management and international student support (my main areas of focus), but I also had the chance to network with some incredible professionals from the institutions to which I am applying. I am graduating this May, and have a very limited search radius centered all the way over in the Pacific Northwest, so believe me when I say getting to go and meet these practitioners was an incredible benefit."



Kaylanii Mertin (2025)

"I'm incredibly grateful for the support from the Tony Cawthon Professional Development Fund, which allowed me to attend the NASPA Annual Conference this year. This grant allowed me to experience a transformative professional development opportunity -- from presenting for the first time at a national conference to attending valuable informational sessions."



Abigail Sylvester (2025)

"Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Tony W. Cawthon Fund! Because of your help, I was able to attend the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors Annual Meeting in Indianapolis, and it was an amazing experience. I attended some great sessions about inclusion and belonging in Fraternity and Sorority Life, ways to improve retention rates, and supporting mental health for our chapter members. I also joined sessions for grad students and new professionals, which were incredibly helpful for learning more about the job search."

Student Awards



Benjamin Dadzie (2025) received the **R.C. Edwards Outstanding Graduate Student Award**. This award is given to the best ‘all-around” graduate student with high scholarly achievement and someone who contributes to the Clemson community through leadership in university and/or community organizations. Benjamin was also awarded the **Outstanding Graduate Student** from the Association of College and University Housing Officers - International (ACUHO-I).



Averie Johnson (2026) received the inaugural **Excellence in Undergraduate Academic Advising Staff Award** from the Clemson University Division of Undergraduate Learning. This award is presented to a staff academic advisor who has consistently delivered outstanding academic advising practices and support to students and engaged in service to the academic advising community.



Hali Sanders (2025) received the **Excellence in Service Award** from Clemson’s College of Education. Award recognizes college, university, state, national, international, and/or professional service with emphasis given to contributions supporting the CoE mission.



Skylar Walder (2026) received the **Walter T. Cox Graduate Student Award** from the Clemson Division of Student Affairs. This award The Walter T. Cox Graduate Student Award is given to a first-year graduate scholar exemplifying excellence within the Clemson community.



Faculty Honors and Awards



Dr. Tony Cawthon was chosen to receive the **Thomas Green Clemson Award for Excellence**. This award was established to recognize Clemson University faculty and staff whose teaching, research and/ or service have been exemplary. The award is given to individuals who have made sustained and significant contributions to academic life at Clemson University.



The **Clemson Graduate School Distinguished Doctoral Mentoring Award** was awarded to Dr. Tony Cawthon. This award is presented to two faculty members to recognize and celebrate their excellence in mentoring doctoral students.



Two of the program's faculty were recognized with awards at the fall 2025 Clemson College of Education Retreat. Dr. Sonja Ardoin (left) was awarded the **Award of Excellence in Teaching and Academic Publishing Award**. This award recognizes exceptional teaching that promotes student learning and efforts to increase student engagement and success. Dr. Michelle Boettcher (right) was awarded the **Award of Excellence in Services**. This award recognizes college, university, state, national, international, and/or professional service with emphasis given to contributions supporting the College of Education mission.



Dr. Sonja Ardoin (right) received the **Outstanding Service as HESA Faculty Award** from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators-South Carolina (NASPA-SC) at their annual state meeting held at USC Upstate. This award recognizes the consistent and exemplary teaching and mentorship of graduate students in higher education and student affairs programs at South Carolina colleges and universities.



COE faculty member Dr. Sonja Ardoin (right) recently received the **ACPA-College Student Educators International Commission for Faculty and Graduate Programs Teaching Excellence Award**. The award offers instructional faculty in higher education and student affairs graduate programs an opportunity to be recognized by their peers as teachers who inspire the next generation of college student educators. Ardoin said it was a "full circle moment" as she was presented the award by Dr. Ali Watts, a former student from her first faculty appointment and now colleague at Bowling Green State University. Congratulations!

Faculty Honors and Awards



Dr. Sonja Ardoin received the **NASPA Region III Outstanding Contribution to Student Affairs through Teaching Award**. This prestigious award signifies that her student affairs colleagues value her contributions to her field. It also exemplifies her hard work within the profession, at Clemson, and the NASPA Region III.

Dr. Sonja Ardoin was also recognized by NASPA as **the Faculty Council Mid-Career Award recipient**. This prestigious award honors mid-career faculty who have excelled in research, teaching and service within the student affairs field. Ardoin's outstanding contributions include significant scholarly work, excellence in teaching, mentorship of students, leadership and dedication to mentoring early-career faculty.



Dr. Darris Means (2005), the Clemson University College of Education's inaugural dean's fellow for rural education, was **elected in 2025 by the National Rural Education Association (NREA) as president-elect designate**. The five-year term will see Means go on to serve as president-elect, president, immediate past-president, and past-president, all roles that put him on the NREA's executive committee. In the role, Means will work with the rest of the executive committee, the executive board and the organization's executive director to develop and implement strategies to support and elevate rural education across the U.S.



Dr. Darris Means (2005) was named **Top 10 Under 10** by his alma mater, Elon University. Ten accomplished alumni of Elon University from the past decade are chosen for this honor if they have achieved professional success, continuously work to better their communities and serve as loyal alum role models.

Alumni Honors and Awards 2024-2025

- **Dr. Lakiesa Latrelle Rawlinson ('03):** Excellence in Leadership Award, University of West Georgia
- **Dr. Maria Iglesia Jaochico ('09):** Chancellor Award for Exceptional University Service, the University of California, San Francisco
- **Kate Radford ('10):** Outstanding Contribution to Student Engagement, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators-South Carolina
- **Dr. Kristin Walker-Donnelly ('12):** National Panhellenic Conference Board of Directors for 2025-2027
- **Elizabeth "Liz" Kubias ('14):** Withrow Student Service Award, Michigan State University's College of Engineering
- **Karee Keefer White ('17):** 2025 Forty Under 40 and 2025 Women of Influence honoree, Greenville, Spartanburg, Anderson Business Report
- **Sherece Smith ('18):** Frank A. Burtner Award for Excellence in Advising, Clemson University
- **Elizabeth Staten ('18):** Staff Supporter of the Year award, Metropolitan College
- **Jared Logan ('19):** Outstanding Orientation, Transition, and Retention Professional Award, NODA Region IV
- **Alexis "Lexie" Johnson ('20):** Student Organization Advisor of the Year Award, Furman University
- **Julia Dingle Robinson ('20):** Dean's Staff Innovation Award, Clemson University's College of Arts and Humanities; Outstanding Professional Award, Clemson's Clemson Chi Sigma Alpha chapter
- **Shauna Hines-Farmer ('21):** Innovation Award, North Carolina Association of Colleges & Employers
- **William "Billy" Watson ('21):** Staff Member of the Year, Shorter University
- **Olivia Battinelli ('22):** Steinhardt Give-A-Violet Award, New York University
- **Abigail Leppert ('22):** Hall Director of the Year, University of Colorado Boulder
- **Jamel Mallory, Jr. ('22):** Rising Star Award, University of North Carolina Career Community "C3" Conference
- **Rylee Bowman ('23):** Outstanding Student Services Award, Clemson University's College of Behavioral, Social, and Health Sciences
- **Dorcas Perez ('23):** Student Ambassador Advisor of the Year, Clemson University's College of Arts and Humanities
- **Amanda Arroyo Santamaria ('23):** Student Organization Advisor of the Year, Spartanburg Community College
- **Allison Weihe ('23):** Spirit of the Eagle Award, University of Southern Indiana's Student Government Association; "Winds of Change Award", University of Southern Indiana's Division of Student Affairs
- **Serenity Wolf ('23):** Outstanding New Teammate Award, Clemson University's College of Science
- **Chris King ('24):** Residence Coordinator of the Year, University of North Carolina, Wilmington

We are sincerely thankful to our colleagues, supporters, and alumnae for their continued generosity and dedication. Your support plays a vital role in shaping a dynamic and meaningful experience for students in the Counselor Education Student Affairs graduate program.

