

# Chera Jo Chassati Watts

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

## EDUCATION

---

- Doctoral Student, University of Georgia Department of Religion & Institute for African American Studies, Athens, GA, Dissertation Director: Carolyn Jones Medine, intended May 2025.
- MA in Religion, Graduate Certificate in African American Studies, 3.97 GPA, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, Thesis Director: Carolyn Jones Medine, Title: "Elliptical Practice: Womanist Buddhist Thought in the Works of Alice Walker," May 2022.
- BS in Psychology, Cum Laude, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, December 2010.

## ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

---

- **Teaching Assistant**, Institute for African American Studies, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, Fall 2019-Present, includes: administrative support to the IAAS Director, Associate Director, Faculty, & Academic Advisor, website edits and content creation using Drupal, coordinating student engagement events, promoting courses and IAAS activities using in-person or digital methods, supervising 1 FWS student worker, and undergraduate curriculum planning.
- **Academic Advisor in Residence**, Franklin Residential College (FRC), University of Georgia, Athens, GA, Fall 2017-May 2022 (5 Academic Years), included intentional student academic support for nearly 100 residents studying the arts & sciences and residing in Rutherford Hall; also included: budget planning & coordinating across 3 program budgets, meetings with campus and community partners, coordinating a student leadership executive board, website edits using Drupal, and facilitating 5-10 monthly academic, service, and social programs.
- **Co-Facilitator, Weekend Academic and Service Experiential Learning Overnight Trip for the FRC**, UGA Marine Institute & Hog Hammock Community at Sapelo Island, Georgia, Fall Breaks 2018, 2019, & 2021, includes transportation logistics, liaising with campus and community partners, organizing student activities for the 24 program participants, and budget planning.
- **Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Georgia-Oxford University Study Away Program**, June 2020 (pivoted online due to COVID-19) & June 2022 (in-person). 2022 trip included 18 program participants, several day-long excursions throughout the UK (London, Bath, Stratford, & others), and intentional on-site academic & residential support for the program participants residing together in the UGA Oxford Centre at Banbury Road.

## FELLOWSHIPS & RESEARCH RESIDENCIES

---

- Invited Program Participant, Penn Center Short Term Research Residency, collaboration among the University of Georgia Willson Center for the Humanities & Arts and the Penn Center with grant support from the Mellon Foundation, St. Helena Island, SC, May 2023.

## PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

---

- "An Ongoing Womanist Buddhist Project: Reading Between the Times," *Literature*, Special Edition: "Spirituality, Identity, and Resistance in African American Literature," edited by Carolyn Jones Medine, 2022. [Link](#).

## PEER REVIEWED BOOK CHAPTERS

---

- Forthcoming book chapter in the *The Routledge Companion to Toni Morrison*, co-authored with Chanara Andrews-Bickers, anticipated 2025. Working title: *A Case Study in Mutual (Re)Creation: A Collaborative Approach to Understanding the Lives, Literature, and Lessons of Toni Morrison and James Baldwin*.

## **SELECTED AWARDS & HONORS**

---

- UGA First Graduate Student Award Winner, honoring contribution & experiences of First-Generation students, November 2021.
- Blue Key Honor Society Member, inducted Fall 2021.
- Georgia Association for Women in Higher Education Louise McBee Award Nominee, January 2021.
- University of Georgia Career Center Acknowledgement for Contributing Greatly to Student Success, 2015-2020.
- Division of Academic Enhancement Outstanding Staff Member of the Year Award Nominee, 2018.
- TRiO/McNair Student Support Services “Beyond the Call of Duty” Award, 2019.
- University of Georgia Academic Advisor of the Year Nominee, 2016, 2017, & 2018.
- University of Georgia Costa Rica Academic Advisor Trip Award Winner, October 2015, included an all-inclusive week-long site tour of the UGA Costa Rica campus, meetings with students & community members, and several educational workshops.
- University of Georgia Training and Development Diversity & Inclusion Certificate, 2014.
- University of Georgia Training and Development Certificate in Academic Advising, 2014.
- Undergraduate: HOPE Scholarship Recipient, Academic Competitiveness Grant, Dean’s List, Georgia Governor’s Scholarship, Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship, Georgia Power Scholarship, 2007-2010.
- Pepperell High School Valedictorian, 2007.

## **GRANTS**

---

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

## **INVITED TALKS & PANELS**

---

- Presentation on the *Rest is Resistance* Book Club from a duo-ethnographic approach, co-presenter: Sha’Mira Covington, University of Georgia Institute for Women’s Studies Symposium, February 2023, Athens, GA.
- Invited Speaker, “But Some of Us are Sad: Exploring Sisterhood as Salvation in Graduate Education” Roundtable, University of Georgia Institute for Women’s Studies Symposium, February 2023, Athens, GA.
- Invited Panelist, Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies concurrently with the American Academy of Religion on “The Womanist Four-Part Definition & The Four Noble Truths,” intended November 2023, San Antonio, TX.

## **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & PANELS**

---

- Panelist, On “bell hooks’ Love Ethic: Body, Practice, and Homeplace,” 2023 bell hooks symposium, Berea College, June 2023.
- Doctoral Student Panelist, University of Georgia Department of Religion Professionalization Panel, January 2023.
- Presentation on the *Hood Feminism* Book Club from a duo-ethnographic approach, co-presenter: Sha’Mira Covington, Southern Humanities Council Conference, January 2022, Memphis, TN.
- Presentation on the Black Lives Matter in the Time of COVID Book Club in Franklin Residential College, co-presented with Sha’Mira Covington, Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR), Virtual Conference hosted by University of Florida, March 2021.

- Panelist, Black Lives Matter in the Time of COVID Panel, Southeastern Women's Studies Association (SEWSA) Virtual Conference, March 2021.
- Panelist, Concerning the Work of Toni Morrison, Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR) Conference in Athens, GA, February 2020.
- Panelist, First-Generation Students & Practitioners, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Brown Bag Luncheon Series, February 2020.
- Panelist, Experienced Academic Advisors, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference, December 2019.
- Experiential Learning: The Undergraduate Research Experience, co-presented with Dr. Mark Farmer from Department of Cellular Biology, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference, November 2015.

### **SCHOLARLY & TEACHING PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY**

---

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

### **ACADEMIC ADVISING PRESENTATIONS & WORKSHOPS**

---

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

### **MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

---

- Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, Member, 2020-Present.
- Southeastern Women's Studies Association, Member, 2021-Present.
- Southern Humanities Council, Member, 2021-Present.

### **UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

---

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

## **ACADEMIC ADVISING EXPERIENCE**

---

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

## **RECENT COMMUNITY SERVICE**

---

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

## **CURRENT RESEARCH INTERESTS**

---

- Ongoing: African American Womanist Thought & Practice (focusing on Alice Walker); Black Buddhists & Practice in America; Black Feminism; Womanism; Love as Active Teaching Practice (in the spirit of bell hooks); African American Female Blended Spirituality; Comparative & Blended Religions; Decolonizing Teaching Strategies, Learning Practices, & Modes of Being in the World
- In Progress (see peer-reviewed book chapters above): *A Case Study in Mutual (Re)Creation: A Collaborative Approach to Understanding the Lives, Literature, and Lessons of Toni Morrison and James Baldwin*, co-authored with Chanara Andrews, concerning archival research citing letters written between Baldwin and Morrison during the 1970s alongside their fictional writing, public appearances, and other public historical documents.