

CHERA JO CHASSATI WATTS

Department of Religion (Peabody Hall) and Institute for African American Studies (Holmes-Hunter Building) University of Georgia | Athens, GA 30602
cheraw@uga.edu | US: (706) 936-5937 | www.linkedin.com/in/chera-jo-watts-83880b26

EDUCATION

PhD in Religion, Intended Spring 2027, University of Georgia

- 4.0 GPA, Dissertation Director: Dr. Carolyn Medine, entitled “Practicing to Transgress: Alice Walker’s Revolutionary Artistry through a Black Buddhist Lens.”

MA in Religion, Certificate in African American Studies, May 2022, University of Georgia

- 3.97 GPA, Thesis Director: Dr. Carolyn Medine, entitled “Elliptical Practice: Womanist Buddhist Thought in the Works of Alice Walker.”

BS in Psychology, December 2010, University of Georgia

- Minor in Child & Family Development, Cum Laude.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

08/2025 – Present

Graduate Assistant Internship Program Coordinator Office of Sustainability, University of Georgia Supervisor: Kevin Kirsche

- Coordinate the Office of Sustainability (OoS) undergraduate internship program consisting of 30 paid interns and 12 direct supervisors. Includes mentoring two Lead Interns, managing and approving all intern payroll, facilitating professional development activities, organizing deliverables, and leading community building events.
- Support additional special projects and events, as needed, including the Circular UGA workshop geared towards faculty and staff leaders in sustainability, Semester in Review events, sustainability grant application review, hiring committees, and more.

08/2019 – 05/2024

Graduate Research Assistant Institute for African American Studies, University of Georgia Supervisor: Dr. Carolyn Medine

- Administrative support to the IAAS Director, Associate Director, Faculty, & Academic Advisor, managing all website edits and content creation using Drupal, coordinating student engagement events throughout each semester, promoting courses and IAAS activities using in-person or digital methods, supervising 1 FWS student worker, and undergraduate curriculum planning. August 2019 – May 2022 held concurrently with FRC Academic Advisor in Residence position.

06/2023 – 07/2023

Graduate Research Assistant Graduate School xPD Summer Internship Program, University of Georgia Supervisor: Dr. Barbara McCaskill

- Remote work supporting initiatives of the Penn Center National Historic Landmark District in St. Helena Island, South Carolina, and Willson Center for Humanities & Arts partnership under the Culture and Community Grant funded by the Mellon Foundation.
- Specific projects: marketing, copyright permissions, and archival research to inform an exhibition, September – December 2023, on the Penn Center campus at the York W. Bailey Museum. Co-edited and compiled, along with Dr. Barbara McCaskill and Ashley Williams, the exhibition booklet: *A World Within Worlds: The Visionary Art of Sam Doyle*.

06/2020 (remote) & 06/2022

Graduate Program Assistant University of Georgia – Oxford University Study Away Program Program Director: Dr. Jamie McClung

- Supported 18 program participants over 17 days in June 2022, including several day-long excursions throughout the UK (London, Bath, Stratford, & others), and intentional on-site academic & residential support while residing together in the UGA Oxford Centre at Banbury Road. (June 2020 pivoted online due to COVID-19).

TEACHING

01/2023 –
05/2023

Graduate Teaching Assistant
Institute for African American Studies, University of Georgia
Instructor of Record: Dr. Carolyn Medine

- **RELI/AFAM 2005, “Introduction to African American Religious Thought,”** 32 undergraduate students, handled grading and designated lectures as assigned.

PROFESSIONAL SCHOLARLY SERVICE

02/2020 –
Present

Executive Associate for Digital Services (Part time, remote)
Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (SBCS), University of Hawaii
Supervisor: SBCS Governing Board

- Editing and publishing blogs to the SBCS website, answering general membership questions and/or redirecting emails to appropriate Board members, preparing annual reports on behalf of the Website and Social Media Committee Chair, and other special projects as assigned by the Executive Governing Board members.

PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC ADVISING EXPERIENCE

08/2017 –
05/2022

Academic Advisor in Residence (Live-on)
Franklin Residential College (FRC), University of Georgia
Program Director: Dr. Ben Ehlers

- Academic and residential collaboration among the Office of Instruction, Housing, and Franklin College for nearly 100 residents studying the arts & sciences and residing in Rutherford Hall.
- Budget planning and coordination across 3 program budgets and meetings with campus partners, faculty, students, or community members resulted in 10 of more monthly academic, service, and social programs as advised by the student leadership executive board and the Director.
- Five total academic years, held concurrently with other university positions.

06/2018 –
07/2019

Coordinator of Scholars Initiatives
Division of Academic Enhancement, University of Georgia
Supervisor: Dr. Lindsay Coco

- Facilitated intentional academic enrichment support programs for need-based scholarship recipients as determined by the Office of Student Financial Aid (210 Georgia Commitment Scholars and 24 Correll Scholars across varying years and majors).
- Held concurrently with FRC Academic Advisor in Residence position.

10/2016 –
06/2018

Academic Advisor II
Franklin College of Arts & Sciences, University of Georgia
Supervisors: Dr. Diane Miller and Mr. Greg Kline

- Advised a roster of approximately 150 students majoring in cellular or plant biology.
- Lead advisor responsibilities included: managing an undergraduate listserv, facilitating the faculty mentoring program, and consulting on curriculum change matters with departmental leaders.
- 2017 – 2018 academic year, held concurrently with FRC Academic Advisor in Residence position.

06/2014 –
10/2016

Academic Advisor I
Division of Biological Sciences, University of Georgia
Supervisor: Ms. Elizabeth Fuller

- Advised a caseload of approximately 300 students majoring in biology or plant biology.

PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Medine, Carolyn J. and Watts, Chera Jo, "Alice Walker," *Oxford Bibliographies* in "African American Studies," New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780190280024-0137.

Watts, Chera Jo, "An Ongoing Womanist Buddhist Project: Reading Between the Times," *Literature* 2 (3), Special Edition: "Spirituality, Identity, and Resistance in African American Literature," ed. Carolyn Jones Medine, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.3390/literature2030013>.

PEER REVIEWED BOOK CHAPTERS

Andrews-Bickers, Chanara and Watts, Chera Jo, "Refusing Summation, Inviting Contemplation: A Collaborative Approach to Understanding the Lives, Literature, and Lessons of Toni Morrison and James Baldwin," *The Routledge Research Companion to Toni Morrison*, ed. Maureen Fadem, Routledge, anticipated 2026.

ADDITIONAL PUBLICATIONS

McCaskill, Barbara, Watts, Chera Jo, and Williams, Ashley, compilers. *A World Within Worlds: The Visionary Art of Sam Doyle*, Exhibition Booklet, September 23 – December 22, 2023, York W. Bailey Museum, Penn Center National Historic Landmark District, St. Helena Island, SC.

Watts, Chera Jo, "Graduate Student Member Spotlights: Blog for SBCS, Chera Jo Watts," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 2023. DOI: 10.1353/bcs.2023.a907587.

Watts, Chera Jo, *Elliptical Practice: Womanist Buddhist Thought in Selected Works by Alice Walker*, University of Georgia, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2022. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/elliptical-practice-analyzing-womanist-buddhist/docview/2681444848/se-2>.

FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS & HONORS

Graduate:

- J. William Fanning Graduate Fellowship, UGA 2025 – 2026
- Jane Mulkey and Rufus Green Graduate Fellowship, Franklin College, UGA 2024 – 2025
- Summer Research Assistantship, Franklin College, UGA June 2024
- Graduate School Summer Research Grant, UGA May 2024
- Lee Roy B. Giles Award, Institute for African American Studies, UGA 2024
- Graduate School Domestic Travel Grant, UGA June 2023
- Graduate School Dean's Award, UGA 2023
- Curriculum Diversity Enhancement Grant, Franklin College, UGA 2023
- University of Georgia First Graduate Student Award Winner, honoring contribution & experiences of First-Generation students November 2021
- University of Georgia, Blue Key Honor Society Member Fall 2021
- Georgia Association for Women in Higher Education Louise McBee Award Nominee January 2021

Undergraduate:

- HOPE Scholarship Recipient, Academic Competitiveness Grant, Dean's List, Georgia Governor's Scholarship, Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship, Georgia Power Scholarship, Pepperell High School Valedictorian 2007 – 2010

University Service:

- University of Georgia Career Center Acknowledgement for Contributing Greatly to Student Success 2015 – 2022
- TRiO/McNair Student Support Services "Beyond the Call of Duty" Award 2019
- University of Georgia, Division of Academic Enhancement Outstanding Staff Member of the Year Award Nominee 2018
- University of Georgia Academic Advisor of the Year Nominee 2016, 2017, & 2018
- University of Georgia Costa Rica Academic Advisor Trip Award Winner, included an all-inclusive week-long site tour of the UGA Costa Rica campus, meetings with students & community members, and several educational workshops October 2015

GRANTS

Women's and Girls in Georgia (WAGG) Conference Grant-Funding Project, \$2000, Grant Recipient for Radical Hope Book Club, University of Georgia Institute for Women's and Gender Studies, 2025 – 2026.

Graduate 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

Invited Talk, 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.

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-presented with 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.

BOOK CLUBS FACILITATED

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.

ACADEMIC ADVISING PRESENTATIONS & WORKSHOPS (CONTINUED)

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.

ADDITIONAL UNIVERSITY SERVICE AND TRAINING

Coordinator, Department of Religion and Institute for African American Studies Writing Retreat, December 2023 and May 2024, University of Georgia.

Coordinator, Department of Religion Graduate Student Professionalization Panel, January 2023, University of Georgia.

Member, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference Planning Committee, 2017.

University of Georgia Training and Development Diversity & Inclusion Certificate, 2014.

University of Georgia Training and Development Certificate in Academic Advising, 2014.

MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Black Women’s Studies Association, Member, 2023 – Present.

American Academy of Religion, Member, 2023 – Present.

Southeastern Women’s Studies Association, Member, 2021 – Present.

Southern Humanities Council, Member, 2021 – Present.

Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, Member, 2020 – Present.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Kindermarket Community Bi-Annual Sale, Athens YMCA, 2015 – Present.

Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery Clean-up, 2017 – 2022.

Athens Area Humane Society Volunteering, 2018 – 2022.