Advancing Rural Sociology: Navigating a Rural Landscape

2025 Annual Meeting
of the
Georgia Sociological Association

November 5-7
ABAC's Georgia Museum of Agriculture
Tifton, GA

Georgia Sociological Association

2024-2025 Officers and Executive Committee

President:	Jewrell Rivers, *Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College*
Vice President:	Ellis S. Logan, *Valdosta State University*
President Elect:	Allen Hyde, *Georgia Institute of Technology*
Past President:	Brandon K. Attell, *Georgia State University*
Financial Officer:	Michallene McDaniel, *University of North Georgia*
Recording Officer:	Melinda Johnson, *Emory University*
Parliamentarian:	Sara Mason, *University of North Georgia*

Members at Large

Teaching:	Hosanna Fletcher, *Georgia State University*
Research:	Carly L. Redding, *University of North Georgia*
Applied and Clinical Sociology:	Christy Flatt, *Gordon State College*

Publications

Semaphore Editor:	Denise Woodall, *University of North Georgia*
Journal Editor:	Linda Treiber, *Kennesaw State University*
Website Coordinator:	Sara Mason, *University of North Georgia*

Letter from GSA President

Welcome Conferees!

As your 2024-2025 GSA President, it is my sincere pleasure to serve you this academic year. On behalf of the Executive Board, we have planned an exceptional conference with research paper presentations, workshops, panel discussions and roundtables. This year's conference promises to be an enriching educational experience for students, researchers and practitioners in the field. The GSA Conference is very student-friendly, so we also encourage participation by students. Students will be presenting their research for paper competitions and monetary awards and serving on panels.

The 2025 Georgia Sociological Association Conference is being held on November 5 - 7 at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture (GMA) and Historic Village in Tifton, Georgia and is hosted by Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC). Our conference theme is "Advancing Rural Sociology: Toward Navigating a Rural Landscape." As a focus of this year's conference, I would like you to consider the unique challenges faced by rural communities and address the prevalent social problems or issues that are often exacerbated among rural populations. For these reasons, it is crucial that we continue to advocate for marginalized, underprivileged and under-resourced groups within rural communities and engage in developing social policy and programs to affect social change.

Conference participants will have the opportunity to tour ABAC's Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village in which they can engage in the lived experiences of rural communities. A 95-acre site of faithfully restored or preserved historic structures, the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village highlights rural life in Georgia from the late 1800s until 1910. The grounds boast a traditional 1870s farm community, progressive 1890s farmstead, industrial sites complex, rural town, National Peanut Museum, working steam train, Art Gallery, Country Store, conference facilities and the Museum of Agriculture.

Lastly, we will spotlight the Rural Community Development bachelor's degree program housed in the Department of Community and Behavioral Sciences within the School of Social Sciences, Education and the Arts at ABAC. The Rural Community Development degree program at ABAC is one of the few of its kind offered within the U.S. This degree program has three tracks: social and community development, community health and psychology. Through this degree program, students are provided with the tools to address the challenges of rural communities and affect social change. The Department of Community and Behavioral Sciences is also the home of the eMajor bachelor's degree

program in Criminal Justice and the Workplace Interpersonal Relationships Certificate program (WIRC). Also, student organizations and programs such as the Helping Professions Association (HPA), the Criminal Justice Club and the African American Male Initiative (AAMI) will be actively engaged in the conference.

I look forward to seeing you at the 2025 Georgia Sociological Association Conference. I invite you to use your sociological imagination to understand the plight of rural communities. Through this conference, it is my hope that you are more equipped and inspired to improve the quality of life and lived experiences of rural populations.

Jewrell Rivers, Ph.D.
President, Georgia Sociological Association
Professor of Sociology, Marriage and Family, and Criminal Justice
School of Social Sciences, Education and the Arts, Department of Community and Behavioral Sciences
Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College


ABAC
ABAC


Country Store
COUNTRY STORE


RIBBON CUTTING
for the Agricultural Technology Building
September 18, 2024 | 9:30 A.M.
Abraham Baldwin
Agricultural College


Center for
Rural Prosperity
& Innovation

Georgia Sociological Association's 2025 SOCIOLOGIST OF THE YEAR

Tiffany A. Parsons, Ph.D.

Tiffany A. Parsons is the Director of Prison Education and Lecturer of Sociology at the University of West Georgia. Her areas of research and teaching are inequality and urban sociology. She holds a B.S. and M.A. in Sociology from the University of West GA and a Ph.D. in Sociology from Georgia State University.

Her experience as an applied and public sociologist spans two decades and is primarily focused on homelessness/housing, ethnoraciality, mass incarceration and reentry, community education, raising awareness, and helping community members effectively and compassionately serve vulnerable populations. She has worked with local nonprofit organizations, public schools, as well as state and municipal governments to develop, implement, evaluate, and revise programs that focus on success as defined by both funders and those who are served. She engages regularly with non-academic audiences to (re)define poverty, homelessness, and criminality, promote anti-racist policy and action toward affordable and sustainable housing, encourage identifying how racist atrocities of the past impact our daily lives (whether in the form of benefit or challenge), and inform about interventions and solutions.

Tiffany is passionate about praxis, directly impacting social change, applying sociology to make communities better, and helping to well inform multiple publics.

Program Schedule

Wednesday 12:00 pm

12:00 – 1:30 **EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING** **BY INVITATION**

Wednesday 2:00 pm

2:00 – 5:00 **CONFERENCE REGISTRATION** **ATRIUM**

2:00 – 2:30 **JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING** **EAST/WEST ROOMS**

Wednesday 2:30 – 3:45 pm

Session 1 **EAST/WEST ROOMS**

HANS MAUKSCH TEACHING WORKSHOP

Workshop Coordinator: Hosanna Fletcher, Georgia State University

Hans Mauksch led a period of significant innovation in the teaching and learning movement in sociology in America during the mid to late 20th century. We continue this focus on teaching innovative sociology with our annual Hans Mauksch Teaching Workshop to kick off our Georgia Sociological Association Annual Meeting.

This year, the theme will be "**Academic Freedom and Teaching Sociology in 2025**." We will first hear from some of our colleagues about navigating the concerns/issues that we are all facing teaching sociology at the collegiate level. We will then spend the remainder of the time with attendees exploring and reflecting on our own experiences… and workshopping solutions together.

Panelists:
Allen Hyde, Georgia Institute of Technology
Sara Mason, University of North Georgia
Janet Koposko, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Micheline McDaniel, Univierty of North Georgia

Wednesday 4:00 – 5:15 pm

Session 2 **EAST/WEST ROOMS**

OPENING PLENARY ADDRESS

Vacant Fields: Visibility, Voice, and Vulnerability in Rural Homelessness

Dr. Rajni Shankar-Brown, PhD, MBA, M-MA, MA, BA

Dr. Rajni Shankar-Brown is an internationally renowned Professor and JBD Distinguished Chair of Social Justice Education at Stetson University and the Founder and Executive Director of the Institute for Catalyzing Equity, Justice, and Social Change. She is also the recipient of Stetson's most prestigious awards — the Outstanding Faculty Advisor Award; the McEniry Award for Excellence in Teaching; and The Hand Award for Distinguished Faculty Achievement. Dr. Rajni is a published author of leading education articles and books, an intersectional equity coach, a community organizer, a cultural strategist, a dancing poet and accomplished artist. Her poet stage name is "Rising Lotus" and she is ranked internationally in spoken word poetry. She is a leading expert on transformative systems change and sustainable educational practices to advance justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, and a lifelong champion for ending and preventing poverty and homelessness. She serves as a long-standing strategic partner of the United Nations and served as the Equity Co-Lead for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and working across federal agencies under past administrations. She is a lead steering member of the National Environmental Justice Institute, and the Past President and current Equity and Education Chair of

the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH). She made history as the first woman of color to hold the position of President of NCH and to be elected for two consecutive terms, as well as serving on the board for over a decade. Dr. Rajni also founded and leads a mentoring and creative arts program for youth experiencing homelessness and low-income families, along with the annual Ending Poverty and Homelessness Conference, a collaborative grassroots movement that has been recognized nationally for sustainable positive impact. With over three decades of advocating and innovating for human and civil rights and a lifetime of public service, Dr. Rajni's leadership has seen the launch of multiple initiatives supporting diverse schools and communities to positively impact the lives of youth-serving professionals, school administrators, teachers, children, youth, and families. She has presented and facilitated professional learning workshops around the globe, as well as published in top peer-reviewed journals and books. Her current book series includes leading works including Bending the Arc Towards Justice: Equity-Focused Practices for Educational Leaders, and Re-Envisioning Education: Affirming Diversity and Advancing Social Justice. In addition, her published collection of poetry Tuluminous (*pronounced Too-Luminous), of which proceeds support youth experiencing homelessness, has been praised as "a marvelous and meaningful testimony of the power of language to heal and transform" by the Presidential Inaugural Poet, Richard Blanco, and she is described as the "Poet Laureate of the just society" by NYU's Moral Courage Project Founder and Oprah's Chutzpah Award recipient, Irshad Manji. Dr. Rajni has worked in a variety of leadership roles with communities, nonprofit organizations, federal/state/local government agencies, higher education, early childhood, and K-12 schools in urban, rural, and suburban areas across the United States and around the globe. She has received international, national, state, and local recognition for her scholarly and creative activities and transformative leadership including being selected as a Faculty-Scholar-in-Residence by the National Humanities Center, Educator of the Year by the International PDK, the Inclusive Excellence Award by UNCW, and the Engaged Scholarship Faculty Award by the Florida Campus Compact. She is deeply committed to inclusive social change that addresses trauma, centers wellbeing, and fosters healing centered engagement. In addition to being a passionate social justice educator and leader, Dr. Rajni is a dedicated Amma (Mom) who loves sunflowers and masala chai.

Wednesday 6:00 - 8:00 pm

GSA MEETUP **OFFSITE: DON JULIO'S MEXICAN RESTAURANT**

ADDRESS: 211 MAIN ST. TIFTON, GA. 31794

Thursday 8:00 am

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION (ALL DAY UNTIL 5PM) **ATRIUM**

Thursday 8:00 – 9:15 am

SESSION 3 **MERCANTILE ROOM**

Panel - Applied Sociology Panel of Faculty, Alumni, and Partnership Leaders from Two Georgia Universities

Moderator: Raeda Anderson, Georgia State University and Shepherd Center

The applied sociology panel brings together applied sociologists from Valdosta State University, Georgia State University, United Way, Shepherd Center, and the iCORD Lab to explore the evolving landscape of applied sociology graduate programs. Panelists will discuss the strengths and limitations of their applied master's programs, with a particular focus on strategies for building and sustaining university-community partnerships that enhance student training while meeting organizational needs within the community. The session will provide actionable guidance for departments considering the development of applied sociology tracks, highlighting curriculum design, community engagement, and career preparedness. Three panelists—alumni and soon to be alumni of these applied sociology programs—will share how their education prepared them for careers in research, policy, and nonprofit sectors. They will also reflect on gaps in their training and what additional skills or experiences would have better equipped them for applied roles. The session will conclude with an interactive discussion, inviting audience members to pose questions, share their experiences, and contribute to a collective dialogue about the future of applied sociology education and practice.

Panelists:
Ellis S. Logan, Valdosta State University
Susan Nebel, United Way
Daniel Pasciuti, Georgia State University
Melissa Treanor, Georgia State University and Shepherd Center

SESSION 4 **EAST ROOM**

Paper Session - Crime and Justice

Presider: Shani Wilfred, Valdosta State University

Homicides and the Vulnerable: Women, Children, and the Elderly as Victims.
Dr. Albert E. McCormick, Jr., M2 Research and Consulting

Based upon a fifteen year examination of homicides in Polk County, Florida, this study found that when women, children, and the elderly are victims, the "typical murder" is not the norm. Motives, characteristics of killers, incident triggers, and weapons all differ from the usual patterns of homicide.

Faith-Based Organizations and Restorative Justice Practices: Voices from the Community.
Dr. Shani Wilfred, Valdosta State University
Dr. Jewrell Rivers, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

The purpose of the research study is to take a deeper look into how Faith-Based Organizations implement restorative justice into their practices. This is a mixed methods study incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodology. This is an exploratory study in which the researchers will present results from two phases of data collection and analysis. For Phase One, Faith-Based Organizations were selected from the IRS Exempt Organizations Business Master File Extract (EO BMF)as the identified sampling frame. Faith-Based Organizations were surveyed regarding their perceptions about the relevance of restorative justice in their practice. Statistical analysis were conducted for Phase One. For Phase Two, participants in the focus groups were selected from survey participants who agreed to be contacted for follow-up and a convenience, snowball sample of individuals from Faith-Based Organizations and community groups known by the researcher. Surveys were completed at the start and end of the focus groups. Focus groups explored the perceptions held by Faith-Based Organizations and community groups regarding restorative justice. Focus group responses were transcribed and a thematic data analysis was conducted. A comparative analysis of the survey and focus group data was conducted between the Valdosta, Quitman and Tifton communities.

A Grassroots Public Sociology of Elder Abuse
Dr. Roscoe Scarborough, College of Coastal Georgia

I describe the logistics of a grassroots public sociology project on elder abuse. I engaged various publics in my local community by publishing a column in our local newspaper, participating in a lecture series at our public library, and giving a series of customized invited presentations for local religious groups. An effort was made to adapt the content of each instance of public sociology to align with community groups' interests and concerns. In all of my elder abuse public sociology, I shared recent data on crimes against the elderly and elder abuse. I highlighted evidence-based approaches to preventing elder abuse. Most community members were primarily concerned with learning about local community resources and practical prevention strategies to protect themselves or seniors in their lives. I conclude by discussing the benefits and challenges associated with grassroots public sociology.

SESSION 5 **WEST ROOM**

Panel - Black Men in Rural America: The Black Male Experience at a Rural PWI

Moderator: Olumide Aborisade, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

This panel discussion includes testimonials from black male students participating in the AAMI program. Students will discuss the challenges black males encounter in rural American, particularly in navigating cultural and social integration on a predominantly white campus (PWI)as a microcosm of society. Students will discuss how the programmatic goals of AAMI (e.g., academic support and mentoring, life skills and career development, cultural enrichment and professional development, and community service and civic engagement)assist black males with capitalizing on their strengths to engage in productive, healthy activities that promote success while diverting them from at-risk, negative environments through proactive, preventative measures, and not reactive approaches.

Panelists:
Zion Timmons, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Lwenzlyn Hills, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Antonio Caldwell, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Anfernee McDonald, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

Thursday 9:30 – 10:45 am

SESSION 6 **MERCANTILE ROOM**

Documentary - Listen to the Land: Food Cultures Exhibition

This workshop will highlight a student-run and produced multimedia project exhibition. It will showcase the diverse food traditions found in South Georgia and the individuals who observe them. American Trapper, Indian, Jamaican, Southern Soul, Turkmen, Slovak, and Native American food cultures are all represented in this captivating multimedia exhibition. The exhibition is a fusion of visual arts, the written word, digital arts and a recipe interactive.

Discussants:
Anthony Baisden, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Jalen Edmondson, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Anfernee McDonald, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

SESSION 7 **EAST ROOM**

Paper Session - Family and Transitions to Adulthood

Presider: Carl Ide, Valdosta State University

Growing up Working: Impression Management and Motivation in High-Achieving Generation Z Students
Sidney Wilson, Valdosta State University
Ellis S. Logan, Valdosta State University

The aim of this research is to investigate the motivations for achievement in Generation Z college students and how they are socialized into carrying that image of success with them. We found that with high achieving students in college they carry the pressure to have a strict sense of positive self-representation which brings forth major themes of imposter syndrome, burnout, lack of self-recognition, and in some cases dissociation and detachment. By conducting open-ended, semi-structured interviews with full time high school and college students who are also working, I aim to understand and conceptualize their "working selves", their work routines, and the extent to which failure and/or achievement motives both. Using a thematic approach focused on categories such as school, work, wellbeing and happiness, individual characteristics, and their social lives outside of work and school, I look for the catalyst for this work-based impression management within this demographic group. Through understanding their backstage habits and contexts, I also look for underlying themes of embedded practices stemming from the influence of the individual's social network. Our research essentially asks, how does this lifestyle affect high school and college students' sense of wellbeing and achievement, and what strategies do they use in order to stay "productive" in their work according to their own standards?

"I'm an Adult Now and I Want You to Treat Me Like One!" College Students, Their Parents, and the Relational Construction of Adult Self-Image
Carl Ide, Valdosta State University

Developing a confident adult self-image is often framed as an individual achievement, with scholars and popular discussions rarely considering relational dimensions of identity development. This paper explores college students' talk of their parental relationships and views of self by drawing on 52 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with white college students at a large, Flagship University. I engage several disparate literatures, including social identity theory, sociology of family, sociology of gender, and emerging adulthood theory to develop a model of parental reflected appraisals of adult status during college. I find that students talk of feeling invalidated as an adult by parents resembles what scholars identify as behavioral control and psychological control. Conversely, students' talk of being validated reflects emotional support and behavioral autonomy as described in the current literature. The present analysis provides a framework for understanding how these relationship characteristics bolster or challenge students' identity processes, finding that parents remain important to their children's' developing of a sense of adulthood during college. Using the theory of "reflected appraisals," I investigate how descriptions of (in)validation of adult status by parents relates to talk of self-concept and students' satisfaction with parental relationships. I consider participants' and parents' gender, showing that families continue to reproduce gender during college, favoring sons' adult identity formation over daughters.'

The Power of No: Teaching Adaptability
Rebecca Nees, Middle Georgia State University
James Collins, Middle Georgia State University

As they have entered the workforce, Gen Z college graduates have faced underemployment, with surveyed managers citing the lack of soft skills as the most significant reason for not hiring younger workers (Elting 2024). One of the skills that is often cited by managers as lacking in Gen Z applicants is adaptability. According to Jen Bruce, CEO and founder of meQuilibrium, "the future of work will belong to those who are not just change-tolerant, but change-ready" (Westfall, 2025:1). As the expectation to prepare students with the soft skills needed for workplace readiness has increased, it can become difficult to manage this in addition to course content. This presentation will discuss the psychology behind the adaptability and motivation and will also discuss examples of how we teach adaptability through our course policies.

SESSION 8 **WEST ROOM**

Paper Session - Rural Health Issues 1

Presider: William Sakamoto White, Kennesaw State University

Hochschild's "Great Paradox" and the closing of hospitals in rural Tennessee—examining the effects and consequences of rural hospital closings
William Sakamoto White, Kennesaw State University

At a July 2022 press conference, Georgia's Governor Brian Kemp stated that "We have taken a holistic approach to health care versus a one-size-fits-all government approach that the Democrats and the liberals want." He took a stand to deny Medicaid expansion as a way to avoid dependency on government, arguing that the program is a "hand-up" rather than a "handout." This approach, however, would lead to a number of rural hospitals closing due to the financial stress involved in reduced access to Medicaid funds. To a large extent, Georgia and Tennessee residents express anger at the federal government, believing resources are unfairly diverted from them to others. Hochschild's "Deep Story" anticipates this sentiment with residents opposing government intervention, including federal aid that could help their communities. This perspective embodies a "Great Paradox" that prioritizes self-reliance and distrusts external assistance, despite personal costs such as rural hospital closures. This paper will examine the effects and consequences

of rural hospital closings in Ducktown, Tennessee and Jamestown, Tennessee and how the "Deep Story" illustrates the "Great Paradox" in trying to rationalize rural hospital closings.

Stratified Georgia: Analyzing the Role of Health and Geography in High Poverty Counties
Phillip Storey, Valdosta State University

This paper examines stratification within the state of Georgia using financial, health, and geographic measures. While Georgia's mean wages are higher than most areas within the southeast, the high poverty portions of Georgia lag substantially behind not only the statewide figures but also the high poverty regions of other geographically and demographically similar states. This research considers the unique aspects of Georgia's high poverty counties in terms of health, geographic isolation, and the characteristics of nearby metropolitan areas. By examining these trends within the high poverty counties of Georgia and several neighboring states, a broad picture of the widening gulfs in public health can be seen and understood.

Right place, right time? Understanding the influence of telehealth and rurality on physical rehabilitation appointment completion in the context of COVID-19.
Madelief L. Tilder, Georgia State University; Shepherd Center; iCORD
Raeda K. Anderson, Georgia State University; Shepherd Center; iCORD
Pat M. Barrett, Shepherd Center; iCORD

Medical appointment attendance is essential to patient recovery, successful community reintegration, and the functioning of healthcare institutions (Mbada et al. 2013). Among physical rehabilitation patients, better compliance with rehabilitation appointments is associated with better functional outcomes (Deutscher et al. 2009). Logistic and financial challenges, such as transportation and distance, limit patient's abilities to complete rehabilitation appointments. Rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations are particularly affected by these structural barriers (Spielman 2007). As the COVID-19 pandemic restricted in-person healthcare delivery, virtual or "telehealth" appointments became a common alternative for outpatient rehabilitation (Dehart et al. 2024). Telehealth removes many of the physical barriers of traditional in-person appointments, allowing rural patients to meet with providers while in their own homes (Anderson et al. 2022). As the primary aim of rehabilitation is to ensure patients can remain in their communities, identifying the factors that most strongly influence appointment adherence is critical for improving access to care and improving rehabilitation outcomes. For patients who require specialized rehabilitation specialized services, the ability to complete appointments may be more challenging, due to limited care options. Shepherd Center a major rehabilitation hospital in the southeastern US, attracting patients from all over the country for rehabilitative services. This study analyses over one million healthcare appointments at Shepherd Center, between March 2020–February 2025, to identify key predictors of appointment adherence. Using bivariate analyses and binary logistic regressions, we examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth options, patient demographics, and geographic access to determine which factors influence appointment attendance. Findings emphasize that healthcare coverage and proximity to rehabilitation care are foundational to patient engagement and success in rehabilitation settings. Our results reflect ongoing challenges within the US healthcare system, where access to high-quality rehabilitation services is unevenly distributed based on timing in relation to the pandemic, patient residence, and sociodemographics.

Thursday 11:00 am – 12:15 pm

PLENARY ADDRESS **MERCANTILE ROOM**

What Does "Making A Difference" For Rural Georgia Healthcare Look Like?

Glenda Grant, MBA

Executive Director

Glenda Grant, MBA, joined the School of Medicine in 2017 in the Academic Affairs department and has worked with Special Programs, Academic Affairs, and as the Director of Strategic Initiatives. She has a background in rural hospital administration, nonprofit management, and higher education. Having lived and worked in rural Georgia all her life, Grant is dedicated to helping rural communities to bring solutions that improve health and access to care. Whether she was serving as the Main Street Business Association president or delivering meals to the homeless, Grant has a heart for service and a love for people. She completed her Master of Business Administration with a focus on health care administration from Mercer University's Stetson-Hatcher School of Business and is a member of Phi Kappa Phi, Beta Gamma Sigma and Sigma Tau Delta Honor Societies. Grant is married to her high school sweetheart, Keith, an orthopedic physician assistant, and they have two adult children, Kate and Evan and a rambunctious chocolate lab, Jack.

Thursday 12:30 – 1:45 pm

BUSINESS LUNCH & AWARDS CEREMONY **EAST/WEST ROOMS**

SOCIOLOGIST OF THE YEAR ADDRESS: Tiffany A. Parsons, Ph.D.

Thursday 2:00 – 3:15 pm

SESSION 9 **MERCANTILE ROOM**

Workshop - Healing and Replenishing Our Spirits: Creativity and Contemplative Practices

Workshop Coordinator: By Rajni Shankar-Brown, PhD, MBA, M-MA, MA, BA

Join internationally acclaimed educator and scholar Dr. Rajni Shankar-Brown for an inspiring workshop on the healing power of creative and contemplative practices. Explore how creative expression can support wellbeing, especially during these extra heavy and uncertain times. Creative exploration offers many benefits including fostering emotional resilience, community connection, and interdisciplinary engagement. In this interactive workshop, participants will gain practical strategies for integrating arts-based practices that promote healing, self-discovery, beloved community, and inclusive learning environments. Together, we'll uncover how creativity can open pathways to hope and belonging!

SESSION 10 **EAST ROOM**

Panel - Sociology and Psychology in the Real World: Bridging Theory and Practice

Moderator: Christy Flatt, Gordon State College

This panel will examine the application of sociological and psychological theory beyond traditional academic contexts. Panelists will present methods for integrating theory into practice and incorporating practical experience into classroom instruction through their experiences in consulting, research, grant writing, community engagement, and student-led, community-based initiatives. Their experience includes programs addressing interventions for unhoused populations, reentry initiatives, collaborations with incarcerated scholars, agricultural resilience, and support for natural resource managers in science-based decision-making. Through case studies and experiential accounts, the discussion will show how sociological and psychological knowledge informs professional conduct, guides policy development, and facilitates social transformations.

Panelists:
Carly Redding, University of North Georgia
Tiffany Parsons, University of West Georgia
Eric Larson, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Juliet Hopkins, University of West Georgia

Paper Session - Incarceration

Presider: Denise Ruth Woodall, University of North Georgia

Transforming Incarcerated Students: The Impact of Higher Education on Identity, Choices, and Behavior

Ciera Garrison, University of West Georgia

Previous research on the effects of Higher education programs within the prison systems has focused on the correlation between higher education and recidivism. This essay explores the immediate impact of earning an interdisciplinary degree amongst incarcerated students at a high-security Georgia Department of Corrections facility. As a student success leader for a cohort of 16 students earning their degrees, I have conducted qualitative research through classroom observations, group discussions, one-on-one interviews, and reflective journaling, giving a voice to the perspective of the student inmate. Initial observations find that the cohort encourages students to grow personally, shifts their identity, and impacts positive behavior. Most of the students have proudly declared that they are the first in their families to attend college, citing a change in their identity and the cohort as motivation to make more deliberate decisions. This analysis considers how higher education can transform incarcerated students' self-perception, decision-making, and social interactions by integrating personal narratives with academic literature. These results align with existing literature on the role of higher education in reducing recidivism and contribute to the literature supporting higher education as a transformative tool for rehabilitation.

The Medical Mistreatment Inflicted Upon Incarcerated Pregnant Women

Michael Casteel, University of North Georgia

This paper examines research regarding the systemic medical mistreatment of pregnant women in United States prisons. The practices analyzed include inadequate prenatal care, shackling during labor, and forced separation at birth. These practices disproportionately affect Black women, and reflect broader systems of racism and eugenics. The paper draws from Foucault's theory of biopower, Davis's work on gendered punishment, and Robert's analysis of race and reproduction to argue that prisons function as mechanisms of torture and reproductive control. Pulling from legal scholarship, the paper also argues that these conditions violate the eighth amendment rights of the incarcerated individuals. This analysis of the mistreatment incarcerated pregnant women face serves as an example of the injustice in the prison system and the pressing need for alternative approaches to justice.

Re-storying the Self: Decarceral Paths Through Identity, Justice, and Social Capital

Denise Ruth Woodall, University of North Georgia

This presentation draws on a broad research agenda, highlighting re-storying as a pathway to unlock the self from the grip of the criminal legal system. Decarceralization is framed as a relational process of reshaping identity, reclaiming agency, and building social capital. Data include studies with 100 opioid users, six recovering mothers, thirty-two formerly incarcerated activists, meth-using women in the suburbs, and a proposal-phase intervention grant, alongside a study abroad lens in contexts where drug use is not criminalized. Across these projects, re-storying fosters liberatory trajectories that counter systemic oppression and move beyond punishment.

SESSION 12 **MERCANTILE ROOM**

Workshop - From Assets to Action: Mobilizing Rural Communities for Sustainable Development

Workshop Coordinator: Carly Redding, University of North Georgia

Rural communities often face persistent challenges, including economic decline, limited resources, and outmigration. Traditional development models frequently emphasize deficits and rely heavily on external interventions, which can overlook the strengths and resilience already embedded within these communities. This workshop, From Assets to Action: Mobilizing Rural Communities for Sustainable Development, introduces participants to Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) as a practical and sustainable framework for fostering local change. Through an interactive, hands-on format, participants will engage in asset mapping, examine real-world case studies, and explore the role of social capital, kinship networks, and informal institutions in building community resilience. Discussions will also address strategies to navigate power dynamics and avoid extractive or top-down engagement models. By the end of the session, participants will: • Develop a critical understanding of ABCD in rural contexts, including both its strengths and limitations. • Acquire practical tools for participatory engagement and co-production of knowledge. • Leave with a sample framework to guide the design of asset-based projects in their own communities, classrooms, or research.

Panelists:
Shubha Chatterjee, Ed.D., LPC, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Adrian Israel Martinez Franco, M.D., Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Eric Larson, Ph.D., Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

SESSION 13 **EAST ROOM**

Paper Session - Sociology of Education

Presider: Jennifer Nicholas, Georgia Tech

From Exclusion to Ability: Rising Sun's Inclusive Education Model in Pakistan
Mohammad Daud Husain, Lambert High School / Rising Sun Institute
Monisha Jackson, Georgia State University

Educational inequality in Pakistan has a significant impact on children with disabilities. Community Based Organizations (CBOs) often bridge such gaps. The objective of this study was to examine, the Rising Sun Institute (RSI), as a qualitative case to understand how CBO's can succeed in converting the idea of inclusive education into reality while facing several challenges. To anchor the study, I reviewed research papers on disability and inclusion in South-east Asia, ethnographic and comparative studies and reports on CBOs along-with interactive sessions with experts at UGA and GSU. Building on that foundation, I used a qualitative case approach and interviewed RSI leaders, alumni, and two currently sponsored students (with parents), took field notes during 10-day fieldtrip to Pakistan, and reviewed organizational documents. All interviews were conducted in Urdu (my native language) and then translated into English for analysis. The study findings show success of RSI in pairing simple decisions (calmer classrooms, transport, therapy alongside academics) with clear founding ethos -"disability is not inability"- to transform student identity from "burden" to "capable." The parents reported less tears in the morning, growing confidence, and visible community respect. Moreover, alumni linked regular school routines to workplace readiness and dignity. The study also highlighted several continued challenges such as unstable funding, lingering stigma

and limited teacher training. It also points to practical steps that schools and policy makers can act upon such as reliable transport, parent education, and employer partnerships, supported by stable public investment. This single-site study offers depth rather than generalization and acts as a seed for future research. RSI success in achieving inclusion is a model other CBOs can adapt to. The future research work should test such patterns across regions and track longer-term outcomes for graduates.

Walking on Eggshells: The Mental Health Impacts of Culture War Policies on Florida Educators
Jennifer Nicholas, Georgia Tech

Throughout 2022 and 2023, Florida initiated a wave of openly conservative and politicized laws governing education. These bills, termed Don't Say Gay, Stop W.O.K.E., and Parental Rights in Education, have resulted in numerous book bans and in-school conflicts between education stakeholders. While prior research and scholarship have analyzed the effects of these laws on students and considered the legal correctness of these laws, research on the mental health impacts of obviously politicized legislation on those employed in schools is scant. Through a textual analysis of these laws and associated materials provided by the state and Governor's office, and in-depth interviews with Florida educators completed in the fall of 2023, this paper outlines the ways these laws have impacted the mental health of educators. Overwhelmingly, educators reported a pervasive culture of fear and self-policing. Educators described fears of escalated conflicts with administrators, students, and parents. Particularly, educators expressed concern that their actions in the classroom would provoke a lawsuit and were clear that they could not economically sustain legal recourse in that eventuality. This specific fear translates into self-censorship, a chronic source of stress for teachers interviewed. Given the actions of the recently inaugurated federal administration on book bans despite the repeal of Stop W.O.K.E. in late 2024, the severe adverse effects of politicizing schools on the workplace for many, many Americans is imperative.

Campus Free Speech in Contested Times: What do College Handbooks Say About Free Speech?
Daniela Rangel, Reinhardt University
Josiah Smith, Reinhardt University
Ryan Schaffer, Brewton-Parker University
Dr. SimonPeter Gomez, Reinhardt University

The considerable upheaval we have seen on college campuses recently has led us to ask a simple question: what speech do colleges and universities claim to protect? We attempt a first try at answering that question through a content analysis of the student handbooks from a sample of colleges and universities within the state of Georgia. Our analysis serves as one of the first looks, through a content analysis of what types of speech do colleges and universities claim to protect. We review the previous academic research on campus free speech and find it lacking a comprehensive approach, focusing mostly on high profile cases of clashes over student speech on select college campuses. We then conduct a content analysis of the Student Handbooks for 28 private colleges in Georgia, focusing on all the language dealing with free speech, free expression, protests, and students' political conduct. We then use Word Cloud to arrive at some initial conclusions about what types of speech, expression is protected, and which is not. We then provide some insight into the free speech codes of several Georgia private colleges. While we started our project by examining the codes of private colleges in Georgia, our goal is to ultimately extend to all public colleges in the state. We envision extending this analysis to colleges and universities in other states eventually. Toward that aim, we conclude with some general suggestions for future research in this area.

Female Teachers in Rural South Georgia
Melissa Harrell

This presentation is part of the research for a doctoral dissertation. Rural P-12 public schools in South Georgia face challenges in employing and retaining female teachers. This study seeks to identify what influences female teachers to accept a teaching position in rural South Georgia and what influences them to remain in teaching positions in rural South Georgia. Female teachers from seven rural counties in South Georgia participated in the survey and focus groups. The data identify positive influences on rural educators' decisions to join and remain in rural South Georgia public school systems.

Paper Session - Medical Sociology

Presider: Linda Ann Treiber, Kennesaw State University

Abortion as a Lens on Health Governance: Law, Ideology, and Infrastructure
Lauren B. Leeder, Georgia State University

Abortion fails to be adequately monitored worldwide, highlighting the weaknesses in abortion governance at the global scale (McGovern et al. 2020). In the United States, this governance extends beyond law, encompassing structural and ideological infrastructures that determine who can access care and under what conditions. Telehealth medication abortion (TMA) is a critical site for examining these dynamics, as states vary widely in restrictions (Berglas et al. 2025; Guttmacher Institute 2025), digital access (Dempsey and Hoy 2024; Nikolic-Khatatbeh, Crowe, and Li 2024; Reddick et al. 2020), and ideological infrastructures (Lambert et al. 2025; Marshall and Rowland 2025; Montoya, Judge-Golden, and Swartz 2022). Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs), which operate outside formal medical licensing and care, serve as a lens into the alternate governance of health as a form of ideological infrastructures. In this context, evidence-based care often receives far less support than these ideological infrastructures (Rabinovitz et al. 2024), creating a unique situation where there are 2,633 CPCs or about three for every abortion-providing clinic in the U.S. (Swartzendruber and Lambert 2025). This project intervenes at a critical moment in U.S. health governance, as abortion reveals how states govern health through law, ideological infrastructures, and material investments that restrict bodily autonomy. To investigate this critical moment, this study constructs an original Abortion Governance Dataset that integrates legal, structural, and ideological measures across states to assess how these forms of governance shape TMA provision, capturing 2024 state-level data for all 50 states and D.C. This analysis brings forward the pressing struggles over health governance amid rising maternal mortality (Gemmill et al. 2025; World Health Organization 2023), provider shortages (Long et al. 2025), and underfunding of evidence-based care (Rabinovitz et al 2024).

Biological Consequences of Social Inequality: ACEs, DNA Methylation, and Functional Impairment in Depression
Sheena Martin, Valdosta State University
Ellis S. Logan, Valdosta State University

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have a statistically significant and dose-dependent etiological relationship with long-term health disparities, including neurological disorders, endocrine and immunological dysfunction, as well as adverse social and behavioral outcomes. ACEs can be traced to social structures and geographical residences, typically falling under social deprivation, environmental stress, and social disadvantage. Fundamental cause theory and Marxist theories attribute these adverse outcomes to societal structural inequality, wherein economic dominance is reinforced and compounded over time. Life Course Theory and cumulative disadvantage theory consider the longitudinal perspectives; LCT considers early resources' dictation of future outcomes, and cumulative disadvantage theory explains the underlying mechanisms of inequality. Together, these drive future disparities. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains how each theory interacts at varying levels of analysis. The reproductive structural inequalities noted are not often measured alongside their biological consequences. This paper explores how impaired DNA methylation, a common symptom of ACEs, mediates the relationship between ACEs and depression. Data from NHANES 2021-2023 provide measures of 5-methyltetrahydrofolate (5-MTHF) as a biomarker for DNA methylation, and previous research has measured its association with ACE contributing indexes. Our results suggest that those with critically and severely low 5-MTHF levels are more likely to self-report depressive symptoms. Specifically, we see an interesting compounding effect regarding overall impairment. Rural families can face higher exposure to structural ACEs such as poverty, food insecurity, limited access to healthcare, incarceration, low wealth accumulation, fewer schools, and domestic violence. Geographically, rural communities also face limited access to intervention and prevention resources, adversely impacting effective solutions. Exploring how depression, as it relates to ACEs and impaired DNA methylation, will help rural communities break the transgenerational biologically embedded cycle and begin to repair the physical and mental health of its members.

Buyer Beware: A Content Analysis of Direct to Consumer Advertising of Weight-Loss Drugs
Linda Ann Treiber, Kennesaw State University

In this presentation, I describe the history of direct-to-consumer marketing of prescription drugs in the US, providing an analysis of some of the methods used by pharmaceutical companies to appeal to consumers. Using content analyses, I identify key themes in drug advertisements for weight loss and type 2 diabetes. Print and television advertisements for Ozempic, Wegovy, Rybelsus, and Mounjaro and the direct services Ro and Hims that ship versions of these medications directly to consumers were studied. The presentation also includes a brief discussion of the health problems posed by obesity and Type 2 diabetes and the basic mechanisms of action for GLP-/GIP agonist medications. Weight loss medications have the potential to be super-profitable for drug companies, in part, because they are used to treat chronic illnesses. Since chronic illnesses have no cure, there is a seemingly endless use cycle for these drugs. At the time of this writing, these medications carry a high price tag. Analysis of the advertisements shows images of happy people enjoying the promise of a better life. Key themes include restoration, increased self-esteem, and high activity. Weight loss drugs focus on the obesity as disease concept, rather than willpower. Less noticeable in the advertisements are the many side effects of these medications. Likewise, advertisers do not stress that the only way to maintain the results is to stay on the medications. Celebrity endorsements of GLP-1 medications have gained prominence (e.g., Charles Barkley and Serena Williams). The presentation ends with a discussion of the pros and cons of direct-to-consumer advertisements for prescription drugs.

Friday 8:00 – 9:15 am

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION (UNTIL 9:30) **ATRIUM**

SESSION 15 **MERCANTILE ROOM**

Roundtable - On Developing a Rural Community Development (RCDV) Major Program: Challenges and Successes

Roundtable Coordinator: Dr. Adrian Israel Martinez-Franco, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

Dr. Franco will discuss the strategic plan initiatives and comprehensive program review. Dr. Larson will discuss curriculum changes, new course and program track development (including the new psychology track), and program modifications. Dr. Koposko will discuss internships, capstone requirements, and mentored research. Dr. Rivers will discuss opportunities for student engagement.

Panelists:
Dr. Eric Larson, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Dr. Janet Koposko, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Ms. Suzanne Smith, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

SESSION 16 **EAST ROOM**

Panel - Innovative and Equitable Housing Solutions: Global Perspectives on Challenges and Community-Driven Approaches

Moderator: Christy Flatt, Gordon State College

How do we advance our understanding of challenges to innovative and equitable housing solutions for vulnerable populations, both locally and globally? Panelists representing agencies from Georgia, Ireland, and South Africa will discuss the complex challenges related to housing attainability and sustainability. The session will incorporate findings from local research initiatives, such as volunteer-led homeless counts, community-engaged pedagogy, policy-oriented interventions, and grassroots research on housing inequity in a global context. Coweta County is situated in west-central Georgia, within the Greater Atlanta metropolitan area, comprising a diverse mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities. The Attainability and Sustainability Task Force of Coweta County, Georgia, is an information-sharing organization that provides resources to address the wide range of housing challenges, from homelessness to the high cost of housing, particularly for entry-level public service workers, such as educators and first responders. The City of Camila is a rural southern Georgia county primarily known for its agriculture. The Housing Authority operates public housing programs, providing and managing affordable housing for low-income families, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. Ireland is a predominantly rural country with a focus on agriculture. The Housing Agency of Dublin, Ireland, is a government agency that provides data, informs policymaking, and collaborates with non-profits to deliver affordable housing and other housing-related services. Concluding the panel will be a discussion on community-engaged teaching and learning in the Cape Flats, a dense suburban housing township and informal housing area outside Cape Town, South Africa.

Panelists:
Allen Hyde, Georgia Institute of Technology
Joe Thomas, Housing Authority of the City of Camila
David Silke, The Housing Agency of Dublin, Ireland
Pamela Gabel, Attainability and Sustainability Task Force of Coweta County

SESSION 17 **WEST ROOM**

Paper Session - Rural Health Issues 2

Presider: Ellis S. Logan, Valdosta State University

Analysis of Spatial Disparity of Healthcare Facilities in Georgia
TJ Smith, Valdosta State University
Cameron Bennett, Valdosta State University
Cason Zachery, Valdosta State University
Jia Lu, Valdosta State University

Access to health care significantly impacts people's overall physical, social, and mental health status and quality of life. However, many areas in Georgia lack easy access to healthcare facilities. The goal of this project was to study the disparity in the spatial distribution of healthcare facilities in Georgia. Geographic Information System (GIS) and statistical analyses were applied in our study. The results captured the spatial disparity of healthcare facilities in Georgia, especially in rural areas. The lack of easy access to hospital services may contribute to inequities in healthcare outcomes among state residents. To address these challenges, we suggested better public health policies for healthcare to improve the overall health of Georgia's population.

Medical Misinformation: Rural America's Public Health Crisis
Amy Catambay, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

The increase in medical misinformation among rural communities presents a unique challenge to advancing the health and welfare of the citizens within these underserved areas. Topics such as vaccine hesitancy, the spread of myths surrounding autism spectrum disorder, opioid use, and the adoption of abstinence focused sexual education are four components of this public health crisis. This literature review aims to examine the pathologies contributing to the misinformation epidemic and how these issues disproportionately impact the rural United States. Emphasis is placed on the impact of sociological concepts, such as cultural capital, symbolic-interaction, and

social network theory that contribute to the persistence and exacerbation of these informational disparities. This review argues that the medical misinformation crisis within rural communities does not have a singular cause, but is produced and augmented by a combination of social, economic, and political factors.

"Real or…Dabbling": Risk Assessment as Biphobia within Queer Women's Health
Ava Andrick, University of North Georgia
Carson Sutherland, University of North Georgia

While there has been a growth in bisexual identification over the last decade, biphobia is still rampant within the lesbian and queer women's communities. Additionally, lesbians and queer women have minimal understanding of sex education. Due to this, lesbians and queer women who sexually engage with a bisexual woman alter the assessment of risk and safety. The goal of this study is to uncover the reasons behind the enduring biphobia. Drawing from twenty-three qualitative interviews, we identified three major findings. We argue that queer and lesbian women use biphobia as a risk assessment tactic by creating a sexual hierarchy of risk, taking into account the context of participants' ages, and the overall lack of comprehensive sex education. We conclude academics need to focus more research on biphobia within the health context of queer communities.

Friday 9:30 – 10:45 am

SESSION 18 **MERCANTILE ROOM**

Workshop - What's Your (Rural) Story? Personal Writing as a Sociologist

Workshop Coordinator: Sandra Godwin, Georgia College & State University

Have you ever wanted to write a memoir? If so, this workshop is for you. Using sociologist Margaret K. Nelson's 2024 book: Sociology Meets Memoir: An Exploration of Narrative and Method (NYU Press) as a guide, we will share ideas about our own sociologically relevant personal stories. After a bit of "free writing" all willing participants, including the facilitator, will share their ideas with each other and provide feedback. Taking into account all participants' experience and expertise, we will address questions such as "Why this story?", "Why now?", "Who is my audience?", "Where might I publish?", and "What obstacles might I face?" No memoir writing experience is necessary. Nor is it necessary to have read Nelson's book.

SESSION 19 **EAST ROOM**

Paper Session - Disabilities and Accessibility

Presider: Raeda Anderson, Georgia State University/Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center/iCORD Lab, Georgia State University

Community Integration and Health Outcomes for Disabled Adults: A Comparative Study of Urban and Rural Settings
Jingyun (Iris) Pi, Georgia State University/ iCORD Lab
Lauren B. Leeder, Georgia State University/ iCORD Lab
Dr. Raeda Anderson, Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center; Department of Sociology, Georgia State University; iCORD lab, Georgia State University
Pat Barrett, Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center; iCORD lab, Georgia State University
Dr. Patricia Lawrence, Georgia State University/ iCORD Lab
Dr. Daniel Pasciuti, Georgia State University/ iCORD Lab

The primary goal of rehabilitation is for disabled adults to return to community participation (Shepherd Center, 2025). Creating a strong connection to community members is important for disabled adults, since quality social interaction is associated with better mental and physical health (Anderson, 2013). Disabled adults who have higher levels of quality connections have better employment outcomes(Richardson 2023), social interactions (Mayhew 2023), and health access (Mitra et al. 2022). Meanwhile, housing barriers reduce community integration (Cienkus 2022). While a myriad of disabled adults' connections have been examined, their perceptions of and sense of belonging within their local communities have not been studied in the context of health outcomes, particularly in urban and rural settings. Social determinants of health emphasize the relationship between health, community, and social support (CDC 2024). Understanding disabled adults' sense of belonging and connection to community is pivotal to planning and adapting communities to improve overall community integration and health. This study uses a Social Determinants of Health lens to analyze the relationship between community integration and health for disabled adults across urban and rural settings. The analysis will utilize descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVAs to measure differences between and within groups, and will use correlation and regression analyses to understand the associations between community integration and health. This project will use the Parks and Green Spaces Survey, which was collected via a self-administered online survey of 336 adults with disabilities across the United States in 2023. This study will share important findings relevant for policy makers, city planners, social workers and case managers with hopes of improving supports for disabled individuals to fully integrate into their urban and rural communities.

The Subnational Geography of Housing Disparities for Persons with Disability: Between and Within Variation.

Melissa Treanor, Georgia State University/Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center/iCORD Lab, Georgia State University
Madelief Tilder, Georgia State University/ iCORD Lab
Olajumoke Tunji-Adepoju, Georgia State University/ iCORD Lab
Daniel Pasciuti, Georgia State University/ iCORD Lab
Pat Barrett, Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center/iCORD Lab, Georgia State University
Patricia Lawrence, Georgia State University/ iCORD Lab
Raeda Anderson, Georgia State University/Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center/iCORD Lab, Georgia State University

The multi-decade housing crisis has been particularly crucial for persons with disability. This geography of housing and community inequalities shape the distribution of opportunities and disadvantages for individuals and their communities. These geographies are especially relevant for people with disabilities who face additional barriers to remaining and thriving in their communities. Existing research has focused on state-level or individual level differences in housing, but other forms of subnational geographic inequalities and the impact of state-level vs regional level disparities remain underexplored. This paper demonstrates the macro dynamics of housing and disability in the US, by comparing pressures on a broad range of issues related to housing and disability between and within subnational geographies. We use data from the American Community Survey and the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium 2015-2023, across community-living adults by disability status. Subnational, regional variations exist in multiple formats and create varying macro-conditionalities for persons with disability. Formally through government and institutional boundaries such as the Social Security Administration, which divides and tracks social security disability benefit rolls into 10 distinct subnational spaces in the US (McVicar 2006). And informally, through historical and social processes in the built environment that shape housing typologies, transportation access, and community amenities. Ultimately, we demonstrate that housing issues for disability require a concrete understanding of the unique subnational geographies of difference which directly influence housing conditions and affordability. These need to be considered primary factors in the study and support of people with disabilities and part of the urgent need for inclusive housing policies that address the challenges faced by disabled individuals as a fundamental component of social well-being and health.

Rurality, Accessibility, and Attitudes: What Factors are Associated with Park Use Among Disabled Adults?

Melissa Treanor, Virginia C. Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center, Atlanta, Georgia, USA; Department of Sociology, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA; Interdisciplinary Community Research on Disability (iCORD) Lab, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Raeda K. Anderson, Virginia C. Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center, Atlanta, Georgia, USA; Department of Sociology, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA; Interdisciplinary Community Research on Disability (iCORD) Lab, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Pat M. Barrett, Virginia C. Crawford Research Institute, Shepherd Center, Atlanta, Georgia, USA; Department of Sociology, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA; Interdisciplinary Community Research on Disability (iCORD) Lab, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Parks and green spaces have been increasingly recognized as beneficial community features that support physical, mental, and social well-being. Despite improvements in accessibility, significant barriers remain for disabled people. While existing research has emphasized inaccessibility and exclusion, less attention has been paid to factors that enable park use among disabled adults. This study reframes accessibility in terms of enablement, rather than deficit, by identifying factors that support disabled individuals' frequent park use. Combining data from the National Neighborhood Data Archive and an online survey of 311 disabled adults, we consider what malleable factors are associated with frequent park utilization, defined as visiting parks at least monthly. We employ separate, binary logistic regressions to predict the likelihood of frequent park use, based on different geographic factors, perceptions of parks, and past experiences of accessibility barriers. Our findings revealed that disabled adults living in communities with more parks and greater percentage of park land were more likely to be frequent users. Rural residents were more likely to be low parks users, perhaps due to greater reliance on informal green spaces. Those who believed that parks were good for their mental and physical health and who felt safe in parks were more likely to be frequent park users. Encounters with accessibility barriers affected park use in complex ways. Disabled adults who encountered barriers to entry such as in parking lots and activity-specific barriers such as campsites, were more likely to be frequent park users than those who encountered them at transient spaces such as event venues, suggesting that committed parkgoers persist despite challenges. Findings highlight the complex interplay of structural, community, and personal contexts that shape disabled adults' park use. Insights identify specific targets for cities and park systems to improve accessibility by reducing barriers and fostering conditions that support inclusive, regular use.

SESSION 20 **WEST ROOM**

Paper Session – Applied Sociology and Social Policy

Presider: Pamela Pitman Brown, Albany State University

Building Academic Success Through Systematic Skill Development: A Multi-Certificate Approach to Student Preparation

Pamela Pitman Brown, Albany State University

Many sociology students enter our courses lacking foundational academic skills often assumed but rarely explicitly taught. Rather than penalizing these gaps or lowering standards, this presentation describes an innovative student success framework implemented across multiple sociology courses that addresses three critical competency areas: academic integrity, artificial intelligence ethics, and time management literacy. The student success module consists of three certificate programs that students complete to demonstrate mastery of essential academic skills. The Plagiarism Certificate ensures students understand citation conventions, intellectual property concepts, and proper source attribution through interactive exercises and assessment. The AI Ethics Certificate addresses responsible use of artificial intelligence tools in academic work, covering appropriate applications, limitations, and ethical considerations in an era of rapidly evolving technology. The Time Literacy Certificate requires students to maintain weekly calendars and demonstrate effective time management strategies, recognizing time management as a fundamental form of academic literacy. This certification system serves multiple pedagogical functions. First, it makes explicit the "hidden curriculum" of academic expectations, ensuring equitable access to knowledge that some students may have acquired implicitly while others have not. Second, certificates are transferable across multiple sociology courses, creating incentives for skill development beyond individual assignments

and building program-level coherence. Third, the system generates data for ongoing assessment of student progress and intervention effectiveness. Implementation involves structured learning modules, competency demonstrations, and point-based incentives that students can apply to future sociology courses. Initial observations suggest improved assignment quality, reduced unintentional plagiarism, and enhanced student confidence in managing academic responsibilities. The approach addresses contemporary challenges in higher education while maintaining academic rigor through proactive skill-building rather than punitive measures. This presentation will detail the development, implementation, and preliminary outcomes of each certificate program, providing practical guidance for colleagues interested in systematic approaches to student success. Attendees will leave with concrete tools and strategies for addressing foundational skill gaps in their own courses, along with assessment frameworks for measuring effectiveness. The session will also address potential challenges and adaptations for different institutional contexts and student populations.

Promoting youth advocacy for resilience to disasters: a pilot study
Allen Hyde, Georgia Institute of Technology

Through Youth Advocacy for Resilience to Disasters (YARDs), we offer a case study of a middle-school science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) program to engage youth in disaster resilience planning through mapmaking and advocacy. From 2021 to 2023, we designed and implemented a 14-session curriculum that empowers middle-school youth (ages 11–14) to advocate for infrastructural improvements that can benefit their communities by learning about disaster resilience from the perspective of environmental justice and equity. Youth explore virtual mapmaking and data visualization to understand the assets and vulnerabilities in their communities related to disasters. Finally, they develop an action plan and present their plan to local civic and government leaders to advocate for change. This curriculum was piloted as an after-school program in the fall of 2022 and twice as a summer camp in 2022 and 2023. Results from student surveys, field note observations, and focus groups show that there was increased self-efficacy among the participants for advocacy behaviors related to natural disasters and an increase in their understanding of and feelings of importance of the program topics. This article can help inform others working with youth on successes and challenges with program development around disaster resilience.

2025 Human Trafficking Guidelines Reform
Jessica Nwachukwu, University of North Georgia

The scope of my research will focus on creating 2025 data-backed guidelines meant to realistically instill good Samaritans with action-based wisdom around potential victims. In addition to this, potential resource provisions to establish community trust among victims will be brainstormed in an effort to bring refreshed social norms or traits to light among the public. Through the duration of my literature review, an efficient list of preventative guidelines and resource accessibility proposals could destigmatize open conversations pertaining to victims and their traffickers. By implementing guidelines such as these, more effective state and federal policies can be developed, and thousands of additional trafficking victims could be saved each year. Reformed guidelines must incorporate destigmatized descriptions in terms of physical appearance, mental health, and drug use toward survivors that ordinary citizens and good Samaritans can notice, as invisibility is an immensely coveted tool by traffickers. Moreover, long-term psychological and physical traumas associated with survivors and victims' presented additional acute symptoms including self-harm, substance use disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Considering this, the aim of my research is to encourage the establishment of local and county communication channels in every city associated neighboring NGOs and Human Services organizations. Therefore, the significance of this research may lead to a broadening and advertisement of empathic social norms pertaining to such vulnerable people while drawing focus to discouraging traffickers instead of their targeted victims.

SESSION 21 **MERCANTILE ROOM**

Panel - The Epidemic of Rural Suicide

Moderator: Torri Williams, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

This panel discussion will focus on the prevalence of suicide in rural communities, the psychosocial factors involved, and resources to address it, particularly on college campuses like ABAC that may have social support systems such as Active Minds.

Panelists:
Ashton Fulp, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Caleb Joiner, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Jesse Lee, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

SESSION 22 **EAST ROOM**

Paper Session - Intersections of Gender and Sexuality

Presider: Cassandra D. Jordan

Legalizing social egg freezing for single Chinese women: Queering reproduction and law for reproductive justice
Jingyun (Iris) Pi, Department of Sociology and iCORD Lab, Georgia State University

This article adopts the queer reproductive justice framework, alongside collected data, to theoretically and empirically explore why single women in mainland China should be authorized legal access to social egg freezing. Through inductive thematic analysis, feminist legal analysis, and critical discourse analysis, this article argues that the existing legislation surrounding social egg freezing should be queered to legalize it for single women to safeguard reproductive justice. It presents single women's motivations for pursuing the procedure, how these motivations reflect their demand for reproductive justice, the legal ambiguities they face, how these legal ambiguities undermine reproductive justice for them, and their advocacy for the legalization of social egg freezing as part of their pursuit of reproductive justice. This article advocates for queering reproduction and reproductive decision-making norms in the Chinese context to challenge the patriarchy underneath. Without such legal reform, single women will continue to experience their reproductive dilemma and stratified reproduction, jeopardizing reproductive justice in mainland China. This article theoretically and empirically contributes to the development of queer theory and the reproductive justice movement within and beyond mainland China.

Demystifying Welfare Dependency: The Emergence of Women as The College-Educated Workforce Majority
Cassandra D. Jordan, Albany State University

In 1994, a book entitled "The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life" was published. The authors were a psychologist, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, a political scientist. In this body of work the authors argue that there is a "cognitive elite' group and race determines intelligence. They suggested these claims justified significant changes in public policy, particularly in the area of welfare. Two years later, in the 1996 Presidential Election, welfare reform was among the top three issues facing America. Many political leaders and media outlets portrayed recipients of AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) as abusers of the system, perpetuating the misconception that they were responsible

for depleting the national budget. On August 22, 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which ended AFDC and replaced it with TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant). This policy change was accompanied by a powerful yet false set of public narratives, most notably the stereotype of the "welfare queen", which targeted Black women as the face of welfare fraud, deception, and dependency. Contrary to what was being publicized in the media and news outlets, research from experts all across the country dispelled these misconceptions. Women who were receiving AFDC benefits used them for the purpose intended. Many furthered their education and once their living conditions improved, they did not defraud the system to continue receiving welfare benefits. Evidence showed that women receiving AFDC used benefits for their intended purpose, including securing housing, meeting basic needs, and pursuing higher education. These developments highlight how racialized stereotypes shaped welfare reform debates in the 1990s. They also underscore how these narratives continue to influence the framing of poverty, gender, and public policy.

The Impact of Social Support on the Willingness of GSM Youth to be Out Across Various Social Spaces

Julia Ryland, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Eric Larson, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

This study delves into the social support aspects LGBTQ youths may or may not receive and how it affects their willingness to be out. Specifically, we are interested in if different levels of social support impact outness in specific social spaces. Using Goffman's presentation of self and its associate theoretical elements as our theoretical foundation, we hypothesis that LGBTQ youths who do not have adequate social support will be less likely to be open in the correlating social space. Leading them to use impression management to generally hide that part of themselves in most situations in those social spaces. For example, from this theoretical lens, we would argue that LGBTQ youth who have low social support at school will be less likely to be out and open about their Sexual or Gender status at school. Data for this study is drawn from a database that included a random sample of 17,112 gender and sexual minority adolescents. Multiple regression models were run to determine if there is a relationship between social support and being out in a particular social space. Further, the models are used to determine if support from one or more social groups (Family, Friends, Teachers, etc.) has a greater or lesser impact on outness than other.

A Bigot's Influence on Corporal Punishment

Juwan Douglas, Valdosta State University
Ellis S. Logan, Valdosta State University
Anne M. Price, Valdosta State University

Corporal Punishment has existed for all of human history across cultural and societal contexts, and continues to be practiced by some but not others. This research aims to examine the different factors that predict attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment in disciplining children. Prior research has shown a strong tie between transgenerational transmission of corporal punishment and religiosity. Despite the reticence of researchers to study religion as a possible determinant of parenting behavior, parents themselves often readily acknowledge the role played by religious teachings in helping them make child-rearing, and particularly disciplinary, decisions (Gershoff et al, 1999). Many families conform to this ideology without even realizing it, as many people are just following the norms that were socialized at a young age from their parental guardians. Many believe that how they were raised worked for them or believe that it would be fair to raise their child in a similar way in order for their child's lives to turn out similar to theirs. However, this ideology can be taken to the extreme resulting in abuse and maltreatment. Child maltreatment can also manifest as a result of parental figures expressing their extreme forms of hatred, primarily bigotry, through corporal punishment. This research uses 2022 General Social Survey data to assess the way out-group hatred or bigotry is linked to attitudes toward spanking children, specifically bigotry related to homophobia, prejudice towards immigrants, sexism, and racism. Regression models revealed that different dimensions of bigotry were linked to more pro-spanking attitudes, but showed different levels of strength in their association when controlling for known predictors of corporal punishment established in the literature. The use of spanking as a disciplinary technique may not only socialize children to see corporal punishment as normative, but its linkage to other forms of bigotry may also be transmitting social norms toward bigotry and out-group hatred simultaneously. Therefore, children

may be inadvertently learning to normalize bigotry like their parental figures and repeating the cycle across generations.

SESSION 23 **WEST ROOM**

Paper Session - Race/Ethnicity

Presider: Ellis S. Logan, Valdosta State University

The Struggles of African American Farmers in Georgia's Black Belt: Contributions from Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Monroe Work
Leonard A. Steverson, Flagler College

The Struggles of African American Farmers in Georgia's Black Belt: Contributions from Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Monroe Work The United States government's promise to provide "forty acres and a mule" to newly freed men after the American Civil War was a hollow one due to the disparities in farm ownership and discrimination that occurred toward African American farmers in Georgia's Black Belt. Discrimination against Black farmers came in the form of legal deception involving land purchases, property ownership, and inadequate financing. Those who were able to own and work farms had to navigate laws, racial customs, and other challenges that came from competing with White farmers. African American farm ownership grew in the 1910s and 1920s but began a sharp decrease in the 1930s that has continued downward to the present day. Scholars W.E.B. Du Bois and Monroe Work offered sociological insights into the plight of Black farmers, as did prominent African American leader Booker T. Washington, specifically on the obstacles faced by farmers in the Black Belt region of Georgia. This presentation addresses how their contributions in this area, although proffered over a century ago, can provide some guidelines for the problems African American farmers face today.

The Key to a Long Life is Deep Community Connections, Secure Family Structure, And Speaking Spanish: A Comparison of the Hispanic Paradox to the Health and Social Functions of Other American Minorities Within Diverse Southern Suburbs.
Emma Ladd-Thomas, University of North Georgia

Socioeconomic conditions, traumatic life events, and systems that are discriminatory toward minority groups have been identified within sociological studies to produce a lower quality of life; however, the Hispanic population within the United States remains an outlier to this phenomenon (Weitz, R., 2019). The Hispanic Paradox can be contradictory, yet the disparities can possibly be explained by other sociological theories that identify cultural variables as the cause of the outlier. Familial networks, outlook on mental health, and ability for financial opportunity and growth might be greater indicators than ability for healthy movement, transportation, or medical intervention in determining health statistics in a community (Weitz, R., 2019). Using the Gwinnett County, Georgia, neighborhoods surrounding Highway 85 that hold a higher Hispanic population than other southern cities, I will analyze the relationship between urban development, political environment changes, and the well-being of different minorities within the population. I theorize that strong religious, familial, and communal ties will be the defining variable between well-being in minority populations. My key findings identify that socioeconomic hardship and language or cultural barriers possibly have less of an impact on the health and well-being of minority communities than political and cultural turmoil. The reaction to that turmoil that the group and those outside of it have should be further researched as a cause of major stress and possible negative health outcomes.

Healthcare Beyond Borders: Overcoming Cultural, Linguistic, and Systemic Challenges for Immigrants
Aniste Marie Pascale Philor, Valdosta State University
Ellis S. Logan, Valdosta State University

Immigrant populations in the United States often face many obstacles in accessing healthcare due to the lack of cultural competence among providers, language barriers, and structural racism that is embedded

into institutional practices. This paper explores how these issues intersect to produce negative health outcomes and disparities in healthcare experiences for immigrants of color. Relying on a comprehensive literature review and quantitative analysis of data from the 2023 National Health Interview Survey, this study emphasizes the prevalence and impact of these obstacles. Drawing on best practices from existing models and scholarship, this paper proposes the Comprehensive Cultural and Linguistic Integration Model (CCLIM). This is a multidimensional framework designed to foster equity through cultural competence training, bilingual staffing, Artificial Intelligence assisted translation, community partnerships, and institutional reform. The implementation of the CCLIM is a critical step toward building a more inclusive and effective healthcare system for immigrant communities.

Friday 12:15 pm

INCOMING AND OUTGOING EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING AND LUNCH **BY INVITATION**

Presidents of Georgia Sociological Association

John T. Doby	1964-65
Tilman C. Cothran	1965-66
Raymond Payne	1966-67
Dorothy Pitman	1967-68
John A. Tumblin, Jr.	1968-69
Homer C. Cooper	1969-70
Barbara Payne Stancil	1970-71
Alpha M. Bond, Jr.	1971-72
Eugene G. Sherman, Jr.	1972-73
John Drenan Kelley	1973-74
Fred R. Crawford	1974-75
Marguerite Woodruff	1975-76
Charlene R. Black	1976-77
John M. Smith, Jr.	1977-78
Anna A. Grant	1978-79
Norma Seerley	1979-80
Larry A. Platt	1980-81
Richard M. Levinson	1981-82
Louie A. Brown	1982-83
Frederick L. Bates	1983-84
Jacqueline Boles	1984-85
Charles J. Karcher	1985-86
Albeno P. Garbin	1986-87
Ruby C. Lewis	1987-88
Charles Jaret	1988-89
Barbara Karcher	1989-90
Robert Agnew	1990-91
Chet Ballard	1991-92
Hugh D. Spitler	1992-93
Robert Johnston	1993-94
G. Roger Branch	1994-95
Albert E. McCormick, Jr.	1995-96
Jay Strickland	1996-97
Fred Zampa	1997-98
Linda August	1998-99
Lana Wachniak	1999-00
Leona Kanter	2000-01
Mel Fein	2001-02
Sam Abaidoo	2002-03
Robert Johnston	2003-04
Ned Rinalducci	2004-05
Michelle McCormick	2005-06
Kevin Demmitt	2006-07
Laurel Holland	2007-08
Michael Hodge	2008-09
Miriam Boeri	2009-10
Donald Gregory	2010-11
Kathleen Dolan	2011-12
Linda Treiber	2012-13
Ned Rinalducci	2013-14
Michallene McDaniel	2014-15
Philip Thomas	2015-16
Alison Hatch	2016-17
Sara Mason	2017-18
Carly L. Redding	2018-19
Darina Lepadatu	2019-20
Darina Lepadatu	2020-21
Pamela Pitman Brown	2021-22
Carly L. Redding	2022-23
Brandon K. Attell	2023-24
Jewrell Rivers	2024-25

Sociologist of the Year Award Winners

Peggy Herrman	2001-02
Robert Agnew	2002-03
Jacqueline Boles	2003-04
Douglas Bachtel	2004-05
Catherine Meeks	2005-06
Barbara Karcher	2006-07
Sandra Stone	2007-08
Charlie Jaret	2008-09
Claire Sterk	2009-10
Lana Wachniak	2010-11
Miriam Boeri	2011-12
Michael Hodge	2012-13
Ralph LaRossa	2013-14
Linda Grant	2014-15
Kathleen Lowney	2015-16
Jody Clay-Warner	2016-17
Mindy Stombler	2017-18
Mel Fein	2018-19
Cynthia Neals Spence	2019-20
Alyasah Ali Sewell	2020-21
Ned Rinalducci	2021-22
Linda Treiber	2022-23
Barbara Harris Combs	2023-24

Meritorious Service Award Winners

1985-86	Drennan Kelley, Dorothy Pitman, Marguerite Woodruff, and John Doby
1986-87	No presentation
1987-88	Anna Grant
1988-89	Imogene Dean
1989-90	Abbott Ferris
1990-91	Homer C. Cooper and Hans Mauksch
1991-92	Albeno Garbin and Ruby C. Lewis
1992-93	Charlene Black, Barbara Karcher, and Charles Karcher
1993-94	Jacqueline Boles and Marian Glustrom
1994-95	Wilfred Bailey and Chet Ballard
1995-96	Ernestine Thompson and Robert Johnston
1996-97	No presentation
1997-98	Sandra Stone
1998-99	No record
1999-00	Roger Branch
2000-01	Al McCormick
2001-02	No record
2002-03	Jay Hughes (Strickland)
2003-04	No record
2004-05	No record
2005-06	Melvyn L. Fein
2006-07	No record
2007-08	No record
2008-09	Donald Gregory and Ned Rinalducci
2009-10	Michelle McCormick
2010-11	Al McCormick
2011-12	James Floyd
2012-13	Michallene McDaniel
2013-14	Laurel Holland
2014-15	Anne Borden
2015-16	Fred Zampa
2016-17	Rodger Bates
2017-18	Linda Treiber
2018-19	Philip Thomas
2019-20	Brandon Attell
2020-21	Christy Flatt
2021-22	Diogo Pinheiro
2022-23	Darina Lepadatu
2023-24	Pamela Pittman Brown

Biography on GSA President, Dr. Jewrell Rivers

Dr. Jewrell Rivers is a Professor of Sociology, Marriage and Family, and Criminal Justice at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. He currently serves on the Board of Trustees for the Tift County Commission of Children and Youth (TCCCY), the Advisory Board for the Department of Social Work at Albany State University, the United Way Board and the Tift Child Abuse Council.

In addition to serving on professional boards, Dr. Rivers was active on the Planning Committee for the Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Conference and served as President, Vice-President and Member at Large for Teaching on the Executive Board for the Georgia Sociological Association (GSA). Along with his vast teaching duties, Dr. Rivers has also published research manuscripts in the Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research (JEQR), the Journal of Family Social Work (JFSW) and the Law Enforcement Executive Forum (LEEF). Along with his manuscript publications, Dr. Rivers has held professional memberships and presented several research papers at the Georgia Sociological Association (GSA), The Criminal Justice Association of Georgia (CJAG), The National Council of Family Relations (NCFR), the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), the Southeastern Council of Family Relations (SECFR) and the Rural Sociological Society (RSS). Statewide responsibilities include teaching sociology for eCore, serving on the Regents Advisory Committee for sociology (RAC) and as Director of the African American Male Initiative (AAMI) at ABAC. Most importantly, Dr. Rivers models community leadership and social advocacy for his students and strives to provide opportunities for them to engage in civic, charitable and non-profit organizations and agencies.