

# Meet the **Southern Miss** Social Work Faculty & Staff



**Laura Achter**, Visiting Instructor | LMSW



Laura Achter received her BSW and MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. Her professional background includes mental health clinician with Pine Belt Mental Health Care Services, Family Preservation Specialist with Child Protective Services (CPS), child welfare social worker, therapeutic foster care specialist, and intensive in-home specialist with Mississippi Children's Home Services/Canopy. Further, she served in the Mississippi Air National Guard for 32 years. She started the military as an enlisted airman and was later commissioned as an officer. She has served as Medical Service supervisor, Equal Opportunity Officer and base Inspector General.

**Interests:** Child Welfare, Family and Children, Ethics, Cultural Competency, School Social Work, Equality, and Mental Health.

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**Karen Aderer**, Lecturer | LMSW



Ms. Aderer has been a resident of the Mississippi Gulf Coast for over 20 years. She has worked in a child advocacy role for much of that time, having served most recently as the District Social Worker for Bay Waveland School. She worked previously at an emergency children's shelter, and has served as a DHS foster parent and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) in Youth Court.

**Interests:** Cultural Competence & Fighting Racism, Ethics, Ethics & Social Media, & Human Rights

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**Bret Blackmon**, Associate Director & Associate Professor | Ph.D.



Dr. Blackmon received his Ph.D. from the School of Social Work at Louisiana State University. He joined the faculty at The University of Southern Mississippi in 2014. He has taught courses in human development, research methods, social entrepreneurship, and program evaluation. Blackmon has engaged in numerous research projects involving the juvenile justice and educational systems, psychological resilience in disaster-prone communities, and person-centered practices. His work experience includes program development and evaluation for at-risk youth, multisystemic therapy for youth involved in the justice system, research and training to address substance abuse in collegiate communities, and case management for individuals with spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries.

**Interests:** Person-centered Practices, Disaster and Mental Health, Health Disparities and Healthcare Policy, & Intersections of the Juvenile Justice and Education Systems

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**Michelle Brazeal**, MSW Coordinator & Assistant Professor | Ph.D., LCSW



Michelle Brazeal, Ph.D., LCSW received her MSW and Ph.D. from the University of Alabama. She previously taught at The University of Alabama, The University of Southern Mississippi and Middle Tennessee State University. Her research focuses on the intersection of physical and mental health. She is also interested in exploring pedagogy in higher education and ways to utilize technology to improve learning. Her practice experience has included providing outpatient and residential mental health services to children and transitional age young adults, providing outpatient addictions treatment, and providing social work services in primary care. As an administrator, she has developed transitional age group homes and integrated health programs. She has assisted in developing a juvenile drug court and a jail diversion program.

**Interests:** Intersection of mental & physical health, effective teaching in higher education, adolescent disruptive behaviors, and trauma in transitional age youth

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**Denise Brown-Rouse**, Field Coordinator & Instructor | LCSW



Denise Brown-Rouse is a licensed clinical social worker residing in Carriere, Mississippi. She received both her BSW and MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. After college, she was employed by the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Family & Children Services Division for more than seventeen years. During her tenure she served as a child welfare caseworker, supervisor, USM Field Instructor and Training Director. Recently, she was a school social worker with the Pearl River Central School District since 2010. In her time at PRCSD, she has served as the mental health provider, Special Education related-service provider, TIER behavior specialist, USM Field Instructor and as the team leader for the Pearl River Central Middle School's Positive Behavior Intervention and Support Team.

**Interests:** Family and Children, Child Welfare, Field Education, School Social Work

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**Melissa Coker**, Finance & Administration Specialist



Mrs. Coker has been a part of the School of Social Work for 20 years. Working as the Finance and Administration Specialist, Mrs. Coker manages department budgets, procurement, hiring procedures, assists with grant management, and provides supervision of the graduate assistants and student workers. Currently, Mrs. Coker serves as the Immediate Past President of the Association of Office Professionals (AOP), and as Staff Representative on the CoEHS Dean's Advisory Council. She has previously served as Faculty Senate Bookkeeper 2010-2013 and chaired committees within AOP.

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## **Melody Davisson**, Student Support Specialist & Instructor | LMSW

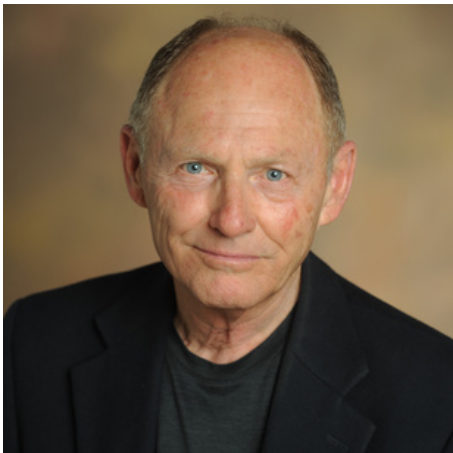


Ms. Davisson is the Student Support Specialist and Instructor for the School of Social Work. She is a Hattiesburg native and received her bachelor's of Social Work from Southern Miss in 2017. She continued her studies at The University of Alabama where she completed her master's degree in Social Work in 2019. Ms. Davisson's professional career started as a medical social worker for a local hospice company.

**Interests:** Adults and Families, Medical Social Work, School Social Work

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## **Michael Forster**, Professor Emeritus | Ph.D., MSW



Dr. Forster serves on several nonprofit boards, including the Mississippi Public Health Institution and the Hattiesburg chapter of USA Dance Incorporated. He cofounded the Family Network Partnership, a community-based youth/family services agency in Hattiesburg; is author/co-author of 60+ academic publications; and is coPrincipal Investigator of \$15M+ in externally funded grants and contracts. He previously worked in child welfare in Chicago.

**Interests:** Politics & Social Movements, Leadership & Organization Management, & Social Welfare Policy

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## **Debbie Graham**, Lecture Emeritus | LCSW



Ms. Graham is a certified clinical supervisor with 17+ years of clinical social work practice, as well as practice in the mental health and addiction fields. She teaches foundation practice, advanced assessment, diagnoses and treatment (mental health/addiction) and theory. Her approach to social work practice is relational, strength-based, and person-centered.

**Interests:** Addiction Assessment & Treatment, Mental Health Access and Addiction Treatment Policies, Mental Health Assessment and Treatment, PTSD, Suicide Assessment & Prevention, & Trauma



# Meet the **Southern Miss** Social Work Faculty & Staff



**Kimberly Hogan**, Assistant Professor | Ph.D., LMSW, MA



Mrs. Hogan is a current PhD Candidate and holds an MSW from Arizona State University. She has a focus on domestic sex trafficking and the therapeutic needs for exiting. Kimberly is a research scholar-in-training with the Global Association of Human Trafficking Scholars (GAHTS). She has worked closely with community groups, including the United States Department of Justice, National Criminal Justice Training Center, AMBER Alert, Navajo Nation, Las Vegas Rape Crisis Center, City of Phoenix Starfish Place, Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution (S.O.A.P. Project), Starfish Mentoring Programs, and the Phoenix and Las Vegas Metropolitan VICE Units. Her research work spans the prevention, detection, identification, and treatment of minor and adult sex trafficking victims.

**Interests:** Human Trafficking, Homelessness, LGBTQ+ Issues, Social Enterprises, and Social Justice.

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**Jenine Housewright**, Field Education Specialist | LMSW



Mrs. Housewright has been a Golden Eagle for more than 20 years, with the majority of that time in the School of Social Work. She has worked in the field office to assist in all placement needs for students, field agencies and faculty within the school. In 2018, she received her MSW degree from the University of Southern Mississippi.

**Interests:** Field Education, Medical Social Work, & Hospice Behavioral Health

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**Susan Hrostowski**, Professor | Ph.D., MSW



Dr. Hrostowski is a social justice advocate who has worked to address policy issues related to race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Her research includes resilience in late life, LGBTQ+ issues, and public policy on HIV. Dr. Hrostowski is also an Episcopal priest who serves on the Diocese of Mississippi Commission on Ministry with LGBTQ+ People.

**Interests:** Aging, HIV/AIDS, LGBT Issues, Resilience, Social Justice, Social Welfare Policy, & Theology

# Meet the **Southern Miss** Social Work Faculty & Staff



**Tamara Hurst**, Associate Professor | Ph.D., LCSW



Dr. Hurst has extensive experience as a forensic social worker and forensic interviewer. She serves on the Mississippi Human Trafficking Council and is also the principal investigator for the Mississippi Wraparound Institute which assists mental health agencies that support families of children with serious emotional disturbances. She frequently conducts keynote presentations and trainings related to child abuse, neglect, and human trafficking.

**Interests:** Food Insecurity in Higher Education, Nonprofit Agency Development, Prevention and Identification of Child Maltreatment and Exploitation, Training and Education - Child Maltreatment Professionals, & Training and Education - Macro Social Work

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**Jerome Kolbo**, Director & Professor | Ph.D., ACSW

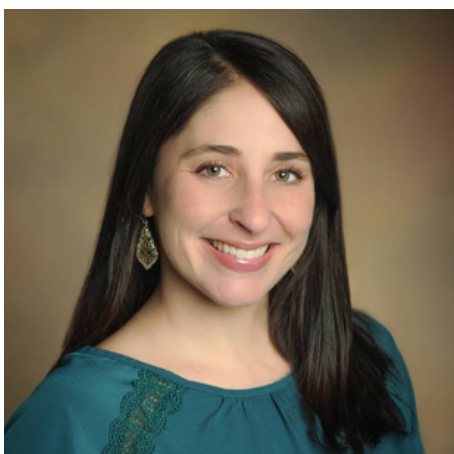


Dr. Kolbo is the Director of the School of Social Work and coordinates the school's MSW degree program. He is the Principal Investigator of numerous weighted, representative child obesity studies, including biennial Child and Youth Prevalence of Obesity Studies among public school students; prevalence of obesity among Head Start students; shifts in extreme weight distribution (underweight and severe obesity) among public school students; and perinatal factors associated with the prevalence of obesity among Pre-K children in licensed child care facilities.

**Interests:** Adolescent Sexual Health, Childhood Obesity, Children's Health, Fitness and Academic/Behavioral Health, Sex Education Policies, & Women's Health and Contraceptives

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**Rachel Lahasky**, BSW Coordinator & Instructor | MSW, LCSW-BACS



Ms. Lahasky has a professional background in primarily school-based social work. She worked as a school-based therapist in both Louisiana and Delaware and served students diagnosed with an emotional or behavior disorder. She also has a medical social work background, and has most recently worked in the medical social services department at Forrest General Hospital in Hattiesburg, MS.

**Interests:** Adolescents & Teens, Grief & Bereavement, School Social Work, Medical Social Work, and Animal Assisted Therapy

# Meet the **Southern Miss** Social Work Faculty & Staff



**Joohee Lee**, Professor | Ph.D., MSW



Dr. Lee joined the Southern Miss faculty in 2006. She earned her MSW and Ph.D. in Social Work from the University of South Carolina and the University of Texas at Austin, respectively. The areas of her research interest include: mental health [different populations: people exposed to disasters; people with chronic health conditions; immigrants]; child welfare; and violence against women (domestic violence and sexual assault). She has produced numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and conference presentations related to these areas. She has served as a faculty advisor for many students who conducted research and presented at various conferences.

**Interests:** Community Resilience, Disaster and Psychological Resilience, Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault Among Asians

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**Anna Mercante**, Visiting Instructor | LCSW



Anna Mercante is excited to be here at USM as a Visiting Instructor and looks forward to sharing her passion for social work and practice experience with her students. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker from St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana. She received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Creighton University and her Master of Social Work from Louisiana State University. She is completing her Doctorate at Tulane University with a research focus on medical social work. Prior to teaching at USM she has worked as a medical social worker in a trauma hospital, addictions therapist, managed a community mental health team, and as clinical director for a behavioral health hospital. She also has a private practice that focuses on mood disorders and life transitions.

**Interests:** Client self determination, professional burnout and job satisfaction, health equity, and health literacy.

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**Catherine Poehling**, Assistant Professor | DSW, MS, LCSW, CCTP-II



Dr. Poehling is a mental health clinician, transformational leader, and community organizer with nearly 20 years of experience working with diverse populations. She has a wide range of clinical experience providing individual and group psychotherapy, clinical supervision, and training. In addition to mental health, she is an active advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. She holds an Advanced Certificate in Forensic Social Work and is a Clinical Certified Trauma Professional Level II for complex trauma. Her current research is focused on the use of Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives (LARC) using the social determinants of health.

**Interests:** Reproductive justice, social determinants of health, trauma, severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI), substance use.



# Meet the **Southern Miss** Social Work Faculty & Staff



**Diana Smith**, Instructor | LCSW



Diana M. Smith, LCSW received her BSW and MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. She received her LCSW at Edgewood Children's Center in St. Louis, MO. From St. Louis, she moved to Atlanta, GA, where she accepted a position of clinical therapist at a wilderness camp for adolescents in the juvenile justice system. She has received specialized training in Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT®), which is a cognitive-behavioral group therapy and has the distinction of being a CBT Diplomate. She returned to Hattiesburg in 2005 and joined the staff at Pine Grove Behavioral Health, where she has spent the last 16 years working with multiple populations in both inpatient and outpatient settings. For the past seven years, she was the Pine Grove program director of Inpatient Therapy Services.

**Interests:** Children & Adolescents, Trauma, Substance Use, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Person-Centered Practices, Adults mental illness.

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**Rhonda Smith**, Visiting Instructor | DSW, LCSW



Dr. Smith is a Licensed Certified Social Worker having received her undergraduate degree in psychology and her MSW from the University of Southern Mississippi. She earned her Doctorate degree in Social Work from the University of Tennessee – Knoxville. She has been working with individuals with mental illness for the past 17 years, first as a case manager at Pine Belt Mental Healthcare Resources and then at Westway Behavioral Health as a clinician in the inpatient facility. After receiving her LCSW, she transitioned into private psychotherapy practice at South Central Behavioral Health in Laurel, MS. Her doctoral research focused on Mississippi's Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) effectiveness on continued mental health care and the systems involved in providing treatment to individuals with severe mental illness.

**Interests:** Adults with Mental Illness, Trauma, Substance Use, Systems, Strengths-Based Treatment, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Art Therapy, Clinical Skills, Crisis Intervention

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**Delories Williams**, Instructor Emeritus | LSW, MSW



Delories Williams is the former BSW Coordinator of the Undergraduate Social Work program in the School of Social Work at Southern Miss. She retired in 2018 and presently has the distinction of Instructor Emeritus. She is currently the owner of Delories Williams Consulting and Training (DWC&T), an organization that partners with schools, nonprofits, and businesses, offering professional development training and consultative services. A few of her community service activities include her role as a board member for the Williams Family Foundation, a member of the PRVO Head Start Health Advisory Board and her membership with the NAACP.

**Interests:** School social work, DEI work, Compassionate/gentle parenting, Social justice issues, Family and Traveling