

Distinguished Scholars 2026/2027

Supporting the advancement of elite graduate students on their journeys toward becoming leaders in behavioral science.

The mission of the Distinguished Scholars is to support the advancement of elite graduate students on their journeys toward becoming leaders in behavioral science. In service of the mission of the Center, Distinguished Scholar volunteers collaboratively identify, explore, and execute projects under the guidance of established leaders, the Center Advisors and Trustees. The group was formed in response to the one of the Center's primary goals: to improve the future of behavioral science by education and development of the next wave of behavioral scientists and practitioners. Student-initiated projects align with the Center's other main goals: to create and deliver trustworthy information on high quality behavioral services and science around the world, and to promote global collaboration among behavioral organizations. Students also work in various capacities to support the Center, such as through volunteer efforts at Center conferences. Scholars' activities align with Center's overall mission: to use the science of human behavior to alleviate human suffering.

Leaders

Robyn Catagnus, EdD, LBS, BCBA-D, National University



Dr. Robyn Catagnus is a board-certified behavior analyst and full professor of Behavior Analysis at National University. She's owned and operated a successful behavior consulting firm and held executive roles in behavioral health and educational technology organizations. As a management consultant, she's developed human capital initiatives to improve organizational behavior. She is a trustee of the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies; reviewer for several prestigious behavior analysis journals; and former member of the editorial board for member of Perspectives on Behavior Science, the flagship journal of Applied Behavior Analysis International. Dr. Catagnus was the founding president of the Multicultural Alliance of Behavior Analysts and Past President of the Culture and Diversity SIG. Dr. Catagnus has degrees in instruction and technology, education, and leadership and strategy (with an emphasis on mindfulness in business).

Thank you to Noor Y. Syed, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA/LBS, SUNY Empire State University for her leadership with Robyn over the last year!



Dr. Noor Syed (she/they) is an Assistant Professor of Applied Behavior Analysis, as well as the founding **Director of the Center for Autism Advocacy: Research, Education, and Supports (CAARES) with SUNY Empire State University.** Recently, she supported the launch of and coordinated a Masters of Science in ABA, in which a core tenet is affirming, responsive practice. Dr. Syed has also been named the Turben Director of Autism Advocacy with CAARES, whose primary initiative is to help SUNY Empire become a fully inclusive and supportive college for those who identify as neurodiverse through a multi-tiered system of support framework. The university was designated an Autistic Supportive™ institution in 2022. In addition, Dr. Syed is the director of Anderson Center International, an organization dedicated to providing training in evidenced-based strategies for scholars from under-resourced areas globally and is President of the New York State Association for Behavior Analysis. She is an Adjunct Doctoral Advisor in ABA with Endicott

College, and is a certified general and special education teacher. Dr. Syed serves on the ABA Ethics Hotline and on the Scientific Council with the Organization for Autism Research. She received her undergraduate degree in behavior analysis under Dr. Raymond G. Romanczyk in the Institute of Child Development at Binghamton University and completed her PhD in ABA with Dr. R. Douglas Greer at Teachers College, Columbia University. Noor is Neurodivergent and came to this work because of her beloved cousin who was born with significant intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities.

DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARS (*Incoming):

- *Amanda Bradley, MS, University of Kansas
- *Tess Fruchtman, MA, BCBA, LBS, NYS LBA, Temple University
- *Elizabeth Hardesty, MA, BCBA, LBA-KS, University of Kansas
- *Arndís Ólafsdóttir, MSc, Florida Institute of Technology
- *Romeo Isaiah Salazar, MS, BCBA, University of North Texas
- Gabrielle Torres, MS, BCBA, Capella University
- *Amy K. Wasersztein, MA, BCBA, LBS, Temple University
- Carson B. Whitford, MA, BCBA, LBA, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Amanda Bradley, MS, University of Kansas

Amanda discovered behavior analysis as an undergraduate and continued to earn her masters degree in Behavior Analysis at Georgia Southern University under the supervision of Dr. Andrew J Bulla. She has contributed to a wide range of research projects, including basic research with non-human animals, translational studies with college-aged students, and applied work with children. Amanda is currently in her doctoral training in Behavior Analysis at the University of North Texas. She works with Dr. Matthew Laske and focuses on Organizational Behavior Management and Behavioral Safety. Outside of academia, Amanda enjoys the outdoors, attending live music events, and spending quality time with family.

Tess Fruchtman, MA, BCBA, LBS, NYS LBA, Temple University

Tess Fruchtman, MA, BCBA, LBS, LBA received her bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in disability studies from The Ohio State University in 2020. She completed her master's degree in applied behavior analysis from Queens College, City University of New York in 2023, under the mentorship of Dr. Joshua Jessel. She is an ASPIRE scholar and PhD student in the special education program at Temple University, under the advisement of Dr. Art Dowdy. She has implemented the principles of behavior analysis in both outpatient clinic and home settings with a variety of children with different diagnoses, ages, and backgrounds. Most of her clinical experience has involved using and training students on the practical functional assessment and skill-based treatment. Her research interests include trauma-informed assessment and treatment of challenging behavior in autistic children, functional analysis methodology, and open science practices. She is the student representative for the Philadelphia Metropolitan Association for Behavior Analysis and a fellow at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia through the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities program.

Elizabeth Hardesty, MA, BCBA, LBA-KS, University of Kansas

Elizabeth Hardesty (she/her) is a fourth-year behavioral psychology doctoral candidate at the University of Kansas working with Dr. Claudia Dozier. She received her M.A. in Applied Behavior Analysis from the University of Houston - Clear Lake and her B.S. in Exercise Science from the University of Kansas. Elizabeth is a passionate behavior analyst, dedicated to the scientist-practitioner model to better the human condition. As part of her graduate training, Elizabeth has experience providing behavior-analytic services in various settings with diverse populations. She has supported individuals with disabilities across the lifespan in focused and comprehensive programs, early learners who engage in severe challenging behavior, individuals receiving adult residential and day services, and care providers for each of these populations. Elizabeth also has experience training special education teachers in behavioral assessment and intervention, supporting Board-Certified Behavior Analysts to conduct functional behavior assessments, and mentoring undergraduate students. Elizabeth's research interests focus primarily on the assessment, intervention, and prevention of severe challenging behaviors across the lifespan, choice and preference, schedules of reinforcement, and durable intervention packages. In her free time, Elizabeth loves to work out, cook meals for her loved ones, and spend time with her dogs.

Arndís Ólafsdóttir, MSc, Florida Institute of Technology

Arndís Ólafsdóttir holds an M.S. in Applied Behavior Analysis from Reykjavik University, Iceland, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Behavior Analysis at Florida Institute of Technology. Her academic and professional work is centered within Organizational Behavior Management (OBM), with a focus on applying behavioral principles to improve performance in organizational settings. Arndís has experience in both clinical and research environments, contributing to staff training, skill acquisition, and evidence-based practice.

Her current research interests include behavioral safety, leadership, and effective training, with an emphasis on promoting sustainable behavior change within organizations. She is particularly interested in bridging the gap between research and practice by developing scalable interventions that enhance workplace performance and safety outcomes. Through her work, Arndís aims to advance

OBM and support organizations in implementing data-driven, behaviorally informed solutions.

Romeo Isaiah Salazar, MS, BCBA, University of North Texas

Romeo Isaiah Salazar is a doctoral student with formal training in behavior analysis, attending the Health Sciences PhD program at the University of North Texas. His professional interests center on applying behavioral science to improve performance systems, leadership practices, and organizational processes within management and health related settings. Through interdisciplinary coursework and applied research experiences, he has developed a strong focus on organizational behavior management and systems-level change.

His master's thesis examined ways to improve procedural adherence among healthcare staff by evaluating a self-monitoring training package designed to support consistent implementation of evidence-based treatments. Building on this foundation, his upcoming dissertation will extend these principles to larger-scale management contexts. His research aims to develop sustainable data-driven

systems that enhance performance while reducing inefficiencies in supervisory systems.

Isaiah values opportunities that promote interdisciplinary collaboration, mentorship, and leadership development. The CCBS Distinguished Scholars program will support the continued refinement of his professional pursuits while reinforcing his commitment to translating behavioral science into practical solutions that benefit organizations and the communities they serve.

Gabrielle Torres, MS, BCBA, Capella University

Gabrielle Torres is a doctoral candidate of psychology with a specialization in behavior analysis at Capella University where she also serves as an Assistant Instructor in the master's program. Gabi received her master's at Teachers College at Columbia University and has been a Board Certified Behavior Analyst since 2008. She is also an International Behavior Analyst and has worked in over 20 countries. She designs and teaches IBAO approved International Behavior Analyst and International Behavior Therapist courses. Additionally, she provides supervision to IBA and IBT candidates, mentorship to behavior analysts and small business owners, and consulting to small-to-mid sized ABA companies and non-profits. Gabi is originally from the Caribbean where she is also actively involved in expanding access to services, capacity building, and supporting public policy efforts. She is focused on ensuring people worldwide get access to high quality and affordable educational and professional

development opportunities. Her research interests include exploring high quality lower intensity ABA models, culturally responsive practices, and leadership skill development programs.

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Amy K. Wasersztein, MA, BCBA, LBS, Temple University

Amy (she/her) is a PhD student and OSEP (Office of Special Education Programs) Scholar at Temple University. She is also a LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities) Fellow at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. Amy’s research focuses on advancing the use of evidence-based practices in behavior analysis and special education to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Her work examines teacher coaching and promoting implementation fidelity as mechanisms for strengthening the adoption and sustained use of behavioral interventions in schools. Amy’s recent scholarship includes systematic reviews on crisis management programs and teacher coaching for behavioral interventions in special education. Her current dissertation uses a single-case experimental design to evaluate more efficient and effective teacher coaching practices for supporting implementation fidelity. In addition to her research, Amy has over two decades of experience supporting children with developmental disabilities across educational, residential, and clinical contexts. Her work aims to bridge research and practice by promoting effective, scalable behavioral supports for educators.

Carson B. Whitford, MA, BCBA, LBA, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Carson Whitford (she/her) is a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska Medical Center under the supervision of Dr. Tara Fahmie. Carson earned her Bachelors in Applied Behavioral Sciences from the University of Kansas and Masters in Behavior Analysis from the University of Houston, Clear Lake. Throughout her academic career, she has worked across a variety of settings including early intervention, severe behavior, home- and community-based services, school-consultation, and adult residential services. It is because of her experience across such diverse settings that she has developed a passion for designing effective and durable interventions for severe challenging behavior and caregiver training.

At the University of Houston, Clear Lake, Carson completed a Master’s thesis evaluating interventions for automatically maintained challenging behavior under the advisement of Dr. Jennifer Fritz. Carson was awarded the Outstanding Graduate Student award from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities at the University of Houston, Clear Lake. Following graduation, Carson served as the program manager for Dr. Dorothea Lerman’s ABA Academy for Educators, a grant-funded program to train special education teachers and paraprofessionals on the principles of behavior analysis.

Currently, Carson works in the Severe Behavior Intervention Department at the University of Nebraska Medical Center’s Munroe-Meyer Institute. Her research interests include the assessment and treatment of automatically maintained challenging behavior, improving the efficacy of behavioral assessments, and caregiver training. In her free time, Carson enjoys reading, trying to keep her plants alive, and spending time with her friends.