

2025 Regents' Awards Nominees



March 6 – 7, 2025

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Olufemi Erinoso - Graduate - UNR**

Olufemi began his academic journey in 2010 with a Bachelor of Dental Surgery from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, where he developed a strong foundation in clinical dentistry. Subsequently, he obtained a Clinical Fellowship in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery with the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria. In 2018, Olufemi earned a Master of Public Health (MPH) from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. During his time at Johns Hopkins, Olufemi worked at the Institute for Global Tobacco Control, where he developed a passion for tobacco control research and policy. Olufemi is currently in his third year of a Ph.D. candidacy in Public Health at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), focusing on social and behavioral health. His doctoral research involves understanding the role of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation among people with substance use disorders interested in switching away from cigarettes. This research contributes to a growing body of knowledge that seeks to improve cessation strategies for marginalized populations and create public health interventions that are both effective and equitable.

In addition to his dissertation work, Olufemi serves as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) and Teaching Assistant (TA) at UNR. As a GRA, he has been involved in leading data management, analysis, and overall project leadership for a large National Institutes of Health-funded human laboratory study. He has also served as an instructor of record for an undergraduate class, where he successfully taught students ethical principles and professionalism in public health. He currently serves as a teaching assistant for graduate and undergraduate technical writing classes at the UNR School of Public Health and as a Graduate Research Assistant for Dr. Karla Wagner at the School of Public Health. As a GRA, he supports research on harm reduction approaches to methamphetamine use in the Mountain West states (i.e., Nevada, New Mexico), and peer-network based approaches to identify and support overdose responders and inform overdose prevention interventions. Knowledge from this research has the potential to impact the over 46 million people in the US who are battling with drug use disorders.

Olufemi has served in many leadership capacities, notably as an advisory committee member of Policy and Regulatory Science Network of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco - a leading professional organization on scientific research on nicotine and tobacco regulatory policy in the US and abroad. At the University, he has served as the President of the African Students Association, and Treasurer of the PhD Public Health Students Association. Olufemi's service extends beyond leadership roles in professional organizations. He has made significant contributions to Nevada's Oral Health Program, which sits within the Department of Health and Human Services. Just this year, he wrote the evaluation plan for Nevada's successful US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grant application, which will provide increased access to oral health services for rural and frontier communities throughout the state. At present, he continues to support the efforts of the state's oral health program by evaluating their Silver State SEAL, the state's school-based dental sealant program, which provides preventive oral health treatment to vulnerable school-aged children residing in rural and frontier communities. These activities have the potential to reduce inequities in accessing regular oral health care in the state.

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Riley Gillis – Undergraduate – UNR**

Riley Gillis is an undergraduate researcher at the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine who is making global impacts through his leadership in diagnostic immunology and drug screening.

As a freshman in college, Riley published his earliest first-author manuscript in a peer-reviewed journal on an obesity study he conducted independently after working for a local public health organization (HSAHEC). His research interests have since shifted to emerging infectious disease prevention and biodefense, where he currently holds a National Institutes of Health research fellowship. Working in the laboratories of Dr. David AuCoin, PhD and Dr. Samuel Lee, MD, PhD at the Center for Molecular Medicine, he leads a team of scientists discovering novel and repurposed drugs for the treatment of *Candida auris*, an emerging multidrug resistant fungal pathogen that has a mortality rate of 30-70%, is a “super colonizer” of surfaces, and infects/kills more people in Nevada than any other state in the union. His research also includes rapid diagnostic development for Ebola disease – including another first-author publication; SARS-CoV-2 - responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic; and Eastern Equine Encephalitis Virus – a “Tier 1 Select” tropical, mosquito-borne agent at great risk for deliberate misuse by bioterrorists with a significant potential for mass casualty events. Since graduating from Hug High School in 2022, Riley has earned research awards, public health accolades, and currently assists the President of the United States when he visits Nevada as a presidential motorcade driver. Riley also moonlights as a professional pianist, where he holds tenure as the principal (section leader) and as a soloist for several professional symphonies, volunteers as a Renown Health Healing Arts Pianist for terminally ill patients and staff, has released a live classical album on Spotify, and leads musical therapy groups at dementia care facilities. He is also the Vice President of UNR’s medical fraternity: Phi Delta Epsilon.

Riley intends to pursue his PhD or MD-PhD in microbiology, immunology, or a related field, and hopes to continue working with the Neglected Tropical Diseases like Ebola in the future. Likewise, Riley hopes his work in the future will continue to assist physicians and other providers in rural and underserved areas, including regions throughout the U.S., South America, and the African continent. In his free time, Riley loves to hike, ride motorcycles, and enjoy the company of friends.

Please see the following new release on Riley Gillis in Nevada Today:

<https://www.unr.edu/nevada-today/blogs/2024/undergraduate-research-riley-gillis>

Training video by Riley Gillis on *Candida* biofilms:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3xSETAdPWYQ>

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Giovanni Jones – CSN**

Giovanni Jones is set to graduate from the College of Southern Nevada in May 2025 with an Associate of Arts degree in Hospitality Management. He has demonstrated strong academic performance, having earned spots on both the Honors List and the Dean's List. In his role as Student Body Vice President, he is leading the effort to reinstate the CSN Honors College program, an initiative he prioritized when assuming his Associated Students of the College of Southern Nevada (ASCSN) responsibilities. His involvement extends across multiple organizations, reflecting a deep commitment to leadership and community. As an active member of the Black Student Union, Coyote Scholars Brotherhood, and the Black Male Mentorship program, he participated in Tiers 1 and 2 of the Student Leadership Academy.

Giovanni's dedication has been recognized with numerous honors, including the Coyote Campus Engagement and the MGM Resorts International Hospitality Management scholarships. His commitment to community involvement includes volunteer work such as participation in the NFL Las Vegas Super Bowl Committee and the establishment of the Lorenzo Williams Math Scholarship through the CSN Foundation. He is proud to have been chosen to be a voice of the CSN Student Body at NSHE Board of Regents meetings, the Hispanic Association of Colleges, the Universities Conference in Aurora, Colorado, and at the Southern NSHE Diversity Summit, hosted by Nevada State University. Beyond student government and community service, he is the founder of Chef Gios Catering where he applies his culinary skills at various high-profile events, including private government assignments.

Giovanni's academic path will continue at UNLV in fall, 2025 in the Hospitality Management program and Honors College, with plans to transfer to Cornell University Honors College to obtain a master's degree in hospitality administration. His journey is marked by academic excellence, robust leadership, and a strong commitment to service while he prepares himself for a promising career in executive hotel management.

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Dru MacKay – WNC**

Dru MacKay is a driven, hardworking, and dedicated student currently completing high school while earning college credits through the Jumpstart program at Western Nevada College (WNC). Born and raised in Fallon, Nevada, Dru grew up in a single-parent household with his mother and older sister. From a young age, he took on responsibilities to help his family, demonstrating a strong sense of reliability and compassion.

Dru has always excelled academically, maintaining honors status throughout his education. His passion for math led him to convince his elementary school teachers to create a math group where students could collaborate and work on advanced concepts together each year, demonstrating his desire to assist others to reach their potential and his dedication to learning.

Outside academics, Dru is a committed athlete who has played basketball since he was five years old and now represents his school on the varsity team. He also works as an academic coach at WNC, mentoring other students and encouraging their success. Growing up in a small, close-knit community instilled in Dru a strong sense of community and a desire to contribute positively to those around him. Dru's commitment to academics, athletics, and community service reflects his drive to succeed and make a meaningful impact in the world.

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Sophia Roman – TMCC**

As a child, Sophia Roman dreamed of attending college. While she may not have understood what it would require or how she would get there, she understood the value of an education. In spite of the snags she encountered along her educational path, she never lost hope of what she could become with a college education. To understand the numerous hurdles and obstacles she overcame to be who she is today, it is important to provide a snapshot of where she came from and the influences that have guided her. At a young age, she lost her father to cancer; losing him also meant she lost her rock and staunchest supporter. Unable to cope with the loss of her father, Sofia's mother developed a violent drug and alcohol addiction, which led her mother to become physically and emotionally abusive and neglectful to Sophia. There were times with no running hot water and no food, and Sophia was moved around to live with her older siblings.

While her mom continued to struggle with addiction, she was accepted for Section Eight housing; Sophia was able to join her mom, finally had a steady roof over her head. When she entered high school, she thought she was on a positive path until her sister (and her four children) needed to move into the house. At the age of 15, Sofia found herself responsible for four young children. She put her own schooling on hold by skipping morning classes and getting the four children ready for school. The family was aware that they needed to be "presentable", or they would "raise suspicion." Eventually, she had to drop out of high school to care for her sister's children, whom she cared for as if they were her own. Even though working to sustain the children and herself became her primary focus, her dream of going to college never wavered. As the children got older, she was able to rely on them to be self-sufficient. They grew up together and raised each other, which gave Sofia the opportunity to be the role model that she always dreamed of being. The spark in her ignited, leading her to start her educational journey. She obtained her HiSet in 2020, then applied to attend TMCC, where she became a full-time student as she continued to work full-time and continued to parent the four children that became her own, all the while maintaining a 3+ GPA.

Sophia has been graced with being able to serve as a peer mentor; she has helped guide other low-income first-generation college students. As a Latina woman, she believes her purpose has always been to serve as a beacon of hope. She wants to show anyone who is lost as she once was can achieve success. Getting education demonstrated that her resilience paid off. Her hard work, dedication, and willingness to persevere amidst all odds, were worth the effort. She is confident that she will continue to give her all, as demonstrated in the brief snapshot of her humble beginnings that played an instrumental role in her life. Her education demonstrates that she is regarded as someone with the potential to be a valuable member of something greater.

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Karissa Sena-Fadenrecht – GBC**

Karissa grew up in Elko, Nevada. She shares a close bond with her siblings and cousins, often spending weekends exploring new places or cooking family recipes. Family gatherings are filled with laughter and stories, creating cherished memories that strengthen family connections. She chose to attend Great Basin College in Elko, Nevada which became a safe place to learn and grow following the pandemic. She graduated with an Associate of Arts in 2022. She will graduate in May 2025 with an Associate of Arts in Early Childhood Education and is also working toward a Bachelor of Science in Social Work while maintaining a 3.8 GPA. Karissa currently works as the ECE Skills Grant Coordinator in the GBC Education Department. She also volunteers as a family advocate for *Heart and Hope*, an organization which provides support for children and family members who have been adversely affected by domestic violence.

Karissa is enthusiastic about community service and providing support for children in the foster care system in rural Nevada. With Karissa at the helm, the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) Honor Society's Beta Beta Epsilon team organized the "You Matter" Foster Child Campaign. The chapter collected 12,000 brand-new items for foster children in rural Nevada, including 7,500 diapers and over \$400.00 in gift cards for foster teens. This was just the beginning of Karissa's altruistic contributions to her chapter, college, community, and region. She has worked endless hours to ensure that her chapter participated in regional and international initiatives. The chapter ascended from a one-star to a five-star chapter in three years.

Karissa was elected as the PTK International Vice President of Division IV in May 2024. This role allows her to connect with diverse cultures and communities while broadening her perspective and enhancing her leadership skills. She continually inspires others to embrace service, leadership, fellowship, and scholarship. Karissa leads by example as she fosters the values that uphold the GBC mission and ideals of the PTK International Honor Society.

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Nicole Thomas – Graduate – UNLV**

Nicole Thomas is currently a fourth-year PhD student in the Department of Educational Psychology and Higher Education. She has previously earned her M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction and her B.S. in Biology from UNLV. She currently serves as a Graduate Assistant for the UNLV President's Office as well as a part-time instructor for SCI 101, an introductory course for science majors. Nicole also volunteers her time as a science instructor for The Garden Foundation, a local non-profit serving adults with special needs. Nicole's current research focuses on how early college learners conceptualize complex ecosystem processes through a complex systems lens. She is the first author of two peer-reviewed journal articles and over 20 conference presentations. She is a two-time recipient of the Nevada NASA Space Grant Consortium Graduate Research Fellowship and has earned several awards for her previous work on misconceptions and trust in science. Nicole served three terms as the Graduate and Professional Student Association President at UNLV, where she successfully advocated for the largest Graduate Assistant stipend increase at UNLV and UNR in recent history. After graduation, Nicole plans to continue her work in science education and advocacy by serving the needs of the greater Las Vegas community.

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Celeste Velasquez – Undergraduate – NSU**

Celeste Velasquez is a graduating senior at Nevada State University (NSU); she will receive a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology (developmental specialization) and a minor in sociology. She transferred to NSU in Fall 2022 from Eastern Arizona College (EAC), where she received an AA in psychology. Since enrolling at NSU, she has worked as a research assistant for Dr. Laura Naumann's research project, Pursuing Equity to Enhance Retention (PEER), and as the student worker for the Psychology and Counseling Department. She is also part of the first cohort of the McNair Scholars Program at NSU and through the program researched how Latine people may or may not use Latin music to express and/or connect with their ethnic identity. She presented this research at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology national conference in Spring 2024. In Summer 2024, she was accepted into the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship at the University of California - Irvine and worked under a Ph. D candidate on her dissertation concerning privilege and prosocial behavior. In her final semester at NSU, she has been working on her own research project through the Advanced Undergraduate Research capstone class investigating the impacts of video game avatars on players' body satisfaction. She is interested in gender differences in video game spaces and intends to pursue related research topics in her graduate studies.

In addition to her academic pursuits, she is a member of the organization Kingman Kindness in Kingman, Arizona, the home of her high school alma mater. Her main role in the organization is to aid in their quarterly clothing swap, a partnership with the local community college which provides professional wear to students. She is the eldest of six siblings and takes her duties as the oldest sibling very seriously by trying to set an example for what they can do if they put their mind to it. This has seemingly paid off because her younger brother enlisted into the U.S. Navy this year. When she is not trying to solve everyone else's problems, she likes to play video games, roller skate, and write poetry. While she has published three poems in the last year, she has not yet been able to perfect her spin on roller skates.

**Nevada Regents' Scholar Award (Sam Lieberman Regents' Award for Student Scholarship)
Eden Wolde – Undergraduate – UNLV**

Eden Wolde is an undergraduate in Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Born and raised in Las Vegas, Eden's upbringing in the historically Black neighborhood of the Historic Westside has profoundly shaped her identity and research pursuits. As a Ronald E. McNair Scholar and fellow of the 2023 UNLV Office of Undergraduate Research First-Generation Research cohort, Eden is currently completing her thesis on the history of Black schooling and associational life in Nevada during the Reconstruction Era. She plans to pursue a Ph.D. to continue researching the history of Black teachers in the U.S. West.

Beyond her research, Eden is committed to engaging with her Las Vegas community while pursuing a research career. She is the co-executive director of the Amplifying Black Voices Mentorship (ABV) Program, with the local non-profit Southern Nevada Black Educators Initiative. By matching pre-service Black students at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, with Black educators/social workers, ABV promotes a culturally affirming experience to retain Black teachers. She has previously served as an assistant coach for Rancho High School's speech and debate team, project manager for the Transformative Justice Educator Fellowship, student ambassador for UNLV's College of Education, and tutor at the Boys and Girls Club. Eden's ultimate vocation is to conduct research that engages with community networks and public history initiatives. As Eden's journey as a Black studies scholar continues to evolve, she hopes to call attention to the treasure trove of stories about Black educational life in the west that remain to be mined and told.

Nevada Regents' Outstanding Classified Staff Award
Lisa (Scottie) Lockrem – TMCC

Lisa (Scottie) Lockrem began her journey at TMCC in the Adult Basic Education Program and learned to read as an adult. Building on this foundation, she continued her education, became an honors student, joined the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and held several offices, including the President of the TMCC Chapter and the Vice President of the Nevada/California Region. She was a founding member of the Teacher Excellence Awards, now titled Teacher of the Year, accepting student nominations, overseeing the Student Selection Committee, and keeping the process going for the last 27 years. She also volunteered as a peer mentor for other disabled students at UNR for nine years. Driven by each achievement, her confidence and passion grow.

With all of the opportunities presented to Ms. Lockrem, she feels she must pay it forward by ensuring the best customer service, making others feel welcome and capable, offering insights into informed decision-making, and supporting her TMCC faculty to provide the best education possible for the students. She remains active in the Classified Council, chairing the Emergency Loan Committee to elevate her colleagues in times of need. Ms. Lockrem is a lifelong learner who earned her MBA in 2023. She is studying data analytics to provide better insights based on data to increase fill rates and webpage promotion and continually improve her contributions to the Visual Arts Programs at TMCC. For these efforts, Ms. Lockrem has been named the Employee of the Month three times and nominated by a student as one of many Career Champions in 2022.

Scottie Lockrem has been the Visual Arts Administrative Assistant (AA) III at Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) since 2002, with increasing responsibilities and job titles. Beyond the primary tasks of this position—which include confidentiality, customer service, faculty support, assisting students enrolling in classes, purchasing, research, reporting, and requested tasks from the administration, Ms. Lockrem also has the unique opportunity to be the first welcoming face in the Red Mountain Building seen by potential and current students, vendors, donors and dignitaries looking for directions or information. Ms. Lockrem's education earned within the NSHE System and years of experience guiding her dynamic approach and leadership style allow her to enjoy training new AAs in the Liberal Arts Division and teaching others around the college how to use office and classroom technology with an understanding that everyone has different strengths and skillsets. Ms. Lockrem's in-depth instructional and institutional knowledge is used to help others understand where we began and recognize how far we have come as an institution.

**Nevada Regents' Creative Activities Award – Community College
Andrezej (Andrew) Lenard – CSN**

Andrew Lenard was born in Poland and has always been driven by his passion for swimming and education. At the age of 20, he moved to New York City to pursue his dream of studying in the USA. While attending LaGuardia Community College, Andrew studied mathematics and swam competitively with a local swim club. His dedication to both academics and athletics earned him a scholarship to the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, KY, where he excelled. During this time there, he won a bronze medal in the 200-meter backstroke at the national championships and served as the captain of the swim team.

Academically, Andrew achieved a near-perfect GPA, earning a place on the Dean' List, and completed his mathematics degree in just three years. With his final year of scholarship, he turned his attention to film and theater, sparking a deep interest in the arts. Following graduation, he moved to Las Vegas to pursue a master's degree in mathematics at UNLV, where he has since settled and started a family.

In addition to his academic and creative pursuits, Andrew remains deeply involved in the Polish diaspora community in Las Vegas. He actively films various cultural events, assists with theater and concert productions, and serves as the master of ceremonies for the annual Polish festival. His passion for filmmaking provides him with a creative outlet, offering a balance to the precision and logic of his work in mathematics. Andrew continues to bridge his two worlds, blending his love for numbers and storytelling in innovative ways.

**Nevada Regents' Creative Activities Award – University/DRI
Jennifer Bellor – UNLV**

Dr. Jennifer Bellor is Assistant Professor of Composition at the University of Las Vegas and holds degrees from Eastman School of Music (PhD), Syracuse University (MM), and Cornell University (BA). Described by Textura as “that rare composer whose music manages to be instantly listenable and emotionally resonant without any compromise to its sophistication,” Bellor is a versatile composer whose music draws on a variety of influences. Her compositional style, marked by a fusion of influences drawn from imagery, literature, and personal experiences, showcases a melodic richness underscored by jazz and pop-infused harmonies. Bellor’s music has been presented widely throughout the U.S. and abroad and has four acclaimed albums to her name.

Her debut album *Stay* (2016), a melting pot of different music styles largely based on poetry, was featured on *NewMusicBox*’s 2016 Staff Picks, which praised the record for its ability to “maintain a highly individual identity without needing to take refuge in pre-post-genre musical silos.” The magazine lauded the first track, “*Chase the Stars*,” not only for its “dazzling eclecticism” combining opera, hip hop, and jazz, but also for Bellor’s singing. The composition was awarded The American Prize (2016) in the orchestral category. *Reflections at Dusk* (Innova Recordings, 2019), showcases instrumental music inspired by the Nevada sunsets; *Jazz Weekly* described it as having “evocative musical images.” Bellor's collaboration with the percussion quartet Clocks in Motion culminated in the release of her album *Oneira* (Aerocade Music, 2022).

Her music was hailed by Textura as “rousing and infectious,” characterized by a distinct expressive signature transcending traditional genre boundaries. The title track, *Oneira*, served as the soundtrack to an animation created by Christine Banna. The music video was featured on *I Care if You Listen*, and it received screenings at multiple film festivals. Her newest album, *Long These Days*, was released on August 16, 2024, by EMITHA's prestigious label, Lexicon Classics. She is featured as the composer, pianist, and producer. Collaborating with soprano Olivia Yokers, bassist Norman Espinoza, and electric guitarist Tasos Peltekis, the concept album comprises art songs and instrumental interludes. Within a month after its release, tracks *Echo* and *Postlude: Resurgence* were featured on Marvin Rosen’s Classical Discoveries radio program and her music video for the title track was featured on Textura. In addition to the release of her album, Bellor was one of the resident composers who served on the faculty at the International Alba Music Composition program in May 2024, where she taught lessons, gave a presentation on her recording project, and heard her composition *A Grey Dream* performed by the Soli Chamber Ensemble.

**Nevada Regents' Teaching Award – Tenured/Tenure Track – Community College
Megan Lahti – TMCC**

Megan Lahti says that science is literally in her genes. She was one of those rare children that knew before kindergarten what she wanted to be when she grew up. While her parents were not the most outdoorsy or animal-loving individuals, they supported her dream to be a herpetologist. They let her adopt exotic rescue animals, supported her rehabilitation of wildlife, and introduced her to the Natural History Museum in San Diego, California. Her first interactions with the museum were as a visitor to the exhibits and educational seminars as a docent and later (during college) as a volunteer in the Herpetology collections. Here, she gawked at the tens of thousands of rattlesnakes stored in rows of tall shelves in jars of ethanol, all collected by her idol, herpetologist Laurence Klauber.

In college, she tailored her classes and extracurricular activities to align with natural history, including natural history museums, and earned her bachelor's degree in Ecology and a second degree in Women and Gender in Society. She then left for Central Washington University to earn her Master's and Utah State University for her Doctorate degrees in Biology (Herpetology). During her graduate work, she continued to work with museum collections for her research and took on her first courses as an instructor, which quickly became a second passion.

While working at the U.S. Geological Survey, she managed the museum collections, trained volunteers and staff, conducted research on threatened and endangered species, and grew her knowledge of ecology, conversation, and museum practices. While teaching at Arizona Western College, she created and taught a herpetology curation course which led to the creation of a herpetology collection. At TMCC, amidst the isolation of Covid, she began developing online curricula and started a natural history museum after collecting hundreds of plants, which she utilized for her botany course. This endeavor quickly snowballed into additional specimens and the collection of over 10,000 specimens in less than four years. When she looks at once-living organisms, she sees more than a specimen; she sees a teaching tool, whether something students can use hands-on to learn preservation techniques or share the history of the specimen and the value it holds to society both within and beyond the field of biology.

Biology captivated her because it is an applied, hands-on discipline, and this aspect is something she brings with passion to her classes. As a biology professor at TMCC, she is allowed to be creative and bridge her interests with her students and their success. She also supports TMCC's recent designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and increased access to education; she recently completed four semesters of Spanish to more effectively communicate biological terms and engage with biology students, many of whom are ESL or bilingual learners.

**Nevada Regents' Teaching Award – Tenured/Tenure Track – University /DRI
Brandon Eddy – UNLV**

Dr. Brandon Eddy is an Associate Professor and Internship Director in the Couple and Family Therapy Program in the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine. Dr. Eddy has been at UNLV since 2017 and teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses. In addition, Dr. Eddy lectures psychiatry and medical residents on various medical family therapy topics.

Dr. Eddy's research agenda focuses on the transition to parenthood and other medical family therapy topics such as postpartum depression, miscarriage, infertility, and autism spectrum disorder. Dr. Eddy has published in academic journals, written several book chapters and magazine articles, and has presented his research internationally, nationally, and locally. Dr. Eddy's 2019 article on Postpartum Depression in Fathers received great attention and was recognized as the most downloaded faculty publication in the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine in 2020. Dr. Eddy also led a team of students in his capstone class in redesigning the play therapy room for the Center for Individual, Couple, and Family Counseling on the UNLV campus.

Most recently, Dr. Eddy presented at the International Family Therapy Association Conference in Toyama, Japan alongside his capstone students from the CFT program. Additionally, he has been accepted to present with his students next year in Aberdeen, Scotland. Dr. Eddy is a member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), International Family Therapy Association (IFA), and Postpartum Support International (PSI).

**Nevada Regents' Teaching Award – Non-Tenured – University /DRI
Melissa Morris – UNLV**

Melissa Morris is an Associate Professor in Residence and the Undergraduate Coordinator in the Mechanical Engineering Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). She previously served as a Teaching Associate Professor for the Fundamentals of Engineering Program, in the Benjamin M. Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources at West Virginia University (WVU). She graduated Summa com Laude with a BSME in 2006, earned an MSME in 2008, and completed her doctorate in mechanical engineering in 2011, all from WVU. She has taught courses such as Freshman Engineering Design, MATLAB, thermodynamics, Thermal Fluids Laboratory, Heat Transfer, Fluid Mechanics, and Senior Design.

Dr. Morris is currently serving as the director of the Southern Nevada Northern Arizona LSAMP Alliance, an NSF funded project aimed at increasing the number of underrepresented students completing STEM degrees. She is also working with a team to develop and HIS Resource Hub, an NSF funded project with the goal of improving educational equity at Hispanic serving institutions by creating a community of STEM scholars aimed at cultivating culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. Dr. Morris has been recognized at college and university levels for her teaching at WV and UNLV; she was also selected as the ASEE North Central Section Outstanding Teacher in 2018 and the ASEE Pacific Southwest Section Outstanding Teacher in 2023.

**Nevada Regents' Academic Advisor Award – Community College
Tara Connolly – TMCC**

As a double-does first generation college student, Tara changed her major seven times searching for the perfect path, but it turned out she had already found it while working as a peer advisor at TMCC in the early 2000's. She enjoyed the process of working with her fellow college students so much that she changed her educational goals to prepare her to become a professional Academic Advisor. She went on to earn a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership, followed by a Master of Education in Learning and Technology, and embraces the spirit of lifelong learning as she continues to earn professional certifications, engage in research, present at conferences, and more.

As a Senior Advisor, she seeks to create a welcoming and inclusive environment both in person and virtually, ready to support all students as they explore and pursue their educational goals, especially those dealing with uncertainty who are perhaps taking the scenic route as she once did. In addition to general advising, she coordinates programming related retention, completion, and transfer, athletics advising, working closely with our student athletes to help them achieve their goals on and off the pitch, and advises international students on an F-1 visa who have come to TMCC from all around the world.

Outside of work, Tara is a 200-hour Registered Yoga Teacher, Reiki Master, and Certified Professional Life Coach who enjoys snuggling with her dog, Harper, paddle boarding, yoga, meditation, hiking, time in nature, and reading.

**Nevada Regents' Academic Advisor Award - Graduate - University/DRI
Han-Fen Hu - UNLV**

Han-Fen Hu is a Professor of Management Information Systems (MIS) in the Department of Management, Entrepreneurship, and Technology at the Lee Business School, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In addition to her role as a professor, she serves as the Graduate Coordinator and Advisor for MS MIS students. She teaches courses including *Software Concepts (MIS 740)*, *Java Programming (MIS 768)*, *Data Management (MIS 766)*, and *Database Design and Implementation (IS 475)*.

Dr. Hu received her Ph.D. in Business Administration with an emphasis on Information Systems from the David Eccles School of Business at the University of Utah. Her research interests focus on electronic commerce, online consumer behavior, and organizational technology strategy. She has published papers in top-tier journals such as *MIS Quarterly*, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *Information and Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Psychology and Marketing*, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *IEEE Intelligent Systems*, *Communications of the Association of Information Systems*, *Journal of Global Information Management*, *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, and other leading IS and marketing journals.

**Nevada Regents' Academic Advisor Award - Undergraduate - University/DRI
Malia Mitooka-Ferranto – UNR**

Malia Mitooka-Ferranto is an Academic Advisor in the College of Engineering at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). She began as an Academic Advisor with us in January of 2016, and was recently promoted to Academic Advisor III—the highest “advisor” category under the university’s new tiered advising structure. Malia earned a bachelor’s degree in 2000 from New York University.

After working as a schoolteacher for three years, Malia began what is now a more than two-decade career at UNR in 2003. She started her career at UNR in the office of Admissions and Records where she was an assistant for four years. She then moved to UNR’s Scheduling Services as an Event and Scheduling Coordinator for the following four years. Next, Malia moved to UNR’s Intensive English Language Center in 2011, where she served as Admissions Coordinator until joining our team in 2016, where she has been since.

Malia is a highly valued colleague who has earned an “excellent” rating—the highest possible—every year from her supervisor.

**Nevada Regents' Researcher Award – Mid-Career
Zhaohuan Zhu – UNLV**

Dr. Zhaohuan Zhu is an associate professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He received his B.S. from Peking University, and Ph.D. from University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Afterwards, he went to Princeton University as a postdoctoral researcher and Hubble Fellow. He joined UNLV in 2016. Dr. Zhu works on star and planet formation. Although he is a theorist specializing in large-scale numerical simulations, he plays active roles in various observational programs. He has ~200 journal articles. He has won many awards, including Sloan Fellowship, Regents' rising researcher award, NSF career awards, etc. He has brought more than \$2 million grant to UNLV as PI. His group members are also successful, winning various awards including NASA FINNEST award, UNLV Barrick Graduate Fellowship, UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees Fellowship, and NASA Hubble Fellowship, etc.

**Nevada Regents' Researcher Award – Distinguished
Vladimir Pravosudov – UNR**

Dr. Vladimir Pravosudov is a Trevor J. McMinn Research Professor and University of Nevada Foundation Professor in the Department of Biology. Dr. Pravosudov obtained his Master of Science degree in Zoology at the State University of Leningrad in Russia in 1983 and his PhD in Zoology degree at the Ohio State University in 1997. Prior to joining University of Nevada Reno in 2005, Dr. Pravosudov received postdoctoral training funded by postdoctoral fellowships from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health and by the Career Award from the National Institutes of Health at Purdue University (1997-1999) and at the University of California Davis (1999-2005). Dr. Pravosudov is an elected Fellow of the Animal Behavior Society and the American Ornithological Society.

Since joining UNR in 2005, Dr. Pravosudov has been continuously supported by competitive grants from the National Science Foundation and from the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Pravosudov published 143 peer-reviewed papers including papers in highly prestigious journals such as *Science* and *Current Biology* and his papers have been cited 6,744 times with h-index of citations of 49. Dr. Pravosudov's research interests concern animal cognition, and he has given invited plenary lectures at major international conferences in his field – such as meetings of the Animal Behavior Society and meetings of the International Society for Behavioral Ecology. Dr. Pravosudov's research is featured in most current textbooks in Animal Behavior and Behavioral Ecology.

**Nevada Regents' Researcher Award – Humanities and Social Sciences
Monica Miller – UNR**

Monica K. Miller, J.D., Ph.D., has been a Full Professor at the University of Nevada, Reno since 2004. She holds a joint appointment between the Criminal Justice Department and the Interdisciplinary Social Psychology Ph.D. Program (for which she serves as the director). She also serves the Judicial Studies Ph.D. program and the Gender, Race, and Identity program. UNR named her as a Foundation Professor. She has won both university and nationwide awards for research and for teaching/mentoring. Most recently, she was named Outstanding Researcher of the Year at UNR in 2023. Currently, she serves on the Executive Committee of the American Psychology-Law Society. Spain, Denmark, Ghana, and Australia are among the countries Miller has taught or went to research.

Dr. Miller is broadly interested in the effects of hate, conspiracy, and extremist groups on society and individual people. In 2023, she edited a book called “The Social Science of QAnon: A New Social and Political Phenomenon” (Cambridge University Press, 2023). QAnon is a conspiracy group made up of people with extreme and hateful ideologies, philosophies, symbols, and actions. Her other research interests include legal decision-making (e.g., jurors), occupational stress and well-being in the legal system, problem-solving courts, and laws affecting procreation and pregnancy. She is also a leading researcher in religion in the court system, having authored two books and two dozen articles on the topic.

She is editor of a book called “The Social Science of the COVID-19 pandemic,” published by Oxford University Press. It discusses the history of pandemics related to the COVID-19 pandemic; the jurisprudence, philosophy, and politics related to the pandemic; and how the pandemic affected families, behavior, and health. Most recently, she edited a 50-chapter handbook called “The Cambridge Handbook of Psychology and Legal Decision-Making,” which is the most overarching and seminal work in the field of legal decision-making. Overall, she has published 19 books and over 200 journal articles and chapters. Miller earned her law degree in 2002 and her Ph.D. in 2004.

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
Kavita Batra – UNLV

Kavita Batra, PhD, MPH, BDS, FRSPH, is an assistant professor and senior medical research biostatistician (recently promoted to interim Executive Director of Medical Research and Scholarly Activities) with the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine at UNLV. She provides statistical and research training to faculty, residents, fellows, and medical students within the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine at UNLV. Additionally, she collaborates with other schools across campus to perform interdisciplinary research.

Dr. Batra began her career in India as a dental surgeon and public health officer. She received her master's and doctoral degree in public health from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Her research interests include, but are not limited to, maternal and child health, the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, understanding social determinants of health, vaccine hesitancy, clinical research, chronic diseases epidemiology, and evidence synthesis. Dr. Batra has published 100+ peer-reviewed articles (Google Scholar page) with an additional 150+ scholarly outcomes at multiple levels. Her work received several mentions in the media (e.g. *Medscape*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *Washington Post*) and by researchers at the global level.

Dr. Batra is an expert in qualitative and quantitative research and has presented her work at several state, national, and international public health conferences. Dr. Batra serves as the Editor-in-Chief to the International Perspectives on Health Equity, Associate Editor to the *Journal of Health and Social Sciences*, a Deputy Editor of the *Journal of Medicine, Surgery and Public Health*, and an editorial member to several journals, such as *Annals of Epidemiology*, *Psychiatric Case Reports*, *Scientific Reports*, and *Healthcare*. Additionally, Dr. Batra is the President-elect to the Delta Omega-Delta Theta Chapter at UNLV, a Grad Alumni Ambassador, a Grad faculty member, a key member of the Power-Based Violence Taskforce, Nevada System of Higher Education, President-elect to the Nevada Public Health Association, a member of the National Occupational Research Agenda Cross-sector Council established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a member of the Global Burden of Diseases Collaborator Network and a technical expert for the Practice-Based Research Network Advisory Group initiated by the Agency of Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Dr. Batra is the PI for a state-funded grant that aims to perform a cost-driver analysis of high Medicaid burden associated with NICU utilization in Nevada. She is also one of a few recipients who received the Faculty Opportunity Award (FOA). Dr. Batra is also the co-investigator on multiple state-funded grants related to the traffic safety.

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
Joanna Blaszczak – UNR

Joanna Blaszczak was born in Dallas, Texas and grew up the daughter of Polish immigrants. Although she always liked math and science, she discovered a distinct passion for environmental conservation and sustainability after volunteering on trail crews in parks around the country each summer in high school through the Student Conservation Association (SCA).

Dr. Blaszczak pursued her interest in environmental science at Cornell University and received her B.S. degree in 2011 in the Science of Natural & Environmental Systems, where she also led rock climbing and several other outdoor education classes through Cornell's outdoor education program. She was then a Fulbright scholar at the Norwegian Institute for Water Research for one year in Oslo, Norway where she discovered a new interest in studying contaminants (in this case mercury) in the environment.

After working for one year at an energy efficiency startup in Boston, she started graduate school at Duke University. Her doctoral research focused on understanding how the configuration of urban development in watersheds changes downstream water quality, merging her interests in ecosystem ecology and environmental toxicology. After receiving her Ph.D. in 2018, she took a postdoctoral research position for one year at the Flathead Lake Biological Station in Montana to develop her ecological modeling skills. Dr. Blaszczak joined the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) as an assistant professor in 2019 in the Natural Resources and Environmental Science (NRES) department. She loves living in and hiking around Reno with her husband, toddler son Reed, and two boisterous dogs

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
Youngae Choi – NSU

Dr. Youngae Choi is from South Korea. In 2011, she and her son came to the USA despite having no relatives or friends here. Dr. Choi is a first-generation student and immigrant. As a minority student and faculty member who speaks a language other than English, she learned how critical diversity and equity are for educational and lifelong success. During her Ph.D. at State University at New York at Buffalo, she was a preschool teacher in various centers and witnessed how early education could shape a child's future, particularly when language barriers and limited access to resources create hurdles. As she advanced her career, Dr. Choi became more attuned to the barriers that underrepresented students face in higher education. Coming from a community that experienced those challenges, she felt a personal connection to the work of advocating for more inclusive practice. This connection inspired her pursuit of grants and research focusing on finding solutions to improve these students and children's academic outcomes. Dr. Choi has been awarded four grants and published three peer-reviewed journal articles since 2020. She has also provided eight professional presentations at both local and national conferences.

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award Pengbo Chu – UNR

Dr. Pengbo Chu is the Nevada Gold Mines Professor and an assistant professor at the Department of Mining and Metallurgical Engineering at the University of Nevada, Reno. Since his appointment in 2020, Dr. Chu has been working extensively on critical minerals. His research has attracted a significant amount of funding (i.e. \$3.8 million with a personal share of \$2.7 million) from various sources, such as the U.S. DOE, NSF, NASA, and private industry. Dr. Chu is leading a dynamic research group consisting of two postdocs, five Ph.D. students, one masters student, one undergraduate, and one student worker, which is developing innovative solutions to tackle some of the most challenging problems faced by the critical minerals production. Dr. Chu's research emphasizes the power of an interdisciplinary approach which has resulted in several new technology developments.

Dr. Chu's research goal is to find innovative solutions to improve the energy efficiency and environmental sustainability of domestic critical minerals production. Dr. Chu is actively collaborating with academic institutions across six states, two DOE national labs, and more than twenty mining companies on critical minerals, through which he aims to establish UNR as national and world leading institution in critical minerals. His research achievements have been recognized by two prestigious awards, including the 2024 UNR College of Science Mousel-Feltner Award for Excellence in Research and/or Creative Activity and 2024 Nevada's Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology Sustainability Leader of the Year award. Dr. Chu obtained from his Ph.D. in Materials Engineering from McGill University, and same institution for his B.Eng and M.Eng in Mechanical Engineering. He completed his postdoctoral training with Canmet MINING under Natural Resources Canada.

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
Thessa Hilgenkamp – UNLV

Thessa Hilgenkamp started as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Physical Therapy at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) in the Fall of 2019. Before that, she served as a postdoc in the Integrative Physiology Lab of the University of Illinois at Chicago to complement her epidemiological Ph.D. training with cardiovascular physiology research, first on a European Union Marie Sklodowska Curie Outgoing Fellowship, then later on the K99 portion of her K99/R00 NIH Career Development Award. Dr. Hilgenkamp has had an active research program on cardiovascular physiology and exercise in individuals with Down syndrome, and she has had consistent funding for her research for the past ten years. Her current R00 research project is investigating the effects of exercise on blood flow regulation in adults with Down syndrome, as a potential mechanism of exercise intolerance. Additionally, she was awarded an NIH R03 grant of 300K to investigate predictors of cardiovascular health and mortality in older adults with Down syndrome, and a COBRE Pilot Grant from the Nevada Institute of Personalized Medicine to investigate the effects of exercise on genetic expression, oxidative stress and vascular function in Down syndrome. Collectively, she has been awarded close to \$1.3M in NIH grants as a PI.

Dr. Hilgenkamp has demonstrated excellence nationally and internationally by publishing mostly in very high tier journals (Q1). She has published 91 journal publications and two book chapters since her first publication in 2010, being first or senior author on 42 out of these 91 publications. Of those 91 publications, 42 were published in the last five years (since her start at UNLV), mostly in very high tier journals (Q1 for 35 out of 42 publications in the last 5 years, 78 out of 91 total publications). Additionally, she has presented more than 100 oral or poster presentations at national and international conferences, including 11 invited presentations and five organized symposia. Her Google Scholar h-index is currently 35, and her i10-index is 65 (Google Scholar) which shows that her research has made an important impact on the work of others. Her publications were cited a total of 3,815 times, including 2,456 times since her start at UNLV (avg 41.9 citations/paper), which puts her in the top ten of most impactful Assistant Professors at UNLV and UNR combined (based on total citations).

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
Li Ke – UNR

Dr. Li Ke joined the University of Nevada, Reno, as an Assistant Professor of Science Education in 2022. He earned his Ph.D. in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education from Michigan State University in 2018. Prior to pursuing his graduate studies in the U.S., Dr. Ke obtained a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Fudan University in China and worked as a high school chemistry teacher.

Dr. Ke's research focuses on promoting meaningful science teaching and learning from elementary through high school. He is particularly interested in how students engage with socio-scientific issues, such as climate change, and how issue-based learning experiences contribute to their development of scientific literacy. His work also examines co-design as an effective tool in professional development to promote teacher agency.

Dr. Ke's research has received funding from the National Science Foundation, including an NSF CAREER grant to explore how data science can be effectively integrated into K-12 science education through the lens of wildfire issues. Additionally, Dr. Ke is a Co-PI for an NSF-funded project investigating how middle school students use different types of models to understand viral pandemics.

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
André Lindsey – NSU

André Lindsey is an assistant professor of speech-language pathology at Nevada State University in the School of Education. He began this position in August 2021. He also holds an appointment as a research investigator with the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital in Hines, IL. This appointment commenced July 2021. He is a licensed speech-language pathologist and worked in short- and long-term medical rehabilitation settings before transitioning to a career in academia. He completed his undergraduate degree at The George Washington University in Washington, DC and completed his graduate clinical training at The University of Texas at Austin. He earned a Ph.D. in Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences at the University of Connecticut. Following his time in Connecticut, he was an associate health polytrauma fellow at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, and a postdoc at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. His research examines cognitive-linguistic changes resulting from acquired brain injury with specific focus given to the interplay between linguistic processes and cognitive processes, particularly memory and executive functions.

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
Jamie Palmer-Asemota – NSU

Jamie L. Palmer-Asemota, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the History, Law, and Society Department at Nevada State University where she teaches in the Sociology and Women's Gender, and Sexuality Studies Programs. She holds bachelor's degrees in Sociology and American Studies from Indiana University – Bloomington as well as a master's and Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Georgia, earned in 2018.

Dr. Palmer-Asemota implements community-engaged research and mentorship approaches that examine social problems in our local context centering educational equity. For this work, she has been awarded the *UGA Emerging Leader Award (2015)*, *SAGE Teaching Innovations and Professional Development Award (2018)*, *Faculty Research Excellence Award in Liberal Arts and Sciences (2022)*, and *Faculty to Student Mentorship Excellence Award (2023)*. Dr. Palmer-Asemota research has been featured in the *Journal of Men & Masculinities*, *Journal of Student Affairs and Research Practice*, and *International Sociology*. Her research has been funded by Georgetown University's Institute for Humane Studies and the Sociological Initiatives Foundation, both nationally competitive. Dr. Palmer-Asemota also spearheaded the implementation of the university wide McNair Scholars Program at Nevada State University to support and expand undergraduate research opportunities.

Dr. Palmer routinely brings research opportunities into her teaching and mentorship which has fostered student-faculty research collaborations including co-presentations at *Northern Nevada Diversity Summit*, *Pacific Sociology Association*, and *National Women's Studies Association conferences*. Dr. Palmer-Asemota's scholarly contributions have led to distinguished recognition not just in her discipline but also in Nevada, such as being named one of Nevada's most promising women leaders by KNPR Las Vegas.

Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
Nicole A. Short - UNLV

Nicole A. Short is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). She earned her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Florida State University in 2019. She has published over 85 scholarly works on the topic of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its comorbidities, notably substance use disorder (SUD) and insomnia.

Dr. Short's research focuses on the etiology, prevention, and treatment of trauma related disorders, with particular interest in identifying malleable risk factors for these disorders and using this knowledge to develop and test digital cognitive behavioral interventions to improve recovery after trauma. Her research has been supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the MayDay Fund, and the American Psychological Association. Dr. Short's recent work has been dedicated to improving recovery for survivors of sexual assault, an at-risk and vulnerable group whose mental health prevention and treatment needs are not being met in the current health care landscape.

In addition, Dr. Short is a member of the Associate Editorial Board of Behaviour Research and Therapy and has served as a grant reviewer for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as well as on the boards of organizations focused on providing services for sexual assault and domestic violence survivors.

**Nevada Regents' Rising Researcher Award
Kristin VanderMolen - DRI**

Dr. Kristin VanderMolen is an Assistant Research Professor at the Desert Research Institute (DRI) in Reno, Nevada, where she focuses on environmental anthropology, climate adaptation, and risk communication. She holds a B.A. in Spanish from Humboldt State University, an M.A. in Latin American Studies from Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Ecuador, and a Ph.D. in Environmental Anthropology from the University of Georgia.

Dr. VanderMolen's interdisciplinary research addresses critical societal challenges, particularly the impacts of climate change, wildfire smoke, and extreme heat on vulnerable communities. Her work combines natural and social sciences, employing innovative approaches to enhance community resilience and inform public policy. Her research record highlights her expertise in risk perception and effective communication strategies for diverse populations.

A dedicated researcher and mentor, Dr. VanderMolen has published extensively in high-impact journals and presented her findings at numerous national and international conferences. Dr. VanderMolen's commitment to bridging science and community needs, along with her impactful contributions to environmental research, positions her as an emerging leader in the field.