

## Chera Jo Chassati Watts

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### EDUCATION

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- **Doctoral Candidate, ABD, Department of Religion**, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 4.0 GPA, Dissertation Director: Dr. Carolyn Jones Medine, entitled “Practicing to Transgress: Alice Walker’s Revolutionary Artistry through a Black Buddhist Lens,” intended 2026.
- **M.A. in Religion, Graduate Certificate in African American Studies**, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 3.97 GPA, Thesis Director: Dr. Carolyn Jones Medine, entitled “Elliptical Practice: Womanist Buddhist Thought in the Works of Alice Walker,” May 2022.
- **B.S. in Psychology**, Minor in Child & Family Development, Cum Laude, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, December 2010.

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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- **Graduate Research Assistant, Institute for African American Studies, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, August 2019-May 2024**, (5 total academic years, Fall 2019 – Spring 2022 held concurrently with FRC Academic Advisor in Residence position).  
Under the direction of Dr. Carolyn Medine, included: administrative support to the IAAS Director, Associate Director, Faculty, & Academic Advisor, managing all website edits and content creation using Drupal, coordinating student engagement events throughout each semester, promoting courses and IAAS activities using in-person or digital methods, supervising 1 FWS student worker, and undergraduate curriculum planning.
- **Graduate Teaching Assistant, RELI/AFAM 2005, “Introduction to African American Religious Thought,” Institute for African American Studies & Department of Religion, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, Spring 2023.**  
32 undergraduate students, course themes: slavery and its legacies in the United States, Howard Thurman, Christianity, Black liberation theology, Malcolm X, Nation of Islam, bell hooks, love ethic, reverend angel Kyodo williams, African American Buddhists, Womanism and Black Feminism.
- **Graduate Research Assistant, Graduate School xPD Summer Internship Program, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, June – July 2023.**  
Under the direction of Dr. Barbara McCaskill, included: remote work supporting initiatives of the Penn Center National Historic Landmark District and Willson Center for Humanities & Arts partnership under the Culture and Community Grant funded by the Mellon Foundation. Specific projects: archival research (on-site with UGA libraries & digital through several archives) regarding Sam Doyle, a native of St. Helena Island and Penn School alum, to inform an exhibition featuring Doyle’s self-taught artistry which opened in August 2023 on the Penn campus and PR/marketing consulting for Penn Center initiatives, including meeting LUCE Foundation specifications for the Sam Doyle Exhibition booklet.
- **Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Georgia-Oxford University Study Away Program, June 2020, pivoted online due to COVID-19, and June 2022, in-person**, (held concurrently with FRC Academic Advisor in Residence position).  
Under the supervision of Dr. Jamie McClung, included: supporting 18 program participants over 17 days in June 2022, several day-long excursions throughout the UK (London, Bath, Stratford, & others), and intentional on-site academic & residential support for the program participants residing together in the UGA Oxford Centre at Banbury Road over the duration of the program.

- **Academic Advisor in Residence, Franklin Residential College (FRC), University of Georgia, Athens, GA, Fall 2017-May 2022**, (5 total academic years, held concurrently with other university positions).  
Included: intentional student academic support for nearly 100 residents studying the arts & sciences and residing in Rutherford Hall, facilitating 10 or more monthly academic, service, and social programs, budget planning & coordinating across 3 program budgets, meetings with campus and community partners, website edits and content creation, and coordinating a student leadership executive board consisting of 10 student leaders and the Director of the FRC.
- **Co-Facilitator, Weekend Academic and Service Experiential Learning Overnight Trip for the Franklin Residential College, UGA Marine Institute & Hog Hammock Community at Sapelo Island, Georgia, Fall Breaks: 2018, 2019, & 2021.**  
Included: coordinating transportation logistics, liaising with campus and community partners, organizing student activities for the 24 program participants, and budget planning for this 3-day and 2-night overnight academic and service enrichment trip for FRC undergraduate students.
- **Coordinator of Scholars Initiatives, Division of Academic Enhancement, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, June 2018 – July 2019**, (held concurrently with FRC Academic Advisor in Residence position).  
Facilitated intentional academic enrichment support programs for need-based scholarship recipients as determined by the Office of Student Financial Aid (210 Georgia Commitment Scholars and 24 Correll Scholars across varying years and majors).
- **Academic Advisor II, Franklin College of Arts & Sciences, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, October 2016 – June 2018**, (2017-18 academic year, held concurrently with FRC Academic Advisor in Residence position).  
Advised a roster of approximately 150 students majoring in cellular or plant biology. Lead advisor responsibilities included: managing an undergraduate listserv, facilitating the faculty mentoring program, and consulting on curriculum change matters with departmental leaders. Graduation certification advisor portfolio included the biology, classics, and Germanic and Slavic languages programs of study for an average of nearly 400 individual student records throughout the academic year. For 2017-18 academic year, held concurrently with FRC Advisor in Residence.
- **Academic Advisor I, Franklin College of Arts & Sciences, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, June 2014 – October 2016.**  
Advised a roster of approximately 300 students majoring in biology or plant biology. Coordinated new recruiting initiatives for Plant Biology program including departmental open house for transfer students, botany greenhouse tours, departmental pizza party, and participation in the 27 academic resource fairs during new student orientation for 2016 & 2017, resulting in 65 % growth in number of plant biology majors during my tenure.

#### **ADDITIONAL REVELANT EXPERIENCE & SKILLS**

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- **Executive Associate for Digital Services, Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (SBCS), University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI, February 2020 – Present**, (remote, part-time).  
Under the direction of the SBCS Governing Board, includes: editing and publishing blogs to the SBCS website, answering general membership questions and/or redirecting emails to appropriate Board members, preparing annual reports on behalf of the Website and Social Media Committee Chair, and other special projects as assigned by the Executive Board members.
- Archival research in special collections such as Russell Special Collections at the University of Georgia, Special Collections at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Princeton University Special Collections, The Low Country Digital Library, and UNC-Chapel Hill University Libraries, among others.
- Website editing in the following content management systems: Drupal, Squarespace, and WordPress.

## PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

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- Medine, Carolyn J. and Watts, Chera Jo, "Alice Walker," *Oxford Bibliographies* in "African American Studies," New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780190280024-0137.
- Watts, Chera Jo, "An Ongoing Womanist Buddhist Project: Reading Between the Times," *Literature* 2 (3), Special Edition: "Spirituality, Identity, and Resistance in African American Literature," edited by Carolyn Jones Medine, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.3390/literature2030013>.

## PEER REVIEWED BOOK CHAPTERS

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- Andrews-Bickers, Chanara and Watts, Chera Jo, "Refusing Summation, Inviting Contemplation: A Collaborative Approach to Understanding the Lives, Literature, and Lessons of Toni Morrison and James Baldwin," *The Routledge Research Companion to Toni Morrison*, ed. Maureen Fadem, Routledge, anticipated 2025.

## ADDITIONAL PUBLICATIONS

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- McCaskill, Barbara, Watts, Chera Jo, and Williams, Ashley, compilers. *A World Within Worlds: The Visionary Art of Sam Doyle*, Exhibition Booklet, September 23 – December 22, 2023, York W. Bailey Museum, Penn Center National Historic Landmark District, St. Helena Island, SC.
- Watts, Chera Jo, "Graduate Student Member Spotlights: Blog for SBCS, Chera Jo Watts," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 2023. DOI: 10.1353/bcs.2023.a907587.
- Watts, Chera Jo, *Elliptical Practice: Womanist Buddhist Thought in Selected Works by Alice Walker*, University of Georgia, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2022. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/elliptical-practice-analyzing-womanist-buddhist/docview/2681444848/se-2>.

## SELECTED AWARDS & HONORS

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- University of Georgia, Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, Jane Mulkey and Rufus Green Graduate Fellowship in Arts and Humanities, Fall 2024 – Spring 2025, \$2524.
- University of Georgia, Franklin College Graduate Student Research Assistantship, June 2024.
- University of Georgia, Institute for African American Studies Lee Roy B. Giles Award Winner, Spring 2024, \$1000.
- University of Georgia, Graduate School Dean's Award, Spring 2023, \$3000.
- University of Georgia, Institute for African American Studies Lee Roy B. Giles Award Runner-up, Spring 2023, \$150.
- University of Georgia First Graduate Student Award Winner, honoring contribution & experiences of First-Generation students, November 2021.
- University of Georgia, Blue Key Honor Society Member, inducted Fall 2021.
- Georgia Association for Women in Higher Education Louise McBee Award Nominee, January 2021.
- University of Georgia Career Center Acknowledgement for Contributing Greatly to Student Success, 2015-2022.
- University of Georgia, Division of Academic Enhancement Outstanding Staff Member of the Year Award Nominee, 2018.
- TRiO/McNair Student Support Services "Beyond the Call of Duty" Award, 2019.
- University of Georgia Academic Advisor of the Year Nominee, 2016, 2017, & 2018.
- University of Georgia Costa Rica Academic Advisor Trip Award Winner, October 2015, included an all-inclusive week-long site tour of the UGA Costa Rica campus, meetings with students & community members, and several educational workshops.
- University of Georgia Training and Development Diversity & Inclusion Certificate, 2014.
- University of Georgia Training and Development Certificate in Academic Advising, 2014.

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

## **GRANTS**

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- University of Georgia, Graduate School Summer Research Grant, \$1500, May 2024.
- University of Georgia, Graduate Student Domestic Travel Grant, \$550, June 2023.
- Franklin College Curriculum Diversity Enhancement Grant, \$100, Acknowledgement Award, University of Georgia Franklin College Dean's Office, January 2023.
- Student Responses to *But Some of US are BRAVE*, \$250, Grant Recipient, University of Georgia Institute for Women's Studies, Spring 2023.
- Franklin Residential College Community Garden Pilot Program, \$3000, Grant Supervisor, University of Georgia Office of Sustainability, Spring 2021.

## **INVITED TALKS & PANELS**

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- Invited Talk, Presentation on the *Rest is Resistance* Book Club from a duo-ethnographic approach, co-presenter: Sha'Mira Covington, University of Georgia Institute for Women's Studies Symposium, February 2023, Athens, GA.
- Invited Speaker, "But Some of Us are Sad: Exploring Sisterhood as Salvation in Graduate Education" Roundtable, University of Georgia Institute for Women's Studies Symposium, February 2023, Athens, GA.

## **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & PANELS**

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- Panelist, On "bell hooks' Love Ethic: Body, Practice, and Homeplace," 2023 bell hooks symposium, Berea College, June 2023.
- Doctoral Student Panelist, University of Georgia Department of Religion Professionalization Panel, January 2023.
- Presentation on the *Hood Feminism* Book Club from a duo-ethnographic approach, co-presenter: Sha'Mira Covington, Southern Humanities Council Conference, January 2022, Memphis, TN.
- Presentation on the Black Lives Matter in the Time of COVID Book Club in Franklin Residential College, co-presented with Sha'Mira Covington, Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR), Virtual Conference hosted by University of Florida, March 2021.
- Panelist, Black Lives Matter in the Time of COVID Panel, Southeastern Women's Studies Association (SEWSA) Virtual Conference, March 2021.
- Panelist, Concerning the Work of Toni Morrison, Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR) Conference in Athens, GA, February 2020.
- Panelist, First-Generation Students & Practitioners, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Brown Bag Luncheon Series, February 2020.
- Panelist, Experienced Academic Advisors, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference, December 2019.
- Experiential Learning: The Undergraduate Research Experience, co-presented with Dr. Mark Farmer from Department of Cellular Biology, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference, November 2015.

## **BOOK CLUBS FACILITATED**

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- *Rest is Resistance* Book Club, partnership among the Institute for African American Studies & Institute for Women's Studies at The University of Georgia, also supported by the Franklin College

Dean's Office, co-facilitated with Sha'Mira Covington and inspired by decolonizing teaching and learning practices, January-March 2023, 25 participants.

- *Hood Feminism* Book Club, partnership among the Franklin Residential College, Institute for African American Studies, and Department of Textiles, Merchandising, and Interiors Diversity in Fashion Grant, co-facilitated with Sha'Mira Covington, inspired by Womanist Buddhist pedagogy and trauma-informed teaching practices, August-September 2021, 30 participants.
- Black Lives Matter Book Club, partnership among the Franklin Residential College and the Institute for African American Studies, co-facilitated with Sha'Mira Covington, inspired by Womanist Buddhist pedagogy and trauma-informed teaching practices, November 2020, 12 participants.

### **ACADEMIC ADVISING PRESENTATIONS & WORKSHOPS**

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- "In the Know: Preparing for your Academic Advising Appointment" Presentation for Need-Based Scholarship Recipients, University of Georgia, 2018.
- Coca-Cola First-Generation Scholars Presentation, University of Georgia, 2017.
- "50 Things to Do with a Science Degree" Collaborative Presentation with Career Center, University of Georgia, 2015-2018.
- New Departmental Advisor Training Sessions, Franklin College of Arts & Sciences, University of Georgia, 2015-2016.
- "Finding Undergraduate Research" Interactive Workshops for Students, University of Georgia, 2016-2018.

### **MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

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- Black Women's Studies Association, Member, 2023 – Present.
- American Academy of Religion, Member, 2023 – Present.
- Southeastern Women's Studies Association, Member, 2021 – Present.
- Southern Humanities Council, Member, 2021 – Present.
- Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, Member, 2020 – Present.

### **ADDITIONAL UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

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- Coordinator, Department of Religion Graduate Student Professionalization Panel, January 2023, University of Georgia.
- Member, University of Georgia Academic Advising Coordinating Council Conference Planning Committee, 2017.

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

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- Kindermarket Community Bi-Annual Sale, Athens YMCA, 2015 – Present.
- Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery Clean-up, 2017 – 2022.
- Athens Area Humane Society Volunteering, 2018 – 2022.