

The HELP Newsletter



EDITORS' NOTES

When we decided upon 'renewal' as the theme for the spring issue, I immediately thought of two creatures: the barnacle and the phoenix.

John W. Gardner was the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Lyndon Johnson, and he compared barnacles to the challenges of making substantive changes later in life. "The barnacle," Gardner explained, "is confronted with an existential decision about where it's going to live. Once it decides, it spends the rest of its life with its head cemented to a rock." Adults are the least receptive to change, and as we grow more comfortable with our surroundings, habits, and opinions, we can become stuck. In pursuing your doctoral degree, you are all actively committing to being a life-long learner, welcoming new information and ideas as a tiny period of continuous regrowth and development.

But as we challenge ourselves to fight against complacency and rigidity, we must also remember the phoenix, rising from the ashes as the pinnacle of regrowth. As you are beautifully struggling within the discomfort of change, remember that change takes time. Various mythologies describe periods of seven to 500 days between the phoenix's death and subsequent rebirth. So be patient with yourselves and flourish in the time (and as you'll hear from me later in this newsletter, go watch some tv). - KRA



Spring is a period of rebirth during which all that has been dormant flourishes anew. Clocks spring forward, flowers spring up, the sun comes back out, and coats, sweaters, and scarves are tucked back into closets. But in higher education, spring is not a season; it's a semester. And, coming so soon after the fall semester, spring often resembles repeat more than rebirth. This sense of repetition is even more pronounced now, as each academic semester since spring 2020 has been preceded by hopes of a return to normal. Normal, whatever it will be, has not yet fully arrived. No recent semester has brought with it a genuine, optimistic sense of rebirth. Many educators know that semesters, even under ideal circumstances, are about making it through. By and large, academia has done just that: we've been making it through. But it's up to us to scratch around for optimism that rebirth awaits around some upcoming corner. Maybe not the next corner or the one after that, but we're getting closer. - LFO3



Faculty Spotlight

Mac McConnell, Ed.D.



Tell us about yourself.

I am a native (aka a Nugget) of Dahlonega and have been employed by the University of North Georgia since 1987. I currently serve as the Senior Vice President for Business and Finance and Assistant Professor, College of Education. In my role as the Chief Financial Officer, I oversee an annual budget in excess of \$280 million and have direct responsibility for financial operations, including capital budget, financial reporting, budget, auxiliary enterprises, information technology, compliance, human resources, and public safety. During my career at UNG I have served as Director of Procurement for 10 years, Comptroller for 2 years, Vice President for Business & Finance for 13 years, and was named the Senior Vice President for Business and Finance in 2012. I earned my Ed.D. from the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education, an M.B.A. from Mercer University, and a B.B.A. in Accounting from North Georgia College. I teach EDD 7200: Finance and Business Management in Higher Education in summers.

Tell us about your professional activities.

Certainly, providing financial oversight and direction in these most turbulent times can be all-consuming, but I truly enjoy mentoring professionals who aspire to senior leadership positions in higher education. I plan to continue my research around higher education finance, international partnerships, and multi-campus effectiveness, and I hope to continue teaching in our doctoral program.

What are your research and/or professional interests?

My research has focused on matters challenging higher education in the 21st century, particularly tuition dependency. My comparative research includes examinations of the European and Chinese models of higher education, including abroad assignments in The Netherlands and China. Furthermore, I have participated in the development of specific university partnerships and efforts in China, Belize, Germany and Poland.

What has a doctoral degree done for your professional career and personal goals?

I earned my doctorate later in my career and it has really been a capstone experience for me. In addition to perhaps qualifying me for future opportunities, the research and the exposure to faculty scholars and my cohort classmates has provided a rich and fulfilling experience.

What do you enjoy doing outside of your professional roles?

I coached youth sports for many years and taught 7th and 8th grade kids as part of a youth program at church. I also love reading, listening to and playing music, and walking my dog.



What advice do you have for EDD students?

Try to identify a research area that you have some familiarity with, and an area that you are interested in. Your dissertation represents a significant amount of work and should be a product you are proud of and one that adds to the body of knowledge.

What's your ideal student?

The most successful students are invested. They carve out the time to read, to research, to think about their writing and to interact with their classmates and their instructor. As well, the following skills are helpful for graduate students to possess: good listening skills, dedication, good writing skills, and ownership of their activities.

If you were stranded on a desert island and had all food and water you needed to survive, what addition two items would you bring with you?

An iPad and cellphone. I'm on call 24/7, so connectivity is important. Even if stranded, people are still going to be calling me.

What has been the most impactful book you ever read?

Principles of Accounting, Vols. 1 and 2. The *why* should be obvious!



Student Spotlight

Katie Fisher



Tell us about yourself.

I'm an adjunct professor, dog mom, rock climber, hiker, cyclist, and avid science fiction nerd who also sometimes dabbles in photography. I fell into teaching during my first master's program when the bio department needed a last minute TA for their anatomy labs. By last minute, I mean I was hired a week before the semester started and received no training. Not only did I fall into teaching, but I also fell in love with it. I've been hooked ever since and have been trying to grow as an instructor by learning new pedagogical approaches and working with students to understand how they learn best.

Why did you choose to attend the UNG EDD program?

I had spent about a year researching Ed.D. programs and had even created a whole spreadsheet. UNG was one of my top choices because of the courses offered -- specifically, the course focused on non-traditional/underrepresented students since that is who I teach, as well as the courses focused on program and course development. Dr. Lanford reached out to me when I got accepted to see if I had any questions. After an awful experience with an advisor, I wanted to make sure I was choosing the right program. After hearing about his journey into the world of education and talking to a student about the professors in the program, I honestly felt like UNG was the perfect place. It was where I was meant to be.

**What is your goal upon graduation?**

Realistic goal: Dean in a biology department or in student affairs. I want to create an environment where students of all demographics are invited to learn and be challenged intellectually in a way that makes them feel seen and heard. The world is changing and higher ed needs to change with it. Simply telling a student to "study more" isn't going to cut it.

What is your area of research for your dissertation?

Student retention. Since I start teaching at the local community colleges, I have met many different students with many different problems: homelessness, cancer diagnoses, alcoholism, long-term hospitalizations, divorce, domestic violence, putting their child's future ahead of theirs, etc. These students want to succeed but have so much going on. We need better programs, better supports for these students.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of the EDD program thus far?

Everything I've learned and meeting all my fellow classmates. I often feel in awe of them because they always seem so much more knowledgeable. I've learned quite a bit from interacting with them through our weekly discussions.

How do you manage the work-family-life-school balance?

I am always terrified of being behind, so I end up spending any free time outside of work working on our assignments so I can enjoy my free time later in the week.

If you could have dinner with any three people (dead or alive), who would they be and why?

Tim Curry (I mean, I would listen to him talk for hours on end), Frank Herbert (I have read his Dune series 5 times through), Alex Honnold (I look up to him as a climber; if you haven't seen *Free Solo*, you should watch it!).

What has been the most impactful book you ever read?

Rock climbing! I am obsessed with this sport. I still haven't fully returned post-surgery, but I'm getting there. I prefer lead climbing vs any other form of climbing because a) you are on a rope and therefore incredibly safe, b) you can do different climbs and moves that are more challenging on top rope, and c) taking a big whipper when you miss a clip or a hold is actually quite fun (so long as you don't hit the ground).

What is your favorite place you have visited, and why?

Red Rocks Canyon. This was the first place I went to on a climbing trip. We went with a large group and stayed in an airbnb. We climbed all day, made and ate dinner as a family, and truly bonded.

If you had to choose ONE superhero ability, what would it be and why?

Teleportation because I hate driving. I'll do it, and I have to for my job, but I don't love it. Traffic is stressful and I often get sleepy when I drive.



Successful HELP Milestone Defense Announcements

Congratulations to those who have successfully completed your prospectus or dissertation defenses! Good luck on the rest of your research and future endeavors!

Dissertation Defenses

Elizabeth Hutchins: *Understanding the Challenge and Support of Academic Advising for First-Generation Hispanic Students at a Rural Hispanic Serving Institution*

Crystal Shellnut: *Nexus Degree Programs in Higher Education: A Case Study of the University System of Georgia's Nexus Degree in Film and Video Production*

Ken Crowe: *Changes in Alumni Identity During a Higher Education Merger*

Jennifer Roberts: *The Perceived Impact of Early College on Students' Self-Efficacy and Transition Post-University Matriculation*

2021 Commencement Speaker, Dr. Katherine Adams

[Click Here to Watch!](#)



CONGRATS!!

Members of the HELP Class of 2021!!



Dr. Nikki Simpson, Dr. Ken Crowe, Dr. Elizabeth Hutchins, and Dr. Crystal Shellnut



HELP Accomplishments



Holly Alderman

In spring 2021, I was selected for a "community building award" from the Terry College of Business at UGA for years of service planning staff socials. I have enjoyed welcoming new staff and creating opportunities for staff to mingle, eat together, play games, take pictures, and interact on a personal level. I believe this makes us better employees and collaborators, but is also just plain fun.

Camille Cook

I received a Certificate of Completion from the United Way of Coastal Empire's Young Leaders Board Readiness Program. The leadership and professional development program trains tomorrow's nonprofit board leaders through consistent involvement in leadership education, professional development, active volunteerism, and philanthropic events. The lesson plan included topics on ethics, strategic planning, fundraising, advocacy, board-staff relationships, resume and bio writing, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the photo below (from left to right): CEO and President of the United Way of Coastal Empire, Brynn Grant, myself, and the ceremony's guest speaker, Cecelia Russo Turner, founder and CEO of Cecilia Russo Marketing.



Anna Holcomb

I had a paper accepted by the Annual Conference of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) titled "Launching a New Discipline-Specific First-Year Discovery Studio: Vision, Purpose, and Adaptation Amid Pandemic-Related Turbulence."

James Blackburn

The work accomplished by our Student Financial Services team at Georgia State University was included as exemplars in the book *Student Financial Success: A Surprising Path to Fix the College Completion Crisis* (2021).

Ragh Singh

I am excited to present my paper, "Investigating the Impact of Commissioned Education Agents in International Student Recruitment," at the Comparative & International Education Society annual conference this April 2022. Also, my chapter proposal focusing on international education was accepted for *The University of North Georgia: Essays on the Past, Present and Future*.

Melissa Johnson

I was able to adapt a paper from my Leadership Theory and Research class into a publication: "Toxic Work Culture during University Consolidations: The Importance of Transformational Leadership in Libraries" has been accepted as a chapter for the upcoming Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) publication *Toxic Cultures in Higher Education*, scheduled for publication in early 2023.

Johnny Kahn

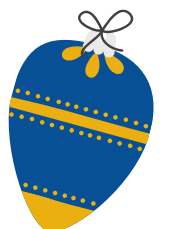
I just received my service award from UNG in recognition of 10 years of dedicated service.



HELP Christmas Cards



From top left to bottom right: Jenica Alvarez & family, Anna Gibbs & family, Johnny Kahn & family, and Kandyce A'see & family. Thanks so much for sharing these joyous holiday photos!





Ice Breakers

Let's Say Goodbye to Winter!



When you were a child, what was your dream job?

- **Brooklyn Herrera:** I dreamed of being a teacher. I almost got it right. :-)
- **Anna Holcomb:** As a kid there was only one response to the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I would always respond that I would be the first woman to be President of the United States of America, and for good measure I hoped to accomplish this feat shortly after my 35th birthday per the constitutional requirements to hold the office. My parents had their hands full.
- **Mario Sheats:** To work as a Rockstar. But I just ended up being one instead. (jk)
- **James Blackburn:** To work in Disney's Imagineering Group. The group brings stories to life through technology.
- **Dr. Katherine Adams:** I wanted to be a mermaid. And I had the kind of parent that instead of telling me this was not a profession instead took me to a "live" mermaid restaurant and created mermaid practice at our community pool.
- **Dr. Kelly Long:** An entomologist because I loved studying bugs.
- **Ragh Singh:** As a kid growing up in India, certainly Bollywood had a huge influence and I hoped to get into the movies as an actor. Of course, having attended a Catholic school I did get to play Jesus for the annual Christmas play, so I certainly felt confident about my resume. :-)
- **Elnora Farmer:** I had an interest in being an actress, then wondered how I would memorize an entire script.
- **Dr. Kelly McFaden:** Marine biologist. Duh.
- **Dr. Michael Lanford:** NBA basketball player, city planner in the offseason

What's at the top of your bucket list?

- **Jenica Alvarez:** Travel to Sweden and Norway.
- **Julius Fleschner:** See the Pacific Ocean. My spouse and I are both from Long Island and grew up next to Atlantic Ocean. We made a deal that when we eventually saw the Pacific Ocean, we would go together. One day we'll make that cross-country road trip to go see it!
- **Mario Sheats:** Creating my own "enterprise or business" or anything that would be useful to others after I'm gone is at the top of my bucket list.
- **James Blackburn:** I would like to play at Carnegie Hall in New York. But since I am not prepared to practice, practice, practice, I think I will settle on publishing a book.
- **Dr. Katherine Adams:** Go to Greece
- **Dr. Kelly Long:** I want to try one of those sky diving tubes where it simulates the experience... definitely not interested in trying the real thing though!
- **Melissa Johnson:** As a lifelong mythology enthusiast, traveling to Greece tops my bucket list! I think that once I successfully defend my dissertation, this will be how I treat myself!
- **Elnora Farmer:** Go on an extreme tornado chasing tour.
- **Dr. Kelly McFaden:** It used to be getting to all seven continents but I went to Antarctica a few years ago, so check. I suppose going to the arctic and seeing polar bears and narwhal would be next.
- **Dr. Michael Lanford:** Travelling through South America



What's a book that you've owned for a while but never read?

- **Mario Sheats:** I have a book titled *The Great Sea* by David Abulafia that I hope to begin reading soon.
- **James Blackburn:** *Heroes: The Greek Myths Reimagined* by Stephen Fry. It's a companion book to *Mythos: The Greek Myths Reimagined*.
- **Dr. Katherine Adams:** *These Truths* by Jill Lepore, which is unfortunate because I told Mario Sheats (c/o 2023) that I would give it to him when I was done!
- **Dr. Kelly Long:** *Blink*
- **Elnora Farmer:** *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell
- **Dr. Kelly McFaden:** I am infamous for having an enormous pile of books waiting to be read and never finishing them all before adding more to the pile. One I've been toting around for a while (uh, two decades?) is *Dune* by Frank Herbert.
- **Dr. Michael Lanford:** *Capital in the 21st Century*, by Thomas Piketty

What was the first movie you remember seeing in theaters?

- **Jenica Alvarez:** *Angels in the Outfield*
- **Mario Sheats:** *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* in 1995 at age 4
- **Kandyce A'see:** The first movie I remember seeing in theatres was *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. My mommy was a huge Indiana Jones fan. I can remember her taking us to PharMor to get candy bars at three for a dollar before she would take my brother and me to the movies.
- **James Blackburn:** The most memorable movie experience from my early childhood was a summer movie series at the local theater in Columbus, Ga. No movie stands out, but the experience of going to the movies without parental supervision sticks with me, especially the grape milk duds.
- **Dr. Katherine Adams:** I saw *ET* on my first day of kindergarten (coincidentally, I stayed up so late that I missed school the next day)
- **Dr. Kelly Long:** *The Witches*
- **Elnora Farmer:** *Popeye* with Robin Williams
- **Dr. Kelly McFaden:** It's not the first movie I remember seeing but it's the one I loved the most and was obsessed with, *Jurassic Park*. I made my mother take me to the theater six times and again a decade later when they rereleased it in theaters. I still have to sit and watch whenever it's on.
- **Dr. Michael Lanford:** *Return of the Jedi*

Mark Your Calendar!



Spring Dates

Spring Break: Mar. 14-20, 2022 **Spring Classes/Finals End:** Apr. 29, 2022 **Grades Due:** May 9, 2022
Spring Graduation Application Deadline: Feb. 18, 2022 **Spring Graduation Date:** May 7, 2022, 3pm,
 Dahlonega, GA

Summer Registration Dates

Registration Opens: Oct. 26, 2021 **TAP Application Deadline:** Apr. 15, 2022 **TAP Registration:** May
 16, 2022 **Summer Classes Begin:** June 6, 2022

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