

Spring 2025 Newsletter

Introduction

CHET Director, Dr. Nancy Schoenberg

A new year, especially this new year, brings all sorts of transitions, leaving people apprehensive, elated, depressed, or any other complex mixture of emotions. Despite this complexity, we at CHET are exhilarated as we enter 2025. Buoyed by another year of unprecedented success and growth, we remain steadfast and effective in our Center's mission.

Holding tight to CHET's mission does not require us to remain the same in perpetuity. As announced several months ago, I have requested initiation of the search for my successor. With stellar support and coordination from the College of Medicine's Dean's Office (Sabrina Brewer) and CHET (Ariel Arthur), an extremely qualified search committee co-led by Dr. Bill Stoops (Behavioral Science) and Dr. Kevin Pearson (Pharmacology and Nutritional Science) has orchestrated a national search for the next CHET director.

Many have asked me why I am seeking a successor, especially in the midst of so much progress. First, I believe in the power of change to ignite creativity and growth. Just as rotating a prism in different directions captures variations in light and perspective, new leadership offers new angles, ideas, and direction. While change is not always easy, CHET's solid foundation and positive and collegial culture enables us to move confidently into our next phase. Additionally, I will leave this position having accomplished what I set out to do. After seven years, we are achieving our shared vision for building one of the nation's strongest and most collaborative health equity research and training centers.



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Introduction (cont.)

CHET Director, Dr. Nancy Schoenberg

We aspired to develop a Center with the most talented faculty, staff, and trainees, starting as one person with institutional support and now surrounded by hundreds. We aimed to recruit a strong cadre of productive and congenial faculty members with significant research programs and to establish nationally prominent training programs. We sought to establish an NIH-funded Center grant, and we have done that. We have drawn on what, time and time again, the data show: diverse talent pools bring the most innovative and impactful results to any environment. After these years, collectively and with support from units and offices across campus, we have achieved these initial aims.

My vision is to enhance CHET's development by bringing new and ever more transformative leadership to the Center. With no plans to step down from my faculty position at UK, I intend to facilitate this transition in every possible way. With your continued and perhaps enhanced engagement, now is a great time for you to do the same.

Heartfelt wishes for a happy, healthy, and transformative 2025,

Nancy

Introducing New Trainees

Madelyn Blakey



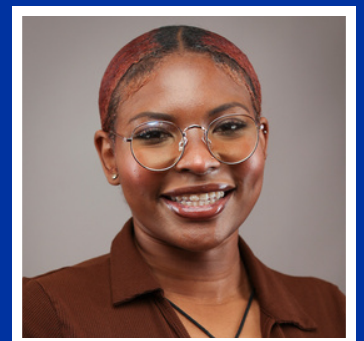
Lafayette High School student
Dr. Justin Moore's Lab

Kathleen Wakeman



Graduate Research Assistant
Dr. Carolyn Lauckner's Lab

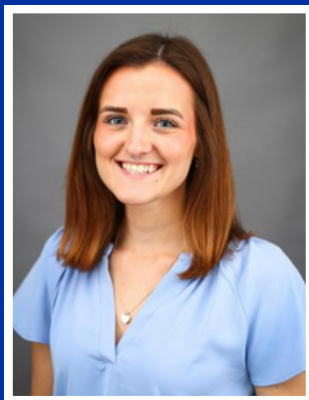
Jayla Fenderson, BS



Postbaccalaureate Scholar
Dr. Erica Littlejohn's Lab

CHET GRA Highlights

Sydney Shafer Uses Wristbands to Study East Palestine, Ohio Chemical Exposure



Sydney Shafer, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Kentucky College of Public Health and CHET GRA working with the Biostatistics and Research Design Core, is delving into chemical exposures in East Palestine, Ohio following the 2023 freight train derailment. Partnering with UK's Dr. Erin Haynes and Duke University's Dr. Heather Stapleton, Shafer's research employs silicone wristbands to measure residents' exposure to semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs).

These innovative wristbands passively capture environmental chemicals, providing noninvasive and cost-effective exposure data. Initial findings revealed no detectable levels of dioxins or furans—positive news for residents. However, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), potentially carcinogenic compounds, were present, likely due to truck traffic and Canadian wildfire impacts.

Shafer's team identified exposure disparities linked to behaviors, such as heavy machinery use and smoking. Participants received personalized reports to empower them with knowledge about their environment.

"This research is about giving communities actionable information," Shafer emphasized.

Supported by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, this work underscores the vital connection between public health research and community well-being.

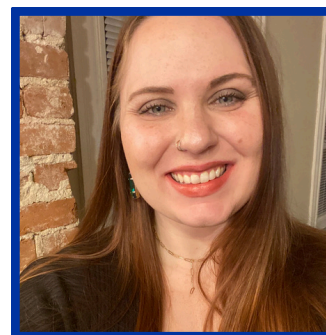
Read more: [HERE](#)

Caitlyn Grunert Contributes to Medical Debt Relief Effort

CHET GRA Caitlyn Grunert recently examined medical debt by census tract in Lexington along with her classmates, and created a policy brief that was presented to the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council Budget, Finance, and Economic Development (BFED) Committee. In collaboration with the nonprofit [Undue Medical Debt](#), on October 29, 2024 the [council voted to allocate \\$1 million in funding](#) to relieve Lexingtonians of their medical debt.

Caitlyn works alongside CHET primary faculty member Dr. Justin Moore.

Congratulations to Caitlyn and her peers for their successful advocacy work highlighting public health in practice and policy!



Joshua Moses Earns Top Award in National Brain Video Contest



Combining his passion for research and creativity, a University of Kentucky student is breaking barriers — literally and figuratively. Joshua Moses, a CHET graduate research assistant working with the CHET communications committee and second-year PhD student in the Department of Physiology, College of Medicine, is committed to both research and science communication. His engaging and educational video about the blood-brain barrier recently won the top award in a national contest held by BrainFacts.org and the Society for Neuroscience. The video highlights the blood-brain barrier's essential role in maintaining the body's balance or homeostasis.

"I'm exploring science communication in my own way, particularly through mass media," said Moses. "When I started my Ph.D. program, I created the brand 'The PhD Himbo,' with the tagline, 'I'm the male Elle Woods.'"

Moses noted that Elle Woods wasn't the typical image of someone in law school and he deeply related to that as a person of color. However, the support he received from those around him encouraged him to persevere. When he entered his Ph.D. program, he made it his mission to inspire others, showing them that they too could succeed in science, even if they didn't see many people who shared their background.

Read More about Josh's work: [HERE](#)

2025 CHET Doctoral Student Pilot Grant Recipients

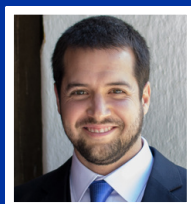
CHET is pleased to announce the following awardees selected for funding through the 2025 CHET Doctoral Student Pilot Grant RFA. This selective funding opportunity supports meritorious projects that focus on identifying, reducing, and/or eliminating health disparities.



Reya Andrews, MS, CN
PhD Student, Division of Nutritional Sciences
Research Nutritionist, Department of Family and Community Medicine

Project Title:

"Healthy Eating Adherence & Routine Transformation through a Kitchen Makeover Whole-Food, Plant-Based Diet Jumpstart (HEARTKITCHEN): A 28-day Pilot Feasibility Study in Low-Income Adults at Risk for Cardiovascular Disease."



Felipe Gonzalez Seguel, PT, MSc
PhD Student, Rehabilitation and Health Sciences
Department of Physical Therapy, College of Health Sciences

Project Title:

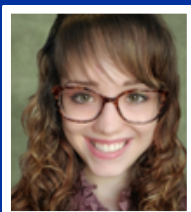
"Are there disparities in delivery of rehabilitation care for patients with critical illness who only speak Spanish?"



Tolulope Oladele, MBBS, MPH, FWACS (OBGYN)
PhD Student, Health Services Research
Department of Health Management and Policy

Project Title:

"Impact of Medicaid Reimbursement on Uptake of Doula Services and Health Outcomes"



Carleigh Litteral, BS
PhD Student, Experimental Psychology - Cognitive Neuroscience
Department of Psychology

Project Title:

"Intergenerational Patterns in Addictive Behaviors, Mental Health Disorders, and Contributory Social Determinants"

HDRT Fellows Selected

Three University of Kentucky College of Medicine students have been selected for the Health Disparities Research Training (HDRT) Fellowship, receiving mentorship from faculty affiliated with CHET. Gabriela Drucker, mentored by Dr. Carolyn Lauckner and Dr. Alison Gustafson, will research food insecurity interventions and their impact on child health outcomes. Veronica Rojas, under the guidance of Dr. Pamela Hull and Dr. Juan Canedo, aims to evaluate an educational video's effectiveness in increasing colposcopy knowledge among Hispanic women. Naiya Sims, mentored by Dr. Erica Littlejohn, will explore the experiences of racially and ethnically marginalized populations with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) screenings.

Read more: [HERE](#)



Gabriela Drucker



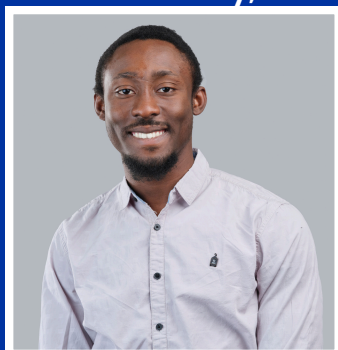
Veronica Rojas



Naiya Sims

Introducing New CHET Staff

Meman Diaby, MS



Research Analyst
Dr. Delvon Mattingly's
Lab

Maria Rockett, MA



Congratulations to former CHET GRA,
Maria Rockett, on her new role as
Research Project Manager working
alongside Dr. Carrie Oser.

Nancy Wolff, BA



Lab Technician
Dr. Elizabeth Rhodus'
Lab

Faculty, Student, & Staff Updates

Rachel H. Farr, PhD (CHET Core Faculty):

- Now editor of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) publication, Research & Policy Briefs. Dr. Farr welcomes submissions for any relevant brief proposals from the CHET community!
- Publications:
 - Jones, A. E., Yinger, O. S., Fallin-Bennett, K., **Farr, R. H.**, Beiring, S., Crouse, C., & Greenstrom, C. (2024). Formation, operation, and maintenance of a community advisory board for research with LGBTQ+ parents. *Transforming Communities*, 1(1), 8
 - Yinger, O. S., Jones, A. E., Fallin-Bennett, K., Gibbs, C. R., & **Farr, R. H.** (2024). Family-centered care for LGBTQ+ parents of infants in the NICU: An integrative review. *Children*, 11(6), 615



Delvon Mattingly, PhD (CHET Primary Faculty):

- Selected as a 2025 editorial fellow at the American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Published: **Mattingly, Delvon T.**, Osayande Agbonlahor, and Joy L. Hart. "Sociodemographic disparities in everyday discrimination among a national sample of adults in the United States, 2023." (2025) *Preventive Medicine Reports*



Shyanika W. Rose, PhD, MA (CHET Primary Faculty)

- Contributing author on Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities – A Report of the Surgeon General



Faculty, Student, and Staff Updates (cont.)

Justin X. Moore, PhD, MPH (CHET Primary Faculty)

- Published: Walker, B., Pollard, E., Howard, S. P., Jones, V. M., O'Connor, K. L., Durbin, E. B., Hull, P. C., Jones, S. R., Adegboyega, A., Wang, X., Owen, W. A. B., Szabunio, M. M., Williams, L. B., & **Moore, J. X.** (2025) "The role of race/ethnicity on the association between neighborhood deprivation and breast cancer outcomes among Kentucky breast cancer patients years 2010-2022." Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention



Kathy Sheppard-Jones, PhD, CRC (CHET Core Faculty)

- Presented at the US Department of Agriculture Target Center on Disability (October 2024): Disability, universal design and the world of work
- Collaborated with the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce to host the Inclusive Workforce Summit in Lexington with over 300 employers, health care providers, workforce development professionals, students, researchers, and Kentuckians with disabilities
 - The event also highlighted the upcoming Disability Hiring Academy, to be held in January 28, 29 & February 5, 2025 with UK's Human Development Institute in collaboration with the Kentucky Chamber



Shemeka Thorpe, PhD (CHET Core Faculty)

- Featured in the Dec. print issue of Essence magazine: [Read More Here](#)
- Symposium abstract accepted to the World Association for Sexual Health Conference entitled: Sexual Healing: Qualitative Methods as a Radical Pleasure Intervention Against Anti-Black Sexology
 - Dr. Thorpe along with her colleague and doctoral student will present for 90 minutes at the conference in Brisbane, Australia in June 2025



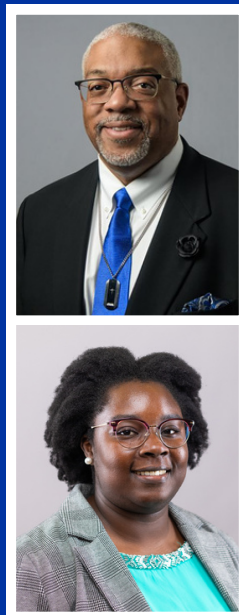
CHET Faculty Highlights

CHET Core Faculty Member and CHET Manager Featured in COM Year in the Life 2024 Annual Report

The University of Kentucky College of Medicine's [Our Care in Action: A Year in the Life](#) highlights the dedication and impact of faculty, staff, and learners over the past year. This project brings the college's mission to life by sharing firsthand accounts of patient care, medical education, and groundbreaking research. Through these stories, the initiative showcases the deep commitment to advancing health in Kentucky and beyond. CHET Core Faculty member Darwin Conwell, MD, and CHET Manager Ariel Arthur, MPH, were featured, contributing their expertise and passion to improving health equity and patient outcomes.

Read More about Dr. Conwell's Year in the Life [HERE](#)

Read More about Mrs. Arthur's Year in the Life [HERE](#)



Congratulations to CHET primary faculty member Dr. Justin Moore and his colleague Dr. Kristen McQuerry on being awarded a research grant for their annual BIostat PRODIGY program.

BIostat PRODIGY is a one-week summer enrichment program for Lexington high school students to learn statistical programming in R. Last year they successfully mentored students from around Lexington. These funds will secure their ability to provide even more fun and engaging research engagement for the next generation of biostatisticians.

Read more about BIostat PRODIGY: [HERE](#)



CHET Core Faculty Member Honored With 2025 Presidential Award

Congratulations to CHET core faculty member, Matthew Bush, MD, PhD on receiving the prestigious Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE).

The award, announced in mid-January by the White House, is the highest honor given by the U.S. government to outstanding, early career scientists and engineers.

Read More about Dr. Bush's award [HERE](#)



SPARK Cohort 6

The University of Kentucky's Students Participating as Ambassadors for Research in Kentucky (SPARK) Program has announced its 2025 cohort. This initiative trains undergraduates to conduct impactful health disparities research early in their academic careers. The six selected SPARKlers are:



Front: Thelma Owiredu, Akua Asamoah, Ainsley Byers. Back: Mariam Younis, Amy Moctezuma Perez, Madeline Barrie

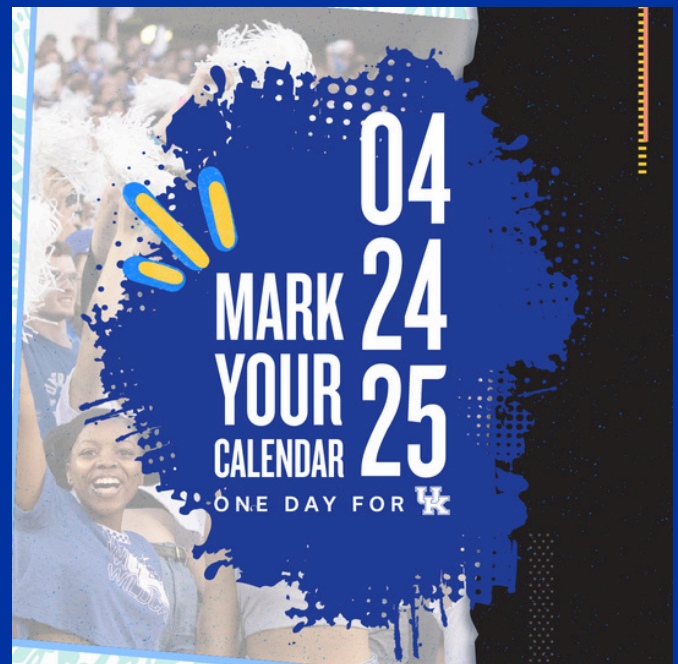
- Thelma Owiredu, junior, public health and business management major
- Amy Moctezuma Perez, sophomore, political science major
- Mariam Younis, sophomore, preprofessional biology major
- Akua Asamoah, sophomore, public health major
- Ainsley Byers, junior, kinesiology-exercise science major
- Madeline Barrie, junior, agricultural and medical biotechnology major

SPARKlers will engage in a semester-long health disparities research course, receive mentorship, and develop projects aimed at improving community health outcomes.

SAVE THE DATE!

For 24 hours on April 24, 2025, University of Kentucky alumni, faculty, staff, students, and friends will support their favorite college, program or cause through One Day for UK—the University's annual giving day.

On One Day for UK, join in the fun and make a gift to CHET!



UK ASCEND Welcomes New Cohorts of Scholars

In the fall of 2024, UK ASCEND underwent a highly competitive application and selection process to identify the second and third cohorts of scholars. Individuals were chosen as ASCEND scholars based on their potential to become highly successful community-engaged researchers and the merit of their proposed pilot projects.

Read more: [HERE](#)

Second cohort — beginning Feb. 1, 2025



Radmila Choate, PhD
College of Public Health



Darlingtona Esiaka, PhD
College of Medicine

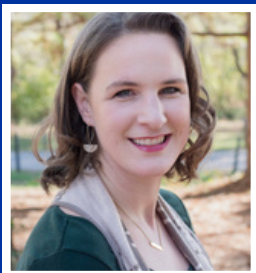


Abigail Latimer, PhD
College of Social Work



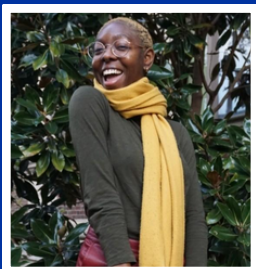
Meagan Scott, PhD
College of Education

Three Postdoctoral Pilots Awarded by UK ASCEND



Laura Peterson-Brown, PhD
Postdoctoral Scholar

Project Title:
"Post-partum Depression in Kentucky: A Community Based Intervention and a Novel AI-powered Screening Tool"



Praise Iyiewuare, PhD
Postdoctoral Scholar

Project Title:
"ART of Hope: Expanded Edition"



Meera Marji, PhD
Postdoctoral Scholar

Project Title:
"Assessing Perceptions and Feasibility of Intermittent Fasting in Kentucky Breast Cancer Patients"

Food as Health Alliance hosts first annual symposium

The University of Kentucky's Food as Health Alliance (FAHA), directed by CHET Core faculty member Alison Gustafson, will host its inaugural Food as Health Symposium on March 11. The event aims to unite experts from agriculture, healthcare, and nutrition to address food insecurity and diet-sensitive chronic diseases in Kentucky.

Read more about the FAHA: [HERE](#)

Learn more about the symposium: [HERE](#)

Register for the symposium: [HERE](#)

A promotional poster for the Food as Health Symposium. The top right features a circular inset image of a wooden surface with various items: a stethoscope, a small scale, and some seeds. The main title 'Food as Health Symposium' is in large blue font. Below it, the text 'Presented by the Food as Health Alliance at the University of Kentucky' is in a smaller, italicized font. Three blue arrow-shaped boxes point right, labeled 'WHEN', 'WHERE', and 'REGISTRATION'. To the right of these boxes are the event details: 'Tuesday March 11, 2025 9:00am-5:00pm', the venue 'Longship Club Kroger Field 1540 University Drive Lexington, KY 40506', and a registration link 'Scan or click here to register' with a QR code. A yellow box at the bottom left says 'Free to attend!'. The bottom of the poster has logos for the University of Kentucky Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment and the Food as Health Alliance.

Food as Health Symposium

Presented by the Food as Health Alliance at the University of Kentucky

WHEN Tuesday March 11, 2025
9:00am-5:00pm

WHERE Longship Club
Kroger Field 1540
University Drive
Lexington, KY 40506

REGISTRATION Scan or click here to register

Free to attend!

 **Martin-Gatton**
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment

 **FOOD AS HEALTH Alliance**

Biostatistics and Research Design Core

The CHET Biostatistics and Research Design Core aims to collaborate with CHET-affiliated investigators on health equity research. Our team collaborates with investigators on every stage and type (e.g., pilot to R01) of a research study. We play key and vital roles in the design and conduction of research studies, as well as the analysis of data arising from such studies. Our resulting goal is to work as a team in order to produce, for instance, competitive grant proposals and high-impact manuscripts in order to promote and advance health equity research.

We encourage CHET-affiliated researchers to collaborate with the CHET Biostatistics and Research Design Core. In order to collaborate with us, we ask that you fill out an initial online consultation request. Please note that priority will be given based on level of CHET membership. To get started, please fill out the collaboration request form below.

[**Submit Your Request Here**](#)