

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR INSTRUCTORS: Fall 2025

SARA MERRICK-ALBANO E-RYT 500, C-IAYT, is dedicated to guiding those facing chronic pain and psychosomatic pain disorders. As a co-founder of Yoga Therapy Associates, her vision is clear: to make the healing essence of yoga accessible and resonant. With a tailored approach that draws from traditional yoga practices infused with contemporary neuroscience insights, Sara offers specialized online yoga therapy. She also sees clients in person in Watertown and Trumbull. Her commitment is to everyone's journey, ensuring that every session is a step towards holistic wellness.

LUIS M. ANEZ, PSY.D., is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine and serves as the Director of Hispanic Services for the Connecticut Mental Health Center. His research and professional interests focus on training and education and community-based Hispanic Behavioral Health Services.

BILLY BROMAGE, MSW, has been working at the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health since 2012. He focuses on working alongside people in mental health and substance use recovery and people experiencing homelessness to engage with and shape their community. This work includes civic engagement and community-building projects like Project Connect and Focus Act Connect Everyday (FACE), as well as support for groups doing advocacy and community organizing from a lived experience perspective including Witnesses to Hunger and the Unhoused Activists Community Team (U-ACT). In addition, he designs classes for psychiatry residents in partnership with New Haven community leaders and activists as a faculty member of the Social Justice and Health Equity curriculum in the Yale Department of Psychiatry. Billy was a core faculty member in the two-year Recovering Citizenship Learning Collaborative (RCLC), which was spearheaded by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

ANTHONY CRETELLA, R.N., is a Registered Nurse who has worked as a Medical / Surgical Nurse since 2010 in the state's largest hospital systems. Before coming to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services he worked in Connecticut's Department of Corrections as a Nurse and Facility Staff Educator. While with the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services he has functioned as a Nurse Consultant and Clinical Educator.

MICHAELA FISSEL, MA, is a Breathwork Practitioner, Meditation Facilitator, 200-Hour Wild Essence Yoga Teacher, and works in the role of Executive Director at Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. Michaela has studied recovery for nearly 16 years and recently completed a graduate degree in Conscious Studies where she explored breathwork as a method for supporting recovery from trauma. Through an integrative approach, Michaela invites a new way of perceiving and responding to distress from a place of empowered present awareness.

LORI L. HAUSER, PhD, ABPP, is a board-certified forensic psychologist employed at Whiting Forensic Hospital in Middletown, Connecticut. There, she oversees the competency restoration service and conducts forensic evaluations – competency, as well as general and sexual violence risk management – for the hospital. She is the Practice Sample Review Chair for the American Board of Forensic Psychology, and she is the Treasurer for the American Academy of Forensic Psychology. Dr. Hauser also provides training and consultative services, both nationally and internationally, to practitioners and investigators in the areas of interviewing and credibility assessment, risk / threat assessment, cognitive bias, and, of course, competency to stand trial.

LINDA LENTINI has over 20 years of peer service experience and 15 of those years have focused on emphasizing the mind-body connection around mental health and addiction recovery. After exploring many options to support her personal healing journey over the past 25 years, she discovered Breath-Body-Mind (BBM). In this training, Linda will share the Coherent Breathing, part of BBM, that is evidence-based to balance the parasympathetic and sympathetic branches of the nervous system. Linda is a Rehab Therapist at Ct Valley, Hospital, a Level Four BBM teacher,

Executive Director of the Breath-Body-Mind-Foundation, Yoga and Qigong instructor, Aromatherapist, and trained in Stephanie Covington Healing/Beyond Trauma.

GIA MONTELEONE is the program specialist for the substance exposed pregnancy initiative of Connecticut. She is a recent graduate with a degree in psychology. With a strong commitment and passion to education and growth she serves as a very valuable resource to the program. Her fresh perspective and enthusiasm for the initiative gives very good insight into the CAPTA and CARA legislations.

MARY-K O'SULLIVAN, LMFT, LADC, LPC, has been working as a Clinical Manager and Clinical Trainer for over 30 years. She has worked in both the private and public sectors in the fields of criminal justice, substance use disorders, co-occurring disorders, and clinical supervision in both inpatient and outpatient programs. She has worked as a trainer for the Department of Corrections, the Judicial Department, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Social Services, UCONN Medical School, the Department of Education, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services in the State of Connecticut as well as working as a Clinical Preceptor for the SARP program at the Groton Naval Submarine Base. She has trained both Nationally and Internationally, including spending 10 years training with David Powell, PhD. and spending time in Singapore assisting their treatment system leaders in developing skills in co-occurring disorders treatment. She currently provides training and/or clinical supervision and oversight to Private Non-profits, DOC staff, DCF staff, DOL staff, CSSD staff including adult and juvenile probation officers, parole officers, juvenile residential services staff, bail staff, women's and family matters staff, clinicians, case managers, and medical staff.

MANUEL PARIS, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine and Deputy Director of Hispanic Services for the Connecticut Mental Health Center. He also serves as Director of Training for the Latinx Track of the Yale Psychology Pre- and Post-Doctoral Fellowship Program at the Hispanic Clinic. His professional contributions focus on the evaluation of cultural/linguistic adaptations of evidence-based interventions, multisite training and fidelity monitoring, workforce development, and public policy advocacy.

KIM PLATT, L.C.S.W., L.A.D.C., has over sixteen years of experience as a clinician, program director and consultant in the behavioral health field. She serves as a faculty at Manchester Community College and maintains a private practice.

ASHLEY ROGERS, LCSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who currently oversees the Safety Education & Training Unit for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. She received her master's degree in clinical/medical social work from Boston University and has over 17 years of experience working in the behavioral health field providing both direct care to clients and families, as well as clinical supervision to staff. Ashley has had the pleasure of teaching both clinical and non-clinical behavioral health staff for over 12 years, instructing courses on topics such as self-care, vicarious trauma, de-escalation, effective communication, clinical supervision, and crisis intervention. In addition, Ashley is certified by the State of Connecticut Police Officer Standards and Training Council as a civilian instructor, which has allowed her to teach Certified Police Officers and Recruits how to respond to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, which includes a simulation and seminar on interacting with individuals who may be hearing distressing voices. While a Vermonter at heart, Ashley currently resides in Connecticut with her husband and 3 beautiful children.

JENNIFER SPIRITO, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over two decades of experience across diverse clinical settings, including the DMHAS Young Adult Services (YAS) program, in-patient hospital medical units, community mental health agencies, and private practice. She is an EMDRIA Certified Therapist and an EMDRIA Approved Consultant, specializing in Complex Trauma and First Responders.

As one of the Clinical Directors of the Fairfield County Trauma Response Team, Jennifer plays a leadership role in assisting first responders and community members affected by critical incidents through education, therapy, and community outreach. In addition to her clinical practice, Jennifer offers educational training and consultation for fellow therapists focused on EMDR and special populations. She is passionate about supporting other clinicians in building fidelity and confidence in trauma treatment. Her clinical work is grounded in the belief that EMDR is a powerful and effective modality for healing, and she brings this passion into each of her roles.

CHRISTINE SAARI, MA, E-RYT 200, C-IAYT, navigating her own path through anxiety and trauma has instilled in Christine a deep-seated passion for helping others find their way. As a co-founder of Yoga Therapy Associates,

Christine specializes in aiding those with anxiety and trauma, emphasizing practices that are both empowering and approachable. Her strength lies in her ability to listen and adapt, individualizing yoga therapy to resonate with each person's unique needs and preferences. Offering online and in-person sessions in Madison and New Haven, Christine's approach is a blend of empathy, expertise, and genuine desire to guide others towards healing.

DONALD SCHERLING, Psy.D., L.A.D.C., is a Senior Clinical Consultant, Health Educator, Behavioral Health Wellness Coach, assistant in the Care for Caregivers Yoga program, & a Clinical Faculty member in the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at Berkshire Medical Center in Pittsfield, MA. Dr. Scherling is a certified trainer for the Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR Institute), the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), and a Senior Clinical Consultant and Trainer with the Connecticut Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services, the CT Women's Consortium, and other regional and state-wide agencies in the Northeast.

SHANE SCOTT is a licensed clinical social worker and a Connecticut native. Shane received his Master's Degree from the University of Connecticut School of Social Work in 2012. He believes that compassion, understanding, and fostering a holistic approach are an integral part of the healing process. As a dynamic and skilled social worker, Shane brings a vast array of experience beginning in 2005, where he began his career with working in with youth and families across the life span and in a variety of settings, including schools and communities. In addition, Shane has experience working with individuals that are experiencing depression, anxiety, trauma, and substance abuse conditions. Shane also has a strong passion and skill in working with individuals experiencing gender and sexual identity issues. Shane also has a talent with facilitating trainings, workshops, and coaching other professionals.

RAYMOND TAFRATE, Ph.D., is an associate professor and clinical psychologist at Central Connecticut State University, as well as a fellow and supervisor at the Albert Ellis Institute for Behavior Therapy. He is also an author, consultant, and trainer.

AVIVA VINCENT, Ph.D., L.M.S.W., V.S.M., earned her doctoral degree from Case Western Reserve University, Veterinary Social Work Certificate from the University of Tennessee, a fellowship with Animals in Society, and trained at The Institute for Interdisciplinary Salivary Bioscience Research, "spit camp". She is an instructor in the Veterinary Social Work and Veterinary Human Support Certificate Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her research interest includes exploring the physiological impact of the human-animal bond; specifically, the potential animal support to reduce fear and anxiety in stressful situations. She is co-founder and owner of Healing Paws LLC, the only VSW practice in Northeast Ohio. Dr. Vincent is on the advisory board of the Center for Human Animal Education Research and Education at Ohio State University, board of directors for the International Association of Veterinary Social Workers and is founder of the human-animal interactions workgroup with the National Association of Social Workers-Ohio chapter. Dr. Vincent is a contributor to the forthcoming volume The Comprehensive Guide to Interdisciplinary Veterinary Social Work, and Career Paths in Human-Animal Interaction for Social and Behavioral Scientists.

ELSA WARD, MS, CAC, is the Director of Recovery and Community Affairs, for Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). She represents DMHAS in national organizations and events as well as helping to ensure meaningful contact, input, and dialogue with diverse representatives of the recovery community throughout Connecticut. Prior to coming to DMHAS, Ms. Ward held a variety of roles over the past 22 years in the private non-profit world, primarily focused on helping those with co-occurring disorders. This has included more traditional settings such as residential, intensive outpatient and detox, then branching out into homeless outreach and engagement programs, supportive housing, peer recovery support and then designing and implementing a paid work apprentice program for people with barriers preventing them from competitive employment. Ms. Ward has an Associate Degree in Drug and Alcohol Counseling and is a Certified Addictions Counselor (CAC) and Bachelor and Master Degrees in Human Services. Ms. Ward brings with her the very essence of empowering people with MH/SUD/COD towards change.

BRENDA WESTBERRY is the President and Founder of Westberry Consulting where she has been involved in providing training and workshops for community organizations and agencies throughout the country. She is a retired Adult Probation Chief from the Connecticut Judicial Branch with over 34 years of experience in working with the criminal justice population, substance abuse treatment agencies, the addicted client population and recovery organizations. Brenda is a 21-year veteran professor in the Sociology, Anthropology, Criminology, and Social Work, Department at Eastern Connecticut State University, A faculty member and Instructor for the NE-ATTC, at Brown University, The New England School of Addiction Studies and the New England School of Best Practices. Brenda is a consultant for the Black Addiction Counselor Education (BACE) program through ADCARE where she provides training for addiction professionals. Brenda is an active member of the NAAP, NACSW.

LISA WIBORG, L.I.S.W-S, V.S.W., completed her graduate degree in Social Work at The Ohio State University and her post-graduate certification in veterinary social work from the University of Tennessee. She has worked in direct clinical settings such as hospital social work, hospice care, and private adoption. Lisa is currently implementing her expertise in the human-animal bond in her current work in hospice. She has also developed a private practice, Healing Paws LLC which focuses on providing social work support into veterinary clinics in Northeast Ohio. Together with her Clinical Scholars Team, she will be implementing an evidenced based program to reduce compassion fatigue and burnout in veterinary medicine and promote the utilization of mental health services in the field. Lisa is currently the lead medical social worker for her hospice agency and continues to focus on education and support in the veterinary social work field with Healing Paws, LLC.