



Meet Dean Christopher Span

"At the GSE, we're large enough to be a school, yet small enough to be a community. Graduates, thank you for contributing to the heart and spirit of who we are. Thank you for enhancing our community."

- Dr. Christopher M. Span

Dean of Rutgers Graduate School of Education and Distinguished Professor



Processional

Class of 2025

National Anthem

PERFORMED BY Kai Cleary

ACCOMPANIED BY

Vocalist

Mason Gross School of the Arts Brass Quintet

Welcome

Dr. Christopher M. Span

Dean and Distinguished Professor

Dr. Francine Conway

Chancellor and Distinguished Professor Rutgers University–New Brunswick

GSE Student Awards

- Nancy HigginsonDorr Award
- Distinguished Clinical Intern Award 2025 Nominees

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Nora Hyland

Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Faculty Director of Teacher Education Learning and Teaching

Student Speaker

Robert James Portella, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION BY

Dr. Nicole Mirra

Associate Professor of Urban Teacher Education Learning and Teaching

GSE Alumni Association Dissertation Awards

- 🖞 Evelyn Headley Award
- Angelo L. Tomaso Award
- P Arleen H. Urban Award

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Barbara Trueger

President, GSE Alumni Association

Distinguished Leader in Education Award

Dr. Christopher C. Catching Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Christopher M. Span

Dean and Distinguished Professor





Doctor of Philosophy Graduates

Doctor of Education Graduates

Director of Ph.D. in Education Program Learning and Teaching

Dr. Juan Pablo Mejía-Ramos

Education Specialists

Master of Arts in **Education Graduates**

Leslie Calabrese

Special Education Faculty, GSE-CSPN Partnership Leader Educational Psychology

Master of Education Graduates

- Dance Education
- Education
- and Supervision
- Measurement, and Evaluation

Leslie Calabrese

Special Education Faculty, GSE-CSPN Partnership Leader Educational Psychology

- Language Education
- ♦ Learning, Cognition, and Development

- School Counseling
- Science Education
 Comparison
 Science Education
 Comparison
 Co
- Social Studies Education
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- Special Education
 Comparison
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ALMA MATER

"On the Banks of the **Old Raritan**"

PERFORMED BY Kai Cleary Vocalist

ACCOMPANIED BY

Mason Gross School of the Arts Brass Quintet

Concluding Remarks

Dr. Christopher M. Span

Dean & Distinguished Professor

Recessional

Class of 2025

ALMA MATER

On the Banks of the Old Raritan

From far and near we came to Rutgers,
And resolved to learn all that we can;
And so we settled down,
In that noisy college town,
On the banks of the old Raritan.

REFRAIN:

On the banks of the old Raritan (my friends)
Where old Rutgers evermore shall stand,
For has she not stood
Since the time of the flood,
On the banks of the old Raritan.

Then sing aloud to Alma Mater
And keep the scarlet in the van'
For with her motto high
Rutgers' name shall never die
On the banks of the old Raritan.

(REFRAIN)

Student Awards



Nancy Higginson Dorr Award

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Nora Hyland

Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Faculty Director of Teacher Education Learning and Teaching

The Nancy Higginson Dorr Award was established by her son to honor graduates who show promise of being exceptional teachers. Nancy Higginson Dorr attended the Dearborn Seminary in Chicago in the 1860's and later became a remarkable teacher who, according to one of her children, "somehow kept alive the inborn curiosity and spirit of inquiry and exploration with which children are born." To the recipients of this award go "deepest wishes that you might get from it the same fullness of life which it helped bring to her."

AWARD RECIPIENTS

- · Sonia Algoo
- · Ethan Farabaugh
- · Ember Hesse
- · Isaac Jimenez Ulerio
- Marisa Kingston
- · Elaine Lam
- Sophia Lange
- · Gabrielle Lowe
- · Avery MacDonell

- · Sophie Martucci
- Peter McCormack
- · Marco Neves
- · Amanda Osborne
- Kaitlyn Perdigao
- Mark Romero
- · Dylan Thibault
- · Peristera Vikatos

Student Awards



New Jersey Distinguished Clinical Intern Award 2025 Nominees

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Nora Hyland

Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Faculty Director of Teacher Education Learning and Teaching

The New Jersey Distinguished Clinical Intern Award is a prestigious honor presented jointly by the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey Association of Colleges for Teacher Preparation. This annual award publicly recognizes the top 15 graduates of New Jersey's teacher preparation programs.

The nominees for this award have all demonstrated outstanding achievement during their student teaching placement. An independent panel of educators evaluates the credentials of each nominee and selects 15 award recipients in June.

The following students have been selected to represent the Graduate School of Education in the statewide competition:

- · Sonia Algoo
- · Gabrielle Lowe
- · Dylan Thibault

Student Speaker



INTRODUCTION BY Dr. Nicole Mirra

Associate Professor of Urban Teacher Education Learning and Teaching

Robert James Portella, Ed.D.

R.J. Portella, Ed D. completed his undergraduate studies at NYU and earned his Masters in Adult and Continuing Education at Rutgers. As an educational coach and teacher for over 30 years, his mission is to help students of all ages identify goals, connect them to resources, and reach their unique potentials.

His dissertation amplifies the voices of single student-mothers in higher education, illuminating their fierce determination amid institutional barriers. Outside of the classroom, you will find him hosting fundraisers in the greater Philadelphia area.



Dissertation Awards



Evelyn Headley Award for Outstanding Dissertation

PRESENTED BY

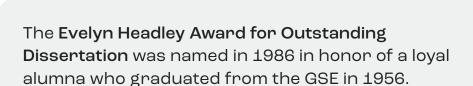
Dr. Barbara Trueger

President, GSE Alumni Association

Yusra Azhar Syed, Ed.D.

Assessing the Influence of an Institutional Muslim Life Program on the Muslim Student University Experience

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. CARRIE LOBMAN



Dr. Evelyn Headley had a long career in education and was a leader in the Edison Township School District. She received the Distinguished Service Award from the GSEAA in 1964. Dr. Headley was a member of the Rutgers University Board of Trustees at the time of her death in 1985.



Dissertation Awards



Angelo L. Tomaso Excellence in Dissertation Award

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Barbara Trueger

President, GSE Alumni Association

Brittany L. Marshall, Ph.D.

It's Not Magic!: Instructional Practices that Cultivate Positive Mathematics Identity in Middle School Black Girls

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. DAN BATTEY



The Angelo L. Tomaso Excellence in Dissertation Award was named in 1993 following the sudden death of Dr. Angelo L. Tomaso, who was a member of the Graduate School of Education Alumni Association Executive Committee and its membership chair.

He had retired as Superintendent of the Warren Township School District in 1989 and was named a "distinguished alumnus" by the GSE Alumni Association. The Washington Valley School in Warren Township was renamed the Angelo L. Tomaso School in recognition of his service to the district.



Dissertation Awards

Arleen H. Urban Excellence in Dissertation Award

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Barbara Trueger

President, GSE Alumni Association

Tamiah N. Brevard-Rodriguez, Ed.D.

The Beauty Performances of Black College Women: A Narrative Inquiry Study Exploring the Realities of Race, Respectability, and Beauty Standards on a Historically White Campus

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. BENJAMIN JUSTICE



The Arleen H. Urban Excellence in Dissertation Award was established in 2017 to honor the life and work of Dr. Arleen Urban. Dr. Urban graduated from the Rutgers Graduate School of Education in 1986 with an Ed.D. She treasured the time she spent at the GSE and was active in GSEAA activities throughout her professional career.

Dr. Urban completed a distinguished 41-year career as instructor and supervisor at the Somerset County Technical Institute. In addition to receiving many formal honors, including the GSEAA Distinguished Service Award and the Rutgers Alumni Meritorious Service Award, Dr. Urban was recognized as an outstanding teacher, known for her deep personal dedication to education and her kind and generous nature.

Distinguished Leader in Education Award



PRESENTED BY

Dr. Christopher M. Span

Dean and Distinguished Professor

Dr. Christopher Catching

Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University



Dr. Christopher Catching has been a leader in higher education for over 25 years. A native of Newark, NJ, his commitment to educational equity is deeply rooted in New Jersey's public education system. A first-generation college student, he attended Newark Public Schools and Essex County Vocational and Technical High Schools and earned his Bachelor of Arts in History from Montclair State University with support from the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program. He has been honored by Newark Public Schools, the NJ Council of County Vocational and Technical Schools, and received the Governor Thomas E. Kean Distinguished Alumni Award from the EOF Professional Association.

In February 2025, Dr. Catching became Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at North Carolina A&T State University, the nation's largest HBCU and a leader in STEM and social mobility. He previously served at Stockton University, where the institution was nationally recognized for advancing equity and first-generation student success.

Throughout his career, he has worked to expand equity in higher education, serving students across 11 institutions in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and now North Carolina. Dr. Catching holds a doctorate from Rutgers GSE, a master's from New York University, and completed executive leadership programs at Harvard Institute for Education Management and other prestigious institutions.

Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education

Shari Monique Cunningham**

Research Universities in Search of Our Kind of People: Black Women Doctoral Student Socialization

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. BENJAMIN JUSTICE

Judith Farmer Jarvis*

Exploring Crisis Leadership in Higher Education through an LGBTQIA Lens: A Case Study of Rutgers University's Crisis Response to Tyler Clementi's Death

DISSERTATION CHAIRS: DR. RALPH GIGLIOTTI AND DR. EBELIA HERNÁNDEZ

Arielle Rihl L'Esperance*

The Afterbirth of a Nation: Midwifery, Medical Education, and Nation-Making in Revolutionary and Antebellum America

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. BENJAMIN JUSTICE

Rachel Schwartz*

Understanding the Experiences of Women with Multiple Roles in Online Social Work Education Programs

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. RICHARD EDWARDS

Mark Walzer**

Interactions Between Underrepresented Students and STEM Faculty During the COVID-19 Pandemic

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. GARY GIGLIOTTI

Thomas Scott Zimmerman**

Promising Brighter Futures: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of the Impact of Promise Programs on BIPOC Student Outcomes in California and New Jersey

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. GARY GIGLIOTTI

Doctor of Philosophy

Amy Elise Adain*

AI-Driven Assessment and Scaffolding for Mathematical Modeling and Explanations During Science Investigations

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. JANICE GOBERT

Cristhian Camilo Altamirano

Graph Comprehension Among Developmental Mathematics Students Through a Sociocultural Perspective

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. DAKE ZHANG

Michael Jay Atzbi

A National Analysis of the Effects of State Policy on Access and Participation Rates in Advanced Mathematics Courses for Students from Historically Marginalized Groups

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. DREW GITOMER

Na'ama Yochana Av-Shalom

Trajectories of Epistemic Reasoning in Science: Socially Negotiated Configurations of AIR Components

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. RAVIT GOLAN DUNCAN

Marina Feldman*

Welcome to the Conversation Garden! Cultivating Learning Communities, Critical Praxis, and Asset-Based Thinking

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. MARY CURRAN

Nattawan Junboonta

Civic Education: The Courts and the Curriculum

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. BENJAMIN JUSTICE

Doctor of Philosophy

Ajua Paule-Andrée Kouadio

A Cocoon and a Cage: Protest, Policing, Punishment, and Surveillance in New York City Schools 1968-1974

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. BENJAMIN JUSTICE

Jeremy Yim Lee

Using Quantitative Comparisons and Student Log Files to Examine the Efficacy of Scaffolds for Multilingual Learners' Science Inquiry

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. JANICE GOBERT

Robin Tamarelli McKeon**

Navigating Uncharted Waters: Relational Trust and Evidence Use Among School Board Members and Administrators During the Covid-19 Pandemic

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. DREW GITOMER

Aaron D. Rabinowitz

Luckpilled: A New Pedagogy of Luck

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. BENJAMIN JUSTICE

Daniela Tirnovan*

Designing Translanguaging Spaces and Pedagogies in Second-Grade Mathematics Classrooms

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. ARTHUR B. POWELL

Debbie Stephanie Andres

Humanizing Pedagogy for Critical Science Education: A Framework for the Professional Development of Middle School Science Teachers

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. CARRIE LOBMAN

Valentina Arango-Correa

A Qualitative Study of Black Women Educators' Experiences with Racial and Gendered Microaggressions

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. SHARON RYAN

Stephen Graham Beun

At the Intersection of LGBTQIA+ and ADHD: The Lived Experiences of Multiply Marginalized Individuals

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. ANGELA O'DONNELL

John Bird

Impact of Student-Mentor Text Messaging on Chronic Absenteeism

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. JUDITH HARRISON

Jessica Cappadona

"NEVER FORGET!": A Case Study of Experiential Learning for Historical Empathy at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. CARRIE LOBMAN

Katherine Castro Guillen*

Pre-College Preparedness: First-Generation Students and STEM Focused Pre-College Programs

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. MARYBETH GASMAN

Gabriela Colón

Home Language Connections: Understanding Families'
Spanish Language Practices to Support
Family Engagement Opportunities

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. MARY CURRAN

Vanessa Maria Conroy

New Jersey Educators' Perceptions and Practices of LGBTQIA+ Student Inclusivity

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. NICOLE MIRRA

Kimberley Deng

From Coolies to "China Virus": A Narrative Inquiry on the Racialized Experiences of Chinese American Students in Higher Education

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. BENJAMIN JUSTICE

Jill C. Dobrowansky

Breaking Barriers: A Qualitative Study of Women Superintendents' Pathways and Leadership in New Jersey

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Megan Alyssa Ehrenfeld*

Real Talk: Exploring World Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Related to Authentic Texts

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Ronald Gerard Foley, Jr.*

Building Bridges in Mathematical Reasoning: How Students Connect Isomorphic Problems in Combinatorics

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. CAROLYN MAHER

Rosalyn Giallanza

Multilingual Learners and Mathematical Discourse:
A Qualitative Study Examining Elementary
Teacher Beliefs and Practices

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. SHARON RYAN

Bruce Robert Henecker*

How Do Teachers Lose Tenure in New Jersey Based on TEACHNJ Legislation: A Qualitative Content Analysis

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. DREW GITOMER

Chinazaekpere Melissa Onyile**

Understanding the Classroom Experiences of Black
First-Generation College Students Using the Strengths Perspective:
A Student and Instructor View

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. BENJAMIN JUSTICE

Dionne Stacy Titre Phillips*

Building Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Knowledge: Conversations with White Teachers of Students of Color

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. MARY CURRAN

Robert James Portella**

A Persistent Yet Dangerous Game of Solitaire: How the Neoliberal University Invisibilizes Single Student-Mothers

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. NICOLE MIRRA

James Allen Register, Jr.**

Welcome to Rutgers: A Study of the Efficacy of Byrne First-Year Seminars at Rutgers University

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. TANJA SARGENT

Jason L. Richardson

The Credit Recovery Experience at High Point High School:
A Qualitative Case Study

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. SHARON RYAN

Henna Tailor

An Inquiry into South Asian American High School Student Discourses

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. DAKE ZHANG

Damali Karima Tolson

Navigating First-Generation Identity: The Experiences of First-Generation College Students and the Assets They Utilize to Challenge and Overcome the Hidden Curriculum

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. NICOLE MIRRA

Todtanisha Waters**

The Voices of Black Alumni and Teachers from a No-Excuses Charter High School

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. NICOLE MIRRA

Shuman Wen**

Bilingual and Bicultural Support for First-Year Chinese International Students: A Case Study of the First-Year Study-Abroad Program

DISSERTATION CHAIR: DR. DAKE ZHANG

Education Specialists

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Janelle Jenkins*

Theresa Peterford**
Natalie Topylko

Master of Arts in Education

Ajua Kouadio

Renée Roundy

Master of Education

August 2024

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Lakeemah Adams

Daniel Arcentales

Lucy Bak

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Daecia-jamè Borgia

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Nicole Cocco

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Adeline Tao

Erin Taylor

Santina Winthrop

Karen Zatika

Master of Education

January 2025

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Emily Fhima

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Rachel McGarvey

Maliha Merchant

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Daniella Yusif

Master of Education

May 2025

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Sabrina Ahmed

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Cassidy Alia

Heba Alkhawam

Gabriella Alves

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Rebecca Briant

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Alexandra Casares

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Alexander Cavezza

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Fiona Cummings

Dasia Darden

Master of Education

May 2025

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Master of Education

May 2025

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