



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

MORGRIDGE COLLEGE
OF EDUCATION

IMPACT MORGRIDGE

2020 Dean's Annual Report

An **Extraordinary** Year

A Message from Dean Karen Riley

It is difficult to capture the past year in a word or a phrase. The convergence of two extraordinary historical events has spurred change and has shone a bright light on the need for systemic shifts that address long-standing social justice issues. A global pandemic has changed the basic ways in which we engage with one another and the ways in which we teach, learn, serve our community and conduct research. Our country is also in the midst of a long overdue renewed national movement for racial justice, which has challenged all of us to examine the ways in which we can affect meaningful and systemic change and address social injustice. The challenges are complicated and complex.

Higher education, and its role in the community, is in flux, but the Morgridge College of Education (MCE) is ready and committed to an approach that prioritizes impact and embraces the reality that we can and must always strive to do better.

Now is the time for higher education to rise to the challenge by growing its capacity to play a unique public intellectual role in service to the community. Due to the rapidly evolving landscape, colleges must be nimble, reflective and responsive. MCE is ideally suited to make a difference in this new era.

Not only do we have a unique set of assets and resources that lend particularly well to addressing relevant societal issues and to preparing students for a dynamic professional landscape, we also are home to a cadre of committed social change agents.

This year began with the implementation of our strategic plan, Impact Morgridge, and confirmed that as societal issues become increasingly complex and more challenging to address through one-size-fits-all approaches, we must utilize an intersystems approach to pave the way for breakthroughs on longstanding, multidimensional problems.



Dr. Karen Riley, dean and professor, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver.

We created and implemented interdisciplinary courses and curricula to prepare our students to work in industries that require a collaborative approach in order to meet the needs of those they serve. We coalesced as committed teachers and scholars to build upon our momentum and passion, creating new knowledge that extends further into the community. We also spent time focusing inward. We challenged ourselves to re-examine our values and actions, and committed to a path of social justice.

At the core of our mission is a strong commitment to creating meaningful social change that is rooted in deep, reciprocal relationships with our community. Our goal is to improve the human condition and improve the lives of others who are marginalized in society.

This challenging year confirmed my previous statements; the strength and determination of the MCE community is unparalleled. I am honored to lead this team and humbled by their resolve, creativity and laudable accomplishments.

It is clear that we have enjoyed remarkable success, have much work to do and are committed to an ambitious path forward. The MCE community has the ability to exemplify the valuable civic actor role that an institution of higher education plays in society by uniting systems in meaningful ways to address problems, influence policies and create systemic change.

Thank you for your continued support and for joining us on this journey.



Dr. Karen Riley
Dean and professor, Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver



Drs. Karen Riley, dean, and Kathy O'Bear, speaker, at the Morgridge College of Education's Fall Retreat.

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#112
TOP GRADUATE
SCHOOLS

U.S. News & World Report

U.S. News & World Report ranked
Morgridge College of Education as one
of the Top Graduate Schools in Education.



Teacher Education Program ranked
in top secondary teacher education
programs in
the nation.



Educational Leadership and Policy Studies ranked
in top educational
administration and
supervision programs
in the nation.

FINANCIAL AID

\$14.5M

Total received in university financial aid



130 Students received a graduate
assistantship, fellowship or
graduate teaching assistantship



77 Students received private,
philanthropic scholarships

ALUMNI

94%

Of 2018/19 graduates employed
or continued education within
6 months

385

Degrees/certificates
awarded in 2018/19

1,929

Alumni engaged

975 STUDENTS

- 66%** Full-time students
- 65%** White
- 13%** Hispanic or Latino
- 6%** African American or Black
- 6%** International
- 4%** Multiracial
- 4%** Asian American
- 1%** Native American
- 1%** Other

63 TOTAL FACULTY

- 95%** Full-time faculty
- 38** Tenured/tenure track
- 14** Clinical faculty
- 2** Professors of practice
- 154** Scholarly works

GRANTS



\$18M

2018/19 total grant funding

PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING



\$14.6M

Over the last four years



\$6.7M

Total philanthropic funding

COMMUNITY



200+

Partners

All data reflects the 2019/20 academic year unless otherwise noted.

26

DEGREES & CERTIFICATES

- 7 Certificates
- 9 Master's
- 1 EdS
- 3 EdD
- 6 PhD

10

PROGRAMS

Counseling Psychology
Curriculum and Instruction
Early Childhood Special Education
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Higher Education
Library and Information Science
Research Methods and Statistics
School Counseling
School Psychology
Teacher Preparation

4

INSTITUTES & CENTERS

Center for Rural School Health & Education
Kennedy Institute for Educational Success
Marsico Institute
Positive Early Learning Experiences Center

2

MODEL SCHOOLS

Fisher Early Learning Center
Ricks Center for Gifted Children

2020: A Year of **Impact**

This is What Impact Looks Like

2020 started strong at the Morgridge College of Education (MCE).

With full momentum, we had our strategic plan to guide us. It called for interdisciplinary action across the college from each of us — our students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors and partners — to help solve the complex challenges we face in education across the communities in which we live, work and serve, each and every day.

At MCE, we are unique. We have expert faculty in education who work across the fields of learning, policy, wellness, information science and human development. We have committed students who apply real-world learning to their academics inside and outside the classroom. And we have unwavering staff who bring decades of experience to their roles in the college.

Over the years, we have gone through intensive planning initiatives and discussions. We have learned that we need to work together as a community in order to achieve real and sustained impact. During the world's cries for racial justice and in the COVID-19 pandemic, we reflected on how we could come together across disciplines to better use our unique assets to elevate our mission and vision more than ever before.

At this time in our nation's history, reminders of our collective teamwork and the strong foundation that we have built over time at MCE are important. We are excited to share some of the highlights.

In 2020, MCE rose 22 spots in the annual U.S. News & World Report, making the list at 112. For several years, our Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program has been ranked among the top programs across the country and this year we were thrilled to be ranked 25. A historical first in the college, we were equally excited when we learned that our Teacher Education Program was ranked number 18 in the nation for secondary teacher education. On top of it all, our faculty nearly doubled their funded research.



Chalkbeat panelists meet with Dr. Karen Riley, dean. From left to right: Sen. Paul Lundeen; Chalkbeat News Bureau Chief Erica Meltzer; Sen. Nancy Todd; Dr. Karen Riley; and Reps. Colin Larson and James Coleman.

Leading within our community is part of our mission and our responsibility as educators. In January, MCE played a significant role in hosting more than 200 community members from across the field of education to attend Chalkbeat Colorado's Annual Legislative Preview. This bipartisan event is essential to the education community to set the stage on pivotal topics that surface in Colorado's legislative session, affecting thousands of students and educators across the state. Erica Meltzer, Chalkbeat's news bureau chief, moderated the panel and was joined by State Reps. James Coleman and Colin Larson, and State Sens. Paul Lundeen and Nancy Todd, who discussed everything from strengthening teacher preparation programs to equitable school funding and preschool expansion plans.

2020 was also a big year for mental health and wellness in education. The Department of Teaching and Learning Sciences hosted its second annual Social Emotional Learning Summit with our Office of Alumni Engagement. Led by Drs. Amy McDiarmid, clinical assistant professor, and Paul Michalec, clinical professor, and Betsy Leonard, community engagement specialist, the summit included State Rep. Dafna Michaelson Jenet and 130 cross-professional educators. With its sold-out attendance, the high demand further validated the crucial need for the community to convene on social emotional learning topics including anxiety, depression and suicide among Colorado's youth. On this day of impact, attendees departed the event with shared resources, support and expertise.

The Center for Rural School Health & Education (CRSHE) also received two large grants this year focused on student health and wellness, totaling \$5.1 million from the Colorado Health Foundation (CHF). It has only been two years since CRSHE came to MCE, and within that time, Dr. Elaine Belansky, executive director, along with her team, have made significant strides, partnering with rural communities in Colorado. Thanks to CHF's generous funding, CRSHE will be able to equip 27 high-poverty rural school districts with support, evidence-based resources and professional development in the next two years.

At the Marsico Institute, Drs. Douglas Clements and Julie Sarama, co-directors, received a \$4.5 million grant from the National Science Foundation to evaluate whether their LearningTrajectories.org web tool is by itself an effective intervention for young children and their teachers. Also, Drs. Clements, Sarama and Traci Kutaka, research associate, continued to expand their research in early childhood curriculum when they received a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). This project is a re-analysis, interpretation and new analysis of data from their existing IES-funded Learning Trajectories (LT) project, Evaluating the Efficacy of Learning Trajectories in Early Mathematics, which will inform the construction of two novel indicators of instructional efficacy to support teachers in the classroom.

While the academic year started off strong at MCE, we would be remiss to say that this year's global hardships haven't affected our community in personal and professional ways. During this time, we have paused and reflected on our responsibility to further elevate educational equity in our communities.

At the onset of the pandemic, CRSHE launched a resource website for Colorado educators looking for fun ways to engage learners and parents trying to get work done with children at home, and students trying to cope with the stay-at-home orders. The website included tips on talking with children about COVID-19, resources for at-home learning, mindfulness and self-care, healthy eating and physical activity and online teaching tools.

Dr. Cecilia Orphan, assistant professor in the Department of Higher Education, played an instrumental role in advocating for rural higher education institutions. In partnership with the Joyce Foundation, Orphan has begun to co-lead a grant-funded study totaling \$101,000 with the newly-launched Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges.

This work will identify how rural public higher education institutions are being impacted in real-time by COVID-19 budget shocks due to state funding cuts and rising costs associated with virus mitigation.

At MCE's Positive Early Learning Experiences (PELE) Center, Dr. Phil Strain, director, and his team of experts were very concerned that preschool children with disabilities would be more likely to experience negative consequences from the pandemic. In response, PELE created valuable resources for early care and education providers serving children with autism. The center provided weekly guidance for adult family members with children at home on topics such as building positive routines and creating visual supports. PELE's reach in the pandemic has been extensive. The center additionally supported school districts across multiple states, including Colorado, Iowa, Oregon and Washington to implement ideas and address real-time concerns.

MCE's interdisciplinary work in the midst of the pandemic signifies the impact of working together. In moments of uncertainty this year, we thought it was very important to celebrate the incredible accomplishments of our students. Although the celebrations looked different, the message and sentiment were the same. We recognized 30 remarkable students who showcased their research, leadership and commitments to equity and social justice across their fields of study during our virtual Student Awards Ceremony.

Additionally, the Class of 2020 graduated into a world where they would truly have an opportune moment to make an impact. Thanks to Dr. Karen Riley, dean, Dr. Mark Engberg, associate dean, each of our department chairs and MCE alumni, more than 300 of our graduates were sent off with well wishes to acknowledge their major milestones with family and friends across the globe online.

MCE remains committed to using education as a tool for creating positive social change in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion. At the time of finalizing this report, the college has come together again in unprecedented ways, and across disciplines, to identify existing efforts and to initiate new opportunities that will create meaningful change within the college, academy and broader community in the pursuit of racial justice.

While we embark on the road ahead, 2020 has solidified that when we work together, we will all continue to make an impact.

Impact **Rural**

Colorado Health Foundation Awards Center for Rural School Health & Education \$5.1M to Address Health and Wellness Challenges



Rural school partners and the Center for Rural School Health & Education team convene for a training in Pueblo, CO.

Just like their urban counterparts, school districts in rural Colorado confront daunting health and wellness challenges — everything from hungry children to students stressed by family turmoil and economic instability.

But unlike their urban peers, rural districts typically confront their challenges with fewer resources. For all their assets (think close-knit communities where everyone knows everyone's name), rural districts often are hampered by limited access to resources, insufficient budgets and tiny staffs where people wear multiple hats.

The Center for Rural School Health & Education (CRSHE) at the Morgridge College of Education (MCE) aims to change that. Thanks to two grants totaling \$5.1 million from the Colorado Health Foundation (CHF), CRSHE will spend the next two years supporting 27 high-poverty rural school districts in their efforts to foster student and staff health and wellness.

The largest of the awards, the \$4.9 million Make It Happen grant, aims to increase healthy eating and physical activity among high-poverty students and school staff, while the second award funds the Resiliency Project, an effort to promote youth mental health and resiliency.

Together, the grants address problems that undermine student learning and achievement, not to mention school performance.

“The big problem that we’re trying to address is the length of time it takes for rural schools to learn about and implement the latest best practices known to support students’ health. There are some really big inequities among rural youth compared to urban,” says Dr. Elaine Belansky, director of CRSHE and a research associate professor at MCE. “We know, for example, that suicide and depression rates are higher among rural youth, and we know that obesity levels are higher. And there’s also indication that some educational outcomes aren’t as good for rural students.”

Despite these challenges, Belansky is quick to point out several community assets. “People in rural communities care deeply about each other,” she explains. “Adults know most children in their community and vice versa. There is a culture of taking care of each other and pooling resources so that they stretch farther.”

Over the life of the grants, CRSHE will dispense the CHF funds directly to districts in the San Luis Valley and in southeast Colorado. In turn, Belansky says, the districts will use these funds to implement comprehensive health and wellness plans customized for their campuses.

Among other things, the new funds may be used for paying wellness coordinators, hosting staff wellness initiatives, purchasing equipment for physical activity, providing cooking classes and offering after-school activities.

As Belansky sees it, this help can’t come soon enough.

Lauren Sheldrake, grants manager and health and wellness coordinator for the Creede School District, notes that demand for comprehensive wellness programs is on the rise — among students, school staff and all the families concerned.

In the Creede district alone, she says, “The number of students reporting needs in the area of mental health has grown from five to 22 students and from zero staff members to 10 in the last year.”

Dramatic escalations like this loom large in Belansky’s motivation to help rural school districts address their challenges. It’s in part why CRSHE’s technical assistance team — made up of MCE faculty, staff and students — will offer one-on-one assistance to superintendents and wellness coordinators.

“We’ll have several touch points with each of the 27 districts to check in with them to see how they are doing with implementing their plan, find out what support they need, help them troubleshoot barriers and link them to other schools implementing similar initiatives. We’ll also take a lot of the pressure off those districts by helping them financially manage their grants,” Belansky says.

Just as important, the CRSHE team will connect the districts to evidence-based health curricula suitable for their needs. Carla Loecke, CRSHE’s director of curriculum and training, developed a user-friendly process for school wellness teams to select health education curriculum. Ben Ingman, the Make it Happen co-project leader says, “Teachers are best positioned to deliver a curriculum if they have training and support on its delivery.”

In Creede, Sheldrake says CRSHE’s work is already helping the district address its challenges to improve the health of students and staff, “This has helped to increase awareness and to destigmatize mental health in our school.”

Dr. Karen Riley, dean of MCE, considers CRSHE’s efforts pivotal to reducing disparity in rural Colorado. “I think this is truly a transformative project and exactly the type of work that we envisioned when we created CRSHE,” she says.

In 2018, CRSHE launched ECHO-DU — a virtual, professional development platform to increase workforce capacity in Colorado and across the country. Through the ECHO-DU program, professionals come together to discuss complex topics during a series of video conference sessions, called an ECHO. ECHOs create a safe and supportive space for professionals to learn together and share their challenges.

Participants also benefit from a team of experts who share resources and the latest best practices on specific topics.

As part of the Make It Happen grant, CRSHE is utilizing ECHO-DU to support the 27 school districts in implementing their health and wellness plans. The first series, held from January through March 2020, was aimed at supporting district wellness coordinators in their efforts to spearhead implementation of their comprehensive health and wellness plans. After the ECHO series concluded, wellness coordinators shared their takeaways.

One wellness coordinator said, “I just really appreciate the chance to network with other wellness coordinators that share similar demographics, successes and challenges. This is the best kind of professional development.” Another stated, “This series has been an excellent sharing resource. It helps to see what communities with similar demographics are doing and to learn from their experiences.”

As Belansky sees it, helping rural Colorado’s schools and students will help their communities as a whole. “I appreciate the ongoing support of CHF and their commitment to rural communities. Every child deserves the best opportunities possible, no matter their zip code. I’m continually impressed by the hard work I see rural superintendents, principals, teachers and staff put in on a daily basis to ensure their students have a high-quality experience. With this funding, I’m hopeful that our partnership with rural schools will lead to continued positive health and education outcomes.”



Wellness coordinators Make it Happen with ECHO-DU.

Impact Community

Library and Information Science Students
Archive Colorado's History for Future Generations



Photos saved by Park County volunteers that Library and Information Science students used to archive.

When the Park County Department of Heritage, Tourism & Community Development needed help moving its historical archive into the digital age, they reached out to the Morgridge College of Education's Library and Information Science (LIS) program. Dr. Krystyna Matusiak, associate professor, was delighted to answer the call and jumped at the opportunity for her students to have hands-on experience archiving Colorado's history in a way that would have an impact on generations to come.

Park County, located 120 miles west of Denver at the geographic center of Colorado, has a rich history of mining

and railroading. As of the 2000 census, the county population density is seven people per square mile. Its historical archives date back to the late 19th century.

"Until now, the archives had been maintained by generous volunteers," Matusiak said. "They meant well, but they were not professional archivers, and many of the items were in boxes and needed to be preserved. I quickly realized we needed funding for what they needed, so I wrote a grant and applied to the University of Denver's Public Good grant program."

Matusiak's grant was approved, and the Department of Research Methods and Information Science was able to cover the transportation costs for Matusiak and select graduate students to travel to Park County to complete the project. In the end, Matusiak and three LIS students, Sam Carlson, Sarah Werling and Lisa Donovan collaborated on the project.

Digitization of photo and oral histories is important in ensuring archives have a long life. As Matusiak and her students continued their archiving process, each realized the value of their work for Park County, its residents and themselves.

"The oral histories are very, very interesting," said Matusiak. "They really tell the life stories of the people who lived in the community."

Donovan, who has been working to digitize the oral histories, says that it is most impactful to know that after she has finished her work, a grandchild might be able to hear the voice of their grandmother or grandfather for the first time.

The first year of the project resulted in creating the Park County Local History Digital Archive, which currently includes more than 500 digitized photographs and 16 oral histories. Once the archive is complete, all of it will be accessible online, where community members, educators, historians and anyone who would like can learn about Park County's storied history.

"It's promoting the preservation, not only of the objects in the collection, but of the whole area, and the more attention we can bring to it, the more historic preservation projects can come out of it," said Carlson.

For Matusiak, the project has informed the direction of her next research project.

"We have applied for funding for the next year, so we can complete the archives," she said. "I personally have started research in Park County. I am just starting my interviews, but I am excited to see where this can take me, and its impact on the community."



Dr. Krystyna Matusiak meets with members of the Park County Archive project.

Impact Youth

In a Groundbreaking Research Project, Two Professors
Measure Creativity to Nurture Young Learners

How to measure creativity has long been a challenge for researchers. Two Morgridge College of Education (MCE) professors, Drs. Denis Dumas and Peter Organisciak, both from the Department of Research Methods and Information Science, have been working to address this historical challenge in education and apply their research outside of academia.

The pair have been named co-principal investigators on a three-year, \$964,081 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. This project, in partnership with Dr. Selcuk Acar at the University of North Texas, is developing a new test for Original Thinking, or creativity, in elementary school students.

The research team is highly interdisciplinary, consisting of specialists in gifted education, measurement and assessment and information science. Building from this rich collaboration, the team will develop a new test instrument for creativity to administer to children, as well as algorithmic tools to automatically score that test.

They call their new system the Measure of Original Thinking in Elementary Students (MOTES), and it will adopt text mining methods, mining language from millions of child-oriented books, TV shows and movies in order to identify which elementary students are capable of generating the most original ideas.

While measuring Original Thinking in children has a long history, the manual scoring of existing tests limits their accessibility because many schools cannot afford the costs and logistics of such tests. Additionally, manual scoring introduces measurement error into the scores. Therefore, fewer children are measured for Original Thinking, contributing to the underrepresentation of students from historically marginalized populations in gifted and talented programs.

This is amplified in rural and other under-resourced communities and there is a need for screening tools that allow the measurement of Original Thinking in a large number of students quickly and at lower cost.

“To be able to provide a cutting-edge measure like this — totally free to educators and school leaders — will lead to a turning point in how schools think about highly creative kids, and how to identify and nurture them,” said Dumas.

Organisciak says of the approach, “The past few years have seen a great deal of innovation in natural language processing, which can benefit education measurement through better understanding of responses that can only be collected in open-ended ways. I’m excited to translate those methods to practice, and hopefully make an impact on how schools serve children.”

At project completion, the MOTES will continue to make an impact with its availability to education practitioners and researchers who can obtain instant scores, for free. The team will also present findings from the research in conference presentations and in peer-reviewed publications, as well as in class with their students at MCE.



As part of Drs. Dumas and Organisciak's research, elementary students will need to show their creativity with everyday objects.

Impact Faculty

Dr. Jesse Owen Awarded \$2M Grant to Study How Gratitude, Forgiveness and Humility Can Improve Well-Being

The past 30 years have seen the emergence of positive psychology, the study of fostering virtues like gratitude, forgiveness and humility, as a counterbalance to psychology's tendency to focus largely on describing psychological problems, or what happens when things go wrong. While positive psychology has made headway in fields like education, its findings have yet to be integrated into many psychologists' and psychiatrists' mental health care practices.

Dr. Jesse Owen, professor and former chair of the Department of Counseling Psychology, is stepping in to make an impact. Owen was awarded a \$2 million, multi-year grant from the John Templeton Foundation to study how psychotherapy can contribute to people being able to live more meaningful lives. Especially fitting is the vision of the Templeton Foundation, which looks "forward to a world where people are curious about the wonders of the universe, motivated to pursue lives of meaning and purpose, and overwhelmed by great and selfless love."

Owen and Dr. Steven Sandage, professor of Psychology of Religion and Theology and research director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Psychology at Boston University (BU), are leading a multi-year investigation to measure whether growth in gratitude, forgiveness and humility can predict — or even help to cause — growth in general flourishing and well-being among mental health clients.

This multi-site project includes collaboration between the Albert and Jessie Danielsen Institute and the Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders at BU, as well as McLean Hospital at Harvard Medical School. Each site is conducting clinical research projects with differing treatment options but within a shared framework and set of research questions. Owen and Sandage hope that the project will offer clinicians higher levels of scientific rigor and clinical application to shift the conversation in mental health from symptom alleviation to allowing clients to thrive. "I am excited for the possibilities to explore client and therapist flourishing," Owen said, "to promote what we all truly want — to live the good life."



Dr. Jesse Owen is a professor in the Morgridge College of Education's Department of Counseling Psychology.

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I am excited for the possibilities to explore client and therapist flourishing, Owen said, to promote what we all truly want — to live the good life.

Impact Alumni

With a Counseling Career Ahead of Her,
Patricia Garcia Aims to Make an Impact at Home

When she enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of New Mexico, Patricia Garcia envisioned a career in medicine.

“For as long as I could remember,” she recalls, “I had always wanted to be a doctor. And then I started taking psychology classes for fun, and I realized it was something I was passionate about.” After all, she says, her psychology classes tapped into two deep-seated desires: “I could help people, and I could also understand people.”

She went on to pursue a double major in psychology and Spanish, graduating in 2016. This past June, she received her hard-earned master’s degree in Counseling Psychology from the Morgridge College of Education (MCE) and is now poised to make an impact in her community.

With her newly minted degree, Garcia plans to return to New Mexico to work with populations that face the same challenges she once confronted. As a self-described Third Culture kid, she grew up an American citizen in a household headed by two immigrant parents rooted in their home culture. Negotiating the demands of the two cultures required “a fine balance.”

“You don’t fit in here, and you don’t fit in there,” she says. With questions of identity paramount in her youth and college years, she sought a stronger sense of who she is and how she can contribute.

“For a long time I couldn’t figure out how I identify as a Latina,” she says. Today, she knows that, for her, being a Latina means helping others understand their identity and channel their talents into fully realized lives.

Her sense of her own talents and powers was refined at MCE, she says, noting that her classroom experiences were reinforced by opportunities to put textbook learning to work in real-world settings.

“One of the big things that this program does is we immediately get immersed in doing counseling,” she says.

Garcia especially enjoyed testing her counseling skills at The Bridge Project, a free after-school and tutoring program formerly run by the University of Denver’s (DU) Graduate School of Social Work.

She leaves DU with a host of honors for her resumé. Chief among them is a prestigious Services for Transition Age Youth Fellowship from the American Psychology Association’s Minority Fellowship Program. It prepares recipients to provide mental health services to youth ages 16 through 25 and their families.

She also served as a community-engaged fellow with DU’s Center for Community Engagement to advance Scholarship and Learning. In that role, she worked on questions related to health equity, meeting with community groups to learn about what needs are and are not being met and why.

“It has definitely been an eye-opener,” she says, noting that through the process she connected with people from diverse backgrounds — among them many migrants — and learned about their specific challenges. In doing so, she came to “acknowledge my own privilege” and understand how people from different backgrounds bring varying perspectives to everyday realities.

“With counseling, I can sit down with a person and really get to know a person’s needs,” she explains. “That’s a prerequisite for delivering lasting help. And I have always wanted to do something to help people.”



Patricia Garcia is a graduate of the Morgridge College of Education's Department of Counseling Psychology.

Impact Learning: **Fisher**

Fostering a Life-long Love of Education

At Fisher Early Learning Center (Fisher), teachers have been tasked with fostering a love of learning among the University of Denver's (DU) youngest scholars. Fisher, an infant through preschool early learning center, falls under the umbrella of the Morgridge College of Education (MCE) and offers hands-on learning experiences for our graduate students in an atmosphere where children can thrive.

Over the past year, Fisher was fortunate to hire Jill Pasion as its curriculum and instruction specialist to implement and improve its new curriculum.

"Pasion arrived at Fisher with extensive knowledge of early childhood curriculum and played an integral role in how Fisher continues to refine its curriculum to meet the needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers," said Hema Visweswaraiah, director of Fisher.

Pasion implemented a primary caregiving system for infants and toddlers, supporting project-based learning in preschool and adopting the Connect4Learning (C4L) curriculum, authored by Drs. Doug Clements and Julie Sarama, co-directors of MCE's Marsico Institute. C4L was developed through funding from the National Science Foundation and draws on interdisciplinary connections between mathematics, science, literacy and social emotional learning.

"When Fisher temporarily closed in mid-March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this solid curricular foundation proved to be critical as teachers and staff transitioned to online learning," said Visweswaraiah.

During the early weeks of the pandemic, teachers focused on one-on-one connections and supported families in their child's development. They provided individual story times, conducted socially-distanced home visits and had frequent conversations with parents to address families' individual needs.

In addition, the center kept classroom communities connected, while adding elements of developmentally appropriate learning activities.

Daily circle times were held, along with small groups and clubs, which allowed teachers to provide children with more intimate learning opportunities. After nine weeks of remote learning, Fisher began a process of gradual and safe reopening.

According to Visweswaraiah, "The transition back to school was smoother and more successful than anticipated."

These unprecedented efforts of Fisher staff, parents and students kept everyone engaged and connected, creating a tighter-knit community of support.

The center began a new school year at full capacity in July. This year, Fisher looks forward to renovating both the infant and toddler playgrounds, putting its curriculum in practice through play. Through collaboration with Didier Design Studio, DU and Fisher have designed a space inclusive of various terrains and engaging components to enhance outdoor motor and sensory play.

Fisher will expand the current infant play area to nearly three times its size, allowing ample space for infants and young toddlers to explore and grow. Opportunities for crawling, climbing, hanging, sand and water play are just a few of the new updates. The toddler playground will also see a significant makeover to establish a nature inspired play area that will challenge learners to utilize their imaginations and skills as they engage in dramatic play and sensory and motor experiences. Both playground renovations are sure to amaze and excite DU's youngest scholars.



Ms. Shelby Wones leads her students in a play-based activity at Fisher Early Learning Center. Wones will begin the Library and Information Science master's program at the Morgridge College of Education in the fall.

Impact Learning: **Ricks**

Strong Leadership and Community Continues in Digital Space at Ricks

With COVID-19 shutting down schools and pushing instruction to the virtual classroom, many parents at the Ricks Center for Gifted Children (Ricks) – a model pre-K through eighth grade school located on the University of Denver (DU) campus – found themselves with new multitasking challenges.

As an alum of the Morgridge College of Education's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program, Craig Harrer, director of Ricks, was perfectly positioned to guide parents, students and staff in tailoring individualized education to meet student needs while moving to a virtual learning environment.

At the onset of the pandemic, Harrer shared tips on how parents could talk to their children about the virus, help their children adapt to a virtual classroom and assignments, and incorporate social engagement virtually.

"We've seen success with allowing for some social engagement in our Zoom meetings at lunch, enabling students to have a lunchtime where they chat with their friends," he said. "For younger students, a Zoom snack time is fun. It's also helpful when teachers can divide students up into work groups so that they can be more focused with just a few students."

"I would also encourage short Zoom or FaceTime sessions with family, classmates and teachers. For the youngest students, teacher interaction seems to be the most powerful tool for their social and virtual engagement."

One form of social engagement involved Ricks' teachers organizing drive-through parades to continue the tradition of celebrating students' birthdays. The drive-through birthdays allowed Ricks families, staff and students a creative way to celebrate and served as an example of the resiliency and dedication of the Ricks community.

To quote one of the Ricks kindergarten teachers, "Birthday parades have become such a special and heartfelt tradition – I think it lifts everyone's spirits!"



The Ricks community celebrates student birthdays.

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Our Programs

At the Morgridge College of Education,
We're Forging the Future Together

Counseling Psychology (CP) – Awareness and Prevention

The social justice focused CP program gives students the skills to become thoughtful, self-reflective practitioners, researchers or leaders so they can go on to counsel adolescents, adults, children, couples or families from diverse cultural backgrounds. CP students are equipped to help people struggling with addiction or other mental health challenges. The CP training enhances students' skills and knowledge to integrate clients' psychological challenges with societal issues and provide culturally sensitive treatment. Faculty research explores many exciting and critically important areas such as class, race, ethnicity, relationship counseling, women's issues and health and well-being. Students examine these issues and apply what they learn through hands-on experience at their placements. The CP program teaches them how to think critically and strategically, so they will be able to meet the diverse needs of the people they will serve.



Curriculum and Instruction (CI) – Innovation and Creativity

The CI program equips students with the skills to critique, construct and implement innovative, inclusive and effective instruction and pedagogy. Whether our students are professors, K–12 teachers, student services administrators or consultants, they are able to turn their education and ideas into a well-structured, inspired curricula. The program faculty work toward the development of the most effective pedagogy, curriculum, scholarship and care for students that is needed to address the current state of education in private and public, as well as formal and informal education settings.



Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) – Early Support – Lifelong Outcomes

The ECSE program is as unique as the young children and families that our graduates serve in public schools, child care programs, early intervention programs (Head Start and Early Head Start), and family support and home-based programs. Nationally-renowned faculty specialize in Fragile X syndrome, autism, play-based assessment and holistic intervention strategies. ECSE students gain hands-on experience in one of our two on-campus model schools, Ricks Center for Gifted Children and Fisher Early Learning Center and throughout Denver metro school districts.



Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) – Leading with Courage

As one of the top 25 leadership programs in the nation, the ELPS program trains professionals to not just lead their schools, but to transform them. By infusing transformative leadership, equity-based practices and innovative processes into curriculum, ELPS has created one of the most successful private college–public school partnerships in the nation. ELPS partners with local education agencies to develop educational leaders to progressively address the current challenges facing schools and other educational systems.



Department of Higher Education (HED) – Access and Equity

With a focus on equity, inclusive excellence and justice, students in HED engage in research, policy and practice to understand and transform education systems. Students work alongside the department's award-winning faculty in preparation for careers in post-secondary education related to administration, policy, teaching and research. Upon graduation, they go on to work in both public and private agencies of higher education. HED prides itself on being a collaborative community that supports students, expands access to education and implements positive change.



Library and Information Science (LIS) – Change Agents for Our Information Society

From libraries and archives, to corporations and nonprofits, LIS professionals are at the forefront of change. Guided by the values of diversity and social responsibility, the program prepares librarians and information professionals to tackle issues in information organization, service, technology and data curation to meet the needs of children, teens, adults, students, researchers and communities from all walks of life. In partnership with our communities, students take on local challenges and act as global-minded citizens. They advocate for equitable information access as the foundation of informed citizenry, civic participation, literacy and meaningful leisure. Designed for the information age, LIS is offered both on campus and online.

Research Methods and Statistics (RMS) – Challenging Assumptions

In a society overwhelmed with information, the ability to produce rigorous research for diverse audiences has never been more critical. The RMS program goes beyond educational research to include social, behavioral and health research. We equip students with cutting-edge quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches for research and evaluation to tackle the ever-growing challenges of our day. Students develop advanced and holistic data analytical skills for promoting social justice and the public good. And our action-based research approach allows students to work closely with our experienced faculty and community partners and start research practice right away.

School Psychology (SP) – 360 Wellness Through Research, Advocacy and Service

When it comes to crisis intervention and mental health, schools have become the focus for addressing these issues. The SP program is training mental health professionals to navigate the multifaceted challenges of these ever-changing environments. Our graduates are administrators, national leaders, practitioners and researchers. Through real-world, practical experience and instruction from our nationally-recognized faculty, SP students are prepared to embark on their careers with tools to support children, families, schools and communities across diverse cultural, ethnic and geographic settings.



School Counseling (SC) – Shaping Students' Lives

The SC online master's program shapes social-justice-focused school counselors who can use their thorough understanding of educational systems and complex counseling concepts to directly serve and advocate for children and adolescents in P-12 schools. The degree helps students develop a strong school counseling identity and teaches them how to successfully address the academic, career and social emotional needs of diverse students. Students also learn how to use data to identify schoolwide trends and develop appropriate programs that help the student population thrive as a whole.



Teacher Education Program (TEP) – Making a Difference

The Morgridge College of Education is a national leader in quality teacher preparation with a focus on equity in education. Our students strive to motivate, guide and inspire future generations. More than almost any other profession, teaching provides the opportunity to make a significant, tangible difference in the world. In TEP, our students complete a yearlong residency that facilitates deep integration of theory and practice. The Urban Teacher Fellowship (UTF) program positions selected teacher candidates in highly impacted schools and provides them with the support necessary to both learn and thrive. UTF students receive their graduate training as part of TEP, and complete their one-year teacher residency in selected schools within Denver Public Schools.

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Now is the time for higher education to rise to the challenge by growing its capacity to play a unique public intellectual role in service to the community. Due to the rapidly evolving landscape, colleges must be nimble, reflective and responsive. MCE is ideally suited to make a difference in this new era.

— Dr. Karen Riley, dean and professor,
Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver



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MORGRIDGE COLLEGE
OF EDUCATION

University of Denver
Morgridge College of Education
1999 East Evans Avenue
Denver, CO 80208-1700

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