

# The Advisor

Newsletter of the Educational Studies Program at  
Eastern Michigan University

September 23, 2021

## Editors

Jennifer Bennett  
jvance@emich.edu

Sara Muchmore  
smuchmo1@emich.edu

## Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Rae Oviatt



Dr. Rae Oviatt, Assistant  
Professor in Teacher Education

The Teacher Education Department within the College of Education recently welcomed its newest faculty member, Dr. Rae Oviatt. Dr. Oviatt, whose pronouns are she/her, is a graduate of Michigan State University and describes her path to Ypsilanti as one paved in her desire to serve the community around her. When we sat down together, Dr. Oviatt effortlessly blended together educational theory, a high set of morals and a deep spiritual connection to her work, which she will undoubtedly bring to the classroom. Within the classroom at EMU, she would like to focus on urban studies, (QT)BIPOC civic/critical literacies, and secondary education.

With prior experience in the K-12 classroom as both a National Endowment for the Humanities Teacher Fellow and Library of Congress Teacher Leader, she is extremely passionate about community engaged research. Dr. Oviatt brings a strong belief that the work we do as academics should not only benefit the institution, but the community around it; that community engaged research is relational, respectful, reciprocal, responsible and sustainable. Within our discussion, it became clear that Dr. Oviatt has a keen eye for social justice and for how some of our work, as researchers, can unknowingly perpetuate colonialism. For instance, she made a very pointed note to discern that the principles of community engaged research that she cited were informed by the Indigenous 4 R's, despite not being an Indigenous scholar, nor working with Indigenous communities herself ([Kirkness and Barnhardt, 2001](#)). Additionally, while she fully believes in decolonizing research strategies, she is also profoundly aware of the mindful individual reflection that one must bring to the epistemological framework, and how true decolonial methods involve a large-scale level of reparative and restorative action. She was also deeply thoughtful on how the audience acutely informs the research methods required. She states, "as a person who does community engaged and youth participatory action research, it has to do with the questions the community or the youth are asking. Oftentimes it's best that we take up looking at the existing research and a lot of times that's the research the systems have taken up, in order to speak back to the systems." At the same time, Dr. Oviatt says that she really loves multi-modal and arts-based research methods, so her work mostly ends in mixed methods products.

Dr. Oviatt says that her advice for doctoral students and teachers is the same: "do what is aligned with your heart and purpose, and while you're in the process of deconstructing everything you have learned, try not to tear everything else down around you. There's a possibility to deconstruct without destructing. There's more self-love on the other side." Welcome, Dr. Oviatt! We are so happy you have joined us!

---

## Dear Dr.

*I've heard a variety of stories about comprehensive exams, some reassuring and some terrifying. How soon should I really start thinking about comps? What advice do you have for planning ahead?*

Dear Perplexed Pre-planner,


The comprehensive exam stage is both an exciting and scary step! I don't have a simple answer for when to start preparing for comps because there are multiple factors to consider, including how long you've had your topic solidified and what else you have going on in your life. Staying organized and keeping careful notes throughout the program is helpful, of course, as well as any time spent specifically preparing for comps. Having easy access to my notes and texts (digital and/or hard copies) and sorting them by question as best I could made comps a bit easier for me.

I changed my topic at the very end of my coursework, so I ended up spending about eight months specifically focused on comps preparation. Others in my cohort spent a few months preparing for comprehensive exams. We were all working outside of the program (some part-time and some full-time positions) and most had young children too, so planning *when* to complete comps so the timing worked best with our own schedules was important. A regular writing schedule is a great habit to get into—figure out when you get your best writing and thinking done (it's the morning for me), when you can focus on reading, and when you're only able to focus on getting minor revision or editing work done (by the end of the day, that's all I'm capable of accomplishing). Develop a writing plan to help you approach your questions in a timely manner that allows you to revise at the end.

While it's important to plan ahead for the actual work of comps, there are other things to consider too. You need to be able to take breaks from writing and thinking. Your brain needs time to relax and process! Spend time with friends inside and outside academia. Arrange for others to send you motivational messages throughout the process. Move your body in a way you enjoy and figure out what helps you work through stress and anxiety. You will learn so much about yourself and your topic completing comps. Good luck!

- Dr. Kaia-Marie Bishop

Do you have a question for Dear Dr.? Please send your questions about activism, education, scholarship, or career to the [Advisor Message Box](#) for inclusion in a future newsletter.



## Hats off to You! 🎩

Congratulations to those who have recently completed their dissertation defenses!

- Dr. Kaia-Marie Bishop
- Dr. Jacquie Pruder St. Antoine

And to those who have recently passed their comprehensive exams!

- Laila Chraim
- Jason DeCamillis
- Kim Dixson Ferrell
- Betsy Stoelt
- Alison Wink

We'd love to share your accomplishments here! Please send news of your presentations, publications, and other special events to our [message box](#) for inclusion in next month's issue.

## Conference at EMU

The Michigan Alliance for Environmental and Outdoor Education conference will be held at EMU on October 1-3. The conference offers a variety of workshops and field trips exploring topics such as Place-Based Education, diversity and equity, and STEM learning. Presenters at the conference include four students in the Ed Studies program, Kelsey DeCamillis, Jason DeCamillis, Miriam Furlan Brighente, and Jennifer Bennett. You can learn more about the conference and register to attend at that [MAEOE website](#).

## New Year Goals

What are you hoping to accomplish in the new academic year? Presentations? Comps? New skills? Travels? Share your goals for the year in our [message box](#), and we'll include them in our next issue to help us all celebrate and support each other.

## Community of Scholars

Our Community of Scholars gatherings resume on Monday, October 4 at 8:00 pm. This year, we'll continue to meet on Zoom from the comfort and safety of our own homes.

This year's gatherings will be on the first and third Mondays of each month from 8:00 to 9:00 pm. Please watch for future announcements with the Zoom link and gathering topics. If you have any suggestions for topics you would like us to cover in our meetings, you can share them through the [Advisor Message Box](#).

## Advisor Message Box

We have created a digital message box this year to make it easier for everyone to contribute to *The Advisor*. You can access the message box at [this link](#) or with the QR code below.

Please use this message box to share good news and accomplishments for our Hats Off section, questions for Dear Dr., article topic requests, and any other questions or suggestions you may have. We look forward to hearing from you!



### Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies

The Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies prepares educators from a variety of community organizations (P-12 schools, higher education and other community contexts) to engage in effective research and practice about teaching and learning within complex social, political and economic systems. A key underlying emphasis of the program is a focus on poverty and its specific impact on urban, as well as suburban and rural communities.



## Save the Date: First Annual EDST Fall Celebration!

Please plan to join us for this fun event on Saturday, October 9 between noon and 3:00 PM. Students, faculty, and families in our Ed Studies community will gather on the lawn between the Porter and Marshall buildings to kick off the new year together.

Families are welcome, and lunch will be served. In case of rain, we'll move our celebration to Saturday, October 16.

Watch more for more details to follow. We hope you'll join us!