

# Provost Award: Excellence in Research and Scholarship 2022 Award Winners

April 27, 2022

## Ailton Santonio Coleman

A native of Dinwiddie, Virginia, Dr. Ailton Santonio Coleman is the first African American male and Asian American to receive a Ph.D. in Public Health from the University of Connecticut. Dr. Coleman has been the recipient of several academic awards throughout his career. He received a B.A. from Georgia State University in Spanish, Language and International Business and in Political Science, International Affairs as a Georgia HOPE Scholar. While at the University of Arizona, Dr. Coleman completed work in community nutrition education and obesity research as a Paul Coverdell Peace Corps Fellow and earned his Master of Public Health in Public Health Policy and Management. As a doctoral candidate in Social and Behavioral Health Science, Dr. Coleman was a Codero-Crandall Fellow at the University of Connecticut and completed his post-doctoral studies as an Oak Ridge Institute of Science and Education Fellow in Program Evaluation with the US Army Public Health Center. In



**Ailton Santonio Coleman**  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Health Sciences  
College of Health and Behavioral  
Studies

2021, Dr. Coleman was selected for the Obesity Health Disparities PRIDE Fellowship through the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Coleman's research has focused on men's health, specifically how gender roles promote healthy and unhealthy behaviors related to chronic disease. Using an eco-social approach, Dr. Coleman has published extensively on the role of fatherhood as a protective factor in the Black community. His [recent publication on the social demographic predictors of father-son closeness](#) was published in *Phylon*, a peer-reviewed journal started by famed African American scholar W.E.B. Dubois. Dr. Coleman is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Republic of Kiribati, '01) and serves as a board member for the Council on Black Health.

## Rebecca B. French

Rebecca B. French is the Head of Metadata Analysis & Operations and an Assistant Professor at James Madison University Libraries. She leads a team responsible for special formats cataloging, metadata for special and digital collections, e-resource batch loading, and metadata analysis and remediation. She also designs workflows, tools and processes for efficiently creating, manipulating, transforming and analyzing metadata at scale.

Rebecca's scholarship focuses on the design and automation of metadata workflows and supporting staff professional development through intentional project planning. She has developed [an original framework for categorizing batch cataloging projects](#) to guide workflow creation and the selection of tools and technologies. She has also published on the role of authority records and researcher identifiers in online visibility.

Rebecca received her B.A. *summa cum laude* from The College of William & Mary and her M.L.S. from Indiana University.



**Rebecca B. French**  
Assistant Professor  
Head of Metadata Analysis &  
Operations

[JMU Libraries](#)

## Kelly Naletelich

Dr. Kelly Naletelich is an Assistant Professor of Marketing. She received her B.S. in Business Management and Economics from Rocky Mountain College and her M.B.A from Midwestern State University. Dr. Naletelich joined JMU in 2018 after earning her Ph.D. in Business (concentration in Marketing) from the University of North Texas.

Dr. Naletelich's research is grounded within consumer behavior and focuses on sensory marketing, motivation and information processing, emphasizing imagery, co-creation and creativity. Her current research explores how different forms of imagery (e.g., abstract vs. representational) influence consumer outcomes. She also enjoys conducting social marketing research that she hopes can positively impact society. For example, she has published papers that examine enhancing consumer sustainability behavior and decreasing distracted driving, which various media outlets have featured. Her research has been published in several journals, including the *[Journal of Business Research](#)*, the *[European Journal of Marketing](#)* and the *[Journal of Services Marketing](#)*. Dr. Naletelich has presented her work at international conferences and received several summer research grants from the College of Business. She also enjoys giving back to the profession by serving as a reviewer for academic journals and working with students by serving as an honors project chair, an honors project reader or mentoring through the CoB Research Experience for Undergraduates.



### **Kelly Naletelich**

Assistant Professor  
[Department of Marketing](#)  
[College of Business](#)

## Matt Pardo

Matt Pardo (M.F.A, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Advanced Honors B.F.A, University at Buffalo) has danced for the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble, Groundworks Dance Theater, RG Dance Projects, the River North Chicago Dance Company (apprentice) and the Lucinda Childs Dance Company. He was recognized as one of the “Top 100 Dancers in the World for 2010-2011”, one of 10 Americans, by Dance Europe Magazine.

Teaching and choreographic credits include American Dance Festival, Elon University, Shenandoah University, Skidmore College, Broadway Dance Center, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre School, Centre National de Danse (Paris) and Point Park University. His opera credits include the world tour of the Olivier award-winning Philip Glass opera *Einstein on the Beach* and *The Daughter of the Regiment*



**Matt Pardo**

Assistant Professor

School of Theatre and Dance  
College of Visual and  
Performing Arts

at Pittsburgh Opera, which was directed and choreographed by Séan Curran.

Pardo is a co-founder/director of The Blanket, a production company that has been featured in *Dance Magazine-online*, *Departures Magazine* (American Express), *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and the *US News and World Report*, as well as on NPR-WESA shows in Pittsburgh. The Blanket has produced four major evening-length productions which individually showcased seminal artists Lucinda Childs (2017 and 2021), Christopher Williams (2018) and Beth Gill (2019). The Blanket has been funded by The Heinz Endowments, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Opportunity Fund, Arts Equity & Education Fund, PNC Charitable Trust, and The William and Catherine McKinney Charitable Foundation, as well as by private donors. Most recently (October 2021), The Blanket produced a week-long run of Lucinda Childs' masterpiece *DANCE* at the Joyce Theater in NYC which was featured in the [Fjord Review](#), [The New York Times](#) and more.

Publications include an article in the *Journal of Dance Education* investigating the utilization of minimalist choreographic practices in dance classrooms, which are employed to aid dance students in the development of more individualized and functional practices of performance.

For more information, please visit [matt-pardo.com](http://matt-pardo.com) or [theblanket.org](http://theblanket.org)

## Paul Raston

In 1999 Paul Raston earned a BSc at Griffith University, Australia, where he was first exposed to molecular spectroscopy from the likes of Alan Knight. In 2007, he received a Ph.D. from the University of Wyoming, USA, under the guidance of David Anderson, where he investigated tunneling reactions in solid hydrogen. His first postdoc was in the group of Wolfgang Jäger at the University of Alberta, Canada, where he investigated finite-sized superfluidity, and his second postdoc was in the group of Gary Douberly at the University of Georgia, USA, where he investigated helium solvated radicals. This was followed by a Ramsay Fellowship at the University of Adelaide, Australia, where Raston's research team characterized unstable species in the gas phase. In 2015, Paul joined the faculty at James Madison University, USA, where he has worked with amazing undergraduate students who helped build a helium nanodroplet isolation spectrometer. In 2019 Paul was honored with a Cottrell Scholar Award, and in 2022 he received an NSF CAREER Award.

### [Raston's research group](#)

currently focuses on investigating microscopic superfluidity, atmospheric chemistry and astrochemistry, using an array of high-resolution microwave and infrared spectroscopic techniques.



**Paul Raston**  
Assistant Professor  
**Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry**  
**College of Science and Mathematics**

## Maryam Sharifian

Through her involvement in international projects, Dr. Sharifian has been working to advocate for education for children around the world and specifically in the Middle East. At the same time, she has been involved at the local, state and national levels to bring change to early childhood education in local communities throughout the United States. In June 2021, she was awarded the largest single-year grant in the history of JMU with \$3,654,000. Commenting to [Madison Magazine](#) and [JMU News](#): "This is a historic time for our community to create equitable access to high-quality early childhood education for all children and families across the Commonwealth."

Her goal is to conduct research that has clear practical implications. She earned her undergrad and graduate degrees in Iran and a Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education from the University at Buffalo, NY. She is currently the Director of Early Childhood Initiatives at James Madison University, an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education and the Program Director of the ECED 2+2 BIS program. In addition, she has served as the PI of the Preschool Development Grant, Mixed Delivery Grant, VIVA Course Design and STEPs Grant to increase access and equity in high-quality early childhood education in Virginia. Dr. Sharifian addresses educational issues relating to [children and teachers in areas of armed conflict](#) (their wellbeing and resilience strategies) and equity and access to high-quality education in marginalized populations.



**Maryam Sharifian**  
Assistant Professor and  
Director of Early Childhood  
Initiatives  
[Department of Early,  
Elementary and Reading  
Education](#)  
[College of Education](#)



## Case Watkins

Case Watkins is a cultural and environmental geographer and Assistant Professor of Justice Studies at James Madison University. Dr. Watkins studies the interactions of politics, cultures and environments; how they shape landscapes and societies, and what they can teach us about social and environmental justice. Based on mixed-method fieldwork in Brazil, Portugal and Louisiana, his research has examined geographies of race, class, and disaster; transnational migration, identity, and citizenship; agrarian, development, and environmental politics; and political ecologies of foodways, race, and agroecological change. His book [\*Palm Oil Diaspora\*](#)

([Cambridge University Press](#), 2021) blends ethnography, archival research and geospatial analysis to reconstruct the environmental histories and political ecologies of palm oil landscapes, foodways and economies in Northeast Brazil and throughout the Atlantic World. That work was recognized with the Roberto Reis Book Award by the Brazilian Studies Association and an Honorable Mention for the Meridian Book Award by the American Association of Geographers (AAG). At JMU, Dr. Watkins serves on the Internal Advisory Board for the [African, African American and Diaspora \(AAAD\) Studies Center](#) and as a Faculty Affiliate of [Latin American, Latinx and Caribbean Studies \(LAXC\)](#) and [Environmental Studies](#).



**Case Watkins**  
Assistant Professor  
[Department of Justice  
Studies](#)  
[College of Arts and  
Letters](#)

## Kayla Yurco

Kayla Yurco is an Assistant Professor of Geography in the School of Integrated Sciences. She is affiliated with the [African, African American and Diaspora Studies Center](#) and is a Faculty Associate with the [Center for Faculty Innovation](#) in the Teaching Area.

Her training is multidisciplinary: she earned her Ph.D. in Geography with a concentration in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies from the Pennsylvania State University; her M.S. in Natural Resources and Environment from the University of Michigan; and her undergraduate degrees (B.S., Biological Sciences, and B.A., English Literature) from the University of Pittsburgh.

Broadly, [her research centers on the intersections of gender, environment and development](#). She draws on her training across the natural and social sciences to consider the intersectional social-ecological challenges and opportunities of environmental change, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. She is a former Graduate Fellow of the International Livestock Research Institute in Nairobi, Kenya, and has a long history of study-abroad



**Kayla Yurco**

Assistant Professor

[School of Integrated Sciences](#)

[College of Integrated Sciences and Engineering](#)

teaching in East Africa. Her work has been published in *Geoforum*, *The Professional Geographer*, *Human Ecology*, *Society and Natural Resources*, *Gender, Place and Culture*, and other journals.

Closer to home, her teaching and scholarship center feminist pedagogies and methodologies within geographic science and STEM training. She is guided by her commitment to inclusion and interdisciplinary social justice education in her teaching and learning. She is also the founding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Director for the nonprofit organization Girls Who Hike VA.

## Research and Scholarship

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