

ISHARA CASELLAS CONNORS

CONTACT INFORMATION icasellasconnors@gmail.com
508-524-9698

ACADEMIC & RESEARCH APPOINTMENTS Texas A&M University
Assistant Professor (2021-present)
Bush School of Government and Public Service
Department of Public Service & Administration

Affiliated Faculty: Latino/a and Mexican American Studies; Africana Studies;
Race & Ethnic Studies Institute

RESEARCH VISITS Stanford University Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences
Visiting Scholar (Fall 2026-Spring 2027)

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Visiting Researcher (Spring 2025)
Globalization, Education, and Social Policy

EDUCATION Boston College, Lynch School of Education
Ph.D., Higher Education

Columbia University, Teachers College
M.A., Higher and Postsecondary Education

Clark University
B.A., Business Management

PUBLICATIONS

Casellas Connors, I. & Korir, V.* (2026). The discourse of Education: A Longitudinal analysis of Office of Refugee Resettlement annual reports to Congress (1980-2020). *Studies in Higher Education*. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2026.2710801>

Casellas Connors, I., Peterson, N.*, Slaydon, M.*, Valenzuela, A.* (2026). Boards in the balance: Governing higher education amid anti-DEI policy. *AERA Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584261421924>

Casellas Connors, I., Wanzer-Serano, D., Rodriguez, M.* (2026). Crafting Servingness at three public emerging Hispanic-serving institutions in Texas. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000708>

Casellas Connors, I., Daché, A., Feik, H.*, Juarez, D.*, Sun, J.* (2026). Un pirámide: U.S. Afro-Latin American cities, counties, and institutional discourse in Florida's public higher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2026.2622755>

Casellas Connors, I., Evans, K., Unangst, L., Chunga-Pizarro, S.* (2025). Reframing higher education for refugees: Pathways, policies, and community cultural wealth.

Journal of Higher Education, 97(3), 546-570.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2025.2463856>

Casellas Connors, I., Unangst, L., Evans, K. (2025). Navigating the tension: U.S. refugee resettlement agency support of postsecondary education access. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. 38(1), 197-222. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feae086>

Casellas Connors, I. (2025). Disrupting the narrative: Afro-Latin Americans across U.S. higher education. In: Perna, L (ed). *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. Vol. 40. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51930-7_5-1

Casellas Connors, I., & Feik, H.* (2025). Communicating social justice in the public sphere: The case of public higher education. *Public Management Review*. 28(2), 359-387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2442582>

Casellas Connors, I., & Gonlin, V. (2025). Complicating Latiné experiences: Afro-Latiné students' perceptions of campus climate and sense of belonging. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. 18(Suppl 1), S374-S389. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000580>

Casellas Connors, I., Unangst, L., Barone, N. (2024). Supporting displaced students: A comparative analysis of institutional supports. *Race Ethnicity Education*. 27 (4), 519-537. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2023.2192947>

Casellas Connors, I. (2023). Racial diversity in the geosciences: Engaging community cultural wealth for success. *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*. 29(2), 1-23. <http://doi.org/10.1615/JWomenMinorScienEng.2022037861>

Casellas Connors, I. (2022). Examining racial discourse in equity reports: Florida's public Hispanic serving institutions. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 30(29), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.30.5955>

Unangst, L., **Casellas Connors, I.**, & Barone, N. (2022). State-based policy supports for Refugee, Asylee, and TPS-Background students in US higher education. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 38(1), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40819>

Casellas Connors, I., & McCoy, H. (2022). Performing anti-racism: Universities respond to anti-Black violence. *Race and Justice: An International Journal*, 12(3), 588-613. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21533687221101787>

Unangst, L., Borg, N., **Casellas Connors, I.**, & Barone, N. (2022). Diversities at US colleges and universities: Online diversity statements at institutions employing chief diversity officers. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, 3(3), 16-36. <https://dx.doi.org/10.52547/johepal.3.3.16>

Casellas Connors, I. (2021). Constructing a monolith: State policy, institutional DEI plans, and the flattening of Latinx identity at Hispanic-serving institutions. *AERA Open*. 1(7), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211063872>

Arnold, K. D., & **Casellas Connors, I.** (2021). The ‘anti-Instagram’: Using visual methods to study the college experiences of underrepresented students. *Visual Studies*, 37(4), 225-243. <https://10.1080/1472586X.2021.1893612>

MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW

Casellas Connors, I., & Wanzer-Serano, D. (Revise and Resubmit). Advancing a theoretical framework for emerging Hispanic-Serving institutions. *American Educational Research Journal*. Revision Submitted September 2026

Claypool, D.* , Adeyemo, F.* , Kluch, Y., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Singer, J., (Revise and Resubmit). “They tell our culture, but don’t see us”: Black professionals navigating frontstage diversity and backstage inequity in the sportswear industry. *Sport Management Review*. Revision Submitted August 2026

Casellas Connors, I. (Revise and Resubmit). Refugee-Serving Nonprofits as Infrastructures of Postsecondary Access for New Arrival Students. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*.

Casellas Connors, I., & Taylor, L. L. (under review). “How do we adapt?”: Enrollment and institutional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Community College Review*.

Cheong, S., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Lui, Z. (under review). Including Community in Sustainable AI Data Center Siting. *Education Policy*

WORK IN PROGRESS

Casellas Connors, I., Evans, K., Unangst, L., Chunga-Pizarro, S.* Two sides of the coin: Administrative burden, street-level bureaucrats, and refugee postsecondary access. Intended for *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

Wanzer-Serano, D., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Rodriguez, M.* , Castillo, M.*. Emerging Hispanic-serving institutions: A systematic literature review of a decade of research. Intended for *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*.

Casellas Connors, I. Situating education in the resettlement regime: Refugee experiences access higher education across state policy landscapes. Intended for *Review of Higher Education*.

POLICY BRIEFS, REPORTS & NEWS

Casellas Connors, I., Evans, K., Unangst, L. (2025). *Campus climate and belonging: Displaced learners' experiences during the presidential transition*.

Casellas Connors, I., Evans, K., Unangst, L. (2023). *Access to higher education: The Maryland, District of Columbia, and Virginia Area*. Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area.

Unangst, L., **Casellas Connors, I.,** Evans, K. (2023). *Humanizing internationalization in the context of permanent displacement*. NAFSA.

Evans, K., **Casellas Connors, I.,** Unangst, L. (2023). *Higher education can be elusive for asylum-seekers and immigrants*. The Conversation.

Casellas Connors, I., Taylor, L.L., (2023). *COVID and community colleges*. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Taylor, L.L., **Casellas Connors, I.**, (2023). *Dual Credit and community colleges*. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Thomas, N., Bergom, I., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Gautam, P., Gismondi, A., & Roshko, A. (2017). *Democracy counts: A report on U.S. college and university student voting*. Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University.

Thomas, N. and Casellas Connors, I. (2017). *More, and more diverse, US college students voted in 2016*. The Conversation.

Thomas, N. and **Casellas Connors, I.** (2016). *Talking politics: A campus conversations guide about your campus voting*. Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University

AWARDS

Equity and Inclusion Fellow. Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management

Best Paper Award. American Education Research Association: Caribbean SIG.
Daché, A., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Sun, J (2024, April). Beyond Blackness.
American Educational Research Association. Philadelphia, PA

GRANTS & CONTRACTS

Serra, D.(PI), **Casellas Connors, I. (Co-PI)**, Cortes, K., Curruthers, C. (2024). Unlocking opportunities: Facilitating student transfers from two-to four-year college through coaching. *J-PAL*, \$268,989.

Guneralp, I (PI), Wiedherwohl, C. (PI). **Casellas Connors, I. (Personnel)**. (2023).TAMU eNGAGE gulf scholars program: Next generation of advocates for the gulf ecosystem. National Academy of Science. \$624,997

Casellas Connors, I. (PI), & Taylor, L.L. (2023). COVID and the community college: Evidence from Texas. *Center for Reinventing Public Education*. \$49,940.

Casellas Connors, I. (PI), Unangst, L. Evans, K. (2022). Cultivating refugee access to higher education across Maryland, District of Columbia, and Virginia. *W.T. Grant Foundation* \$49,992.

Evans, K (PI), **Casellas Connors, I. (Co-PI)**, Unangst, L. (2022). Access to higher education for refugees in the MD/VA/DC area. *University of Maryland, Office of Translational Research*. \$35,000.

Casellas Connors, I. (PI), Wanzer-Serrano, D. (2022). Discourse tracing of emerging Hispanic-serving institutions in the University of Texas system. *Race and Ethnic Studies Institute, Texas A&M University*. \$9,960.

Taylor, L.L.(PI), **Casellas Connors, I. (Co-PI)**, Cortes, K. (Co-PI), Jansen, D. (Co-PI), Gronberg, T. (Co-PI), (2021) Examining shifting enrollment across Texas community

colleges: Administrative perspective navigating enrollment declines. *Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board*. \$480,000.

Casellas Connors, I. (PI). (2019). Experiences of racially minoritized students in the geosciences. *Texas A&M University Diversity Seed Grant Funding*. \$2,000

Casellas Connors, I. (Lead Staff). (2019). Thriving in the geosciences: An integrated approach to supporting first-year students. *Halliburton Foundation*. \$35,000

Casellas Connors, I. Graduate Student Support. (2018). Boston College. \$500

CONFERENCES PRESENTATIONS

Casellas Connors, I., Evans, K., Unangst, L. (2026, April). Refugee belonging in U.S. higher education: A critical integration studies approach. *American Educational Research Association*. Los Angeles, CA.

Casellas Connors, I. (2025, November). Policy by design or omission: A national analysis of in-state tuition policy for displaced populations. *Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management*. Seattle, WA.

Casellas Connors, I., & Wanzer-Serrano. (2025, November). Ecologies of emergingness: A grounded theory of organizational change. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*. Denver, CO.

Casellas Connors, I., & Chunga-Pizarro, S.* (2024, April). From barriers to bridges: Supporting displaced learners in their postsecondary journey. *International Research Society for Public Management*. Bologna, Italy.

Casellas Connors, I., & Chunga-Pizarro, S.* (2024, November). Breaking boundaries: Unveiling racialized administrative burdens in refugee resettlement. *Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management*. Washington, DC.

Casellas Connors, I., Wanzer-Serrano, D., Rodriguez, M.* (2024, November). Ecologies of emergingness: Emerging Hispanic-serving institution administrators navigating a changing landscape. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*. Minneapolis, MN.

Wanzer-Serrano, D., **Casellas Connors, I., Rodriguez, M.*, Castillo, M.*** (2024, November). Emerging Hispanic-serving institutions: A systematic literature review of a decade of research. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*. Minneapolis, MN.

Casellas Connors, I., Evans, K., Unangst, L., Chunga-Pizarro, S.* (2024, November). Treat people with dignity and respect: HEI administrators and refugee policy. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*. Minneapolis, MN

Casellas Connors, I., Daché, A., Feik, H., Juarez, D., Sun, J. (2024, April). Un pirámide: U.S. Afro-Latin American cities and student campus contexts in Florida's public higher education. *American Educational Research Association*. Philadelphia, PA.

Daché, A., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Sun, J (2024, April). Beyond Blackness. *American Educational Research Association*. Philadelphia, PA.

Awarded Best Paper. This paper received the Best Paper Award from the Caribbean Special Interest Group.

Casellas Connors, I., Evans, K., Unangst, L., Chunga-Pizarro, S. (2024, April). Reframing higher education for refugees: Pathways, policies, and community cultural wealth. *American Educational Research Association*. Philadelphia, PA.

Wanzer-Serano, D., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Rodriguez, M. (2024, April). State systems and advancement of servingness at emerging Hispanic Serving institutions. *American Educational Research Association*. Philadelphia, PA.

Casellas Connors, I., Taylor, L.L. (2024, March). COVID and Hispanic Serving Community Colleges: Evidence from Texas. *Association for Education Finance and Policy*. Baltimore, MD.

Martinez-Benyarko, M. **Casellas Connors, I.** Garcia-Louis, C., Hayward, J. Munoz, N. (2023, November). Putting the 'Afro' in Latinidad: Interactive symposium on the past, present, and future of Afrolatine/a/o scholarship. *2022 Association for the Study of Higher Education, Presidential Session*. Minneapolis, MN.

Evans, K., Unangst, L., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Khpalwak, R. (2023, October). Community advisory board's identification of barriers to accessing higher education for recent refugee arrivals. *Council on Social Work Education*. Atlanta, GA.

Unangst, L., **Casellas Connors, I.** (2022, November). Refugee resettlement agency and community service organization support of higher education access in the US. *Association for the Study of Higher Education, Presidential Session*. Las Vegas, NV.

Casellas Connors, I., Wanzer-Serrano, D., Rodriguez, M. (2022, November). Discourse tracing of emerging Hispanic-serving institutions in the university of Texas system. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*. Las Vegas, NV

Casellas Connors, I., Unangst, L., Barone, N. (2021, October). Institutional supports for displaced students in Houston and Sacramento: A critical, comparative analysis. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*.

Casellas Connors, I. (2021, April). Afrolatinx Students?: A state snapshot considering Latinx. *American Educational Research Association*.

Casellas Connors, I. (2021, March) Advancing racial equity through HSI diversity, equity, and inclusion plans. *Association for Education Finance and Policy*.

Unangst, L., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Barone, N. (2021, February) State based refugee higher education policy in comparative context: A critical policy analysis. *Comparative and International Education Society*.

Rosenman, E., **Casellas Connors, I.**, Pollard, J., & Loomis, J. (2020, November) Uneven geographies of financial vulnerability in US higher education. *Regional Inequality in Europe and the US*.

Casellas Connors, I. (2020, April). Examining Racial Discourse in Equity Reports: Florida's Public Hispanic Serving. *American Educational Research Association*.

Casellas Connors, I. (2018, November). The limitations of diversity policy: Critical discourse analysis of SUNY Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*, Tampa FL.

Arnold, A., **Casellas Connors, I.** (2017, November). The anti-Instagram: Using visual methods to study the college experiences of underrepresented students. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*, Houston TX.

Nespoli, L., **Casellas Connors, I.** (2011, February). Community college big ideas: Identifying the best and boldest ideas to promote sustainability, maintain or improve quality, and, most significantly, improve student success. *2011 American Association of Community Colleges*. New Orleans, LA.

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Casellas Connors, I. (2025). Campus climate and belonging for displaced learners. *Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration*. Virtual

Casellas Connors, I. (2025). Navigating barriers, building futures: Policy, persistence, and postsecondary access for displaced learners. *Department of Higher Education, Oxford University*. Oxford, UK.

Casellas Connors, I. (2025). From barriers to bridges: Supporting displaced learners in their postsecondary journey. *Department of Sociology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*. Barcelona, Spain.

Casellas Connors, I. (2024). Community of practice: Developing educational opportunities for refugees. *Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration*. Virtual

Casellas Connors, I. (2024). Longing to belong – newcomer students in the higher education ecosystem. *Every Campus a Refuge*. Troy, NY.

Casellas Connors, I. (2023). DEI policy and implementation on campus: Centering racial equity. *Student Equity Institute. San Diego, State University*. San Diego, CA.

Casellas Connors, I. (2023). State systems and the advancement of servingness at emerging Hispanic-serving institutions. *Race and Ethnic Studies Institute, Texas A&M University*. College Station, TX.

Casellas Connors, I. (2023). Public higher education: A site for examining the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion at public institutions. *McCormack Graduate School, University of Massachusetts*. Boston, MA.

Casellas Connors, I. (2023). Displaced learners’ access to U.S. higher education: Using qualitative data to explore the transition systems that support equitable access. *Ontario Institute for the Study of Education, University of Toronto*. Toronto, Canada.

Casellas Connors, I. (2022). Politics and policies of racial equity and inclusion in U.S. higher education. *Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, University of Wisconsin, Madison*. Madison, WI.

Casellas Connors, I. (2019). Strategies for increasing diversity in the geosciences. *Catalyzing Opportunities for Research in the Earth Sciences (CORES): A Decadal Survey for NSF’s Division of Earth Science*. Houston, TX.

Thomas, N., **Casellas Connors, I.** (2018). Strategies for improving campus climates for political engagement. *Association of American Colleges and Universities*. Washington DC.

Thomas, N., **Casellas Connors, I.** (2017). Educating for the democracy we want, not the one we have. *Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Meeting*. Baltimore, MD.

Casellas Connors, I. (2016). Fostering campus climates for political learning & engagement. Plenary panel. *Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Meeting*. Indianapolis, IN.

Casellas Connors, I., & Thomas, N. (2016). Facilitating political conversations. *New England Campus Compact Conference*. Worcester, MA.

Casellas Connors, I. (2015). Politics 365: Campus climate for political learning. *Massachusetts Campus Compact*. Boston, MA.

SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

Department
2021—present: Bush School Public Service & Administration, Admission Committee

University
2024—present: Steering Committee Member, Texas A&M University, Education Research Committee

2023—2024: Co-Lead, Texas A&M University Hispanic Serving Institutions Working Group

Discipline
2023—present: Editorial Member, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis

2025—2026: Program Committee, American Association of Education Research, Division J

2022—2023: Program Committee, Association for the Study of Higher Education

JOURNAL REVIEWER

Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (2025 x3, 2026)
American Educational Research Journal (2025, 2026 x2)

International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (2025)
Urban Education (2025 x2)
Critical Studies in Education (2025)
Education Policy (2024 x 2)
Refugee Studies (2024; 2025 x 2)
Race Ethnicity and Education (2022 X; 2023)
Teachers College Record (2022)

MEMBERSHIP

American Educational Research Association

2026 AERA Division J Program Committee
Division J; Latina/o/x Research Issues; Critical Examination of Race, Ethnicity, Class and Gender (CERECG)

Association for the Study of Higher Education

2023 ASHE Conference Program Committee
Council on Ethnic Participation
Council on Public Policy in Higher Education

Association of Education Finance and Policy

Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management

International Research Society for Public Management

ADVISING

Doctoral Student Committee Members

Iliana De La Cruz, Education Curriculum and Development (2021—2023)
Mariana Rodriguez, Communication (2023—present)
James Martinez, Higher Education (2023—present)
Brittany Glick, Architecture (2023—present)
Amaris Vargas-Mohan, Higher Education (2024—present)
Jacqueline White, Higher Education (2024—present)
Alfredo Valenzuela, Higher Education (2025—present)

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Texas A&M University

Assistant Dean, Diversity and Climate (2018-2021)
College of Geosciences

Tufts University

Assistant Director (2015-2018)
Institute for Democracy and Higher Education

Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education

Director (2011-2013)
Future Ready Massachusetts Coalition & Director of Policy and Research

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Education Pioneers Fellow (Summer 2011)
Department of College and Career Readiness

New Jersey Council of County Colleges
Graduate Research Assistant (2010-2011)

Mercy College
Faculty Development Consultant (2010)
Provosts Office

University of California, Berkeley
Manager of Development and Alumni Relations (2007-2010)
International House

Brandeis University
Annual Giving Officer (2006-2007)
Fundraising and Alumni Relations