



EXECUTIVE DOCTORATE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

Higher Education Division Graduate School of Education University of
Pennsylvania

Cohort 23
Class of 2025 Biographies



Otgonbat Barkhuu

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Founder/President

Global Leadership University

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Mr. Otgonbat is an entrepreneur, educator, politician, and best-selling author of several books which include *An Opportunity to Study in the United States* and *On the Balcony: A Mongolian Dream*. He is a frequent speaker on

leadership and education, both in Mongolia and internationally; recently he has been lecturing on authentic and adaptive leadership for a variety of audiences in Mongolia and abroad. After graduating from Dickinson State University in the United States, with a BS in Business Administration, he earned his graduate diploma in International Travel/Tourism Management at the University of Queensland in Australia as a Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholar. After ten years spent setting up his own university and being active in Mongolian politics, Mr. Otgonbat graduated from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in 2016, with a Master's degree in Public Administration (as a MC/MPA Mason Fellow). At Harvard he was selected as a fellow at the Harvard Graduate School Leadership Institute and the Center for Public Leadership at the Kennedy School. Mr. Otgonbat was also a New Generation Fellow at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii. He has held advisory positions in the cabinets of the Mongolian Education and Finance Ministers and worked as Chief Operating Officer of the Millennium Challenge Account in Mongolia. He is the founder/president of the Global Leadership University (www.glu.edu.mn), a leading institution of higher learning located in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia with a current enrollment of 3000 full-time students studying in fields of medicine, nursing, business, law and humanities. He is also the

founder/chairman of the board of the New Century Leadership International School (www.newcentury.edu.mn), one of few Cambridge International schools in Mongolia. He is currently pursuing his Doctor of Education (EdD) in higher education management at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) and his dissertation work is focused on building a world-class university in Mongolia. He lives with his wife and three children in Ulaanbaatar.

You can find his recent book, *On the Balcony: A Mongolian Dream* [HERE](#).



Tiffany Clayton

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Director- High School Programs

University of Pennsylvania School of Arts and Sciences
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Tiffany Clayton is the Director of High School Programs at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Arts & Sciences. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications and Sociology from Albright College, and a Master of Science in Counseling & College Student

Personnel from Shippensburg University.

Before joining the Penn community, Tiffany served as the Director for Student Involvement & Leadership & Coordinator for Multicultural Programs at Albright College. Tiffany has over 15 years of higher education experience in academic enrichment opportunities, multicultural programming and education, student and campus activities, student center management, high school to college transitional programs, admissions and recruitment, leadership and development, and fraternity and sorority life.

Tiffany is involved in numerous professional associations such as the Association of University Summer Sessions, the North American Association of Summer Sessions, and the Association for Pre-College Directors. A strong believer in collaborative teamwork and working smarter and not harder. Tiffany regularly workshops with her team to make sure they are continuing to align with those ideals, while still meeting their shared goals despite being a small (but mighty) team.

Tiffany is a Philadelphia native, and dog mom to senior dog, Kiwi, a Shih Tzu Poodle. When not working enjoys spending time with loved ones, going to the movies, concerts, and cruising.



Emmanuel Guillory

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Senior Director

American Council on Education
Washington, D.C.

Emmanuel A. Guillory is an advocate, policy expert, and motivational speaker who currently serves as the Senior Director of Government Relations at the American Council on Education (ACE). In this role, he manages an extensive portfolio of legislative and regulatory issues as a primary government relations resource for the broader higher education community to the United States Congress, the White House, the United States Department of Education, and other agencies as warranted. His portfolio includes a primary emphasis on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), especially Title IV programs, and the budget and appropriations process. Other issues within his

portfolio include accreditation; college costs; student aid; institutional accountability; institutional aid in Titles III and V of the HEA; oversight; privacy; technology; accessibility; and disability, among others.

Previously, Guillory served as the Director of Student and Institutional Aid Policy at the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) leading the private, nonprofit sector of higher education on policies such as student financial aid; institutional aid programs in Titles III and V of the HEA; and certain regulatory issues. Guillory also served as the Director for Public Policy and Government Affairs at UNCF (United Negro College Fund, Inc.) for two years and served a decade in the House of Representatives, most recently as a Professional Staff Member on the Committee on Education and the Workforce. He is a 2020 and 2021 recipient of the Hill's Top Lobbyist recognition in Washington, DC; a recipient of the Top Executive Award from Marquis Who's Who of America; a prior federal negotiator for the Department of Education in 2019 and 2022; and a former President of the Committee for Education Funding, the largest educational coalition in our country, in 2022. He has his own nonprofit organization where he awards scholarships to students, and he serves as a Lecturer through the Archers Fellowship Program in the University of Texas System.

Guillory earned his Bachelor's of Science in Psychology from Texas A&M University and his Masters of Arts in College Student Personnel from Bowling Green State University. He is currently pursuing his Doctorate of Education in Higher Education Management at the University of Pennsylvania.



Sylvia He

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Founder & CEO

Global Youth Entrepreneurship Zone

Santa Clara, California

Sylvia is a seasoned educator with over 16 years of innovation and leadership in K-12 education across China and the United States. Her journey in the field of education began in 2005 during her sophomore year at

Beijing Language and Culture University of China, when she took her first professional steps at the New Oriental School (NYSE: EDU). Sylvia later transitioned to Woodpecker Education, a company dedicated to providing high-quality admission consulting for Chinese students. Her influential roles at Woodpecker spanned from Chief Academic Director to General Manager of the Beijing Branch and International Program Director, demonstrating her dedication and expertise in the educational sector. Eight years ago, Sylvia relocated to the United States and established her own education-focused enterprise. She was subsequently invited to join the founding team at IC Education. Here, her primary responsibilities included researching and developing an individualized, cross-cultural international high school diploma program – the IC Curriculum. Following her graduation from the University of Pennsylvania's Education Entrepreneurship Program (C6) in 2020, Sylvia founded the Global Youth Entrepreneurship Zone (GYEC) in Silicon Valley. GYEC is designed to prepare high school students for college and enhance their career readiness through a focus on entrepreneurship education. Now entering its fourth year, GYEC boasts a diverse student body hailing from seven countries, further illustrating Sylvia's ongoing impact in the field of education.



Beth Prieto

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**Former Chief of Staff, Office of the
University President**

*Southern New Hampshire University
Manchester, New Hampshire*

With over 20 years of experience in the higher education sector, Beth is a passionate leader and advocate for student and alumni success. In her most recent role as Chief of

Staff at Southern New Hampshire University, Beth worked closely with President Paul LeBlanc and the senior leadership team to advance the University's mission, vision, and strategic goals by collaborating with stakeholders across the university. Prior to this role, Beth served as Deputy Chief of Staff, leading the Organizational Learning Collaborative, a research and learning team dedicated to advancing university initiatives. With the onset of the pandemic, Beth worked closely with the Office of the University President's team to adapt operations to help members of the community connect, discuss, and address critical issues.

A strong strategic and systems thinker, Beth has built a successful track record leading organizational change efforts in highly matrixed, complex organizations. As the Executive Director of the Career Development Center at SNHU, Beth led a team of professionals to provide comprehensive and innovative career services and programs by building strong internal and external partnerships while incorporating creative approaches including design thinking. Before her work at SNHU, Beth gained extensive experience in career development and advising at Babson College in Wellesley, MA, and the University of New Hampshire in Durham, NH, where she helped MBA, undergraduate students, and alumni achieve their career aspirations.

With strong skills in nonprofit management, public speaking, and career development, Beth is committed to creating a positive and inclusive culture that fosters collaboration, innovation, and excellence in all her work. Having grown up in a large family, Beth is happiest when surrounded by loved ones. She and her husband Jim currently reside in Manchester, NH with their kids, Ava and Xavier.



Serena Rao

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Senior Associate Dean

Stanford University

Stanford, California

Serena Rao has more than a decade of higher education management experience and is passionate about applying data, governance, and strategy to nurture interdisciplinary research. She is currently

the senior associate dean in the Office of Vice Provost and Dean of Research at Stanford University. Reporting to the Vice Provost/Dean, she serves as the chief financial and operating officer for the fifteen cross-disciplinary labs, centers and institutes, and the five research compliance and administrative offices. She also facilitates or leads strategy development and execution of university-wide academic initiatives. In the last three years, Serena founded the Research Development Office that supports large-scale proposal development, created a five-year strategic plan to enhance shared research platforms that led to a \$50M investment in instrumentation and data infrastructure, and developed a ten-year financial plan that contributed to the fundraising success of the Stanford's Doerr School of Sustainability.

Serena began her higher education career at the Stanford's University Budget Office in 2011. She was a member of the provost's Budget Group that advised on resource priority and allocation, undertook cross-functional analytical projects for senior leadership that informed strategic direction and decision, and developed the Stanford's annual consolidated budget. Prior to HigherEd, Serena managed city-wide transportation and transit planning initiatives, annual capital budget, and long-term debt forecast under the Office of Management and Budget of New York City. She has a Master of Public Administration from New York University and dual bachelor's degrees in economics and political science from Peking University in Beijing, China.

Outside of her work, Serena is a dedicated yoga practitioner with over 500 hours of training and finds peace of mind in reading and Chinese watercolor painting.



Patrick Sexton

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Executive Director, Teacher Education Programs

University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Patrick Sexton is the Executive Director of Teacher Education Programs at Penn GSE. He supports students, faculty, and leaders in the [Urban Teaching Residency](#) program, the [Urban Teaching Apprenticeship](#) program, and the [Independent School Teaching Residency](#) program. He represents Penn GSE at the institutional, regional, and state levels on issues related to teacher education as we work in partnership toward a more anti-racist and just educational system. Mr. Sexton joined Penn GSE after nearly 15 years at the University of Washington in Seattle where he was the Assistant Dean for

Teacher Education. His background is in both teacher education and arts education, particularly theater arts.



Rajeev Sooreea

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Associate Dean and Professor

Dominican University of California –

Barowsky School of Business

San Rafael, California

Rajeev Sooreea is Associate Dean and Professor of International Business in the Barowsky School of Business at Dominican University of California. For the past 12

years, he has served his school in various capacities and is known to be an academic entrepreneur.

As Associate Dean, Dr. Sooreea oversees program quality, curriculum development, programmatic innovation, and faculty research. He has led his school to earn AACSB initial accreditation and is currently leading his school's reaccreditation efforts as well as working on building international strategic partnerships. He is a key founding faculty for several business programs including an undergraduate program in Global Innovation and Entrepreneurship, a China Online MBA, an M.S. in Business Analytics, an M.S. in Accounting, and more recently an M.S. in Cybersecurity and a Healthcare Executive MBA. He served as the Founding Director of the Healthcare MBA program, the MBA Program Director, and the Director of Assessment. Recently, he co-led an initiative that enabled his school to become a member of the Microeconomics of Competitiveness Affiliate Network at Harvard Business School.

Previously, Dr. Sooreea has taught at leading universities including the University of California Berkeley and the Pennsylvania State University. His research interest is interdisciplinary and lies at the intersection of global business, innovation, and entrepreneurial universities. He is passionate about how international business and innovation models can be used to transform the management of higher education to create societal impact. He is the recipient of five teaching excellence awards and multiple grants. In 2021, he received a Fulbright U.S. Scholar award to conduct research in Mauritius, Africa, in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship. He has 15+ peer-reviewed journal publications and presented at 25+ conferences including at Oxford and Stanford.

Besides his two decades in academia, Rajeev has worked in financial management, advised senior money managers in New York City, and provided consulting to start-ups as well as multinationals including HSBC, Standard Chartered Bank, AfrAsia Bank, and State Bank of India. He has also assisted in founding organizations internationally in the areas of social entrepreneurship.

Dr. Sooreea holds a Ph.D. in Applied Economics from Western Michigan University, an M.A. in Economics from Leeds University Business School from the U.K., and a B.A. Honors in Economics from Bombay University, India. He also holds a Master's degree in Management and Finance from Harvard University and an Executive Education in Business Analytics from the MIT Sloan School of Management.



Nicole Thomas

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Director

University of Pennsylvania, Urban Health Lab
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Nicole is an enthusiastic strategist, trainer, and entrepreneur with over 25 years of experience in the higher education, financial services, and small business and workforce development sectors. A certified Diversity,

Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) professional, she specializes in community-academic partnerships, strategic planning, organizational development, and high-impact communications.

Nicole currently serves as the Director of the Urban Health Lab at the University of Pennsylvania where she leads a team of dedicated professionals working on a portfolio of research and action projects aimed at achieving health, racial, environmental, and economic justice for all people. She is a cofounder and Co-Director of the Penn Community Scholars Program and the REACH Initiative (Research and Equity in Academic-Community Partnerships for Health) both at the University of Pennsylvania. Since 2015, the Penn Community Scholars Program has successfully trained over 60 community members, representing 55 community-based organizations, to conduct research using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. The REACH Initiative expands and leverages this program to facilitate the creation of equitable community-academic partnerships using a novel online platform, training, and coaching services.

Prior to returning to Penn in 2021, Nicole was the Director of Strategic Initiatives and Regulatory Affairs for the Thomas Jefferson University College of Nursing where she worked directly with the dean and associate deans to craft and implement a strategic vision to assure that the college and its graduates are positioned as leaders in healthcare delivery and innovation. She oversaw all compliance and accreditation systems, communications, and a wide range of stakeholder relationships. Nicole was instrumental in expanding the college's partnerships with diverse communities to improve health. She played a key role in building a culture of excellence and inclusivity within Jefferson College of Nursing for a team of +75 full-time faculty, +350 adjunct faculty, and +20 staff. She co-led the newly established Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee within the college, led the development of the DEI Roadmap, and served on a 5-member team responsible for delivering a DEI training program across the Thomas Jefferson University enterprise.

In 2011, Nicole founded and led a Philadelphia-based consulting company which offers training, communications, organizational development, and community-engagement strategies and tools to academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses. A Philadelphia native, Nicole works to employ and institutionalize evidence-based yet imaginative approaches to addressing the present and emerging health, socioeconomic, and environmental challenges facing diverse communities. In these roles and throughout her academic career she has worked to improve health outcomes, dismantle structural racism, achieve equity, and create opportunities for Black and Brown and other historically disenfranchised communities. She is committed to leveraging community-academic partnerships, science, and relationships to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Prior to beginning her academic career in 2004, Nicole obtained valuable work experience in banking and workforce development. In 2000, she cofounded a family-owned novelty legwear company where she oversaw the marketing, human resources, and philanthropic activities for 35+ employees, 13 retail locations, and a wholesale division.

Nicole holds a master's degree in business administration from Temple University and a bachelor's degree in business administration from Kutztown University.



Melissa Ann Vitek

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**Dean of Global, International and
Specialized Programming**

Salus University

Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

Melissa Vitek, OD, FAAO, PNAP is a graduate of the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO). She is an Associate Professor at PCO, Salus University and the

Dean of Global, Interprofessional and Specialized Programming at Salus University. Dr. Vitek served as the interim Provost and Vice-President of Academic Affairs at Salus from May 2018-February 2019. Dr. Vitek also currently serves as the director of Salus' MSc in Clinical Optometry degree program and is the course coordinator and a course instructor for the Interprofessional Evidence Based Practice course at Salus University. She is a member of Salus' Interprofessional Education Advisory Committee, Salus' Assessment Committee Salus' Deans Council. Dr. Vitek serves on several national committees focused on international and interprofessional programming.



ChenXin Xu

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Director of Public and Continuing Education

The Tianjin Juilliard School
Tianjin & New York

ChenXin Xu, a native of Beijing and raised in New York, has established herself as an internationally acclaimed pianist, passionate educator, accomplished higher education

executive, and successful serial entrepreneur in both the US and Chinese markets. With over two decades of experience in executive multicultural educational leadership and management, her credentials include degrees from The Juilliard School and the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

Ms. Xu was one of the founding members of the Juilliard China initiative, and currently, she serves as the Director of Public & Continuing Education at the Tianjin Juilliard School, which is the first and only overseas campus of the renowned Juilliard School in New York. In this capacity, she is responsible for overseeing the Divisions of Public and Continuing Education, which offer an extensive range of educational and innovative programs tailored to professionals, pre-professionals, music educators, and music learners spanning all age groups.

In addition to her role at the Juilliard School, Ms. Xu serves as an industry mentor at the prestigious Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University and holds a senior advisory position at the Central Music Education Institute in Beijing, China. Her contributions and commitment to the advancement of performing arts education exemplify her dedication to nurturing talent and driving excellence in the field.

Ms. Xu resides in New York and Beijing with her twin daughters.



Hend Zainal

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**Executive Director of Strategy, Management,
and Partnerships, Higher Education Division**

Qatar Foundation

Doha, Qatar

Hend Zainal is the Executive Director of Strategy, Management, and Partnerships at Qatar Foundation's (QF) Higher Education Division. Hend is an experienced higher

education management executive specializing in transformation, innovation, and design thinking.

In her current role, Hend is responsible for managing QF's Doha-based partner universities, including Virginia Commonwealth University, Weill Cornell Medicine, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University, Georgetown University, Northwestern University, HEC Paris, and QF's homegrown Hamad Bin Khalifa University. She has previously worked as a consultant at the Office of the Chairperson of QF and at the Office of the CEO of QF, focusing on strategy, communication, and transformation projects. She has held various internationally focused leadership roles in the government and private sectors in Qatar.

Hend was responsible for the development of QF's Higher Education strategy, which focuses on improving the learner's journey by fostering better connections across all stages of education, ensuring students' access to multi-campus program and course offerings,

encouraging multidisciplinary academic and research efforts, and promoting better coordination and collaboration on administrative levels. In addition to supporting the President of Higher Education in the management of operations, Hend is currently responsible for setting QF's Higher Education strategic priorities, ensuring their continuous improvement, nurturing the necessary partnerships to achieve them, and generating innovative solutions and ideas to support their implementation.

Hend holds a BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and an Executive MBA from HEC Paris and is an American Council on Education (ACE) Fellow.



Victoria Zyp

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Academics Programs Manager, ISMO

National Defense University

Washington, DC

Victoria manages Academic Programs for the International Student Management Office at NDU. In this capacity she conceptualizes masters-level American Studies Field Studies program content for International Fellows across the university and manages staff planners to execute 20+ travel-study programs across the academic year. She joined NDU in June 2019.

Prior to coming to NDU, Victoria managed political party assistance programs in Algeria for the National Democratic Institute. She has also consulted on capacity building initiatives for political parties and civil society organizations in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Domestically Victoria spent over a decade working in organizing, management, and training roles for political campaigns and advocacy

organizations, as well as on government relations projects for Airbnb. She holds a BA in Economics and Policy Studies from Rice University and MA in Arab Studies from Georgetown University, where she was awarded the National Security Education Program Boren Fellowship and Critical Language Scholarship. She has studied in Germany, France, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey.