

# **MSW grad researches grief and bereavement**

August 22, 2025 9:00 AM Stephanie Holden  
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Nia Nicks, PhD, MSW

Nia Nicks, PhD, LMSW, was inspired to pursue social work because she felt called to serve others. When she heard Tulane School of Social Work's motto – Do Work That Matters – she knew that this would be the place for her.

"These values align closely with my own belief in the importance of honoring humanity, cultivating compassion, and holding space for people who are unique and different," she said.

Dr. Nicks graduated with her Master of Social Work (MSW) from TSSW in 2017 before pursuing a PhD in Social Work from Louisiana State University, which she earned in 2024. When her father died during the COVID-19 pandemic, she wanted to transform her loss into something that could help others.

"I learned this approach at Tulane—how to turn pain into purpose, tragedy into teaching," Nicks said. "I watched faculty members research topics like domestic violence, torture, and trauma, and create tools that could help others heal. That deeply moved me, and I knew I wanted to do the same."

Her dissertation, "A Qualitative Examination of Grief, Mourning, and Bereavement Among Grief-Based Mental Health Providers," expanded upon the foundation of trauma-informed care, research, and clinical treatment she gained at TSSW.

"I saw a real need for more research within the field of social work—particularly research that reflects the lived experiences of those we serve," said Nicks. "I'm most passionate about research that has clinical implications—research that doesn't just sit on a shelf but improves people's lives."

She says her research was shaped by faculty like [Dr. Charles Figley](#), Dr. Violet Yeager, and Dr. Eric Corzine. But one professor in particular brought clinical social work to life.

"[Dr. Candice Beasley](#) didn't just teach theories—she showed us how to apply them in practice," said Nicks. "She equipped us with the tools to help people effectively while avoiding the risk of re-traumatization. Her teaching gave me a foundation of clinical approaches and modalities that I still use today."

Nicks' growth while at Tulane wasn't just academic, though. She learned to be resilient and persistent, to find outlets for self-care and compassion, and, most importantly, to build community with the people around her.

“The diversity of the student body and faculty at TSSW created space for deep dialogue, mutual respect, and real-world skill-building. We had to learn how to resolve conflicts, set boundaries, and practice compassion even when we disagreed. These lessons taught me not only how to be a better clinician but how to be a better person.”

When asked to give advice to current MSW students, Dr. Nicks echoed this sentiment: “Your success will be shaped by the people around you. Being surrounded by people who listen, care, and support you can be deeply comforting. We’re all in this human experience together, and community helps ease the burden.”





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