

Autavia Grubaugh, MPH | MSSW Candidate, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

I am honored to be nominated for the Student Member at-Large position on the Executive Board of the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports (ASWIS). I am a Master of Science in Social Work candidate at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and hold a Master of Public Health in Population Mental Health and Wellbeing from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. My academic and professional interests lie at the intersection of mental health, positive and sport psychology, social environments, physical activity, and whole-person wellbeing.

I currently serve as a member of the ASWIS Research Committee, as well as the President of UT's Master of Social Work Organization (MSWO). I am also Research and Assessment Committee Chair for the Graduate Student Senate, a Graduate Assistant for UT's BRIDGE Initiative, and a Graduate Intern at the Boyd Center for Community Schools. Through these roles, I have gained experience in student advocacy, organizational leadership, needs assessment, interdisciplinary collaboration, and translating student perspectives into actionable initiatives.

As an independent researcher, I developed Adaptive Grit, a conceptual framework exploring how individuals sustain meaningful long-term goals through persistence, flexibility, and responsiveness to changing circumstances. Building on this work, I recently submitted my first Graduate Student Research Award proposal for an 8-week feasibility pilot involving 40 MSSW students. The proposed program integrates resistance training, Adaptive Grit psychoeducation, and social support to explore their potential to improve psychosocial wellbeing, resilience, and burnout. Together, my research and leadership experiences reflect my commitment to advancing whole-person wellbeing through physical activity, supportive environments, and evidence-informed practice.

My Vision for the Future of ASWIS

I believe sport social work is a growing field with extraordinary potential, and I hope to see ASWIS continue leading its development. Decades of research have demonstrated the benefits of physical activity for mental health, emotional wellbeing, and the mind-body connection. However, participation is shaped by far more than individual motivation. Families, communities, physical ability, socioeconomic circumstances, and systemic barriers influence who has access to sport. Too often, those who could benefit most face the greatest obstacles to participation.

I envision ASWIS advancing a holistic approach to sport across the lifespan, grounded in social work's person-in-environment perspective, systems thinking, and commitment to social justice. I believe sport, mindset, and physical activity can be powerful tools for addressing social and behavioral challenges, including those reflected in the Grand Challenges for Social Work. Through evidence-based practices, interdisciplinary collaboration, and advocacy, we have opportunities not only to support individuals, but to transform the environments and systems that influence their wellbeing.

I hope to contribute to a future where sport social work is recognized as a meaningful avenue for prevention, intervention, and community empowerment. Equally important to me is introducing emerging social workers to this field, helping them recognize how sport and physical activity can complement traditional practice and reach individuals and communities who need support most. I would be grateful for the opportunity to represent student members and help advance this vision.