The Illinois experience as we have designed it is unique. It is valuable. It sets our School apart. Most importantly, we provide a wide range of opportunities for students at all levels to learn, explore, grow, and mature into highly-prepared graduates entering the profession.

Our rich history provides the foundation for our approach to educating future social workers to impact communities and the field, to strengthen vulnerable families, and to become innovators and entrepreneurs. For example,

- Our leadership and service learning opportunities benefit the community and help to develop entrepreneurial skills (see pages 2-7)
- Our wide-ranging opportunities to conduct research are available to students at the BSW, MSW, and PhD levels (see page 8)
- Our block placement plan (see page 9) prepares students for success from the beginning of their careers
- Our extensive reach allows students to do their internships not only throughout the state, but beyond
- Our joint MSW/PhD program (see page 11) helps certain students gain both degrees in an accelerated fashion
- Our MSW Outreach Program (see page 12) enables place-bound practitioners to further their education online

I’m proud to have had the opportunity to build on the strong foundation of our past and help prepare us for excellence and impact now and in the future.

Transforming, educating, innovating, advocating – that is the Illinois Social Work experience.

Wynne Sandra Korr
Dean and Professor

We are growing. We are diverse. And we are always, in every endeavor, program, and initiative, focused on cultivating future leaders.

It all adds up to transformative experiences for our students.
The School of Social Work, through the Community Learning Lab, has forged relationships with professionals and students from 29+ units on the Urbana-Champaign campus.

**Actuarial Sciences**
**Art History**
**Biology**
**Chemical Engineering**
**Chemistry**
**College of Business**
**College of Education**
**College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**
**College of Media**
**College of Medicine**
**Communication**
**Community Health (Applied Health Sciences)**
**Department of LaRaza/Latino Studies**
**Department of Statistics**
**Division of General Studies**
**East Asian Language and Cultures**
**Economics**
**English Department**
**History**
**Molecular and Cellular Biology**
**Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations**
**Office of Public Engagement**
**Office of Volunteerism**
**Psychology Department**
**Sociology**
**Statistics**
**Statistics in the Community**
**College of Nursing**

“Since its launch in 2012, the Community Learning Lab has given the School of Social Work a presence in the community and in the University at large. It gives the School something tangible that we can market to people beyond our training and beyond our internships. It gives instructors the opportunity to tailor their classroom assignments so that students can actively engage in the community,” says Sherrie Faulkner, director of BSW field education.

“There’s a sense of satisfaction in giving back,” she adds. “In the end, we want the community to benefit the most from the CLL.”

The community benefits, but so do the students.

“It makes the learning much more fresh and hands on,” Faulkner explains. “They can come back to the classroom and talk about what’s happening in the community and apply it to real-life situations.”

Students across all three Social Work degree programs and multiple units at the University get experiential transformative learning opportunities that solidify what they are learning in the classroom. It makes them more marketable, and helps to enhance their resumes.

The experience also helps students begin to develop as professionals. They begin networking with people, and some have gone on to continue to volunteer at the agencies.

Community agencies receive the help they need. Students gain invaluable experience. Faculty become better connected with the community. Campus units become interconnected and learn from each other.
This past spring, graduate student Morgan Tarter was placed, through the Community Learning Lab (CLL), at Carle Hospital in Urbana. As part of an assignment in her program evaluation course, Tarter created a survey for Carle employees to communicate how well they thought the Pastoral Care staff was meeting the needs of the patients on their floor.

“After just two weeks, we received 95 responses,” Tarter said. “It assisted the Pastoral Care department in making decisions about how they can better serve their clients – the patients.”

Tarter said her experiences with CLL have greatly helped her. “I learn best when I'm actually doing a task or working hands on to complete something,” she says, “And after completing my assignment, I was able to add program evaluation to my resume as a tangible skill.”

“Tarter says she was excited to work with Carle, because it's an organization she is interested in. In fact, her engagement with Carle through CLL opened the door for her to undertake an internship at the hospital.”

“I help provide newly-delivered moms with support, resources, and information that help them transition home from the hospital,” she says. “I believe my prior experience with Carle helped me to stand out among the other interviewees for the internship.”

While Tarter recognizes how CLL has benefited her, she also sees the benefits for the community. “What I especially love about the CLL is that you can see how it is directly impacting the community.”

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Seniors Chelsea Fry and Haley Scott probably didn't envision that they would be helping the Savoy (IL) Fire Department put out small fires… but that's exactly what they did as part of their Community Learning Lab (CLL) project.

“We had over fifty documented calls in one year in which we did not need to respond,” says Lt. Sam Smith of the Savoy Fire Department. “What the callers really wanted was a different service from a different agency.”

“Chelsea and Haley collected data to identify community services available to the public,” Jeremy Leevey, assistant fire chief says. Some of those services include in-home care, other health-related care, assisted living programs, and mental health agencies.

“We created materials for senior citizens that listed everything from food assistance to transportation,” Fry says, “We also made a booklet to help those in a mental health crisis that featured counseling options and hotlines.”

The hope is that the booklets will help the people who call with issues that don’t require service from the fire department, and also cut down on the number of such calls.

“The resources [that people are calling in for] are not always as easy to find as one might think,” Scott says.

“Chelsea and Haley did an amazing job.” Leevey says. “The project exceeded our expectations.”

CONFIRMING HER CAREER PATH

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CREATING A MUCH-NEEDED RESOURCE

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COMMUNITY IMPACT
The Share A Chair Project

Kushal Parikh and David Kirby, both graduate students in the School of Social Work and students participating in the Social Innovation at Illinois initiative, came upon a great idea while traveling by train to New Orleans two years ago.

The students have experienced firsthand the frustrations that wheelchair users commonly face in traveling.

“Airlines are known for damaging personal wheelchairs,” Parikh says. But even on the train, he says, “we experienced many of the barriers that prevent wheelchair-using individuals from traveling.”

The students worked to develop Share a Chair, “to make traveling as convenient and hassle-free as possible,” says Kirby. “We will allow wheelchair users traveling by air to temporarily rent a wheelchair so they don’t have to risk damage to their own personal wheelchair.”

Kirby and Parikh worked on their project during the summer session of the Entrepreneurship at Illinois iVenture Accelerator. They are still researching the market and the medical equipment industry, Kirby says. “There’s a lot of red tape to navigate with anything healthcare-related,” he notes.

Both students have had their eyes opened by their experiences with the Accelerator and with Social Innovation at Illinois.

As a result of this program, Parikh says, “I now know how to develop a business model, research market size, etc. I have also learned that survival in the business world heavily depends on the relationships formed with colleagues, mentors, and potential business partners.”

Kirby says that most importantly, he has learned that “I can affect a significant amount of change. It has shown me that anyone with a good idea, and the motivation to see that idea through to fruition, can make a difference.”

PreparIng Students To be Agents of Change

The world of social work – and the world itself – is changing, and the School of Social Work is doing something about that.

Social Innovation at Illinois is a venture that cross-lists courses in social work and business and that partners with numerous units across campus. It provides opportunities for students to address social problems and create commercial value, and it helps student teams design and launch a product, service, or program.

Led by the School of Social Work, Social Innovation at Illinois is a highly collaborative effort, with support from the College of Fine and Applied Arts, the Academy of Entrepreneurial Leadership, the Office of Public Engagement, the Office of Technology Management, Research Park, and IllinoisVENTURES, to name a few.

Visiting Assistant Professor Noah Isserman says that Social Innovation at Illinois is part of the School’s focus on preparing students for the future. “This is part of preparing our students to continue to be practicing social workers in an evolving world,” says Isserman.

Social Innovation at Illinois has partnered with the College of Business to kick off the Entrepreneurship at Illinois | Venture Accelerator, which features 13 teams of students from various units on campus. Almost a quarter of these entrepreneurial teams are lead by School of Social Work students. The “Share a Chair” project (featured on page 7) is an example of social innovation at work.

Leaders In Social Innovation
Many schools of social work offer all three levels of study. But few, if any, operate at those three levels the way Illinois does. “For example, there’s concern in the broader field that we’re not preparing enough people for leadership and management roles,” Dean Wynne Korr says. So the School began giving undergrads experiences in management and leadership work — building, Korr says, a pipeline for macro practice. “And we did the same thing with undergraduate research,” Korr adds. “We’re creating that pipeline of social workers who are not only exposed to research methods, but doing it in teams that incorporate students from the BSW, MSW, and PhD programs.”

Assistant Professor Karen Tabb, principal investigator for Identifying Depression through Early Assessment (IDEA), creates teams from all three degree programs (read more about IDEA on our website: socialwork.illinois.edu/idea) “Including undergraduates and masters students in our research team is a unique experience, because they often ask the most clear and profound questions that help us get to the ‘WHY’ or significance of our research studies,” Tabb says. Tabb notes that it’s also valuable to the graduate students, because they help mentor the undergrads in learning how to conduct biomedical research. “Over the years, I have received feedback from the research assistants that they find value in working with students across the various levels,” Tabb says. That value is felt at the undergraduate level as well. Her BSWs help prepare for annual symposiums, and this year two of her undergrad research assistants will present findings at a national scientific conference. “For the undergraduates, the IDEA team experience provides an opportunity for them to think about graduate studies and whether or not they want to pursue a PhD in social work,” Tabb says. “For the graduate students, the experience encourages them to think about how to best teach and mentor others and how they might want their own research team and lab to function.” According to Korr, “It’s really the cornerstone of their education...”

Our block placement plan – which began 50 years ago as the Illinois Placement Plan – came from the School’s vision to be the preeminent School of Social Work with a land grant mission, says Dean Wynne Korr. “That means for us that we have to promote access into state-of-the art professional social work education for residents throughout our large state,” she says. A big part of that state-of-the-art education is the block placement plan, where students serve in a full-time one- or two-semester internship that aligns with their concentration of study. Students complete their coursework prior to starting their placement, providing a solid foundation. They are both fully immersed in the internship and fully supported by their field faculty. Students emerge prepared to take the next step in their career. “It’s really the cornerstone of their education,” Korr says. “Our block placement plan prepares students for workplace demands. They leave with the knowledge and preparation that they need.” Before entering into their internships, students are solidly steeped in the theoretical concepts through classroom work. Those concepts come to life as the plan – and their internship – unfolds. When a plan has remained in place for 50 years, it’s because it works. In doing so, it helps to set Illinois apart — which was, after all, the plan all along.
IMPROVING MARKETABILITY THROUGH OUR JOINT PROGRAM

The joint MSW/PhD program is intended for students interested in PhD study who have a master’s in a related field but who have not earned an MSW degree. The program allows completion of both degrees in a slightly expedited time frame than is required to earn each degree separately.

“The program helps us recruit students with exceptional academic credentials from related disciplines; our unique structure helps them become competitive candidates on the job market by providing strong training in research, teaching, and practice experience,” says Min Zhan, associate dean for academic programs and associate professor.

Students from countries with little or no MSW social work education enter our doctoral program hoping to learn about social work education and research. They must have a master’s in a related field, but without an MSW their education here is incomplete.

“As a School, it helps us to graduate the strongest students,” says Christie Avgar, assistant dean for student affairs. The joint program (which began in 2010) makes the students as marketable as possible.

Lenore Matthew, a current joint MSW/PhD student says, “Before entering the program, I earned a MA in International Relations and worked in the field of international development as a practitioner and researcher for several years. The joint program truly gave shape and meaning to my career trajectory. The MSW core courses provided me with concrete practitioner training, which my more theoretical MA had not provided. In addition, the complementary nature of the MSW and PhD components allowed me to apply much of my doctoral research to practice on the ground. All in all, the joint program has prepared me to be a more capable and marketable researcher, practitioner, and educator.”
REACHING FAR AND WIDE

Some practitioners who want to earn their MSW from the University of Illinois are place-bound, living and working far from campus.

For more than 40 years, we have helped to meet their educational needs through our MSW Outreach program. Through the program, students take blended and online courses to earn their MSW. They can still earn a living in their own community while working toward their degree.

Prior to the field education phase of the MSW Outreach program, all students complete one semester on the Urbana-Champaign campus, taking classes from specialized faculty specific to their concentration.

“State-wide at last... during the 40 years of the MSW Outreach program, we have evolved to meet the growing need for social workers throughout Illinois. Our latest changes make an MSW education accessible from any part of the state,” says Susan Cole, MSW program director and associate professor.