

UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS
SOCIAL WORK
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



2017 REPORT



THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

WELCOMES DEAN STEVEN ANDERSON

Steven G. Anderson, the School of Social Work's new dean, shouldn't have trouble finding his way to campus.

Anderson earned his BSW in 1973 and MSW in 1974 from Illinois. He subsequently earned a master's and PhD in political science from the University of Michigan. He was a professor in the University of Illinois School of Social Work from 1998 to 2010 before moving on to become director of the School of Social Work at Arizona State University from 2011-2014. For the past three years, he has been director of Michigan State University's School of Social Work.

Anderson will take the reins from Dean Wynne Korr, who provided strong leadership and vision for the School during her 15-year term as dean.

"I am excited to be coming back to Illinois and am very thankful for this opportunity," Anderson says. "I came to the university as an 18-year-old freshman from west central Illinois, and a great many of my closest friendships and personal values were formed here. When coupled with the strength of the School and its inclusion in such a great university, serving as the dean is a wonderful honor and something to which I very much am looking forward."

Anderson says his initial priorities will be to continue to move the School forward in a positive direction, with emphases on expanding high-quality research and educational programming as well as community service impact. He is also very interested in the role of new technologies in stimulating social work educational and service innovations.

"Keeping abreast of new ideas and possibilities are critical in extending our leadership and continuing to be the highest quality program we can be, so I also want to focus attention and energy toward this end," he adds. "With the breadth of technological resources and innovations available at the University of Illinois, our potential to innovate and be technological leaders in social work is very promising."

Welcome home, Dean Anderson.



LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL CHANGE:

A FULLY ONLINE OPTION

Leadership and Social Change, one of two primary master-level concentrations in the School of Social Work, is undergoing a change of its own. Beginning in August, the concentration will offer a fully online option for students with a BSW degree.

"This opens advanced degree opportunities to social work professionals who are out in the community, as well as to rural students and to those who are working full-time and want to do a part-time MSW degree," says **Ben Lough**, MSW program director.

He notes that online offerings are increasing. "There's a demand for online courses," he says. "We have expanded our online and hybrid course offerings over the last few years. The whole university is moving in this direction. Students have indicated they want a fully online option, and we're responding to that request."

Leadership and Social Change focuses on macro practice, which makes it ideal for online study, Lough says. "Professional social workers need more opportunities to increase their competencies in indirect practice—like policy, advocacy, and organizational management" he says. "It works well online because the students aren't doing face-to-face clinical work."

The program helps meet a need in the profession, Lough adds. "By getting more people engaged in macro practice," he says, "we can strengthen nonprofit management and leadership in the community."

Lough believes offering Leadership and Social Change as a fully online option is coming at just the right time. "I'm excited about it," he says. "In this funding environment, nonprofit leaders need additional skills to keep their organizations afloat. A lot of that comes down to good management, good organization survival techniques, the ability to write grants, to seek funding from other sources. We are confident this will be good for students, for the School, and for the state."

INTRODUCING THE OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

EARLY CHILDHOOD COURT: ENHANCING THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN



The School of Social Work is partnering with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to create a workforce development office.

The focus of the office will be to provide training and support for effective and culturally-appropriate child welfare services in Illinois, says **Wynne Korr**, who will continue her work as a professor after ending her tenure as dean.

Korr worked closely with DCFS's **Monico Whittington-Eskridge**, associate deputy, Office of Learning and Professional Development, in developing the vision and plan for creating an Office of Child Welfare Workforce Development. The plan involves education for students and support for child welfare practitioners.

"The Office is part of a larger structure that supports DCFS," Korr explains. "It will include the Office of Child Welfare Practice, which is focused on pre- and in-service training for staff and foster caregivers, academic internships in child welfare, and birth parent support." The Office will also offer a Field Implementation Support Program to enhance the supervisory skills of middle managers in child welfare practice settings.

The School has a long history of fruitful partnerships with DCFS, especially with the Children and Family Research Center (CFRC), all focused on achieving its core mission of strengthening vulnerable families.

In July, a new program was launched in Illinois to improve the outcomes and well-being for babies from birth to three years old served by the child welfare system.

The Early Childhood Court Team program is a collaboration among many agencies and entities, including the School of Social Work, says **Kimberly Mann**, Deputy Director of the Office of Child Well-Being at the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS).

"We wouldn't be where we are without that network of support," says Mann, who mentions Chapin Hall, the Erikson Institute, the Juvenile Protective Association, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and the Irving B. Harris Foundation as some of the additional partners.

Early Childhood Court has been more than two years in the planning, Mann says. The program builds upon four years of implementation of a federal demonstration that also targets this age group. She describes the program as a therapeutic court designed to reduce the typically adversarial nature of courtroom processes and focus on the healthy development of very young children. Children who have been exposed to early life trauma and adversity are the focus of the court.

The initial launch involves 30 families. The program utilizes an evidence-based model initiated in Florida and later adopted by Zero to Three, an organization focused on the well-being of infants and toddlers.

"The court team will hold child and family team meetings and hearings before a judge on a monthly basis, which supports a higher degree of cooperation and accountability that gets created by the frequency of contact and the enhancement of all parties knowing and understanding child development and the impact of child trauma for this age group," Mann says.

Early Childhood Court is designed to improve collaborative problem-solving and case coordination among child welfare professionals, clinical providers, and the court. Goals include using best practices to enhance well-being and permanency outcomes and preventing future court involvement by addressing the issues that prevent families from succeeding.

"It's a win for the School of Social Work, which has a long history of supporting child welfare training and system enhancements," Mann says.

"It's also a win for DCFS and quite frankly for the citizens of Illinois," Mann says. "If we're able to achieve the outcomes that have been achieved by others, and I'm quite certain that we will, we will have made a major contribution for this most critical developmental period."



Studies have shown that integrated care results in better patient satisfaction, better adherence to treatment, and better outcomes.

PREPARING STUDENTS TO WORK ON INTEGRATED CARE TEAMS

Integrating behavioral healthcare in primary care settings is becoming the norm, and the School of Social Work is at the forefront in preparing students for the roles they will play in those settings.

“The vision of integrated care is holistic,” says Associate Professor **Janet Liechty**. “Patients can address their biopsychosocial health concerns in the primary care setting, and work with a coordinated team that seeks to support their overall health and well-being.”

The practical implications of integrated care, Liechty says, include “better screening for conditions like depression and anxiety in primary care settings, wider availability of effective brief interventions to help with depression in the clinic, and more consistent referral practices to ensure patients get referred—and actually connected—to the type of care that they want and need.”

The School of Social Work has been teaching and promoting integrated care models since 2012, when SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration) and the Council on Social Work Education released a model curriculum, Liechty says. All students in the healthcare focus area receive training in integrated care.

“They learn the basics of standardized screening tools, collaborative care models, and evidence-based interventions that social workers can provide in healthcare settings,” she says.

The School offers several courses that cover Motivational Interviewing, a common brief intervention used in integrated care. In addition, in 2015, Associate Professor Doug Smith received a three-year grant from SAMHSA to develop an SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment) scholars program, and that same year Liechty received a five-year Healthcare Education and Leadership Scholars (HEALS) grant to promote social work leadership in implementing integrated care models.

“New opportunities for clinical social workers to work on integrated care teams in outpatient healthcare settings are rapidly emerging,” Liechty says. “Our students are getting state-of-the-art training in best practices for healthcare and the integration of behavioral and primary health. This ensures they will be equipped to be team players and leaders in the transformation of healthcare to better serve patients and families.”



THE COMMUNITY LEARNING LAB: HANDS-ON SOCIAL WORK IN THE COMMUNITY

Kevin Tan knows the ups and downs of working with young people. And he makes sure his students know them, too.

Tan, an assistant professor, was a school social worker for six years in Singapore and the US before coming to the School of Social Work. Each fall he teaches a Social Work Practice with Children and Adolescents class, and he shares his own experiences with his students.

“It helps make the content relatable for students,” Tan says. “I don’t paint a rosy picture about working with young people. I share the struggles and challenges I had and the ways I overcame them.”

Tan’s class is hands-on, with each student spending 20 hours with a community organization, agency, or school in working with youth. The Community Learning Lab (CLL), which creates and supports relationships between the community and University of Illinois students, helped to establish the connections with the various agencies—among them the Crisis Nursery, Orchard Downs Preschool, Don Moyer Boys & Girls Club, Centennial High School, and the Child Development Lab.

“The students gain real-life experience in the field,” Tan says. “They bring their struggles in working with clients back to the classroom and we talk about the challenges in working with young people.”

Those student hours in the field are part of the nearly 36,000 hours of community service that have been provided over the years through the CLL. More than 400 community partnerships have been brokered through the lab.

“The Community Learning Lab gives students a wide range of potential sites for their service learning projects,” says Tan. “It’s an eye-opening experience for the students.”

Thanks to Tan and the CLL, the students get those real-life experiences that turn into revelation about what it means to practice social work with young people.

ROSALBA HERNANDEZ:

INVESTIGATING THE LINK BETWEEN EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH



In a recent pilot with 19 Hispanics in Chicago, **Rosalba Hernandez** found hope for people suffering from depression and anxiety to improve their emotional health.

“During the eight-week trial, participants meet once a week with a psychologist, a therapist, or a social worker,” Hernandez says. “Each week they learn a different skillset to increase their emotional wellbeing.”

Hernandez, an assistant professor, tailored a curriculum that focuses on positive psychology interventions for those suffering from depression or anxiety—and found improvements in depressive symptoms.

Hernandez has for years studied the link between emotional and physical health. In one study, she found that people who were more optimistic were more likely to have better cardiovascular health.

“We hypothesize that people who are emotionally healthy are more likely to cope more healthfully, to engage in healthy behaviors such as physical activity and healthy eating, and that people who are happier are less stressed and therefore don’t have some of these inflammatory reactions to stressful situations,” she explains.

In 2016, Hernandez received a five-year grant from the NIH to conduct a larger trial similar to the Chicago pilot. The new trial involves 126 Hispanics, and will involve additional biomarkers, including blood samples and blood pressure monitoring.

So far, she adds, the interventions are increasing emotional well-being. The next step is to see if that translates to improvements in overall health.

“There’s some indication in other populations with other chronic illnesses that this might be a good therapeutic kind of intervention, but we know very little when it comes to cardiovascular disease and risk factors, particularly in Hispanic Latinos,” Hernandez says.

Her goal remains constant: to see if psychology interventions can improve health outcomes, particularly for Hispanics.

“I’m also interested in seeing how we can promote positive health in a holistic manner, both emotionally and physically, in the Hispanic community,” she says. “And how can we not only do interventions at an individual level, but how we can promote a healthy and healthful environment.”

KATE WEGMANN:

FINDING INTERVENTIONS TO COMBAT STEREOTYPING’S EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



Kate Wegmann, an assistant professor in the School of Social Work, is exploring the relationship between academic achievement and elementary students’ perceptions of stereotyping. It’s a topic that most researchers have overlooked, but one that Wegmann, with her bachelor’s degree in elementary education, sees as valuable to pursue.

“A lot of research on stereotype threat has been done with college kids,” she says. “But what if this phenomenon takes place much earlier and prevents people from achieving and going to college?”

Stereotype threat and other forms of perceived discrimination inhibit performance and limit the brain’s ability to learn new material, Wegmann says. For example, stereotype threat accounts for a 50-point deficit in SAT scores for students of color; checking a box identifying yourself as female before taking a math test can trigger a similar stereotype response.

Wegmann’s aim is to figure out when it starts and develop practical interventions that could be used in elementary schools.

“My goal is to take what has worked with older populations, with college kids and middle schoolers, and adapt that developmentally,” Wegmann says. “This is pretty exploratory work. The work that’s been done with stereotype threat in elementary schools is fairly limited.”

One study she conducted in a North Carolina middle school showed promising results. She had kids write about a value that was personally important to them. Their teachers then read their essays.

“We wondered if this process would help the students overcome the possible stereotype threat, and if the teacher reads an essay, would he or she see the student differently,” Wegmann says. “We saw a statistically significant difference in grades at the end of the school year, especially among African American children.”

That, she says, is an example of an intervention that is both simple and cost effective. “Ultimately, I want to find out what interventions work, why they work, and when they should be implemented,” she says. “What I’m doing now is laying the groundwork for the next step.”

Wegmann is actively looking for elementary schools to partner with in her research. She can be contacted at kwegmann@illinois.edu.



TARA POWELL:
**BREAKING GROUND IN THE
 FIELD OF MENTAL HEALTH**

If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, Tara Powell may be on her way to a weighty discovery in the field of mental health.

Powell, an assistant professor whose primary area of research is in post-disaster mental health, has designed and is testing a mental health awareness intervention for Syrian refugees living in Jordan, and for Jordan citizens as well.

“There’s been a lot in the literature in the last 10 years about the high prevalence of mental health disorders in low and middle-income countries, and the lack of access to care,” Powell says. “But I don’t know of any other study that’s looking at the impact of reaching people who have experienced trauma and providing them with a preventive intervention. I’m pretty excited about it because it’s not something that’s been done. There’s a lot that says, ‘we should do this,’ but there’s nothing that says, ‘we did this, and this is how it worked.’”

Soon, Powell will be able to tell others how her intervention worked. Currently she is trying her intervention with 600 people at three clinics in Irbid, Jordan, collecting data at various points along the way. In the three-armed study, one group receives mental health awareness sessions to reduce the stigma of mental health care and to provide people with an outlet to talk about stressors and coping strategies.

Powell’s research is in collaboration with Americares, a disaster relief organization, and the Royal Health Awareness society.

“The prevalence rates of post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety disorders is extremely high among the Syrians, because they’ve experienced a lot of trauma,” she says. “The purpose of these sessions is to provide people with preventive interventions to help them cope with the traumatic stressors they have experienced, and to refer them to ongoing care if they need it so they receive some kind of mental health support.”



ANNE COULOMB:
GAINING A BROADER PICTURE

For a person who described herself as “really shy” when she entered the University of Illinois, **Anne Coulomb** has come a long way.

Coulomb was co-president of the BSWA (Bachelor Social Work Association), was involved with the Ambassadors program, studied abroad in Greece, and lived in a Living-Learning Community on campus for three years.

She also found great community within the School of Social Work itself. “One of the strengths of the School is you have classes with a lot of the same people, so you become familiar with other students. It quickly becomes your home on campus.”

Coulomb is preparing for her internship at The Pavilion Behavioral Health System in Champaign this fall. She will graduate with her BSW this December, a semester early, with future plans for grad school and her licensing as a clinical social worker.

The School has “helped me gain a broader picture of the world that’s more accurate,” she says. “My time here has broadened my understanding of other people and has given me a taste of all the different areas that social workers focus on.”

Coulomb knew early on she wanted to be a social worker. She was helped by a social worker on and off from second grade as she dealt with anxiety. “Having someone help me work through low periods in my life and find ways to cope, I wanted to be able to do that for someone else,” she says.

While drawn to clinical mental health, she says when she goes to grad school she will be open to other opportunities. “One thing I learned about social work is there are so many things you can do with it,” she says. “So, I want to concentrate on mental health, but I’m open to different experiences.”

CAROL MAUCK:

CHANGING STUDENTS, CHANGING THE FUTURE



“Social change is of the utmost importance,” Mauck says, **“because for marginalized populations, this is our hope for changing the future.”**

All professors hope their courses change their students. **Carol Mauck’s** course, however, focuses on her students changing society.

The clinical assistant professor, who previously owned her own social work consulting business, offers a class that focuses on social change and social entrepreneurship.

Mauck’s course, SOCW 321, is student-driven. Students figure out their passions, engage with agency professionals and entrepreneurs, and craft their projects. Examples of former projects from her and other professors’ previous 321 classes—some of which have spun into full-blown business ventures—include Creative Soles, a shoe-making business that employs artists with disabilities (the artists receive half of the sales); MakerGirl, a venture that inspires girls to be active in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields; and Share a Chair, a Zipcar for wheelchairs that increases freedom and convenience in travel for wheelchair users.

“With Creative Soles,” Mauck says, “artists’ psychosocial needs are being met, because they have a job and gain all the emotional components that go with that,

and it’s sustainable in terms of contributing to their income.” The student who developed Creative Soles, Drew McNamara, is establishing Creative Soles as a not-for-profit.

Part of the change students experience comes from the learning process they go through.

“Students learn to manage a budget, they learn to pitch their ideas, they learn about micro financing and how to create a project,” Mauck explains. “They learn how to establish funding, how to make it sustainable. They also learn logic models and critical thinking skills. Those are skills that will serve them well no matter where they go in life.”

In the end, perhaps the biggest change can be seen in Mauck’s students, whose eyes are opened to the possibilities they have to create positive change.

“Students learn that we don’t have to make a choice between impact and income,” she says. “We have the potential to have great social impact and still be able to make a living, and support ourselves.”

JANET D. CARTER-BLACK:

NEW JOURNAL SHOWCASES UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

This past spring, five undergraduate social work students were able to add a new achievement to their resumes: published author.

The students’ scholarly work was published in the inaugural issue of the School of Social Work’s new online journal, *Journal of Undergraduate Social Work Research* (JUSWR).

The idea of creating a student-led, peer-reviewed journal for the School of Social Work was introduced by **Dr. Brenda Lindsey**, teaching associate professor and BSW program director. In their roles as advisory board members, Dr. Lindsey, along with **Dr. Janet Carter-Black**, teaching associate professor and undergraduate research program coordinator, collaborated on the development and publication process of the journal.

“The journal showcases our undergraduate students, highlights their research, and contributes to the advancement of social and economic justice,” says Dr. Carter-Black.

The annual publication’s first issue offered five articles, including literature reviews focused on topics such as the identification of gaps in teaching intersectionality in institutions of higher education and comorbidity of diabetes and depression among Latina women, as well as a policy analysis of the Illinois Early Intervention Services System Act.

Dr. Carter-Black points to the value of the experience itself, emphasizing the benefits to students. “They not only gain early exposure to research, they have the opportunity to develop new skills at a manageable pace,” she says. “More importantly, they become members of the social work research community. As such, they are able to make a genuine contribution to society as a whole.”

Dr. Carter-Black acknowledges how critical Dean Wynne Korr’s support was in the successful launch of the inaugural issue of JUSWR. “Dean Korr is tireless in her commitment and determination that first and foremost, everything that happens at the School of Social Work must focus on providing a high quality of education for the students,” she says.

View the journal online:
go.illinois.edu/ssw_ugresearchjournals

NAJAT QUSHUA:

HELPING TRAUMATIZED REFUGEES



The recent flood of Syrian refugees fleeing their home country moves **Najat Qushua** deeply.

“That,” she says, speaking of the plight of the refugees, “is my motivation to work in this field.”

Qushua grew up in Israel and knows well the traumas of political conflict and war. She worked for 15 years as a social worker in a psychiatric hospital in Jerusalem before coming to Illinois in 2014 with her husband, who is a visiting professor in Jewish studies. She is working on her PhD here.

“In the mental health center in Jerusalem, I worked with people who were traumatized because of many events, not just war,” she says. “But in Israel, as you know, there is political conflict. I thought it deserved to be more explored how conflict and war affect people’s lives.”

Qushua’s research focus is on women who experience war trauma.

“I’m looking at how mothers help their kids make sense of these hard things,” she says. “There is a need specifically to study mothers and children, because they are the highest percentage of refugees. Motherhood in wartime is most important to focus on.”

She will decide later which refugee camp to center her research on. She names the West Bank, Europe, and the US as possible locations.

“There are a lot of national organizations who work with refugees, and they concentrate on work, food, and clothes, but mental health is not much focused on,” Qushua says. “It is a very important part of research and I would like to contribute to that.”

Her professors and advisor, she says, have been a great support to her here.

“They help me when I’m trying to find appropriate people so I can do research in this field,” she says. “They always welcome any question or any help I need or how to contact people in the field of refugees and mental health.”

BRUNA CARDOSA:

ADVOCATING FOR POLICY CHANGE

Bruna Cardoso knows what it’s like to be an undocumented student.

Cardoso, from Sao Paulo, Brazil, came to the US on a tourist visa in 2001, and was unauthorized after its expiration up until 2013, when she attained DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status. DACA allows certain people to receive renewable two-year employment authorization permits.

Last summer, to help undocumented and DACA University of Illinois students voice concerns and to create allies and advocate for policy change, she helped found I-CAUSE—Illinois-Coalition Assisting Undocumented Students’ Education.

“We’ve held two staff and faculty trainings and one for students,” says Cardoso, who is pursuing her MSW with a focus on leadership and social change. “We talked about what undocumented means and gave people a bit of immigration background. We want to educate people and bring awareness to different national issues as well as state and local issues.”

The university, she adds, has been very supportive of I-CAUSE and undocumented students. “Chancellor Robert Jones came and talked to us, and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Renée Romano is very supportive of us,” Cardoso says. “They even formed a coalition of their own to respond to all the executive orders coming out that would affect international students and undocumented students.”

Cardoso, who received her undergraduate degree in human services from Columbia (MO) College, interned and worked for The Illinois Department of Human Services for three years as a therapy aide at the Elgin Mental Health Center before coming to Illinois to work on her MSW. She is taking the LSAT for law school this September.

“I like administration and policy so much that it just makes sense for me, because the law affects my life every single day, so what better way for me to get involved even more in law than by becoming a lawyer,” Cardoso says.

She is appreciative of her time at Illinois. “I’m thankful for my graduate assistantship, La Casa Cultural Latina, the support I received from Dean Korr and my professors, and for the Educational Opportunity award that I received,” Cardoso says.





CLAIRE LUCE:

LOOKING AT CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH A SOCIAL WORK LENS

Claire Luce, a Boulder, Colorado native, is not afraid to travel. After three years of undergraduate work in Switzerland, she moved to New York City and worked in community engagement during Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, lived and worked in Chicago, and then came to Urbana-Champaign to work on her MSW.

Having graduated in May with her MSW, Luce is heading to Richmond, where she will begin her PhD work at Virginia Commonwealth University.

With her undergrad degree in environmental science, her MSW, and her experience with hurricanes and underserved populations, her PhD focus is not surprising.

“I’ll be looking at how we can focus on climate change solutions through a social work intervention lens,” she says. Low-income people, she notes, don’t have the option to get on a plane and fly away from their problems (caused by, say, Hurricane Katrina).

“As social workers, we try to serve the populations who are most affected by major disasters and who have the least agency in changing policies,” she says. “And this is a major area where that’s not really a focus worldwide.”

While at Illinois, Luce helped get a grant for 13 female first-generation college students who wanted to go to graduate school. The students received GRE scholarships and were mentored through the graduate school application process.

Luce credits Kate Wegmann, one of her professors at the School, for mentoring her and helping her sort through where she could be most effective upon graduation.

“I spent a lot of time trying to figure out if I missed this piece of environmental science,” Luce says of her undergraduate degree.

The answer was yes. And so Luce will pack her bags again, for Richmond, but with fond memories of her time at Illinois.

“I experienced a lot of personal growth here as well as academic and intellectual growth,” she says.

“I met some people who really changed my life and changed the way I see not only the field of work that I want to do, but how I see this country and my ability to interact with clients as well as keep on my day-to-day life.”



LAURA CAVENY:

DEVELOPING RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALUMNI

Terra Kern MSW '11 has been involved with the School of Social Work in numerous ways: as an undergrad and graduate student, as a graduate assistant, and as past president of the alumni board of directors.

“My reciprocal relationship with the School continues to influence my professional development,” Kern says.

That’s exactly what the School is looking for: reciprocal relationships with its alumni.

Kris Koester MSW '12 exemplifies that reciprocal relationship as well. Koester is taking the reins from Kern as alumni board president; he has already served as vice president.

“Kris’s dedication to the School and drive to support the advancement of the profession is contagious,” says **Laura Caveny**, associate director of development. “Kris has prompted new alumni programming and an overall increase in board donations.”

Caveny notes that alumni are living examples of the School’s success.

“Alumni really tell the stories of our success,” she says. “Parents don’t always understand the value of this degree. Alumni success stories are one avenue for that story to be told.”

Alumni, she adds, help keep the School informed.

“They give us insight into what’s going on in the field and how we can improve our programs to better prepare our students and to serve the community at large,” Caveny says. In addition, she says, alumni can help the School by serving on the board or offering internships to students.

Monetary gifts are particularly helpful in this time of unstable state funding. “We’re not always looking for that huge, life-altering gift,” Caveny says. “Just being able to count on annual contributions from our alumni will allow us to continue to grow and improve. Those gifts are so important.”

Many alumni, faculty, and donors give back generously to the School—often through scholarships that support students. **Dr. Charles Cowger** '76 (PhD) donated the money for the **Janice Hartman** '76 (MSW) Scholarship in honor of his late wife. **Nancy White-Gibson** '92 (MSW) is currently on faculty. She chose to give back to the school to celebrate the life of her late husband.

“Making that investment in us gives us a louder voice not only in this region, but on a national level, in terms of educating social workers,” Caveny says. “It’s important for alumni to recognize the value of their degree and in turn pay it forward for current students.”

NEW FACULTY AND STAFF



Shanondora Billiot | Assistant Professor

Education: PhD, Washington University, 2017; MSW, University of Michigan, 2007; BA, Sociology, Louisiana State University, 2005; BS, Psychology, Louisiana State University, 2005; AS, Graphic Design, US College of Air Force

My background in social work is... I have over 10 years of experience working in the field, from crisis intervention and post-disaster grassroots community development in Louisiana to implementing and analyzing federal and international health and mental health policies with the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Veterans Affairs as a Presidential Management Fellow.

I was a Henry Roe Cloud Fellow at Yale University and have completed fellowships with the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies at Washington University, University of Washington Indigenous Wellness Research Institute, and the Council on Social Work Education Minority Fellowship Program.

My primary research focus is... Social justice and wellbeing among marginalized populations, specifically, the intersections of power, the environment, and mental and physical health among indigenous peoples.

My favorite part about teaching is... Teaching provides an equally important opportunity to advocate for social and environmental justice, as does my research agenda. My goal in teaching is to train the next generation of social workers with the latest scholarship and tools available. I consider my teaching successful if students apply self-reflection and critical thinking skills to their practice and develop a commitment to professional service. I enjoy learning new ways of communicating the connection between research and practice for social work students.



Kevin Tan | Assistant Professor

Education: PhD, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago; MSW, Brown School of Social Work, Washington University in St. Louis; BSW (Honors), the National University of Singapore

My background in social work is... I received my BSW in Singapore. After that, I worked as a school social worker for four years before coming to the United States in 2006 for my MSW at the Brown School of Social Work, Washington University in St. Louis. Following my masters, I worked in a school district in the St. Louis area for two years. Subsequently, I pursued my PhD at the School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, before joining the School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in August 2016.

My primary research focus is... I study youth risk behaviors such as aggression and substance use. I also study positive youth outcomes such as their academic performance. Specifically, I study how patterns of risk and protective factors such as social-emotional learning relate to long-term problem behaviors and educational outcomes. I look at how social contexts such as schools and families relate to individual risk and protective factors and outcomes.

My favorite part about teaching is... Getting to know students! I love teaching and interacting with students. I make it a point to understand their interests and their motivations for doing social work. I also strive to support and help students achieve their goals. The best part about teaching is seeing students learn and grow in the classroom.



Laura Caveny | Associate Director of Development

Education: BA, Communications, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; MPA, Public Administration and Policy Analysis, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

My background in social work is... Before joining the School of Social Work, I worked in higher education advancement at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) and Blackburn College. Most recently, I served as the Director of Development for the College of Arts and Sciences at SIUE. The Social Work program at SIUE is housed within the College of Arts and Sciences. The nature of my work connects me with individuals from all walks of life. My current donors allow me to experience the field of Social Work through their eyes. I continue to be amazed by the hard work and dedication professionals have in this field.

My primary job focus is... Overseeing and executing alumni relations and fundraising strategy throughout the School of Social Work. This includes alumni programs, events, engagement efforts, donor relations, and annual gifts.



Rachael Dietkus Miller | Assistant Dean for Student Affairs

Education: BA, Sociology, 2000, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; MSW, Advocacy, Leadership & Social Change, 2010, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

My background in social work is... I was drawn to macro social work because of social justice and international human rights work. When I was considering graduate school in 2006, I had just completed a fellowship at the United Nations. In 2006, I spent nearly four months focusing on economic and social human rights as a delegate to the former Commission on Human Rights and witnessed the creation of the new Human Rights Council.

I started MSW program in 2008 and ended up completing my field placement with the Health Care for Homeless Veterans team at Veterans Affairs. I worked at VA for six years within the clinical, engineering, and mental health areas. In my last three years, I was the Coordinator of the same program where I did my field placement. My work was the perfect intersection of macro and clinical.

I am interested in social work because... of its perfect intersection and overlap with other fields. Macro social workers can have great influence and impact on so many different systems, which is exciting to see in sectors from design to healthcare.

My primary job focus is... As the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, I work on recruitment, admissions, student success, advising, programming, and career services. I get to do great front-end work with students as they prepare to be strong, professional, and innovative social workers.



Julie Muñoz-Nájar | Clinical Assistant Professor, Field Education Liaison

Education: MSW, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; BS, Psychology, Illinois State University.

My background in social work is...unique. After an abrupt realization at boot camp that my dream job in law enforcement would require me to carry a weapon, I decided to drop the gun part and embrace a more warm and fuzzy career in social work. Ten years later and I've been enriched through macro-level experiences related to health care, autism, community nutrition and infant mental health.

I am interested in social work because... This field has some of the most vast opportunities to serve your community and transform right along with it as it morphs to meet the needs of our ever evolving society.

My primary job focus is... Providing a stepping stone for bachelor students on their path to self discovery through the internship process in the classroom and with our amazing network of community providers in the field.

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