

FALL 2014

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**INTERNATIONAL
IMPACT**

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SOCIAL WORK UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN





▶ Have Project, Will Travel



Assistant Professor, Ben Lough doesn't live in airports. But it might, at times, seem that way to him.

His roles in international research and service have taken him to Germany (where he served as a resident consultant to the United Nations), to American Samoa (where he was a consultant to the Department of Human and Social Services), to Guatemala (where he was a program evaluator for Mayan Tree), and to Armenia and the Republic of Georgia (for more program evaluation work).

He is currently engaged in work in South Africa (where he is researching employment issues for young people) and Uganda (where he is assessing public health issues and the role of village health teams).

Then there is the presentation he gave in Korea in October on international volunteering, an issue dear to his heart. Not to mention two potential collaborative projects with the College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES) that may take him out of the country.

No doubt Lough's passport is thick with stamps. But more important than logging frequent flier miles is what he does when he gets on the ground.

Empowering Women in Agriculture

One of the joint research proposals with ACES is focused on empowering women in agriculture. Where the work will take place is yet to be determined, but the purpose is set. "Traditionally, men work with big livestock, like cattle, and women work with chickens, pigs, goats, and horticulture," says Lough, an assistant professor. "The idea is how can we empower women to take advantage of the resources offered through USAID and other international programs that often disproportionately benefit men? How can we channel some of these resources to help women as they work for their own families in raising small livestock, and in supplementing their nutrition with garden products?" Lough will be teaming with associate professor Chi-Fang Wu, who says, "I'm glad to be involved in this project, because my research is always focused on women's studies and program evaluation. We want to reduce the gender gap and increase the empowerment of women farmers."

Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Lough says that the project is a good example of "strong interdisciplinary collaboration and how social work researchers are looking across disciplines to think about how to better empower women."

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Another proposed interdisciplinary collaboration with ACES, is a two-year pilot study in Honduras. “It will explore how training programs that aim to enhance horticultural productivity in rural households influence social outcomes,” Lough says. Those outcomes include women’s empowerment, poverty alleviation, and well-being, along with traditional nutrition-based outcomes, such as dietary diversity and micronutrient status.

The Role of International Volunteers

Lough also recently traveled to Lima, Peru, to present a paper that he and doctoral student Lenore Matthew coauthored on international volunteering and governance.

“International volunteers play a lot of different roles in governance institutions,” he says. “They can work directly within a government agency, or they can work with civil society groups to pressure governments to change. As outsiders, they often put a different kind of pressure on governments to change their policies and practices, especially when they’re coming in with resources and the backing of transnational organizations.” Lough says he and Matthew show that “it’s not just the casework that volunteers do with individuals; it’s a whole range of action, from micro to macro interventions. At the personal level they link citizens with organizations and governments, but also at the macro level, they help push important policy changes through their advocacy roles.”

An International Focus on Peace and Social Justice

For 24 consecutive years, the School of Social Work has presented the Daniel S. Sanders Peace and Social Justice Lecture. The School will welcome guest speaker, Norma Price, MD, on April 28, 2015 at the Alice Campbell Alumni Center. The event, which is free and open to the public, begins at 7:30 p.m.

Dr. Price’s talk will focus on the experience of migrants in Southern Arizona and the social justice issues facing this population, including health disparities and barriers to service delivery.

This lecture is named after Dr. Daniel S. Sanders, who served as dean of the School of Social Work from 1986 until his untimely death in 1989, and was internationally recognized for his efforts to achieve world peace, human rights, and social justice. He also held numerous invited and elected appointments in social work-related organizations worldwide. Sanders received the Messenger of Peace award from the United Nations and was president and a founder of the Inter-University Consortium for International Social Development.

While at Illinois, Sanders served as a professor and as director of the Center for the Study of International Social Welfare Policies and Services. In addition, Sanders organized the Women and Peace conference on campus.

Through the Sanders Lecture, the School of Social Work is able to annually bring a scholar or expert in the area of peace and social justice to campus. Speakers not only present a lecture, but interact with faculty and students and meet with community sponsors.

To learn more about Dr. Sanders and the Daniel S. Sanders Peace and Social Justice Lecture series, visit our website at: socialwork.illinois.edu/sanders-lecture/



24th Annual
Daniel S. Sanders
Peace and Social
Justice Lecture

April 28, 2015
7:30 p.m.

Alice Campbell
Alumni Center



Corfu, Greece

▶ Studying Abroad: A Life-Changing Experience



Cyrielle Gauthier, who is graduating in December with an MSW from Illinois, has studied abroad twice – for a semester in Athens, Greece, as a junior, and now for a semester in Cape Town, South Africa.

“Every day brings a new adventure,” Gauthier says. “I meet new people, do things I never thought I would do – like paragliding, surfing, and great white shark cage diving – but most importantly I learn more about myself.”

Gauthier is interning at a home for chronically ill children. Her experience, she says, reminds her every day why she chose social work as a career. She has learned to expect the unexpected, and she has “fallen in love with the contradictions” – the beautiful mansions and the townships filled with shacks – that make up South Africa.

Gauthier is one of four social work students studying in South Africa this semester, and one of about 20 students from the School who have studied abroad in the past year.

“It Deepens Their Appreciation”

Mary Maurer, assistant dean for field education and MSW field education director, says, “Studying abroad provides an opportunity for students to see a whole new world.

It deepens that sense that there’s a world beyond the United States; it deepens their appreciation for new cultures and for people. It gets them to step outside of their comfort zone.” Students who study abroad go through an application process and then take a pre-departure course to prepare them.

“We’re cognizant it has to be mature students who study abroad,” Maurer says. “We want to be sure the students we are selecting are ready for the challenge, because it’s different than being placed in an internship in Chicago. We can’t drive there if they’re having difficulties.”

A Variety of Opportunities

Besides semester-long internships or study, the School also offers short-term courses leading to summer internships. Brenda Lindsey, BSW program director, has developed a Costa Rica partnership, and Hellen McDonald, clinical assistant professor in field education, offered an “International Perspectives in Social Work: Service Learning in Greece” course this past spring. Ten students – including other University of Illinois students – completed 16 hours of local service learning as part of their eight-week pre-departure class, during which they learned about Greece’s history, culture, social services, and other issues. McDonald and Michelle Asbill, a PhD student at the school, then led an 18-day expedition to Greece in May and June, where students completed another 32 hours of service learning in Athens and 32 more hours of service on the island of Corfu.



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“We were able to do some cross-cultural comparisons, not only between social service delivery in the US and Greece, but also within Greece, between rural and urban communities,” McDonald says. “It was very intensive.”

The students found similarities in terms of limited state funding in both the US and Greece, McDonald says. But they found some differences as well.

“In Greece, students found people are more laid back in how they provide services,” McDonald says. “Confidentiality is not as intense and formal as it is in the US.”

Another cultural difference students discovered is Greeks like to touch, to hug, to kiss each other on the side of the face. Experiencing such cultural differences, and making note of them, is an important part of studying abroad.

“A Better Understanding of the World”

As Cyrielle Gauthier puts it, “Studying abroad gives you a better understanding of the world. It widens your view of the world; it helps you learn not only about yourself but others as well and how beautiful our differences can be. No one ever returns from studying abroad regretting their experiences. Instead, you return as an individual who has witnessed and come to be a part of a completely different environment and culture, and that is truly invaluable.”

In Greece, McDonald says, students gained an international perspective on social service institutions. She says the trip was a big success, and plans are in the works to offer similar short-term study abroad courses, co-sponsored by the University of Illinois Study Abroad office.

Of the course she offered, McDonald says, “It’s the only course that offers this cross-cultural service learning both here in the US and in another country. We’re working on developing a teaching model so that others – across the university and maybe beyond – can emulate the format.”

Partnering with National Taiwan University

Study abroad programs are often created through the university’s relationship with other universities and institutions. In the case of the School’s exchange partnership with National Taiwan University (NTU), it came about through relationships established by Joyce Feng, 1988 PhD, 1981 MSW, a longtime professor at NTU, and Susan Cole, associate professor and MSW program director at Illinois, and Dean Wynne Korr.

“Joyce came back about seven years ago for our open house for the new building,” Cole recalls. “She hoped we could have a closer relationship between her department and our School.” The two, along with NTU grad and Illinois School of Social Work associate professor Chi-Fang Wu, began to talk over possibilities. But it was during a 2010-11 sabbatical taken by Cole at NTU that an idea for an exchange was birthed.

“NTU had students doing field practicums in Los Angeles and New York, but the programs were unstructured and they weren’t satisfied with it,” Cole says. So she, Feng, and NTU social work department chair Li-Chen Cheng worked out an exchange between the two schools. In addition, the two schools alternate hosting a biannual conference.

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“It is always good for social work students to develop their cultural sensitivity by means of learning about systems and issues from diverse societies,” says Feng, who taught for 30 years at NTU before becoming a cabinet member in the government in 2013. “This partnership provides ample opportunities for enriching students’ learning, both in Taiwan and in Illinois.”

NTU students have come to Illinois in the summers of 2013 and 2014. Illinois students have yet to go to Taiwan, but that is in the works. While the process has been “creeping forward,” Cole says, it’s entirely worth it.

“It’s been amazing for the NTU students who have been here,” she says. “And it’s been amazing for our faculty. We see their appreciation for the quality of our program and for their experience here, and it has been inspiring for us all.”

Cole notes that while the issues that social workers deal with in Taiwan and in the US are similar, each country has a unique cultural take on how to handle those issues.

Growing Personally and Professionally

And therein lies the beauty of studying abroad. You learn from others; you learn about others. You grow personally and professionally.

As Cyrielle Gauthier says of her internship in South Africa, “This internship has put me in situations that are out of my comfort zone and has pushed me to better understand myself and my abilities. You do not need to have the same medical diagnosis, economic status, or skin color to help and support someone. Good intentions, honesty, and rawness are what allow me to be of help to others. I could not have learned how to work through differences in the classroom like I have been able to do here in Cape Town, and for that, I am forever grateful.”



Increasing Interest

Across campus, 27 percent of all University of Illinois students study abroad. At the School of Social Work, “The interest in study abroad is increasing,” says Mary Maurer, assistant dean for field education and MSW field education director. “One of the things students are looking at when they look at our School is study abroad options or international internship options. So it is on the radar for many students. Some specifically ask about it.”

Being immersed in a new culture, and stepping back and learning from people in another country, is part of the attraction, Maurer says. So are the cultural excursions. For example, the students in South Africa have excursions on each Friday, visiting sites in and around Cape Town and other portions of South Africa. The students in Greece did the same.

“It’s the internship piece,” Maurer says, “but it’s also that deeper understanding of the world they’re living in for three months. It’s truly a life-changing experience.”



Relationships Surpass Language



Megan Wicklund has made a strong friend in three-year-old Shlelelo, whose mother is deaf. Wicklund, who graduated from Illinois in 2013 with an MSW, is working for the Peace Corps in Matsetsa, Swaziland at the High School for the Deaf.

She went to Swaziland with no Swazi sign language training. Since her arrival in the fall of 2013, she has had to learn two languages: sign and siSwati, which is spoken in Swaziland. Wicklund is overcoming her struggles with both languages. But the most gratifying part of her work is the relationships she has built.

“The Peace Corps allowed me the chance to truly learn that relationships surpass spoken language and culture,” she says. “A hug can go a long way, and even better is when the child you are showing affection to starts initiating the hugs herself. I was not expecting this to be the most gratifying part of my service, but it turns out that personal relationships have been the best part. And isn’t that the basis of good social work anyway?”

Taking on a Challenge

Wicklund took on the placement at the deaf school “because it sounded intriguing and challenging,” she says. When she got to the school, she was forced to do lots of finger spelling, rather than word signing – and then ran into the challenge of many students who struggled with spelling.

She received permission to change her life skills class to a literacy class, and says that the students are expanding their vocabularies.

Not one to shy away from challenges, Wicklund has taken on two video projects while in Swaziland: One that gives a literal voice to deaf children who tell their stories, and the other that teaches teachers how to sign.

Wicklund admits to some frustrations along the way, but says the challenge of working at the deaf school – at learning both sign and siSwati – helps her appreciate the communication frustrations of her students.

“They have to wait for someone to explain it to them and hope they get a clear answer,” she says. “I feel the same way when things are happening around me in siSwati. It’s another way that I was able to strengthen my relationship with the students. It’s something we have in common.”

How SSW Prepared Her

Her MSW coursework at Illinois helped prepare her for Swaziland, she says, because “as social workers, we are taught to prepare for the unknown.” Life in Swaziland, and at the school, is unpredictable, but she takes on the changes and challenges well. She also learned, through Illinois, the importance of building rapport in working across cultures. That rapport is evidenced in how Shlelelo has blossomed in the 14 months that Wicklund has known her.

“My heart soars with each new English phrase she picks up or when I am able to understand one more phrase from her in siSwati,” Wicklund says.



▶ Studying Informal Labor in Brazil



Doctoral student Lenore Matthew will start her new year off in Brazil, beginning her research on the impact of low-income women's participation in Pronatec, a workforce training program that supplies vocational and technological education.

"I hope to uncover how participating in formal employment training programs affects women's well-being and shapes relationships within families," Matthew says. "Programs geared toward labor formalization, like this one, particularly affect low-income women and, by extension, children, in the Global South. This area of research has the potential to uncover real impacts of labor formalization and training programs on vulnerable families," she adds.

The research will take place in Salvador de Bahia, where Matthew spent the summer of 2012 studying intensive Portuguese. Her research grew from the connections she made that summer.

A Wealth of Resources on Campus

She notes that she has access to a wide variety of resources made available by Brazilian and US scholars and other international researchers. "There is a very supportive community of 'Brazilianists' at the U of I," she says, through various programs, centers, professors, visiting scholars, and students. "We are so fortunate to have such strong area studies centers and an international focus on campus. All of this facilitates interdisciplinary and cross-national research and dialogue."

The Problems of Informal Employment

In Brazil, Matthew says, about 40 percent of people are informally employed – meaning they work in unprotected and unregistered jobs outside of the formal regulated labor market. "Women are more likely to be informally employed, and certainly more likely to hold precarious jobs that compromise their safety and well-being," Matthew says. "Various studies document the exploitation of informally employed women – domestic workers, factory workers, women who make and sell products in their home. Women earn less, are paid less often, and are likely to be subjected to unjust, unsafe working conditions. Without regulations – and the enforcement of regulations – these circumstances will not be alleviated."

Matthew speaks of new market interventions aimed at addressing the informal sector, such as providing access to enterprise loans for women. "But we have to ask," she says, "How are the transitions affecting them psychologically, economically, and otherwise? What about their families? These are questions to consider going forward, and some of the questions I am examining in my research."

Making Research Come Alive

Most of Matthew's research and practice have been in Latin America. In comparing her research abroad to here in the US, she says, "The wheels turn differently [outside the US]. Analysis and writing are beautiful aspects of research, and that's the part of my work I often do stateside. But talking to people – understanding people's lives, making connections, connecting with people – that is what makes research come alive."



▶ Extending Her Reach Far Beyond Home



For Tara Powell, returning to the Midwest is returning to familiar ground. But from 2001, when the Iowa native left the Midwest and the US to do a two-plus-year stint in the Peace Corps in West Africa, she has been on a journey – one in which she shifted gears on her career choice and in which she has traveled to many countries to offer help to others, particularly to those struggling to recover from disasters.

“When I was in the Peace Corps in West Africa,” Powell says, “I was in Ivory Coast when there was a coup. I was also in Equatorial Guinea when there was a coup. So I kept experiencing these conflicts and saw adverse consequences from them, with kids being displaced, and people not having their basic needs met. I decided when I got back to the US I wanted to get a master’s in disaster response and recovery.”

Powell, one of three new faculty member at the School of Social Work, returned from West Africa and enrolled at Tulane, in New Orleans, to work on a joint masters in public health and social work. On her way to her degree, she and the region suffered through Hurricane Katrina, and she was evacuated and displaced for a semester to Washington University in St. Louis.

Her experience in West Africa steered her toward international work. She was set to do an international internship, but her experience in New Orleans brought her back to that devastated city

“because there were significant needs there in social work and in public health.” She started an internship in the public school system of New Orleans. “It was crazy and chaotic,” she says. “But I learned a lot from it and that’s where my career started. I thought I would be a public health professional and I ended up being a social worker.”

Active in International Work and Research

While Powell has ended up in the States, she has remained active internationally. As she was finishing her dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin, AmeriCares, a nonprofit emergency response organization, asked her to go to the Philippines to help reestablish mental health care within local government organizations where people were impacted by Typhoon Yolanda, which killed more than 6,300 people in November 2013. Powell spent all of February and April 2014 in the Philippines, working in three regions, “equipping nurses, social workers, and psychologists with information and training through the WHO on how they can respond to people who are having mental health distress symptoms,” she says.

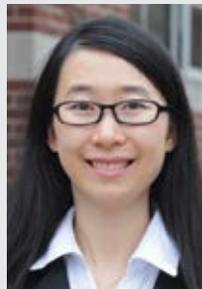
Settling Into Her Work at Illinois

Having just joined the School’s faculty, Powell has hit the ground running at Illinois. She is currently researching post-disaster settings and taught a generalist social work class in the fall. Next semester, she will be teaching social work with groups. “I’m bringing my experience into the classroom at Illinois,” she says. “I am teaching these classes because of my experience providing clinical services to children and their caregivers who have experienced trauma.”

Powell is also active with Save the Children and recently completed a study for the UK branch on 15 middle- and high-income countries to assess the disaster recovery programming they have in place.



Coming to Illinois: A Brilliant Decision



Ruiwen Sun has been in America, and in Illinois, for just a handful of months. She misses her family, friends, and teachers back home in China. She yearns for the delicious food she ate back home. She prefers crowded streets (she grew up in Nanchang, capital of Jiangxi Province in China, with a population of 5 million, and attended undergrad school in Nanjing, another capital with a population of 8 million). She struggles, she says, with her English, which is her second language.

But for all that, she calls her decision to work on her MSW at Illinois' School of Social Work "brilliant."

Helped by Teachers and Students

"I have met nice and experienced teachers," says Sun. "Some of them are experienced social workers with plentiful clinical experience, and others are knowledgeable professors with rich research experience. Also, I like my lovely friends and classmates here. They are always willing to help me. I have made a few very close friends through the summer semester.

"I've learned a lot of new things, both in the social work profession and in daily life. I am quickly improving through various assignments, though I may suffer a lot from these assignments due to the language issue. But I am really happy I am challenging my limitations and achieving a better self."

SSW: A Friendly and Caring Atmosphere

Sun chose Illinois, she says, for the quality of the social work program, the supportive atmosphere for international students, and the array of professors' research topics. "I was impressed by the friendly and caring atmosphere at the School of Social Work," she says.

She spends extra time on her assignments, she says, because she is still learning English. "I have been going over English grammar systematically," she says. "For the social work profession, I know language is quite important. And I am working hard on it."

Bringing Back to China What She Learns Here

Sun chose social work as her major back in 2007, and notes that the profession was not well known then in China and is starting to grow there now. The information she came across about social work said that it was "to help needy people," and she wants to do just that.

So here she is, learning about social work issues, practices, and systems while also learning a new language. She expects to graduate with her MSW in either August or December of 2015, and plans to get a PhD in social work, though she says she might try to get some post-MSW social work experience first.

"For the long term, I plan to return to China," Sun says. "I want to bring what I have learned here back to China."

GETTING TO KNOW RUIWEN SUN

What do you do for fun?

I watch Chinese and Korean TV dramas, read documentary novels, biographies, and romantic novels.

What's your favorite thing about campus?

The libraries! The environment is quiet and enjoyable. I also like the bus system.

What's your advice for students considering studying abroad?

Work hard, stay optimistic, be open-minded, ask questions and do not be afraid to ask for help. Respect others and be kind.



Smoothing the Waters



The School of Social Work is entering the final phase of its involvement with a Guatemala water project that began in 2008.

That was the year that the University of Illinois Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering undertook an Engineers Without Borders project in a village of about 450 people in southwestern Guatemala.

The project was initially geared to build a centralized water treatment facility that could deliver clean water to villagers' homes. After experiencing both structural and social obstacles, the focus shifted to providing residents with bio-sand water filters.

Helping With the Communication Process

The School became involved in 2011 to help smooth the communication process with local partners, which had become snarled through cultural and language differences.

"There was a lot of confusion in the beginning," says associate professor Chi-Fang Wu, who became involved along with associate professor Lissette Piedra and PhD candidate Lenore Matthew. "But things have been running more smoothly since we got involved."

The grant the School had been operating under expired at the end of August, but the School is still analyzing qualitative and survey data collected from households in the communities. "We also remain on the team as consultants to our local partners," Wu says.

In Data Analysis Phase

"We want to use the information to help us understand the cultural and social barriers [in using the filters] and what are the effects of the water treatment program on people's health," she says.

In November, Wu and Piedra, along with associate professor Thanh Huong Nguyen and graduate student Hanting Wang from the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, met again with Executive Director Anne Kraemer Diaz and Medical Director Peter Rohloff from Wuqu' Kawoq. Wuqu' Kawoq is a Guatemalan health alliance that has been involved in the project for several years. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been gathered by engineering and social work students, and Wu says the data analysis phase "is an exciting phase for us to be in. We are seeing how the water treatment program has been implemented and how the program has affected the local community."

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The survey data will reveal information about program implementation as well as the villagers' health. Unfortunately, Wu says, they don't have any baseline data, because the School wasn't brought in at the beginning. "We ask them about their general health before using the water filter system and their health condition now," she says. "We know it's not the best way to get that data, but that's the best given our situation."

Establishing Trust and Relationships

As for the communication problems that existed at the beginning, Wu says they were complex, but were solved. "You can't just install the water technology," she says. "You have to think about what's best for the people receiving it."

Once trust was established and communication flowed smoother, the project took off. A key to that smoother communication was having Lenore Matthew, who is fluent in Spanish, translate for the group. "It's very important to have consistent team members so we remain the same when we are working with our Guatemalan partners, and to have a bilingual team. Lenore was fantastic," Wu says. "That deepened our relationship. Building relationships and deepening the communication with our community partners is really important."

"Sometimes just having the knowledge itself won't solve the problem. You need to understand their perspective and strengths and have the capacity to engage the stakeholders from the community."

The water filters are working, and Wu and her team are available to troubleshoot any problems. But, she says, the filters are not the long-term solution. "Advocacy and pushing for larger changes – such as a complete water infrastructure – is part of the solution," she says. "This really highlights how international social work is a combination of direct solutions and macro-level advocacy work."

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