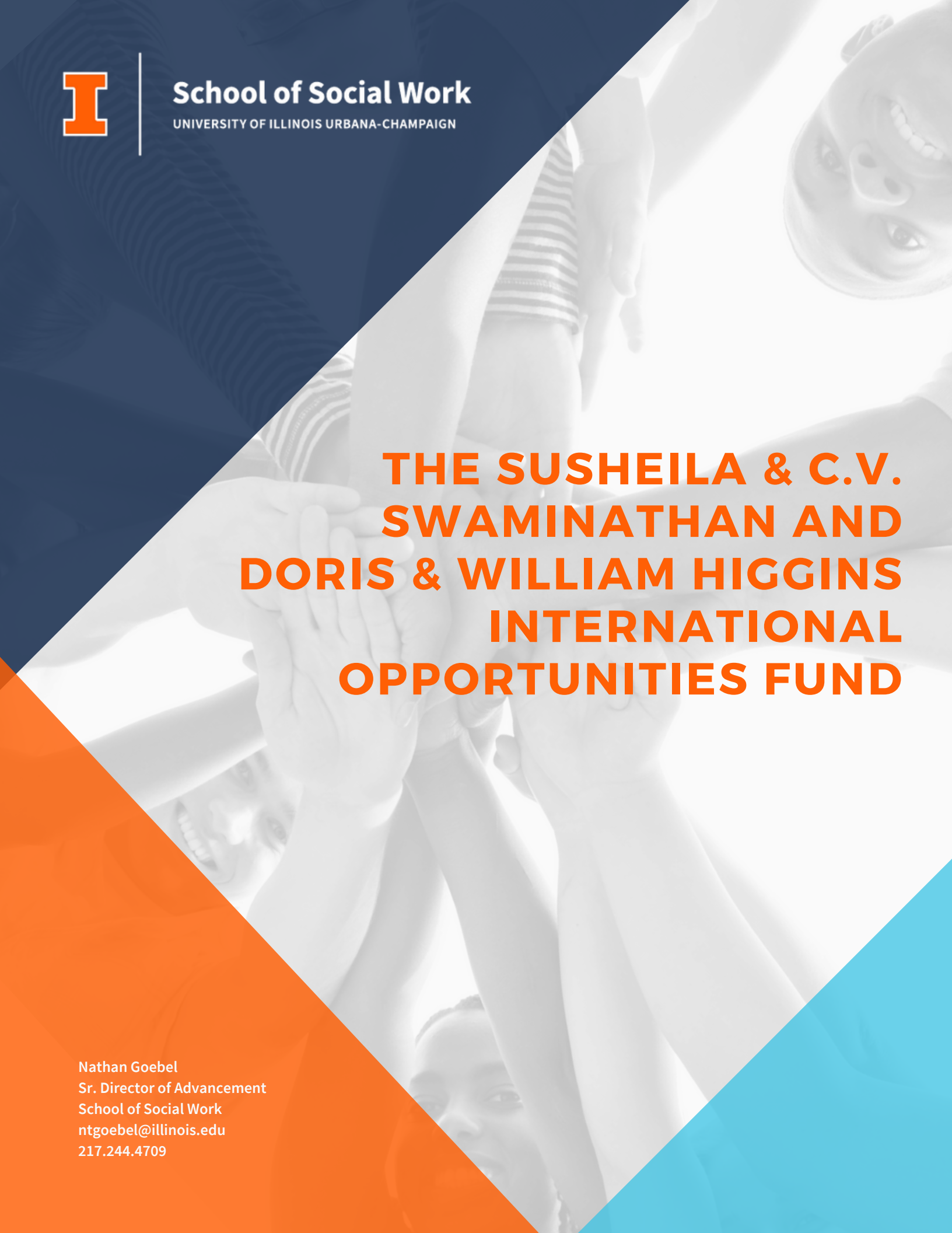




**School of Social Work**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

A large, semi-transparent image of a group of diverse people's hands and faces reaching towards the center, overlaid on a background of diagonal stripes in dark blue, orange, and light blue.

**THE SUSHEILA & C.V.  
SWAMINATHAN AND  
DORIS & WILLIAM HIGGINS  
INTERNATIONAL  
OPPORTUNITIES FUND**

Nathan Goebel  
Sr. Director of Advancement  
School of Social Work  
[ntgoebel@illinois.edu](mailto:ntgoebel@illinois.edu)  
217.244.4709



**Chathapuram (Ram) Ramanathan, PhD., ACSW., LMFT, CSW.,** Professor, School of Social Work, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois. He received his BSc (Science) from St. Joseph's College, Bangalore University, India, and was awarded both his MSW and PhD from the University of Illinois. Professor Ramanathan, of Illinois State University, has worked as a social worker for four decades as practitioner, researcher, professor, and administrator. His practice and scholarship are rooted in cross-cultural (is multi-lingual) social work, social development, addiction recovery and corporate social responsibility. He has presented over 50 papers and workshops in 18 countries; published 50 plus reference articles, book chapters, case studies, and co-authored four books; and received multiple Fulbright awards. Michigan governor bestowed a tribute for his contributions to diversity, religious harmony, peace at international, national, and state levels, and recognized him as an important Asian American leader. In 2020, University of Illinois, School of Social Work Alumni awarded Community Achievement Award; in 2021, he received Jim Billups International Social Development Leadership Award, conferred by International Consortium for Social Development. In December 2022, was presented a Lifetime Achievement Award by, Friends of United States a Non-Governmental Organization, for his dedication to advancing humanity globally through knowledge development, dissemination, promoting student and scholar exchanges, and study abroad programs.

Steve Higgins and Ram Ramanathan met in graduate school at the University of Illinois in 1979 and have nurtured a meaningful relationship between themselves and their families for nearly 50 years. They are both committed to global social work practice and reciprocal learning. They value international experiences and believe that to be effective social workers in a globalized world actualizing study abroad, as well as field work experiences in India, the largest democracy that is culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse, will help the student to be a well-rounded social workers, global citizens, and leaders in the profession. We further believe these experiences will help the University of Illinois School of Social Work students to appreciate diversity within our national boundaries.

Ram's mother Mrs. Susheila was fluent in English, French and several Indian languages, an artist raised three children. Ram's father Mr. C.V. Swaminathan was in senior management of a British multinational company. His graduate degree was in Physics (held 1st rank in the Presidency of Bombay during British India) and received an engineering degree from the Indian Institute of Science. Their commitment to humanity, compassion, and empathy was and is inspiring. They both admired Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. Ram's wife Pravina worked for two decades as a civil rights enforcer and as Asian American civil rights liaison for 10 years. Their son Vinay was born and raised in Michigan and is an engineer and has an MBA in finance. Both Pravina and Vinay have volunteered in organizations that work with folks facing socio-economic challenges, and structural inequities. Vinay volunteered as teenager at Nightingale Senior Center, in India; and as professional in Atlanta, volunteered with Families First. Both Pravina and Vinay have volunteered with Habitat for Humanity as well.

(continued)

## UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Ram's wife Pravina worked for about two decades as a civil rights enforcer and as Asian American civil rights liaison for 10 years. Her work as a Civil Rights Enforcer and Asian American Liaison, was recognized on the floor of 110th Congress for her work to protect the civil rights of Michigan residents and advocate on behalf of Michigan's Asian American Communities.



**Stephen (Steve) Higgins, MSW, LCSW** attended Eastern Illinois University for his undergraduate degree in education. Following student teaching, he worked in community mental health for three years before enrolling at the University of Illinois in August 1979 to pursue his MSW. During graduate school, he helped establish Champaign County Operation Snowball and worked at Metro Police Social Services. Upon earning his MSW in 1981, he worked for 35 years as a school social worker.

As a school social worker, he built trusting relationships with students, families, administrators, and school staff. Throughout his tenure as a school social worker, his practice incorporated the developmental assets framework which builds upon and strengthens “40 research-based positive influences and qualities that influence young people’s development” (Search Institute). He also relied upon the tenets of the Circle of Courage, a model that integrates First Nations’ teachings and research in positive youth development based on “the principle of universal needs for emotional health youth including a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity.” Steve has been a staunch advocate for social justice. At Urbana Middle School, he founded a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) group, one of the first middle school GSAs in the state. He also developed and facilitated Students Have a Voice, a student leadership group dedicated to empowering students to promote acceptance and understanding among the student body while advocating for the rights of all students. In recognition of this work, he received the McKinley Foundation’s Social Justice Award in 2015.

Steve’s extensive US travel and his travel overseas strengthened his dedication to ensuring all students and families feel valued and heard. Traveling broadens our experiences and allows us to develop a deeper understanding of people who are different from ourselves. Traveling strengthened Steve’s commitment to the importance of cultural diversity and cross-cultural understanding and these values were incorporated into his social work practice throughout his career.

(continued)

## UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Steve's father, William Higgins, was in the insurance and real estate industry and his mother, Doris Ann Higgins, was also in real estate. Neither of them attained a college degree; however, they both highly valued education and the importance of continuous growth. Their compassion and generosity provided the building blocks that informed Steve's career. Steve's wife, Shawna, is a former special education teacher and current director of the Urbana Adult Education Center. Her commitment to diversity, inclusion, and thoughtful cross-cultural transactions have training of her staff has been recognized by her peers and her board of Adult Education Center. His son, Erik, lives and works in Berlin Germany where he teaches business management classes. His oldest daughter, Rachael, earned a degree in therapeutic recreation and is considering earning her MSW. His youngest daughter, Madelyn, is a junior at Urbana High School, and has volunteered her time to better others' lives and most recently volunteered through Habitat for Humanity to build houses with other teenagers in Mississippi. It has been exceedingly inspiring to learn from her Gen Z perspective.

Given their lived experiences and values, Ram and Steve want to create opportunities for social work students to live and learn in different cultural contexts. They are grateful for the opportunity to honor their parents, with their families' support, by initiating this scholarship endowment.

If you would like to honor the Swaminathan and Higgins families and provide support for student opportunities in India, please visit the [Make a Gift](#) page and indicate that your gift is for the **Susheila & C.V. Swaminathan & Doris Ann & William Higgins International Opportunities Fund-11777893**.

You may also contact [Nathan Goebel](#) in the SSW Office of Advancement with any questions or to discuss additional opportunities to make an impact through philanthropy. Thank you for supporting the social work profession and the communities we serve across the globe!

