MSW 2016 Hooding Ceremony

On May 24th, 2016, we graduated our 9th class of MSW students! Family and friends joined the MSW graduates, faculty, and staff on the Oviatt Library front lawn to celebrate the annual Hooding Ceremony. Professor Allen Lipscomb and MSW graduate Jimmie Jakes presented the faculty and student keynote speeches, respectively, both to uproarious applause. Recipients of the Jean E Daniels Leadership and Academic Achievement Award were also honored during the ceremony. The students receiving the award for their outstanding performance and contribution were Honey Bianchi, Javier Blas, Lucia Holguín, and Brandon Mikel.

We wish all of our graduates the best in their next endeavors.

CSUN’s MSW Program Ranked #13!

California State University, Northridge, Department of Social Work has been ranked #13 in SR Education Group’s 2016 list of Top Graduate Programs. The 2016 Top Graduate Program rankings represent graduate schools and programs all across the nation and are based on student reviews. Making it on this list means we have earned an extremely high satisfaction rating from our graduate students. This year we admitted 23% of applicants for our two year state-side program, 20% of applicants for our three year state-side program and a whopping 29% of our applicants for the online program. Our 411 students in all cohorts of the CSUN MSW program provide over 178,000 hours of services each year to the surrounding communities through their internships at the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Children and Family Services, 8 local hospitals, 14 local school districts, charter schools or non-public schools. We have nine new and continuing partnerships across the CSUN campus where our students are providing services in conjunction with other disciplines. Examples include the Pride Center, Queer Studies, the Veterans Resource Center, Disability Resources and Educational Services, Grandparents as Parents program assessment in partnership with the College of Education.
Message from the Chair

Martin Luther King, Jr. stated: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter," and "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

This has been a summer of violence and divisiveness in our nation and world. Our national and global social work communities are grieving the surge in the loss of human life and dignity while elections in the United States are illuminating the many polarities, possibly exploiting the discontent of the masses. Although this tragic history is not a new phenomenon, the ability to capture these events on social media has made the exposure to our culture far more accessible, undeniable, and concrete. The repetitive exposure to these violent events also increases a culture of trauma. Although we as a nation need time to grieve and heal from this violence, we also need to organize. Our social work profession and code of ethics guide us to “rise as a people.” This rise must include a spectrum of group members, including directly impacted communities, allies, and cautious participants alike. Many of our faculty, staff, students and alumni have been active in movements to end violence and voice the injustices of stalled prosecution. Advocacy happens on every level. I urge you to get involved by lobbying, writing letters to elected officials, attending peaceful events, making financial contributions or whatever you have the time and resources to do. Conscious interruption can also have a huge impact on disseminating more inclusive information to all.

The CSUN MSW faculty are educating socially informed and engaged social workers and sending them into the workforce to raise consciousness and to sometimes be the voice of dissent. Our admissions numbers continue to rise and our caliber of education strengthens. I love going out into the community with my CSUN MSW t-shirts and having people talk about students, faculty and alumni and the outstanding work that we are doing to make positive changes and be civically engaged.

Thanks to MSW partnership with the Pride Center, CSUN is one of the first universities to establish gender neutral bathrooms on campus. We are proud to be one of the most diverse campuses in the nation, and to be working toward reducing the achievement gap and increase retention and graduation rates of our students. Our MSW program is looking at international relationships to share social work values worldwide, and we plan to begin a partnership with the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in fall 2018.

All the best for an outstanding year ahead,

Amy Levin
New Staff Update

The MSW department recently welcomed several new staff members to the team! The first to join was Administrative Support Assistant Camille Pili-Jose, who started last winter. Camille graduated from CSUN with a degree in Sociology with an emphasis on Work & Society and a minor in Gerontology. Immediately after graduating, she began working with a local assembly member. After a few years in politics, she decided to explore working in higher education. Since starting with the department in December 2015, she has enjoyed assisting the students reaching their goals and looks forward to her growth in the department. In the early spring, Ian Donaldson began helping out on Tuesdays and Thursdays as a part-time Administrative Support Assistant. Ian hails from Portland, Oregon, where he earned a bachelor’s in Social Sciences from Portland State University, along with a certificate in Chicano/Latino Studies. After graduating, Ian went on to work for Portland State at the Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education. Later in the spring we welcomed our new Onsite Admissions and Student Engagement Coordinator, Jessica Rubalcava. Jessica graduated from CSUN with a Bachelor’s Degree in Journalism, emphasis in Public Relations and a Minor in Sociology. She is currently getting her Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Prior to joining the MSW department, she worked in Human Resources with The University Corporation, and worked at CSUN’s Human Resources, Recruitment Department before that.

Alumni Update

Harout “Harry” Berberian, ACSW is an alumni of the 2014 CSUN MSW Program who graduated with distinction. Harry is currently employed as a Mental Health Clinician I within an AB150 program providing mental health treatment to serve the post-incarceration probation population in the San Fernando Valley. Harry has served under many titles throughout his career, including: Psychiatric Social Worker, Mental Health Clinician, Clinical Oncology Social Worker, HUD-VASH Veterans Social Worker and Clinical Case Manager. Harry is nearing the completion of his clinical hours for licensure and is studying to take the California Law and Ethics and Clinical LCSW exams to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. Harry is a compassionate social worker who is interested in becoming a field instructor to give back to a profession that has given him so much.

“Harry is a compassionate social worker who is interested in becoming a field instructor to give back to a profession that has given him so much.”

CSWE Feminist Manuscript Award

Dr. Sarah Mountz received the 2015 Feminist Manuscript Award from the Council on Social Work Education for her paper “That’s the Sound of the Police: State-Sanctioned Violence and Resistance Among LGBTQ Young Adults Previously Incarcerated in Girls Juvenile Justice Facilities in New York State.” Her paper addresses the marginalization of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender and questioning youth in social service and community settings, which can leave them vulnerable to violence and increased likelihood of incarceration. The Feminist Manuscript Award was established by the Women’s Council to recognize innovative scholars who contribute to the advancement of feminist knowledge as it pertains to social work theory, research, practice, and education.
Select Publications and Presentations

Our faculty collaborate with students on publications and we are proud that five of our recent alumni are co-authors on papers that stemmed from some of their original Capstone research projects.


Associate Professor Wendy Ashley has been collecting data with Dr. Allen Lipscomb on the needs of racialized clinicians in clinical supervision. They have surveyed clinicians, students and licensed supervisors to get a sense of what people are doing and missing in supervision. Key areas they are highlighting include affirmation, intersectionality and privilege.

Dr. Ashley is also working collectively with the Family Focus Resource Center on campus and the Regional Center to provide clinical case management to families with children with autism. Several of our MSW students are providing services to these families.

Under the guidance of Steve Sherry with collaboration from the University Consortium for Children and Families and the Department of Children and Family Services, we were able to offer 8 stipends for students to intern in public child welfare this year. Through the CASWEC grant and under the supervision of project coordinator Julie Gould and consultants Robin Sims and Luis Curiel, an additional 42 students (17 full time students and 25 part time students who are current public child welfare employees) receive financial support to earn their MSW’s and work in the Department of Children and Family Services after graduation.

SELECT FACULTY PUBLICATIONS and PRESENTATIONS


Dr. Alejandra Acuna published an article with the Director of School Mental Health at LAUSD, Helping those who come here alone, in Kappan Magazine (December 2015/January 2016) about young, unaccompanied immigrants.

Drs. Hyun-Sun Park and Jodi Brown interviewed graduates from the CSUN MSW 2014 online, two-year, and three-year stateside face-to-face cohorts and recently published their findings that show that these alumni maintain their research self-efficacy one year after graduation. These interviews resulted in a 2016 publication titled “Longitudinal student research competency: Comparing online and traditional face-to-face learning platforms” published in Advances in Social Work.


Dr. Wendy Ashley presented two papers at the Association of Black Sexologists and Clinicians Spring Roundtable Series in St Thomas, Virgin Islands in April 2016. “Black Eyes Matter” and “tHAIRapy: Therapeutic Hair Care as an Ethnically Relevant Treatment Paradigm.”
The 20th Annual CSUN Student Research & Creative Works Symposium

Several MSW students presented at the 20th Annual CSUN Student Research & Creative Works Symposium in February. The symposium offers students the opportunity to give poster and oral presentations on a wide range of research and creative activities, from the impact of streaming on the music industry to the effect of performance-based pay on teacher motivation and student outcomes. Students Sahara Ramirez and Shant Deravanesian gave a challenging 3-minute oral presentation, garnering the attention of Hedy Carpenter, CSUN’s Director of Graduate Studies, who asked them pertinent questions on their research. Other MSW presenters included Javier Blas, Samara Katten, Claudia Ochoa, Charvie Kong, and Daniela Levin, who showcased posters reflecting the wide range of social issues faced by contemporary social workers. Students described the experience as enlightening and enriching, praising the forum as an excellent opportunity for the exchange of ideas and information.

Reducing Mental Illness Stigmas can Lead to Economic Gains

Professor Alejandra Acuña has been quoted in a recent article detailing the use of social media to reduce stigmas associated with mental illness. The piece centers around a study by the RAND Corporation, which suggests that by using social media to reduce stigmas for those suffering from mental illness, there is an increased likelihood that those sufferers will find or maintain gainful employment, thereby contributing more to state tax revenues.

In the article Professor Acuña says, “This is an important finding. Social marketing campaigns have been used with great results to change behavior and address public health concerns like nutrition and HIV testing.”

“Universal approaches like social marketing... [are] a great opportunity to shift social norms.”

To read the entire article, please visit: http://californiahealthline.org/news/state-economy-gains-by-reducing-the-stigma-of-mental-illness-study-says

BUILD PODER: Reflections on Privilege Conference 2015

The BUILD PODER Reflections on Privilege Conference 2015 was held for students, faculty and staff campus wide on December 2, 2015. Dr. Sarah Mountz and Professor José Paez led a Privilege Spectrum, exploring notions of privilege, oppression, and resilience. MSW student leaders facilitated small and large group discussions highlighting the vast and varied differences in privilege and perspective. The day-long event also included an exhibit titled the White Privilege Room, which invited participants to think about historical events and current conditions relating to White privilege in the U.S. Dr. Sarah Mountz had the pleasure of introducing esteemed keynote speaker Tim Wise, a prominent anti-racist educator and activist, whose address was titled Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity.
Lobby Days

On April 16-18, fifty-one CSUN MSW students travelled to the capital to partner with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to lobby for bills that promote social justice. The following bills and items were the focus at this year’s Lobby Days: SB 23 Repeal of the Maximum Family Grant, Restoring the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and State Supplemental Payment (SSP) Grant Cuts and the Cost of Living Adjustments, and AB 2590 Restorative Justice Act. Faculty and students attended the NASW rally with posters and chanted with other MSW students from across the state. CSUN MSW students volunteered to help support the event and registered as team leaders to prepare their group for the meeting with their state representatives. All the students received a valuable lesson outside of the classroom as they were exposed to the politics of macro social work at the state level and actively engaged with their government to make a difference for their communities back home.

Advanced Field Instructor Training

On January 22, 2016, the Field Education Department conducted an advanced Field Instructor Training on Cultural Humility. Forty Field Instructors attended the training. Feedback from the field instructors applauded the timeliness of the trainings primary focus and the experiential exercises which motivated their active participation. They appreciated the safe space to share their narratives. Many of them had never had an opportunity to share their story relative to their race, culture, class, sexual orientation, or immigrant experiences. The overall qualitative feedback from our field instructors was they left feeling empowered to address this vital information with not only their students but also with their professional colleagues.

The Field Education Department will be conducting its’ 2nd Annual Advanced Field Instructors Training in January 2017. The topic will be “Preparing Social Work Students for the 21st Century Workforce: An Array of Opportunities.”

MSW Faculty and Staff Protest Arrest of Black Lives Matter Organizer

Several of our students, faculty, and staff joined hundreds of others in June, to protest the arrest and sentencing of Black Lives Matter activist, Jasmine Richards. Richards was convicted of “Felony Lynching,” an unprecedented charge for a Black citizen, stemming from an incident where BLM protesters attempted to protect another Black woman from harm. The conviction is widely seen as being politically motivated and an attempt to silence and intimidate the movement. Protesters gathered outside the Pasadena Courthouse during her sentencing hearing, wearing white clothing and donning orange ribbons in a show of solidarity. Paper was provided to protesters who wished to write letters of support and encouragement to Richards. Pictures of participation by members of the CSUN MSW program were featured on the BLM Facebook page.
CalSWEC/UCCF 2015-2016 Update

The CSUN MSW program has had the honor of receiving Title IV-e contracts (CalSWEC and UCCF) that allow us to offer stipends to students wanting to work in public child welfare, as well as to support the education of a number of child welfare workers who are coming back to school to earn their MSW degree. We graduated four UCCF students in May and have accepted 8 second year students to intern this coming year at DCFS in Palmdale, Lancaster and Chatsworth. These students will be expected to work at DCFS to support public child welfare. We also graduated 13 CalSWEC students in the spring, 7 of whom were employees while the remaining 6 have begun their careers at DCFS somewhere in the state of California. We are thrilled to collaborate with LA County DCFS and to have so many of our alumni working to better the child welfare system.

Honoring Prince During Our Faculty Retreat

Many of our faculty and staff have shared in a collective grief and reminiscing upon learning the news of the passing of Prince. For many, he was a musical storyteller and icon, and his early and sudden death has been likened to that of John Lennon. It was suggested by some that we wear purple for our faculty meeting on May 17th to signify solidarity for this man who paved paths for gender nonconformity, Black and racial equity and advancement, and many other important social justice movements. His dedication to fluid gender expression and racial equality will be missed, particularly in light of the recent upsurge in violent attacks.

“[Prince] paved paths for gender nonconformity ... and racial equity”

Diversity Day

On February 9th, the 7th Annual Diversity Day, a student-led conference, examined environmental inequalities and the legacy of colonization. One of the keynote speakers, Klee Benally, shared about his fight to protect Indigenous sacred lands and the effects of colonization for his community. His talk invigorated the audience to take notice of the lands they are occupying and challenged the crowd to not be an ally but rather an accomplice in joining the fight of others. Terisa Siagatoni, another keynote speaker, performed spoken word and moved all who were present with her passion to raise awareness for her pacific-islander community and the ability to call for healing and justice for all. The conference also hosted an arts activist panel that shed light on the various mediums people can use to make a statement and the power that art can evoke in society. The event offered many more presenters through various breakout sessions. The event ended with a dynamic musical performance by Aztlan Underground.

“Mother Earth” by Kristy Sandoval
Painted live at the 7th Annual Diversity Day
The CSUN Social Work Society

Social Work Society (SWS) is a student-run organization for MSW students in the program. This past year the group hosted multiple meetings, organized to support various causes and events, fundraised to participate in Lobby Days, and also hosted the first annual town hall meeting. The town hall meeting provided an opportunity for students and faculty to connect and discuss the CSUN MSW program. SWS has also created four $500 scholarships for the incoming first year students. The organization continues to unite MSW students to work together to raise awareness of social issues and create opportunities for students to practice advocacy.

Competing for the Flynn Cup

When it comes to Matadors, we have quite a special group in the MSW department. On April 2, 2016, our MSW Matadors participated in the Flynn Cup for the 6th consecutive year. With dominating victories against CSULA and CSUDH, and very close losses to UCLA and USC, our players played their hearts out, as usual. Our team lost to USC in the semi-final game to finish 3rd in the tournament. We made new friends from other MSW programs and had an excellent time competing and building new connections with fellow social workers.

In the last few years the camaraderie and sportsmanship between schools has elevated exponentially. The Flynn Cup has proven to be a unique venue for social work students, alumni and faculty to strengthen the bonds within the program and to enhance connections with other Social Work programs in Southern California. Our team is grateful for the love and support we receive each year from friends and family, and from students and faculty in the MSW department who came out to cheer us on.

I’d like to take a moment to highlight how special our group is. With their limited free time, current students and alumni have carved out dozens of hours from their demanding schedules to attend practices and games in their quest for improvement and team cohesion. Many bonds have been created amongst members of the team of softball players over the past several years. While we may not all be world class athletes, we do have a core group of players who are not only committed to advocating for social justice, but are also committed to their own self-improvement, supporting one another, and making lasting memories. It has been a privilege for me to spend time with such quality people. I look forward to continuing in my mentorship role over the years to come.

By Frank Costello, MSW 2007 graduate