

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**

GRADUATE COLLEGE of SOCIAL WORK



NOTEWORTHY

A Publication of the Graduate College of Social Work

FALL 2019

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DEAN

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MISSION STATEMENT

The University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW) prepares diverse leaders in practice and research to address complex challenges and achieve sustainable social, racial, economic, and political justice, local to global, through exceptional education, innovative research, and meaningful community engagement.

About the Cover: ONWARD | The Next 50 Years
(Story pg. 14)

Top L to R: Melanie Pang, inspired by Grace Lee Boggs; Landon Ritchie, inspired by Harvey Milk; and Kandice Webber, inspired by Angela Davis

Bottom L to R: Amanda Williams, inspired by Frida Kahlo; Ali Lozano, inspired by Dolores Huerta; and Joeall Riggins, inspired by Maya Angelou

Portraits by: Anat Ronen

NOTEWORTHY



After a yearlong celebration of 50 years of social work education, I've learned we have as much to celebrate as we have work to do to achieve social, racial, economic, and political justice. I am honored to serve as Dean to help guide the College **ONWARD** to The Next Fifty Years as we continue our tradition of advocacy, activism, and responsiveness to current issues, which require both our leadership and unique social work perspective. This fall, just as we did last year, we welcomed our largest-ever incoming class of MSW students. And so, it is with pride and abiding hope that we enter our 51st year at the GCSW poised to build on our past for an even brighter future for all who champion social work values.

In this edition of Noteworthy, we celebrate the achievements and successes of the 2018–2019 academic year. I am proud to share faculty research situated firmly in our vision, student achievements that advance its cause, illustrious alumni who work in every possible iteration of the social justice sphere with excellence and innovation, and community partners who show up in partnership with us to fight for a common goal, social justice for all.

And finally, a note on our cover. To bridge the past with our future, we are highlighting the work of GCSW students, alumni, and community activists in a series of striking portraits by artist Anat Ronen where the subjects appear alongside their social justice inspirations. Throughout the year, we will continue to unveil portraits of those whose work spans the breadth of today's social justice issues. In the great tradition of art serving as a canvas to raise awareness and champion social change, the paintings are an invitation for others to learn more about these talented, dynamic, and determined modern-day activists. They are proof positive that social justice work, throughout its history, is carried forth by ordinary citizens who dream of better lives for us all and then fight for it.

For though we know the fight for social justice is far from over, we are inspired by the work being done by those in our very own community each and every day. By sharing their stories, we hope to inspire others to join the social justice movement that stokes their passions and commitment. **We can only hope to achieve justice for all through the work of many dedicated people determined to dream of and work for a more just world.**

Warmest regards,

Alan Dettlaff, PhD, MSW

Dean and Maconda Brown O'Connor Endowed Dean's Chair

NEW FACULTY MEMBERS

This year we welcome two scholars whose research reflects the GCSW's vision of achieving social, racial, economic, and political justice, local to global, and explicitly addresses issues within marginalized communities and a commitment to racial justice.

"I have always wanted to join the faculty of a college or university that believes in addressing social and racial justice, locally and nationally among marginalized and oppressed groups," said new Assistant Professor Donte Boyd. "I'm excited to expand the knowledge on HIV, Black families, Black adolescents, and other health disparities to students, staff, my faculty colleagues, and to the greater Houston area through a racial justice lens," said Boyd.

Assistant Professor Charles Lea also joins the GCSW as a new faculty member.

"What attracted me most to the GCSW was its explicit focus on race. My research centers around Black boys and men, so being able to join a community of researchers who lead with race and address the systemic issues tied to it is priceless," said Lea.

"AT THE **GCSW**, OUR PRIORITY IS TO AMPLIFY ISSUES OF **RACE AND RACIAL JUSTICE**. THE WORK OF DR. BOYD AND DR. LEA ADDRESSES CRITICAL ISSUES THAT ARE FOCUSED ON DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS TO **BRING ABOUT CHANGE**."

– DEAN ALAN DETTLAFF



DONTE BOYD
Assistant Professor

Dr. Boyd's research addresses ways in which socio-contextual factors impact Black male adolescents' decision-making behaviors. He examines ways the role of the family and other important persons in Black male adolescents' lives impact HIV prevention behavior and other health outcomes as well as the impact of school context among Black male adolescents in shaping their sexual health behaviors.



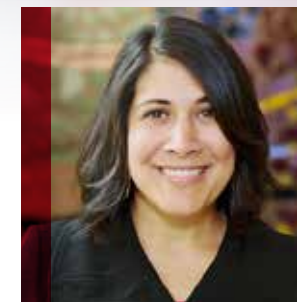
CHARLES LEA
Assistant Professor

Dr. Lea's research and scholarship investigate the intersectionality of race/ethnicity, class, and gender in educational, correctional, and neighborhood contexts, and the impact these issues have on the health and well-being of young Black men and boys at risk and involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

NEW FACULTY LEADERSHIP

The GCSW is pleased to announce new administrative leadership for MSW and doctoral students with the appointment of three faculty members. Associate Professor Sarah Narendorf has been appointed Associate Dean of Research and Faculty Development, Professor of Social Work Susan Robbins, Associate Dean of Doctoral Education, and Clinical Assistant Professor Aabha Brown, Foundation Coordinator.

"Our pursuit of justice is the top priority in all aspects of our work at the GCSW. As we continue to grow and amplify our social justice vision, leadership plays a critical role. This incredible team of leaders is fully dedicated to this vision and to doing the work necessary to make a real and lasting impact. I'm excited to see the change that will come," said Dean Alan Dettlaff.



AABHA BROWN
Foundation Coordinator

"I'm excited to design and implement more implicit curriculum opportunities for students to further integrate their exposure to the myriad ways social workers pursue and achieve social justice. My teaching focuses on professional skill development, self-awareness, and competent practice because I intensely believe education remains one of the most powerful tools in the pursuit of justice."



SARAH NARENDORF
Associate Dean of Research and Faculty Development

"I am honored to support our faculty in generating scholarship that contributes to solving some of our most challenging social problems. The work our faculty does is grounded in our vision of achieving social justice, and I am excited about the opportunity to increase public impact of that work."



SUSAN ROBBINS
Associate Dean of Doctoral Education

"I'm excited about the opportunity to guide the PhD program and train our students to be public impact scholars. It will be challenging, but I believe that it can be attained through collaboration and careful planning. This is necessary if we are to achieve the College's mission and vision."

“Educating is about teaching people to ask the right questions so they may discover for themselves what is wrong.... and we must do it in community, not alone as individuals.” – **Angela Davis**

“How you conceptualize freedom defines your perspective of race and privilege.” – **Angela Davis**

A CONVERSATION ON RACE *and* PRIVILEGE

“Why is talking about race and social justice still necessary? People talk about a post-racial America. But there are aspects of racism that are overt and becoming more widespread thanks to the person who occupies the highest office in this country.” – **Angela Davis**

“I never thought of it as white privilege when I was younger. I thought if I did the right thing, good things would happen to me. Good things did happen to me, but I didn’t know at the time it was because I was white.” – **Jane Elliott**

“We have to refuse to tolerate the intolerable. If the status quo is intolerable for you, it’s intolerable for me.” – **Jane Elliott**



Social Justice Solutions: A Conversation on Race and Privilege with Angela Davis and Jane Elliott has been viewed over 77,000 times and is available on our YouTube channel.
bit.ly/GCSW-SJS-AngelaDavisYouTube

SOCIAL JUSTICE SOLUTIONS

ANGELA DAVIS and JANE ELLIOTT

On September 6, 2018, the GCSW hosted a historic first-ever meeting of activist, scholar, and writer Angela Davis and educator Jane Elliott for **Social Justice Solutions: A Conversation on Race and Privilege**. It was the latest installment of the annual series led by students, which invites activists, thought leaders, and the community to explore strategic actions to affect social change. At the sold-out event, moderated by GCSW Professor Emeritus Jean Latting, Davis and Elliott offered incisive commentary from lives spent fighting on the front lines of civil rights and racial justice for the last half-century. Both implored the audience to consider race from a historical context.

“I don’t know whether we grasp the extent to which racism has affected and infected the entire history of this country. It’s not a simple thing. Racism is deeply ingrained in the economy, in the school system, in the prison system, criminal justice. What we are addressing today are issues that should have been taken up in the immediate aftermath of slavery. But they are also issues that should have been taken up with respect to the colonization of this part of the world. The first victims of racism were indigenous people,” said Angela Davis.

Elliott added, “Racism is only 500 years old. You were not born a racist. You have to be carefully taught to be a racist. We should stop teaching racism in our homes and our churches.”

Student organizers Shanquela Williams (MSW ’19) and Naiyolis Palomo (MSW ’19) were inspired to invite the speakers to facilitate an in-depth exploration of issues they felt were important not only for social workers but the community.

“Race and privilege are social constructs at the core of so many issues we face in today’s society, including racial divide, police brutality, and structural racism,” said Palomo.

To conclude the event, Davis and Elliott were asked to give audience members three action steps for combatting racism.

ANGELA DAVIS: 1. JOIN AN ORGANIZATION AND BECOME A PART OF A LARGER COMMUNITY. **2. CALL OUT** RACIST COMMENTS WHENEVER YOU HEAR THEM, DON’T LET IT PASS. **3. RECOGNIZE** THE DIFFERENCES AMONG DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND **BECOME AWARE** OF THOSE STRUGGLES.

JANE ELLIOTT: 1. TURN OFF YOUR TELEVISION. **2. PICK UP** A BOOK. **3. GO OUT** OF YOUR WAY TO **MEET SOMEONE** YOU WOULD HAVE NEVER WANTED TO MEET.

A fitting launch to the College’s 50th anniversary, Dean Alan Dettlaff spoke to the importance of the event.

“As a college of social work, we are committed to providing a community platform and leading important conversations. We’re proud that once again, our students took the lead by proposing a topic and inviting speakers that reflect the heart of social work. As social workers, we have a responsibility to confront racism, discrimination, and oppression. This is part of our values and is written in our code of ethics,” said Dean Alan Dettlaff.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



Assistant Professor Juan Barthelemy's *Summit School Evaluation Project* funded by a UH Small Faculty Grant addresses programming and educational outcomes

at The Summit School, an alternative school primarily comprised of youth who identify as Hispanic (over 90%). The school serves students who have been temporarily expelled from middle and high schools in the Pasadena School District for serious behavioral problems or offenses, resulting in juvenile-justice involvement.

The project will develop a systematized, standard process for tracking and measuring student progress as well as preparedness for students to return to their schools of record. Evidence-based tools will be developed to measure how prepared students are to return to their home schools or if the schools of record are prepared to receive students back after they have completed their programs at the alternative school. The project addresses efforts to reduce recidivism when students return to their schools of record. In addition, the project will help determine how they perceive peer relationships and academic achievement with regard to locus of control.

Dr. Barthelemy's experience and research with at-risk and justice-involved youth fueled this project, which aims to impact systemic issues within the school system to disrupt the school to juvenile justice system pipeline.



Despite recent advances in understanding barriers to Hispanic health services utilization, Hispanics continue to be over-represented in low service utilization groups

and premature termination of services, both significant predictors of hospital readmissions.

Assistant Professor Sharon Borja's federal grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services addresses diabetes (DM), hypertension, obesity, comorbid depression, and anxiety, which are longstanding disparities among Hispanics in the United States. The grant will fund the two-year study, *Latino Health Behavioral Health Services Utilization: A Mixed Methods Study Using Experimental Vignette Survey, Qualitative Methods, and Pilot Testing of an Electronic Fotonovela Intervention*.

The study attempts to address these gaps by conducting a three-phase mixed-method study in several different aspects: to better understand the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of Hispanics toward diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and comorbid depression and anxiety diagnosis using an experimental vignette methodology. As part of the project, Borja will collaborate with a local federally qualified health center to co-design and pilot a culturally-responsive intervention using entertainment-education (E-E) tools in the form of fotonovelas (FN). E-E is an effective tool to increase health literacy among Hispanics.

The project impacts minority beneficiaries by engaging Hispanics in the Houston metropolitan area, which has a population of more than two million.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



The child welfare system in the United States is characterized by racial disproportionality and disparity for African American children at every decision point. Research on the

predictors of child welfare system involvement and their influence on levels of disproportionality has focused overwhelmingly on individual-level risk factors.

Assistant Professor Reiko Boyd's project *Mapping and Modeling Strengths among Vulnerable African American Families* departs from the traditional approach of computing disparity ratios based on African American/White comparisons and instead will examine intragroup differences among vulnerable African American families to determine whether strengths may be protective against child maltreatment reports. In addition, this study will utilize Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and multilevel modeling to map and analyze both strengths and structural barriers at the neighborhood level in order to understand how strengths, not just risk, may vary between families and across structural contexts. Mapping is an under-utilized tool in child welfare research.

Funded by a New Faculty Development Grant, the project employs a strengths-based perspective, which holds the unique potential to bring a needed paradigm shift. By conducting an analysis of strengths among this vulnerable population, this study will explore what may be working for, not just against these families, even in the context of structural barriers.



Through an innovative partnership between the GCSW and The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, **Professor Robin Gearing's** *Justice System Diversion: Mental Health Treatment Engagement and*

Quality Improvement Research Dissemination Grant further developed engagement and intervention skills of clinical and support staff at the newly established Harris County Mental Health Jail Diversion Program. Designed to decrease justice system involvement for first time non-violent offenders with mental health concerns by diverting them out of the justice system to community based mental health services, the program serves diverse populations, requiring staff to have strong engagement skills and knowledge of evidence-based intervention approaches.

Drs. Gearing and Washburn (PhD '15) worked with leadership and staff to identify the core populations accessing services to develop a training program that translated the latest research to practitioners and focused on a wide range of behavioral health concerns such as: substance abuse, trauma and PTSD, schizophrenia, unipolar and bipolar depression, and personality disorders. Components on how to best engage vulnerable populations often underserved in the health and mental health spheres, including people experiencing homelessness, military service members and veterans, members of the LGBTQ+ communities, and a wide variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds, were included. By equipping providers with skills to competently address the behavioral health needs of vulnerable populations, the program addresses overrepresentation within justice settings, and the health disparities often experienced by those from racial/ethnic minority and other historically underserved communities.



Reform or Abolish:

BRINGING JUSTICE to the
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

“**CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM** CAN BE A CONDUIT, BUT IT **MUST END WITH ABOLITION**. WE SHOULD IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT PRISONS, WITHOUT POLICE. ABOLITION NEEDS TO BE A DESTINATION. **WE CAN’T BE AFRAID TO SAY THAT.**”

– MARLON PETERSON



Top L to R: Judge Shannon Baldwin, Natalia Cornelio, Jay Jenkins, and Joeall Riggins

Bottom L to R: Ashton Woods, Brandon Dudley, Mike Webb, Marlon Peterson, Kandice Webber, Juan Barthelemy, and Dean Alan Dettlaff



ACTIVISM & ADVOCACY

AMPLIFY YOUR VOICE

This spring, the GCSW hosted **Reform or Abolish? Reimagining the Criminal Justice System** for the annual Amplify Your Voice community forum that offers information, skill-building, and informed analysis of issues from social workers, activists, and community leaders. The daylong event featured panel discussions and a keynote address by Marlon Peterson, Soros Justice Fellow, host of the Decarcerated Podcast, TED Resident, writer, and advocate.

“It’s important for the GCSW to provide opportunities for our students and community to understand the issues and systems that create and perpetuate inequality. When I think of systems that perpetuate injustice, I immediately think of the criminal justice system,” said Dean Alan Dettlaff.



Underlying Issues, a panel moderated by GCSW Associate Professor Quenette Walton, explored conditions including economic disparities and the school to prison pipeline that affect incarceration rates. The panel on **Reform**, moderated by MSW student Joeall Riggins, examined current reform ideas and whether those efforts were enough to make the criminal justice system more just. And **Take Action**, a panel moderated by GCSW Associate Professor Juan Barthelemy, posed the question: How can individuals and communities advocate for real and lasting change?

Much of the discussion situated criminal justice within the context of racial justice, addressed the role of institutions and interrogated existing models of punishment. Here are a few highlights:

“It’s not a war on drugs; it’s a war on Black people. We have to call things what they are. We cannot use coded language.” – **Terrance “TK” Holmes**

“We know that arrests don’t work. If so, the United States would be the safest place in the world.” – **GCSW Associate Professor Juan Barthelemy**

“It’s popular to say you’re a reformer. As citizens, you have to look beyond the buzz words. A cite and release program is better than a diversion program.” – **Judge Shannon Baldwin**

“There is a serious act of humanity at the heart of abolition and reform. As [prison abolitionist] Ruth Wilson Gilmore said, where life is precious, life is precious.” – **Kandice Webber**

“As a practical matter, prison abolition is less about closing actual prisons, and more about opening up your mind, skill sets, and resources to what we can create. Prison abolition is a project of freedom visioning, justice creating with racial, gender, social, and economic equity as a guide.” – **Marlon Peterson**

Reform or Abolish? Reimagining the Criminal Justice System is available on our YouTube channel. bit.ly/GCSW-Amplify19

UH HEALTHY START

Last spring, the GCSW received a \$4,870,000 grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration to provide community-based and family-centered services and health education to residents in the 10 Houston-area ZIP codes with the highest rates of death and complications surrounding birth. The rates of infant mortality, low birth weight, and pre-term birth in these ZIP codes are at least 1.5 times the national average.

Led by Associate Professor McClain Sampson, the Healthy Start Initiative is the largest program in Houston designed to address these longstanding perinatal health disparities explicitly. While the services will be available to any woman who is pregnant or has just given birth, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, the initiative will target Black women, their partners, teenagers, infants, and their families to promote preconception care, early prenatal care, longer intervals between pregnancies, fatherhood involvement and behaviors that can reduce risk.

Despite being home to a world-class medical center, renowned physicians, and high-quality medical treatment, many communities in Houston experience significantly higher infant and maternal death rates. In some areas of Harris County, rates are nearly five times the national average, with Black women and their babies at the greatest risk.

Houston's vast urban landscape and rapid growth present challenges for low-income residents, many of whom live in neighborhoods without convenient access to medical care. Demand for primary care has outpaced supply in many areas across Houston.

"We have a history in this country of disconnected healthcare, and that can lead to adverse outcomes, especially for mothers and children," said Sampson. "Our case managers will connect them to integrated health centers where they can see the pediatrician, OB-GYN, primary care, and behavioral health in the same location. It's a much more efficient way to take care of families."

The program aims to reach 3,000 mothers and 500 fathers over the next five years. To help the parents navigate a fragmented healthcare system, case managers and community health workers will canvas neighborhoods to connect women with health insurance, transportation, and timely, continuous and regular primary and preventive care at integrated health clinics, including the newly opened federally qualified health center on the UH campus.

Health education programs will provide families with information about managing stress and mental health, nutrition, sleep, sexual health, and more. Sampson will also train doctors and nurses on implicit bias, or the idea that attitudes and stereotypes can unconsciously affect actions and decision making.

"Research shows that implicit bias does occur in the health care setting," said Sampson. "Claims made to a provider by low-income minority patients, for example, can be dismissed more readily than those from a patient with more resources. The actions may be unconscious, but it needs to be addressed to achieve equity."



UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

**HEALTHY
START**

Healthy Moms. Healthy Families.

"THE SIGNIFICANT **DISPARITIES IN THE NUMBER OF MOTHERS AND INFANTS WHO DIE** OR SUFFER MAJOR COMPLICATIONS ACROSS RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS FUELED MY PASSION FOR LEADING THIS INITIATIVE. THERE'S A MAJOR PROBLEM OF INEQUITY. BY EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTING THIS PROGRAM, **WE CAN WORK DIRECTLY TOWARD RACIAL JUSTICE** FOR EXPECTANT AND PREGNANT MOTHERS IN HOUSTON."

– MCCLAIN **SAMPSON**



WE CAN ONLY HOPE TO **ACHIEVE JUSTICE** THROUGH THE WORK OF MANY **DEDICATED PEOPLE** DETERMINED TO DREAM OF AND WORK FOR A MORE **JUST WORLD.**

Coming Soon 2020:
Amanda Williams, inspired by Frida Kahlo;
Joeall Riggins, inspired by Maya Angelou;
and Landon Ritchie, inspired by Harvey Milk

ONWARD | THE NEXT 50 YEARS

As the GCSW officially begins its 51st year, we are committed to moving ONWARD to achieve social, racial, economic, and political justice local to global. To bridge the past with our future, we are highlighting those committed to social justice. GCSW students, alumni, and community activists appear alongside their social justice inspirations in a series of striking portraits by artist Anat Ronen. Over the next year, we will unveil portraits of those whose work spans the breadth of today's modern social justice issues. We invite you to learn more about each of these talented, dynamic, and determined modern-day activists. They are proof positive that social justice work, throughout its history, is carried forth by ordinary citizens who dream of better lives for us all and then fight for it. For though we know the fight for social justice is far from over, we're inspired by the work being done by those in our very own community every day. By sharing their stories, we hope to inspire others to join the social justice movement that stokes their own passions and commitment. Introducing:



Kandice Webber, inspired by Angela Davis: "I've always been aware of the injustices Black people encounter. I just didn't know what to do about it. I followed Black Lives Matter closely after the death of Michael Brown. Watching Black people take to the streets, stirred the fight in me. I felt like our time had come. We were going to continue the movement our parents and grandparents started. I had no idea how hard or how long we would have to fight. I still don't know. **I just know I'm not done fighting yet.**"

Ali Lozano, inspired by Dolores Huerta: "One week after graduating from the GCSW, and two weeks after starting my new job at the Texas Civil Rights Project, I was in Austin at the Capitol fighting alongside hundreds of other Texans to defeat a bill that would have created a pathway to state-sanctioned voter suppression. **We organized, testified, and won.** Our collective power becomes stronger through our ability to access the ballot box. I fight, through both policy and advocacy, to defend its integrity, and expand its representation of all people, every day."

ONWARD The Next 50 Years

Melanie Pang, inspired by Grace Lee Boggs: "Food insecurity is a social, racial, economic, and political issue because it is a symptom of poverty. For 30 years, we've believed that we can end hunger by feeding people, and we were wrong. Now that hunger has increased while food banks distribute more food than ever, we must face the reality that we cannot end hunger until we end poverty. Ending poverty will take shifting our beliefs toward a consensus that race is woven into the structures of our economy and politics, and we must develop solutions together that can motivate us to change them as a country. My work is about facilitating that dialogue, providing the necessary education, and advocating for policy change so that our community can not only imagine but also **believe in a world that doesn't need food banks.**"

NEW ENDOWED FACULTY

The Graduate College of Social Work is honored to announce the following appointments to GCSW faculty in recognition of significant contributions as scholars, educators, and authors. Professors Monit Cheung and Patrick Leung have been appointed endowed professors, and Associate Professor Luis Torres has been appointed as an endowed chair.

“These GCSW faculty are exceptional scholars and researchers. They have been constant and vocal supporters of the GCSW and its vision of social justice. I am beyond proud that they will hold these prestigious positions and use them to further our mission of achieving justice,” said Dean Alan Dettlaff.



MONIT CHEUNG
Professor of Social Work
Mary R. Lewis Endowed Professor in Children and Youth
“I am excited about being recognized to honor Dr. Lewis’s life of services with children, particularly those with disabilities and in poverty. I am particularly excited about expanding Dr. Lewis’s work to integrate research evidence into practice and to feature the GCSW as an innovative channel to promote social justice.”



PATRICK LEUNG
Professor of Social Work
Gerson and Sabina David College Endowed Professor for Global Aging
“With this endowment, I will work with international, national, state, and local organizations in addressing issues relating to the elderly. As well, I will incorporate a focus on the aging population in teaching social work courses.”



LUIS TORRES
Associate Professor of Social Work
Humana Endowed Chair in Social Determinants of Health
“We can and must do more to address these social determinants if we truly want to improve the health of individuals, communities, and populations. Health is perhaps the most critical social justice issue of our time.”

FACULTY HONORS

The following awards and honors reflect our faculty’s exceptional contributions and leadership. We congratulate them on these accomplishments that exemplify their commitment to achieving social, racial, economic, and political justice, local to global and preparing social work leaders of tomorrow.

“I am honored to work with a world-class faculty whose achievements not only advance the cause of social justice nationally and even globally but serve as stellar examples to our students, alumni, and community. The following faculty reflect the best of those committed to sustainable change and a life dedicated to social work values,” said Dean Alan Dettlaff.



DONNA AMTSBERG, LCSW-S
Clinical Assistant Professor
Director, Trauma Education Program
Honored as a Phi Alpha Society Faculty Inductee for outstanding support and achievement in helping MSW students gain access to quality, trauma-informed educational and direct practice experiences.



AABHA BROWN
Clinical Assistant Professor
Foundation Coordinator
Honored with a UH Teaching Excellence Award given in recognition of outstanding teaching by faculty instructors, clinical faculty, research faculty, artist affiliates, and lecturers.



JODY WILLIAMS
Nobel Laureate
Sam and Cele Keeper Endowed Professor in Peace and Social Justice
Honored by the Council on Foreign Relations as one of six women whose contributions have helped to shape the contemporary world order by working across borders to build a more peaceful, prosperous, and equal world.

AUSTIN LEGISLATIVE INTERNS



For over fourteen years, GCSW students have participated full-time in the legislative policy-making process through the Austin Legislative Internship. The program is one of very few opportunities nationally for social work to have a seat at the table and lend their social work perspective to the political process.

“The experience offers a unique opportunity for social work students to work within a state legislature,” said GCSW Associate Professor Suzanne Pritzker, program director. “By working on the front lines of the policy-making process, students gain knowledge of how policies are made along with the confidence and skills to impact policy.”

Student interns work as full-time staffers in the Legislature, either as policy analysts with the Legislative Study Group (LSG), a Caucus of the Texas House of Representatives or in legislators’ offices. When they weren’t busy working during the 86th Texas Legislative Session, the 2019 class of interns were blogging their experiences. Here’s where social work meets policy in the words of a few of our students:

“The Austin Legislative Internship has further cemented my interest in policy and, specifically, my dedication to macro practice as a social worker. It has shown me almost limitless opportunities for social work within both clinical and macro practice.” – **Emily Joslin**

“Social workers need policy, and policy needs social workers.” – **Kayla Lail**

“I have learned that this space is as much mine as it is for those who were elected into office. That progress is made through hope, not through fear. That change can happen if you simply show up, just as you are.” – **Merci Mohagheghi**

“I believe a social work perspective can be helpful when looking at policy, as it can create a more three-dimensional view of policy, focusing our attention on people, the environment, and the governmental changes themselves.” – **Elizabeth Churaman**

“I often wonder what legislation would look like if the legislature were run by social workers—kind of like a Utopia, I think. I realize our profession helps all people, in many ways, which is why, through this experience, I’ve never felt prouder about my profession as I do now. More social workers are needed in legislation.” – **Gracie Cuevas**

“I am here for an experience and to learn the process, but when I return I will stand for the rights of all people, including women.” – **Donisha Cotlone**

ACTIVISM & ADVOCACY

VOTER ENGAGEMENT AND POLITICAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE



Last fall, the GCSW launched the Voter Engagement and Political Justice Initiative supported by the New York Community Trust and the Council on Social Work Education. The initiative is a partnership with Houston-area community organizations

that focus on non-partisan voter engagement with marginalized minority communities.

Expanding access to voting is integral to social work practice, according to Suzanne Pritzker, Associate Professor and project leader. The initiative’s first project was to host a deputy voter registrar training at the start of the semester during our Foundation sequence. More than 100 students, faculty, staff, and alumni participated in the training designed to increase voter registration in Houston and beyond.

Pritzker added that it’s particularly important to engage with underserved communities because voting empowers individuals and communities, increases representation, impacts policy outcomes, and challenges long-standing disenfranchisement efforts disproportionately experienced by minority communities.

“There can be a lot of confusion about the voting process, so we are giving students and community members important information about voting rights,” said Pritzker. “The key to this is engagement. We want to knock down barriers keeping citizens from exercising their right to vote.”

Deputized students were encouraged to volunteer with the following partner organizations in voter registration drives and other voter outreach activities: Mi Familia Vota; Houston Justice; OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates of Greater Houston; Emgage USA – Houston Chapter; Texas Organizing Project; and The Metropolitan Organization.

“We want our students to learn about the process first hand and gain the skills and confidence to go out and register voters throughout their careers,” said Pritzker. “This is an opportunity to help people meaningfully find their voice in society.”



SPEAKING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

MACONDA BROWN O'CONNOR DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

For the third annual Maconda Brown O'Connor lecture, the GCSW welcomed Jesmyn Ward, two-time National Book Award Winner, and MacArthur "Genius" Grant recipient. Ward's memoir *Men We Raped* was selected for the Dean's Summer Social Justice Reading Series, an annual event where the GCSW reads together as a community to explore social justice issues in keeping with our vision.

"Our goal is to heighten awareness and spark the conversations necessary to achieve real and lasting change," said Dean Alan Dettlaff.



Before the lecture, Ward met with a group of students who asked about Ward's writing process, therapy, and whether she believed things had changed since writing the book.

"I see changes which are great, but some things remain the same," said Ward.

In her lecture, Ward explored this very theme in a moving reading that reflected on her experiences becoming a mother.

"After I gave birth, I didn't know that Black infants are twice as likely to die as white infants. Later I found out how grim the statistics are, 11.3 per 1,000 Black babies, and 4.9 per 1,000 white babies. I didn't know that this racial disparity is wider than in 1850, 15 years before the end of slavery," said Ward.

Her lecture poetically gave voice to concerns of raising children in a world with systemic racism, gender inequality, homophobia, and transphobia, as well as her belief that stories can lead to real change.

"We need stories. We need to remember the power of the story to transform, to explain, to predict and to engender sympathy and trust. This is what I attempt to do in all my work, to tell stories that will carry sympathy, trust, and make people feel tenderly for each other," said Ward.



"I seek to tell stories that will make us real to each other. I strive to tell stories that will make us more aware of all the ways history bears down on our lives, the ways that all the beliefs and wounds fester and ooze in the present. I seek to tell stories that will bind us together in the telling." – **Jesmyn Ward**

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

1968 | 2018

On August 17, 2019, the GCSW community gathered to celebrate 50 outstanding alumni* and 50 years at the 50 for 50 Anniversary Celebration. Former and current faculty, deans, students, honorees, and more attended this event to celebrate 50 years of social work education. Jokingly and joyfully dubbed The Social Work Prom by many attendees, the moniker was befitting the festive atmosphere marked by reunions with former classmates and professors.

The program took attendees on a journey of the GCSW's past accomplishments and evolution. It featured reflections from Angie Grindon, GCSW founding class alumna, GCSW Professor Susan Robbins, Retired Clinical Professor and 50 for 50 honoree Sandra A. López, former GCSW Dean Ira Colby, and current MSW student Donisha Cotlone.

A panel discussion moderated by Assistant Professor Dr. Quenette Walton explored, "The GCSW's Role in Social Justice Over the Last 50 Years: How Have We Moved the Needle?" with alumni and 50 for 50 honorees Melanie Pang and George Bement along with community members Sylvia Brooks and Amanda Cloud.

The celebration of the GCSW's past included a look towards the future. In his remarks, Dean Alan Dettlaff shared news of the upcoming GCSW building renovation that will create a learning space fitting for the 21st century. Also, he unveiled portraits from the ONWARD series highlighting social justice work by those in the GCSW community.

Former Dean Colby perhaps summed up the feelings of all in the room in his remarks. "I have hope in the future because of what you, and others in the field, are doing. Thank you."

***See the complete list of 50 for 50 honorees on pages 23 and 24**



50 FOR 50 ALUMNI

Row 1 L to R: Meghan Baker, Jennifer Battle, George Bement, Cynthia Briggs, Ada Cheung
Row 2 L to R: Tony Fernandez, Melanie Fisk, Laurie Glaze, Maranda Harris, Ann Hilbig
Row 3 L to R: Roberta Leal, Sandra Lopez, Sondera Malry, Dawn McCarty, Beverly Mcphail, Yvonne Mendoza
Row 4 L to R: Hope Pacheco, Naiyolis Palomo, Melanie Pang, Paula Paust, Needha Queen
Row 5 L to R: Josephine Tittsworth, Mel Taylor, Melissa Torres, Candice Twyman, Jennifer Varela



Row 1 L to R: Susan Collins, Deysi Crespo, Elena Delavega, Sonya Edwards, Laura Evanoff
Row 2 L to R: Robert Hilliker, Sarah Howell, Heather Kanenberg, Cecile Keeper, Mandi Kimball
Row 3 L to R: Marcie Mir, Misty Mouza-Lanza, Chau Nguyen, Lillian Ortiz
Row 4 L to R: Tziona Regev, Cynthia Reibenstein, Kay Schiller, Betsy Schwartz, Eusebius Small, Helen Stagg
Row 5 L to R: Chloe Walker, Ann Webb, Amanda Williams, Lee Wunsch



BLACK LIKE US

For the second year, the GCSW hosted **Black Like Us: A Candid Conversation about the LGBTQ Experience in the Black Community**. Part celebration, part conversation, the annual community collaboration was held during Black History Month.

In opening remarks, event curator Harrison Guy shared the inspiration behind Black Like Us – to provide a space to explore the experience of being Black, LGBTQ, and people of faith. “As we know, the church has both healed and harmed a lot of people in the LGBTQ community,” said Guy.

New York Times Best Selling author Michael Arceneaux headlined the evening with a reading from *I Can't Date Jesus*, his timely collection of essays about growing up in a world that constantly tries to deride and diminish your humanity. A discussion moderated by writer and professor Josie Pickens followed.

“More often than not, otherness is conceived as pathology...literally to be a gay man was to be mocked or to die,” said Arceneaux.

Joining the conversation, Houston activists and religious leaders served as panelists for a community dialogue moderated by Jotina Buck. They shared words of wisdom in response to audience questions mainly on the theme of navigating oppression in religious and non-religious contexts.

“I don’t have to check a box in order to exist. It’s my humanity that matters most,” said Jotina Buck.



“It’s important for us to be able to own who we are, know what we need, and seek out those places that bless us.” – **Jeffrey Campbell**

“I wanted to write books and be on television and offer a perspective I felt was missing: Working class, Southern, Black, Gay, Country, Twerk-friendly and so forth.” – **Michael Arceneaux**



L to R: Josie Pickens, Dee Dee Waters, Harrison Guy, Michael Arceneaux, Marvetta Walker, Shon Stewart, Jeffrey Campbell, Jotina Buck, Seek the Poet, Dean Alan Dettlaff

LIVING THE VISION



The annual **Living the Vision Scholarship Luncheon** provides essential financial support for GCSW students poised to join the next generation of social workers to bring about real and lasting change.

Each year we select a speaker and honorees who, through their life’s work, reflect a commitment to

social justice. Through the luncheon, we honor those who live the vision of achieving social, racial, economic, and political justice while highlighting their examples to our students.

Lisa Falkenberg, opinion editor for the Houston Chronicle delivered the keynote address for the 2019 event. In 2015, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for commentary for a series that exposed a wrongful conviction in a death case and led Texas lawmakers to reform the grand jury system. Using examples from a body of work that critically examines social justice issues, her talk explored effective strategies for modern-day advocates.

Also, we honored Houston women who have had a significant impact in the ongoing pursuits of civil rights and civic engagement. Laurie Vignaud was honored with the Spirit of Social Work Award for taking a stand for equal access to banking services and speaking out against redlining. GCSW Alum Barbara Mackey, (MSW '92) was honored with the Social Work Excellence Award for decades of leadership in Houston area organizations and as a member of the Dean’s Advisory Council.

Special thanks to Co-Chairs Linda Cantu and Kathy Davis and Honorary Chair Mary Beth Arcidiacono for giving their time, talent, and commitment to this event benefitting GCSW students.



“**HOME RAISED ME** BUT THE GCSW’S DEAN’S ADVISORY COUNCIL **GAVE ME WINGS.**”

– KAMAH ASHA **WILSON**,
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT



GCSW GROUNDBREAKING

The Graduate College of Social Work is breaking ground on a \$3.9 million building improvement project. The entire first floor of the four-story GCSW building will be renovated to create modern learning environments that encourage collaboration between researchers, students, and community partners. Funded in part by donations from the Mehta Family Foundation, Houston Endowment, Hamill Foundation, Frees Foundation, and the Creuzot family, the project includes a new lobby and entry pavilion to enhance the college's visibility on campus.

The future lobby will include lounge and table seating centered around a display wall and interactive installations that reflect the college's vision to achieve social, racial, economic, and political justice for all. Classroom configurations, acoustics, and technology will be improved to encourage active learning.

The new Mehta Family Foundation Community Pavilion will add modern style and character via a new main entrance to the building and provide students space to gather and study. The project is expected to be completed by spring 2021.

"Being part of a learning environment where you feel valued and supported is critical to student success, and the physical space in which our students learn is an important component of that," said Dean Alan Dettlaff. "I'm incredibly grateful to our generous donors for recognizing our students' value and trusting us to create the learning environment they deserve."

Originally built in 1978, the current building lacks adequate common space. Classrooms don't support emerging technology and innovative research projects happening at the college. Despite these challenges, the GCSW continues to thrive, now ranked among the top 25 social work graduate programs in the country by U.S. News and World Report. Over the past five years, the college has grown from approximately 350 MSW students to more than 500 today.

"Our students are the next generation of change-makers, and they deserve a learning environment that is both beautiful and equipped with the technology required for 21st-century classrooms in all disciplines," said Dettlaff.

SOJOURNER TRUTH LOUNGE

Thanks to a generous gift, the GCSW student lounge will receive a long-awaited facelift and a new moniker that pays homage to the social justice inspiration of one alum and donor.

"Sojourner Truth has long been an inspiration for me. Once enslaved and always illiterate, she nonetheless spoke truth to power. Sojourner was the first feminist foremother I know of that addressed oppression based on both race and gender. Her oratory skills were profound; I would give almost anything to go back in time and hear her speak! I hope by naming the student lounge after her, future graduate social work students will be similarly inspired," said Dr. Beverly McPhail (MSW '89).

McPhail and her husband Kevin Kulish have made a significant impact on the University of Houston through their philanthropy. Her dedication stems from the influence the GCSW has had on her own life.

"Attending the Graduate College of Social Work changed my life in innumerable ways, both professionally and personally. I have seen years and years of graduating students go out into the world and do amazing work in political and clinical realms, making a real difference in the world. I am so proud and grateful to be a graduate of the GCSW," said McPhail.

Recently the College launched a capital fundraising campaign to renovate the second floor, where the bulk of student engagement takes place. McPhail seized the opportunity to make a gift of personal significance and long term value for future generations of GCSW students.

"As a long-time adjunct faculty member at the GCSW, the student lounge has special significance to me. It is where I had rich discussions and built community with other students. Social workers and women are often given the message that our duty is to serve others and not take care of ourselves. However, I think having a lovely, as well as comfortable, place to rest, eat, laugh, debate, and learn is the essence of self-care. Our students deserve it! My husband, Kevin Kulish and I, are delighted to provide that special space for future students," said McPhail.



**Contact Director of Advancement
Januari Fox, MSW for more information
on naming opportunities.**



Jimmy Moreland/The Daily Cougar

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