

# Contact

2022–2023

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of North Carolina  
at Chapel Hill

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latest alumni news



SCHOOL OF  
SOCIAL WORK

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Please submit alumni news by email:  
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#### DEAN

Ramona Denby-Brinson, Ph.D.

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Kandace Davis Farrar, J.D.

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#### ASSISTANT DEAN FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

Barbara Wiedemann

#### STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST AND PRIMARY CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Susan E. White

#### SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT PRODUCER

Chloe Yopp

#### ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Nancy E. Oates (p. 20), Barbara Wiedemann

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Jon Gardiner/UNC-Chapel Hill (p. 4); Primary event photos and headshots by York Wilson Photography; Art Howard (p. 32 portrait); Rob Holliday/UNC-Chapel Hill (p. 32); Joy Noel Baumgartner (p. 38, with VITAA study team); J'sha Gift (pp. 44-45)

#### DESIGN

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
CB #3550, 325 Pittsboro Street  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599  
ssw.unc.edu

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## Community progress toward strategically plan[t]ing the School's future

The School's Strategic Plan[t]ing process launched in August of 2022 as a collaborative effort to decide the direction of our School. From day one, we focused our work with three pillars of excellence top of mind — teaching, research and community engagement — and centering inclusive excellence at the heart of everything that we do.

First, we undertook a multi-pronged assessment strategy providing a 360° view of the School. The inclusive and comprehensive organizational assessment was undergirded in principles of diversity, equity and inclusion. The surveys, focus groups, and various listening sessions alone involved hundreds of people from our immediate community including students, staff, faculty, community partners, alumni and board members. The Senior Administrative Council (SAC), an existing leadership group representing key areas of the School's academics and operations, then organized a strategic leadership workshop, assessing how we think,

act, and influence together — and how we can mutually develop the School's strategic priorities across the School and in the community.

Next, a broader coalition of faculty and staff members worked to identify five School strategic priorities:

1. Supporting our most valuable asset — **our people; our community** — and the culture and climate in which they do their work.
2. **Preparing our students** to lead as future practitioners.
3. **Research** for impact and real-world problem solving.
4. Reciprocal, meaningful and **community-defined engagement**.
5. Impact-oriented levels of **advancement, marketing and communications** in order to deliver consequential outcomes and effectively tell our story.

Together, we also established milestones and identified who is accountable, responsible and connected to the execution of these priorities and associated plans of action. SAC members and other faculty and staff leaders collaborated to finalize goals, outcomes and metrics in preparation for a spring strategic session with our partners from Kairos Insights, an executive coaching and consulting firm. From there, detailed outcomes, metrics and 90-day deliverables and one-year goals were created by committees led by: **Evi Taylor** and **Mimi Chapman** (teaching & learning), **Gary Bowen** and **Gary Nelson** (community engagement & impact), **Sheryl Zimmerman** (research advancement & impact), **Robin Sansing** (people & culture); and **Kandace Davis Farrar** and **Barbara Wiedemann** (advancement & marketing/communications).

This fall, we will present our 90-day assessment. Follow our progress online at [ssw.unc.edu](https://ssw.unc.edu).

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#### CELEBRATING OUR PRACTICUM INSTRUCTORS

Practicum Instructor Appreciation Day on Friday, May 19, 2023, honored the School's valued practicum instructors and celebrated their success with family members and friends, including former students. The festivities focused on the successful academic year and a meaningful name change from "field" to practicum instructor. Chapel Hill Town Poet Laureate Cortland Gilliam also stopped by and contributed a poetry reading to the event.

# From the Dean



## Dear colleagues,

We've been busy!

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We are delighted to share some highlights of our work over the last two academic years in this double-feature issue of Contact magazine.

Some of the things I don't want you to miss:

- **Our feature story** on the proposed online MSW program, which we are on target to launch in 2024 under the guidance of Director of Digital Learning and Instruction **Tina Souders**. The story by Strategic Communications Specialist **Susan E. White** is a powerful overview of why we want to give students from across North Carolina access to the highest quality online MSW we can provide. The new program will enable more of our students to help their communities thrive and is one way the School can help address the dire mental and behavioral health workforce needs across the state. (p. 6).
- **Our students**, the reason we all come to work every day. Their successes are highlighted under sections "Build Our Community Together" (p. 11), "Strengthen Student Success" (p. 15), and in three of the video links detailing the impact of giving on recent graduates **Jackie Perez-Albanil**, MSW '23, and **Whitney Miller**, MSW '23, as well as current student **Carlton Johnson**, MSW '24 (p. 44).
- **Our people and culture**. Our staff help us to accomplish the good work detailed in this issue. Their support holds us all up. In particular, I want to recognize the new staff members who have joined us since August 2022 (p. 22); and the stellar contributions they have made while working alongside our longtime colleagues. Ensuring the well-being of our community is essential to the School's success. Read about how we "Enable Career Development" (p. 19) with the help of some of the School's unsung heroes (p. 40). Under "Optimize Operations," learn about the staff who have done the heavy lifting required in our efforts to ensure equitable salaries, develop career advancement opportunities, create accurate position classifications, and advance policies and procedures that lead with equity.
- **The research and community engagement impact of our faculty**. Our world-class researchers continue to lead the field in discoveries that strengthen the programs, services and policies which are implemented every day in the field. The magazine's "Discover" (p. 23), "Serve to Benefit Society" (p. 31) and "Globalize" sections (p. 35) highlight some of the groundbreaking research. Our ongoing Impact Report microsite ([sww.impactreport.unc.edu](http://sww.impactreport.unc.edu)) details more of that important work.

- **The impact of your generosity**. In "Advancement" (p. 43), you'll read about how the School exceeded its Campaign for Carolina goal by 107%. The impact of those donations reminds us what a bedrock of support we have from you, our generous alumni and friends. Longtime supporter and board member **Rich Preyer's** reinvestment in us (p. 34) is just one example of the dividends your Campaign gifts will continue to pay forward.
- **What's ahead**: We'll unveil more details on our website later this summer, but we wanted you to be among the first to know about the largest private individual donation ever made to the School (see the back cover); the exponential growth of our Mental Health First Aid Program, recently supported by the Chancellor's Office (p. 31); and our three newest faculty members, who joined us in July (p. 18): **Bridgette Thom**, **Tess Thompson** and **Hsun-Ta Hsu**. They join researchers **Rebecca Rebbe**, **Ankur Srivastava** and **Orrin Ware**, who arrived at the School last year, as did our first-ever Carolina Postdoctoral Program for Faculty Diversity Fellow **Millicent Robinson** (p. 25).
- **Office of Community Engagement & Outreach**. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention an exciting development underway as we speak. Soon, we will relaunch our search for director of a new office designed specifically to lift us up in our efforts to transform the scholarship of discovery (knowing) into doing and to build new research efforts with the lived experience of our communities as a guiding force.

Contact magazine offers news summaries of the more in-depth stories you will find at [sww.unc.edu](http://sww.unc.edu). Once you've had a chance to review this issue, please dive in more deeply on the stories that speak most directly to you by entering the short "go.unc.edu" URLs we include with nearly every story summary.

And for inspiration, I suggest using your mobile phone to scan the QR code on page 14 (a video about one of my social work heroes, **Hortense McClinton**) or the QR code on page 44 (our "Because of you, THEY can" impact of giving video).

Thank you for being an active part of our community. I'm glad you are here and appreciate your support!

**Ramona Denby-Brinson, Ph.D.**  
Dean and Kuralt Distinguished Professor

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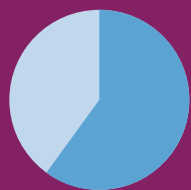


150 students, on average, accepted annually to the School's MSW programs



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current number of accredited online MSW programs in the nation: 195



over 60% of student candidates expressed interest in an online MSW over the past 5 years

# School to launch online MSW program to meet growing need for social workers

The evidence that North Carolina desperately needs more social workers has never been clearer. Couple the estimated shortfall of nearly 24,000 social workers over the next seven years with the reality that fewer than 800 students, on average, graduate annually from the 12 master of social work programs within the UNC system, and the math adds up to one looming equation: a gigantic challenge to shore up the state's workforce in the areas of child welfare, aging, disabilities and especially among needed practitioners in mental and behavioral health.

For UNC School of Social Work leaders, this reality also points toward several solutions, including: the launch of an online MSW program to increase the number of professionally trained social workers to support the growing population of vulnerable and marginalized individuals across the state. In fact, UNC School of Social Work is on track to do just that in 2024, when the first cohort of students enrolled in the School's new online MSW program are expected to begin classes.

The proposed program, which is in the final stages of development and institutional review, is designed to mirror the existing campus-based MSW program in academic curriculum, faculty engagement, quality, rigor, and outcomes. To graduate, students must complete 62 credit hours in coursework online and two internships within the community. Moreover, like the students from the School's campus-based programs, students graduating from the online program will be

just as prepared for direct practice, management of nonprofit and public agencies, community practice, and leadership positions, said **Tina Souders**, the School's director of digital learning and instruction.

"This new program is going to offer people not only a great opportunity to earn an MSW from a Top 10 school of social work, but it will allow them to do so right in their homes," said Souders who is leading the development of the School's online program.

In expanding its degree options to a virtual format, UNC School of Social Work will join 195 other accredited MSW programs across the nation, including other institutional peers with Top 10 programs, that offer students a primarily virtual path to a social work career. In particular, the program is expected to target non-traditional students within North Carolina and the Southeast who because of life circumstances, such as job requirements and location, cannot shift busy schedules or obligations to attend graduate school full time in Chapel Hill.

For School **Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson**, such an expansion is necessary to broaden the educational opportunities for residents in every corner of the state. Given that about 500 qualified MSW applicants have been turned away from UNC over the last four years — including individuals of color, residents from low-resourced households, and individuals in rural areas — the School must do more to expand its capacity, she said.



"This really is about access and our social work mission of inclusion," she said. "We want to diversify the workforce and make sure that we're preparing practitioners to work in all parts of our state and to serve in communities where the clients they are helping look like them. So, without a doubt, I believe our online MSW program will allow us to expand our capacity and produce the diverse workforce of social workers that North Carolina needs."

## Growing demand for Carolina's MSW program

Since the School waived the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) from its admissions requirements in 2019, applications to UNC's MSW program have nearly doubled over the last few years. Currently, the number of applications that the School receives to its MSW programs amounts to more than four times the total number of students it can physically accommodate.

On average, about 150 students are accepted into the MSW program annually. However, School leaders estimate that at least 100 additional applicants met admissions criteria each year over the last four years but were not admitted. **Sharon Holmes Thomas**, the School's assistant dean for recruitment, admissions and financial aid, is confident a new online MSW program will not only enable the School to capture some of these additional applicants but also attract those who have been asking for the School to develop a virtual program.

Momentum for an online MSW at UNC gained significant traction during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as many secondary and higher education classrooms across the country shifted rapidly to remote or hybrid remote learning environments. Although most colleges, universities and secondary schools have returned to in-person learning, online classrooms continue

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to be very popular options for many student candidates, Thomas said.

For example, over the past five years, more than 60% of those attending an information session on the School's MSW program expressed interest in an online program, she said. And of those who were interested, 20% were people of color, and 75% were North Carolina residents.

"That's what has been so interesting to me — that so many of the people interested in attending a graduate school remotely are from within our own state," Thomas said. "And with a growing number of our peer institutions also considering online programs, if we're going to remain competitive in this market, we have to address the educational demands that we're seeing."

#### Pathways to the online degree

For Souders, the last few years have been hyper-focused on the design and logistics of establishing an online program and ensuring that the program fits seamlessly into the School's degree portfolio. As a long-time educator, who

helped School of Social Work faculty pivot to remote learning during the pandemic, Souders sees the digital classroom as an attractive flexible space, especially for students who embrace technology and new ways of learning.

For example, the online MSW classes will include a mixture of live instruction delivered by the School's world-class faculty and academic content and coursework that students will have the flexibility to complete each week during a time that is convenient for them, Souders said. Having the option to choose where and when they learn, especially for professionals trying to balance school with other responsibilities, including a job and family, is crucial, she said.

"So, if it's eight o'clock at night and the student is a parent who has just put the kids to bed and that's the best time of day that they can set aside to learn, then that's when they do it," she said.

As proposed, the School expects to enroll 30 students in January 2024 and another 30 in August, with an anticipated maximum enrolled capacity

***"With a growing number of our peer institutions also considering online programs, if we're going to remain competitive in this market, we have to address the educational demands that we're seeing."***

**SHARON HOLMES THOMAS**

of 215 by 2027. Souders is especially proud that the online courses will be taught by current clinical, tenure and tenure-tracked faculty.

***"A lot of online programs use adjunct faculty, but our goal is to use our own faculty to build and teach our courses," Souders said.***

The online MSW team includes **Stefanie Panke** and **Rich Stewart**. Panke is the School's first digital pedagogy coach and provides expertise in online learning and design thinking. Stewart is an instructional technologist with expertise in communications, design, website development and online instructional content development. Together with Souders and other academic leaders, the team is building activities into the curriculum that encourage online students to engage with faculty and with other students in real time. Every online student will also be assigned a student success coach to help each student build community with their peers, address challenges, and prevent isolation, which can occur in an online format, Souders added.

"Student success coaches will proactively reach out to students to see how they're doing in class, to help them develop their plans of study and to make sure that they're taking the courses they're supposed to take and getting the credits they need," she said. "They are going to play a crucial role in the success of the students."

#### Strengthening the workforce

In launching the online MSW program, School leaders are also aiming significant efforts toward addressing the state's current social work labor shortage. Although the number of licensed clinical social workers in North Carolina has grown over the last 10 years to around 15,000, demand continues to outpace supply. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that North Carolina's need for professionally trained social workers will grow 9% to 12% by 2031.

Job openings for practitioners with expertise in counseling, mental health and substance use are expected to grow even more, especially in rural communities, where residents often live in poverty and lack access to any health or behavioral health care providers, said Valerie Arendt, executive director of the N.C. Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. Moreover, a recent report from the N.C. Institute of Medicine found that individuals in these same households are more at risk for poor health outcomes.

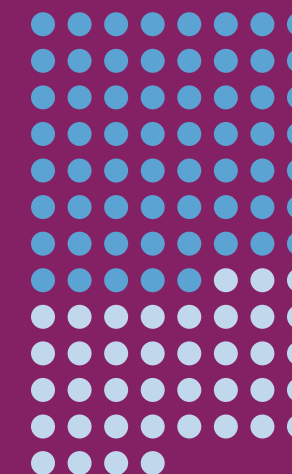
That social workers have moved to the frontlines where traditional doctors, psychiatrists and other health professionals are not available isn't surprising, Arendt said. In fact, across the country, licensed clinical social workers are now the primary providers of mental health, substance use, and behavioral health services and interventions.

"In North Carolina, at least 61 of our 100 counties don't have a single psychiatrist," Arendt said. "Why? Because psychiatrists tend to live in areas where people have insurance."



Est. shortfall of nearly **24,000** social workers in NC over the next 7 years

**61** of the state's 100 counties do not have a psychiatrist



current number of licensed clinical social workers in North Carolina: **15,000**

In fact, demand for more social workers is increasing so much that shortages over the next seven years are predicted for the following positions:

- **13,300 mental health and substance use social workers** to assist individuals seeking treatment for mental illness or substance use,
- **19,900 health care social workers** to assist aging populations and,
- **29,100 child, family, and school social workers** to work with families to strengthen parenting skills, prevent child abuse, and find alternative homes for children who are unable to live with their biological families.

Although having more trained social work graduates from UNC each year will not completely solve the state's labor shortage problem, North Carolina will certainly benefit from having a larger pool of licensed practitioners, Arendt said.

"With UNC's expansion to an online program, these new graduates are going to help more North Carolina residents gain access to needed services," she added.

Long-term, the goal isn't just about recruiting more students to the social work profession, added Denby-Brinson, who has been eager to launch an online MSW since being named School dean in August 2021.

"For us, this is about attention to quality," she said. "This has never been about a race to be the biggest online program. Our race is focused on having the highest quality online MSW program."

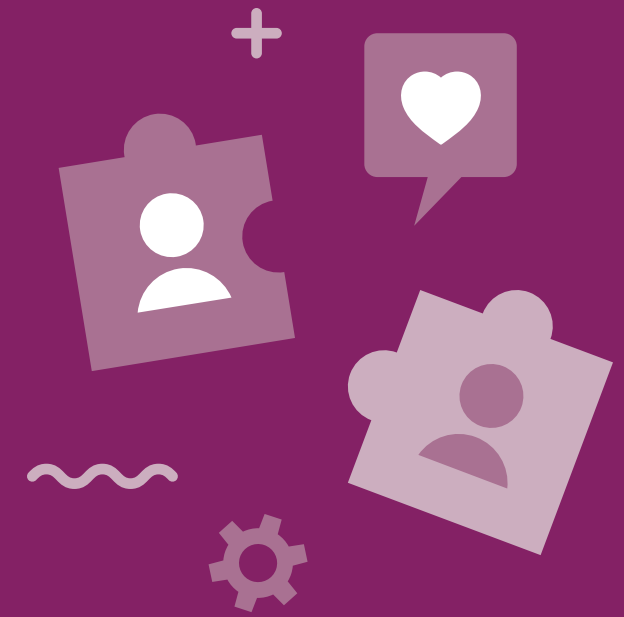


### JORDAN INSTITUTE FOR FAMILIES

Congratulations go out to the School's **Jordan Institute for Families**, which recently announced a successful five-year review by the University's Centers & Institutes Review Committee. Since its founding in 1996 by Michael Jordan and his family, the Institute's mission has been to cultivate safe, stable, nurturing families over the life course. This work spans an array of interrelated initiatives — in maternal health, racial equity, home visiting, children's mental health, youth in foster care, and preschool suspensions and expulsions, to name a few. Institute Director **Sarah Verbiest** is pictured with SSW Board of Advisors member **Deloris Jordan** (above).

### DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR MIMI CHAPMAN COMPLETES TERM AS CAMPUS LEADER

Associate Dean for Doctoral Education and Frank A. Daniels Distinguished Professor for Human Service Policy Information **Mimi Chapman**'s term as chairperson of the faculty ended in June when UNC Gillings Associate Professor Beth Moracco stepped into the role. Chapman was recognized for deftly steering a ship through turbulent times, including the pandemic.



use the **GO.UNC.EDU** links for a deeper dive into our stories

# Build Our Community Together



## Master's student Bridgette Agbozo recognized for advocacy, activism and leadership

[GO.UNC.EDU/BRIDGETTE](https://go.unc.edu/bridgette)

First-year student **Bridgette Agbozo** was among five North Carolina social work students to receive the Equity and Inclusion Student Award from the National Association of Social Workers North Carolina Chapter.

The monetary award supports the inclusion of a diverse chapter membership and supports students pursuing a variety of social work specialties.

The recipients of this award were selected based on their commitment to incorporating and promoting equity and inclusion into their social work practice, their high academic achievement and leadership.

Agbozo, a dual-degree Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health student, was recognized for their advocacy, activism, and leadership in micro and macro social work.

*Agbozo, a dual-degree Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health student, was recognized for their advocacy, activism, and leadership in micro and macro social work.*



## Late Professor Maeda Galinsky named a Social Work Pioneer

[GO.UNC.EDU/MAEDA](https://go.unc.edu/maeda)

**Maeda Galinsky**, a distinguished professor who spent more than 50 years at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as a social work scholar, researcher, teacher and mentor, was inducted into the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Social Work Pioneer Program.

Galinsky, who died Sept. 9, 2019, was among 20 other social workers from across the nation who earned the NASW distinction in 2022. The late Galinsky was also the third UNC School of Social Work professor to be inducted into the pioneer program in recent years. Retired faculty members **Iris Carlton-LaNey** and **Hortense McClinton** were both honored as NASW social work pioneers in 2015.

The pioneer program was created to honor members of the social work profession who have contributed to the evolution and enrichment of the profession. The program identifies and recognizes individuals whose unique dedication, commitment and determination have improved social and human conditions. NASW social work pioneers are considered role models for future generations of social workers.



## Associate Dean Travis Albritton selected for prestigious leadership program

[GO.UNC.EDU/TRAVIS](https://go.unc.edu/travis)

The National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education selected **Travis Albritton**, the School of Social Work's associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion, for its 2022–2023 Academic Diversity Officer Fellows Program (ADOFP). The program offers leadership development and mentorship for new and early career academic diversity officers.

Fellows were selected from a pool of recommended applicants from the national organization's member colleges and universities.

Albritton, who is a member of the University's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council, also serves as the director of the School's Chapel Hill 3-Year MSW Program, as faculty liaison for the Dual Degree MSW/M.Div program, and as chair for the School of Social Work's Diversity Committee.



## University leaders joined School in honoring trailblazer Hortense McClinton

[GO.UNC.EDU/HORTENSEMCC](https://go.unc.edu/hortensemcc)

Nearly 250 friends, family, UNC and community leaders, social workers, and School of Social Work faculty, staff, and students gathered for a dinner celebration on May 13, 2022, to honor the legacy of **Hortense McClinton**, the first Black faculty member at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The event, hosted at the Rizzo Center in Chapel Hill, capped a weekend of historic ceremonies, including the dedication of a newly renamed residence hall in honor of the trailblazing McClinton. For the School, the celebration marked the official launch of a campaign to create the Hortense McClinton Legacy Scholarship. The scholarship will support students who are first in their families to attain a graduate education and who exemplify McClinton's pioneering spirit.

The special dinner also offered the social work community an opportunity to uplift a faculty member who paved the way for other African Americans to join the teaching ranks at UNC, noted **Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson**.



## Alumna Vera Tayeh makes gift to inspire new approaches to research partnerships

[GO.UNC.EDU/C4C](https://go.unc.edu/c4c)

Over the last 20 years, many universities have ramped up community-based research efforts to ensure that individuals and families who participate in academic studies are respected and to promote a more collaborative process in addressing community problems.

But what if these kinds of partnerships were driven even more by the needs of a community and not a research agenda? What if academic institutions financially supported the innovative ideas of residents eager to address the challenges their neighborhoods often face?

Thanks to the generosity of alumna **Vera Tayeh**, MSW '87, the School aims to do just that with the launch of the Tayeh Call for Collaboration (C4C) for Children, Youth and Family Well-being. The project, funded with a generous gift from Tayeh, will support meaningful community initiatives focused on strengthening the lives of individuals and families.



## OUTSTANDING DOCTORAL STUDENT

**Alexandria Forte** was named the School's 2022–23 Outstanding Doctoral Student of the Year. Since enrolling in the School's doctoral program in 2019, Forte has centered her research in the areas of nutrition and social justice for Black families, with a particular emphasis on improving the detection of food insecurity among children and adolescents. As a scholar and the William R. Kenan Jr. Fellow within UNC's Royster Society of Fellows, she has produced eight peer-reviewed publications, one book chapter, three reports, and 15 presentations in these areas during her tenure in the Ph.D. program.



# Strengthen Student Success





## Theresa Palmer receives one of UNC's four Distinguished Teaching Awards

[GO.UNC.EDU/THERESA](https://go.unc.edu/theresa)

Clinical associate professor **Theresa Palmer** was named a winner of the University's prestigious 2022 Distinguished Teaching Award. A clinical associate professor and then coordinator for practicum education in the School's 3-year MSW Program in Winston-Salem, Palmer was among four UNC faculty members honored for post-baccalaureate teaching.

All total, 25 faculty members and teaching assistants were recognized in 2022 for outstanding teaching and mentoring for graduate and undergraduate students. Administered by the Center for Faculty Excellence, the awards were chosen by the University Teaching Awards Committee from more than 800 nominations.

Palmer is the seventh School of Social Work faculty member to receive the post-baccalaureate teaching award since it was established in 1995.



## UNC School of Social Work ranked a Top 10 school for the 7th time in 25 years

[GO.UNC.EDU/TOPTEN](https://go.unc.edu/topten)

The School remains one of the top 10 social work programs in the nation for 2023, according to the U.S. News & World Report "Best Graduate Schools" list. The School of Social Work tied for 7th among the nearly 300 social work schools that were considered across the country.

The School's MSW program was also among 19 graduate programs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recognized among the top 10 in the nation in their respective categories.

## School attracts budding research scholars from around the globe

[GO.UNC.EDU/PHD6](https://go.unc.edu/phd6)

The newest cohort of doctoral students bring a broad span of domestic and international research interests, helping to strengthen the School's ongoing examination of social problems that challenge individuals, families and communities around the world.

"The doctoral program really is a place where we push and embody the various priorities that the School has in different ways," said **Mimi Chapman**, the School's associate dean of doctoral education. "Whether that be embodying equity or globalization or pursuing more cutting edge research, the students who enroll in our program enable us to consistently lead in a variety of issues. I've always said, 'There's no Top 10 School of Social Work without a doctoral program.'"

**"There's no Top 10 School of Social Work without a doctoral program."**

**MIMI CHAPMAN**



**Emmanuel Owusu Amoako**



**Dicky Baruah**



**Capt. Kenneth R. Harris III**



**Imani Johnson**



**Danya K. Krueger**



**Joan Wangui Wanyama**

## Pan-university collaborations bring three notable scholars to the School



Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson welcomed Associate Professor **Hsun-Ta Hsu** and Assistant Professors **Bridgette Thom** and **Tess Thompson** to UNC-Chapel Hill on July 1. The three newest tenure-track scholars joined faculty at the School of Social Work and across Carolina in preparation for the 2023–2024 academic year.

“In collaboration with School of Data Science and Society Dean Stanley Ahalt and UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center Director Shelton Earp, I am so pleased to bring these three esteemed researchers and educators to Carolina,” said Denby-Brinson. “In doing so, I am thrilled to join forces with two of Carolina’s visionary leaders. We are building bridges together in an effort to improve the lives of vulnerable and marginalized populations in North Carolina and around the world.”

She added, “Our UNC School of Social Work researchers are committed to serving humanity by developing and implementing evidence-based policies and practices that address societal problems. The work of Drs. Hsu, Thom and Thompson will bring an even greater depth of discovery to those efforts.”



**Associate Professor Hsun-Ta Hsu** brings an expertise in artificial intelligence (AI) and technology to Carolina. His work analyzes the implications of using tech tools to address societal disparities and improve systems. In particular, his research examines multilevel social determinants of health outcomes among individuals who are unhoused. Hsu joins Carolina from the University of Missouri School of Social Work, where he was an associate professor. As a Core-Faculty Affiliate of the Center for Artificial Intelligence in Society at the University of Southern California (USC-CAIS), Hsu expanded his research to incorporate AI in order to understand health and housing disparities faced by individuals who are unhoused. Dr. Hsu’s work has been funded through the Centers for Disease Control and private foundations. He is serving in a joint post with the University’s School of Data Science and Society.

**Assistant Professor Bridgette Thom** examines cancer survivorship, especially the financial impact of cancer and resultant disparities in treatment adherence and health/mental health services use. Her work focuses primarily on adolescent and young adult cancer patients and survivors. Thom comes to UNC from Columbia University in the City of New York, where she served as a senior research specialist in the department of nursing at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. She earned her MSW and doctorate at Columbia University School of Social Work, where she focused on social policy and administration. Her work has been funded by the National Institutes of Health and private foundations. She is serving in a joint post with UNC Lineberger.



**Assistant Professor Tess Thompson** studies how social context affects health in terms of cancer prevention and control. She weaves together three main strands in her work: the effects of family on health, the importance of social support, and the role of health communication in reducing disparities. Her research interests include developing healthcare interventions that recognize and support partnerships between Black women with breast cancer and their caregivers. Prior to joining Carolina, Thompson was a research assistant professor at Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, where she earned her doctorate. Her work has been funded by the American Cancer Society and the National Institutes of Health, among others. Thompson is also serving in a joint post with UNC Lineberger.

### ON THE MOVE

**Andrea Murray-Lichtman** assumed the role of Director of Practicum Education at the School in June 2023. Murray-Lichtman has served on our faculty for 10 years, with seven of those years in practicum education. She is a doctoral candidate with local and international research and practice experience.

### ALWAYS LEARNING

Faculty and staff members continue to take advantage of the hundreds of free courses available to UNC employees via online learning provider LinkedIn Learning. The university also provides live learning sessions each month on popular topics ranging from The Art of Business Writing to High Impact Feedback & Listening. Supervisors can work with the School’s HR team to help coordinate team-building or live-learning sessions on a specific topic as well.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Beginning in academic year 2022–2023, Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration **Joe DiConcilio** began setting aside funds for the professional development needs of our School staff, whose work supports all of our faculty and student success. The University has professional development options, but if an outside opportunity becomes available that would benefit a staff member in their job, they are encouraged to present and discuss this with their supervisor who can work with DiConcilio to help make the opportunity available.



use the **GO.UNC.EDU** links for a deeper dive into our stories

# Enable Career Development

## Faculty members receive promotions

The following faculty members were awarded promotions in 2022-2023:

### **Kanisha Brevard, research associate professor**

Brevard works on projects focused on maltreatment prevention, kinship care, and the evaluation of evidenced-based interventions for children and youth in foster care. Brevard's research interests include efforts to eliminate racial disproportionality and improve outcomes for children and families of color in the child welfare system.

### **Linda Kendall Fields, clinical associate professor**

Fields is the director for **UNC Cares** and the special projects facilitator for NC Money Follows the Person, a state project that helps Medicaid-eligible North Carolinians who live in inpatient facilities move into their own homes and communities with supports.

### **Will Hall, associate professor**

A triple Tar Heel (and MSW and Ph.D. alumna of our School), Hall's work centers on understanding mental health and social problems affecting LGBTQ youth and addressing these problems through effective psychosocial interventions.

### **Paul Lanier, professor**

The associate director for the **Jordan Institute for Families**, Lanier also serves as a research fellow at UNC Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research and as a faculty fellow with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. His research focuses on developing, evaluating, and scaling-up evidence-based prevention programs in child welfare, mental health, and early childhood systems.

### **Rainier Masa, associate professor**

A lead researcher with the **Global Social Development Innovations** center, Masa also serves as a faculty affiliate of the UNC African Studies Center and as a member of the UNC Center for AIDS Research. His research focuses on the intersection of economic security and HIV among adolescents and young adults.

### **Laura Phipps, clinical associate professor**

As the director for the **Family and Children's Resource Program (FCRP)** at the School, Phipps oversees FCRP's work in building the capacity of organizations that serve families to increase the effectiveness and impact of their work.

### **Tina Souders, clinical professor**

Souders serves as director of digital learning and instruction and works exclusively to advance the School's online MSW program and digital instruction needs of the School's faculty. Souders is a licensed clinical social worker and former director of the School's 3-Year Winston-Salem MSW Program.



## Amy Blank Wilson: A fighter for the forgotten

[GO.UNC.EDU/AMY](https://go.unc.edu/amy)

**Amy Blank Wilson** focuses her research on people some find easy to forget. She wants to understand what life is like for those with mental illness that impairs their functioning and who are involved in the criminal legal system. She wants to know what they need when the prison guard lets them out the door and locks the gate behind them, and they are once again free, wearing only the clothes they came in with, but with empty pockets, and still accompanied by the challenges they battle.

Wilson, an associate professor and the School's Prudence F. and Peter J. Meehan Early Career Distinguished Scholar, has won multiple grants to fund her work that begins where people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression — who sometimes self-medicate with opioids or street drugs — intersect with the criminal legal system. For Wilson, focusing on a population in need, especially those with serious mental illness who face inhumanity, is a calling.

"I'm driven by the suffering I've seen — and I've seen a tremendous amount," she said. "I can't be someone who looks away. I'm not wired that way."

## Dedicated staff singled out for their service

Each year, we recognize and honor individual staff members for their commitment to helping our School achieve its mission and for their unique contributions to the School. All total, 11 staff members were recognized with awards over the past two years in the following categories:

### **ABOVE AND BEYOND**

**Jameceia Holliday**, training and events planner with Behavioral Health Springboard (2022) and **Magdelene "Mags" Ramon**, research assistant (2023).

### **BACKBONE**

**Iris Cheng**, business services coordinator for the Family and Children's Resource Program (2022) and **Samuel Deal**, facilities manager (2023).

### **BEHIND THE SCENES**

**Erica Desiderio**, administrative support staff member with the Peer Support Specialist Program (2022) and **Thomas "Tommy" Howell**, administrative support specialist (2023).

### **ESPRIT DE CORPS**

**Drew Lasater**, human resource specialist with the Business Office (2022) and **Barbara Leach**, family support project coordinator (2023).

### **POSITIVITY**

**Gwen Ricks**, business services coordinator for Behavioral Health Springboard (2022) and **Yvette Thompson**, administrative support specialist (2023).

### **OUT OF THE BOX**

**Thaddaeus Edwards**, technology support technician, Behavioral Health Springboard (2022).

## Evi Taylor, former MSW director and department co-chair at Arkansas State, steps into leadership role at the School

[GO.UNC.EDU/EVI](https://go.unc.edu/evi)

**Evelyn "Evi" Taylor** was named the School of Social Work's new associate dean for MSW education in July 2022. Taylor is the second School of Social Work faculty member to hold the position. She follows **Lisa de Saxe Zerden**, who served in the leadership role for nearly six years. Zerden stepped down from this administrative post to resume her full-time tenure track faculty position.



## School thanks recent retirees for decades of service to state

### John McMahon retires after 30 years of state service

[GO.UNC.EDU/JOHN](https://go.unc.edu/john)

As a writer, editor, clinical associate professor and facilitator, **John McMahon** dedicated his career with UNC's **Family and Children's Resource Program** to strengthening child welfare agencies and improving outcomes for families, children, and communities.

### Rebecca Brigham retires after nearly 40 years of service

[GO.UNC.EDU/REBECCA](https://go.unc.edu/rebecca)

As a clinical associate professor and assistant dean of practicum education, **Rebecca Brigham** was known as a "visionary" who positioned the School of Social Work's practicum program to be a national leader in student advising, community collaboration and preparation for the future.

### Marilyn Ghezzi retires after 38 years of service to the state

[GO.UNC.EDU/MARILYN](https://go.unc.edu/marilyn)

**Marilyn Ghezzi** retired after 20 years of service to the state of North Carolina as a clinical social worker, followed by nearly as much time in her second career in higher education at Carolina. The clinical associate professor was recognized with teaching awards at least 21 times over her academic career.

## Staff Updates

We would like to welcome the following who joined the School's staff from July 2022–June 2023 and congratulate those who transitioned into new roles during the same time period.

<b>Shalisa Clifton</b>	Administrative Support Specialist
<b>Samuel Deal</b>	Facilities Manager
<b>Erica Desiderio</b>	Soc/Clin Research Specialist
<b>Abby Cannon</b>	Research Associate
<b>Molly Hurd</b>	Technology Support Specialist
<b>Peter Tesh</b>	Technology Support Specialist
<b>Shavonta Fleming</b>	Technology Support Specialist
<b>Miriam Madison</b>	Admin Support Specialist
<b>Vanessa Apple</b>	IT Analyst/Programmer - 2
<b>Madeline Braxton</b>	Admin Support Specialist
<b>Sarah Hammond</b>	Research Scientist
<b>Angela Tobin</b>	Social Services Professional
<b>Julia Metz</b>	Soc/Clin Research Assistant
<b>Aisha Stocks</b>	Executive Assistant
<b>Chloe Yopp</b>	Public Comm Specialist
<b>Krystal Graves</b>	Children with Complex Needs Program Specialist
<b>Rich Stewart*</b>	Applications Technician
<b>Anna Bey</b>	Admin Support Specialist
<b>Lara Chatterley</b>	Executive Assistant
<b>Annie Francis</b>	Sr. Research Associate
<b>Stefanie Panke</b>	Digital Pedagogy Coach
<b>Jameceia Holliday</b>	Assistant Director of Administrative Services & Operations
<b>Joe Petrizzi</b>	Associate Director of Development
<b>Kamryn Clairmont</b>	Director of Annual Giving and Donor Relations
<b>Annamae Giles*</b>	CARES Program Coordinator
<b>Alexandria Schmidt</b>	Administrative Support Specialist
<b>Caroline Blessing</b>	Assistant Director of Recruitment, Admission, and Financial Aid

\* New Role

## SSWR

**Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson** is the president-elect of the Society for Social Work Research (SSWR). Denby-Brinson is the Wallace H. Kuralt Sr. Distinguished Professor of Public Welfare Policy and Administration at the School, and has served as dean since 2021. She will serve as SSWR's president from February 2024 to January 2026.

## \$34.5M

Total awards to UNC School of Social Work principal investigators between fiscal year 2022 (July 2021–June 2022) and fiscal year 2023 to date (July 2022–May 17, 2023).

[sswimpactreport.unc.edu](https://sswimpactreport.unc.edu)

## GADE

Professor **Mimi Chapman** is the president-elect of the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE). Chapman is the Frank A. Daniels Professor for Human Service Policy Information at the School, and has served as associate dean for doctoral education since 2019. She will serve as GADE's 2023–2024 president.



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# Discover



Rachel Goode is an assistant professor.

## Rachel Goode wins prestigious national research achievement award

[GO.UNC.EDU/RACHEL](https://go.unc.edu/rachel)

Assistant Professor **Rachel Goode** was named the winner of the 2023 Society for Social Work and Research Deborah K. Padgett Early Career Achievement Award. Goode, an adjunct assistant professor at UNC's Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders and a faculty member at the University's Nutrition Research Institute, was honored for her work in treating obesity and eating disorders among African American women and those experiencing poverty.

The prestigious Padgett award honors researchers whose accomplishments reflect innovative scholarship and who have demonstrated a rigorous approach to social work research. In addition, award winning scholars are selected based on work that exhibits an emerging influence in the field and because their contributions to advance the profession are noteworthy.

Goode, who joined the School in 2017, is the second Black woman to receive the national SSWR research award since it was created in 2007.

## National Institutes of Health call on Trenette Goings to serve

[GO.UNC.EDU/TRENETTE](https://go.unc.edu/trenette)

**Trenette Clark Goings** was invited to serve as a standing member on a scientific review panel for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The highly selective appointment is a significant honor given that only 3.2% of all NIH reviewers are Black and even fewer are social workers.

"This selection means the opportunity to share my voice in a way that I think will improve science and health outcomes for everyone — including families and children," Goings said. "I will be objective and fair and given my perspective as a Black woman who grew up in a rural persistently poor county with few resources and many adversities; I will bring a unique perspective."

Goings, the Sandra Reeves Spears and John B. Turner Distinguished Professor of Social Work, has gained national recognition for her achievements as a scholar in the substance use field since joining the School in 2010.



Brianna Lombardi is a 2018 Ph.D. graduate of the School and current faculty in the Department of Family Medicine.

## \$4.5 million grant deepens understanding of behavioral health workforce needs

[GO.UNC.EDU/HRSA](https://go.unc.edu/hrsa)

UNC Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research and UNC School of Social Work are partnering over the next five years to lead a new federally funded Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center.

Funded by a \$4.5 million grant from the national Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the center will join a network of eight other federally funded centers across the country — including one already established at Sheps — that collect, analyze, and report data to help decision-makers at the federal, state, and local levels understand health workforce needs.

Moreover, this latest workforce research center will be the first within HRSA's network of centers to be led by social workers. **Brianna Lombardi**, a 2018 Ph.D. graduate of the School and current faculty in the Department of Family Medicine, will serve as principal investigator and director of the new center. Lombardi currently serves as the deputy director of the HRSA-funded Carolina Health Workforce Research Center, which has operated within Sheps for nearly 10 years. **Lisa de Saxe Zerden**, School of Social Work associate professor and director for Interprofessional Education and Practice, will serve as deputy director and co-investigator of the behavioral health project.



Lisa de Saxe Zerden is an associate professor and director for Interprofessional Education and Practice.

## Postdoctoral research fellow focuses on how Black women cope with stress

[GO.UNC.EDU/MILLICENT](https://go.unc.edu/millicent)

Growing up in rural North Carolina, **Millicent Robinson**, MSW '17, often wondered why there was a history of stress-related chronic health conditions in her family when White families from nearby communities never appeared to face the same challenges.

Learning that she was born a county over in a hospital that served mainly White residents further piqued her interest, especially as she heard others talk about the hospital's plethora of resources and better health outcomes for newborns.

Robinson's curious nature eventually led her to pursue a career that focuses on strengthening mental and physical health and their connections, particularly among Black women. At UNC School of Social Work, she is honing these skills as the School's first two-year postdoctoral research fellow through the Carolina Postdoctoral Program for Faculty Diversity. The program aims to attract under-represented scholars and prepare them for tenure track appointments at the University of North Carolina and at other research universities.



Millicent Robinson is a postdoctoral research fellow, Carolina Postdoctoral Program for Faculty Diversity.



Tonya Van Deirse is a research associate professor.

## Tonya Van Deirse receives NIMH award for her work to increase mental health services in NC’s criminal legal system

[GO.UNC.EDU/TONYA](https://go.unc.edu/tonya)

Research associate professor **Tonya Van Deirse** was awarded a nearly \$639,000 Mentored Research Scientist Development Award from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). The grant is Van Deirse’s first federal mentorship award and will provide research funding and intensive peer faculty support over the next four years to enhance her work around mental health services within the criminal justice system.

Much of Van Deirse’s interest focuses on evidence-based research that connects people with serious mental illnesses in the criminal legal system to needed treatment. For her NIMH award, Van Deirse is leading a study that aims to enhance linkages to treatment for people with serious mental illnesses who are in the state’s specialty mental health probation (SMHP) program.

Currently offered in 27 counties across North Carolina, SMHP aims to connect people with serious mental illnesses to community-based mental health services. SMHP officers are a vital component of the model and are trained to use problem-solving techniques to address the needs of those on their caseload. The program’s success depends heavily on coordination and collaboration between probation officers and mental health service providers.



Sheryl Zimmerman is a University Kenan Distinguished Professor, executive director of the Center for Excellence in Assisted Living (CEAL@UNC) and the co-director of the Program on Aging, Disability and Long-Term Care at UNC.

## Dream-granting for terminally ill adults: Sheryl Zimmerman takes on a new advisory role

[GO.UNC.EDU/DREAMFOUNDATION](https://go.unc.edu/dreamfoundation)

University Kenan Distinguished Professor **Sheryl Zimmerman** was appointed to serve on the National Board of Directors for Dream Foundation, the only national dream-granting organization for terminally ill adults. Zimmerman will work closely with staff, serve as a valuable advisor to program services, and bring awareness to end-of-life, palliative care, and long-term care organizations based on her extensive knowledge and networking.

Zimmerman, who co-directs the Program on Aging, Disability, and Long-Term Care, Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, is internationally recognized as an expert in long-term care services and supports for older adults and for her work in comparative studies of long-term care and end-of-life services and supports and was recently named Executive Director of UNC@CEAL.



### PFSI INVENTORY

In mid-June, (left to right) Research Assistant Professor **Todd Jensen**, Lieutenant Colonel Erika King — an assistant professor at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs — and Kenan Distinguished Professor **Gary Bowen** presented at the 2023 Military Social Work & Behavioral Health Conference about their Personal and Family Strengths Inventory (PFSI), a brief, self-administered, support-focused assessment.



### NC’S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM

NC Representative **Sydney Batch**, MSW/JD ’06, NASW-NC Executive Director Valerie Arendt, and Disability Rights attorneys Lisa Nesbitt and Joonu Coste came to campus in early April to serve on a Legacy Speakers Series panel titled “Policy Practice and Advocacy to Transform North Carolina’s Behavioral Health System.”



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# Promote Democracy

***“We must position ourselves to receive stories without personal bias and find ways to connect with people to empower them to speak with those who are in power to affect structural change.”***

**MIA IVES-RUBLEE**



## **Bobby Boyd Leadership Lecture: Alumna Mia Ives-Rublee urges social workers to be conduits for change**

[GO.UNC.EDU/MIA](https://go.unc.edu/mia)

Over the last nearly 15 years as she transitioned from work as a direct practitioner to academic researcher to community organizer to policy changemaker, **Mia Ives-Rublee** learned one very important lesson: Social workers must first consider how their own experiences with grief and pain may collectively impact the people they are trying to help.

“Allowing others to speak and amplify their stories is one of the best things we can do as social workers, and to do this, we must learn to silence our own thoughts, needs and wants. We must position ourselves to receive stories without personal bias and find ways to connect with people to empower them to speak with those who are in power to affect structural change,” said Ives-Rublee, a 2009 MSW graduate, Distinguished Alumna, and the 2023 guest speaker for the School of Social Work’s **Bobby Boyd Leadership Lecture**.

As director of the Disability Justice Initiative of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for American Progress, Ives-Rublee now works a few blocks from the White House in a role that allows her to publicly advocate for federal policies that protect the rights of people with disabilities across the country. Prior to joining the Center for American Progress, she fought for disability justice and inclusion at nonprofit organizations and businesses across the United States. Recognized as one of Glamour Magazine’s Women of the Year, Ives-Rublee is best known as a founder of the Women’s March Disability Caucus and co-organizer of the original Women’s March on Washington in 2017, one of the largest protests in American history.



***The speakers series, which Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson developed and launched last year, offers the School, the campus community and others the opportunity to consider the progress that has been made in addressing grand social problems.***

## **Second Legacy Speakers event focused on mental and behavioral health care**

[GO.UNC.EDU/MICHELLE](https://go.unc.edu/michelle)

Nearly 400 community leaders, advocates, social work practitioners, faculty, students and others gathered in person and virtually on April 3, 2023, for the School’s 2nd Annual **Legacy Speakers Series**. The daylong event focused on Advancing Equity and Transforming Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Systems through Social Work Advocacy, Research, and Workforce Development.

The speakers series, which **Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson** developed and launched last year, offers the School, the campus community and others the opportunity to consider the progress that has been made in addressing grand social problems, such as child maltreatment and family trauma, and to think about the challenges that remain.

The day-long event included panel discussions on issues such as behavioral health workforce development; policy practice and advocacy to transform North Carolina’s behavioral health system; advancing equity in substance use disorder treatment and recovery; and meeting the behavioral health needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Keynote speaker Professor Michelle Munson of New York University’s Silver School of Social Work was the highlight of this year’s event and spoke about her research, which focuses on psychosocial interventions and services for youth and young adults living with serious mental health conditions and their loved ones.



### Perez-Albanil awarded NASW Consuelo W. Gosnell Scholarship

[GO.UNC.EDU/JACKIE](https://go.unc.edu/jackie)

The National Association of Social Workers Foundation awarded MSW student **Jackie Perez-Albanil** the Consuelo W. Gosnell Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship recognizes master's degree candidates in social work who have demonstrated a commitment to working with, or who have a special affinity with, American Indian/Alaska Native and Hispanic/Latinx populations.

Consuelo W. Gosnell was a champion of civil and human rights and worked diligently to improve conditions for critically under-served American Indian and Latinx communities in the Southwest. She practiced for many years in federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Perez-Albanil (on cover), who graduated from the School's 12-month Advanced Standing program with a Community, Management and Policy Practice concentration, is committed to serving the Latinx community. Perez-Albanil is especially passionate about supporting students in their educational journeys and advocating for immigration reform.

### Series returns with strong call for anti-racism research

[GO.UNC.EDU/CAMARA](https://go.unc.edu/camara)

The Black History Month Research Series returned in February 2023 with a host of virtual workshops that examined research within an anti-racism framework. This collaborative project, which launched in 2022, was created by and is co-hosted by UNC's **Global Social Development Innovations (GSDI)** and **INSPIRED Lab**. The series brought together thought-provoking and innovative ideas, procedures and research findings that address persisting disparities and inequities.

The series also showcased research from UNC social work faculty and doctoral students, as well as invited presentations from external scholars. The month-long event kicked off with speaker Camara Phyllis Jones, MD, MPH, Ph.D., a family physician, epidemiologist and Leverhulme Visiting Professor in Global Health and Social Medicine at King's College London. Dr. Jones presented on the topic "Confronting Racism Denial: Naming Racism and Moving to Action."

Jones' work focuses on naming, measuring, and addressing the impacts of racism on the health and well-being of the nation and world. Her allegories on "race" and racism illuminate topics that are otherwise difficult for many Americans to understand or discuss: that racism exists, racism is a system, racism saps the strength of the whole society, and we can act to dismantle racism.



### MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FOR NORTH CAROLINA'S STUDENTS

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Coordinator **Alicia Freeman** reports that the program has presented 55 training sessions to more than 900 of Carolina's faculty, staff and students since last summer, with seven upcoming training sessions scheduled for this summer. MHFA provides evidence-based training designed to help participants develop basic skills to help someone who is experiencing a mental health crisis, respond to substance use disorders, and identify professional resources that can provide additional care. The MHFA training is available as a single full-day session or as two half-day sessions.

The UNC MHFA program was initially launched at the School by **Tara Bohley** and **Jodi Flick** nearly a decade ago. When the initial grant funding for the program ended, UNC Chancellor **Kevin Guskiewicz** provided additional funding which allowed Freeman and her growing team of trained facilitators (37 at last count) to reach more widely across Carolina's campus. Freeman and her colleagues at the School's Behavioral Health Springboard are in talks now about expanding MHFA more broadly to teens and youth in all 100 counties through partnerships with public, private, and charter schools and other youth-serving organizations. Watch [ssw.unc.edu](https://ssw.unc.edu) this fall for more on this development.



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# Serve to Benefit Society



## School becomes new home for Center for Excellence in Assisted Living

[GO.UNC.EDU/SHERYL](https://go.unc.edu/sheryl)

For 20 years, the national **Center for Excellence in Assisted Living (CEAL@UNC)** has focused on advancing the well-being of people who live and work in assisted living through research, practice, and policy. These efforts will expand and intensify now that the center has transitioned to CEAL@UNC and landed in a new home within the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the fifth top-rated public university in the country.

Based within UNC's School of Social Work and supported by UNC Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, CEAL@UNC is led by University Kenan Distinguished Professor **Sheryl Zimmerman**, co-director of the Sheps Center's Program on Aging, Disability, and Long-Term Care. Zimmerman, CEAL@UNC's newly named executive director, is a leader in assisted living research and care for people with dementia as well as an internationally recognized expert with more than 25 years of scholarship focused on long-term care services and supports for older adults.

**Zimmerman, CEAL@UNC's newly named executive director, is a leader in assisted living research and care for people with dementia as well as an internationally recognized expert with more than 25 years of scholarship focused on long-term care services and supports for older adults.**



Allison De Marco is an advanced research scientist at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute.



Tonya Van Deirse is a research associate professor.

## School faculty honored with University Public Service Awards

[GO.UNC.EDU/ALLISONTONYA](https://go.unc.edu/allisontonya)

Faculty members **Allison De Marco** and **Tonya Van Deirse** were among 10 Carolina faculty, staff, students and organizations recognized in April 2022 with University Public Service Awards for outstanding contributions to the campus and broader communities.

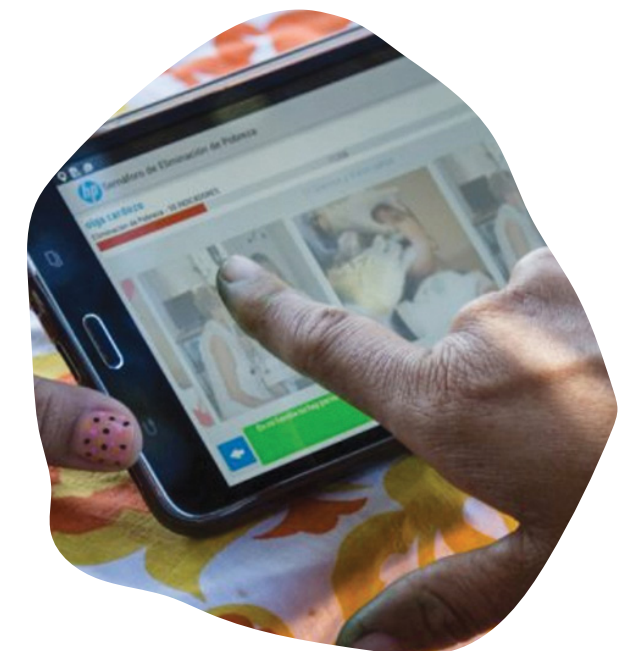
De Marco, an advanced research scientist at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute and adjunct assistant professor in the School of Social Work, and Van Deirse, a research associate professor within the School, were both honored by the Carolina Center for Public Service with the "Office of the Provost Engaged Scholarship Award." This award recognizes individuals and campus units for public service through engaged teaching, research and partnership.

## Stoplight-colored assessment tool helps 100 families set and reach goals in Cabarrus County

[GO.UNC.EDU/ASPIRE](https://go.unc.edu/aspire)

Families experiencing poverty often face circumstances that can be overwhelming, such as having to choose between paying the rent or utility bills during a financially challenging month. But a new initiative of the School's **Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Lab** is helping families to learn to navigate these challenges in more manageable ways.

Through the use of an online app known as Aspire, social services clients can help to identify challenges in their lives by tapping through a 55-question survey with stoplight-colored responses to pinpoint areas where they are red (suffering), yellow (struggling) or green (thriving). They see the results in the color-coded circles of a one-page "Life Map." In cases where extra support or resources are needed, individuals and families are directed to appropriate agencies that can help.





Rainier Masa is an associate professor.



Will Hall is an associate professor.

## Faculty members Masa and Hall named L. Richardson Preyer Early Career Scholars

### GO.UNC.EDU/RAINIERWILL

Associate Professors **Rainier Masa** and **Will Hall** were named L. Richardson Preyer Early Career Scholars. The social work colleagues are the first to be selected for the new awards, which recognize faculty who have demonstrated service to the state of North Carolina and for their significant contributions in scholarly research and teaching at the School.

The awards were created thanks to the generosity of philanthropist **Rich Preyer**, who along with his wife Marilyn Jacobs Preyer, has been a long-time supporter of the School of Social Work. Preyer currently serves on the School's Board of Advisors.

Candidates for the L. Richardson Preyer Early Career Scholars are tenure-track faculty members whose work supports children and families. Selected scholars also have a record of integrating teaching, research, and community service and have demonstrated a commitment to student mentoring and a willingness to train students to engage in community-based research.

## Study shows School's effort to improve access to behavioral health is working for both patients and providers

### GO.UNC.EDU/PRIME

When the School launched **UNC-PrimeCare** nearly eight years ago, the goal was to address the nation's rapidly growing need for more behavioral healthcare workers within the integrated landscape of health care services. School leaders now have evidence that the federally funded program is meeting its intended purpose and perhaps more important, PrimeCare social work graduates are succeeding.

According to findings from a five-year study, PrimeCare graduates said they felt better prepared to work in health care environments, such as hospitals, health clinics and substance abuse treatment facilities, compared to students who graduated from the School's traditional MSW program without the integrated care training. The longitudinal study also found that PrimeCare graduates are having greater success securing jobs more quickly after graduation and are landing jobs with higher salaries.

**The longitudinal study also found that PrimeCare graduates are having greater success securing jobs more quickly after graduation and are landing jobs with higher salaries.**



### GALAPAGOS

UNC School of Social Work team members met this year with senior administrators at Oskar Jandi Hospital (OJH) in San Cristobal, Galapagos, Ecuador, to discuss a practicum site for social work graduate students. Pictured (left to right): Jonathan Herrera and Djalmar Zombrano with OJH; UNC faculty **Gina Chowa** and **Mauricio Yabar**; Susana Espinoza with OJH, UNC faculty **Evi Taylor** and recent MSW graduate **Ilana Shtivelman**.

### GLOBAL REPRESENTATIVE

Distinguished Professor **Kim Strom** continues to be sought after around the globe for her expertise in ethics. In 2022-2023, Strom presented in Kosovo to women leaders from Southeastern Europe; spoke on moral courage in Zagreb, Croatia; designed an online presentation for the University of Moldova; taught classes involving students from 14 countries at the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia); met with the US ambassador to Slovenia; and developed a performance appraisal system for school social workers in the country of Georgia. Strom and colleagues from a multinational research team conducted numerous presentations on their report on the global ethics implication of COVID.



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# Globalize

## School works to strengthen recruitment of international students

[GO.UNC.EDU/SSWGLOBALRECRUITING](https://go.unc.edu/sswglobalrecruiting)

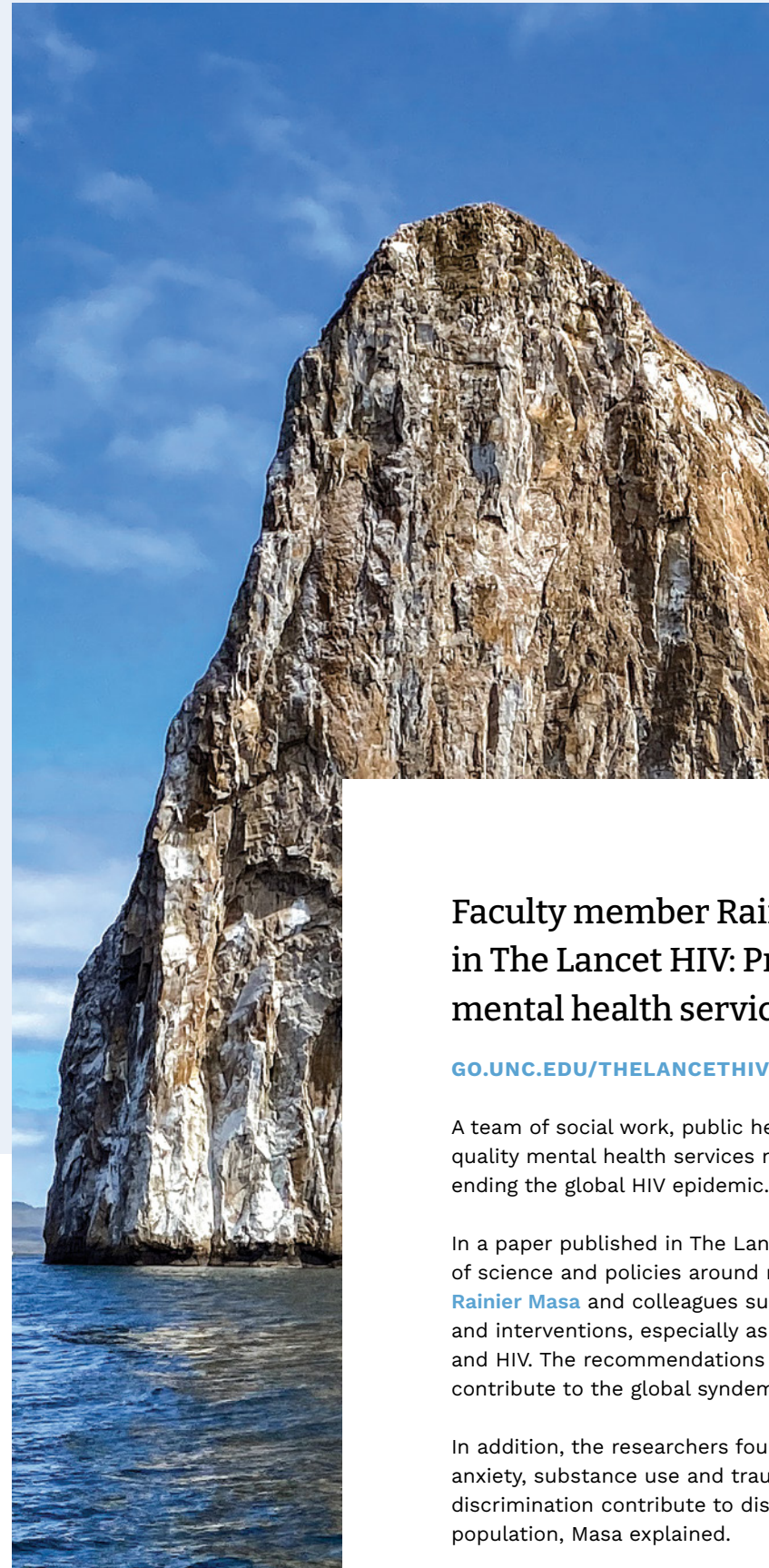
School leaders say the number of international students are increasing again after a decline in recent years, along with enhanced efforts to recruit more students from countries outside of the United States.

These future scholars and practitioners are needed to help advance the University's mission to solve some of the world's most challenging problems, said **Gina Chowa**, the School's associate dean for global engagement. At the same time, the success of this work is dependent upon ensuring the next generation of social workers have a global mindset, whether practicing in the United States or in the international arena, she said.

### Gina Chowa receives the 2023 UNC Faculty Award for Global Excellence

[GO.UNC.EDU/GLOBALGINA](https://go.unc.edu/globalgina)

Johnson-Howard-Adair Distinguished Professor **Gina Chowa** has been awarded the 2023 UNC Faculty Award for Global Excellence. The award, conferred by the Office of the Vice Provost for Global Affairs, recognizes UNC-Chapel Hill faculty members who have made significant contributions to the globalize pillar of Carolina Next: Innovations for Public Good strategic plan. Pictured below, second and third from right: Charles and Gina Chowa with (left to right) Associate Dean **Kandace Davis Farrar**, **Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson**, graduate student **Joan Wanyama**, Associate Professor **Rainier Masa**, and Assistant Dean **Sharon Holmes Thomas**.



## School center to partner on multi-million-dollar, multi-country USAID project

[GO.UNC.EDU/SSWANDUSAID](https://go.unc.edu/sswandusa)

UNC's **Global Social Development Innovations (GSDI)** has been awarded a \$1 million contract to participate in a multi-million-dollar, multi-country project that aims to assess the needs of and strengthen support for marginalized and underrepresented groups around the world.

The contract is part of a five-year, \$19 million project that will support the mission and work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). GSDI, which is housed within the School and focuses on improving the lives of young people, and Mathematica, a company that uses data and technology to improve well-being, are collaborating as research partners on the initiative.

Together, GSDI and Mathematica will conduct multiple research activities to understand how marginalizing women, youth, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and non-dominant racial and ethnic groups and preventing them from fully participating in social, economic, political and cultural life impacts development in lower- and middle-income countries.

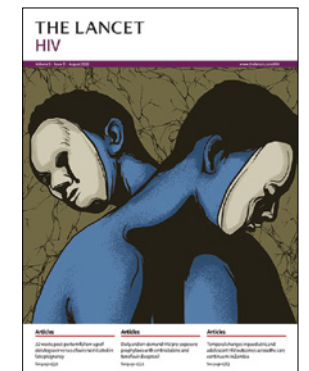
### Faculty member Rainier Masa and colleagues in The Lancet HIV: Prevention should include mental health services

[GO.UNC.EDU/THELANCETHIV](https://go.unc.edu/thelancethiv)

A team of social work, public health and medical scholars say improving access to quality mental health services may be the most effective public health strategy for ending the global HIV epidemic.

In a paper published in *The Lancet HIV* as part of a series exploring the advancement of science and policies around mental health and HIV services, associate professor **Rainier Masa** and colleagues suggest that psychological care should be integrated with HIV prevention programs and interventions, especially as a growing amount of evidence continues to point to a link between mental health and HIV. The recommendations are based on a review of current literature examining the multiple factors that contribute to the global syndemic of HIV and mental health problems among men who have sex with men or MSM.

In addition, the researchers found that previous studies have shown that MSM face higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance use and trauma than the general population. There is also strong evidence that stigma and discrimination contribute to disproportionate mental health problems and HIV transmission within the MSM population, Masa explained.



## Baumgartner, partners awarded \$3.1 million NIH grant to increase access to adolescent health services in sub-Saharan Africa

[GO.UNC.EDU/JOYNOEL](https://go.unc.edu/joynoel)

For nearly 20 years, **Joy Noel Baumgartner** has focused much of her research on interventions that promote equitable access to reproductive health services and HIV testing in low and middle-income countries, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. Such efforts have been designed to make young people more aware of opportunities to receive health services with hopes that they will see health providers regularly later in life and maintain better health.

Nevertheless, researchers have learned that adolescents, especially those at greatest risk of unintended pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections, don't often take the initiative to visit a health clinic on their own, said Baumgartner, a Wallace Kuralt Early Career Distinguished Scholar. However, Baumgartner and her research collaborators at Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS) in Tanzania, think they may have discovered a more effective way of tackling this challenge.

Thanks to a \$3.1 million R01 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Baumgartner and her research team are launching a new five-year project that encourages community health clinics to partner with local schools to bring entire classrooms of students into clinics for wellness visits. The school field trips will allow nurses and doctors to provide all students with information on reproductive health and HIV testing and give them the chance to assess each child's overall health.



## School center tapped by World Bank

“Financial inclusion” is the ability to access appropriate, affordable and timely financial products and services.

Without it, an entrepreneur can't get the credit she needs to start up a small business. Workers can't make day-to-day financial transactions, like sending and receiving money. A young woman can't get insurance to secure the tools vital to keeping her business operating.

How can people living in poverty build resilience through financial services? And how can opportunities for financial inclusion improve the lives of marginalized adolescent girls and young women, breaking well-documented gender gaps that last a lifetime?

Washington, D.C.-based Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) is asking those questions. The organization dedicated to advancing the lives of people in poverty — especially women — through financial inclusion is housed and administered by the World Bank.

In November 2022, CGAP tapped the School's **Global Social Development Innovations (GSDI)** center to analyze a decade (2012–2022) of what is called systematic literature review synthesizing the evidence of programmatic interventions designed to improve financial inclusion from low and middle-income countries.

Watch for the report elucidating findings of this analysis to be shared later this summer on our [ssw.unc.edu](https://ssw.unc.edu) website.

## KEEPING THE SCHOOL CONNECTED

The School's **Computer & Information Technology Unit (CITU)** has been busy helping faculty and students transition from COVID remote work back to hybrid and in-person classes. In addition, all Tate-Turner-Kuralt Building classrooms and conference rooms have been upgraded to support hybrid meetings. The team has also upgraded SSWis — (pronounced “Swiss”) — the SSW Information System which acts as a portal allowing more than 320 MSW students, practicum instructors/task supervisors, and faculty advisors to complete and submit online forms related to practicums. “Pre-SSWis” alumni may appreciate how helpful it is to have this online system in place! CITU team members stay busy helping faculty transitioning online instruction from Sakai to Canvas; supporting and training for Microsoft Office 365 transitioning to the cloud; and consulting on the preparations for the MSW Online Program.



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# Optimize Operations

# Targeting operational excellence

[CAROLINANEXT.UNC.EDU/PLAN](https://carolinanext.unc.edu/plan)

Assistant Dean for Administration **Joe DiConcilio** joined the School in 2019 after having served the University in other administrative roles since 2001.

DiConcilio and his team are responsible for the facilities, finance, and human resources work that support the School's mission. Together, they provide critical functions necessary to support groundbreaking research, nationally recognized teaching, and burgeoning community outreach efforts.

DiConcilio talked with us about how his team seeks to make the most efficient use of the School's resources in alignment with the University's Operational Excellence initiative.



## The School's workforce is growing as Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson puts new initiatives and opportunities in place. What does that mean from a human resources standpoint?

It means that HR Consultant **Carolyn Adams** is always working above-and-beyond. Remember: every time the School or one of our active centers, labs and institutes hires someone, it goes through Carolyn and her team. Since 2005, she has overseen HR for the School, and she did that with the help of HR Specialist **Drew Lasater** until 2022 when HR Specialist **Jennifer Jean-Baptiste** joined them. One of our recent efficiencies is that we took a retired accounting technician position and reclassified it, assigning it to HR. That allows us to provide additional support as we continue to grow as a School and advance initiatives to bring salaries, position and career growth in balance, in keeping with our goals to retain excellence at both the faculty and staff level.

In May, the School's workforce was made up of 254 permanent and temporary faculty, staff and student workers. Every one of those people is backed by our HR team.

## Another responsibility under your oversight is maintaining physical facilities and infrastructure and working to support and enhance campus safety. Give us an example of how that happens at the School.

**Sam Deal** joined the School as facilities manager in 2022. He maintains the Tate-Turner-Kuralt Building and acts as SSW's liaison with facilities and campus safety partners across Carolina. He has implemented improvements in two of what can be the most contentious topics on any campus: parking and office space allocation.

Visitors to what we affectionately call the TTK building used to jockey for passes which were manually logged and distributed on-site. Sam and IT Director **Phil Kaufman** investigated the possibility of issuing permits digitally and implemented a new system. Now, visitors contact a group of us directly via the [sswparking@unc.edu](mailto:sswparking@unc.edu) email address to request a parking spot. We reserve spaces via a digital calendar that sends the requestor a printable pass. That has streamlined what was a cumbersome process.

## Give us an overview of what is new in the world of space allocation.

In 2023, we formed a Space Planning Committee. That consists of four staff members, who call on the dean as needed. The charge is to develop best practices for how to use available space efficiently and equitably. That group assesses the needs of the community and looks at where offices are available. Juggling the "where" and "when" of available space is a complex conundrum. The committee is developing policies and procedures that allow for as fair and equitable a way forward as possible. We will implement some of those solutions this summer. This is one example of how we're enhancing "compliance readiness" by aligning routine operations with suitable routine processes and procedures.

## Can you give us another example of how the School has sought cost efficiencies while maintaining a supportive work environment?

After COVID struck in 2020, and the University began shifting to hybrid and remote work, we found that most of the office space we were leasing for one of our research groups was not being used. We made space in TTK for those who were not working from home. When we brought those colleagues back to TTK, we realized significant cost savings to both the School and the University.

Today, we are getting creative about the space that we have here on Pittsboro Street. We're incorporating things we learned because of the pandemic about how effective many of us can be working from home. We're taking into consideration how to best use concepts of shared space and office hoteling. We're also looking at data about productivity and job satisfaction in order to be as nimble as possible.

## How does Grants Manager Penny Hawkins' team work to keep the School operating effectively?

At last check, total awards to the School's principal investigators between July 2021 and mid-May 2023 totaled \$34.5 million. Penny's team includes **Ruth Morgan**, **Nicole Mynhier**, **Monica De Pietro**, and part-time accounting support person **Kim Whitfield**. When I arrived at the School and recognized the high level

of grant activity, I restructured the grants team to better meet those needs. Together, these five staff members help to facilitate the enormous success of our innovative social work researchers.

To that end, Penny's group has developed new tracking methods for finance and accounting sharing agreements, FAQs related to the eCRT (effort certification) process, routing efficiencies for processes like the University's travel records, changed the way primary award contact designees are handled, and worked with Associate Dean **Sheryl Zimmerman** and Research Associate Professor **Steve Day** to revise the proposal playbook used by faculty and staff alike.

## How is the finance team optimizing the School's success?

Accountant **Diane Taylor** and I work with budget managers to develop the most efficient use of available funds to meet the needs of the School, and Executive Assistant **Cindy Justice** is an integral supporter of that work. Diane works with Cindy and other executive assistants and program coordinators to track expenses in a timely way. We've been cleaning up accounts and revamping program codes to more closely track budgets. And for anyone who oversees or helps track a budget at the School, we have made that reporting digitally accessible wherever possible.

## What are some other initiatives towards operational excellence in the academic year ahead?

We're in the process of reworking the administrative structure of the School, with an eye to redistributing some of that work in support of existing departments and in our newly ramped-up Communications and Advancement teams and planned-for Office of Community Engagement and Outreach. We'll continue to develop best practices in response to the needs of our colleagues. There is always room for improvement in enhancing the consistency and ease-of-use for policies and procedures related to travel, professional development, course buy-outs, and other key processes. Our goals of efficiency and effectiveness are guided by the desire to treat every situation equitably.

## Kenan Distinguished Professor Gary Bowen to retire in December



**Gary Bowen**, a Kenan Distinguished Professor who has served on the faculty at the School for nearly 40 years, including five years as dean, is retiring in December. Bowen, who joined the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill campus in 1985, will leave behind an academic career filled with accomplishments at the administrative, teaching and scholarly level.

“One can measure a person’s commitment to their profession and their institution by years of service, the consequential and lasting impact of their work, respect garnered from peers, and how the path they have charted is often emulated, and in Gary we find all of these,” said **Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson**, noting Bowen’s decades of service to students, alumni, faculty and multiple communities across North Carolina.

Originally hired by former School of Social Work **Dean John B. Turner**, Bowen worked closely with Turner to help develop the School’s doctoral program in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By the time he was appointed School dean in August 2016, the Ph.D. program had grown to national prominence, with alumni serving as leading scholars in public and private universities and in leadership roles in policymaking institutions across the nation and world.

As dean, Bowen helped foster new initiatives in anti-racism and social justice and supported enhanced opportunities for research and innovation within the school, including the creation of the **Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship Lab** and the **Global Social Development Innovations** research center. He also guided plans for the school’s two-year centennial celebration, One Hundred Years of Social Work: Ready for Next, from 1920–2020. A year later, Bowen stepped down as dean to return to a full-time faculty role.

**“I love this University and our School of Social Work — both are priceless gems for the people of North Carolina and beyond. I will always be a proud Tar Heel!”**

Named among the nation’s top 50 “Most Influential Contemporary Social Work Faculty” by the Journal of Social Service Review in 2019, Bowen has published extensively on school engagement and academic success of middle and high school students, as well as on the nature of the work and family interactions in branches of the U.S. military.

Over the course of his scholarly career, Bowen has remained active in many professional associations, including as a Fellow with the National Council on Family Relations and the Society for Social Work and Research. In 2016, he was identified as one of 40 “high impact” social work scholars in a study published in the journal *Research on Social Work Practice*. As a teacher, Bowen received the Dean’s Recognition of Teaching Excellence six times. In addition, he was recognized during his tenure for Excellence in Doctoral Student Mentoring, as a member of the School’s Distinguished Alumni, and for Outstanding Leadership, Impact and Contribution to the Mission of Teaching, Research and Service.

Bowen said he appreciates the numerous opportunities he’s had over his career to engage with students and collaborate and serve alongside faculty and staff.

“I love this University and our School of Social Work — both are priceless gems for the people of North Carolina and beyond. I will always be a proud Tar Heel!”



Dear UNC School of Social Work alumni and friends,

It was the honor of my life to join you in July 2022 as your new associate dean of advancement. Together, we’ve achieved incredible milestones. With only six months remaining in the Campaign for Carolina, we were not expected to meet our \$23 million goal. However, so many of you answered the call and even with the odds against us, we not only met but exceeded that goal! And then, just a few months later, we excelled once again and achieved record-breaking success on GiveUNC, Carolina’s unified day of giving. Most notably, we will celebrate this fiscal year not only as the most successful year in our School’s history of fundraising but for surpassing our 10-year fundraising average by nearly 500%!

These successes are more than numbers. They translate into the ability of faculty to conduct more cutting-edge research, training for mental health first aid, and the construction of homes for veterans and for others with mental health challenges. These numbers represent students who will receive scholarships and who will have the opportunity to pursue social work without the fear of overwhelming debt. These numbers have faces, and I hope this latest issue of *Contact* magazine helps you glean a sense of their impact.

But this is just the beginning. We have so many more goals on the horizon to pursue and to accomplish for UNC School of Social Work. The best is truly yet to come.

As I enter my second year, I look forward to traveling more and meeting as many alumni and friends as possible. Together, we can explore the part you can play in our School’s future — whether that be through volunteerism, advocacy, or philanthropy. There is a role for everyone. I can’t wait to meet you.

Sincerely,

**Kandace Davis Farrar, J.D.**

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## School raises \$113K+ during GiveUNC campaign

[GO.UNC.EDU/SSWGIVEUNC23](https://go.unc.edu/sswgiveunc23)

The School raised more than \$113,000 during the University's GiveUNC campaign this year, setting a School record for donations since the annual day of giving first launched. In addition, this year's contributions exceeded the total amount collected from all of the previous five GiveUNC campaign years combined, noted **Kandace Davis Farrar**, the School's associate dean for development.

Over the course of 24 hours, the School of Social Work received 112 gifts from donors from all over the country, earning the School a 7th place finish in total dollars raised in comparison to other campuswide schools, departments, and programs participating in the campaign. Alumni, faculty, staff, students, friends, and others participated in this year's giving day and designated much of the funding to the **Hortense McClinton Legacy Scholarship Fund**. The scholarship was established last year to honor McClinton, a social work trailblazer and UNC's first Black faculty member.

## New role reflects comprehensive approach to strategic communications and marketing

[GO.UNC.EDU/BARBARA](https://go.unc.edu/barbara)

The School welcomed **Barbara Wiedemann** as the new assistant dean for strategic communications and marketing in September 2022. A former communications strategist for UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media, she fills a new role that reflects the School's growing national profile and the increased need for an integrated and comprehensive approach to communications and marketing, announced **Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson**.

Prior to joining the Hussman School in 2018, Wiedemann directed Carolina's in-house design team (now UNC Creative). Her service to the state also includes several roles with the North Carolina Museum of Art, where she worked for three years as head graphic designer and then later as publications director. During her tenure there, Wiedemann worked with Pentagram design consultancy to rebrand the museum and served as managing curator of a blockbuster design exhibition.

## MSW alum named Top 10 CNN Hero of the Year

[GO.UNC.EDU/NORA](https://go.unc.edu/nora)

Distinguished Alumni Award winner **Nora El-Khoury Spencer**, MSW '17, was among the individuals recognized as Top 10 CNN Heroes of 2022 for her work in launching a nonprofit to empower women. Created in 2007, the ongoing CNN Heroes program honors "everyday people doing extraordinary things to change the world."

A 2001 graduate of Carolina's journalism school, Spencer is the founder and CEO of Hope Renovations in Carrboro, N.C., an organization that uses a hands-on training program to teach women to work in the construction trades. Through Hope Renovations, trainees provide repairs and renovations to the homes of older adults, enabling them to age in place within their own communities.

Although Spencer did not win the Top Hero Award during a live broadcast from New York, she raised additional awareness for her organization, which she eventually hopes to replicate across the country.

## Kandace Davis Farrar named associate dean for advancement

[GO.UNC.EDU/KANDACE](https://go.unc.edu/kandace)

**Kandace Davis Farrar** was named the School's new associate dean for advancement in July 2022.

Farrar has worked for University Development at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill since 2014, including as the former senior director of development for scholarships and student aid, her previous position for the last three years. In this role, she led fundraising strategy for need-based scholarships and student aid by identifying, cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding gifts of \$100,000 or more.

In addition, she developed and executed a development strategy for campus-wide committees related to educational equity, college access and underrepresented populations; and supervised two additional development officers and an assistant director for scholarships. She exceeded her fundraising goals for three consecutive years.

## 44 Watch our "Because of you, THEY can" impact video

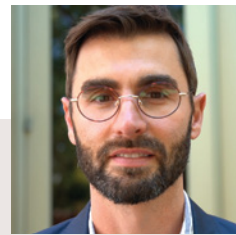


**Associate Professor  
Amy Wilson**

*"[Philanthropy] allowed us to try new things. And that's really important in the world of housing."*

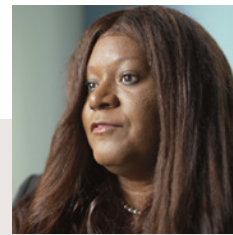
[GO.UNC.EDU/BECAUSEOFYOU](https://go.unc.edu/becauseofyou)

In celebration of the successful conclusion of the Campaign for Carolina, please use your mobile phone camera to hover over the QR code to watch a video created by recent UNC Hussman graduate J'sha Gift '23. The video provides a glimpse of what generous philanthropy makes possible. "Because of you, THEY can."



**Associate Professor  
Will Hall**

*"Receiving this donation, under the leadership of Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson, helps me do the research that I want to do to make the difference that I want to make with the community."*



**Dean Ramona Denby-  
Brinson**

*"What [our donors of unrestricted funds] are really signaling is their trust in us, their confidence in us. And we take that quite seriously."*



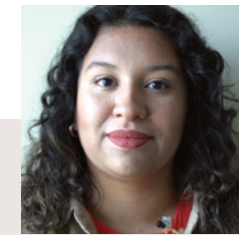
**Whitney Miller,  
MSW '23**

*"I was really fortunate to receive scholarships while at UNC. It was hard being an out-of-state student and to figure out how that would work financially. It's made it possible to be in the program that I desire."*



**Carlton Johnson,  
MSW '24**

*"[Social work versus medicine] is a different kind of life saving. I want to — in 50 years — have increased access to health care where I came from and make it easier for other places like mine to get access to the things they need."*



**Jackie Perez-Albanil,  
MSW '23**

*"...There were so many people before me that whether they're here still or not they are cheering me on. It is truly my ancestors' wildest dreams for me to be graduating, for me to be the first in my family to be able to afford an education."*



## Lori Messinger and Nora El-Khoury Spencer receive 2022 Distinguished Alumni Awards

[GO.UNC.EDU/LORINORA](https://go.unc.edu/lorinora)

Lori Messinger, MSW '96, Ph.D. '99, professor and dean of the University of Tennessee Knoxville College of Social Work, and Nora El-Khoury Spencer, MSW '17, the founder and CEO of Hope Renovations in Carrboro, N.C., were named as recipients in 2022 of the School's Distinguished Alumni Awards. The awards, which are given yearly, recognize alumni who have achieved distinction in the social work profession, who embody social work values and who carry the School's mission of service into the world. Alumni can be nominated by peers, faculty members, staff, fellow alumni or students and are chosen by a committee.

In celebrating the achievements of the 2022 award winners, **Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson** noted that both Messinger and Spencer "epitomize what it means to lead in a consequential manner."

"A significant part of Lori's legacy is the opportunity she has created for thousands of social workers to receive the education and preparation needed to serve their communities. Likewise, she has enabled the careers of social work educators and scholars and in doing so, elevated the standing of our profession."

Spencer's work is equally impressive, Denby-Brinson said.

"When I think about what Nora has done to elevate women and

***"Messinger and Spencer epitomize what it means to lead in a consequential manner."***

**DEAN RAMONA DENBY-BRINSON**

increase their economic standing, one word comes to mind, transformational," she said. "Nora's leadership has not only changed the lives of the women she is helping, but it has set into motion the economic uplift of those women's families and communities for generations to come."

## UNC School of Social Work exceeds \$23 million milestone

[GO.UNC.EDU/26MIL](https://go.unc.edu/26mil)

The School surpassed its ambitious goal to raise \$23 million by 107%, concluding the University's signature "Campaign for Carolina" fundraising drive with \$26.4 million in gifts.

The campus-wide Campaign, which the University publicly launched in 2017, was one of the largest fundraisers in UNC's history, with more than \$5 billion in total collected. The Schools campaign success adds to this historic milestone.

Many of the most generous donations came from the community of people who know the School best — supportive alumni leaders and key stakeholders.



## Karen Randolph and Charity Watkins receive 2023 Distinguished Alumni Awards

[GO.UNC.EDU/KARENCHARITY](https://go.unc.edu/karencharity)

Karen A. Randolph, Ph.D. '00, professor emerita at Florida State University's College of Social Work and Charity S. Watkins, MSW '13, Ph.D. '19, assistant professor at North Carolina Central University's Department of Social Work, were selected to receive the School's 2023 Distinguished Alumni Awards.

Each year, the School recognizes alumni who have achieved distinction in the social work field, who embody social work values and who carry the School's mission of service into the world. Alumni can be nominated by peers, faculty members, staff, fellow alumni or students and are chosen by a committee.

As a first-generation college graduate who earned her doctorate after years of social work practice, Randolph was recognized for her long and distinguished career in studying and helping children and families in need.

Watkins — the first to receive the School's new Distinguished Recent Alumni Award, which recognizes alums who have graduated within the past 10 years — was celebrated for her work as a champion for strong parent-child relationships and academic resilience among socioeconomically marginalized Black children.

Randolph and Watkins were both honored during the School's graduation ceremony on Saturday, May 13, 2023, at Memorial Hall on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.





## Dear SSW Alumni and Friends,

First, I want to offer a huge congratulations to **Dean Denby-Brinson** and the entire SSW team for surpassing the school's goal and raising \$26.4 million as part of the Campaign for Carolina. Like everything the SSW does, this goal was ambitious, and this achievement is worthy of celebration. Of course, this accomplishment would not have been possible without you — our dedicated alumni and friends. Through your contributions, you continue to show just how invested you are in the SSW, its students, and its future. Thank you!

This support enables the SSW to continue its long history of innovation and commitment to educating quality practitioners and leaders in the field of social work who will help solve the most pressing challenges in our communities and across our nation. As the COVID-19 pandemic recedes, it is clear we face a growing mental health crisis across the country that is putting particular pressure on our children and families. Seemingly every day, we read headlines about injury or death from the misuse of firearms. As a brand-new mom (my daughter Kennedy was born in March) it is hard not to be concerned — but I can't help but be hopeful, too.

My optimism is rooted in the knowledge that social workers are at the forefront of addressing these challenges and that as the nation's preeminent institution, UNC SSW is leading the way. At the core, this leadership means providing the highest quality education for all social work students, delivering that content in a way that meets their needs.

Our continued influence is also driven by our faculty who push the edge of excellence for research and policy. These efforts include the recent and exciting announcement that the SSW is now home to the **Center for Excellence in Assisted Living (CEAL@UNC)**, a national non-profit focused on advancing the well-being of people who live and work in assisted living through research, practice, and policy. Such opportunities do not just happen. Rather, they are the result of years of consistent hard work and exceptional scholarship aimed at improving individual lives.

Success and progress cannot happen without you. Our students and faculty need support. The SSW's nationally recognized centers for excellence are made better by our alumni's contributions of their time, talent, and treasure. The UNC SSW is committed to tackling hard problems, lifting up the next generation, and investing in the future, individual by individual, community by community, state by state.

Thank you for all that you have done over the past year to ensure the SSW's success and for your continued investment to sustain this important work.

In partnership,

**Caitlin Bearden Kappler**  
President  
UNC School of Social Work  
Alumni Council

## 1950s

**Jennette Shiver Franklin**, MSW '56, of Norfolk, Va., died on May 22, 2022.

## 1960s

Former North Carolina Sen. **Howard N. Lee**, MSW '66, received the Southern Regional Education Board's inaugural Jack Hill Champion of Education Award. The award honors state leaders who make important long-term contributions to education and to the board's work on behalf of the 16-state region. The Chapel Hill Town Council also voted unanimously to rename the Chapel Hill Transit facility on Millhouse Road for Lee and his wife, Lillian Lee.



## 1970s

**Robin Bilazarian**, MSW '78, works with a large training organization, lecturing nationally on emotional freedom techniques, also known as tapping. This integrative cognitive somatic therapy tool corrects emotional and physical dysregulation. Bilazarian has written a book and published in peer-reviewed journals on the topic.

**Rebecca Thompson Davis**, MSW '74, was honored as a NASW Social Work Pioneer. Davis is an associate professor for professional practice and director of the Office of Global Social Work Programs at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Davis was honored for her global impact in social work practice, including her work in Romania, where she developed curricula and taught in the

newly re-opened schools of social work and at the University of Bucharest, where she did foundational work to develop and teach coursework on social work practice and child welfare.

**Patricia Seward Graham**, MSW '79, authored the book "Hope in a Time of Despair: A Caregiver's Journey of Faith," which chronicles caring for her husband after a devastating stroke.

**Suzanne Gray**, MSW '77, was selected to serve as interim director of the Pitt County Department of Social Services. Gray has more than 40 years of experience in social work.

**Michael Francis Hauser**, MSW '72, died on May 7, 2022. A military veteran, Hauser spent much of his professional career at the Greensboro Vet Center, where he counseled fellow veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Janice Faye Gibbs Lucero**, MSW '70, died on March 17, 2022. A former dancer with The Lost Colony outdoor drama, Lucero also worked as a professor at Tidewater Community College.

**Martha F. Waters**, MSW '70, died on Feb. 8, 2022. A former program director for Wake County Child and Family Services, Waters served as the associate director for field Instruction at UNC School of Social Work from 1996 until her retirement in 2002. She was known as a social worker, spiritual leader and life-long seeker of justice.

**Virginia Wittekind**, MSW '77, died on Jan. 29, 2022. A former instructor at Western Carolina University and UNC-Chapel Hill, she also worked with troubled teens in Asheville and served as a social worker and bereavement coordinator for Jackson County Hospice.

## 1980s

**Joseph “Joe” Dow Harwell**, MSW '81, died on January 18, 2023, at the age of 77. Harwell was a former therapist who retired from Baptist Hospital in Columbia, South Carolina, and Haywood County Hospital in North Carolina.

**Martha Shackford Malling**, MSW '83, died Jan. 17, 2023. A clinical social worker, Malling worked for John Umstead Hospital's adolescent treatment unit; Duke University Medical Center; the University of North Carolina Hospital, and with Dorothea Dix Hospital's Outpatient Clinic, where she provided mental health services to children and families, while supervising clinical interns and residents at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

**Te Anne Oehler**, MSW '81 of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Cedar Island, North Carolina, was recognized as Social Worker of the Month by the S.C. Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. Oehler works in private practice and as an adjunct faculty at Horry-Georgetown Technical College.

**Elizabeth Pomeroy**, MSW '84, died on May 27, 2022. For more than 30 years, Pomeroy worked as a clinical social worker with children, adolescents, adults and families. She served as the co-director of the Institute for Grief, Loss and Family Survival at the University of Texas School of Social Work, where she held the Bert Krueger Smith Professorship in Mental Health and Aging.

**Roberta Wallace**, MSW '87, retired in 2021 after 34 years at Duke University Hospital. She worked on various inpatient units, outpatient clinics and for 10 years with Solid Organ Transplant. She supervised many social work interns, had a special interest in mutual aid support groups and was a long-time member of the International Association for Social Work with Groups.

## 1990s

**Andy Berry**, MSW '90, was appointed interim principal at East Alexander Middle School for Alexander County Schools. Berry has worked with Alexander County Schools since October of 2020 as a behavior

specialist. Previously, he worked for 24 years in Caldwell County Schools, including 15 years as a principal at an elementary school.

**Marcella Hamilton**, MSW '97, earned her DSW at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Hamilton is an Intensive Community Mental Health Recovery Team Lead at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in North Charleston, South Carolina.

**Cynthia Jane Harris**, MSW '91, died unexpectedly Nov. 13, 2022, at Piedmont Medical Center in Rock Hill, S.C. Harris spent much of her career serving the needs of others seeking mental health, substance use or development disability services throughout the state of North Carolina. For 10 years, she served as the chief clinical officer for Partners Healthcare.

**Michelle Hughes**, MSW '95, received the Florette Angel Memorial Child Advocacy Award for her leadership as executive director of NC Child, a nonprofit that advances public policies to ensure that every child in North Carolina has the opportunity to thrive – whatever their race, ethnicity, or place of birth.

**Michelle Kline**, MSW '19, founded DogCo Launch, a new company that aims to help pet business owners grow and scale sustainably.

**Barbra Lassiter**, MSW '94, of High Point, died on March 12, 2023.

**Jennifer C. Nelson Mischler**, MSW '99, is a dialysis social worker for the Kernersville VA Healthcare Center.

**Carrie Jordan Myers**, MSW '99, published “Soul Confetti: Celebrating Life’s Lessons,” a book of insights from her own life aimed at inspiring others to write their own poetry, stories and journals.



To read 2023 commencement story, see [go.unc.edu/Stedman](https://go.unc.edu/Stedman)

**Sheryl Neverson**, MSW '95, was quoted in the WTOP news article, “Health campaign in Prince George’s County offers free support to most vulnerable.” Neverson is vice president of Maryland Programs for Volunteers of America Chesapeake and the Carolinas.

**Renaë Sigmon**, MSW '93, was appointed as deputy police chief of the Greensboro Police Department. Sigmon has been with the department since 1995 and had been serving as the assistant chief of the support bureau.

## 2000s

**Avery Cook**, MSW '04, was named director of UNC Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Cook has been with CAPS since 2006, serving as the department's interim director since 2021. Cook was also featured in the

Chapelboro.com article “They Are Not Alone”: UNC CAPS Director Details Expansion, Vision for Mental Health Services.”

**Julia Powers Davis**, MSW '20, is an outpatient psychotherapist with TPC Integrative Psychotherapy & Pastoral Counseling in Raleigh, NC.

**Mat Despard**, MSW '94, Ph.D. '15, was selected for the International Visiting Research Fellowship Scheme at the Centre on Household Assets and Savings Management (CHASM) of the University of Birmingham (UK). Despard was also appointed to the Academic Research Council of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the federal government agency responsible for consumer protection in the financial sector. Despard is an associate professor at UNC-Greensboro's Department of Social Work, School of Health and Human Sciences.

**Lauren Louison**, MSW '07, is assistant commissioner for the Bureau of Maternal, Infant & Reproductive Health with the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene.

**Justin Perry**, MSW '09, was featured in the Spectrum News 1 article “Push for more mental health services in Black and minority communities,” for his work to support those in need. Perry is a licensed clinical social worker in Charlotte and a member of the School's Board of Advisors.

**Katie Rossini**, MSW '02, was named executive director of School Improvement for East Baton Rouge Parish School System. Rossini supervises the continuous improvement process at the district's 90 schools.

**Tim Schwantes**, MSW '07, co-authored the op-ed “Activating the potential of residents to lead community transformation, collaboratively” for Grantmakers in Health. Schwantes is the senior project officer for Healthy Places by Design.

**Emily Simpson-Keyes**, MSW '20, became the member assistance funds manager at the nonprofit CEF: Community Empowerment Fund in North Carolina's Durham and Orange Counties.

**Shannon McNally Wallace**, MSW '08, is a clinical social worker and substance use specialist with the Department of Defense, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center.

**Summer Woodside**, MSW '03, received the 2022 Gary Lee Shaffer Award for Academic Contributions to the Field of School Social Work. Woodside is an associate professor in the



Social Work Department at UNC Pembroke. The School Social Work Association of America presents the award annually to one faculty member in the nation who has made significant contributions in the field of school social work. The award is named after the late Gary Shaffer, a former UNC School of Social Work faculty member and a passionate advocate for children and the field of school social work.

## 2010s

**Aileen Aylward**, MSW/MPH '16, is a multi-disciplinary team coordinator at the New York City Elder Abuse Center at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City, where she and her team collaborate across systems to identify and address complex cases of elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.

**Keesha Benson**, Ph.D. '12, ran for a seat on the District 3 Pinellas, Florida School Board. Benson is the former chief learning and evaluation officer for the nonprofit Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg (Florida) and is owner of Providence Group International.

**Hannah Boyd**, MSW '18, was promoted to director of information management with AuthoraCare Collective.

**Emilia Diamant**, MSW '12, was named Avodah's new national director of programming. Founded in 1998, Avodah is dedicated to training new generations of Jewish social justice leaders.

**Caroline Evans**, Ph.D. '15, and **Craig Schwalbe**, Ph.D. '04, co-authored the 11th edition of *Direct Social Work Practice*, a primary book used in classrooms by more than 100 social work programs across the country.

**Ashley Givens**, Ph.D. '18, published the paper, "Traumatic experiences among individuals with severe mental illnesses on probation," in the journal *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health*. Givens is an assistant professor at the University of Missouri School of Social Work.

**Julia Harr**, MSW '13, is an advanced clinician social worker for the New York Presbyterian Weill Cornell - Women's Health Practice.

**Oprah Keyes**, MSW '14, was promoted to director of strategic partnerships at the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

**Bridget Mahoney**, MSW '07, is a social worker with the Department of Veterans Affairs in Ann Arbor, Mich.

**Meredith Poe Martin**, MSW '11, is vice president of programs at Crossnore Communities for Children, a child welfare and mental health nonprofit serving children and families throughout western North Carolina.

**Donald McDonald**, MSW '16, presented "Model for recurrence of 'relapse' policy considerations for the SUD peer-based workforce" at the National Association of Social Workers Conference in Washington, D.C.

**Jon-Erik (J.E.) Mitz**, MSW '15, presented the webinar "A Small World: Building Resiliency and Hope after Childhood Trauma," sponsored by the Church of the Brethren's Discipleship Ministries and the Anabaptist Disabilities Network. Mitz is the secretary for the Anabaptist Disabilities Network board and works as a licensed clinical social worker and clinical supervisor in a community health center in Indiana.

**Tobirus Mozelle Newby**, MSW '11, was selected as a recipient of the 2022 American College Health Association's Hannibal E. Howell, Jr. Award for Promoting Diversity in College Health. The award honors members who have made outstanding proactive contributions to their campus communities or association by promoting health care and preventive health relevant to ethnic minorities. Newby is a licensed clinical social worker and the manager of the University Health Services' Social Services Department at University of California, Berkeley.

**Sarah O'Rourke**, MSW/MPH '16, was named chief program officer for the California-based MOMS Orange County, a nonprofit dedicated solely to newborn and pregnancy health. O'Rourke is an experienced maternal and child health professional with a passion for health equity and perinatal mental health and will oversee the nonprofit's programs, including health education and home visiting.

**Jong-Gyu Paik**, Ph.D. '11, is an associate professor with the Department of Social Welfare and dean for student affairs at Changshin University, Changwon Korea.

**Kate Palmer**, MSW '18, was promoted to senior program officer of Carolina's APPLS Service-Learning program.

**Sharon Parker**, Ph.D. '12, was awarded a grant from the inaugural Looking Forward funding program. The program — co-created by UNC Chancellor Kevin M. Guskiewicz and N.C. A&T Chancellor Harold L. Martin — was established with the goal of providing solutions to complex issues facing the citizens of North Carolina and beyond.

**Derrell Pettway**, MSW '16, serves as a pre-admission screening and resident review evaluator at Neighborhood Service Organization in Detroit.

**Everett Rollins IV**, MSW '13, was recently promoted to Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Rollins is currently assigned to the Indian Health Service in Cherokee, NC.

**Nora El-Khoury Spencer**, MSW '17, founder of the Carrboro-based nonprofit Hope Renovations was featured on the Drew Barrymore Show. Spencer discussed with Barrymore her organization's mission to empower women to pursue living-wage jobs in the construction trades. Spencer was also featured as a CNN Hero for her nonprofit work and was honored by the National Association of Home Builders as the Woman of the Year at the 2023 International Builder's Show in Las Vegas.

**Charity Watkins**, Ph.D. '19, MSW '13, was appointed as an adjunct assistant professor within the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Duke University. The appointment is related to a Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women's Health (BIRCWH) award that Watkins received. Watkins also received the 2022 Excellence in Teaching Award from N.C. Central University, where she serves as a tenure track assistant professor in the Department of Social Work.

**Pamela Wellman**, MSW '17, was featured in The Baltimore Sun article "The 'first first responder': Mental health clinicians are now taking some of Baltimore County's 911 calls." Wellman is the program manager of



Baltimore County's 911 call center clinician pilot project. As a licensed mental health clinician, Wellman fields emergency calls and works to assist callers in mental or behavioral health crisis until other first responders can arrive.

## 2020s

**Amanda Alston**, MSW '22, serves as the assistant director of community partnerships and co-director of the Winston-Salem Community Action Coalition in Wake Forest University's Office of Civic and Community Engagement.

**Joy Ayioka**, MSW '20, is employed with Wake Med as an emergency department behavioral health clinician.

**Hannah Campbell**, MSW '21, serves as a homelessness prevention social worker at Pisgah Legal Services in Asheville.

**Allison Carte**, MSW '20, was promoted to the role of lead therapist at Palmetto Lowcountry Behavioral Health near Charleston, South Carolina.

**Gerard Chung**, Ph.D. '21, accepted a position on the tenure track at the National University of Singapore's School of Social Work. Chung also joined Singapore's Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR) as a research fellow last summer.

**Carolyn Ebeling**, MSW '20, is an outpatient psychotherapist at Three Oaks Behavioral Health & Wellness.

**Jeremy Finazzo**, MSW '22, is a tobacco treatment counselor at UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center.

**Annie Francis**, Ph.D. '22, accepted a position as a senior research associate working for Dean Duncan at UNC's School of Social Work.

**Liz Fussell**, MSW '20, serves as a social worker at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

**Jessica Jones**, MSW '21, serves as an outpatient therapist at Krippa Family and Psychological Wellness Services in Cary.

**LB Klein**, Ph.D. '21, served as a guest editor for a special issue of the Journal of Interpersonal Violence. Klein also was elected treasurer of the executive board of the Caucus of LGBTQ Faculty and Students in Social Work. Klein is an assistant professor at the Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Siera Nie**, MSW '22, is a social worker at Piedmont Health SeniorCare.

**Anna Parisi**, Ph.D. '21, accepted an assistant professor position at George Mason University.

**Molly Schloss**, MSW '22, joined N.C. Health's Adolescent Medicine Clinic and Pediatric Clinic for Gender Wellness as an integrated behavioral health clinician. Schloss provides integrated behavioral health services, including assessment, case management and psychotherapy, to adolescents and their families.

**Ndella Seque**, MSW '22, became a medical social worker at New York City's Premier HealthCare over the summer.

**Emily Simpson-Keyes**, MSW '20, is the member assistance funds manager of the Community Empowerment Fund.

**Victoria Snow**, MSW '20, lives in Gainesville, Florida, where she is employed as a psychotherapist with Mindful Mind and Body.

**AC Sullivan**, MSW '21, works as a dispositional advisor for the Office of the Public Defender, 4th Judicial District in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**Melissa Villodas**, Ph.D. '22, was named an assistant professor in the social work program at George Mason University College of Public Health.





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**School of Social Work**  
Tate-Turner-Kuralt Building  
325 Pittsboro St  
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## Using philanthropy for change

We are thrilled to announce that UNC School of Social Work recently received the largest individual gift in the School's history for the development of a new student fellows program!

This program, which will launch later this year, aims to integrate the School's micro and macro education and training. The goal: to advance the business, administrative and legislative advocacy skills of our MSW graduates so that they are best prepared to develop better practices and influence policies to transform child welfare and adolescent mental health in the state of North Carolina.

Thanks to a generous donation from a local philanthropist, who has committed \$3 million to this program, our School is another step closer to strengthening the leadership skills of future social workers who will work on behalf of children and families in the most underserved areas of our state. In the coming weeks, you will hear more about this new program, so stay tuned!