



School of Social Work
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

Fall 2024



**SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES and VULNERABLE
POPULATIONS**



Fall brings opportunities to grow, refine, and succeed in new ways

Hello Friends and Supporters of the School of Social Work,

Fall of 2024 is off to a racing start! The School of Social Work has been very busy welcoming our new students, reconnecting with our returning students, and delivering on our mission of positive change. We continue to grow, innovate, and challenge ourselves to do better. As we refine our MSW offerings, we are looking ahead to see how we can improve the services we offer to our students and the larger community. While change can be unsettling, it also offers us an opportunity to grow, refine, and succeed in new ways. We are currently accepting applications for the MSW program. If you are considering a return to the School, please **check out our offerings**.

In this newsletter you will see some of the incredible work of our faculty, students, and alumni. The breadth and depth of this work supporting communities and vulnerable populations is amazing. If you are an alum of the School and would like to share your story in our “Alumni Spotlight,” please reach out to our communications manager, **Brandon Drain**.

I hope you will consider supporting the School so that we can continue to grow. While your financial support is wonderful (see opportunities for giving on page 8), your time and interest are also very welcome. Please feel free to reach out to me with any ideas or suggestions. Stay connected to us via social media: **Instagram, Facebook, X, LinkedIn**.

Go Green!

Anne K. Hughes, PhD, MSW, FGSA
Director
Associate Professor
School of Social Work
Michigan State University



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS

DOD grants \$1.1 million to MSU School of Social Work for mesothelioma caregiver support



Dr. Amanda Woodward

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) granted Michigan State University’s School of Social Work and the Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation a grant of \$1,125,417 to improve psychosocial support for mesothelioma caregivers. Mesothelioma is an aggressive cancer linked to asbestos exposure and often affects the military population. The median survival for mesothelioma patients is just eight months, and many caregivers face unique challenges, including legal and financial complications.

The study aims to provide effective support through a 10-week-long intervention program, focusing on meaning-making as an essential aspect of bereavement adaptation. “We hope the intervention proves effective at supporting caregivers and becomes widely adopted,” said **Dr. Amanda Woodward**, MSU School of Social Work professor and PI on the grant. The research team includes MSU Social Work doctoral students **Jen Hirsch** and **Linda Zhang**, who will work on understanding caregivers’ experiences from diagnosis through the bereavement process. Sessions will include a combination of information sharing, participant reflection, and practical exercises aimed at providing support to caregivers during a challenging time.

[Read the full story here.](#)

Meet our new dean’s research associate: **Gabriel Johnson**



Dr. Gabriel Johnson

Gabriel Johnson earned his PhD in health behavior and health education from the University of Michigan School of Public Health. He is a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Research Scholar. His research focuses on how masculinity is an intersectional and dynamic social construct that captures how structural factors impact and shape the health of Black men and masculine-of-center individual, e.g., studs, transmasculine people.

Through the application of Critical Race Theory and intersectionality, Johnson seeks to understand the factors contributing to adverse and beneficial mental health outcomes for Black men and masculine-of-center individuals. His research aims to implement interventions that center community voices, placing them in control of both the narrative and the development of solutions to improve their health and well-being.

[Read the full story here.](#)

MSU research supports **Michigan Juvenile Justice Reform**



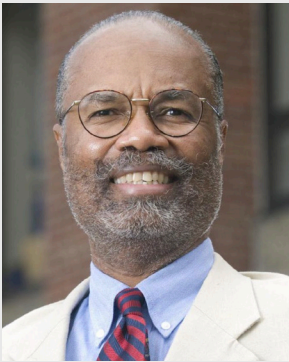
Ashlee Barnes-Lee

On December 12, 2023, Michigan Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist signed a bipartisan bill reforming the juvenile justice system, which went into effect on October 1, 2024. The reform aims to improve diversion and re-entry services for youth, with a focus on reducing racial disparities and expanding community-based alternatives to detention.

Ashlee Barnes-Lee, an assistant professor at MSU’s School of Social Work, said the reform accelerates alternatives to detention and promotes community-based programming. “This new legislation broadens my opportunity to partner with courts to improve outcomes for youth,” said Barnes-Lee, emphasizing her work in reducing racial and ethnic disparities. Her community-driven research focuses on developing strategies that strengthen juvenile risk assessment, while also promoting a strengths-based approach to support youth.

[Read the full story here.](#)

MSU Professor Ronald E. Hall publishes groundbreaking book on colorism



Dr. Ronald Hall

MSU School of Social Work Professor **Ronald E. Hall**, along with various international researchers, has published a new book titled *The Routledge International Handbook of Colorism*. Colorism is defined as “discrimination based on the color of a person’s skin,” according to Hall and his co-authors. This first-of-its-kind book is a collective study from researchers around the world, detailing the various facets of how colorism has been woven into the cultural fabric of communities of color. The book also examines policymaking in the sphere of colorism internationally, providing thoughtful insights on discrimination in different contexts.

“I am committed, as I have been throughout my career, to completely changing or redirecting social discourse pertaining to race, and replacing it with a focus on skin color,” said Hall. Hall views race as a contrived concept without basis, one that serves only to polarize. In academic discourse, he argues that race is unquantifiable and suggests that melanin content should be the objective basis for labeling people of color.

Read the full story here.

How DEI-focused campuses mitigate sexual assault risk: Insights from MSU researchers



Carrie Moylan

A team of MSU School of Social Work researchers found evidence suggesting that several campus-level factors are uniquely associated with an individual’s risk of experiencing sexual assault on a college campus. These factors include binge drinking, levels of discrimination, and the diversity of gender and sexual orientation on campus.

“Students were less likely to experience sexual assault on campuses that were more diverse or where less discrimination was reported,” said **Carrie Moylan**, an associate professor at MSU School of Social Work.

“We suspect that campuses that are diverse and inclusive create more of a sense of belonging and community, which is likely protective against sexual assault.” The study emphasizes that focusing on the campus environment and community-level factors can be a proactive approach to prevention.

Read the full story here.

New MSU study reveals disproportionate incarceration rates of LGBTQ+ youth in juvenile justice system

A recent Michigan State University-led study found a strong correlation between the high incarceration rates of LGBTQ+ youth and the myriad of inter-institutional and inter-systemic factors that constitute structural vulnerabilities they face. Despite representing only 10.5% of the U.S. population, LGBTQ+ youth make up 28% of youth incarcerations in the juvenile justice system.

The study found that queer and trans youth had a 90% higher probability of being incarcerated for prostitution and related charges compared to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts. Structural vulnerabilities, including family rejection, homelessness, and systemic discrimination, contribute significantly to the overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ youth in the juvenile justice system.

“Policies must change to ensure that there is adequate sexual orientation and gender identity data collection to promote accountability and transparency,” said **Jax Kynn**, doctoral student at MSU’s School of Social Work.

[Read the full story here.](#)



Jax Kynn



Hannah Boyke

MSU Social Work PhD student leads advocacy for social work licensure reform



Jen Hirsch

Jen Hirsch, a PhD student at MSU School of Social Work, has been at the forefront of advocating for social work licensure reform. In November 2021, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) released disaggregated pass rate data for its exam, revealing significant disparities among racial and ethnic groups. In response, Hirsch and her colleagues conducted a social and racial equity policy analysis of alternatives to the ASWB Exam.

The result was a peer-reviewed policy analysis paper that explored various ethically-based alternatives, including jurisprudence exams and provisional licensures, as equitable pathways to licensure. Hirsch also testified before the Michigan House Subcommittee for Behavioral Health Policy in support of the *Social Work Licensure Modernization Act*, which seeks to remove barriers to licensure that disproportionately impact marginalized social workers.

[Read the full story here.](#)

MSU intern uses storytelling to address gun violence in Flint, MI



Christa Young

The Flint Community Initiative (FCI) Program has provided MSU intern **Christa Young** with an opportunity to address gun violence through storytelling. During her 10-week internship, Young used her passion for storytelling to create a video project titled *Layers of Grief*, which documented the long-lasting impact of gun violence on a Flint resident who lost her best friend to violence.

“Through storytelling, it humanizes the issues and helps build a stronger emotional connection with the audience,” said Young. She collaborated with the Community Public Safety Collaborative in Flint to highlight the grief and resilience of community members, and hopes the project raises awareness about the urgent need for intervention in Flint.

[Read the full story here.](#)

MSU Social Work student Taylor Vander Laan receives ACOSA 2024 Outstanding Student Award



Taylor Vander Laan

The MSU School of Social Work congratulates MSW student **Taylor Vander Laan** on receiving the Association for Community Organization and Social Action (ACOSA) 2024 Outstanding Student Award. The award honors BSW or MSW students engaged in exemplary community practice, especially in partnership with marginalized or under-represented populations.

As vice chair of Red Project, a local harm reduction agency, Vander Laan has helped make naloxone accessible, reducing overdose fatalities by 30% in the past four years. During his time in the MSW Program, Vander Laan has also been involved in the Advocacy Scholars Program, where he honed his skills in advocacy, social justice, and policy promotion. “I felt seen by the staff and faculty. When people are valued and seen for who they are, then they can grow into who they want to be,” said Vander Laan.

Read the full story here.

BASW students on Homecoming Court



Tazkira Amin

Tazkira Amin is a senior from Warren, MI, who embodies Spartan pride through her academic achievements and community service. Tazkira is pursuing a degree in Social Work with minors in Cities: Environment, Design and Society, and Global Health and Epidemiology. She has contributed significantly to organizations like the Center for Community Engaged Learning, Humanity for Prisoners, and the Honors College Service Club. Tazkira believes in celebrating the beauty of community interaction: “I encourage everyone to smile more often and thank the unsung heroes of our campus.” Tazkira is honored to be part of the 2024 Homecoming Court and sees her role as a call to action for fellow Spartans.



Erin Caldwell

Erin Caldwell, from Brighton, MI, is committed to serving the community through her role as president of the Residence Halls Association and as a peer mentor at the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities. Erin is majoring in Social Work with minors in Human Behavior and Social Services and Resource Management. Her leadership roles reflect her dedication to equity, community, and fostering a sense of belonging. “Get involved and stay involved!” she says, sharing that her college experience became meaningful through her engagement with campus initiatives. Erin hopes her involvement sends a message about the importance of equity and community.



See the full Homecoming Court here.

Juan Flores: Advocating for first-generation students



Juan Flores

Juan Flores, a proud MSU alumnus and Office of Cultural & Academic Transitions (OCAT) staff member, has dedicated over 15 years to student success initiatives, advocating for marginalized and first-generation populations. Growing up in Southwest Detroit, Flores navigated life as the oldest of ten siblings, ultimately becoming the first in his family to graduate high school and pursue higher education. Despite facing numerous obstacles, including homelessness during his transition to college, Flores worked tirelessly to earn his degrees from MSU in criminal justice and clinical social work.

Today, Flores continues to give back to the community that supported him through programs like OCAT and Latinos Unidos, where he serves as a mentor and advocate for student success. He is passionate about creating opportunities for students to feel a sense of belonging and navigate their higher education journey with confidence.

“It’s part of my identity, I live for service in a way,” said Flores. He coordinates events like the Annual Thanksgiving Unity Dinner for students staying on campus during the holiday break, providing a sense of community and belonging for those far from home. Flores’ work exemplifies the spirit of Spartan service, ensuring that first-generation and marginalized students have the support they need to succeed.

Read the full story here.

Join our MSW Program

Knowing you want to be a part of improving the social and economic climate is one thing—being equipped to do so is another. A Master of Social Work (MSW) from MSU will give you the tools you need to make lasting change.

Whether someone has worked in the field for decades or is just completing a bachelor’s degree, the MSW Program at Michigan State University offers a wide variety of formats to educate the social work practitioners of tomorrow.

Learn more by attending one of our *Information Sessions!*

You can also join us on **January 8, 2024 at Baker Hall 221 from 12pm – 1pm.**

Learn more here.

UPCOMING EVENT FOR BASW STUDENTS

Let's celebrate
The End of Semester

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2024
12PM–2PM

CELEBRATE THE END OF THE SEMESTER
WITH YOUR FELLOW BASW STUDENTS
AND PROGRAM STAFF

LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED IN
BAKER HALL ROOM 155 FROM 12PM TO 2PM

Combat Veteran Certificate Program honored at World War One Grove Memorial Plaza

We are proud to announce that our Combat Veteran Certificate Program now has a commemorative brick installed at the World War One Grove Memorial Plaza at Michigan State University. This meaningful addition serves as a tribute to the courage and sacrifice of combat veterans and symbolizes our ongoing commitment to supporting those who have served.

The World War One Grove Memorial Plaza is a historic site on campus dedicated to honoring the legacy of service members. The inclusion of our program's brick not only recognizes the valor of past heroes but also highlights the importance of providing specialized education and resources for veterans transitioning back into civilian life.

Our Combat Veteran Certificate Program is designed to equip social work professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support combat veterans and their families. Through comprehensive coursework and practical experience, participants gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by veterans.

We invite you to learn more about how the Combat Veteran Certificate Program is making a difference in the lives of veterans. Visit our website to discover program details, admission requirements, and how you can contribute to this important initiative.

Learn more about the Combat Veteran Certificate Program [here](#).



Invest in initiatives meaningful to you

Students enter the profession of social work with a strong commitment to service, integrity, and competence. As social work educators, we believe that the good our graduates do is multiplied and extended across generations, and we are honored to help prepare them for their service.

In keeping with land-grant principles of education, research, and outreach/service, we take seriously our

responsibility to the education and training of students as well as outreach for community engagement.

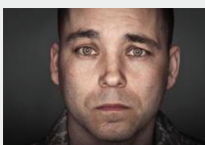
If you share our values, please consider supporting these efforts with a gift to one of the scholarship and endowment funds highlighted below. A full list of giving opportunities and links to donate online can be found at <https://socialwork.msu.edu/alumni/endowments.html>.



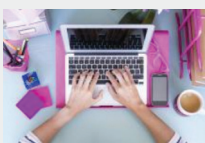
Robert Little Scholarship Fund
This fund provides scholarships for graduate students with a career interest in child welfare, with preference for those who want to work in kinship care.



Dr. Mary Bremer Barron Scholarship Fund
This fund supports scholarships for students, with preference for those from the greater Flint community.



MSW Veterans Scholarship
This fund supports veterans by providing scholarships for study in the MSW program.



Paul P. and Donna K. Freddolino Endowment for Distance Education
This fund supports the School of Social Work's distance educational programs, including both student support and the development of new educational technologies.



The School of Social Work Endowed Fund
This fund provides a range of supports for the School, including student scholarships, support for faculty research, and support for School programs.



Future Leaders Endowed Scholarship in Social Work
This fund supports graduate students through scholarships, assistantships, or fellowships.



Gary R. Anderson Endowed Fund for Child Welfare Leadership
This fund supports workshops, lectures, and scholarships in the School related to child welfare leadership and workplace development.



Chance at Childhood Endowment Fund
This fund supports research, education, training, and outreach concerning intervention and treatment for at-risk children and families; children's justice; and coordination of professionals dealing with at-risk children and families.



Youth Education and Support
This fund helps build, test, and disseminate research focused on real ways to increase child and youth access to accurate, non-stigmatized knowledge of mental illness and recovery.



David and Nancy Hanafin Neal Scholarship Fund
This fund supports student scholarships that enable BSW or MSW students to continue their education and complete their degrees.



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Visit the School on the web: socialwork.msu.edu



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Alumni Board*

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Prepare for the Social Work Licensure Examination

Qualify for State of Michigan School Social Work certification

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Become a Field Instructor or Field Faculty Liaison

Donate to support the School's scholarships, research, and programs

A Mission of Social Justice and Positive Change: The MSU School of Social Work is dedicated to educating students for ethical, competent, responsive, and innovative social work practice, and to conducting and disseminating high quality research that improves the well-being of the most vulnerable in society. Our teaching, research, and outreach synergistically promote social justice, positive change, and solutions to the problems facing diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Michigan State University is an equal opportunity educational employer.



School of Social Work
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OUR SCIENCE **TRANSFORMS THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE**
AND INSPIRES LEADERS