

# Salute to Flint!

By Mary Barron, PhD, MSW, and Paul P. Freddolino, PhD

**M**SU's part-time MSW program at the Flint branch campus will be graduating its first class in May. This is a great celebration for students, their families and friends and affirms the School of Social Work's commitment to provide ongoing educational opportunities to human services staff and organizations in the Genesee Valley area.

Through a partnership with the MSU Extension Genesee County office, this group of 36 students has been able to complete all of their required MSW courses in Flint, with field education arrangements close to where they live or work. Students were attracted to this program by its proximity to their homes and jobs, the availability of evening classes and quality of the program.

The cohort model used in Flint means that students take most classes together as a group, and they take them in the same sequence. The advantages of this structure are that students get to know each other very well, and a spirit of camaraderie develops. Students have the opportunity to take electives on campus, which provides the opportunity to get to know other undergraduate, graduate and PhD students, including international students.

The Flint students are MSU's best advertisement for the program. We are proud of their accomplishments and academic achievements. We look forward to an ongoing relationship with these new MSU alumni.

*Best of luck to the graduating class of '04! ■*



Flint students from SW 851—Clinical Social Work Practice: Treatment Groups, led by Lucy Mercier, PhD, MSW. The class covers intervention strategies, techniques, research and practice issues in prevention and treatment groups.



*U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow is awarded honorary PhD from MSU (see page 3).*

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# Rewarding academic year culminates in spring celebrations

**G**reetings! The semester is speeding up and rapidly coming to a close. It has been a full and rewarding academic year. I hope that many of you have great memories of spring at MSU and jubilant graduations.

This issue of the newsletter features creativity and diversity. The creativity is evident in such themes as the social work-theatre teamwork, the field education collaborative and grand rounds.

Diversity is evidenced in the example of the elder focus groups, curriculum diversification and MLK student presentations. This includes the progress and the challenges in cultural competency and diversity and a growing professional interest in spirituality.

The role of a public university in addressing spirituality is beginning to be explored.

My best wishes for a spring full of celebrations!

—Gary R. Anderson, PhD, MSW, Director

## Clinical students collaborate with actors

By John Mooradian, PhD, ACSW, LMFT

**T**his semester, MSW students enrolled in *SW 871: Advanced Clinical Social Work with Families* will have the opportunity to participate in a unique learning experience. In selected class meetings, social work and theatre students will practice their respective skills in simulated family therapy sessions. In each simulation, one social work student will conduct a session that involves theatre students playing the roles of family members.

These simulations were developed to bring to life realistic emotional and systemic inter-

action and to capture the complexity of a live family interview. In contrast to traditional role-plays, simulations provide high levels of emotional intensity and clinical challenge that are sustained for the duration of a complete family therapy session, while providing a safe atmosphere for extension of skills.

Clinical students will practice joining with the family, rapidly assessing family needs and intervening systemically. Theatre students will practice improvisational skills, such as “being-in-the-moment” and responding to other participants with appropriate emotion.

After each simulation, participants, classmates and professors will share feedback. Each simulation will also be videotaped for individual review by the

student therapist, the actors and their respective professors.

This project was initiated last year with MSU’s theatre department, but due to the departure of the theatre professor, it will be implemented with students from Kalamazoo (Michigan) College under the supervision of Karen Pruis-Berthel.

Students from last year’s class offered highly enthusiastic feedback about the simulations, indicating that they learned specific skills and gained professional confidence. All students strongly suggested this experiential approach should be expanded. Some social work students reported the simulations were the most valuable component of their clinical education.

# U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow: Social Work alumna receives honorary PhD from Michigan State University

At the MSU December commencement ceremony, Senator Debbie Stabenow was the keynote speaker and honorary degree recipient of a "Doctor of Laws" degree. At a reception preceding commencement, School of Social Work Director Gary Anderson gave the following comments to an audience that included the MSU President, Provost, Deans and other honorary degree recipients.

"Debbie Stabenow made history in 2000 when she became the first woman from the State of Michigan elected to the United States Senate.

"As local residents know, this was not her first elected office. She had been elected to the Ingham County Board of Commissioners in 1974 and was the youngest person and first woman to chair that Board. She was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives where she served for 12 years from 1979 to 1990, and was the first woman to preside over the Michigan House. She served in the State Senate for four years (1991-1994), was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1996, where she served two terms, and then she was elected to the U.S. Senate in November 2000.

"Before all of these pioneering and significant accomplishments, Senator Stabenow was a Spartan. She attended Michigan State University from 1968 to 1972 where she received a BA in Interdisciplinary Social Science with a concentration in Social Work. Upon completion of her Bachelor's degree,



U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow and MSU School of Social Work Director Gary Anderson.

she enrolled in the MSU School of Social Work and earned a Master's degree in 1975.

"Our professional Code of Ethics states: *Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.*

"Improving social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice have characterized Debbie Stabenow's life and career, extending from her work in Lansing-area schools after graduation, authoring legislation to combat domestic violence, supporting fiscal responsibility and tax relief for middle-class families, preservation of our natural resources, and championing assistance for older adults and the need

for affordable medications.

"Her willingness to listen, her connectedness to the people of mid-Michigan and approachability across the state, and her commitment to education reflect the social values of our great land grant university. In very practical ways, she has advanced educational opportunities for students. In each elected position, students from the School of Social Work have served as interns in her offices to advance their knowledge of the policy-making and political process and to gain inspiration from Debbie Stabenow's leadership.

"Her combination of local knowledge and national and international interests provides for interesting analyses of our country's social and political challenges. Her skills in relationship building serve her well as she inspires trust and connections to people and organizations. Her assessment skills are broad and deep and produce an insightful understanding of society and politics. Her willingness to work hard demonstrates her competency and her effectiveness. And throughout this work, her fundamental optimism and compassion for others is clearly evident. It is an honor to recognize her achievements at this special time and ceremony. She richly deserves this special and high recognition, as she is a great example of a person and leader who has received two degrees from our wonderful University and continues to share our commitment to advancing knowledge and transforming lives." ■

# Practical considerations with regard to the role and place of spirituality in clinical practice

As noted by our colleague David Knaggs, spirituality is increasingly recognized as an important consideration in all of social work. It is becoming recognized in clinical work with individuals, in family services and in community development involving faith-based resources. Spirituality is also included in the mission of some human service organizations and has been of significant national policy interest as the use of federal funding for faith-based service agencies is redefined. There is also increasing recognition that spirituality is distinct from religion. While promotion of religion is not appropriate for a university, the promotion of scholarship in spirituality, and helping students understand its appropriate application in policy, clinical practice and organizational and community practice would be an important contribution by schools of social work.

On January 31, 2004, the MSU School of Social Work Alumni Association sponsored a breakfast on spirituality and clinical practice. This was a follow-up session to a presentation on spirituality from a philosophical and theoretical perspective in spring of 2003.

Dr. Mary Alice Collins, professor at the MSU School of Social Work, crafted this outline (see box). She also led the lively discussion at the breakfast. Her thoughtful reflections and expertise were greatly appreciated. ■

## Spirituality in clinical practice

Prepared by Mary Alice Collins, PhD

### **Practical considerations with regard to assessment**

1. Inquire respectfully about spirituality/religion, both current and past.
2. Ask how he/she feels about his/her religion or belief system.
3. Inquire if the person's spiritual base is helpful or hindering; if so, in what way.
4. Inquire about these topics in much the way you would gather data about health or family strengths.
5. Don't be surprised if people are ambivalent about their own views.
6. Expect differences across the life span and at times of trauma.
7. Remember it is your responsibility to learn about the particular religion.
8. Ask if the client wants the spiritual aspect to be part of therapy.

### **Practical considerations for the social worker with regard to worker self-disclosure**

1. Self-disclosure is based on the need of the client.
2. The less self-disclosure, generally speaking, the better in that the focus is on the client.

### **Reflections on the experience of a spiritual connection in clinical work**

1. The spiritual part that social workers do is to be fully present as the client uses his/her framework to move toward treatment goals.
2. I have found that when clients tell their life stories from the deepest places of their being that I feel awe and wonder. I experience it as reverence for the person.

### **Observations with regard to treatment**

1. Just as clients may have a transference reaction to the clinician, they can also have a transference relationship to God.
2. In general, follow, don't lead, in spiritual discussions.
3. Be informed and empathetic enough to make an appropriate comment or intervention.
4. Relate the spiritual portion to the whole person and the overall treatment plan.
5. Be authentic.
6. It is often useful to look at the cognitions that the person holds in relationship to God or a higher power.
7. Encourage adaptive use of spirituality for psychological and interpersonal change.

### **Issues with regard to professional boundaries**

1. One has to be careful not to abuse the power of the therapeutic relationship. The client's experience is the client's own by choice.
2. It is not useful or wise to get into theological arguments.
3. There are pitfalls to avoid both if you are of the same persuasion as the client and if you are of a different persuasion (for example, you may assume you are more alike than you really are).
4. Honor the client's preferences about such issues as prayer, consultation with a minister or other religious figure.
5. If the client does not feel he or she can work with you because of spiritual issues, refer to an appropriate clinician.

Additional issues and examples were raised at the alumni breakfast. Future workshops on spirituality and practice are planned, including implications for community practice.

# Child Welfare Learning Collaborative: A report on year three

By JoAnne McFall, MSW, BSN

The Michigan State University School of Social Work and Outreach Partnerships joined with Catholic Social Services of Lansing more than three years ago to develop a Child Welfare Learning Collaborative. The goal is to develop a scholarly service approach to best practice to benefit at-risk children, their families, the staff who care for them and the MSU faculty and students who participate in this innovative program.

This school year, 19 social work students (four undergraduate and 15 graduate) have been placed in programs throughout Catholic Social Services, including the Administrative Offices, Ballentine Stepping Stones, St. Vincent Home and the Family Mental Health Clinic. In addition to the 16 hours each week students spend in agency placement, the collaborative provides additional learning experiences for students, faculty and staff.

On September 17, 2003 the Collaborative hosted a kick-off event titled, *Surviving and Thriving in Foster Care*. Young people, parents and social workers told educators about their experiences in the child welfare system. The listening/responding panel included facilitator John Seita, PhD and assistant professor in the School; Dr. E. Sharon Banks, Superintendent, Lansing School District; Lynne Martinez, Michigan's Children's Ombudsman; Cindy Anderson, Director of Special Education, Ingham Inter-

mediate School District; Jack Kresnak, *Detroit Free Press* reporter; Maria Candy, Director, Office of Legislative and Liaison Services, Family Independence Agency; and Bill Long, Executive Director, Michigan Federation for Children and Families. The goal of this event, according to Annette Abrams, Director of University Outreach Partnerships at MSU, was to bring together the two major institutions in the lives of foster children—the child welfare system and the educational system—to impact practice and policy issues and meet the children's needs.

MSU social work students then received an intensive two-day orien-

tation to the agency. Each month they attended Grand Rounds sessions to augment the field education experience (see inset below) and also facilitate monthly student "brown bag" sessions to informally reinforce learning.

A student in the clinical concentration reports that "the collaborative runs smoothly with strong, well-rounded educational experiences," and an agency administrator suggests the importance of qualifying and quantifying student contributions to the agency. The Child Welfare Learning Collaborative is becoming the exciting, multi-dimensional and reciprocal process it was intended to be! ■

## Grand Rounds topics and presenters

Rebuilding the Broken Bond: Loss and Attachment Issues

—Debbie Martin & Cheryl Stout, St. Vincent Home Intensive Foster Care Workers

Psychiatric and Medication Assessments

—Andrew Homa, consulting psychiatrist at St. Vincent Home

Play Therapy: The Answer of Play

—Mildred Powe-Ericson, Director, Residential Programs; Dikke Hansen, Director, Family Mental Health Clinic; Tina Johnson, Director, Intensive Foster Care

Identifying and Responding to Educational Needs in Child Welfare

—Denise Lycos, Principal, Ingham Intermediate School Districts  
Secondary Learning Center

Legal Issues in Child Welfare: The Interplay between Social Work and Law

—Joe Kozakiewicz, Director, Chance at Childhood Program

Mood Disorders: Diagnosis and Behavioral Interventions

—Andrew Homa

Everything I Needed to Know About Child Welfare but Didn't Learn in School

—Agency Field Education Instructors



## Undergraduate Program attracts largest class in years!

By Susan Bowden, MSW, ACSW

The undergraduate program has experienced unprecedented growth in the past two years. We now offer two sections of every required upper-level course, with one of those sections meeting in the evening to accommodate the needs of students who must work during the day. This year, our junior class has 56 students, and our senior class has 48 students. Diversity, the signature theme of our undergraduate program, is well-reflected in our student body; this year students of color comprise 36% of the junior class.

Demand for the program is at a record high, with many sophomores declaring social work as their major, and over 125 students in our *Introduction to Social Work* class. With our curriculum emphasis on diversity, requiring every student to do a special project with a diverse population in the junior year, and on integrating gerontology content into our required courses, the undergraduate program is striving to prepare our students for social work practice in the 21st Century.

*We are looking forward to another record-sized class entering Fall 2004!* ■

## MSW Program offers urban specialization

By Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore, PhD

Advanced Standing students and those students entering their second-year MSW field placement within the Organizational and Community Practice major can now earn a certificate in Organizational and Community Practice in the Urban Arena. This certificate program is designed to allow students to investigate and learn to understand the causes, consequences and possible solutions of urban problems and their correlation with social work.

In particular, students focus on issues related to racial, social, economic and political inequity among urban residents. This certificate program incorporates a blend of required courses in the MSW curriculum and electives in Social Work and other disciplines and professions.

Specialized field education provides students an experience, including work in urban areas and policy arenas to integrate social work values, ethics, policy, research and practice.

Advanced Standing and second-year field placements will be in settings where students learn about issues in the urban arena. For more information, contact Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore, PhD, at [jacks174@msu.edu](mailto:jacks174@msu.edu). ■

### More Flint program Social Work students



Flint students from SW 851 class led by Mary Alice Collins, PhD, MSW.

# MSW Program offers specialization in social work with older adults

By Diane Levande, PhD

The three-year Geriatric Enrichment Grant from the Hartford Foundation (see *Fall 2003 News*) to infuse content regarding older adults and geriatric social work into the undergraduate curriculum has sparked a number of other exciting developments in the School. Foremost among these developments is a specialization in Social Work with Older Adults for MSW students, designed to prepare professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to provide services to the growing population of people age 65 and over. It is essential that more social workers be equipped with tools needed to understand the complex issues that confront older adults and their families and the policies, programs and services designed to assist and support people in their later years. This specialization incorporates courses and field experiences that focus on the biopsychosocial aspects of aging, health and mental health care systems, service and resource identification, access and development, practice methods, interdisciplinary service delivery and planning, and care management services and funding.

Courses in the Social Work with Older Adults specialization are a blend of required courses in the MSW curriculum, electives in Social Work and other disciplines and professions, and a supervised field placement in a setting working with older adults. For more information, contact the School at (517) 353-8632 ■

## Resources in gerontology

One of many benefits of the Hartford Geriatric Enrichment Grant for the School has been a continuing stream of resources on aging and social work with older adults generated by faculty and students within the School, as well as by the external network of social work programs across the country. The following works may be of interest to you.

### Macro issues

- Burnette, D. (1999). Custodial grandparents in Latino families: Patterns of service use and predictors of unmet needs. *Social Work*, 44, 22-35.
- Day, K., Carreon, D., and Stump, C. (2000). The therapeutic design of environments for people with dementia: A review of the empirical research. *The Gerontologist*, 40, 397-406.
- Rank, M. R. and Hirschle, T. A. (2000). The likelihood of poverty across the American adult life span. *Social Work*, 44, 201-216.

### Care/case management

- Diwan, S., Ivy, C., Merino, D., and Brower, T. (2001). Assessing need for intensive case management in long-term care. *The Gerontologist*, 41, 680-686.
- Fast, B., and Chapin, R. (2000). Strengths-based care management for older adults. Baltimore: Health Professions Press.
- Kleyman, P. (2001). Care Management: Who wants it, who gets it, does it work? *Aging Today*, 16.

### Consumer-directed care

- Benjamin, A. E., Matthias, R., and Franke, T. M. (2000). Comparing consumer-directed and agency models for providing supportive services at home. *Human Services Research*, 35 (1), 351-366.
- Tilly, J., and Wiener, J. (2001). Consumer-directed home and community service in eight states: Policy issues for older people and government. *Journal of Aging Social Policy*, 12 (4), 1-26

### Videos

- Recognizing and Responding to Emotions in Persons with Dementia*. 1997. Terra Nova Films. 25 minutes.
- Alzheimer's Disease: How Families Cope*. 1997. Films for the Humanities and Sciences. 28 minutes.

### Game

- Elder Issues*. Circle of Life Aging Services, PO Box 241435, Apple Valley, MN 55124. (Check Circle of Life web site for information).

### Acronyms demystified

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| NAGEC:  | National Association of Geriatric Education Centers  |
| GEC:    | Geriatric Education Center                           |
| GRECC:  | Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center    |
| AHEC:   | Area Health Education Center                         |
| ACMA:   | American Case Management Association                 |
| CMSA:   | Case Management Society of America                   |
| AGHE:   | Association for Gerontology in Higher Education      |
| AGE-SW: | Association for Gerontology in Social Work Education |

# Social work students facilitate grandparent focus groups on the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Reservation

By Suzanne Cross, PhD

As part of the research study “American Indian Elders Parent Their Grandchildren: Three Factors Influencing Their Role” implemented by Dr. Suzanne Cross, nine social work students interested in the field of gerontology were selected as facilitators for focus groups during a meeting of the Michigan Indian Elders Association (MIEA). The MIEA represents 11 tribal nations and bands in Michigan. One hundred elders participated in the focus groups by sharing their thoughts and opinions on the topic of grandparents raising their grandchildren. The research instrument utilized during the session included questions focused on the benefits of the Indian Child Welfare Act, the changing role of elderhood in American Indian communities, the impact of issues of historical trauma, and what they would like social workers to know when working with elders in American Indian communities.

This study is being supported, in part, by the Pearl J. Aldrich Endowment in Gerontology Award and a grant from Families And Children Together (FACT). Also, a Chi Miigwetch (sincere thank you) to Lisa Kennedy, Elders Advocate, from the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe for including the focus group session on the MIEA agenda.

After the focus groups were concluded, the students and Dr. Cross met at the University Club for lunch and shared their experience in a round table discussion. The students’ comments included:

“Thanks to the time I spent with the elders, I better understand the importance of listening to, being sensitive towards, and thoughtful of their culture. The elders’ views of social workers varied greatly because of their past experiences. Some social workers they encountered were unpleasant because they did not take the time to understand the differences in culture and the individuality of each family. Through the extra time I took listening to their stories and concerns, they were able to see that I was there for their benefit, not my own.”

—Janet Yo, BASW Student



Back row L to R: Lauren Walsh, Deanna DeHaven, Megan Metzger, Emily Proctor, Emily Lietz, Janet Yo. Front row L to R: Tamra Compton, Angelique Day, Dr. Suzanne Cross. Not pictured: Glenn Stutzky.

“In listening to the American Indian elders’ stories I was reminded of how important it is to remember to show respect for cultures different than my own. It became very clear that when I go out into another culture, I represent not only myself, but also my profession, race and culture. The experience has taught that social workers need to talk less, listen more and understand American Indians have quite a sense of humor. It was a great field learning experience.”

—Glen Stutzky, Doctoral Student

“The memories the elders spoke about regarding their boarding school experiences of physical and sexual abuse were horrifying. The elders recalled being forcefully taken from family, moved hours away and being forbidden to practice traditions. One grandmother shared a memory of a male boarding school peer who ran away. ‘We were happy that he was to get away, (pause) but we don’t know what happened to him after that. The boarding schools taught us (women) domestics, not reading or writing.’”

—Angelique Day, MSW Student

“Through this experience, I was able to gain a better perspective of what it was like for some of the elders to have grown up during difficult times. Also, this was a valuable opportunity for me, to hone my interviewing skills as a social worker and to learn what would be required of me as an American Indian social worker when working with this population.”

—Emily Proctor, BASW Student



## Beloved professor was groundbreaker in use of technology to teach social workers

**W**ith sadness, we report that **Professor Emeritus Ethelbert (Bert) Thomas**, MSW, died on November 13, 2002. Thomas, 81, joined the faculty in 1962 as an Assistant Professor after having worked in the field that was then called mental retardation. He was granted tenure and appointed Associate Professor in 1967, was promoted to full Professor in 1972, and retired as Professor Emeritus in 1987.

For several years, Bert served as an Assistant Dean in the College of Social Science where he worked in continuing education, and he worked with the social work practice community to offer special courses and workshops aimed at skill development. Bert organized continuing education events that provided MSU students and community practitioners with the opportunity to learn from world-class educators and practitioners, such as Karl Menninger and William Glasser. Bert was also instrumental in establishing the School's first extension program in Traverse City, the precursor to our current distance education program.

During his years at the School, Bert taught a variety of courses, but he is probably remembered most for his undergraduate class on interviewing skills, where he made groundbreaking use of technology to teach students about interpersonal skills and communication. Using video tapes and volunteer role-players, Bert was able to give his students intense, detailed feedback to help them develop their skills early in their professional training.

Bert enjoyed traveling, and he used his sabbaticals to explore the world. He was well-liked, very supportive of students, enthusiastic about teaching and a generous mentor to many MSU social work students. He will be missed.

## ALUMNI NEWS

**Elizabeth A. Carey**, MSW, MSU '96, became Executive Director of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families effective March 22, 2004, following six years as Director of Government Relations for the Council on Accreditation, Inc., a national standards-setting organization based in New York.

**Lisa L. Davidson**, ACSW, MSU '91, has been named the new Director for the MSU Employee Assistance Program. Lisa's most recent position was Coordinator of Health Realization Services for the Ingham County Community Voices Grant. She has been a therapist/trainer since 1991 and is partner and co-founder of Lakeside Consulting, Inc.

## FACULTY/STAFF RECOGNITION

### **Nancy Fair**

School of Social Work Office Supervisor  
30 years of service to MSU

### **Nancy Gray**

School of Social Work Graduate Programs Office Assistant  
25 years of service to MSU

### **Dr. Paul Freddolino**

Professor, School of Social Work  
25 years of service to MSU

Retirement reception to honor

### **Dr. Diane Levande**

and celebrate her retirement from  
Michigan State University and the School of Social Work  
after 33 years of service

### **Kellogg Center**

**Thursday, April 29, 2004**

**4:30-6:00 PM**

Brief program at approximately 5:00 PM  
No charge for the reception  
Request colleagues and friends consider making  
a donation to the Levande Endowed Fund for  
Gerontology in the School of Social Work

# Solidarity and the interconnectedness of human life

By Nora Salas

I was asked today to talk about how to carry the work of Dr. King into our lives. The truth is, I always have mixed feelings about speaking at MLK Day celebrations. All too often commemorations of Dr. King's work have rendered his legacy bland and unrecognizable; a "kumbaya" vision of hand-holding integration, the multiculturalism and diversity so popular today a mere shadow of the life he spent working for economic and social justice. As with many struggles for social change, Dr. King's work has been "mainstreamed"—made both more accessible and more palatable, more widespread, but also less transformative. This phenomenon can be seen in the extent to which our society has brought Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement into the mainstream without changing its most basic equations. The players have changed, but the odds have only worsened. The widening gap between the rich and the poor means our society has more "losers" than ever before, and bigger winners.

We can also see this here at the University, in our own classes and on campus. There are some students for whom our classes seem diverse, and that's their experience, but it's not mine. In my second term as a first-year MSW student, I have never been in a class with another Latina, much less a Xicana. There are few other students of color. This is not particularly surprising, given the fact that there are currently 42 Xicano/Latino graduate students in total at MSU. Maybe that's a 100% or 200% increase from Civil Rights Movement Era. So in 2004, I'm 1/40th of the Xicano/Latino graduate student population on campus, instead of 1/20th or 1/10th.

One of the ways our profession has sought to deal with the fact that many of its clients are people of color when its professionals are overwhelmingly white is to train us to deal with people of other cultures. Cultural Competence—that's the theory. Yet so far, I find the cultural competence content we're presented with interesting because it implicitly assumes that we're all competent in white culture. I find it interesting that when we discuss cultural competence and

These remarks by Salas and Yo were presented at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration held at Erickson Kiva on the MSU campus on January 19, 2004. The commemoration was sponsored by the MSU School of Social Work, College of Social Science, and College of Education.

racial justice, we spend precious little time discussing what it means to be white in America. As if one could even begin to seek justice for others before one had figured out what racial justice would mean for one's self. What would racial justice mean for white people in America? What does cultural competence mean for a Xicana social worker? Now there's a few questions involving "use of self" I'd be interested in hearing discussed.

Still, I have significant doubts about cultural competence. The danger of cultural competence is the same as the danger of multiculturalism and diversity. These concepts gloss over the issue of justice for the members of oppressed groups. Social justice is more than a pretty mosaic, more than the melting pot and salad bowl metaphors that address only the presence of different people, not their relationship to each other. As social workers, we know about the importance of relationships. Social justice would involve societal transformation. Training well-meaning social workers to deal with individuals of other cultures is no replacement for actually training members of oppressed groups.

I believe that communication can help us to move forward and understand each other, but I'm afraid no amount of cultural competence can make you understand how it feels to be 1/40th of the Xicano/Latino graduate student population on campus. But I didn't come here today to make you feel sympathetic or guilty, and I don't say this to you all to discourage you from seeking social justice in your life or your work as social workers. After all, we are here

because at some most basic level, we want to help people. We learn about social work's commitment to social justice in our courses, and we have agreed to help pursue this goal simply by being here, but we need to spend more time discussing and considering why social justice is important for us personally. The theme of this year's MLK Day Celebration is "How far we've come, why haven't we come farther?" There are a lot of reasons we haven't come farther, some of which have been alluded to today, but there is one particular reason that stands out for me. We don't understand solidarity.

There is a big difference between sympathy and solidarity. Sympathy, or feeling sorry for someone, is not an emotional response I'm particularly interested in. Sympathy may make our clients feel good for a fleeting moment, but it doesn't put food on the table, pay their heat bills or send them to bed with a smile. Guilt is the handmaiden of sympathy, and constrains the actions of many people.

What I'm interested in is solidarity. Maybe it's because of my labor movement background, but I believe in the power of solidarity. Solidarity is when you recognize that your personal fate is intimately tied into that of others around you. Solidarity is when you believe that an injury to one is an injury to all. Solidarity is when you read a story in the paper about racial discrimination and truly believe that a world where such things persist is worse for you and your children. Solidarity is a call to action, not just because you think what is happening is hurting others, but because an injustice somewhere is an injustice everywhere.

Solidarity is more than just alleviating human suffering because it makes you feel bad, or it's just not right, but because human suffering compromises your own quality of life. Solidarity is about the undeniable interconnectedness of human life.

Solidarity puts feelings of sympathy into action: If you are truly in solidarity with the oppressed of the world, you are compelled to act in some way, regardless of circumstances. Perhaps Dr. King said it best in his letter from a Birmingham jail:

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

As social workers, we are often counseled to seek therapy before we start to counsel others. And having finished my first semester as an MSW student, I could probably use some therapy. But I want to give you all another suggestion: Get involved in a community change effort before you go out and try to work in a community. As much as I wonder about just how much progress we've made, the fact remains that there are people of all kinds out there involved in efforts to improve their communities every day. As social workers we have many valuable skills and privileges, we have much to give, and a lot to learn.

As social workers, we believe that there is the possibility that our clients will change—change their behaviors, change their perspective and ultimately change their lives. If we did not believe this, our efforts would be futile. In this we're already starting ahead of the game because so much of society has given up on the idea that any type of change is possible. If we can globalize our belief in the possibility of individual change, we will be a mighty force indeed. This faith may have been Dr. King's greatest strength. As he said,

"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become reality. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word." ■

*Nora Salas, a first-year MSW student, was invited to be on a student panel and charged with responding to the role of the current generation to move the Dream forward.*

## MLK: An American dream

By Janet Yo

I am a young Korean-American woman in the 21st Century; he is a wise African-American man from the not-so-distant past. Somehow we are the same. Somehow we have the same experiences, we believe in the same God and passionately fight for the same goals. Somehow we have the same dream. Somehow his words are exactly what I need to hear and hope to speak from my heart.

He knows my experiences and understands the pain of racism and marginalization. He identifies with the anger this can incite and recognizes the necessity to look past the bitterness and instead be motivated to generate change. When the assumptions of passivity, submissiveness and weakness get placed upon me, I want to shout in defiance and rebel with anger and resentment. When the strength of my womanhood is stripped away from me with a few whistles and derogatory comments, I want to retaliate with rage. In such times, identifying with my frustration, he tells me, "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness." I want to carry hate and remember each wrong done against me. But he reminds me, "We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies."

He shares my compassion for others who experience oppression. We are both passionate about servitude and sacrifice. When I realized that I did not want to pursue a career in business and was asking myself about the plans for my future, he simply responded with another question, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" And as I began studying and practicing social work, I became overwhelmed by the magnitude of injustice in the world. Then, he pacified my insecurities, "Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

He and I find faith and hope in the same God and cry out to Him in our times of trouble. We seek to obey God, and when the world seems hopeless, it is God that gives us a glimpse of the glory that is to come, even if we might not experience it directly. He expresses my sentiments perfectly, "I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land! I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land." Our God is the source of our motivation to serve and love people. He teaches me this truth from Scripture, "The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But... the Good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

In essence, he embodies my best intentions and my highest hopes for humanity. He articulates with conviction: "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality." I pray that his belief will soon be the belief of every individual in this country and in this world, so that we might truly see his dream and my dream come true. ■

*Janet Yo, BASW student, was featured at the Annual MLK Day program as winner of the Artist Expression Contest sponsored by the School's Diversity Committee. All students are invited to participate, to express their understanding of Dr. King's work as it relates to their daily lives and the profession through any type of artistic expression.*

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