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SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

University of St. Francis



Social Work Department Graduation Celebration

On December 13, 2024, the Social Work Department jubilantly celebrated their BSW & MSW graduates in Turk Theater. BSW graduates are **Kylie Macikas** and **Allen Lofton** and MSW graduates are **Monique Bell**, **Yazari Gutierrez**, **Caprisha Neal**, **Emma Ostermann**, **Manal Majeed**, and **Beth Svoboda**. Graduates celebrated their accomplishments with their families, friends, colleagues and faculty.



MSW Salute – Emma Osterman, December 2024

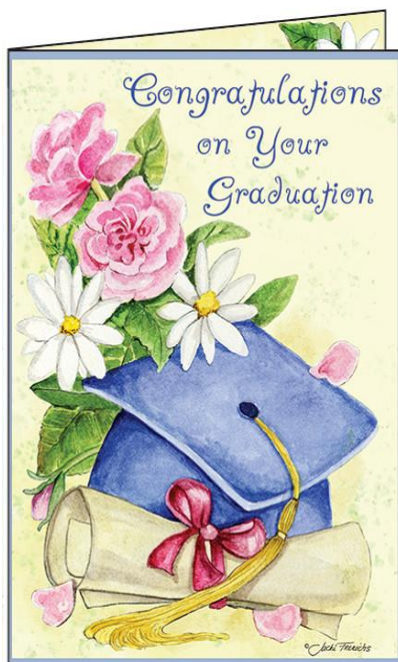
“Becoming a social worker isn't just about completing coursework or passing exams—it is a calling. It's about being there for people when they need it the most—offering support, advocating for justice, and empowering those who are often unheard or forgotten. It requires not only knowledge and skill but also immense heart and courage.

Our work will not always be easy, and the road ahead will continue to have its challenges. But because of the education we have received here, we are equipped with the tools, the heart, and the passion to navigate those

challenges and make a real, lasting impact. To my fellow graduates: We've made it, and I couldn't be prouder to be in this with all of you. The world needs social workers now more than ever, and I have no doubt that each one of us will continue to make a difference—no matter the obstacles we face.

Thank you to our professors, mentors, friends, and families who have supported us along the way. And most of all, thank you to my fellow graduates for making this journey one I will never forget. Here's to the future, and to the impact we will have together.

Congratulations to us all!"



Phi Alpha Honor Society Induction



On March 11, 2025, the Department of Social Work honored nine students, **Isabella Witman-Keen**, **Riley Neste**, **Gianna Greenan**, **Jacob Pangilinan**, **Angela Lalli**, **Mary Grace McGrath**, **Riley Jo Fleming**, **Olivia Bukowski**, and **Braelyn Oberle** as they were inducted into the Phi Alpha Honor Society. The purpose of Phi Alpha Honor Society is to provide a closer bond among students of social work and promote humanitarian goals and ideals. Phi Alpha fosters high standards of education for social workers and invites into membership those who have attained excellence in scholarship and achievement in social work. The induction ceremony was held in Turk Theater.





Angel Tree

The Social Work Department and the Academic Center for Excellence at USF sponsored an Angel Tree in support of the Salvation Army of Joliet in December 2024. The Salvation Army Angel Tree program allows donors to purchase gifts, coats, and clothes for families in need, making their holidays brighter. We sponsored **100 children and two complete families** this Christmas season. The Salvation Army Angel Tree at USF was very successful due to the giving spirit of all involved!

2025 Recognition of Social Work Scholarship Awardees

The Department of Social Work recognized five students with awards from the department. **Adriana Arias** was the recipient of the Meritorious Service Award. This award recognizes a senior who has been personally responsible for providing outstanding service to a department, program or college and who best represent the university's values of Respect, Compassion, Service and Integrity. **Jolelle Kapinga** was awarded the Dr. Christine Ponquinette Scholarship. This scholarship is awarded annually to an undergraduate junior or senior majoring in social work or a graduate student, based upon academic excellence and financial need. **Myah Hitchcock** and **Riley Neste** were awarded the Dr. James P. McCabe Scholarship. This scholarship was established in 1996 and is awarded annually to a junior or senior pursuing a degree in social work. An application must be submitted and awards are based on factors including academic achievement, community involvement and financial need. **Mary Grace McGrath** was awarded the Dr. Billie Terrell Multicultural Scholarship.



Publication

Dr. Joyce Kraus, along with Dr. Karen Blaha from the College of Education, published “Building Culturally Responsive Learning Environments Through Franciscan Values” in the *AFCU Journal* on September, 17, 2024. The article is available at

<https://franciscancollegesuniversities.org/journal-entry-3/>

Summer Undergraduate Research Experiences (SURE) Program

BSW student Adriana Arias and Dr. Kyung-Mee Choi researched the SURE project entitled “Indigenous Perspective: Hope, Resilience, and Adaptation of Migrants and Refugees” in summer 2024.



Presentation

On October 26, 2024, Dr. Kyung-Mee Choi presented the proposal entitled “Religion and Spirituality in Korean American Social Work Education and Practice” in the 70th Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, Partnership Session, Kansas City, MO.



On November 15, 2024, Dr. Althia Gayle, Assistant Professor of Social Work and School Social Work Program Coordinator, and Dr. Laura Honegger, Associate Professor of Social Work, attended the American Society on Criminology conference in San Francisco, CA. Dr. Honegger gave a presentation entitled, "Analyzing Body Worn Camera Footage Using an Objective Instrument, " which focused on the assessment of police interactions with persons in mental health crisis before and after an 8-hour Introduction to Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training.

On November 14, 2024, Drs. Gayle and Honegger gave a poster presentation entitled, "A Status Update on U.S. Mental Health Courts." The presentation included results from their ongoing study of adult U.S. mental health courts. This research project aims to provide a current state of adult MHCs within the United States, particularly regarding program structure, participant eligibility criteria, referral, case processing, trauma-informed programming, available internal and external resources, and use of sanctions and incentives.

On April 4, 2025, Dr. Dan Knapp and Prof. Rachel Lagorio along with Prof. Heather McDonald and Prof. Courtney Pritchard of College of Nursing presented the proposal "Influence of Social Work and Nursing Interdisciplinary Collaboration Skills at the undergraduate level: A pilot investigation" at the Wisconsin Council on Social Work Education conference.

On April 5 & 6, 2025, Dr. Buster Ogbuagu presented the topic "Their Way or No Way: 'Whiteness' as Agent for Marginalizing and Silencing Minority Voices in Academic Research and Publication" as a Keynote Speaker in the 32nd Annual Midwest Conference on Literature, Language and Media (MCLLM) at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb. The 2025 Theme is "'Trouble' – Confronting Bigotry in Higher Education and Academic Scholarship."



BSW and MSW Students Internship

Fall Semester, BSW students spent approximately 1400 hours serving local community agencies through their generalist internships. MSW students spent approximately 6100 hours serving area community agencies through generalist and advanced generalist internships. And School Specialty MSW students spent approximately 5700 hours in area schools completing school social work internships. That equals more than 12,000 hours our social work students give to our communities.

MSW Information Session

MSW virtual information sessions were held on Wednesdays, February 26 & April 30, 6 pm – 7 pm via Zoom. We shared interests, career goals, expectations, needs, etc. with prospective students seeking an advanced generalist concentration or a school social work concentration. We had a lot of positive and supportive interactions with students and shared helpful information about our unique MSW program, admissions, and financial aid.

Dr. Buster Ogbuagu and more than 20 BSW and MSW students attended NASW Social Work Advocacy Day on Wednesday, April 9, 2025 at Illinois State Capital Building, Springfield.

Student Presentation & Field Instructors Training were held via Zoom on Friday, April 11, 2025. Around 40 MSW students presented their field project. For the field instructor training, Ms. Jen Crazythunder, LCSW, and Ms. Tameron Keeffe, LCSW from Family Service Association of Greater Elgin, presented the topic "What is Community Mental Health" and BSW student Adriana Arias and Dr. Kyung-Mee Choi presented the topic "Indigenous Perspective: Hope, Resilience, and Adaptation of Migrants and Refugees."



Upcoming Events

The BSW and MSW Programs will host information sessions for Summer 2025 via Zoom:

BSW Information Session

June 14, 2025, 9 am – 10 am

These meetings are virtual; however, in-person meetings can also be coordinated. Anyone who is interested in learning more about our program, please email BSW program director Dr. Dan Knapp at DKnapp@stfrancis.edu!

MSW Information Session

June 25, 2025, 6 pm - 7 pm

Anyone who is interested in learning more about our program, please email MSW program director Dr. Kyung-Mee Choi at kchoi@stfrancis.edu!

BSW/MSW New & Returning Student Kick-Off will be held on Thursday, August 21, 2025,
9 am – 2:30 pm.