



Year
in Review
2019

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University of
Pittsburgh

School of
Social Work



Letter from the Dean

My first year as dean was an amazing whirlwind of activities, relationship building, and learning. I came to the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work because I was impressed with all that was happening here at the school and the tremendous potential it had to do even more. My expectations were exceeded as I got to know everyone; learned about all the remarkable work that is being done; and began to form relationships with people in the school, the broader university, and the surrounding communities. I feel truly fortunate to be in this place, at this time, with these people!

As we went through the year, I was struck by the tremendous desire and willingness to engage—everyone (students, staff, faculty, interdisciplinary colleagues, community partners, local leaders) has brought genuine energy, enthusiasm, and a concerted effort to help us live up to our potential and to the ideals of social work. I have been nourished, motivated, and sustained by this outpouring of zeal and support. This has come during the roller coaster of events and emotions that have enveloped Pittsburgh and the broader world during this past year. I am deeply grateful to the colleagues and students who pulled together, challenged each other to think broadly and deeply, and pushed for social change and social justice. These are challenging times—it is wonderful to be surrounded by others who are willing to do the critical work necessary to fight for a better world.

The school made great strides this year. We recruited and welcomed four new faculty members, expanded our ability to serve students by creating a new Associate Dean for Student Success position, recognized the centrality of our field education colleagues by reclassifying their positions as faculty, and welcomed a new director of the Master of Social Work program. We also transitioned the Center on Race and Social Problems from its inaugural and founding director to new leadership for the years ahead. Faculty secured a range of new funding—to support research in our areas of strength, to work with others across campus and the community, and to more fully support students working in the critical areas of opioids and child welfare. The broader university's investments in community engagement led to the opening of two new Community Engagement Centers (in Homewood and the Hill District). The school's deep involvement in these centers and communities allowed faculty, staff, and students to do cutting-edge work in youth empowerment, effective schooling, and community development.

This year was full of challenges and opportunities, bringing renewed focus, new relationships, and a chance to take stock of where we are and to think about where we want to go. In the coming year, we will build on this new foundation to formalize priorities, implement new strategies, and expand our connections and collaborations with partners in our collective work for equity and justice. Thank you to everyone who helped make this past year a delightful incarnation of our focus on excellence and impact! I look forward to all that we can do as we move forward.

Yours,

Elizabeth M.Z. Farmer
Dean

Year
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Year of Growth in the School of Social Work

The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work is growing, creating new opportunities for community engagement, professional education, and exciting faculty research.



Mary Ohmer



Molly Allwein



Aliya Durham



Keith Caldwell



Yodit Betru



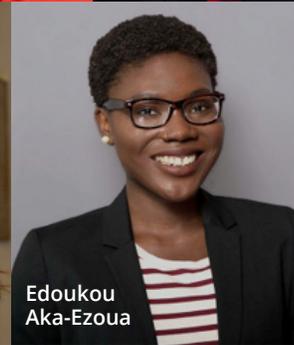
Rachel Gartner



Travis Labrum



Deborah Moon



Edoukou Aka-Ezoua

Retirement opens new positions and opportunities

The retirement of Clinical Associate Professor Tracy Soska has created three openings within the School of Social Work. Filling Soska's previously held positions (official and unofficial) will be new COSA Chair and Associate Professor Mary Ohmer; Molly Allwein, the new director of professional and continuing education; and Aliya Durham—the school's first-ever director of community engagement, as well as an assistant professor of social work.

Familiar faces take leadership roles at the School of Social Work

School of Social Work alumnus and Bachelor of Arts in Social Work Program Director Keith Caldwell has been named as new associate dean for student success.

Clinical Assistant Professor Yodit Betru has been named director of the Master of Social Work (MSW) Program.

New faculty

The School of Social Work has welcomed three new faculty members this year.

Assistant Professor Rachel Gartner conducts prevention-focused scholarship to address gaps in the literature regarding how we conceptualize and measure sexual violence, as well as microaggressions and other forms of victimization for marginalized groups such as women, sexual and gender minorities, people of color, and those with intersecting and marginalized identities.

Assistant Professor Travis Labrum researches issues affecting persons with serious mental illness and their families, including caregiving and conflict, as well as violence toward family members, such as elder abuse.

Assistant Professor Deborah Moon focuses her research on identifying capacity-building strategies for community agencies that are traditionally underutilized in disseminating and implementing evidence-based, family-focused psychosocial interventions that can prevent childhood trauma and promote child well-being.

New staff

Edoukou Aka-Ezoua has joined the School of Social Work as the Project Support Coordinator for the Child Welfare Workforce Excellence Fellows Program.

Pitt Child Welfare and Allegheny County Partnership Receive Workforce Excellence Grant

A collaboration between the Pitt School of Social Work and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) has been selected as one of seven partnerships nationally to take part in a new Workforce Excellence initiative through the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau. The NCWWI will engage the Workforce Excellence sites in a five-year plan to cultivate inclusive organizational leadership and high-performing staff. This will include work at the county level regarding organizational factors that affect culture, climate, performance, and retention. At the university level, the NCWWI grant will provide funds and infrastructure support for as many as seven students per year to receive specialized stipends, training, courses, and cohort-based learning to support their development as social workers in public child welfare.



Helen Cahalane Principal Investigator, Child Welfare Education and Research Programs

As a condition of the program, all trainees will commit to working in the Allegheny County Office of Children, Youth, and Families for a set period upon program completion. Taken together, this federally funded initiative provides resources, expert consultations, collaborations among partnering universities and public systems across the country, and opportunities to fully realize the benefits of partnerships between local governments and universities.

The grant was possible because of the long-standing and productive relationship between the Pitt School of Social Work and Allegheny County DHS. As NCWWI's announcement said, the award recognizes the partnership between DHS and the University of Pittsburgh for its "commitment and dedication to the development of the child welfare workforce."

"We're excited to offer this professional development opportunity to our students and to further our commitment to strengthening the child welfare workforce," said Dr. Helen Cahalane, principal investigator for the Child Welfare Education and Research Programs and clinical associate professor in the Pitt School of Social Work. "Our long-standing partnership with Allegheny County DHS places us in a great position for accomplishing the goals of this national-level Workforce Excellence initiative." ■

Professor Works with Community Partner to Help Improve Services for African American LGBTQ Youth

Assistant Professor of Social Work Darren Whitfield has spent his career working with community partners to help improve health outcomes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities (LGBTQ), particularly communities of color. Most recently, he has partnered with Community Human Services Inc. (CHS) to conduct a community needs assessment and evaluate its work on a series of innovative new programs that are a part of Project Silk, which has been funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



Assistant Professor Darren Whitfield

Pittsburgh currently has limited culturally responsive mental health and substance use services and few HIV services accessible to African American youth ages 13–24.

Project Silk will work to reduce barriers to such services. This is especially critical and timely work because in the past five years, most HIV infections in Allegheny County have occurred in African American gay and bisexual men and transgender women in that age group.

In addition to evaluating programs, Whitfield will assist with adapting interventions and oversee study evaluation. He also will work with Project Silk staff to build the capacity of existing providers to integrate culturally responsive principles by equipping existing providers with the skills and knowledge to incorporate welcoming and affirming principles for serving African American LGBTQ youth. Whitfield stated, "I am very excited to be working within the community to improve accessibility of vital physical health and mental health services for African American LGBTQ youth in Pittsburgh. I believe there is a ton of energy and expertise in the community. It is about harnessing this collective energy." ■

Federal Grant Takes Aim at Opioid Epidemic in Western Pennsylvania

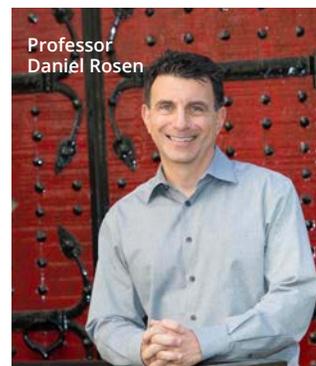
A new \$1.25 million federal grant secured by Professor of Social Work Daniel Rosen will help strengthen training to combat opioid abuse for 70 MSW students, place them in areas of Allegheny and Beaver counties that have the most overdose deaths, and extend training to staff at the School of Social Work's community partner organizations.

The Opioid Workforce Expansion: Social Work Initiative for Program Professionals is a new three-year project funded through the Health Resources and Services Administration. Each year, the initiative will recruit a broad and diverse cohort of students from three of certificate programs in the School of Social Work—Integrated Healthcare, Gerontology, and Mental Health. Through an advanced curriculum, six annual seminars, and specialized field placements at sites in critical areas, the students will develop skills to work in interprofessional settings and to better understand the relationships among the physical and behavioral health issues of people with opioid use disorders.

At the heart of the initiative is integrated care, which is helping to break down the silos of drug addiction, mental health, and physical health.

"We've seen the transformation of the role of the social worker in the healthcare system," Rosen said. "A doctor may come in and see a patient complaining of back pain, prescribe an MRI, and leave. Now a social worker is present who can help coordinate all the patient resources. Does he have a way to the clinic? Does he need help navigating through the system? Does he have access to food? It is empathetic care coordination? And it makes all the difference.

"Social workers have historically stepped into crisis situations to improve the coordination of care for individuals with substance use disorders," he added. "This grant will allow us to build an infrastructure that will last for years." ■

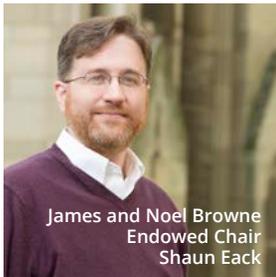


Professor Daniel Rosen

New Treatment Could Be Life-Changing for Individuals with Schizophrenia

When most people think of schizophrenia they think of the cardinal symptoms of the condition, such as hearing voices and experiencing feelings of paranoia, which are debilitating for individuals living with the illness. What most people don't realize is that with medication those symptoms can be managed, but the negative symptoms that are left behind can have effects that are just as detrimental. These "negative symptoms", which involve challenges in motivation, social withdrawal, and difficulty communicating with others, are some of the largest barriers that people with schizophrenia face to building a better quality of life, such as sustaining relationships or going back to work or school.

In partnership with his colleagues from the University of Pittsburgh Department of Psychiatry, Dr. Shaun Eack, the James and Noel Browne Endowed Chair, associate dean for research, and professor of social work and psychiatry has received a new grant funded by the National Institute of Mental Health to address those lingering negative symptoms.



The new project is addressing one of the last frontiers in the treatment of schizophrenia. Although the rate of people with the disorder who experience negative symptoms is high, there are currently no treatments available for those who suffer from them, and nearly every medication considered for treatment of negative symptoms has failed.

Drawing on work from his previous clinical trials, Eack and his team will use Cognitive Enhancement Therapy (CET) to help reduce negative symptoms through improving social thinking and understanding. CET is a psychosocial treatment developed by social worker Gerard E. Hogarty, MSW of the University of Pittsburgh Department of Psychiatry, which has shown considerable promise in improving outcomes in schizophrenia. The researchers hope that by using CET to improve social thinking and understanding, the negative symptoms of schizophrenia can be reduced, helping individuals achieve greater functional recovery in the community.

"We know that, in addition to medication, psychosocial treatments can be powerful in promoting the functional recovery of individuals with schizophrenia. This study will, for the first time, identify the degree to which psychosocial treatments focused on improving thinking and social functioning can reduce the considerable burden of negative symptoms for individuals and families affected by this condition," Eack said. ■

Interdisciplinary Team Looks to Help Youth Moving Through the Juvenile Justice System

A national leadership program from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has given a team of University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University professors the chance to see whether their innovative approach to holistic legal representation can improve juvenile indigent defense representation and, in turn, young peoples' life outcomes.

Associate Professor of Social Work Jeff Shook's *Improving Juvenile Indigent Defense and Health through Holistic Representation* project is a partnership with the Education Law Clinic and Juvenile Defender Clinic at Duquesne University. Working with faculty from Duquesne Law School, Shook saw the project as an opportunity to build on their collaborative work to improve representation for youth at risk of being pushed out of schools and into the justice system.



Associate Professor Jeffrey Shook

Most youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system have significant health, mental health, and substance use issues; have been excluded from school and other child-serving institutions; and/or are disconnected or excluded from necessary supports and resources in their communities. For many, their defense attorneys serve as their primary advocates to help them obtain medical and mental health services and to connect them with supports and resources.

Shook will coordinate the research component of the project by training interviewers, overseeing data collection, and analyzing data, among other aspects of the project. The team's Holistic Representation Model combines legal and clinical services, enabling social workers, psychologists, and/or counselors to work as part of the legal team to address a variety of client needs. The goal of the researchers is to provide evidence of the health and educational benefits of combining clinical and legal services.

"Through my work, I have experienced and observed how youth are marginalized and moved through systems without real efforts to address their needs," Shook said. "I've also come to understand how having a trained and committed advocate can change the trajectories of youth and make systems responsive to their needs." The project will also give Pitt School of Social Work students opportunities to participate in field placements at clinics, as well as graduate students the ability to engage with faculty in research in the field of juvenile justice. ■

Student Executive Council Steps into Leadership Role

The Student Executive Council (SEC) represents MSW students at the Pitt School of Social Work, but the 2019 SEC is expanding its responsibilities to include those in the larger social work community, as well as the City of Pittsburgh. The SEC has engaged the school administration as never before by holding monthly Conversations with the Dean, as well as sitting on faculty committees to offer student perspectives. The council has implemented extended orientation to assist with the transition for incoming and returning students, planning activities such as self-care classes, yoga, and



(continued)

a diverse food festival, as well as offering subcommittees for students to join. Other scheduled SEC events include training on inclusive language, social events for students of color and LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersex, asexual) students, and a domestic violence art show. SEC members also were responsive to student interests by hosting a Narcan® (naloxone) training, intergroup dialogue training, and gatherings for international students.

Most impressively, the council has responded swiftly and responsibly to injustices at the local and national levels, including the deadly mass shooting at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue and the not-guilty verdict for the police officer who shot and killed teenager Antwon Rose II, by holding vigils and rallies that were powerful, peaceful and open to all.

"It has been a busy year for the SEC, and we are humbled to plant seeds in the School of Social Work and to serve students and the greater community," said SEC President Angela Padovano. "We are excited to collaborate more with social work faculty and staff members. We will continue to respond to social injustices, happening both locally and nationally. We look forward to creating safer spaces for students to learn, develop professionally, and create relationships." ■

Teens with Foster Care Experience Bond at Annual Pitt-Johnstown Retreat

Every August for the past 11 years, teenagers who have had experience in Pennsylvania's foster care system convene at the University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown campus for an Older Youth Retreat—an event that allows these teens to bond with others just like them in a week of motivating talks, social activities and educational sessions.



Students enjoy the 2019 retreat

About 120 young people ages 16–21, some still in foster care, attended this past retreat. From rural areas like Butler County to the urban core of Philadelphia, the teens met to chart a course for their future, alongside others who have experienced substitute care. The annual event is sponsored by the Department of Human Services and coordinated by the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center, part of Pitt's School of Social Work.

The teens themselves devised the slate of activities—cooking classes, volleyball and other sports, a hip-hop dance class, furniture building, gardening, a talent show, and more. The young people do it all in a campus setting, sleeping in the dorms, living with peers, and using the campus facilities, which can help to plant the seed for furthering their education.

This event is especially timely given the passage of Pennsylvania's new Fostering Independence Through Education Act that guarantees that foster children with a high school diploma or GED can get a waiver on tuition and fees at any public or private college or university in the state. ■

New Leadership at the Center on Race and Social Problems

For the first time since it was launched in 2002, Pitt's Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP) will have a new leader at the helm. Interim Director James Huguley, also an assistant professor of social work, says he will build on the excellent foundation laid by Larry E. Davis, dean emeritus of the school and CRSP founding director.



Interim Director of the Center on Race and Social Problems
James Huguley

"I want to expand our capacity to short-circuit the distance between cutting-edge race research and applied work on the ground," Huguley said. He plans to continue the signature CRSP activities such as its speaker series, summer institutes, and student and faculty research awards. He also wants to expand the center's research footprint. "We want to do empirical work that is influential not only in our region, but also abroad. We're excited to think about possibilities on that front," he said.

Also joining CRSP as senior fellow for research and community engagement, is School of Social Work Professor and David Epperson Chair John Wallace.

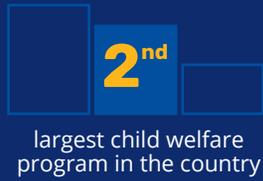
"I am excited to work with my colleague James Huguley, to build upon the tremendous foundation that Dean Davis and others laid at the Center on Race and Social Problems," said Wallace. "In my new role, I am particularly excited about moving forward our community-based research collaborations and supporting the work of CRSP-affiliated scholars, both within the School of Social Work and across Pitt's various schools and departments." ■



Senior Fellow for Research and Community Engagement
John Wallace

By the Numbers

* Educational Excellence



166

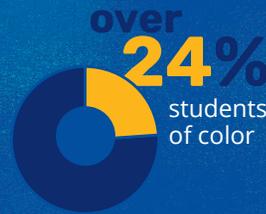
The School provided 166 paid training and pre-doctoral fellowships

totaling more than **\$2 million dollars** in student support for FY 2019.

* Diversity & Inclusion



Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP) is the **first and only** interdisciplinary race center in a school of social work in the country.



* Scholarship & Research



over **\$1.9 million+** in research expenditures

& over **\$24 million+** in training grants

41 active research projects

* Community Engagement

2 community engagement centers embedded in the community and supported by the University.

16 funded collaborative research projects with a community partner

600

field work opportunities including over 200 mental health placements

Students collectively provide over **350,000**

field placement hours to service agencies and organizations worth over **\$8.6 million annually.**

* Alumni & Career Networks

over **10,000** alumni

here in Pittsburgh

across the country

around the world

VanKirk Career Center offers **one-on-one** career counseling

4,428

Continuing Education program attendees



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Year in Review 2019

Pitt's New Centers Bring University Resources Directly to Neighborhood Residents

The University of Pittsburgh has always prided itself on being a community-engaged, urban campus embedded in Pittsburgh's neighborhoods and with deep roots throughout the region. Two new Community Engagement Centers (CECs) are Pitt's way of combining the community's agenda and wisdom with the University's resources to open new doors for growth and more opportunities for area residents. In partnership with residents and stakeholders in communities such as Homewood and the Hill District, the University is making long-term commitments of investment, infrastructure, programming, and staffing in Pittsburgh's neighborhoods.

The School of Social Work has a large footprint at the Homewood CEC which houses the Pittsburgh Assisted Communities and Schools program; several field placement opportunities; classes; and research projects, including the Space and People in Neighborhoods Project's Youth Research Advisory Board, led by assistant professor Jaime Booth. When talking about the role of the CEC in their work, one advisory board member said, "It provides a space for us to meet as a board and talk about the future steps of our research project. Without the CEC, we would not have been able to complete the research because residents have been able to stop by and get more information when it is convenient for them."

The University's approach in Homewood is informed at every stage by the Homewood Advisory Council of community leaders and residents who guide how the CEC in Homewood benefits local partners and community members. One of the most active members is Homewood native and the David E. Epperson Chair and Professor of Social Work John Wallace. "I am proud to be a part of a University and a school that so clearly demonstrate their commitment to use their research, teaching, and service to benefit our communities," Wallace said.

The Hill District CEC will open its doors in 2020 but is already supporting the work of one of the School of Social Work's community engagement fellows, who is completing her field placement with the CEC as it moves toward opening the physical space. Fellow Kat Bakrania is creating tools such as a resident database and communal small-business directory that will be used by the Hill CEC for years to come; she is also enhancing engagement efforts with neighborhood residents by attending community events and partnering with stakeholders to address community challenges. ■



Opening night at the Homewood Community Engagement Center