

ENGAGE Newsletter May 2021

The ENGAGE Team



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ENGAGE is a strategic effort connecting the school to community issues, partners, and movements for greater equity and social change.

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Congratulations Graduates!



Congratulations 2021 School of Social Work Graduates

This past year has been different than anyone could have expected, and has brought with it many challenges to overcome. Despite these challenges, you made it! This is an achievement worthy of celebration in any year, but surviving and graduating this year in particular is a huge accomplishment. Congratulations 2021 SSW graduates!

Welcome New SSW Faculty



Ashley Cureton, PhD, MSW

I am currently a Provost's Postdoctoral Fellow & Lecturer in the School of Education and the Department of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University. I received a Ph.D. and master's degree from the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice at the University of Chicago. I also received graduate certificates in forced migration, refugee studies, and refugee mental health from the University of Oxford, Harvard University, and Northwestern University. Prior to attending graduate school, I also worked as a Research Associate at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research where I implemented and evaluated Check & Connect, a comprehensive student engagement intervention focusing on school completion and social competence among immigrant students in Chicago Public Schools. My research has been published in Urban Education, The Urban Review and the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management.

I identify as a refugee, migration, and international social work scholar who explores the social-emotional, linguistic, and academic development and experiences of migrant and refugee youth and their families in the U.S. and abroad. By engaging in community-based participatory research, I am particularly interested in how displacement and exploitation impact their overall academic and social development, sense of belonging, and racial and cultural identities. I am committed to learning how educational institutions and humanitarian organizations can offer more effective interventions and programs to promote educational equity and opportunity among these vulnerable populations.

I am so excited to become a faculty member in the SSW. My long-term research goal is to identify child, family, and systems-focused, culturally specific interventions to improve academic and mental health outcomes among migrant and refugee youth and their families in the U.S and abroad. I have a particular interest in exploring the impact of racial discrimination, xenophobia, and bullying on migrant and refugee students' mental health and academic achievement in schools. I am committed to learning how educational institutions and humanitarian organizations can offer more effective interventions and programs to promote educational equity and opportunity among these vulnerable populations. I am also very excited about being involved with the Global Social Work pathway. I can't wait to learn about the current courses and to consider new courses in this area. Due to my extensive work abroad, I'm excited about creating and leading global programs and initiatives for the SSW community.

As a first-generation, low-income, African American woman with a disability, my particular background embodies diverse and intersecting identities, which have contributed to my role as a social worker and scholar. Navigating higher education was a difficult process due to my particular identities, so I recognize and value the importance of creating an equitable, varied, and inclusive environment for aspiring social workers. As a former Ronald E. McNair Scholar and an alumna of the Leadership Alliance Program (initiatives funded by the federal government to support promising students from underrepresented backgrounds in graduate work), I received generous support from faculty and staff over the years in my pursuit of a PhD degree. As an Assistant Professor, I will similarly offer mentorship and support to the next generation of scholars. I will take an active leadership

role in furthering diversity in the School of Social Work by mentoring students from underrepresented groups who actively participate in diversity initiatives. Moreover, I will continue to actively recruit students from such groups, and, if necessary, create additional programs to facilitate career development and professionalism to support their particular needs within the broader campus community.

I look forward to contributing to the policy and practice of addressing the important challenges faced by refugee and migrant communities in Dearborn, Grand Rapids, Detroit and other cities in Michigan. I hope to collaborate with school districts and community-based organizations across Michigan to tackle mental health and educational disparities among migrant and refugee populations.



James Ellis, PhD, MSW

James M. Ellis, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from the University of Washington, a master's degree in Social Work and a doctorate degree in Higher Education from the University of Michigan. His research investigates the degree to which microaffirmations and microaggression promotes or impedes the college transition experiences of first-generation college students and undergraduate men of color. In addition to his scholarship, James has served in a variety of professional roles in partnership with programs and organizations dedicated to advancing educational opportunities for adolescents and young adults from racial-ethnic and socioeconomic marginalized backgrounds. At the school of social work, Dr. Ellis will continue to advance his research program and teach courses in the MSW program within the program evaluation and applied research and the welfare of children and families pathways. He is also a faculty affiliate at the Vivian A. and James L. Curtis School of Social Work Center for Health Equity Research and Training.

The Power of Storytelling Our Identities

From left: Aaron Foley, Eric Thomas, Jessica Care Moore



Storytelling builds the foundation of human interaction. Telling others how we got here and why we care about an issue builds connection, allows us to share our values, and create meaning. The art of public narrative is used in all aspects of social work practice - from helping clients rewrite the stories they tell themselves, to helping communities galvanize social change, to helping policy makers tell a “story of self” while creating a “story of us.”

Who is telling their stories, and how?

Case Study



Charles Williams II, PhD student and pastor of Historic King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit mobilized hundreds of people at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to make sure the city's most vulnerable were cared for. Within days of Governor Whitmer's emergency stay-at-home order, Williams, alongside other Black activists, made the decision to ensure the city of Detroit's aged and immunocompromised would not be exposed to the deadly virus.

Check It Out

Immigration and Migration



Immigrants have made vast contributions to this state - economically, politically, and socially. The fabric of American society was created by the contributions of a diverse range of immigrants. As a nation, however, we continue to suppress and demonize immigrants.



What is the story of immigration in this country? What are the stories of immigrants?

From top left: Fayrouz Saad, Fatou Seydi-Sarr, Laura Sanders, Wojciech Zolnowski



[International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit](#)



[ABISA Detroit](#)



[Detroit Phoenix Center](#)

SSW Student Engagement Highlights



Blake Newman

Throughout my time at the UM SSW, one of the experiences I have most enjoyed is my field placement with ENGAGE. I started with ENGAGE last fall in my first semester and have learned so much through the many projects we work on, and the amazing team we have. I am so grateful that I was placed with ENGAGE and how much the team has welcomed me throughout the year. I am excited to continue to work with ENGAGE and to continue to learn from the amazing team and grow as a social worker with them.

ENGAGE Team Spotlight

Fatima Salman

ENGAGE Program Manager Fatima



Salman, MSW '15, was named a Racial Equity Fellow by Detroit Equity Action Lab. The Racial Equity Fellowship develops leaders who work to end structural racism in Detroit.

Congratulations, Fatima!

Fatima is also running for [President of NASW-Michigan](#) on an election slate with several other SSW alums. Elections are open through **May 14, 2021**. All NASW-Michigan members were emailed an election link on April 12. **Vote Fatima!**

Upcoming Events

Upcoming Fall Semester 2021

Stay tuned for upcoming virtual events, such as the continuation of our Virtual Discussion Sessions. Visit our [website](#) for more information or the [SSW events page](#) to register for upcoming sessions.

[View Past Sessions](#)

SSW API Coalition Teach-Ins

The API Coalition will be holding a series of teach-ins to address anti-Asian hate and its causes, among other related issues. Attend these teach-ins during the Spring/Summer semester to learn more.

Keep In Touch

If you are faculty, staff or a student doing cool work in communities, [reach out to ENGAGE](#) to be featured in our social media! ENGAGE can also help connect you to other community partners.

To find out more about ENGAGE and our virtual discussions, please visit our [website](#).

*You have any questions, please reach out to
ENGAGE at sswcommunityengagement@umich.edu*

The ENGAGE Team