

ISSUE EIGHT
2023

AHEAD

Social Work Research and Innovation at the University of Michigan

RESEARCH AND TEACHING
INNOVATIONS 2023

THANKING EIGHT GREAT ADVISORS

A 21st-CENTURY RESEARCH OFFICE

A JEWISH COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP
STUDENT EXPLORES THE HOLOCAUST
IN NORWAY

WE LOVE AI (FOR CERTAIN THINGS)!

THE ART COLLECTIVE HOLDS AN
END-OF-SEMESTER HAPPENING



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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AHEAD

Social Work Research at
the University of Michigan

Editor in Chief

Rogério M. Pinto, PhD

Designer

Linette Lao

Writers

David Pratt, Allison Goldstein,
Rogério M. Pinto

Photography & Photo Editor

Nicholas Williams

Copy Editor

Ruth Gretzinger

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Beth Angell

Dean and Professor of Social Work

Renée Tambeau

Director of Marketing & Communications

ssw.umich.edu

ssw.ahead@umich.edu

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schoolofsocialwork](https://www.facebook.com/universityofmichigan/schoolofsocialwork)

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welcome



It is with great pleasure and some wistfulness that I present to you this eighth issue of *AHEAD*, the U-M School of Social Work's research magazine. Six years ago, at the invitation of then-dean Lynn Videka, I assumed the role of associate dean for research (ADR) at the school. Thank you, Lynn, for this wonderful opportunity!

Since then, I have worked to create diversity in the office, trained staff about strategies for making the treatment of faculty equitable and inclusive, and promoted innovation in research.

I have enjoyed developing relationships with the many new faculty hired the past few years—finding out the ways they all are innovating. Facing inward, I have built a team of research administrators that works collaboratively with me and with Ryan Bankston, director of administration, finance, and operations. Facing outward, I have been invited to serve on university-level committees, and it has been a great pleasure to meet and collaborate with administrators and faculty across the campus. Most recently, my work to integrate the arts into social work keeps growing and attracting more attention to our school.

And then there is this magazine. I founded *AHEAD* in 2017 to publicize research innovations at the school. I am thrilled to see *AHEAD* #8 overflowing with innovative projects, proposals, and stories, so typical of an engaged, curious, and forward-thinking faculty—and student body and staff!

For the second year in a row, we held Lightning Talks, five-minute presentations by faculty on their research and teaching innovations. For a briefing on these innovations, please see pages 4–9.

We have made strides in both the arts and technology. For photos of our Art Collective, see pages 12–14. To update us on technology, we turned to Prof. Brian Perron. On page 10, Brian talks about artificial intelligence, an area in which social work research needs to catch up.

Finally, this issue showcases significant, highly engaged research that comes from outside the specialized club of “research faculty.” See page 16 for research conducted by a recent master's student, and please note that two of this year's Lightning Talks involve clinical faculty.

In gratitude for the diligent day-to-day work of the research office, I invited the office's five members for an informal chat about what they do and how they define their “21st-century research office.” That interview begins on page 27.

In *AHEAD* we speak about social work research in ways that other schools' publications don't. It has changed how we are perceived by the university and by other schools of social work. I offer great thanks to those who discussed their work with *AHEAD*, and to all of our writers and photographers and designers.

On January 1, 2024, Prof. Matthew Smith will take over the ADR office. Matt speaks about his work twice in this issue, on pages 7 and 23. One of those pieces is my thank you to him for supporting me as one of my faculty advisors. I join the rest of our social work community in welcoming him and supporting him in his new role.

Rogério M. Pinto, PhD

*University Diversity Social Transformation Professor
Berit Ingersoll-Dayton Collegiate Professor of Social Work
Associate Dean for Research and Innovation
University of Michigan School of Social Work*



Rogério Pinto's favorite moment as Associate Dean for Research? Perhaps World AIDS Day, 2018. Here, participants gather materials to create art works in the style of the AIDS Memorial Quilt.



Lightning Talks 2023

PLUSH CHAIRS AND THE SPARKLE OF DIVERSE IDEAS

BY ALLISON GOLDSTEIN

Last winter, the offices of the associate deans for research and for educational programs at the School of Social Work once again invited social work faculty to submit abstracts for five-minute Lightning Talks on how they were innovating in their research and/or teaching. And once again, our faculty came forth with myriad exciting innovations, and the Lightning Talks lit up a festive, full-house, post-pandemic faculty meeting on May 3, 2023.

"I felt so acknowledged and inspired!" says Sonia Harb, the school's Detroit engagement specialist. "The innovation, creativity, and technology that our faculty are working on are all remarkable." Harb's collaboration with ENGAGE: DETROIT program manager Fatima Salman is described on page 5.

"I could see the passion, creativity, and dedication for doing good social work and advancing our profession."

– Associate Dean Robert Ortega

"The format was like a talk show," says associate dean for research Rogério M. Pinto, "with plush chairs and each presenter waiting to give their talk ensconced in a chair while cheering on the other talks. All very colorful! And most faculty were there in person, so that was festive, too."

Pinto gives tremendous credit for the festivity to Michelle Ehlers in the Dean's Office. "Michelle drew up this nice format ... we also made sure to have flowers and awards to hand out, it became so celebratory, even a touch glamorous! I think the school needed it,



Above, left to right: Robert Ortega (associate dean for educational programs), Beth Sherman, Matthew Smith, Rebecca Sokol, Ashley Cureton, Rosalva Osorio Cooksy, Sonia Harb, Fatima Salman, Rogério M. Pinto (associate dean for research).

especially after COVID. We got to make a show of all the good work that we do."

Pinto also notes that the types of innovation showcased were very special. There was tremendous variety: technological and artistic innovation, community-involved innovation, trauma-related innovation, and more. In the pages that follow, we present the 4-1-1 on all of this year's innovations, including excerpts from the original abstracts and some words from each innovator about what makes their work special.

"The Lightning Talks provided me with a platform to share my work, but more so the opportunity to hear about the work of my colleagues," says Prof. Beth Sherman, whose Lightning Talk is summarized on page 8. Said Robert Ortega, associate dean for educational programs, whose office co-sponsored the event, "I could see the passion, creativity, and dedication for doing good social work and advancing our profession. It was very inspiring." ■



Collectively Pursuing Employment Equity and Economic Opportunity for Detroiters

SONIA M. HARB, MSW 1991, DETROIT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIST, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

FATIMA SALMAN, MSW 2015, PROGRAM MANAGER, ENGAGE: DETROIT; LEO LECTURER, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

To convene more than 70 nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, grassroots activists, and businesses to advance employment equity and economic opportunity for Detroiters is powerful. But that is the mission of the Detroit Employment Equity Learning and Action Collaborative (EELAC), led by the U-M School of Social Work. The most innovative part of this initiative is the involvement of the people it affects the most: workers.

"For any solution to be meaningful, it has to come from the people most affected by the issue they face in their lives, for example housing insecurity," says Sonia Harb, an engagement strategist at the school.

To accomplish this, Harb, Fatima Salman, the school's ENGAGE representative (the school's ENGAGE initiative promotes class-related projects in Detroit and Washtenaw County), and other EELAC leaders partnered with six community organizations in Detroit that serve different populations and constituencies: housing insecure individuals, single-parent families, disabled and older workers, and current and formerly incarcerated individuals. The EELAC team convened 13 focus groups and asked questions like, "What is a 'good job'?" "What are the barriers to your getting one?" "What do you look for in a workplace?" "What is stopping you from advancing in the job you have?" The team analyzed their findings and synthesized them into a report, *Detroit Workers and Job Seekers Speak: A Deep Dive Into Worker Aspirations, Needs, and Change Ideas* (you may view it at tinyurl.com/3twfuu97).

KEY INNOVATION

"EELAC [Employment Equity Learning and Action Collaborative – ed.] is a collective impact roundtable with 65+ organizations [designed] to create employment equity for Detroiters. In 2021, we designed a study with Detroit job seekers and workers to generate a Workers' Agenda. EELAC will engage partners to advance the recommendations and launch a call-to-action symposium for this social change effort."



Sonia M. Harb and Fatima Salman

"One thing that we saw over and over with the focus groups," says Salman, "and this is not necessarily surprising, was that whenever folks from the community organizations were together, the solutions they reached were generated from themselves. It was not just a matter of workers knowing and understanding their problems. They were able to generate their own solutions when working together in groups."

The solutions that the focus groups generated ended up corroborating the recommendations EELAC had made earlier in its *Blueprint for Employment Equity* (view at tinyurl.com/4s263v9n). "What the focus groups said aligned perfectly with our recommendations," Harb reports. "It was very validating."

The bottom line? Workers wanted jobs that aligned with their passions and interests; they wanted to feel their skills were being applied; and they wanted to feel that they were learning and growing in their jobs. "It's what all human beings want and need," says Harb. "So the burden is on the employer to create an environment that attracts and retains these workers."

Salman, Harb, and EELAC are now in the process of persuading employers to make this happen. Their current initiatives include policy advocacy and media appearances to disseminate EELAC's findings. EELAC will soon hold a symposium in partnership with Detroit Future City, a nonprofit founded in 2015 to implement the massive, 50-year Detroit Strategic Framework (more information at detroitfuturecity.com). ■



Coordinating Studies to Answer Bigger and Better Questions

REBECCA SOKOL, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL WORK, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Few researchers have the budgets or resources to conduct big, multi-site studies. In social work research, these limitations exist alongside a need for rich, deep knowledge of local communities, which develops on a smaller and more intimate scale. Smaller, localized studies may not generalize to broader contexts, however, limiting their impact and applicability.

This dilemma has galvanized Rebecca Sokol, assistant professor of social work, to think about what it would take to coordinate multiple smaller studies across a state, a nation, even the world, to increase the power of the results they yield. “How can we harmonize studies so that we can answer important research questions?” Sokol asks. “Can we align project timescales and measures so that we can pool results and have more robust findings that might be generalizable beyond a local context?”

Sokol is currently working with the Institute of Firearm Injury Prevention to do just this: she and her workgroup are coordinating three project sites across the United States to support research on community-based interventions meant to prevent firearm violence. Each site is conducting its own study, but the workgroup has aligned elements like core measures and data collection timescales, so that results can be collated for greater statistical strength and broader research applicability.

This kind of alignment is challenging. “It takes a lot of relationship-building with different project teams,” Sokol says, “and we have to make the case for why it is important to do study harmonization in the first place.” She emphasizes that a lot of negotiating and compromising is required to get an end result everyone is comfortable with implementing. But while it’s tough work, she finds it worthwhile.

“At the end of this project, we will have three project sites across the United States that are all focused on community-based interventions to prevent firearm violence,” Sokol says. “And we are going to be



Rebecca Sokol

KEY INNOVATION

“Individual research studies provide valuable insights into social phenomena, but coordinating multiple studies that evaluate similar interventions, policies, or relationships between variables is necessary to advance science. Combining the results of multiple individual studies through meta-analyses is often constrained by differences between those studies—incompatible measures, differing assessment timelines, [or] an inability to access original data.

“Collaboration between similar studies during initial design phases may overcome these challenges, coordinating studies by means of standardized measures, harmonized assessment timelines, collaborations on cross-study analyses, and enhanced dissemination efforts. More powerful analyses, more meaningful research questions, and wider distribution of findings can result. We can address bigger and better questions and improve our understanding of complex social phenomena.”

able to do analyses that pool data across these three very different settings. So I think the potential is really exciting and makes the work worthwhile.”

Sokol has focused largely on firearm violence, but there is another area in which she would like to see coordinated studies: universal basic income, the policies and programs under which citizens of a given population receive regular guaranteed income in the form of unconditional transfer payments. Pilot studies in this area are underway, but sample sizes are still mostly small. Investigators struggle to attain the statistical power to identify associations. “What if some of these studies could collaborate to ask similar questions in a similar timeframe?” Sokol asks. “We could advance research in this area and advance public understanding of what universal basic income is.” ■



WorkChat: A Virtual Workday

MATTHEW J. SMITH, PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL WORK, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Nearly 50,000 autistic youth transition from high school to the working world each year; however, only a quarter of them successfully land jobs within two years of graduation. These frustrating statistics are what motivated Prof. Matthew Smith and his team to partner with the conversation simulation company SIMMersion to develop and test virtual job skills training programs for autistic young adults.



Matthew J. Smith

"We're looking to help a group that is historically underemployed—compared to their peers with disabilities and to their peers without disabilities," says Smith.

Smith et al.'s most recent innovation, WorkChat, is a workday simulation, with virtual characters, that helps autistic young adults enhance their conversations with customers, coworkers, and supervisors in workplace settings. The simulation is gamified, so the users/players complete tasks to earn trophies and to progress to the next level, while scoring points for selecting responses as they converse with the game's various avatars. Importantly, the responses the players choose affect how the avatar responds. "If you make negative statements, that character could become annoyed or upset with you," says Smith—just like in the real working world.

One of the most crucial aspects of WorkChat is the fact that it was developed with the input of three different advisory boards. Smith had previously built work-skills interventions in partnership with community and scientific advisory boards, but for WorkChat he intentionally recruited a diversity advisory board, too. "Historically

in autism research, interventions have largely been developed by and studied within the white community," Smith says. "By developing a diversity advisory board, we could be more inclusive and give a voice to perspectives that have historically been marginalized in intervention development."

The board's role was to provide insight into how the design of WorkChat could embrace diversity. This resulted in a new kind of look to the game and a variety of actors being recruited to voice the avatars.

Smith and his research team also programmed spontaneous elements of fun into WorkChat, to make the game not just educational but enjoyable to play. For example, one of the tasks a player must complete is stocking shelves with boxes of cookies. The team created an option where, instead of putting the cookies on the shelf, the player can open a bag and start eating. "It becomes fun when you add things to do that you probably wouldn't normally do or that are not necessarily acceptable to do," says Smith, "like open a bag of cookies and chomp away!"

Of course, when the player meets with their supervisor-avatar at the end of the virtual workday, they receive feedback on their choices. If they opted to eat the cookies they should have been stocking, they will hear about it! All part of the normal workday Smith seeks to create for the benefit of those ready, willing and able to work but seeking practice with communication skills. ■

KEY INNOVATION

"Autistic young adults face low employment rates and challenges with sustaining employment. We partnered with the autism community to develop a new, gamified virtual workday experience to practice conversations with customers, coworkers, and supervisors.

"Our new [cognitive behavioral] intervention builds off the success of our recent virtual interview training program that was designed with the autism community and demonstrated initial effectiveness among BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color – ed.] autistic youth. Through our dissemination of the findings of this project, we learned the autism community wanted, and asked us to develop, a program that focused on conversations at work."



“Despair Is Not an Option”

BETH A. SHERMAN, MSW 1989, CLINICAL ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL WORK, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
SHARI SAUNDERS, CLINICAL PROFESSOR EMERITA, U-M MARSAL FAMILY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

KEY INNOVATION

“[We] developed a simulation which engages School of Education, School of Nursing, and School of Social Work students to apply [multicultural counselor Dr. Bryana] French’s framework of radical healing in communities of color. The simulation exercise guides students to ask questions that affirm critical consciousness, radical hope, strength and resistance, self-knowledge, and collectivism.”

“One reason we built out the simulation was that we had been talking about—and I had been particularly interested in—interrupting some of the narratives that say trauma is about people being broken and damaged,” says Beth Sherman, a clinical associate professor of social work and faculty co-lead of the Trauma-Informed Practices mini-certificate offered by the School of Social Work, U-M Marsal Family School of Education, and U-M School of Nursing. Sherman and Shari Saunders of the Marsal Family School thought, if the Trauma-Informed Practice course focused on negativity and deficits alone, it would weaponize trauma-informed theory or trauma-informed practices, and it would miss the survival and thriving aspects of being able to live in community, deal with adversity, and get through it.

Sherman and Saunders started by modifying trauma-informed “intake” interview protocols from nursing, education, and social work, so that those protocols’ questions would better elicit responses related to strength, coping, resistance, and community support. “It wasn’t enough for us to take the theory of radical healing and just hand over these really rich, strength-based, case examples for our students to learn from,” Sherman says. “During the development phase, we asked ourselves, how would our students know about their families’ strengths and resistance, radical hope, self-knowledge, and community support, unless we gave them tools to ask questions that would elicit this information?”

With a new interview protocol in hand, Sherman and Saunders worked with a team at the University of Virginia to build a simulation, voiced by actors, that students could use to practice interviewing.



Beth A. Sherman and Shari Saunders

“We created an African American family where the mother had died nine months earlier, following childbirth,” Sherman explains. The rest of the family comprised a father, daughter, infant son, and grandmother, all with complex, intersectional identities. The collaborators chose this scenario in part to highlight the trauma of Black women dying at disproportionate rates during childbirth, and also to emphasize how Black families and their communities survive and persist in the face of such traumas. “We wanted to focus on how the family was, with despair not being an option, because they had to keep taking care of the children, household, and finding a way to deal with the grief of senselessly losing a wife, mother, and daughter, and move forward in their lives,” Sherman says.

Sherman and Saunders piloted the simulation with three student groups last year, and they will be rolling it out as part of the Trauma-Informed Practice course in fall 2023. Students will interact individually with the simulation to practice the interview protocol and will then come together and share learnings with one another.

“Using a simulated family allows students to practice with the option to ‘do no harm,’” Sherman says. Of critical importance, “they are practicing in a way where they are not impacting actual individuals. These are avatars. Actors.” The Trauma-Informed Practice class has an enrollment of more than 100 social work, nursing, and education students. “People are very interested in trauma-informed practice right now,” Sherman says. “It’s very exciting. Being able to integrate anti-racism and radical healing into the practice pieces of the mini-certificate is an important step forward.” ■



Using Forum Theatre as a Teaching Tool

ASHLEY E. CURETON, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL WORK, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, AND ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES, MARSAL FAMILY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

ROSALVA OSORIO COOKSY, MSW 2006, FIELD FACULTY AND LEO LECTURER, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

KEY INNOVATION

"Difficult conversations about power, privilege, and oppression are an essential part of social work education. However, many social work students feel ill-equipped and overwhelmed by the prospect of initiating difficult conversations, [a feeling] generally rooted in miscommunication, the power differential between students and faculty, and limited skills.

"A Forum Theatre performance was implemented to offer students and faculty concrete strategies on how to engage in difficult conversations around 'isms' (e.g., racism, sexism, and classism) that arise in social work settings."

The impetus for this innovation came directly from social work students. Ashley Cureton and Rosalva Osorio Cooksy belong to the Promoting Action for Intersectional Social Justice, or PRAXIS, committee at the School of Social Work. PRAXIS has student participants, and they raised the issue of how to have the "difficult conversations" they are told are de rigueur in social work.

How could students engage faculty, staff, and community members in conversations around "isms" (racism, classism, sexism, ageism, ableism); diversity, equity, and inclusion; and power, privilege, and oppression? Such conversations are essential to social work education, but students may hesitate to initiate them. They may be wary of the power differentials between themselves and faculty and staff.

"A student is in their field placement for a total of 912 hours," Osorio Cooksy says, "practicing how to be a social worker in the community. They're going to be having hard conversations out there, including with supervisors, clients, peers, and other professionals. We were really interested in this."

As the two collaborators brainstormed, Cureton brought her arts and theater experience to bear on the question of how students could practice initiating and holding challenging conversations. The idea that surfaced was to train students using Forum Theatre.

Forum Theatre, a technique created by Brazilian practitioner, drama theorist, and political activist Augusto Boal, engages "spect-actors"—members of the audience brought up onstage—in problem-solving strategies. "We wanted to infuse the arts into the social work curriculum and profession, and we thought Forum Theatre might be a tactic to do that," says Cureton.



Ashley E. Cureton and Rosalva Osorio Cooksy

Cureton, Osorio Cooksy, and artist in residence Lisa Jo Epstein held an intensive three-day training for 13 students, who learned Forum Theatre techniques and developed a script based on their classroom and field experiences. Ultimately, students performed their script at an event open to the entire school. In line with the Forum Theatre format, audience members were invited to be spect-actors—to get up on stage and redirect the dialogue, improvising their own ideas of how challenging conversations might play out, and drawing the other actors into this.

To take one example, a group of international students acted out a scene showing how they felt ignored by faculty and peers in classrooms and field placement settings. After presenting the problem, the students acted out a possible intervention: they portrayed themselves connecting, building a supportive community, and inserting their identities into class discussions. Spect-actors with identities similar to the student actors were then invited to act out the same scene, improvising other possible interventions to support marginalized international students. "It really is an interactive, collective experience," says Cureton. "Faculty can incorporate Forum Theatre principles into their classrooms and field context. Not only is it going to impact students' experiences in our programs, it will inform research in this area moving forward." ■

AI

THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB?

Brian Perron is our human in the loop

BY DAVID PRATT

Prof. Robert Taylor curates a series of periodic trainings at the School for early social work career professionals. Prof. Brian Perron has for some time contributed talks on technology. Perron's topic this year? The pros and cons of using artificial intelligence in quantitative and qualitative research.

Perron spoke about social work research in the era of large language models, that is, generative AI, the type that creates new content (as opposed to discriminative AI, which primarily classifies existing data.). Most of us know generative AI by the name ChatGPT, though there are also Bard (Google), Claude (Anthropic), and many others. When asked what these models can actually do, "I recommend that people test-drive the models for themselves," Perron says. "Build your own understanding of what a model can and cannot do. Learn the art and science of giving prompts to the platform."

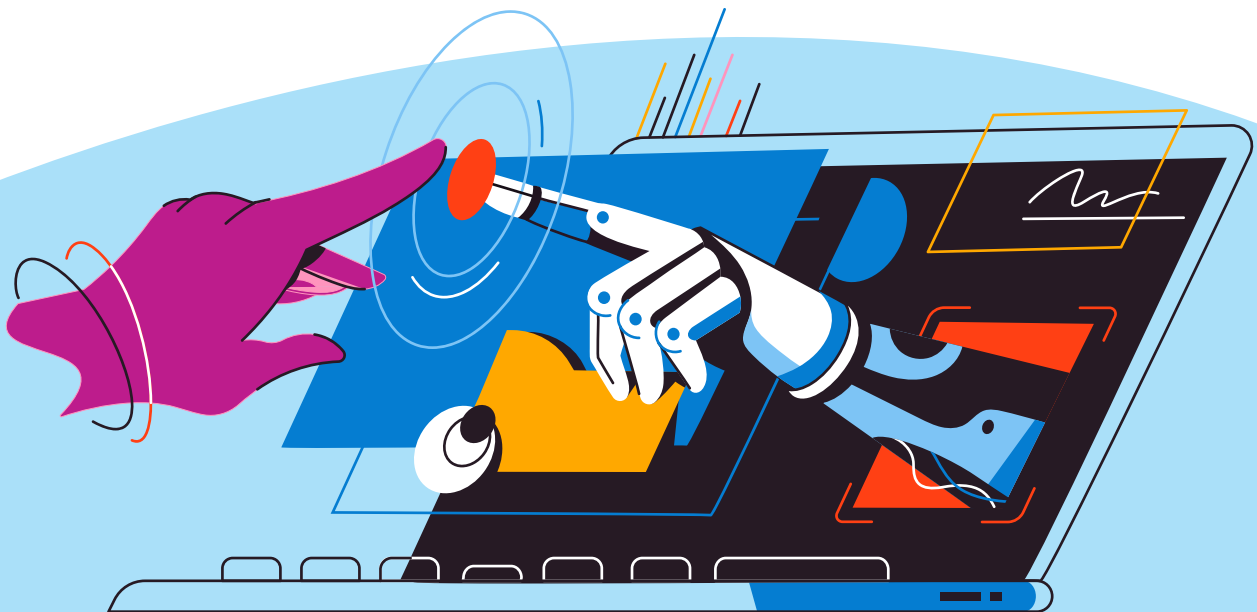
Soon, one will see limitless, almost dizzying possibilities. "AI provides some amazing tools for writing code," Perron says. "I have been more efficient and effective in my data analysis, because AI helps me generate, debug, and optimize code much faster." Perron's own tools of choice

are GPT-4 for writing code, and, for text analysis, Claude, because of the amount of input it can accept.

AI can also have a high accuracy rate for translating code from one programming language to another, and it can also clean up code, comment on it, and even help the user learn code. Perron cites in particular Code Interpreter, a Python-based ChatGPT plug-in that lets you upload and analyze data using natural language (that is, any human

"We should not approach AI with fear. The sooner people learn about it, the better. We don't want scholars to have discrepancies in their AI knowledge."

language that has developed organically, through use, repetition, and change, rather than been built). "You tell the model what you want it to do," Perron explains, "and it will translate your natural language into actual code and analyze the data." In Perron's data



courses, students—even those without a background in data—use AI to solve problems more quickly than before.

All very good. But aren't we supposed to be shocked, shocked about the dangers of artificial intelligence? Whom will it replace? Will it make fools of us? In social work specifically, will it jeopardize clients?

Perron agrees that there are challenges. "You should not be exposing these models to sensitive data," he says. "You are sending data and information to the cloud, to the companies that manage the platforms, who can view it, keep it, even use it. Your protections are limited." Perron recommends reviewing user agreements, however long and complicated.

Those tut-tutting over AI may also say that it generates natural language that is flat and lacks situational awareness. It has no voice but a kind of drone, and unsupervised AI models, lacking contextual understanding, may give users inappropriate or even dangerous information. The possibility of using AI as a therapeutic tool—a bridge to which we have not yet actually come—is discussed elsewhere in this magazine, in pieces on Profs. Lindsay Bornheimer (page 19) and Matthew Smith (page 7).

"The tasks AI does best are specific ones for which there are huge amounts of training data," Perron says. In the case of writing code, for example, the models have been trained on huge volumes of existing code. Some AI models have produced unexpected creative ideas, and Perron believes that AI can help researchers brainstorm concepts, hypotheses, and solutions. Perron designates ChatGPT as the most capable of the models, but emphasizes that all models depend on one's ability to prompt creatively. In the end, though, Perron says, "AI is not going to replace the human in the loop. There are always things the model has not seen, on which it has not been trained."

AI also creates opportunities for qualitative analysis, since we possess large language models trained on enormous amounts of text. Social work research itself generates much unstructured text—often in the form of interviews—and it can take a long time to process. AI can quickly transcribe, summarize, and search text, and perform entity recognition, finding themes the researcher wishes to extract from texts. But ethical



Brian Perron

issues still remain around sensitive data. "You can overcome some of these problems," Perron says, "by running smaller language models locally, like LLaMa and Alpaca." At the moment, though, to run these, one needs a powerful desktop computer and the technical skills to perform the installations.

"We should not approach AI with fear," Perron says. "Some skepticism is healthy, but it will soon be integrated into any and every part of life that offers opportunities to embed technology. So the sooner people learn about it, the better. We don't want scholars to have great discrepancies in terms of their AI knowledge."

This is a real possibility. AI technology has developed so rapidly that we do not have a curriculum for training researchers in it. "It will take great initiative to make that shift," Perron says, "because the tools and the skills needed are changing so fast." ChatGPT-2 was released in February 2019; GPT-3.5 arrived in March 2022; and GPT-4 in March 2023. Says Perron, "Never before have I had such difficulty staying current."

As for the possibility that AI will soon outsmart us or turn on us? "There is a lot of discussion about AI coming close to being sentient," Perron says. "But I look at it simply as a tool. When working with technology, you should always seek the right tool for the right job. AI can be a great tool for many tasks, but not all." ■

Celebrating Art in Research: A Self-Healing and Social Justice Variety Show

And Did We Mention There Was Cake?



Left: the perfect way to celebrate the hard work, energy, joy, and courage that went into the variety show.

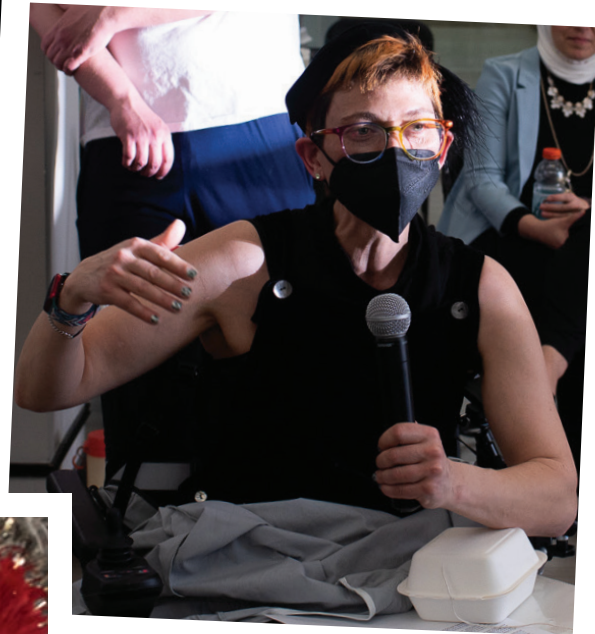
Music! Dance! Balloons! Cake! A piñata! A cathartic, end-of-term "pity party"....

"It was a happening," said one staff member. "It was divine madness!"

Said Associate Dean Rogério M. Pinto (widely rumored to be the cause of the madness): "In my entire career, I have never seen anything like it!" One participant called it, "A new way of sharing art and addressing social justice." Another trumpeted a seven-word manifesto for the day: "Art should be everywhere, accessible to everyone!"

So what was our Self-Healing and Social Justice Art Collective up to in the School of Social Work lobby on April 12, 2023? A variety show! More than 100 faculty, staff, and students from across the university gathered to see members of the Collective perform, to take a whack (or two or 10) at that piñata...and to share that cake.

As part of his drive to integrate the arts into social work practice and research, Pinto founded the Collective just before the COVID pandemic hit. Those joining him built and sustained a unique bond online. They articulated a mission, soon transitioned to in-person meetings, and ultimately found a collective mode of expression. Actually, two modes: the performance, including dance, poetry, performance art, and an audio work housed in the first-floor reflection room, was complemented by a Photovoice exhibition in the hallway outside the Office of Student Services. Members of the Collective had taken photos in



**“Art should be everywhere,
accessible to everyone!”**



response to a prompt about how they healed from trauma and injustice. The goal wasn't "the perfect shot," but rather capturing individual emotions and stories. Speakers in the hallway played a sound collage of the artists' reflections on their process. In the lobby, the bursting piñata capped the variety show, and the photos stayed up several more days.

"The event inspired everyone," says Prof. Beth Sherman, who spoke to the audience about her 30 years of dedicated work at the school. "I have never seen that kind of energy around a stage—people performing, reading stories, dancing, talking to each other, sharing food, and cheering for the Collective. That's the spirit we need post pandemic. The arts are one way we can heal ourselves and make the physical space of the school relevant again."

Top: Gwynneth VanLaven, MSW '24 launches "Pity! Party?!"

Center: Lisa Michaels, MSW '23 swings at the piñata.

Bottom: Sreyashi Dey, MSW '23 performs her dance work "Ananta, the Infinite."



“With art we can heal ourselves and make the physical space of the school relevant again.”



This Art Collective event was made possible in part through the generosity of Ms. Martelle Chapital-Smith, MSW '86. We offer our thanks to her, and to any donors who choose to support this important work!

Top: Prof. Pinto finds the perfect little black hat!
Center: expressive, playful, and celebratory at “Pity! Party?!” Bottom: “Washing in Comfort,” choreography by Heidi Schmitz, MSW '19; dancers Heidi Schmitz and Sophia Schwartz, BFA '23, U-M Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design.

WELCOME GREER AND CANDACE!

"Social work is in the middle of an effort to integrate art practices into the research that we do," says associate dean for research Rogério M. Pinto.

As part of the university's anti-racism cluster hiring initiative, Pinto, and colleagues in social work and the performing arts, pursued a cluster hire for four professors who integrate the arts into their research. Two professors were hired by the U-M School of Music, Theatre & Dance (SMTD), and two by the School of Social Work.

And here they are...

Welcome to Greer Hamilton and M. Candace Christensen!

Greer A. Hamilton, MSW, PhD, is a place-based researcher who examines how systems of oppression are embedded into the built environment and impact people's health, well-being, and use of public spaces. She uses community-engaged and arts-based approaches to understand study participants' experiences with places.

M. Candace Christensen, MSW, PhD, takes a critical feminist approach to community-engaged, qualitative, arts-based research methodologies that prevent and respond to gendered, racial, and anti-LGBTQ+ violence. Their commitment to these approaches is grounded in their positionalities as a Femme genderqueer, polysexual artist-activist and survivor of sexual violence.

Hamilton and Christensen will research and teach how the arts can be robust platforms for addressing racism and advancing social justice. "We will situate U-M at the forefront of combining theory and practice to articulate how the arts reflect, shape, and archive cultural ideologies and how, in turn, communities and individuals can advance social justice," says Pinto.

Sarah Shields, a third-semester nontraditional MSW student who was a member of the faculty search committee for these hires, sees the initiative as part of a broader social work movement that has significant potential for revolutionizing the care social workers can provide.

"What is interesting and innovative about this faculty search is that we are centering the arts, and arts-based healing, within social justice," says Shields. "Art can reach people in a way that other methods cannot." ■



Greer A. Hamilton (top) and M. Candace Christensen (below)



secret history

AN MSW STUDENT FROM NORWAY RESEARCHED HOW THE HOLOCAUST AFFECTED NORWEGIAN JEWS

BY DAVID PRATT

Jørgen Reberg, who received his MSW this year, was a member of our school's Jewish Communal Leadership Program (JCLP).

But Reberg is not Jewish.

He came to the United States from his native Norway at 19 to visit his father. The experience of a new country and the possibility of a new educational system appealed to the young man. "I wanted to learn about the world," he says. "Studying in the United States seemed an excellent way to do so."

At Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI, a class on the Holocaust introduced Reberg to the Visual History Archive at Steven Spielberg's USC Shoah Foundation. Reberg realized he had never heard narratives of Jews who lived through the Holocaust in Norway.

Norway today is home to 2,500 Jews, most in and around Oslo, 300 miles south of tiny, rural Meråker, where Reberg grew up. "I had no Jewish classmates," he says, "and I never heard about the Holocaust in school." Still, at the time, "Jew" as a slur was often heard amongst Christian schoolchildren. ("Christian" is used here in a general, descriptive way. Norwegian religious life and its designations have nuances beyond the scope of this article.)

Norway's 1814 constitution was considered one of the world's most liberal at the time, but it forbade the entry of Ashkenazi Jews into the mostly Lutheran country. This "Jewish Clause" was repealed in 1851, but, for the next century, immigration to Norway remained mostly Swedes and Danes.

The Nazis invaded Norway on April 9, 1940 and controlled it until May 1945. Reberg found Norwegian Jews' testimonies in the USC Shoah Foundation archive (vha.usc.edu/home)—some from refugees who arrived in Norway after the war and some from Norwegian-born Jews. The testimonies had been neither indexed nor translated. Native speakers of Norwegian are hard to find outside of Norway. Reberg contacted the foundation and volunteered to help index and translate testimonies. He began in 2018 and felt an immediate rapport. "I felt an emotional connection as if I was in the room with them," he says. "This can happen when interviewees talk about an environment the researcher knows, the same buildings and parks."

Reberg next sought a Master of Social Work program and found that U-M's had perhaps the most active, engaged Jewish communal leadership group in the country. Reberg was drawn. He enrolled in both our MSW program and in the JCLP.

At the School of Social Work, Reberg began a qualitative study of the testimonies, looking at the written and

Top, left to right, photos used by permission of the Jødisk Museum Trondheim, Norway: unveiling of a memorial for victims of the Holocaust at the Jewish cemetery, Trondheim, 1947, photo by Schrøder; Julius Paltiel (who later survived Auschwitz), center, in a class picture from the 1930s, photographer unknown; Julius Paltiel with older brother Idar (murdered at Birkenau in 1943), shown in the 1920s, photographer unknown.

spoken language in relation to its social contexts. Doing an independent study project with Associate Dean Rogério M. Pinto, Reberg created new codes that related less to the historical (troop movements or the layout of a barracks) and more to survivors' experiences seen through a social work lens ("What was it like?" "How did you survive?"). Reberg's research question: Within the testimonies, were there narratives that had previously received little to no consideration from Holocaust scholarship?

Reberg found his JCLP experience rewarding in many ways. "I look forward to Shabbat," he says. "It's powerful to be there and hear the songs; it stays with me through the week."

"The questions that the interviewees were originally asked revealed certain power imbalances," Reberg says. "Which narratives ended up being elevated and which did not?" Survivors' common experiences—displacement and deportation, for example—are extremely important, but are not all there is to the Holocaust. The exceptional and unexpected and their contexts can be just as revealing. Those contexts—and the researcher's ethical lens—will determine methodologies.

Among other things, "JCLP helped to make me more familiar with the nuances of discussions going on in the American Jewish community today," Reberg says. For example, JCLP students often discussed gender issues and the significance of the social pressure to have Jewish children. (Many branches of Judaism recognize only those with Jewish mothers as Jewish.) "Without those discussions in JCLP," says Reberg, "I would not have picked up on references in the testimonies to Jewish continuity after the war, to having Jewish children, and the implications all that has in relation to gender roles. It's not explicit in the testimonies.

But in spite of cultural pressure to have children after the war, some Jews chose not to, and others still were not able to, for various reasons." These are "negative cases" in the dataset, examples of narratives we hear less about in Holocaust scholarship. Other examples of negative

cases Reberg found include married people separated from their spouses by the war, but who, counter to their communities' expectations, felt ambivalent about being reunited; and young children who, due to certain wartime circumstances, chose to or were forced to reverse roles with their parents.

Some Jewish interviewees questioned their relationship to Norway. In the testimonies they refer to their neighbors as "regular Norwegians," suggesting a disconnect between being Norwegian and being Jewish. "This is an issue right now throughout Europe," Reberg points out. "How are religion and national identity related?" Today, one-third of the population of Oslo comprises immigrants or children of immigrants. But Norway, like the rest of Europe, is experiencing a wave of xenophobia and racism that worries Reberg. It does not necessarily register the same way with his countrymen. "Many Norwegians think that race and racism are American constructs," he says. "They think a Norwegian can't be racist."

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Reberg found his JCLP experience rewarding in many ways. In addition to finding context for his research, he encountered leaders representing all aspects of the American Jewish community, and he also found a

personal element. Where he grew up, Jewish rituals and beliefs were all but unknown. "Now I look forward to Shabbat," he says. "It's powerful to be there and hear the songs; it stays with me through the week."



Jørgen Robertson Reberg, MSW 2023; pathway: Program Evaluation and Applied Research; Jewish Communal Leadership Program

Reberg also praises his mentors. "Without mentorship, I could not do this research. A mentor facilitates your ability to come up with your own ideas. Prof. Pinto helps me find my own direction in my research, without telling me what to do." Of JCLP's director, Prof. Karla Goldman, Reberg says, "She and I have great discussions. We reach conclusions that neither of us could have reached on our own—the product of true dialogue, not simply a two-way monologue.

"Judaism has a rich history of philosophical thought," Reberg says. "The tradition of reflecting and questioning goes to my own proclivities. Even questioning the holy, regardless of what conclusion you get to. You might be reassured...or you might go in the opposite direction." ■

thank you for being a friend

Who advised and inspired Rogério Pinto in his time as associate dean for research? Here, he thanks those who advised him. BY DAVID PRATT

"We have a great opportunity to shape existing resources and develop new ones," Prof. Rogério Pinto wrote to eight colleagues, soon after he assumed the role of associate dean for research (ADR) at the School of Social Work. "I am asking each of you to help me think about short- and long-term issues concerning the ADR office. You are a group with diverse research portfolios, so you represent very well a faculty with vastly differing resources and needs." Prof. Lynn Videka, then dean of the school, had encouraged Pinto to assemble this group, to guide him in moving the school's research efforts and research office forward.

Over the next six years, then, Pinto would be advised, formally and informally, individually and occasionally in group meetings, by Profs. Lindsay Bornheimer, Shawna Lee, Ethan Park, Beth Glover Reed, Trina Shanks, Beth Sherman, Matthew Smith, and Addie Weaver.

"You can't be associate dean for research in a vacuum," Pinto told *AHEAD* in August 2023, as his tenure was coming to an end. "You constantly have to take the pulse of the faculty, but you have few opportunities to address them or hear from them all at once. So you choose specific people that represent different domains of research. I wanted advisors who could help me because of their innovations and because of who they were." Pinto also chose individuals diverse in what they taught, "because a connection between teaching and research is extremely important."

This informal committee helped Pinto in many ways. "Some helped me identify external reviews for internal pilot grants," he says. "Some provided feedback on grants. Some provided ideas about events, like World AIDS Day in 2018. Some suggested content for *AHEAD*!" During COVID, Pinto sometimes went for walks with his

advisors, winding through the streets of Ann Arbor's west side while sorting out issues that arose out of the daily work of the ADR office as well as disruptions brought about by the pandemic.

As of last August, just one issue remained: how to thank the eight advisors. The answer is in the pages that follow. Each of the eight was given their own page in this magazine—to say whatever they wanted about their research, their careers, the state of the discipline of social work, the state of our society, and so on.

So come for a walk. From Arborview over to West Park, past the big tree and the pond, up through Water Hill to St. Thomas Cemetery, and back. Let's hear about co-production, "missing middles," clinical faculty doing research, and much more. It was rare that Pinto actually got to meet with all eight advisors at once. But you get to do so now. In that way, we are thanking *you* for reading *AHEAD*....



LINDSAY BORNHEIMER is innovating in very good company...

Lindsay Bornheimer focuses her research on suicide driven by serious mental illness, especially schizophrenia spectrum disorders. "My mission is to get treatment into the hands of more people," Bornheimer says. "So, first of all, how do we assess who is at risk? We need to go beyond asking clients if they are feeling suicidal. Not everyone who has those feelings is going to answer yes to that question."

Bornheimer also seeks to streamline treatment, making it more accessible and usable. Many people lack regular access to evidence-informed treatment. But technology can improve access. Bornheimer is part of the School of Social Work's Treatment Innovation and Dissemination Research Group (TIDR), which emphasizes technological solutions to mental health challenges; this includes a commitment to low-cost, sustainable interventions and working with underserved individuals.

Bornheimer's current suicide prevention study uses "engagement enhancers." Between appointments with a live therapist, clients receive encouraging text messages, reminding them to practice cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques they have learned from an intervention Bornheimer created. They also watch short videos that feature a young man, André, who inspires others by seeing a therapist and practicing CBT techniques to silence negative voices.

"We can take what we learn from clients' responses to these technological enhancers," Bornheimer says, "and eventually add more technology in delivery of the treatment. Right now, in my current study, live providers deliver everything but the enhancers. More technology would be a positive direction to go."

Bornheimer has found the School of Social Work to be a perfect home for her research, and for her. "I came here because people were conducting groundbreaking, innovative research, including intervention research. U-M has so much support for me, so many departments and centers, so many relationships with agencies and organizations."

Bornheimer's current intervention is being tested at Washtenaw County Community Mental Health, which

has a strong relationship with the university. Bornheimer also has an appointment in Michigan Medicine's Department of Psychiatry; several faculty in psychiatry are co-investigators on her current grant. She is also a faculty member at the U-M Depression Center and Injury Prevention Center.

AHEAD had an important question for Bornheimer. If "more technology would be a positive direction," what about artificial intelligence? "AI makes me nervous," Bornheimer says. "Social workers go through a program, get a degree, and gain skills. I am not sure how replaceable that is."



Bornheimer calls AI-delivered therapy (should it come to pass) "messaging without a protocol." She asks, "What parameters are there to make sure AI messaging is accurate, effective, and safe? We would need to train and contain technology. AI on its own could probably not pick up on clinical skills. But we are going to see technology evolve, and there are ways in which it can be helpful in treatment."

Bornheimer references her own study. "I use technology to enhance engagement," she says, "but I developed that language and messaging. I am licensed and I have expertise. If someone asked ChatGPT, for example, about a method of suicide, it might say, 'Oh, yes, do this, take this pill.' We would want to transmit to AI some of the clinical skills that enable humans to engage in a conversation—the way we would say to a client or patient, 'Tell me what's going on.' And we try to be helpful and preventive, rather than giving someone tools that clinically we would not want them to have."

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Given the support Bornheimer felt the school was giving her for her research, *AHEAD* wanted to know how the heart of the operation, the school's research office, was doing. "They take on so much of that work not visible day to day," Bornheimer says. "So much comes before submission of a grant and after the grant is awarded. Behind every person is another person helping them do what they are doing." ■

SHAWNA LEE isn't talking about research...or is she?

Lately, the School of Social Work's research office has helped Shawna Lee in ways not having to do with research per se. Lee has indeed built a successful career researching parenting risk behaviors, child maltreatment, and community-based interventions. But she has also, since 2019, directed our Program Evaluation Group (PEG).

PEG was created when former dean Laura Lein, upon assuming the deanship in 2009, went on a listening tour of local nonprofits to see how our school might help them. The answer: Program evaluation...please! These organizations needed to report results to funders and others, but they had little budget to conduct such evaluations.

The university classifies PEG's work as research, though Lee argues it mostly is not. This puts PEG in an unusual position. "For a while, we were entirely on the school's dollar," Lee says. "Returns on program evaluation are low. Meanwhile, the school's research office had to administer these small grants. My mission was to make us less reliant on school funds. I navigated a reasonable understanding with the research office."

Now, our research office has increased flexibility for PEG and its clients by moving some smaller projects to a procurement status. "The research office did a great job," Lee says. "We are in a place financially where we can better offset the research office's effort. We are paying our way a bit more."

As for the good that PEG is doing in the area, it comes in many forms at many levels.

For example, PEG is currently supporting the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development on an equity self-assessment for local nonprofits. "We have about 23 nonprofits, of all sizes," Lee explains, "looking at how they incorporate client or user input regarding services delivered, leadership, inclusivity, and diversity—even how inclusive their physical spaces are."

PEG is implementing this self-study process and making proposals of its own for these organizations to advance

equity. PEG and the county selected an assessment tool called the Protocol for Culturally Responsive Organizations (PCRO). PEG is facilitating workshops and conversations between the local organizations and the developers of the PCRO, and is also providing the nonprofits with technical assistance and capacity building.

"Our role is as a thought partner," says Lee. "We held a summit where the organizations shared their goals. We wanted a more unified vision of equity. Now, the Protocol and the facilitation of equity are more embedded in the context of Washtenaw County."

PEG is also working at the state level, helping Michigan evaluate the impact of its Social Determinants of Health plan, involving nearly 100 different programs to enhance equity and reduce social barriers to health care.

PEG has assisted the School of Social Work itself, facilitating the evaluation components of re-accreditation. It has helped U-M's schools of dentistry and public health, Michigan Medicine, and our own school evaluate DEI activities.

"PEG's work is applied," Lee explains. "We work in the community, as a team. My academic research is mostly just me. I type papers and analyze data. I like working on community projects, where you see outcomes and impact faster. We fill a big need. If a community organization is starting out and needs funding, they have to demonstrate that they're reaching the client base and having good outcomes. Supporting that journey is rewarding."

Lee is of course not giving up research. Recently, a colleague, Prof. Julie Ma at the University of Michigan-Flint, was awarded a National Institutes of Health R15 grant to study child development and well-being from more than 60 low- and middle-income countries. Ma and Lee, along with Professor Andrew Grogan-Kaylor here at our school, will focus on how gender inequality can perpetuate family violence. "It's a macro to micro study," Lee says. "It's really exciting." As Lee begins her "typing and analyzing," be sure to watch this space! ■



ETHAN PARK is moving a marginalized field of study to the center...

Ethan Park earned his undergraduate degree in his native Korea, then came to the United States to earn an MSW at Washington University in St. Louis. He became interested in the organizational aspect of social work, so he added an MBA and went to work as a corporate strategy consultant. He heard repeated user and client demands for more relevant and transparent service experiences.

Working toward a PhD in social service administration from the University of Chicago, Park needed an agenda for his dissertation, and that idea of user/client engagement came back to him, in a different context. "I thought social workers might be better able to anticipate needs from users who have limited means," he says. If social service agencies had better organizational policies and programs in place, Park thought, they could better demonstrate equity and could make better services more available to the most vulnerable and marginalized.

Park had found little language or theory around social workers involving clients in decisions on organization-level policies. In the public administration literature, however, Park learned about "co-production," which refers to users of services participating in and influencing the responsive services offered by providers.

Park subsequently participated in an evaluation of the State of California's extended foster care program. California was mandated to invite youth into the care decision-making process to review goals and help plan services that would respond to young people's needs in education, employment, and housing.

"My work in California," Park says, "looked at how national politics, service availability, and county child welfare departments' collaborations with other service systems affected youth access to care." Park's work, then, demonstrated the roles of the public policies, rules, guidelines, and public opinion by which the state government abided.

When Park sought his first academic job in 2017, he found only three social work programs hiring organization scholars. The U-M School of Social Work was one. "I knew Michigan would have strong support for organizational

scholarship," Park says. "The School of Social Work was a powerhouse producing organizational scholars in the '70s and '80s. There is also a tradition across the U-M campus emphasizing organizational scholarship."



At the School of Social Work, Park worked with Prof. Rogério Pinto on social service agency collaboration in the delivery of HIV services in New York City. "In this case," Park explains, "collaboration between providers is a precondition of provider/client co-production. Providers will leverage each other's capacities and resources to provide better services to those with HIV."

Park says he can bring the idea of co-production to any health or social service. He is particularly interested in community development, personal finance, and employment. Currently, he is also working with Prof. Trina Shanks on a project funded by the American Rescue Plan Act, which provides relief from the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on governments, businesses, and individuals. Park's intent is "to learn more about community-based organizations and to collaborate with them to develop their capacities and articulate their value propositions."

Park is also interested in the role of evidence in research. "There are types of evidence that lie outside the 'scientific' idea of evidence produced by randomized controlled trials," he says. He cites user testimonies, theory, anecdotal evidence, clinical insights, policies, values, and more.

Park is deeply involved in social work's scholarly community, including service as a treasurer and board member of the Society for Social Work and Research, an Organization & Management Cluster co-chair, and Special Interest Group co-convenor. Recently, the co-convenors launched Scholars of Organization Management Exchange (SOME), a set of efforts that includes scholarly exchanges, professional development, and social events. "We created SOME," Park says, "because organization scholarship is still marginalized in social work. Emerging scholars have a difficult time finding mentors and collaborators within their institutions. We are out to change that!" ■

BETH SHERMAN is doing research – and she wants you to know...

Professor Beth Sherman is a longtime member of our clinical faculty. She is also a researcher. “As a clinical faculty,” she says, “I had been a *consumer* of research, a translator of findings for my students. Now, though, the School of Social Work is encouraging clinical faculty to see themselves as *generating* knowledge.”

The change Sherman sees is part of a national conversation about what scholarship is. Our school leadership, Sherman says, “encourages contributions from clinical faculty in defining what research is and how it can be best disseminated.”

For our annual Lightning Talks, clinical and research faculty submitted abstracts about their innovations, and clinical faculty, whose innovations may involve teaching practice, are encouraged to “take this work seriously in terms of creating new knowledge,” in Sherman’s words. (Sherman’s 2023 Lightning Talk is summarized on page 8.) “The school’s research office has helped me understand that I am not writing and presenting just to advance my career, but out of a duty to share what I’m doing so other people can learn from it.”



“We are teaching anti-racist, anti-oppressive trauma-informed practice in ways that make it explicit and visible,” Sherman says.

Sherman has been collaborating for some time with Shari Saunders, Clinical Professor Emerita at the U-M Marsal Family School of Education, on how theoretical ideas can be translated into materials and practices in schools. How, for example, can trauma-informed theory be translated into trauma-informed practice in a classroom? What would public school teachers, nurses, and social workers actually do? “Clinical faculty are well positioned to address this,” Sherman says (one answer is eschewing punitive practices, such as suspensions), “as a teaching contribution *and* as knowledge to be published or presented at research conferences. That creates a different space for me to think about my work.”

Sherman and Saunders co-created simulations—or “sims,” animations in which live actors voice avatars in real time—to make the trauma-informed practice explicit and visible as part of a joint collaboration between the School of Social Work, the U-M School of Nursing, and the U-M Marsal Family School of Education. “Our students will not be doing their first practice on real families and kids,” Sherman explains. “This helps us with ‘doing no harm.’” Saunders agrees, adding: “Practicing with an avatar family will help students gather information to better understand the family’s experiences through a radical healing lens. We use a radical healing framework in the interprofessional Trauma-Informed Practice course to support the development of anti-racist practice.”

Another project, co-led by Sherman and by Prof. Daicia Price, also clinical faculty, gives students practice with avatars. “Dr. Price and I were encouraged to develop child-focused simulation,” Sherman says. “We created a biracial child whose depression manifests as irritability and problems at school.”

The team hopes to take the additional step of building out the child’s family. “We are hoping to have the child’s parents talking about *their* concerns,” Sherman says. “In the simulation world, multiple sims interacting with each other is a bit of innovation. But there’s often a whole cohort raising a child, so you will have a few people in the room, seeing things differently.”

Sherman is also a content specialist for TIPPS (Trauma-Informed Programs and Practices for Schools), directed by Prof. Todd Herrenkohl at the School of Social Work. TIPPS is also involved in community collaborations on implementing trauma-informed practices in schools. “We are teaching anti-racist, anti-oppressive trauma-informed practice in ways that make it explicit and visible,” Sherman says. “I would like to write and present about this.”

It also helps that the research arm of the school is committed to clinical faculty engaging in research. “It enriches my feelings about taking my own work seriously,” Sherman says. “The school is clear that what I am doing is important and needs to be shared. I now belong to that group that shares knowledge beyond the classroom.” ■

MATTHEW SMITH knows some people you can talk to about a job...

In 2012, Prof. Matthew Smith created an online simulation featuring a fictional human resources employee named Molly. The simulation served those with serious mental illnesses who wished to practice job interview skills.

"We reached out to help underserved and marginalized communities with low employment rates," Smith says. Molly engaged the "applicant" with prerecorded questions and information. The applicant could choose their responses from an onscreen menu.

A coach in the corner of the screen gave a thumbs-up to cooperative, engaged responses. The list also included inappropriate responses. These would get you a thumbs down.

Created in partnership with the Maryland-based company SIMmersion, the platform was subsequently tested with those soon to be released from prison. Smith's team is now finishing a federally funded evaluation of the Molly simulation at the Vocational Villages, located within the Parnall and Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facilities in Jackson, MI and Ionia, MI, respectively.

The team next partnered with the autism community—including students and staff from Ann Arbor schools—to create Rita and Travis, two interviewers whose pre-recorded questions were geared toward autistic youth and young adults seeking to reduce job-interview anxieties. Like Molly, Rita and Travis ask standard job interview questions—"What is something you are good at?"—and users choose from a list of set responses. Rita and Travis have served over 300 students, and NIMH has approved a grant for a controlled validation study for autistic students in 16 schools.

Smith's team began the Rita-and-Travis process by sharing the Molly simulation with 25 autistic youth and young adults and asking how they would modify it to meet their needs. For example, Molly came with a text-heavy online curriculum. The youth said they would prefer more images and bullet points. Molly's questions had up to 15 possible responses. The youth said six to eight would be more manageable.

Representatives of the autism community then asked Smith's team to build a tool to help youth sustain jobs, by practicing social skills in the workplace. The team is now testing WorkChat, which involves participants in a virtual workday, to help them navigate on-the-job tasks and

sharpen their interpersonal skills with virtual customers, coworkers, and supervisors. (For a deeper look at WorkChat, see page 7.)

Smith and his team presented the WorkChat idea to their diversity advisory board for advice on how

to improve inclusiveness so that autistic BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) youth and young adults would feel validated. They presented a WorkChat prototype to 18 autistic youth and young adults, whose feedback went into the final version.

Smith would like to test WorkChat with other underserved and marginalized populations, such as adults with schizophrenia spectrum disorders. "We want to see if WorkChat is an evidence-based service that can support different populations in keeping jobs," Smith says.

One more question must be asked these days: what about using artificial intelligence to guide job interview platforms? ChatGPT could come up with questions, and deep-fake technology could produce a realistic interviewer. Smith is skeptical. "You could invest in that," he says, "but would it help people significantly more than what Rita and Travis seem to be doing? Is it worth millions in public funding to reinvent the wheel?"

Most critically, AI would need to be carefully regulated. In scripting Molly for prison work, the team had to account for returning citizens talking about their prior convictions. Molly had to make appropriate, empathic responses.

A social work sensibility, in other words, must preside. Smith's platform offers opportunity and support. It offers hope and realism. It is also practical, using technology to multiply opportunities for society's most vulnerable.

Choose "Thank you" from the pull-down menu and you get a thumbs up! ■

The platform offers opportunity and support. It offers hope and realism. It uses technology to multiply opportunities for society's most vulnerable.



ADDIE WEAVER is helping a population social work has not emphasized enough

Prof. Addie Weaver grew up in a rural community in Pennsylvania. Today, she looks ahead (no pun intended) and also back to that community. In particular, she looks to her church.

"Where I grew up, there were few specialty mental health providers," Weaver says. "But folks in my church with mental health challenges went to the pastor, who had those relationship-building skills."

Weaver majored in sociology and political science at Lycoming College in Williamsport, PA, then spent a year with AmeriCorps, as an intake coordinator at a legal service organization. "People came with housing or custody issues," she says, "but I saw underlying, unmet mental health needs. There were maybe two mental health care options in the entire county, and folks ended up on waiting lists."

Weaver then earned a master's degree in public administration. "I would work toward change through policy," she says. "However, with the incremental approach our country has to policy making, I questioned if I would be able to affect mental health treatment availability." The ethics and values of social work resonated with Weaver. "That was how I could give back to communities like the one I grew up in," she says.

Seeking to close the mental health treatment gap in rural areas, Weaver has created Raising Our Spirits Together (ROST), a rural mental health intervention facilitated by pastors and supported by Entertain Me Well (EMW), a platform co-designed by Weaver and Prof. Joseph Himle. ROST uses cognitive behavioral therapy, with conversations sparked by short, animated videos in which characters face depression, social anxiety, and other challenges like those faced by ROST participants. ROST has finished its randomized controlled trial, and, says Weaver, "preliminary work shows that folks benefited from the treatment and stuck with it. This is exciting, as a major challenge with mental health treatment is keeping people engaged and coming back."

Weaver sees a lot of potential for technology to help rural communities. "Social work has not emphasized enough the perspectives and realities of rural folks," she

says. "We import interventions developed in cities, but rural infrastructures and values are different."

To start, Weaver believes rural communities would have more opportunities with better internet access. Rural areas also have few institutions of higher education, few hospitals, and few brick-and-mortar financial institutions. Better internet could connect such areas to education, health care, and finance. Weaver sees a lot of

"Social work has not emphasized enough the perspectives and realities of rural folks," Weaver says.



promise in our school's online MSW program.

"It engages students from rural areas," she says, "and those students are the most likely to practice in those areas, where we have a shortage of social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists."

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Weaver also took the opportunity to discuss the challenges women face in academic research. "During the lockdown portion of COVID," she recalls, "many women researchers took on even more family and caregiving responsibilities, while still balancing work. I felt an urgency about advancing my research because folks had mental health needs, and with ROST we had an intervention that could help. I also had kids at home, and I often felt I wasn't doing well in my work or family responsibilities. Women researchers may not feel comfortable naming or discussing that, but it has great implications for work-life balance and productivity. We have a way to go in terms of addressing women with caregiving responsibilities in academic spaces."

Still, Weaver feels supported at our school. She has brought her children to community meetings and to the building on snow days. "My kids even popped up on Zoom when I was teaching," she says. "I worried how it would impact my evaluations, but one student shared that she found it inspiring as a female identifying person who hoped one day to have kids herself. I was touched by that." ■

TRINA SHANKS is looking out for the next generation...

From her time as a Rhodes Scholar in the 1990s, Trina Shanks has explored ways to help vulnerable, low- and moderate-income families. Her first solo grant came from the Ford Foundation, in 2012, to study child savings accounts (CSAs) in Michigan. "I was crafting research and finding results with my own design and my own energy," she says. "I saw CSAs allowing families to plan for children's postsecondary education. It was working the way it was supposed to." (Businesses, philanthropy, and/or local or state governments may fund CSAs. For example, the city of St. Louis, MO funds CSAs with parking fines. Businesses like supermarkets may fund CSAs in the form of rebates.)

Shanks wrote papers and reports and informed CSA practice directly. She now belongs to a national CSA advisory group. Elected and appointed officials seek her advice, as do those starting CSA programs. "It feels good to be part of a national conversation," Shanks says. Through a grant from the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan, she is also the state evaluator for CSA programs, funded by the office of Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer.

Shanks's work has had great impact at the state and national levels, but anyone who knows her knows that her name is nearly synonymous with that of the city where she lives: Detroit.

In 2005, then-dean Paula Allen-Meares obtained a multi-million-dollar grant from Detroit's Skillman Foundation. Shanks became co-PI of a youth-focused community development project in six Detroit neighborhoods. Each neighborhood founded a community organization, and four remain strong today. "A lot of new leadership emerged," Shanks says. (The work is summarized here: tinyurl.com/smfba8h.)

In 2017, our school published a strategic plan that included community engagement. Who better to lead that initiative than Shanks? The result: ENGAGE, which works with faculty and students wishing to conduct community-engaged research. One of ENGAGE's strongest projects is the Brightmoor Alliance, which continues

the Skillman work in the Brightmoor neighborhood of Detroit. For the Alliance (brightmooralliance.org), Shanks's team will produce an impact statement, logic model, and proposal for an early childhood program, 6-a-Days, to help parents engage with children through specific daily activities. Her partners include students from the school, ENGAGE, and a community advisory board. "We're helping a community partner go from something grassroots to something researched and documented," Shanks says.

But Shanks could not help but notice that funding for community relationships always ended. "I wanted to be a long-term partner," she says. So she established the Center for Equitable Family and Community Well-Being at the school. When there is interesting work to be done, the Center stays connected to community partners, regardless of funding. Currently, the center has summer youth employment partnerships with the Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation and Connect Detroit, administering 2,000-plus surveys of young people's summer employment experiences. Shanks also chairs the Data, Research, & Evaluation committee for Grow Detroit's Young Talent, with the center as a long-term partner. "We were funded in the past and there were interesting findings," she says. "Rather than drop it, we continue to help with their youth exit survey." (tinyurl.com/mrjhd98)

And sometimes these things happen: the center received a grant to work with the Racial Equity Office (REO) of Washtenaw County, examining the impact of COVID on low-income ZIP codes in Ypsilanti, MI (tinyurl.com/et5hmpsc). When the REO launched their American Rescue Plan-funded projects around racial equity, they asked to partner with Shanks's team on evaluation, leading to a million-dollar grant to the center.

Shanks is now looking to create systems that help young people succeed, with or without family support. Says Shanks, "Building on relationships and policy connections I have, and thinking about innovations like child savings accounts, intentionally pulling all that together in meaningful ways to help young people at the systems level: that's what I'm excited about now!" ■



BETH GLOVER REED wants you to think about “missing middles”...

Beth Glover Reed has been a friend and advisor to me, and this year she reached a very special landmark: retirement. But Beth is not stopping. Feminist thought, power dynamics, intersectionalities...Beth cares about these issues with a passion and talks about them with tremendous energy, urgency, and wonder. So for Beth's thank-you page, I thought I would just give her a prompt—"What feels urgent to you right now?"—and let her expound. Here, then, is Prof. Beth Glover Reed, live and at liberty, August 7, 2023, a time we both will cherish. - RMP

You asked what feels “urgent” to me as I am officially retiring. As you know, most of my practice, research, and teaching has focused on illuminating and changing the interacting forces that create and sustain systems of inequality, and on developing strategies to define and promote critical and transformative justice.

I think we have made progress in identifying forces that create patterns of inequality and strategies to challenge and change these in larger macro societal structures, in systems of meanings that interact with and co-create each other, and in systems of inequality. But meaningful efforts for change come unraveled over time. We need to understand why, and we need to understand how we can nonetheless continue to move forward.

An important domain for education and change work toward justice is the “missing middles”—social processes that connect (that is, they are “in the middle of”) micro and macro systems and the structural, cultural, intra- and interpersonal realms and systems of power. This includes how everyday actions occur—routines, training and supervision, decision-making, implementation steps, and group, family, and organizational and community dynamics. Prof. Patricia Hill Collins, the author of *Black Feminist Thought*, calls this the “disciplinary” domain of power. How can we illuminate, disrupt, and alter these dynamics so that they support change toward justice?

We divide social work into micro and macro systems, and in our individualistic culture, we learn less about the complex social and systemic processes that shape us and shape all social systems, partly because we are taught we

can control our own destinies. Influencing social processes requires particular skills and knowledge—we have to learn to “see,” recognize, challenge, monitor, and change processes in the “here and now,” as they occur.

Examining the temporal domain—how we got where we are—can help to uncover forces that shaped pathways. Mentorship helps. For instance, one of my grandmothers was a social justice activist and worked hard to influence subsequent generations. Other times, we learn through our own circumstances. I came to gender and cultural studies as part of my own survival as a person, as a scholar, and as an activist. As a girl, I was surrounded by many strong women; nonetheless, I was not interested in the roles they played. I had to work to understand forces shaping those roles in order to maintain other aspirations. Experiences with the arts can also illuminate alternatives and can motivate actions and heal. Such strategies are consistent with those developed by Paulo Freire—to raise critical consciousness, envision and act to challenge inequity, and work for justice.

In graduate school, I was fortunate to gain great knowledge, training, and experience in social processes, especially group dynamics and facilitation skills. We used co-facilitation, with a more senior person co-planning and facilitating with a less experienced person. With only two women in the program, I had always co-facilitated with someone who identified with the male gender before I implemented any major training by myself. This experience was shockingly different from earlier ones, and I realized that most of the theory and methods I had been taught were developed in work with mostly male, white, and affluent individuals in various types of groups and social systems.

My skills in recognizing, analyzing, influencing, and facilitating social systems of various sizes—engaging with forces in the middle—have been important in my survival and in achieving my goals. To work for transformative, critical justice, we need to develop a vision of what this could be. If we just whack away at the consequences of oppression, we will probably improve outcomes for many, but we may not move toward the world we want. A vision and implementation of a more just world must include just social processes, filling the “missing middles,” and paying regular, everyday attention to maintaining them. ■





A 21st-CENTURY RESEARCH OFFICE

What Did It Take to Create One
and How Does It Work Day to Day?

Last summer, as Rogério M. Pinto prepared to step down as associate dean for research at the end of 2023, he gathered the research administrative staff he had built over the past six years for a talk about “the 21st-century research office” that he strove to build with them. *AHEAD* was invited to drop by, and of course we had a few questions....

AHEAD: Thank you all for coming together today! Let’s start with what everyone does and how long you have been with the research office.

Deborah Stark-Knight: I’ve been here since March, after 15 years in engineering at UM-Dearborn. I am a research administrator senior.

Jodi Caviani: I am assistant director for financial and research operations. I’ve been here since 2019.

Heidi Madias: I’ve been a research administrator for 16 years; here for two.

Amber Farmer: I’m a senior research administrator. Heidi and I started the same day: August 2, 2021. Before I worked at the medical school in the clinical trial support office.

David Greenberg: I’m a research administrative associate. And I’ve been here for a year and a half.

AHEAD: And of course Associate Dean Pinto, who brought us together to address, well...

Rogério Pinto: Yes, I wanted to leave a record of what the people in the research office do. I believe that today we have a 21st-century research office. We did not have that six years ago.

Above, left to right: Jodi Caviani, Associate Dean Pinto, Amber E. Farmer, Deborah Stark-Knight, Heidi M. Madias, David Greenberg.

AHEAD: And what defines that 21st-century office?

Jodi Caviani: When I came, a lot of research was going on but we didn't have the staffing. We hired more people, and it was a group effort finding efficiencies. Our biggest thing, of course, is submitting grant proposals; that's about 20 percent of what we do. Tracking is crucial, especially for internal proposals. We can pull reports on what we send the U.S. government, but grants through the university or local nonprofits may not be tracked, except by us.



"The beautiful thing is, this team truly helps each other."

Amber Farmer: We are bringing our internal systems up to the current level of technology and reflecting the research needs of the faculty. I would also say that "21st-century office" refers to the hybrid work model, which improves our work-life balance.

Heidi Madias: When I came here, everyone was focused on submitting proposals and making sure there were no problems post-award. But the middle is so important.

Jodi Caviani: We play a large role in getting from the proposal to the awarding of the grant.

Heidi Madias: Our use of a budget template is a good example of efficiency. It is a wonderful tool, because much of what happens in the middle, like Jodi was saying, is budgeting. I had one proposal with eight external sub-awards to be budgeted and the template was very helpful.

AHEAD: What are sub-awards?

Heidi Madias: It's when the principal investigator, the PI, collaborates with other institutions. The NIH might be the "prime sponsor." Money comes from them to us, making us the "direct sponsor" of the sub-awards. The sub-awardee reports to us; we report back to NIH.

Deborah Stark-Knight: But not just dollars. There's the rest of the contract. There's stuff about hiring and people's qualifications, or security or safety measures around sensitive data or human research participants. We make sure sub-awardees follow those rules.

AHEAD: Is there a particular interesting grant you can walk our readers through?

Heidi Madias: Someone received an R01 grant, but there was a JIT, "just in time," meaning the NIH wanted more information. They reduced the budget 26 percent. The grant had nine sub-awards we had to re-budget. Then we had to increase the salary for a research assistant—by half the amount, but we couldn't ask for more because NIH had already reduced the budget. So we worked with that sub-awardee to agree to cost-share the other half.

Jodi Caviani: We worked closely with the PI as they decided what to cut.

Amber Farmer: We have to build relationships, because we are monitoring PIs' spending. I'm telling someone, "You're going to be X-amount in the hole if we don't change something." It helps if they know me. Research faculty here are very willing to work with us.

Deborah Stark-Knight: We get all the parties together and make sure they understand each other. We make recommendations, but in the end, it's the PI's decision.

Heidi Madias: We each have about 18 faculty with grants. We report to nine each month, asking if the balances are right or did an expense hit that wasn't supposed to? This keeps them on top of their grants.

Jodi Caviani: We are a more proactive office now that we are more efficient.

Amber Farmer: I'm extremely proud when I get something closed that's been sitting out there for a while. Research projects don't close on the end date. There's always a sense of accomplishment when you get the last penny off and close it out.

AHEAD: What effect did COVID have on your office?

Jodi Caviani: COVID actually helped us grow. Faculty had more time to seek opportunities. We saw a huge wave of applications.

Amber Farmer: And we hired more people. This office has grown exponentially. The number of grant proposals submitted is up to 11 per month, average, with corresponding post-award work. It's been such a pleasure to be in that process and see things shape and change.

Jodi Caviani: A lot of research with in-person elements had to be paused with COVID. Money was not being spent, so we had to communicate with sponsors. Then we hired somebody who worked in the office for one week and then we had to go remote. Fifty percent of my day was training them on Zoom.

AHEAD: How does the mission of the School of Social Work impact each of you?

Heidi Madias: Doing this job I feel like I can give back to what's really important. It feels good to be involved in making social changes.

Amber Farmer: At the medical school, I saw things I worked on get FDA approval or I'd see COVID vaccines get approved. Here, the research is different, but I feel like I'm part of the team because I'm working closely with PIs to make sure that their projects turn out well.

David Greenberg: All of us in the office really have that service, big heart caring for this job. Putting a big grant through and seeing it rewarded and thinking, I had an influence on that!

Deborah Stark-Knight [to Pinto]: Speaking of procedures, thank you for getting your ID done for your...

Rogério Pinto: Yes, for my National Science Foundation proposal. My first one!

AHEAD: Just what is a day in the office like for you? You come in and...

Deborah Stark-Knight: The first thing that blew my mind was the email! Maybe three pages! Then the list of actual work. Which items are mine to approve? What others can I help with?

David Greenberg: I prep to meet with the team and see how we can help each other. My work day is challenging because of the different processes Heidi

mentioned. I might have 10 steps for one process and two get done in July, and another four in September...

Heidi Madias: When you put in a proposal, you have to be thinking about what will happen post-award. When you're dealing with post-award stuff, you're thinking, I hope they put that in the pre-award!

The plan for the day is, if there's something you can do quickly, do it or you'll forget. Then proposals. A proposal can come in late. It's due tomorrow. And do as much of the post-award stuff as you can, so down the line it won't be like, "You never put the cost share on this award that started two years ago."

Deborah Stark-Knight: We also work with our business operations office. Everybody who has any involvement in what faculty are working on. We might be involved in hiring or in approving expenses.

Amber Farmer: The inconsistency is what's consistent.

Jodi Caviani: The beautiful thing is, this team truly helps each other.

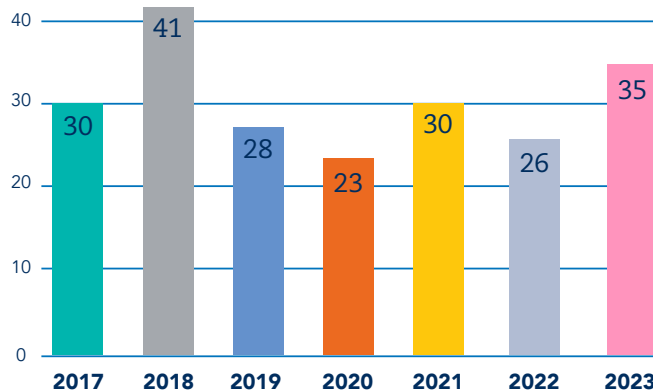
Amber Farmer: Everyone gets along and helps each other. Every day someone's popping in on the chat and saying, "Do you need anything? I have some time." ■



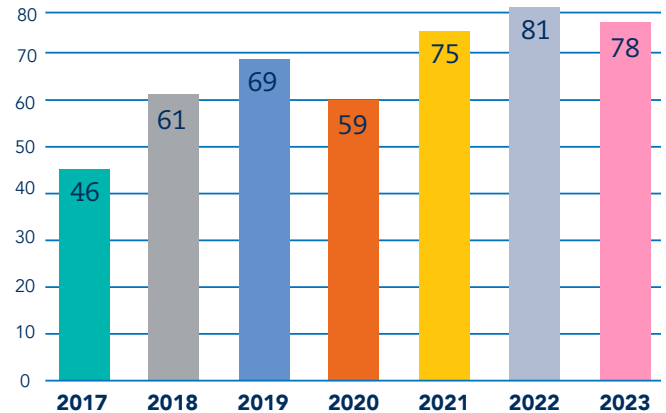
Working with Ryan Bankston, director of administration, finance, and operations.

BY THE *Numbers*

Total Proposals Awarded
FY 2017-2023



Total Proposals Submitted
FY 2017-2023



Total Research Expenditures

FEDERAL

FY 2017	\$2,089,954
FY 2018	\$2,830,863
FY 2019	\$3,002,067
FY 2020	\$3,253,820
FY 2021	\$2,827,181
FY 2022	\$2,928,809
FY 2023	\$3,846,781

NON-FEDERAL

FY 2017	\$1,257,866
FY 2018	\$1,821,808
FY 2019	\$1,729,677
FY 2020	\$1,349,588
FY 2021	\$1,340,553
FY 2022	\$1,528,623
FY 2023	\$2,780,537

Total School of
Social Work Awards

FY2017
\$3,864,730

FY2018
\$7,291,262

FY2019
\$3,661,044

FY2020
\$4,354,278

FY2021
\$ 5,819,519

FY2022
\$ 7,075,738

FY2023
\$6,123,267

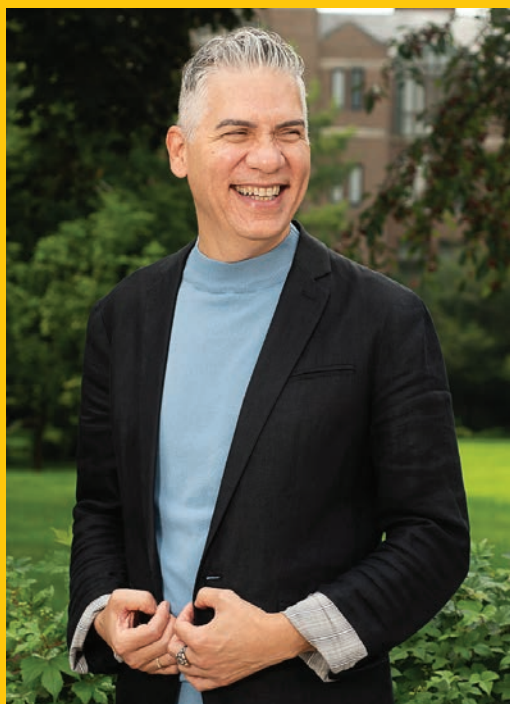
Total SSW Indirect Costs Recovered

FEDERAL

FY 2017	\$492,196
FY 2018	\$548,118
FY 2019	\$514,975
FY 2020	\$558,477
FY 2021	\$587,709
FY 2022	\$789,088
FY 2023	\$1,015,550

NON-FEDERAL

FY 2017	\$166,060
FY 2018	\$247,973
FY 2019	\$227,974
FY 2020	\$108,311
FY 2021	\$171,998
FY 2022	\$175,994
FY 2023	\$375,024



More thanks—and see you around the campus!

Wrapping up my final issue of *AHEAD*, I have thanked (pages 18–26) those who particularly advised and inspired me during my six years as associate dean for research at the school. I would now like to take the opportunity to thank all those who gave their time for interviews with our writers and who in some cases wrote *AHEAD* articles themselves or lent us photographs. All of you helped to make our magazine richer, more relevant, and more enjoyable.

I also thank members of the U-M School of Social Work Marketing and Communications department, which has supported the creation of all eight issues of *AHEAD*. My thanks also to Linette Lao of Invisible Engines, who created the original look of the magazine and designed all issues to date.

There would have been no *AHEAD* without the enthusiasm and encouragement of Lynn Videka, dean of the school from 2016 through 2021. In 2022, Beth Angell became dean, just as we were assembling issue #7, and she immediately lent her support. I am grateful to them both.

Finally, thank you for reading. I hope our dispatches from U-M social work researchers have engaged and informed you, and have helped you stay ahead.

Roger W. Butts

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