



2013 ANNUAL REPORT

SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Everything we do, from our curriculum to our intensive internships to our student programs, stems from our passion to strengthen vulnerable families.



“Because that’s what we’re all about: Affecting lives for the better.”



Our passion for helping families in need defines not only what we do, but who we are. From our gifted faculty to our bright and energetic undergraduate and graduate students, our passion drives the work and collaborations we undertake to transform and rebuild lives.

Indeed, our passion is the vital spark behind

- our innovative work and programs,
- our collaboration with other organizations and units, and
- the positive impact we have not only on our local community, but on our state and nation, and on people living in other countries as well.

On these pages you’ll read about the impact some of those innovative efforts and collaborations are having on the lives of people in need. Whose lives? Those of

- Low-income mothers suffering from perinatal depression
- Sexual assault victims
- People living in countries who are aided by volunteers
- Parents interacting with child protective services workers
- Guatemalans in need of clean drinking water
- Families trying to save for their children’s college education

You’ll also learn about our collaborations with community agencies and with the National Guard in ways that promise to change lives for the better.

Because that’s what we’re all about: Affecting lives for the better. It gives meaning to our day. It informs our teaching and research. And it makes a difference in the lives of those we touch.

Regards,
Wynne Sandra Korr
Wynne Sandra Korr
Dean and Professor



IMPACT | ACROSS FENCES AND BORDERS

It began as a conversation across a backyard fence. It turned into a multiyear project that crosses borders and still has not ended.

Associate professor Chi-Fang Wu had a conversation over her fence with her neighbor, Thanh (Helen) Nguyen, an associate professor in Civil and Environmental Engineering. Nguyen explained the communication problems civil engineering students were having as they worked on an Engineers Without Borders project in Socorro, Guatemala. Wu suggested that social work students get involved to work through the social barriers hindering the project.

“We needed to gain trust from the local community and help them get involved,” Wu says. “We wanted the community members involved in the decision-making process as we moved forward. We wanted to consult rather than tell them what to do.”

The project entailed implementing a water filtration system in Socorro, a village of about 450 people in the highlands of southwestern Guatemala. The villagers depend on water from the nearby Chichoy River, toward which much waste is channeled, resulting in high contamination levels. Civil Engineering had developed a plan in the fall of 2008 to build a centralized water treatment facility that would distribute clean water to homes. However, they encountered structural and

social obstacles over the following years, resulting in a change in plans. The team instead implemented point-of-use bios and water filters, a cost-effective and efficient filtration method. However, while community members were involved in reaching the decision, some villagers had become discouraged and unhappy through the complicated process. Cultural and communication barriers developed between some community members and the university team.

Two social workers from Wuqu’ Kawoq, a health alliance committed to solving development problems that strengthen local cultures, began educating the local community about the filter system, and the School of Social Work became involved in 2011, when Wu, Nguyen, and associate professor of social work Lisette Piedra wrote a grant proposal for \$30,000 to conduct a pilot study in Socorro. Social work doctoral student Lenore Matthew will be making her third trip this August to Guatemala. Matthew travels each time with several civil engineering students and works directly with local social workers in Guatemala. Wu, Piedra, and Matthew also hold monthly meetings with the civil engineers and have regular bilingual conference calls with Wuqu’ Kawoq and the project partners in Guatemala.

“One of the biggest barriers we faced,” says Piedra, “is the political history that created distrust of foreigners. But the other piece was just underestimating the capabilities of the professionals in the Socorro community and learning how to include them more and help them participate in the problem-solving process.”

Wu says part of the challenge was realizing the differences in ways that people from the US and Guatemala communicate. “For example,” she says, “the students expected everyone to openly and explicitly state the problems they had with the project, but in Guatemala, such direct communication is considered offensive. This led to complications among the international team members and between the students and community members, as students were not hearing of the problems that had surfaced in the village.”

However, with better communication built on deeper trust and appreciation for how people in each culture communicate, those problems are lessening, Piedra says.

“The thing to keep in mind when we’re talking about cultural difference is it’s not just the School of Social Work or Western thinking and Guatemalan thinking,” Piedra says. “It’s also between disciplines. The way social workers think and the way engineers think is very different. So learning how to communicate effectively and make use of each other’s strengths has been key.”

Piedra says that each partner has learned a common language and that the Americans have become more understanding of the indirect communication style of the Guatemalans. “Otherwise it can be easy to assume something is not an issue when in fact it is,” she says. In turn, she adds, the Guatemalans have been much more open with the Americans when they are dissatisfied.

Pictured above: Chi-Fang Wu, Associate Professor of Social Work; Hanqing Wang, Civil Engineering student; Lenore Matthew, PhD student in Social Work; and Thanh Nguyen, Assistant Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering

“The communication is happening,” Piedra says. “It’s not always smooth, but it’s happening. There’s an effort on both ends to go with the imperfections that come with a collaboration that’s very new and very culturally different.”



Pictured above: Colonel Thomas Zubick, MSW 1996; Samantha Hack, PhD 2013; Leah Cleeland, PhD candidate in Social Work; and Colonel (RET) Paul Hastings

Colonel Thomas Zubick, a 30-year National Guard veteran who received his MSW from Illinois in 1996, didn't like a trend he and Colonel (RET) Paul Hastings were seeing: guardsmen were not reenlisting in the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in the Illinois National Guard. "In one year, we lost 828 soldiers, for a number of different reasons," Hastings says.

Zubick and Hastings created a survey to uncover those reasons, and Zubick turned to his alma mater to analyze the data. PhD student Leah Cleeland analyzed the qualitative material, and Samantha Hack, who earned her PhD this summer, oversaw the quantitative analysis.

"We found that the extended MUTAs – weekend trainings that last longer than two days – were rated most negatively," Hack says. "Soldiers who had full-time work or school commitments were more likely to rate extended MUTAs and online trainings negatively. Married guardsmen were more likely to rate deployment negatively, while unmarried guardsmen with children were more likely to evaluate extended MUTAs negatively."

Cleeland says that the surveys pointed sharply to guardsmen's concerns about maintaining an increased training schedule while balancing family and work responsibilities. "You're always going to suffer to some degree as opposed to your colleagues, especially as you

get promoted within the ranks, because you have this secondary job that takes away from your regular job," she says.

Zubick, who is a forensic social worker at the Elgin (IL) Mental Health Center, says that based on the findings, the Illinois National Guard units are considering how to accomplish their mission within the traditional Saturday/Sunday training assembly, rather than relying on the extended trainings.

"Colonel Hastings and I hope to finish writing the papers with Leah and Samantha to bring these results to the national level so all National Guard units can benefit from this research," he adds.

Cleeland says that building the relationship with the colonels, and seeing the research work helping the Guard, made the project stand out for her. "It was a unique and special partnership," she says.



Min Zhan, PhD Program Director and Associate Professor of Social Work

Families with more accessible financial assets – such as savings, CDs, and bonds – are more likely to both send their children to college and see them graduate, says Min Zhan.

Zhan, PhD program director and associate professor in the School of Social Work, completed two studies with Michael Sherraden, the founder of the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis. The studies singled out the impacts that financial assets, nonfinancial assets (such as owning homes and businesses), secured debt, and unsecured debt have on students' college enrollment and graduation.

"The savings and other financial assets are the most important in influencing children's education," Zhan says. She notes that secured debt, such as loans for vehicles or homes, can be a good indicator, if a person has the capacity to pay a loan back. But consumer debt and other unsecured debt can have a harmful impact and diminish a person's ability to take out loans.

The data that Zhan and Sherraden analyzed were from a longitudinal study begun in 1979 by the US Department of Labor. The study followed the life experiences of people who were 14-21 years old in 1979. Zhan and

Sherraden examined the college graduation status of the children of the initial female respondents. These children were 23 or older in 2006.

"The ratio of unsecured debt to financial assets is very high for minority families," Zhan says. "Unsecured debt is negatively associated with college attendance and graduation among black and Hispanic children."

Minorities were hit especially hard during the recent recession, Zhan adds. "Their assets dropped significantly," she says. "A major implication here is facilitating savings is important for kids to attend and graduate from college."

Another research highlight showed that a substantial portion of the black-white gap in college attendance and graduation disappears after household assets are considered. A small portion of the gap between Hispanics and whites also disappear by this measure.

Zhan also points to another factor that can be just as critical as finances: a student's home environment. "If your parents stress the importance of college, you're more likely to value it yourself," she says.



RESEARCH | THE BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERISM

Lough is studying the impacts of international volunteerism on communities, organizations, and the volunteers themselves. He says there are big differences between the outcomes for short-term and long-term volunteers. “There’s definitely more focus on the volunteers on the short-term side,” he says. He mentions the cross-cultural exchanges and increased global citizenship and social justice awareness that short-term volunteers receive. “On the long-term side, volunteers gain a lot,” he says, “but it’s focused much more on community outcomes. People lump volunteers into one box, but it’s really quite different in terms of outcomes.”

The study he conducted, which involved a trip to Kenya in the summer of 2012, focused more on long-term volunteerism. These volunteers immerse themselves in the communities, and the communities come to trust them. Organizations such as Peace Corps really expect the first year for a volunteer to be one of settling in, learning about the community, spending time with locals, and understanding the needs.

Lough notes that communities value the learning and capacity development that long-term volunteers bring. “There’s skill-sharing and long-term relationships that can lead to a lot of benefits. Ultimately these volunteers are able to engage with development projects [water, sanitation, malaria nets, etc.] and do them long-term. It’s a collaborative effort with the community,” he says, as opposed to short-term efforts that are often labor- and volunteer-centric.

Volunteers, Lough adds, typically bring prestige to a local organization. More locals tend to get involved when long-term volunteers are working on community projects, and the presence of volunteers can also spur more funding from other agencies.

In addition, Lough says, volunteers can make connections to resources and advocate for the community once they are home. This “helps get money and resources flowing back to the organization,” he says.

In fact, both long-term and short-term volunteers leave a lot of benefits in their wake, he notes. “Community members really gain a lot from the personal relationships with the volunteers,” he says. “They gain knowledge from the volunteers, and the volunteers gain knowledge from them. So it’s really a reciprocal exchange at the community level.”

While long-term volunteers help in areas such as poverty, education, health, and maternal empowerment, they have an added value beyond what short-term volunteers often provide, Lough says.

“Volunteers are seen by communities as more accountable to the community, are valued for the new ideas they bring to programs and projects, and bring optimism to communities,” he says. In addition, their work is often continued after they return home, thus extending the positive impact on the community.

One of the implications of his study, Lough says, is that volunteers could be given more access to aid resources for the community. They normally come in with few resources to implement programs. Another issue centers on the race issue: Many black community members feel disempowered by white volunteers; the black community members often assert that white volunteers are better and more advanced. “That’s very disempowering, and it’s a big issue that needs to be addressed,” Lough says.

Duration of service is another issue. “We need to make sure volunteers are out there for a sufficient amount of time,” he says. “If global citizenship is the goal, or energy and vitality is the goal, then short-term projects are fine. But long-term volunteers are able to do more capacity building and sustainable development.”

Last year, nearly 900,000 Americans volunteered internationally in either short-term (two weeks or less) or long-term stints. Those going for long-term stays, particularly for a year or more, go through a cultural adaptation process, says Ben Lough.

“At first you think it’s great, then you think it’s horrible, then you adapt to it and after a year it begins to feel like your culture,” says Lough, an assistant professor at the School of Social Work. “After two years you don’t even think about it anymore.”

Pictured above: Ben Lough, Assistant Professor of Social Work

Ben’s article, “Measuring International Service Outcomes: Implications for International Social Work Field Placements” was selected as the Best Quantitative Article of 2013 in the *Journal on Social Work Education*.



Child protective service (CPS) workers face challenging circumstances when making a first visit with families that have been reported for abuse or neglect.

Most parents have negative notions of CPS workers, believing they are intent on taking their children from them, and the meeting is usually an unwelcome surprise. These circumstances present significant barriers between CPS workers and parents – ones that need to be overcome to best help the family.

“When parents have an emotional response, the workers need to get past that,” says Jill Schreiber of Children and Family Research Center. “However, it can be difficult for workers to remain calm, to listen, to be supportive, and to explain things when dealing with parents who are angry or upset.”

Schreiber, Tamara Fuller, and Megan Pacey interviewed 40 parents throughout Illinois who had experiences with CPS to study the effectiveness of the CPS response to low-risk maltreatment allegations. “We wanted to hear from the parents themselves,” says Fuller, director of Children and Family Research Center. “Not many studies have gone directly to the parents.” Schreiber, Fuller, and Pacey found that parents more positively engaged with CPS workers when workers demonstrated

what Schreiber calls the “three C’s”: competence, care, and communication skills. “Parents are unhappy when workers don’t return calls or weren’t thorough in their work, such as checking their resources well,” Schreiber says. “We need to train caseworkers to be competent, to communicate effectively, and to signal care.”

Fuller notes that many people they interviewed had their negative stereotypes dispelled when they realized CPS workers were there to help them. She says CPS workers could benefit from a public service campaign that explains their role. In addition, she says, workers should receive more training that focuses on the three C’s – particularly in light of the fact that many CPS workers have heavier caseloads than called for by social work standards and policies.

“For the most part, people who go into CPS go into it to try to help families,” Fuller says. “They’re not going into it with an idea to break up families or traumatize parents or children. I think our findings are largely reflective of that. But it’s hard to follow through and be responsive with promises when you have 40 cases going at once.”



Pictured: Katie Sissors, MSW 2010, Director of Programs, The Center for Women in Transition; Alicia Beck, Assistant Dean for Advancement; and Darnell Fisher, MSW 2013

IMPACT | UNVEILING THE COMMUNITY LEARNING LAB

Sherrie Faulkner knew she’d struck a chord within the community. She’d sent out a feeler to 40 local agencies about their interest in a new community learning lab to be hosted by the School of Social Work – and 30 had quickly and affirmatively responded.

“All of these agencies said we’ve partnered with [the School] before and we’ve had a great experience, and they gave us a plethora of ideas about how we could partner together,” says Faulkner, director of BSW Field Education and a clinical assistant professor.

The lab is being piloted this fall with the help of a public engagement grant written by Alicia Beck, Assistant Dean for Advancement, and Faulkner. Six classes will initially use the lab, which will match agency and class needs through the use of a database.

Among the needs expressed by the agencies are research, program and project development, community outreach, fundraising, grant work, and more.

“The agencies will benefit because they will have the talent and manpower that they don’t always have with the economy the way it is,” Faulkner says.

“We’ll be able to help them expand their services and maybe even manage to stay viable to serve more people in the community.”

The Community Learning Lab will help the School develop students who are better prepared to step into their new careers, and it will give faculty the tools and availability to build project ideas, she adds.

“And the students are going to grow,” Faulkner says, “because they’re going to get this hands-on experience which not only is good experience but will also make them more marketable.”

Faulkner, who will be acting as liaison between the School and the community for the fall semester, says the School will have a full launch of the program in December, bringing together the agencies and the students and faculty who have taken part in the lab to that point, with hopes of expanding that participation. “One of our competencies is changing practice to respond to needs,” she says. “We truly know what the needs of the community are when we’re working with them. This lab is really sustainability for everyone. We’re doing this together and meeting needs for each other.”

This project is funded by the University of Illinois Office of Public Engagement.



RESEARCH | HELPING WIC MOTHERS WITH DEPRESSION

“For many women, pregnancy is one of the first times when they’re receiving regular health care from a provider,” Tabb says. “So this might be the first time when a woman with low income is speaking about mood disorders in a clinic setting.”

Tabb and the other researchers are studying data gained from the MOOD (Maternal Obstetrical Outcomes Database) registry, working with the Champaign Public Health District, which provides care for women receiving WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) benefits. WIC serves low-income populations.

“Most studies catch community-based samples, which are a mix of public and privately insured women,” Tabb says. “Ours will be one of the first registries in the country producing findings solely on WIC participants”-in terms of psychosocial risks.

She adds that there is only one other epidemiological study out there on WIC participants and depression.

Last December, Tabb and her team conducted focus groups with the public health clinic staff, and found four main themes:

- Literacy and the need for interactive multilingual programs
- Needs for links to networks with outside psychological services
- Training and capacity-building of staff to screen women for depression
- Potential for an enhanced technology-based screening process

“Most of the staff do not feel adequately trained to provide mental health care in a public health setting,” she says.

To compensate for that lack of training, Tabb says, the public health district is moving toward providing its caseworkers with tablets that have touchscreen programs that patients can use in assessing their mental health and providing rapid referrals.

“After the patient uses the tablet,” Tabb explains, “the program tells the clinician any symptoms of depression that the patient has, and suggests treatments.” Such a system, she says, has many advantages: “It takes away the need for handling paper. It eliminates communication barriers and literacy barriers. Patients can work with the program in their native language, and the feedback for the clinician is in English. You can work the tablet with voice technology. It eliminates someone having to score the screening and writing an assessment. The electronic form goes directly into the medical records.”

The tablets, along with a collaborative care model that will help public health care providers, should prove to be a great resource for providers and a great help to perinatal mothers – particularly those of low income.

“There’s so little out there for WIC mothers right now in terms of depression,” Tabb says. “I hope we’re adding something that will be very useful.”

Karen Tabb Dina is heading a study that could positively impact the mental health of low-income women across the country – and break some ground while doing so.

Tabb, an assistant professor, is leading a research team that is studying data of 10,000 perinatal women over the next several years to learn about perinatal depression and other psychosocial risk factors such as suicidal ideation, stress, and anxiety.



Rachael Ahart (Moore), MSW 2012
Patrol Officer, University of Illinois Police

Rachael participated in a unique field placement in which she split time between the Women's Resource Center (WRC) and the Campus Police Department, impacting how the department handles sexual assault, and providing a critical resource for women seeking assistance at the WRC.



RESEARCH | USING FORENSIC EVIDENCE TO BRING JUSTICE TO SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES

Forensic science can play a great role in bringing justice to sexual assault cases, says Ted Cross.

"There is purpose in conducting forensic medical examinations and crime laboratory analyses in these cases," says Cross, research professor for the Children and Family Research Center. "Meaningful proportions of cases have injury evidence and forensic evidence."

Cross, who led a study funded by the National Institute of Justice that examined the frequency, timing, and impact of forensic evidence in sexual assault cases in Massachusetts, says that crime labs "were able to develop a DNA profile in 40.9 percent of cases. And in those cases with a DNA profile, 37.9 percent were matched to the suspect; 8.3 percent to a suspect in another case; and 17.5 percent to a convict in prison for another crime." He adds that nearly 87 percent of victims had biological evidence of some sort that could help in identifying the criminal.

And that evidence is best gathered by trained medical specialists. "Most telling," he says, "was the difference between examinations conducted by Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) and examinations conducted by other medical providers. SANEs are specially trained, dedicated nurses who understand the trauma of sexual

assault and the needs of patients, who are expert in conducting examinations and collecting specimens, and who can devote time and skills to doing careful, thorough examinations and provide expertise to police and prosecutors." SANEs, he adds, are more likely to find genital injuries.

Cross says there has been little research to date to detail how often forensic medical exams following sexual assault bear fruit, leading to arrests and filing criminal charges. "Victims show enormous courage in participating in often long and difficult examinations with the hope of seeing justice in these cases," he says.

"The full implications will only be evident once we collect and analyze criminal justice data," he adds. "But even what we have learned so far has implications. The findings so far suggest that injury evidence and forensic evidence are fairly common, supporting the value of the investment in forensic medical examinations and crime laboratory analysis sexual assault."

Guided by our award-winning faculty, our students receive a perfect balance of classroom experience and fieldwork. The result? Poised and inspired professionals ready to make a difference in the world.





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