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The Fellow is the official peer-reviewed publication of the Ph.D. students at the School of Social Policy & Practice at the University of Pennsylvania

The End of an Era

Another academic year has come to an end, marking the end of an era. This summer, Dr. Ram Cnaan is concluding his term as the chair of our doctoral program after 6 great years. During his term, Dr. Cnaan provided us with direction, guidance and support. His door was always open, and we knew we could turn to him for anything, academic or personal alike. On behalf of the PhD students of SP2 we want to say THANK YOU! Dr. Susan Sorenson will be taking over the position in the next academic year. We look forward to working with her and wish her luck in her new position!



The Fellow always provides a good opportunity to highlight some events and achievements and thank those who made them possible. Thanks to Joanna Bisgaier, Rosie Frasso, Itay Greenspan and Katy Kaplan for another semester rich with great talks and workshops. Next year, Katy Kaplan has agreed to continue as colloquia co-chair. She will be joined by Michelle Evans-Chase. Tom Byrne did a great job as our GAPSA representative and due to popular demand he has agreed to continue representing us next year. Meanwhile, Julie Tennille and Samira Ali will take over as DSSC co-chairs. Thanks to all who volunteered to take on these important roles!

After a year long break, this upcoming Fall we will be welcoming several new students. DSSC representatives have been in touch with each new student to answer any questions he/she might have about the program. Samira Ali, Stacey Barranger and Abhijit Visaria have put together a welcome kit full of information and resources for our incoming cohort. We thank them for their efforts on this! In addition, each incoming new student will be paired with a peer-mentor to provide ongoing support.

Lastly, we want to congratulate again those who will be walking in the upcoming graduation ceremony this May: Tae Quen Kim and Karen Zurlo who have already accepted new positions and have been working at these new positions for the past academic year will be joining Brian Coleman and Jason Matejkowski. CONGRATULATIONS!

We wish you all a productive and relaxing summer (oxymoron?!) and look forward to seeing the results of your efforts in the next issue of the Fellow...

See you at the end of the year party!!!
Maayan Schori and Mary Zhou, DSSC Co-chairs

PEER REVIEW

We all work hard writing papers for classes, and many papers are worthy of more than just a letter grade. The Fellow provides an outlet to share unpublished manuscripts, essays, book reviews and editorials with colleagues in an effort to distribute ideas, spark debates, obtain feedback, encourage journal submissions, and support interdisciplinary collaborations. Full references are available upon request to the authors.

Social Justice: Ethical principle or political oath?

by Jonathan M. Lukens | mjlukens@sp2.upenn.edu

The mission statement of the School of Social Policy & Practice states that “The pursuit of social justice is at the heart of the School’s knowledge-building activities.” The NASW (1996) code of ethics dictates that social workers “pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people.” However, the concept of social justice is nebulous and rarely defined, despite serving as a core value of the social work profession. But this is merely an exemplar of a larger issue in social work education: we tend to assume agreement on social work’s ethical first principles. We inadequately explore the possibility that there are diverse and contradictory interpretations of important ethical principles which are considered core values of social work. What’s more, by failing to adequately explore these first principles and allow for open debate on our core social work values we become dogmatic, and our ethical codes degenerate to simple political oaths.

Two theories, briefly

In a recent lecture for a group of MSW students, I contrasted two contradictory positions on social justice: The distributive justice of John Rawls against Robert Nozick’s libertarian view of the minimal state. Both positions make claims about social justice, but both have very different policy implications. In his book, *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (1999) argues for a position which he summarizes as “justice as fairness.” Rawls posits a State wherein all persons would “have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others” (p. 53). Social and economic inequalities that exist must benefit the least well off; unequal distribution must not worsen the situation of others. Political offices and positions must be open and available to all people under conditions of equality of opportunity. Because Rawls’s position on individual rights does not make an absolute claim to all forms of property and means of production, we may formulate institutions that redistribute political and economic resources to benefit the least well off. This position is implicit to the conceptualization of social justice that is in the NASW code of ethics, and also reflected in the SP2 values which state that social workers aid oppressed populations in securing a “more equitable share of social, political and economic resources.” However, this is only one conceptualization of social justice, and although the curriculum assumes a Rawlsian stance, alternative conceptualizations are hardly explored.

In his 1974 libertarian treatise “Anarchy, State, and Utopia,” written in response to Rawls, Robert Nozick argues for the establishment of a minimalist state that exists only to protect the basic rights and liberties of citizens. Nozick forwards a Kantian position, arguing that attempts to forcibly redistribute an individual’s wealth treats them as a means only, and thus cannot be morally justified—that is, they become merely a resource for the state to achieve some social or political goal, an action that Nozick would argue is usury. Thus, the redistribution of wealth is only morally justifiable if it is done so voluntarily. Acts of charity only have moral worth if they are undertaken freely—charity facilitated through redistribution by the state, since coercive, is devoid of moral value. For Nozick, if an individual acquires property justly (i.e. either by their own labor or by the voluntary giving of another) she is entitled to that property, and it is the job of government to protect, rather than usurp that entitlement. In Nozick’s view, the Rawlsian position is a clear violation of individual rights, and is therefore morally untenable. The just society is judged not by the distribution of resources, but by its adherence to a set of principles including individual rights, due process, and the rule of law. Justice is not a function of outcomes. Nozick’s and Rawls’s positions lead to very different political philosophies and very different social policies.

Conclusion

The point here is not to argue the relative merits of either position, but rather to show that 1) social work needs to attend to first principles rather than assume universal agreement on definitions of rights and social justice among students and practitioners, and 2) our mission statements and codes of ethics must reflect the diversity of opinions regarding these first principles. If we fail to do so, we open ourselves to a significant critique, which is that our codes of ethics are not guidelines for proper professional conduct, but merely demands for political oaths that regulate the people and ideas we allow into the profession. Furthermore, without rigorous study into the fundamentals of moral and political philosophy students, teachers, and practitioners lack the basic philosophical foundations necessary to defend our policy positions, and we become simply dogmatic. In my experience as both teacher and student, I believe we have fallen short in this task. For the profession of social work to advance, this shortcoming must be addressed.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Jill Witmer Sinha, PhD (SP2 2004)

Assistant Professor, School of Social Work,
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Tell us about your work and how it relates to your research at Penn.

My research looks at service provision by faith-based organizations and/or congregations. Some of the research is descriptive, such as where such programs are based, their size, what motivates the kind of services that they provide. Some of my research is similar to what I did as a doctoral student at SP2 with Dr. Cnaan. Other research that I have done looks at social service provision by congregations for refugees, role of religion among vulnerable youth, and microcredit programs (international) among women provided by secular and faith-based NGOs.

What experiences at Penn have been the most valuable for you - as a student and now in your job at Rutgers?

The most valuable experience for me as a doctoral student at Penn was getting in-depth knowledge, mentorship and experience of the publication and grant-writing process, from the start to finish - that is from conceptualization, analysis, writing and editing to submitting and re-submitting several articles. Due to my knowledgeable mentors, I had the opportunity to be engaged in writing articles and grants first-hand. That experience helps tremendously, particularly as a faculty member at a Research I university, where publishing is highly valued.



What has been your biggest challenge as you have transitioned from being a graduate student to a faculty member at Rutgers?

After I graduated from Penn, and became a mother of 2 boys, managing the time between the two pre-school aged children and work was the most challenging. In particular, it was important to develop a rhythm in work, doing conceptual work and writing. However, working is still easier than caring for kids!

What were your key considerations in choosing a career in academia and accepting an offer from Rutgers School of Social Work?

I wanted to be a faculty member in a research university. I enjoy teaching, but I wanted a university where there was a focus on research. I was also interested in living in an urban area and applied only to research universities in urban areas. Rutgers' campus in Camden had a great fit for my research interests and experience.

Do you have any advice for current SP2 PhD students vis-à-vis the job market and their career prospects and options?

A teaching-focused university or a relatively small program would be very different from a research-focused university, which comes with considerable pressure on research and writing. An important question for the students to reflect on is what their primary interest is - if it is in teaching, working with students, advising and mentoring them, or if it is in asking new and interesting research questions and then answering them (and writing grant applications!). It is important to deeply consider what context would you like to be in, what would make you happier. In research, it is easy to get consumed by the peer-evaluation in the 3rd year of the tenure track, but as one of my mentors once said to me, "do good work and be kind to yourself". You should do good work that you care about. Your work may complement the work of faculty that is looking to hire you, or you may be a less attractive "fit" than other candidates for some schools - not because of quality, but just the area of interest. However, that does not reflect on your ability. Your selection is a function of who and what research is already represented in the faculty, what your own research interests are, what courses you have taught, etc. While it is important to be strategic and you can highlight various aspects of your experience, you cannot be all things to all people. Your conceptual, intellectual self is what you want to be proud of and what goes with you!

Is there anything else you think current PhD students should know?

Independent studies are very helpful and you should choose them thoughtfully as a way to prepare you for what you want to do in your research. It also helps (and forces) you to do the literature review, write a proposal, or even write the first two chapters of your dissertation! You can tailor the independent study to your specific needs at the time, and it is helpful later on if you have had taken the time to focus, and organize your thoughts.



Did You Know...

Tired of searching and organizing through all of the articles on your computer? Tired of writing citations? Well, there is a software that helps to upload, organize, search, and share articles. It is called Mendeley and can be downloaded for FREE at www.mendeley.com. The program has various helpful features: it retrieves articles' citations, lets you highlight in pdf, sync with microsoft word to insert citations, share articles, and store articles on the web.

Publications

Metraux, S., **Byrne, T.** & Culhane, D. P. (2010). Institutional discharges and subsequent shelter use among unaccompanied adults in New York City. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38, 28-38.

Cullen, S. W., Nath, S. B., & Marcus, S. C. (in press). Understanding medical errors in inpatient psychiatry. *Psychiatric Quarterly*.

Jha, A. K., Stone, R., Lave, J. R., Chen, H., **Klusaritz, H.**, & Volpp, K. (in press). The concentration of hospital care for black veterans in Veterans Affairs Hospitals: Implications for clinical outcomes. *Journal for Healthcare Quality*.

Noonan, K. Rubin, D., **Mekonnen, R.** & Zlotnik, S. (2009). *Securing child safety, well-being, and permanency through placement stability for children in foster care*. A policy brief prepared by the PolicyLab at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute.

Matejkowski, J. McCarthy, K., & Draine, J. (in press). Personal norm of reciprocity among mental health service users. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*.

Presentations

Cullen, S. W., & Solomon, P. (2010, April). Family community integration: The effects of maternal mental health. Poster presented at the Penn-ICOWHI 18th Congress. Philadelphia, PA.

Lee, S., Rothbard, A., & **Noll, E.** (2010, January). Effects of facility and regional characteristics on length of psychiatric hospitalization among people with serious mental illness. Paper presented at the 14th Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). San Francisco, CA.

Mekonnen, R. (2009, November). Conceptualizing cross system collaborative research in child welfare. Poster presented at Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Annual Program Meeting. San Antonio, TX.

Kim, T. K. & **Joshi, M.** (2010, January). Three types of "the poor": A typology using poverty duration and poverty recurrence. Paper presented at the 14th Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). San Francisco, CA.

Klusaritz, H., & Boris, R. (2010, January). Methadone maintenance and intra-agency processes of care: Hospital admissions for a traumatic medical event and interruptions in treatment. Paper presented at the 14th Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). San Francisco, CA.

Tennille, J. A., Faerber, J, Solomon, P, McDermott, P, TenHave, T, Blank, M. (2010, January). Development and validation of the Risk Rapport Scale: A measure of therapeutic relationship aimed at primary and secondary HIV prevention. Paper presented at the 14th Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). San Francisco, CA.

Tennille, J. A., Solomon, P. L., Eachus, S, Blank, M. (2009, November). Primary prevention of HIV in persons with severe mental illness; A case manager delivered intervention. 137th American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting & Exposition, Philadelphia, PA.

Thomas, K. A. (2010, April). The role of cities in reducing future homelessness among women victims of IPV. Paper presented at the Penn-ICOWHI 18th Congress. Philadelphia, PA.

Zhou, H. & Shang, X. (2010, March) Exploring the experiences of volunteer teachers in rural China. Paper presented at the 54th Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society. Chicago, IL

Awards/Funding

Julie Tennille was awarded the 2010 Hal Levin Award by the faculty of the School of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

Kristie Thomas, Melissa Dichter & **Jason Matejkowski** won first place at the University of Pennsylvania's Injury Science Day for their poster entitled "Intimate vs. non-intimate partner murder: Differences in legal, situational, clinical, and personal characteristics based on a representative statewide sample".

Joanna Bisgaier won the P.E.O. (Philanthropic Educational Organization) Scholar award in the amount of \$15,000 for the 2010-2011 academic year. This award is based on "scholarly excellence, academic achievement, and worthwhile career goals".