GREETINGS!

Greetings from the DSSC,

Welcome back to all the returning PhD students and candidates! We hope the summer has been restorative and productive, and we look forward to hearing about your summer activities as the semester begins. This year we welcome a smaller cohort of PhD students to SP2: Ashley Fuss will be joining us full-time, and Shimrit Keddem will continue her studies as a part-time student. Check out this issue for special introductions to both new students, and please take some time to personally welcome them to the program.

This year we have several things to celebrate as we begin the semester. Congratulations to all the second-year students who successfully passed preliminary exams! Seongho An, Christina DeNard, Kalen Flynn, Lauren Gurfein, Travis Labrum, and Allison Thomp - each of you worked hard all year, and the passing of prelims is only one small reflection of the success you have achieved so far in the program.

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WELCOME!

Dr. Susan Sorenson, Director of PhD Program

Welcome to the 2014-2015 academic year! From what I hear from students, staff, and faculty – and consistent with my own experience – summer flew by. I hope each of you had a replenishing and productive few months.

The School of Social Policy & Practice is starting a new phase with our new dean, John L. Jackson, Jr., who assumed the post on July 1. Most PhD students met him this spring when he spoke about his work at the proseminar. We will plan a welcome event early in the academic year. Also, please greet former dean Richard J. Gelles when you see him at 3815 Walnut – his office is now on the second floor of our building.

A special welcome to Ashley Fuss and Shimrit Keddem, who comprise our first-year cohort for AY2014-2015. In the past few years we had larger cohorts than our usual five students – we had applicants we really wanted – so we have a smaller cohort this year. (If you are a prospective applicant who is reading this online, cohort size is based on our commitment to provide four years of support to each of our PhD students. We anticipate enrolling four to six students for AY2015-2016.) Ashley and Shimrit will carry the first-year cohort banner well.

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MEET OUR NEW STUDENTS

Ashley Fuss received her BA in Sociology from Queens College, City University of New York, in 2008 and completed her MSW from Fordham University’s Graduate School of Social Service in 2011. As a student, she completed her field placement at Mount Sinai School of Medicine’s Department of Psychiatry and Community Medicine where she worked on NIMH-funded research projects focused on youth and families impacted by poverty. Ashley joins SP2 from New York University’s McSilver Institute for Poverty, Policy, and Research. At McSilver, she was responsible for numerous research initiatives and worked closely with community-based organizations to design evaluation protocols to embed into their programs. Ashley has also worked with providers across New York State to implement evidence-informed interventions and has led evaluation projects that examined the impact of clinical and business best practice initiatives designed for mental health clinics. Her research interest is the psychosocial welfare of veterans, service members, and their families. Specifically, she is interested in the assessment of trauma and other mental health difficulties among service members and veterans and in programs and policies that support military families.

Shimrit Keddem has worked at the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Medicine for ten years. During that time she completed a Master’s degree in Urban Spatial Analytics (MUSA), an interdisciplinary program combining the field of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) with an urban content area. Shimrit chose a focus in public health. Since completing her Masters degree, she has continued her career at the University of Pennsylvania. Currently, she manages the Mixed Methods Research Lab in the Department of Family Medicine. She also teaches qualitative data analysis software classes at the Van Pelt Library. Shimrit hopes to focus her studies on women’s health drawing from prior experience as a counselor and medical assistant in reproductive health clinics.

Welcome from Dr. Sorenson (continued from page 1)

Congratulations to Micheal Shier, who successfully defended his dissertation in June. Micheal had a remarkable publishing record while a student – a trend that I’m sure will continue as he launches his academic career as a tenure-track assistant professor position at the School of Social Work at the University of Toronto.

The others in the same cohort as Micheal, Daniel Curtis and Marlene Walk, have defended their dissertation proposals and are working on their research. Daniel has relocated back home to Utah, and Marlene is spending a year on a fellowship back home in Germany. Minseop Kim, who is in Pittsburgh now, and local Liz Noll anticipate finishing their dissertations in the coming months.

Alexandra Schepens successfully defended her dissertation proposal in June and is awaiting the final thumbs up on funding for her federal NRSA application that will fund her work for two years. The last I knew, almost everyone else in that same cohort (AY2012-2013) plans to defend their dissertation proposals in the fall. A busy group of seven students!

And the now-second-year cohort (AY2014-2015) of six students, with this summer’s preliminary examinations happily behind them, is looking forward to their last year of coursework. They’re also launching multiple research projects – almost all were supported through various funding sources within the School this summer.

All this suggests that the decision to have two, rather than three, years of coursework seems to be working well. And, on a related topic, thanks to all who suggested ideas for the content and structure of the proseminar this coming year. Its addition to the curriculum a few years ago provides a structured focus on professional development as well as facilitates communication and collaboration across the cohorts. We will continue to revise the curriculum to benefit our students.

Melissa Elfont will continue to provide administrative support for the PhD program. She will continue to be the go-to person for approval for requests to spend the $500 each student will get for professional development this academic year. We are fortunate to be able to offer this funding again this year; please use it because the funds don’t carry over from year to year. In the past, conference travel has been the primary thing for which students have used the funding but that varies – some are using the funding for compensating research participants and other research-related expenses. See Melissa if you have questions.

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Lauren Gurfein

During two weeks in March, I attended the United Nations 58th Commission on the Status of Women, a gathering of thousands of women (and a handful of men) in New York to exchange ideas about how the international community could address the challenges unique to meeting the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. As the goals’ 2015 deadline approaches and conversations begin about the post-2015 agenda, it was a prescient moment to identify gender-specific gaps and propose solutions to address these shortcomings with the time remaining for the MDGs and through future international development strategies.

That in any given meeting one could find themselves in a room filled with diplomats from Jordan, activists from Myanmar, feminists from Uganda, and indigenous women from Peru, revealed the true magic and allure of the United Nations. No doubt this was a privileged bunch, but every person there – young or old, powerful or not – was given a voice and a platform to relay their message, promote their agenda, push for their priorities. As well, they were given the opportunity to find support among the diverse crowd and forge transnational relationships and partnerships with other groups and individuals – collaborations that may last well beyond the MDGs.

For the most part, the main challenges were clear and drew a consensus: the MDGs omitted key issues like violence against women, including child marriage; sexual and reproductive health and rights; and women’s triple role of caretaker, community builder, and worker. As well, a major limitation of the MDGs was its failure to integrate gender-specific benchmarks within each goal – despite the fact that women and men experience and overcome issues like poverty and HIV/AIDS differently. A primary concern is that isolating gender into a single MDG encourages a misperception that women’s priorities are somehow separate from the other goals. A call for gender-mainstreaming of all goals was universal.

Though there was also largely an agreement of the need to acknowledge environmental factors including conflict, disaster, culture, and the economic crisis when addressing gender equality, there was little discussion about structural issues. Seldom did people discuss the deep-seated drivers of gender inequality like patriarchy, capitalism, and plain old sexism. Even though these ideas were occasionally referred to as the foundations of the problems women and girls face, it was never a part of the dialogue related to solutions. The MDGs, with its outcome-oriented framework, in fact never, considers the more substantial structural changes that would need to occur to really empower women and rid the world of gender inequality. In addition, the MDGs depoliticize and de-historicize issues—like women’s equality—that cannot be sustainably addressed in a vacuum. The structural forces and environment matter, and in fact, have the true power to enable or inhibit sustainable changes for women.

So, on the one hand some very important issues were raised – and with the strong support garnered at CSW 58, it is likely they will be addressed in future development frameworks. As well, for its ability to provide a forum for women from a global activist community to come together and learn and share and network, CSW 58 was an absolute success. However, until the development community is willing to identify and address the structural forces that stimulate and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality, the changes that are made will not be deep or sustainable and there will continue to be a need for CSWs for many years to come.

Welcome from Dr. Sorenson (continued from page 2)

The DSSC co-chairs, Ryan Petros and Angelina Riley, and I will continue to meet semi-regularly to address ideas, suggestions, and concerns from the PhD student body. I also am available for one-on-one meetings and informal conversations over coffee or tea.

In closing, the Communicating Science workshop by the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) has been tentatively scheduled for late this fall. Dean Jackson is making arrangements for a team of videographers to film the PhD students as they talk about their research, why they chose Social Welfare, why they chose Penn, and more. The video clips will be posted on the soon-to-be-unveiled new website.

Best wishes for a year of learning, failing and learning from it, and succeeding.
Tell us about your work as an Assistant Professor at West Chester University.

I’m gearing up for the start of my second academic year as an Assistant Professor at West Chester University in the Graduate Department of Social Work. My work consists of teaching, engaging in scholarship, and serving my immediate community of students, colleagues, my university, and the local as well as international community of people and scholars with whom I share social justice, research and practice interests. I can honestly say that I’m living the dream as I truly love the combination of these activities and cherish the independence that comes with an academic appointment. You can find me in pajamas drinking coffee and writing a few half days out of my week!

I’m currently developing a grant proposal on my dissertation to submit to NIMH, consulting on a 4-year knowledge translation project on intimacy and sexuality for persons with mental health conditions with the Temple Collaborative on Community Inclusion, and working with a colleague, Dr. Casey Bohrman, on a qualitative study analyzing transcripts of Motivational Interviewing sessions with women in ER settings who’ve experienced IPV and exhibit problem drinking patterns as part of Dr. Karen Rhodes’ RO1.

What experiences at Penn have been the most valuable for you as an Assistant Professor?

Specifically, my mentor, Dr. Phyllis Solomon, but also other professors and colleagues at Penn, pushed me to publish and experience what would ultimately be the work of an Assistant Professor. By the time I was on the job market, I had run RO1 studies, had written grant proposals, and had numerous peer-reviewed publications and presentations. I also had experience with teaching courses at Penn and elsewhere and a solid sense of my research agenda and what parts of that agenda I felt most passionate about. Additionally, at the urging of my friends, prior to getting on the job market, I forced myself to workshop my job talk in front of a sizable audience of my cohort members, existing faculty, and doc students who were at an earlier stage in the program. Do this! It’s a good practice to carry into the future.

What were your key considerations in deciding to take a position as an Assistant Professor at West Chester University?

I made the call to restrict the search geographically. My partner’s family and my family live in the immediate area. My parents (now in their mid-70s) live 7 minutes drive away from WCU. All our friends and my band live here. This is important. I was able to negotiate a good salary and funds for travel. It felt right. I know this sounds a little strange but I really liked the search committee and other faculty members I met. WCU has a very clear social work orientation and a focus on social justice and highly student centric. Coming from a social work practice background, I found this highly appealing.

Do you have any advice for current SP2 Ph.D. students vis-a-vis the job market and their career prospects and options?

• Keep a positive attitude.
• Develop collaborations with people you like and respect and be accountable to them.
• Write. Write.
• Stay close to your social justice passions.
• Make time to have fun, be with your family, take good care of your physical and spiritual self, and keep a regular schedule (whatever that means to you).
• Do all of the previously mentioned things.
• Remember that a good dissertation is a done dissertation.
Conference Presentations


Walk, M.; Willems, J: Aiming at a data driven definition of volunteer types: The key to improved volunteer management practices. Paper presented at the 11th International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), July 2014, Münster (Germany)

Werding, E.; Walk, M.; Schinnenburg, H.: Caring for the future - Challenges for childcare professionals in the wake of inclusive education. Paper presented at the 11th International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), July 2014, Münster (Germany)


Awards and Fellowships

Marlene Walk was invited to participate in the PhD Seminar at the 11th biannual conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), Münster (Germany), July 2014

Marlene Walk was invited to participate in the Public and Nonprofit Division’s Doctoral Consortium at the 74th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, Philadelphia (PA), August 2014

SP2 Doctoral Summer Fellowships

Sambudda Chauhuri – The Unspoken Mother: Perspectives about mothering from a sex worker community in Kolkata, India

Christina DeNard – A Discursive Analysis: Caseworker Perspectives on Mental Health Disparities among Racial/Ethnic Minority Youth in Child Welfare

Kalen Flynn – Neighborhood Social Trust and Adolescents’ Perceptions of Safety during Daily Activities

Lauren Gurfein – The Influence of Information and Communication Technologies on Attitudes Towards Wife Beating: A Multi-Country Study

Angelina Ruffin – Understanding Polygamy and Intimate Partner Violence from the Perspective of African American Sunni Muslim Women

Welcome from the DSSC (continued from page 1)

We want to extend a warm welcome to Dr. John L. Jackson Jr. who began his tenure as Dean this summer. We are excited to move forward with his leadership. Please watch for further details about a welcome gathering to greet Dean Jackson in the coming weeks.

Two students have seen their families expand over the summer. Congratulations to Jeff who welcomed the newest member to his family! Micah Avi was born in May, and all are happy and healthy. Congratulations to Alexandra who married her husband, Jarreau, this July!

Lastly, we recognize the students who have recently become PhD candidates. Congratulations to Alexandra Schepens, and Megan Stanton for successfully defending their dissertation proposals!

Good luck to us all as we enter this new academic year! Please check your email for news about the first DSSC meeting of the year as well as community building events that will begin in the next few weeks.

DSSC co-chairs,
Ryan and Angelina