Greetings from the DSSC!

Congratulations on the successful completion of another academic year! As we approach the end of the year, we would like to reflect on our achievements, opportunities, and the fun that we’ve shared as a group of students.

We would like to extend hearty congratulations to those who have successfully defended their dissertations and will soon graduate: Megan, Marlene, Minesop, Daniel, and Liz. As you embark on this new chapter of post-doc life, may you have success in continuing your great work. All the best to each of you, and keep in touch!

Several of the third year students successfully defended their dissertation proposals this past year. Congratulations to Alexandra, Ryan, Dan, and Grace, and best of luck to Angelina and Jeffery who will be defending their proposals shortly.

As classes wrap up, we congratulate Ashley and Shimrit for completing their first year and wish them luck on their upcoming preliminary exams. The second year students are also finishing up their course work and will soon begin work on their dissertation proposals. We look forward to hearing more next year!

This spring, the DSSC hosted a couple of happy hours, a wonderful Ethiopian dinner at Abyssinia, and took a trip to the Adventure Aquarium in Camden, NJ. Ryan and Lauren also coordinated with Bobbie to organize a number of rich Theory Discussions over lunch this past semester. Thank you! Finally, the DSSC will host the annual End of Year Party, a time to celebrate our accomplishments and thank the faculty and staff who have invested in each of us. This year we have chosen a “Philadelphia” theme with local tasty treats and favorites. We hope to see all of you there!

Thank you to all of the students and faculty who have helped to make our program the great one that it is. Thank you to Dan who served as the PhD student representative on the program’s advisory board, Christina who served as the GAPSA rep, and the Fellow’s editorial board: Eunhae, Jeffery, Travis, and Allison. We wish everyone a restful yet productive summer and look forward to seeing you in August!

DSSC co-chairs,

Allison & Kalen
STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Ashley Fuss

It’s hard to believe that it has been a year since I made the decision to move to Philadelphia from New York City. And even harder to believe that year one of the program is almost over! Even though NYC and Philly is only 100 miles apart, the decision to move here was one of the toughest I have made. After all, I had lived in in NYC all my life, all of my family and friends live there, and I had an amazing job. So the idea of moving out of state for the first time, as an adult, and to an unfamiliar place was scary. After much consideration, mentorship, checklists, and excel spreadsheets I decided that SP2 was the best decision for myself, career, and future. And after almost finishing year one, I am confident in my decision.

I have been really impressed with the quality of the Penn's faculty and how invested, committed, and enthusiastic they are in classes and with their students. Being back in an academic environment that values learning, innovative ideas, and thinking about things from various perspectives has also been really great. The hardest thing this year was establishing myself as a student again and transitioning from a full-time employee to a full-time student. Even though I was used to working a lot and being really busy, as an employee, at the end of the night my work for the day was complete and most weekends were mine to enjoy. However, being a PhD student is different in that you go to bed each night with the feeling that you weren’t as productive as you should have been that day and when you binge-watch Netflix on a Friday night you feel guilty that you should be working. My advice to new PhD students is to allow yourself guilt-free breaks each week and to go on a mini-getaway or vacation at some point during the year so that you can rejuvenate your mind!

So Philadelphia isn’t New York, and yes, even though they still use tokens here, there are also some great things about it. I love living in the heart of the city, yet still having a spacious apartment. I love that the city is a manageable size and that you can walk almost everywhere. I love the beauty of Penn's campus. And I love that it’s so accessible and close to NYC! I admit that since moving here I have spent the majority of my weekends in NYC, but some of my favorite Philly spots are: Breakfast/Brunch—Day by Day; Lunch/Cafe—Talula's Daily; Dinner/Drinks—Tria Taproom; Coffee—Hub Bub; Exercise/Spinning—Body Cycle Studio.

I feel fortunate for the opportunities that I have had this year and am now more than ever excited for what the future brings!

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Susan Kinnevy, PhD'02

Tell us about your work as the director of special projects with the Philadelphia Department of Human Services?

I came to the agency in 2009 at their invitation to create what is now called the Division of Performance Management and Accountability. I did that over the course of four years and I built up nearly 55 people in the division who looked at both individual data and aggregate data to help the performance of the agency as a whole and the performance of all of the people in the agency. After four years I transitioned into this, another office I would develop, and that’s the Director of Special Projects. That means I take on things that don’t have a proper home at DHS—they don’t fit comfortably in one place or the other or projects for which my skillset is of import and that skillset comes a lot from the Doctoral program at Penn. The first thing I did was start a grant writing situation, I got a grant from the Children’s Bureau for preventing homelessness for aging out teens with a planning grant for 2 years and we’re now competing for the implementation grant, which is due at the end of May. I also write request for proposals when we’re looking for vendors. I also do specialized case file reviews. I did one that was specifically with the Department of Education. I also take on anything that involves a deeper look at data or writing about data. That can be a lot of things. So it’s really a very unique position. A lot of times I get to spearhead things that I’m particularly interested in and my next field of inquiry is predictive analytics.
What were your key considerations in deciding to transition to a non-academic position?

I think it was the challenge. How many people get to create a division? And the Division of Performance and Accountability combined a couple of things. It combined my knowledge of practice in general, practice of child welfare, and a heavy data component. I was a returning student. I went back to school when I was almost 50 so I didn't think going in the direction of academia was a particularly good idea. I enjoyed academia, I enjoyed teaching, and I enjoyed lecturing. I enjoyed a lot of elements of academia but I felt like I was burying myself in that. This opportunity came along which seemed to have a lot more practical implications and I thought I can see the impact of what I do; I can be a service to the field in general and I get a chance to create something.

Do you have any advice for PhD students considering a non-academic career?

I think you have to think about why you're doing this to begin with and put aside questions of security. I think a lot of times people think “I'll stay here and get tenure and I'll have security for the rest of my life” but I know a lot of unhappy academics. So you have to think “why did I do this to begin with? How best can I deploy the skills I've gained through this educational experience?” If it comes out the other end that you have another avenue to pursue that’s nontraditional or going against the grain of the academic establishment you just have to go with it and realize that every one of the paths you’re going to take is going to take you somewhere else. That journey itself, I would think, is part of the reason that you went to school because you must have some innate curiosity about the world and how things work and how the knowledge gained by your research project is important to the field you’re in or the body of knowledge. I think you have to think it through. If you come out either side it doesn’t matter, just think it through and don’t blindly go ahead with an academic career that doesn’t make you happy.

What experiences at Penn do you think best prepared you for the positions you’ve had?

Penn has an openness that some doctoral programs don’t have. There are some very good doctoral programs where your experience is much prescribed. You follow the plan and the plan is set for you by the institution and by the chair of your committee. Penn is more open than that. In my experience I had a lot of freedom to develop and explore. Some of the best advice I got was the head of the doctoral program encouraged us to use our elective to take something unrelated to social work that just sparked our interest. It was really good advice. I took a folklore class. It was just wonderful. I got to do an interesting project through that. I had two different deans and both allowed me to explore what I wanted to explore. I had a lot of freedom and I appreciated that freedom. Because of that it allowed me to approach the job that I’m in with that same idea; I had flexibility. That was my experience at Penn and it was really invaluable.

PEER CITES

Publications


**Presentations**


**Awards and fellowships**

Chenyi Ma: "Still Vulnerable after These Years? Housing Recovery in New Jersey Communities after Sandy" was selected to receive the Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship Award for 2015 from the Wharton Risk Management and Decision Processes Center.


Alexandra Wimberly: SP2's Excellence in Teaching Award, which is presented to two standing faculty members and two non-standing faculty members in recognition of excellence in teaching and mentoring during the previous year.

**Job offers accepted**

Marlene Walk accepted a job offer as Assistant Professor at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) at Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis.