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## DIVERSITY AT SP2

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“A school committed to social justice should be using cutting-edge social theory and field-based practical training to teach students how to love better—more inclusively, more effectively, more holistically, and more emphatically. It is a kind of evidence-based love and caring that doesn’t predetermine the outcome of any specific research intervention or clinical technique, but it is based on the idea that our goal and motivation is to make the world a better place for everyone, especially those rendered most vulnerable or stigmatized. It is an investment in the notion that social categories shouldn’t set limits on empathy and solidarity—that community is strengthened, not threatened, by difference.”

-Dean John L. Jackson, Jr., PhD

Throughout its [history](#), the School of Social Policy & Practice (SP2) at the University of Pennsylvania has been committed to understanding and embracing diversity in its countless forms. With our Master of Social Work (MSW) program, the first program of its kind to organize its curriculum around the construct of institutional racism, two other expanding and ambitious masters programs (in Social Policy and Nonprofit Leadership) that organically complement and extend our MSW offering, and two exciting doctoral programs (a clinical Doctorate in Social Work and a PhD in Social Welfare) that produce some of the most sought- after thought leaders in our fields, SP2's mission is to think critically, thoroughly, and holistically about the many factors that impact people's everyday lives and life chances.

As SP2 has evolved, so too has the understanding of diversity that grounds and enlivens its work. Our historic commitment to racial and economic justice has in recent years intersected in vital ways with emerging commitments individuals and communities marginalized along other axes of oppression. Individuals and organizations across SP2 have mobilized to create curricular, interpersonal, and structural space for the consideration of [LGBTQ+](#) needs and experiences and the elevation of LGBTQ+ voices both within and beyond the School. This understanding and this commitment is about striving to consciously honor the complex and multifaceted experiences of self and community that shape our lives together.

SP2 strives to be a space of principled inclusivity, valuing differences of opinion and attempting to foster an institutional environment where we all think openly, honestly, reflectively, and deeply about the questions and concerns that both unite and divide us. For our faculty, students, and staff, diversity is a multifaceted and intersectional concept that includes careful treatment of questions about how differences linked to race, sexuality, gender identity, religion, ideology, mental illness, ethnicity, class, age, and so much more systematically privilege some and marginalize others. The issues that we grapple with—from homelessness and racism to prisoner re- entry and poverty, from responsible philanthropy and economic mobility to aging and child welfare—are some of the biggest in the academy and in society, and many seem intractable. But we also recognize that we have the best chance of doing justice to these social issues by embodying a truly diverse and inclusive space from which we can attempt to re- imagine our social world.

In many ways, SP2 is among the most diverse Schools at the University of Pennsylvania in terms of the demographic composition of its alumni, staff, students, and faculty. Moreover, our graduates have occupied and continue to fill key administrative positions at the University of Pennsylvania that have diversity- related portfolios, including:

- Director and Associate Director of the African American Resource Center
- Assistant Vice President of Community Relations for the Office of Government and Community Affairs
- Director of the LGBT Center

## Structural Diversity

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SP2 is committed to increasing the ideological and structural diversity that inform life and learning at the School. We believe that students become the most effective scholars and practitioners when they are exposed to a variety of perspectives and approaches. Our [diverse and talented faculty](#) are substantive experts who teach by example: skilled practitioners, inspirational teachers, and world class scholars.

We make a conscious effort to create educational environments where students learn from faculty and staff who both reflect their identities and lend new perspectives on race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality, gender, age, academic background, political beliefs, and more. To reflect both the populations

we serve and our student bodies, we actively recruit faculty and staff from historically under-represented and marginalized communities. We also make concerted efforts to retain our faculty and teaching staff by providing them with individual and group mentoring within the School and across the University.

## Diversity in the Curriculum

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SP2's focus on social justice demands an interdisciplinary, intersectional, and engaged commitment to recognizing and valuing the innumerable identities, experiences, histories, and aspirations that animate our local and global community. This commitment permeates all five of our rigorous degree programs (MSW, MSSP, NPL, DSW, and PhD), helping to bind those programs to SP2's comprehensive mission: producing the best social service providers, policymakers, and nonprofit leaders in the world.

The **Master of Social Work (MSW)** program makes a conscious and deliberate effort to create an educational environment that values diversity and views such diversity as a major strength in preparing social work professionals and promoting a just society. The hallmark of our program is the *racism sequence*, which consists of the courses SWRK 603: American Racism and Social Work Practice and SWRK 713: Understanding Social Change: Issues of Race and Gender. SWRK 603, taken in the first year, prepares students to consider diverse issues throughout their coursework, while SWRK 713 is the capstone course in the final semester of our program, which asks students to synthesize their MSW learning process to reflect on, discuss, and engage with the notion that power creates racial and other disparities in communities and groups. Questions of diversity in its myriad and intersecting forms are infused throughout the MSW curriculum, and countless field placement opportunities are available for MSW students to work with diverse populations within and outside of Philadelphia. In keeping with the interdisciplinary mission of the School, elective courses such as SWRK 798: LGBTQ Communities and Social Policy and SWRK 741: Gender and Social Policy are open to master's-level students across program lines. Indeed, they are open to the entire University.

The **Master of Science in Social Policy (MSSP)** program focuses on increasing equality, promoting equity, and forging policy change. All MSSP courses contain material that focuses student attention on the ways that policy inequities and inadequacies disproportionately affect particular populations in the U.S., whether by income, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, or other marginalizing constructs. Students also focus papers and assignments in several of the courses on social problems of particular concern to them, which often include concerns about exclusion because of sexual orientation, gender biases, family origin, and racism, as well as on human rights issues both in the US and abroad. Students learn evidence-based advocacy and policy formation, implementation, and evaluation skills that prepare them to combat the inequities, inequalities, and inadequacies they research. The internship, the culminating project of the program, allows students to implement their skills in various settings.

The **Master of Science in Nonprofit Leadership (NPL)** program aims to prepare leaders to understand the role nonprofit organizations play in solving complex human problems and the ways in which these organizations can create positive social change. Many NPL courses include discussions, assignments, and projects focused on how nonprofits and social enterprises can address issues connected to income, race, gender and the challenges faced by marginalized populations. Students also select topics for assignments based on social, economic and policy issues connected to their passions and commitments, both in the United States and internationally. Additionally, the NPL program's diverse faculty imbues the courses with an awareness and concern for the importance of diversity in nonprofits and social enterprises. Full-time students complete practicums with and part-time students are employed by nonprofits that are often working with underserved communities in and around Philadelphia.

The **PhD in Social Welfare** educates a new generation of researchers, teachers, and leaders. Students are taught by a diverse group of faculty from across the School and University. The Program offers a confluence of diverse philosophies and approaches to social work, social welfare research, social policy, social theory, and social justice. Questions of diversity animate the curriculum at large, illuminated through both elective coursework across the University and critical SP2 offerings on the philosophy, history, and policy of social welfare. Throughout their time in the PhD program, students are taught how to carefully analyze social problems in order to understand difference and propose effective, research-based solutions.

The **Doctorate in Clinical Social Work (DSW)** prepares leaders in social work practice who produce and disseminate practice knowledge and educate the next generation of social work practitioners. Woven throughout the DSW curriculum is a critical stance that compels students to question complex social polarities such as authority and subjugation, privilege and privation, and diversity and uniformity, which reflect the social conditions and problems with which social work is most acutely concerned. Students are taught to recognize structural barriers and inequities that produce and perpetuate discrimination and oppression and to develop strategies to both address and educate people about these injustices. The DSW program's curricular offerings enable students to focus on the practices and populations about which they are passionate, from culturally competent supervision and training within the discipline itself, to the intersection of race, class, sexuality, and gender in clinical practice, to serving families, children, and youth in inner city contexts. Intersectional and multicultural considerations form the foundation of the DSW program and shape both the pedagogy and the practice of its alumni.

## Student Body

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We believe that teaching should not be limited to the classroom, but rather that learning also occurs on a daily basis through conversations with peers. As a result, we are committed to recruiting and supporting students from a variety of racial, ethnic, cultural, national, and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as students with various sexual orientations and gender identities. There is no "typical" SP2 student; each student brings different perspectives, experiences, and beliefs to SP2.

During the 2015- 2016 academic year, members of our student body—SP2's largest to date—came to Philadelphia from 15 countries and 32 U.S. states. They brought with them their experiences in 71 different academic majors from 155 universities the world over, knitting together perspectives and practices gained in fields from English and Economics to Philosophy and Film, from Human Services and Humanities to Anthropology and American Studies. Over one- third of these students self- identified as students of color, and still more forged new paths in the histories of their families, as members of their first generations to attend college. SP2 is proud to encourage the pursuit of these paths for all students, regardless of personal or family financial circumstances: 90% of SP2 master's students who requested grant assistance from the School received it—an investment based on our firm belief in their promise and potential as scholars and as agents of meaningful social change.

SP2 actively recruits students with diverse academic experiences. Our students earn their undergraduate—and sometimes master's—degrees from a wide variety of institutions (including public and private HBCUs, MSIs, HSIs, community colleges, and liberal arts colleges) and engage in full- time, part- time, non- degree, transfer, study abroad, and sub- matriculate coursework. Additionally, students major in a variety of fields at their undergraduate institutions, enabling SP2 students to offer and encounter cross- disciplinary perspectives in every class.

We welcome students of all identities and experiences to SP2 and are dedicated to reviewing all applications holistically, without merely relying on GPA or standardized test scores. The interview is a critical step in our admission process, as it allows us a better understanding of each student's

singularity and wholeness and helps students, in turn, to discover if SP2 will empower them to meet their goals. We aim to be transparent throughout the admissions process and are dedicated to sharing information with any interested students through scheduled information sessions, recruitment events, and personal pre-application appointments.

At SP2, we are dedicated to creating a supportive and responsive environment where our students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Our faculty, staff and students try to actively nurture a culture of diversity and inclusion so that students feel welcomed and respected. Our student services and support team works closely with students, and our faculty and staff are always available to provide informal support, individualized advising, and linkages to the many resources on Penn's campus. We encourage students to participate in SP2 student organizations that offer opportunities for students to connect with and support one another. These organizations include:

- [Association of Black Social Workers](#)
- [Collectivist – An SP2 Journal](#)
- [Criminal Justice Bloc](#)
- [Disabilities Special Interest Group](#)
- [Jewish Social Work Alliance](#)
- [Hispanic/Latino Alliance for Change and Equity](#)
- [QSP2](#)
- [Social Work Advocates for Immigrant Rights](#)
- [SP2 Quaker Peer Recovery](#)
- [SP2 School Social Work Group](#)
- [SP2 Student Government](#)
- [Students for International Social Work](#)
- [United Community Clinic](#)

Penn's many campus hubs and communities provide further safe spaces where our students can find support and a sense of belonging. These hubs include:

- [Career Services](#)
- [Counseling & Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
- [Family Center at Penn](#)
- [Graduate Student Center](#)
- [Greenfield Intercultural Center](#)
- [La Casa Latina: The Center for Hispanic Excellence](#)
- [LGBTQ Center](#)
- [Makuu Black Cultural Center](#)
- [Marks Family Writing Center](#)
- [PAACH: Pan-Asian American Community House](#)
- [Penn Violence Prevention](#)
- [Penn Women's Center](#)
- [Student Disability Services](#)
- [Student Health Services](#)
- [Weingarten Tutoring & Learning Resources Center](#)

## Extracurricular Opportunities

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There are many opportunities for students to enhance their academic experience at SP2, enabling them to interact with diverse groups of peers and faculty and address issues related to diversity, inclusion, oppression, and social justice. These opportunities include, but are not limited, to participation in student government and SP2 student organizations—listed above—and representation on program governance committees. Additionally, students are invited to participate in town hall meetings and engage with SP2's ["Screening Social Justice" Film Series](#).

SP2 students are also able to engage with the wider University's diverse body of students through lectures, student groups, films, and other Penn sponsored events. These interdisciplinary opportunities enable students to consider issues that cross disciplinary boundaries. Each of SP2's programs is collaborative in nature, and engaging with others at the University allows students to begin to build meaningful connections with those who may be future colleagues in efforts for social justice.

## Alumni

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Our [alumni](#) continue to tackle issues of diversity, power, and privilege in their careers and to advocate for disadvantaged and disenfranchised populations. Our alumni are able to utilize the classes and conversations they had here at SP2 in order to counteract discrimination and oppression in their daily work and communities. Many of our alumni hold leadership positions related to diversity and inclusion in various organizations.

Our alumni remain connected to SP2, serving on advisory committees, networking with other alumni, and attending SP2- sponsored events, both on- campus and throughout the United States and the world. Additionally, alumni support SP2's diverse recruitment efforts by referring students of all different backgrounds to each of our five degree programs.

## Commitment to the Community

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SP2 is located in the vibrant community of West Philadelphia and is committed to engaging with the community in which we live and work. Students have the opportunity to affect positive change in and to advocate for our local neighbors in a number of contexts, including, but not limited to, their field placements, internships, and practicum experiences. Through these opportunities, students provide tangible services to diverse and often marginalized communities, discovering, in turn, through real-world experience, how to combat issues of disempowerment and social marginalization in a variety of contexts.

These contexts are not limited to the local; in our increasingly global society, students must attend to matters of cultural diversity that sometimes mirror and other times confound their local and national perspectives. Students at SP2 are encouraged, therefore, to examine complex social problems through a global lens; this interdisciplinary perspective allows them to learn the importance of considering and respecting cultural norms, political structures, and local and foreign policies. [Global engagement opportunities](#) available at SP2 include study abroad programs, faculty- led courses overseas, and globally based independent studies.

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Promoting social justice and working against forces of oppression have been central to SP2's efforts since the founding of the MSW program over a century ago; they ground our work to this day, challenging us all—faculty and students, alumni, staff, and community—to grow together into new knowledge and to grapple with ever- evolving examples of injustice and inequity. Understanding, respecting, and celebrating diversity is essential to SP2's educational mission and values, and we are committed to helping students learn how to have difficult conversations, listening without pre- judgement, and addressing social problems from diverse perspectives. It is a commitment that we take seriously and one that we hope to nurture in our students as they become empowered to work for a more just, equitable, and compassionate world.

*For more information about the mission and vision of the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice, please visit our website at: [www.sp2.upenn.edu](http://www.sp2.upenn.edu).*