

MOSAICS

Time for **change** in American policing. On that we can agree.

WHAT ROLE SHOULD SOCIAL WORKERS PLAY?

| by Jana Eisenberg

Amid this American moment, with disasters both natural and man-made ongoing, and a populace violently divided, another argument in microcosm is ongoing: *how and if* social workers should be part of the solution regarding police reform.

The question has been reframed considering the opportunity now before us—driven by the Black Lives Matter movement, the outcry against police killing Black people, and the need, considered by a majority of Americans, to reform the police system. Yet within our profession, the debate is as complex as the number of terms used to define the issue.

“Defund the police”; “abolish” the police; “divest and reinvest”—some call on the profession as a whole to support the Black Lives Matter platform. And, while the National Association of Social Workers published a paper advocating for dismantling racist policing, in June, its CEO, Angeló McClain, argued in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed that social workers can effectively work alongside police.

UCLA social work chair Laura Abrams and Alan Detlaff, University of Houston Graduate

School of Social Work dean countered McClain’s statement with an open letter signed by over 1,400 social workers. “This appears to be a rush to ally ourselves with a criminal justice system known to perpetuate destructive violence and oppression against Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities,” they wrote. “...As a profession, we have not yet reckoned with the racism and anti-Blackness that exists among ourselves and our key social welfare intuitions.”


This internal debate has been framed as “either/or” or “both/and”—both sides believe that social workers should advocate for change; some believe that social workers should EITHER work with the police within their systems, OR not at all, while the other side thinks it’s possible for social workers to BOTH work within the existing policing system AND simultaneously work to change it.

Detlaff, during Jonathan Singer’s recent National Facebook Live debate said, “I’m... for ‘either/or’; we’ve already had ‘both/and’! We’ve been collaborating [with police and criminal justice systems] for decades, and it has not led to meaningful changes. We are complicit if we continue to work with violent, racist institutions.”

On the opposite side, Terry Mizrahi, a professor at Hunter College’s Silberman School of Social Work, supported “both/and.” “We can be part of the solution. [Social workers] can be both critics and collaborators. We need to be...where policy is being made, and...where the protest is happening. We need both.”

In Buffalo, a group called Western New York Agents of Change, made up of social work and mental health professionals, sent an open letter to the mayor, flatly opposing the use of social workers “with and/or within police departments” and advocating for a fully funded, independent mobile mental health team.

Our dean spoke against Mayor Brown’s initiative. “When we partner with an organization we go in as guests... that’s exactly how we’d be with the police. When you’re a guest you have to live with the rules of that house,” Dean Smyth told an *Investigative Post* reporter. She also noted that there are too many problems with that “house,” that is, with policing. Smyth added, “This isn’t about bad people. This is about bad systems that need to be restructured.”

 [See more inside ----->](#)



FROM DEAN NANCY J. SMYTH

It's an understatement to say that 2020 has been truly challenging. Between the pandemic, the economic impact, and the racial injustice reckoning that is still underway, we've all been shaken, at every level. We must pay attention, and do what we can, especially related to promoting racial justice for Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian people and other people of color.

Uncertainty and the unknown still has the ground shifting. We are fortunate that our choice of profession, and a combination of education, predilection, and experience, teaches us to be flexible, creative, solution-oriented, and empathetic.

As I'm sure all of you have, we've shifted our gaze to where we can make the most positive impact. For us, this is with our students who need more support during this time, so we've reprioritized our time, energy, and funds accordingly.

Mosaics magazine has always been a way for us to connect, a place for an exchange of stories and information, a medium to remind us all of our shared values, goals and ideals. Our highest imperative in the current environment is our students' needs; however, with this greatly abbreviated version of our print magazine, we do want to convey some of our ongoing activities and thoughts, and also share some of your input.

In response to the Black Lives Matter movement, our faculty, staff, students and I have already begun discussing our curriculum and school policies to achieve more focus, depth and transparency on racial justice. We will be reaching out to alumni and community partners shortly as part of this work.

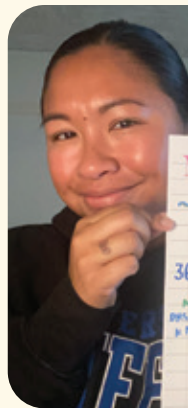
We are hearing from you about what's happening. Via a crowdsourcing survey, we asked a few questions about how your work has changed since the pandemic and lockdowns started. See next page for a selection of your answers.

In moving forward, I believe that we need to be creative in staying connected at a human level. ("Zoom-fatigue" is real. Especially if it's all work and no play.) I've found myself turning to nature, finding solace and breath in the outdoors; let us hear from you about how this is affecting you.

Thank you again for your support in all the ways that you do.

Dean Nancy J. Smyth

Why I'm here: MEET OUR STUDENTS



The UBSSW Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) program launched in 2019. The online program is designed for working professionals, and has just begun its second academic year.

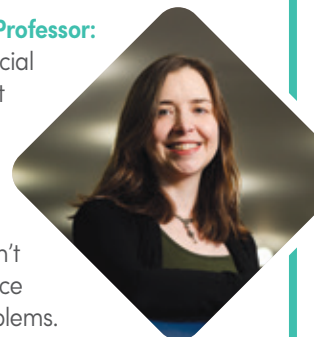
As Michelle Fortunado-Kewin searched for a DSW program, she had a mission: She wants to find—and more importantly implement—interventions to

SW and Policing continued...

Our faculty members' opinions reflect the diversity of these points of view. For example:

Patricia Logan-Greene, Associate Professor:

Using force or arrest to deal with social issues, like mental health crises, isn't helpful, and may create more lasting harms and lasting problems. Some forms of partnership between social work and police have worked. But we can't add a few social workers to the police and expect that to solve all the problems. The biggest things we need are hard looks at police accountability systems and structures.



Christopher St. Vil, Assistant Professor: This is a political issue. Law enforcement is a broken institution, it has been since slavery; it has roots in overseers being deputized to chase down slaves. Once police are trained to be violent and use force, they get on the job and they're looking for action. This won't be fixed by having social workers ride along with police. Social workers try to work with people—that won't work with police. Social work has nothing to do with police having qualified immunity.



For more on this story visit socialwork.buffalo.edu/mosaics

MOSAICS

The magazine for alumni and friends of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work

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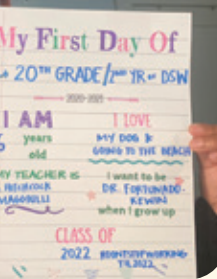
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For an electronic version of this publication, visit socialwork.buffalo.edu/mosaics.

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Photo courtesy of Michelle Fortunado-Kewin



reduce suicide and suicidal ideation in the youth she works with.

Observing mental health issues and challenges in herself and in her own family inspired her to want to help others, said Fortunado-Kewin, 36, who identifies as Filipino.

She found her way to social work in college. Now, she holds a bachelor's,

a master's, and is a licensed clinical social worker, also credentialed in pupil personnel services (PPSC).

She's the program coordinator and clinical supervisor for the San Francisco Unified

School District's Student Intervention Team. She's also a field faculty advisor/adjunct assistant professor at Smith College School for Social Work (Northampton, MA), and also maintains a private practice.

Within the San Francisco school district, she saw higher suicide ideation rates in Filipino students, and sought interventions. "I found information about why this population experiences those thoughts, but not a lot about what we can do specifically," she said. "I needed to explore these issues more deeply. The topic was perfect for a doctorate."

She quickly understood that a DSW, versus a PhD was right for her. "The DSW is practice-focused. With a PhD, there can be a years-long gap between research and implementation. I want to impact clients, community, and systems sooner," she noted.

Fortunado-Kewin learned about the School's DSW program through a Facebook ad; she was attracted to the comparably affordable tuition, and especially to the School's human-rights, social justice and trauma-informed perspective. "As a person of color and a woman, I'm hoping this degree allows me to have more impactful leadership and planning roles for other people of color," she said.

"What's especially helped is the professors' flexibility and knowledge," she added. "With the pandemic, and all of us [DSW students] working full-time, the School has been very welcoming and understanding."



For a fuller profile of Fortunado-Kewin, please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/ubssw-mfk-dsw>

Q&A We asked, you answered:

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE PANDEMIC HAD ON YOUR WORK?

Particularly with regard to technology, a range of alumni (from 1987-2018) and others share how they've handled pandemic-related workplace changes.

How has work changed overall?

"At the start of the crisis, within 72 hours, we took 700 clinicians and around 7,000 patients virtual."

Matthew L. Schwartz, MSW '18, DSW student, senior counselor II, Horizon Health Services

"Remote learning is challenging for children who experience spectrum disorder traits. Caregiver phone calls last much longer. The intensity of normalizing worldwide uncertainty has been an important change."

Patricia Denhoff, MSW '87, school social worker

Has moving online changed work?

"Online group treatment was new, and it has been very successful."

Carrie Corby, MSW '09, LCSW, Kelberman Center

"[Some of my clients are] non-offending parents of children who've been sexually abused. Confidentiality can be difficult, if the perpetrator is in the home as well."

Jamie Core, MSW '18, medical social worker, Banner University Medical Center (Tucson AZ)/therapist, Arizona's Children Association

What tools have worked?

"Technology helps, but I only get wi-fi in certain areas of my home. That makes it hard!"

Bonnie Oliver, MSW '11, social worker, ConMed Health

"Zoom and WebEx have been a huge help. We [started using the collaboration software] Samepage more widely, to provide COVID-19 resources to systems (primarily schools). We use short videos, and longer recorded lectures to get information to individuals."

Samantha Koury, MSW '15, UBSSW adjunct faculty/project manager, Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care

Any particular benefits or challenges?

"It is difficult to do remote sessions with patients who don't have technology."

Melina Ciotta, MSW '20, behavioral health clinician, Horizon Health Services

"Some parents requested that I continue to do group sessions with their students. The virtual platform provided some sense of normalcy; a means to stay connected with peers."

Ginny Reidman-Dangler, MSW '02, retired school counselor

How are you thinking about the future?

"I am encouraged by the increased awareness of mental health and in particular, employee wellbeing."

Megan Andrews, MSW '94, UBSSW adjunct faculty/field educator, assistant director, Child & Family Services EAP

"[The pandemic and response to it] highlights the importance of face-to-face interaction with our participants, while also making us aware of the flexibility for other areas."

Millie Sheppard, program manager, MedStar Washington Hospital Center- Community Violence Intervention Program (assisting Prof. C. St. Vil with clinical research)



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Professor Hilary Weaver

INDUCTED INTO THE NASW SOCIAL WORK PIONEERS® PROGRAM

The NASW Social Work Pioneers® program—one of the profession’s highest accolades—has been awarded to Prof. Hilary Weaver.

“You are one of a select few chosen to join the ranks of social workers who have explored new territories and built outposts for human services around the country,” read her notification. Dean Nancy J. Smyth proudly added, “We are excited and gratified to see Hilary’s contributions honored by the luminaries of our great profession.”

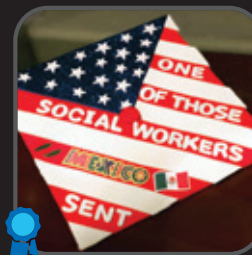


Capping off an unusual year

One thing that makes us strong as social workers is our adaptability, our understanding of how to handle different—and difficult—situations. Our 2019–20 graduation ceremony, while conducted remotely, via media including live and video streams and online photo sharing, still captured the hope and determination that we—and our graduates—embody. We congratulate each of these new alumni.



MOST CREATIVE
Whitney Marris



BEST REPRESENTATION OF THE FIELD
Hector Chaidez-Raicho



MOST INSPIRATIONAL
Victoria Eden