PARTNERING for CHANGE

A PUBLICATION FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

HIGHLIGHTING SOCIAL WORKERS AND ALLIED PROFESSIONALS COMMITTED TO BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

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MSW CERTIFICATE PROGRAM / PROGRAMA DE CERTIFICADO DE MSW

LISTA
LATINA/O/X INITIATIVES FOR SERVICE, TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

Approximately 20% of both New Jersey and New York’s individual state populations are Hispanic, and as this community continues to grow, there is a lack of culturally competent social practitioners to work effectively with these populations. The LISTA Certificate Program, with funding from the New York Community Trust, was developed to fill this gap.

LISTA aims to increase the number of social workers who are culturally competent to provide services to Hispanic populations through:

- Education on evidence-based culturally responsive practices
- Internships in Hispanic serving agencies
- Experiential learning through study abroad in Hispanic countries

The LISTA Certificate Program offers multiple annual scholarships and stipends. In honor of LISTA founder Dr. Raymond Sanchez Mayers, who is retiring this year, the School of Social Work is seeking your generosity to support our scholarship fund.

For more information, contact Director of Development Erin Capone at ecapone@ssw.rutgers.edu.

SOCIALWORK.RUTGERS.EDU/LISTA
“It doesn’t matter how strong your opinions are. If you don’t use your power for positive change, you are, indeed, part of the problem.”

CORETTA SCOTT KING
Dear Friends,

After another productive summer at the School of Social Work, we are excited to welcome fall and the many changes that come with the new season. There are so many happening right now in New Jersey — the trees are changing color, the air is cooling down, and the pace of each day quickens. We are also beginning a new academic year, and with it comes a sense of hope as a new cohort of students begins its journey to a career in social work. There is also another major change afoot — we are returning to campus.

For months, our planning team has been working tirelessly to strategize our return to Rutgers. Using guidance from federal and state public health officials, our team made the safety of our entire community its highest priority. There are many mixed emotions among us as we repopulate our spaces, but our community is resilient. We will be even stronger together than we were apart.

When I reflect on the many months that the pandemic kept us home, I am both impressed with, and sometimes appalled by, the way that social issues have come to the fore and have energized our country. The pandemic has lifted up our knowledge of health and work inequities. Race-based hatred and violence endure and call out the ways that progress toward racial justice has been stalled. How shall we respond as a people? Social workers have serious work to do as we lead for justice in multiple ways.

I was happy to hear that Juneteenth will be recognized as a national holiday. Juneteenth holds important historical and current value for all who celebrate liberation from slavery. The holiday also helps us focus on issues of justice delayed and denied, and calls us to both memory and action. Memory is important, but without the action, we cannot choose the change we know is required in our country and our communities.

Change, and particularly those who create change, is the focus of this edition of our alumni magazine. In it you’ll read about the many changes that have taken place at the School since our last update and about other changes on the horizon. You’ll meet alum Maury Lieberman and his wife Leslie Scallet, who have dedicated their lives to creating a better world through positive change. You’ll also learn about our new podcast, which, in its first season, put a spotlight on change makers in politics.

The twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism have challenged our community in countless ways. Challenges provide the impetus for change. Let us choose to lead for justice. Thank you for your dedication to the School of Social Work and the entire Rutgers community.

In solidarity,

Cathryn C. Potter, M.S.W., Ph.D.
DEAN AND DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR
RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
After more than a year and a half conducting classes, meetings, and other business remotely, Rutgers School of Social Work students, faculty, and staff are beginning to return to campus this fall.

"Rutgers is meant to be an in-person, face-to-face university community," said Dean and Distinguished Professor Cathryn C. Potter. "Although there will be challenges as we repopulate our spaces, the School of Social Work is using guidance from federal and state public health officials to inform our planning to ensure the safety of our entire community. Our return is also guided by three principles as directed by the university:

1) We are returning to the classroom and the workplace in support of our mission of teaching, research, clinical care, and service;
2) our commitment to the health and safety of the campus community, based on science and public health guidelines, remains paramount; and
3) the safe repopulation of our campuses is a shared responsibility, which means we all must do our part to keep safe, to ensure equity in our return, and to be flexible in implementing the return.

President Holloway has also tasked Senior Vice President for Human Resources Vivian Fernández to chair a presidential task force on the future of work at Rutgers. The group will provide suggestions to better serve the Rutgers community, operate more efficiently, promote work-life balance, and support sustainability.

"We are focused on building a better future for the School of Social Work community," said Potter. "Although there will be challenges as we repopulate our spaces, we know our return to campus will be a positive step forward in this long journey. Looking back on all that we’ve endured since March 2020, I know that our community members are resilient."

To learn more about Rutgers’ return to campus planning, visit coronavirus.rutgers.edu.

FIFTH ANNUAL CHALLENGING RACIAL DISPARITIES CONFERENCE: A CALL TO ACTION

Rutgers School of Social Work hosted its fifth annual Challenging Racial Disparities Conference, “A Call to Action,” on Wednesday, June 2, bringing together social workers and allied professionals for a powerful learning opportunity on the topic of racial disparities and white privilege. More than 300 participants attended the virtual conference, which was organized by the School of Social Work’s Office of Continuing Education.

Dean and Distinguished Professor Cathryn C. Potter, Ph.D, offered initial remarks to attendees, and the opening keynote was presented by Dr. Catherine Lee, an associate professor in the Departments of Sociology & Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Rutgers University. Dr. Lee spoke on how to confront the legacy of Asian exclusion and anti-Asian racism.

Dorothy Roberts, J.D. served as the keynote speaker and shared anti-racist lessons for social workers on Black women and reproductive justice. Roberts is a professor of law and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, with joint appointments in the Departments of Africana Studies, Sociology, and the Law School. She is the founder and director of the Penn Program on Race, Science, and Society.

An internationally recognized scholar, public intellectual, and social justice advocate, Roberts has written and lectured extensively on anti-racist lessons for social workers on Black women and reproductive justice. Roberts is a professor of law and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, with joint appointments in the Departments of Africana Studies, Sociology, and the Law School. She is the founding director of the Penn Program on Race, Science, and Society.

Each year, the keynote lecture is offered in honor of social work professor Dr. William Neal Brown, the first Black professor at Rutgers, who passed away in 2009. Dr. Brown’s longtime partner, Suzanne Zimmer, supports the annual conference as a way to acknowledge his legacy and contributions to Rutgers, which have historically gone unnoticed.

Following the keynote was a panel discussion moderated by Assistant Professor of Teaching Christine Morales, LCSW. Panelists included Elsa Candelario, MSSW, LCSW, Bonnie Cushing, LCSW, Catherine Lee, Ph.D., and Dorothy Roberts, JD. Morales posed challenging questions submitted by audience members, and the panel answered thoughtfully. Much of the discussion was centered on the many ways white people can stand in solidarity with Black, indigenous, and people of color and how these efforts can be sustained over the long term.

Attendees gained new skills and ideas to address issues of race in their practice with clients, organizations, communities, and within themselves.
RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK / PARTNERING WITH VIRTUAL CONVOCATION CEREMONY

On Monday, May 17, Rutgers School of Social Work hosted a virtual convocation ceremony to recognize our BASW, MSW, DSJH, and PhD, graduates. Families and friends gathered virtually in support of their loved ones who have spent years of hard work completing their programs and dedicating countless hours of class time, research, and field work. In total, 996 students earned a degree from the School of Social Work this year, including 835 MSW students, 147 BASW students, 11 DSJH students, and 3 PhD students. Dean Carolyn G. Potter welcomed guests to the ceremony and recognized the many sacrifices our students have made during the pandemic.

Along with the conferral of the degrees, the school presented the following awards in recognition of our students’ outstanding work:

- Drizin’s Dissertation Award: Yuqi Wang
- Emerging Scholar IDEIA Research Award: Iris Cardenas
- Outstanding MSW Student in the Clinical Specialization: Martha A. Pender and Dean Alexander Manning
- Outstanding MSW Student in the MAP Specialization: Marlinea Stephanie Ulbed
- Outstanding MSW Student in the Online Program: Sonia LaVonne Bradley
- Outstanding MSW Student in the Intensive Weekend Program: Simone Alexandra Jarvis
- Outstanding MSW Student in the Blended Program: Nicole Tippa
- Outstanding MSW Student Studying in Newark: Rodrigo Cardenas, Jr.
- Outstanding MSW Student Studying in Camden: Kareemah Major
- Outstanding MSW Student Studying in New Brunswick: Elizabeth Helen Antonowicz
- Outstanding MSW Student in the Camden BASW Program: Anais Kojfe
- Outstanding MSW Student in the New Brunswick BASW Program: Asia Davis
- Dean’s Dissertation Award: Rodrigo Cardenas
- Outstanding Professor in MAP Specialization: Cassandra Simmel
- Outstanding Professor for Excellence in Inclusion, Intersectionality, Diversity, Equity and Advancement (IDEIA) Teaching: DuWayne Battle
- Outstanding Professor for Innovative and Creative Teaching: Marla Blunt-Carter
- Most Supportive Professor: Anna Haley
- Exemplary IDEIA Research Recognition Award: Abigail Williams-Butler
- Outstanding Part-Time Lecturer: Jennifer Polizotto
- Doctoral Student Teaching in the BASW or MSW Programs: Cacie Butter and Lorraine Howard
- Most Supportive Staff Award: Arlene Hunter

In addition, faculty and staff members were presented the following awards:

- Outstanding Professor in Clinical Specialization: Ryan DiMeglio
- Outstanding Professor for MAP Specialization: Cassandra Simmel
- Outstanding Professor for Excellence in Inclusion, Intersectionality, Diversity, Equity and Advancement (IDEIA) Teaching: DuWayne Battle
- Outstanding Professor for Innovative and Creative Teaching: Marla Blunt-Carter
- Most Supportive Professor: Anna Haley
- Exemplary IDEIA Research Recognition Award: Abigail Williams-Butler
- Outstanding Part-Time Lecturer: Jennifer Polizotto
- Doctoral Student Teaching in the BASW or MSW Programs: Cacie Butter and Lorraine Howard
- Most Supportive Staff Award: Arlene Hunter

Student speaker Marlinea Ulbed, a member of the MSW Class of 2021, addressed the audience with words of encouragement and support. Rounding out the program was a speech from Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester, the first African American and the first woman to represent Delaware in the U.S. House of Representatives. The event also included a performance from Christiana Danielle, a woman to represent Delaware in the U.S. House of Representatives. The event also included a performance from Christiana Danielle, a

Dean Potter concluded the ceremony with words of encouragement for the Class of 2021. “Graduates, you have been prepared for a fabulous career in social work by an outstanding group of faculty and field instructors. We know each of you will find creative ways to make a difference in the lives of the people and communities you serve. You are entering a new world at a time of great crisis and need. You are the future of our profession. You are our hope for a more just future. This is not the end of our time together. You are a Rutgers social work grad now, and you will lead alongside the school for years to come. We are so very proud of you.”

Congratulations, graduates, and welcome to the Rutgers School of Social Work alumni network!
Assistant Professor Emily Adlin Buck authored "That Which Is Invisible: has been Made Invisible: The Need to Bring a Structural Risk Perspective to Reducing Disproportionality in Child Welfare" in Juar and Social Problems.

Assistant Professor Vanessa Williams served as panelist for the NASW-NJ annual conference on March 18. Dr. Williams was the keynote speaker for the Entrepreneurial rapidly to the development of the journal, help ensure the journal’s standards are rigorous and that its content advances knowledge in the field. Dr. Williams also elected to the board of directors for the Center on the Economic well-being of the Family. Additionally, she authored "Moving toward health and social equity for women who use cannabis during pregnancy and lactation" in JAMA Network Open.

Ph.D. student Peter Trettel, Assistant Research Professor, Associate Director of the Center for Prevention Science, and Director of the Northeast & Caribbean Prevention Technology Transfer Center wrote "Antipsychotic Treatment for Youth in Foster Care: Perspectives on Improving Youths’ Experiences and Providing Informed Consent" in American Journal of Orthopsychiatry.

Assistant Professor Emmy Tideringen, Assistant Professor Emily Adlin Buck and Ph.D. student Alejandra Sánchez authored "Negotiating child poverty mandates in Housing First for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Challenges in the Crisis Systems" in The Milbank Quarterly.

Assistant Professor Brian Goodwin was appointed for the journal Human Services.
NEW FACULTY: FIVE OBJECTS THAT MATTER

Rutgers School of Social Work is pleased to announce the hiring of three new faculty members. Assistant Professor and Chancellor’s Scholar for Inclusive Excellence in Intimate Partner Violence Prevention & Intervention Maxine Davis, Associate Professor of Professional Practice Tanazda Hubbard, and Associate Professor and Chancellor’s Scholar for Inclusive Excellence in Interpersonal Violence Research Chiara Sabina began in their roles on September 1, 2021.

Dr. Maxine Davis is a second-generation activist who is passionate about discovering how to end violence perpetration in romantic and intimate relationships. She studies people who act abusively and interventions designed to help them change. As a scholar of intimate partner violence and abuse (IPV/A), she focuses on interventions to assist Black and Latino men in ending abusive behaviors in their intimate relationships.

Dr. Tanazda Hubbard’s practice interests include working with children, adolescents, adults, couples, and families struggling with adverse childhood experiences, parenting, parent-child conflict, family conflict, ADHD, mood disorders, ODD, relational challenges, personal and family crisis, unsolved trauma, and self-development. Dr. Hubbard’s scholarship interests focus on in-home/in-community behavioral health, relational neglect in adolescence, opposition in adolescence, personhood, family wellness, relational interventions, structural discrimination, anti-racism and anti-oppression, incorporating social justice in clinical practice, clinical supervision, and creating and sustaining nurturing spaces for Black women in leadership.

Dr. Chiara Sabina’s research centers on interpersonal victimization, especially intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and dating violence among Latinos. Dr. Sabina employs a contextual, strengths-based perspective with respect to interpersonal violence focusing on understudied groups, the influence of cultural variables, help-seeking perspective with respect to interpersonal violence focusing on understudied groups, the influence of cultural variables, help-seeking

02. PLANTS
I recently found a connection to nature and deeply enjoy the beauty in living plants. I love sitting or working outdoors because it gets me closer to trees and large bodies of water. Plants give me calming energy and fill my heart in an indescribable manner. I’m growing my collection both indoors and outside, but only with “easy” perennials or low maintenance and forgiving varieties because I have a long way to go before I can claim a green thumb. Nonetheless, plants give me great joy, and I aim to cultivate a small forest in my office and home garden.

03. GRADUATION PHOTO
I bought this original painting from an artist in Antigua after visiting Guatemala in 2011. It hangs in each office I occupy. Every time I look at it, I am reminded of the beauty in the mountains I climbed but also remember the piercing images of the local dump—the first place I saw abject poverty. Guatemala holds a special place in my heart and always will.

04. GUATEMALAN PAINTING
In her office space I occupy. Every action I take is in response to the question: what would Aunt Bertha say about this? Would she expect me to stand up or stay silent? How would she advise me to speak? Studying under Aunt Bertha and my mother (Maxine Johnson), sochning their seamless synergy in pursuit of justice taught me lessons that guide me every single day. As community organizers, committed to causes beyond themselves, they taught me true social work. As a guidepost in all my decisions or endeavors, I strive to make them proud and please God.

05. HANDS
My nails are art and expression that serve as evidence of the freedom I have to be myself in places that were not originally built for me. Long and gold nails that make me smile. I adorn a ring gifted by Keith, a partner who is too amazing to describe in words alone. The ring is engraved with “purpose driven,” a perfect description of who I am.
01/ RELAXING ON THE PORCH
This is one of my favorite pictures in my home. Laying back with one’s feet up, basking in the sun with peace and quiet, feeling a gentle breeze. She reminds me to take time to do nothing, to just sit in the sun, take it all in and do so guilt free. This picture has become a part of me that at the mere thought of the image I can take myself to a peaceful, calming place internally.

02/ MY VILLAGE
This wall unit hangs in my front room on the main level of my home. There is nowhere you can turn without seeing pictures of my family and me. It is full but not complete. There are more pictures of family and friends throughout the house. The pictures capture our love, strength, and connections. They remind me of the cloth I am cut from, shoulders I stand on, and that I am never alone.

03/ A SHELTERING TREE
A dear friend of mine gave me this portrait over 20 years ago and explained to me the importance of our friendship during a painful time in my life: the loss of my youngest brother. We have been there for each other and our families over the years. She has taught me what true friendship looks and feels like. It is a blessing to have a friend who becomes your sheltering tree.

04/ DAILY WORD
As a social work practitioner, I hear many stories full of hurt, pain, sorrow, and struggle from those I support on their journeys of healing and recovery. I want my day with a positive and inspirational word that helps to center and ground me. When needed, I can take a moment to reflect on the words and I feel calmed, inspired, and energized. It feels like a warm blanket on a cold day.

05/ PASSPORT
Sign me up! I love traveling and taking in different ways of life. Visiting is wonderful, but living abroad has changed me. I lived abroad in Granada, Spain during college and then again in 2015-2016 in Quito, Ecuador. One memorable trip was staying in my great grandfather’s home in Camagüey, Cuba. Another was witnessing the marvels of Machu Picchu. Traveling is life-giving to me, and my list of places visited is not quite long enough.

01/ COLORFUL TREE
As Joyce Kilmer wrote, “I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree.” And the splendor of trees is even more magical in the fall. This beautiful one greeted me for many years on my way to work. It served as a daily reminder to pause, breathe, and appreciate what is around me.

04/ HOT AIR BALLOON
My ride on a hot air balloon was unforgettable and was the most wonderful celebration of another year of life. Being literally a mile high let me enjoy my local world in a whole new way and take in the buzz of life below at first, and then the stillness that envelops our daily life. It was much more peaceful than my sky diving journey, although that was exhilarating as well.

03/ GRACIAS A LA VIDA
This song composed by Violeta Parra and performed by Mercedes Sosa signals gratitude and connectedness. Some of the translated lyrics are, “Thank you to life, that has given me so much, it has given me laughter and it has given me tears, that’s how I can tell joy from agony, the two materials that form my song, and your song, which is the same song, and everyone’s song, which is my own song.”

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05/ EVENT TICKETS
I’ve collected tickets for decades to remember the events and activities that inspire me. I love going to see foreign films, listening to the symphony, appreciating the visual and performing arts, dancing, taking in lessons from the wise, and wondering at the gift of life. One of the events I especially enjoyed was listening to Thich Nhat Hanh speak in Chicago. Another was hearing the live salsa of Marc Anthony.

TAWANDA HUBBARD

CHIARA SABINA
RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK'S PODCAST PUTS A SPOTLIGHT ON THOSE COMMITTED TO BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE
A part of our commitment to leading for justice through innovation, excellence, collaboration, and community, Rutgers School of Social Work launched a new podcast, Toward a More Just Future, last spring. The series explores a variety of topics pertinent to social workers and students working towards progress. Season one, “In the Spotlight,” focused on change-makers and was hosted by Marla Blunt-Carter, Assistant Professor of Professional Practice at Rutgers School of Social Work.

Blunt-Carter spoke with voices in politics to understand what change is, how it unfolds, and how more people can get involved. “When conceptualizing the first season of our podcast, we wanted to create a space for dialogue on change,” said Blunt-Carter. “Although our main audience is comprised of social work students and practitioners, we wanted these important conversations to be approachable and accessible to everyone; no matter where they are in their education or career. Change can, and should, happen at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Our goal was to convey that creating change at any level can be difficult, but it can be done by anyone.”

Season one brought three international politicians and change makers into conversation with Blunt-Carter. Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester, the first African American and first woman to represent Delaware in the U.S. House of Representatives, kicked off the season. Congresswoman Blunt Rochester serves as an Assistant Whip for House Leadership and sits on the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sarah McBride, an activist and elected official who is a Delaware General Assembly member, was in conversation with Blunt-Carter in the second episode. McBride is the first transgender state senator in the country, making her the highest-ranking transgender official in United States history. Rounding out the first season was a conversation with Valerie Biden Owens, a media consultant, political strategist, and the sister of President Joe Biden.

Read on for some of the first season’s highlights.

**Lisa Blunt Rochester on creating change through social work:**

“I actually am the product of a social worker: our dad, a Rutgers grad. I am the sister of a social worker: my sister Marla. And I’m the mother of a social worker: My daughter, Alyssa, also graduated with a Master of Social Work from Rutgers. I watched you guys, from both a micro and a macro level, deal with social work... There are so many different ways in which you can have an impact on people’s lives and improve their quality of life. As a caseworker, I still remember over 30 years ago, people who, because I was advocating for them with the Social Security Administration, got their benefits. And they were homeless. That matters. That one-on-one matters. Social workers can run for office. Social workers can help make sure that people with the right vision, the same mission, the same goals, get elected... On more personal side, I would say as an individual, make sure you know your why. It helps to keep you going when the storms come. You can stay rooted in that why.”

**Sarah McBride on becoming a Delaware State Senator:**

“I was incredibly lucky. I was raised in a loving family, a supportive family, a progressive family, and I had a world of possibilities before me because of that luck and that privilege. But buried deep inside of me was a struggle with my gender identity, a struggle with who I am, and a struggle with how I fit into this world. And from a really early age I was dealing with the tension between who I was and what everyone thought I was between who I wanted to be and what seemed possible. And so, I kept my gender identity buried deep inside. I really found an escape in reading. And in particular, in reading history. But more than an escape, I found hope in reading those history books because, as much as I was struggling with how I fit into this world, I saw in those history books the story of every chapter was the story of advocates, activists, citizens, and accessible to everyone; a small group of courageous elected officials who would band together to deepen our sense of equality and justice for more and more people who for too often had been pushed to the margins and into the shadows. So I found hope in those history books, and I saw in reading those stories, that politics was the place where you could make the most amount of change for the most number of people in the most number of ways possible. And I thought, perhaps, if I could make a change in my community, if I could build a world where more people could live freely and fully, whether there’s someone like me or someone else, that perhaps that would be a fulfilling life, even if I couldn’t live an authentic life. But as I grew up, I saw that the only way to live a fulfilling life is to live at your core an authentic life.”

**Valerie Biden Owens on how she gained her confidence:**

“Confidence is the number one prerequisite for success in life. And I had the great advantage of having a big brother who told me from the beginning that whatever he could do I could do better. He said I was smarter than he, I was more athletic than he. Whatever it was, he said there was nothing that he could do that any woman couldn’t do, but particularly me. Confidence is not part of one’s DNA. I didn’t actively take notes to learn how to be confident. I hung around with my brother. He told me I could be anything that I wanted to be. And my parents said, ‘you can be anything.’ They were always encouraging. It’s wonderful to have a mentor, somebody who, when you’re down, who says, ‘come on, you can do this.’ Confidence is not something that’s part of your DNA. It’s something really hard to get ahold of. Some people get it a little bit more easily or a lot more easily than others. And look, Marla, once you have it doesn’t mean it stays. I don’t know about you, but sometimes I just feel it slipped right through my fingers.”

Learn more about the School of Social Work’s podcast and listen to the full episodes of Toward a More Just Future at socialwork.rutgers.edu/podcasts.
Maury Lieberman grew up in the 1950s in Milwaukee, where his father was involved in progressive Wisconsin politics. In the mid-50s, his father took a chance on a new business and moved the entire family to Houston, at that time a small, segregated Southern city. There he witnessed far more overt displays of prejudice, racism, and injustice than he had ever seen before. The only Jewish student in his segregated Texas high school of 2,500, Maury felt like a fish out of water. “They were traumatic teenage years,” he recalls. Quiet support from some teachers and community members taught him never to generalize about any group or environment.

Meanwhile, nearly 800 miles away in Clayton, Missouri, Leslie Scallet was experiencing her own set of challenges growing up in the same decade. She excelled in school, but girls were not expected to pursue careers outside of teaching or other female-dominated jobs. “Since I had good grades, I could aspire to teach high school, but no other options were mentioned,” she says.

Despite the distance, he moved across the country and became a social work student at Rutgers. Just one of two community organization students in his cohort studied casework and group work. Maury fully immersed himself in his studies and field work, receiving a hands-on education in how to effect change.

Leslie also became intent on changing the world, taking the message in John F. Kennedy’s famous presidential inauguration speech as a call to action. “There was a lot of attention to improving the world in the 1960s, and a lot of people were going to law school to do just that,” she says. After studying history at Washington University in St. Louis, she decided to pursue a career in law. Encouraged only by her father, Leslie went on to earn her J.D. at the University of Pennsylvania.

Upon graduation, his extended family expected him to apply for law or medical school, but Maury had different plans. “I always wanted to go to school in the East, and Rutgers School of Social Work offered me a scholarship,” he says. Despite the distance, he moved to New Jersey to fully immerse himself in his studies and field work, receiving a hands-on education in how to effect change.

In the background of Maury’s post-graduation life was the Vietnam War, so he chose to continue studying and received an education in urban and regional planning at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public and International Affairs. After graduating, he joined the U.S. Public Health Service, receiving a Navy lieutenant’s rank, and was assigned to a civilian post at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in Washington, D.C.

While there, Leslie’s diverse educational background became an asset in her job collaborating with other interdisciplinary thinkers. “The center was the vanguard, with other interdisciplinary thinkers. "The center was the vanguard, and everyone thought we were off the wall," he says with a laugh. “Even our office arrangement was different – a big open space where we sat on the floor or on beanbags.”

Maury and Leslie felt fortunate to have careers that provided them the freedom to think differently and deepen their understanding of mental health. And although they worked for nearly two decades, Maury and Leslie only knew each other informally, seeing each other infrequently. But eventually, they developed a relationship, getting close and marrying. They both went on to other jobs later in their careers and decided to retire in the late 1990s. Unlike many new retirees, Maury and Leslie were busy, serving as activists, consultants, and board members for local, national, and international organizations.

After spending years supporting several disparate causes, Maury and Leslie realized they needed to formalize their efforts and determine if their time and resources were being used to their fullest extent. They took some time to reflect on their education and work, finding that one of the greatest lessons they learned was the importance of measuring the clients where they are. A foundation of social work practice, this idea would become one of the guiding principles of their philanthropic efforts. During a meeting about their support, Rutgers School of Social Work Dean Cathryn C. Potter prompted the couple to write down the purpose of their philanthropy. “It was the first time Leslie and I stepped back and really understood our philanthropic values.”

For Maury and Leslie, who have spent more than two decades on their philanthropic journey, learning from both success and failure and finding collaborators they can trust have become guiding principles. “You have to be honest about what you do and don’t know and admit to the possibility that you may not even know what you don’t know. And you have to find the right people to help you understand how to be effective,” they say. It’s this idea that has helped them fulfill their shared desire to continue learning along their philanthropic journey. With limited resources and so many good causes in need, Maury and Leslie also had to choose which organizations to support. They decided to work only with groups that provide real and measured success and also employ people that truly understand their philanthropic values. “We want to be engaged in the organizations we support in some way, whether it’s advisory, participatory, or facilitating, so we can use our accumulated wisdom and skills. But we don’t want to control things and come in and say things have to be done a certain way,” Maury says.

Recently, the couple chose to support travel and educational experiences for Rutgers School of Social Work students specializing in management and policy. Their inspiration comes from a desire to foster student activism and heighten policy awareness. “We believe social workers need to understand policies because a lot of societal problems are the result of them,” Maury says. “Social workers have a role in solving their clients’ problems by changing policy rather than just by accommodating to the policy that’s there. Social workers are often pigeonholed, but I always make it very clear that part of my ability to do the work I’ve done throughout my life is because of my social work education.”

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They called the document “Voyage,” a nod to their time at sea, but also to their constant evolution and desire to continue learning along their philanthropic journey. With limited resources and so many good causes in need, Maury and Leslie also had to choose which organizations to support. They decided to work only with groups that provide real and measured success and also employ people that truly understand their philanthropic values. “We want to be engaged in the organizations we support in some way, whether it’s advisory, participatory, or facilitating, so we can use our accumulated wisdom and skills. But we don’t want to control things and come in and say things have to be done a certain way,” Maury says.

Recently, the couple chose to support travel and educational experiences for Rutgers School of Social Work students specializing in management and policy. Their inspiration comes from a desire to foster student activism and heighten policy awareness. “We believe social workers need to understand policies because a lot of societal problems are the result of them,” Maury says. “Social workers have a role in solving their clients’ problems by changing policy rather than just by accommodating to the policy that’s there. Social workers are often pigeonholed, but I always make it very clear that part of my ability to do the work I’ve done throughout my life is because of my social work education.”

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Susan E. Van Vleet ‘76 has spent nearly five decades working as a management consultant using her social work background to guide companies and their staff in making changes big and small. She shares her journey to a career in social work and how her company, Susan Van Vleet Consultants, Inc., is ushering in change for the change makers.

Rutgers School of Social Work: Tell us about your educational and career journey.

Susan Van Vleet: I attended a program in high school called Future Jewish Center Workers. It was run by social workers from the Jewish Welfare Board in New York City. We attended weekend sessions on Sundays and learned about becoming a social worker in a Jewish non-profit. There were incredible social workers who trained us each week, including Saul Alinsky, the famous civil rights community organizer, and William Schwartz, who taught us about group work. I was hooked! I finished high school and went to college convinced I needed to take every social science class available. I majored in sociology and psychology to prepare for an MSW. I also took one undergraduate social work course from another institution because my school didn't offer them.

In 1968 I graduated and was hired by the Bureau of Children’s Services, which later became the Division of Youth & Family Services (DYFS) in New Jersey. Because of my work experience and education, I was put into intake immediately, investigating child abuse and neglect in Mercer County right out of college. I took every training opportunity.

DYFS offered, and because of Title 20, there were a few social workers implementing the program with the parents in their homes. During this time, the U.S. Foster Parent Association was being formed, and I supported that process along with the formation of a New Jersey branch. I was also part of a special program at my agency funded by Title 20 that put thirty of us through the MSW program at Rutgers. We all graduated with commitments to years of service to children and families, and learned about becoming a social worker in a Jewish non-profit. There were a lot.

After I completed my years at DYFS, I left to join Effectiveness Training Inc., a small for-profit educational corporation run by Dr. Thomas Gordon (the author of PET and a psychologist). I became his director of government relations and built that department in his company. We funded training programs in schools and public agencies all over the U.S. and in other countries. Our biggest contract involved training all the teachers and staff in the Queens, New York City school district.

Somewhere during all of this work I got married, divorced, and then married again—and I had two children! Looking back, I don’t know how I had the energy to do it all.

RUSSW: What does your company, Susan Van Vleet Consultants, Inc., do?

SVV: We are a 43-year-old management consulting company. We specialize in diversity, change management, team building, communications, and any human issue in companies. Our clients are mostly Fortune 500 companies. We work with anyone from front-line workers to VPs and CEOs. We have over 25 copyrights and three trademarks. We have worked in 19 countries with people who come from all over the world.

What we do works because we use and teach the skills and concepts from social science. We have developed long-standing relationships with people we have coached and worked with to solve personal and professional problems. When people leave a company, they take us with them to their next company. Even though the company is our client, our belief is each individual we train or work with is also our client no matter where they work. We also have four distributors that we have trained and licensed to lead, market, and sell our programs. One of our distributors has worked with NASA and another works with CEOs.

RUSSW: How does your social work education relate to the work you do?

SVV: It relates directly to all the work we do. The concept of starting where the client is is something I learned from my first social work supervisor. I also continue to use my community organization skills and group work skills that I learned at Rutgers School of Social Work.

We have been able to solve problems with our clients that other consultants cannot because they do not have this skill base. We are not afraid of conflict or listening to people’s emotions because of our training, so we can make deeper and longer lasting changes for our clients and their companies.

RUSSW: As a change maker yourself, what are some of the ways your company is creating change for those who are change makers, like social workers?

SVV: We are opening up the corporate setting to the unique skill base social workers have. From assisting teams in coming together quickly and working through conflict so they can bring a lifesaving drug to market ahead of schedule to creating diversity and inclusion in places it did not exist, there are many opportunities for social workers to get involved.

For some of the VPNs and CEOs with whom we work, we may be the first social worker or psychologist they have ever met. It may also be the first time they have experienced training based on social work or psychological principles. We also encourage people to participate in therapy. We make referrals out of every workshop we hold, mostly to LCSWs in our client’s area.

Another area I’m passionate about is advocating for fair pay for social workers. We are at a pivotal point in the field. We are needed everywhere, so it’s our time to leverage our requests for higher salaries. I always make it a point to share this idea with the groups of social workers. Most recently I discussed it with members of NASW California. I’ve also worked with a few social workers individually to ask for higher salaries. I think this is one of the most important things NASW should be doing. We need to examine what our salaries should be— not what they currently are.

RUSSW: What are your hopes for the future of social work?

SVV: That my profession, which I love so much, will see itself as necessary everywhere. We social workers should feel confident that our unique skill base is needed all over the world in every setting. I also hope that we demand the salaries we deserve for the life-changing work we do.

Since I’ve modeled what a social worker can be, there are currently more than ten children of our corporate clients who have chosen to get their social work degrees. They’re doing it because they see the changes in their parents. So, now, I am paying back by helping attract the next generation to the field of social work.
Rutgers School of Social Work: Tell us about the work you’re doing to bridge the fields of environmental justice and social work.

Mariann Bischoff: A lot of what we do falls at the intersection of social work, environmental justice, and education. We sit right where all three of those pieces meet. We are trained as social workers, and our passion is environmental justice, so we’re channeling this intersection into action through education by working with our students in the classroom and working with professionals by providing continuing education opportunities and professional workshops.

RUSSW: What are your goals with this work?

CM: I want to shift the social work paradigm. Mariann and I have noticed that social work tends to be very human centered, or anthropocentric. There’s an invisible hierarchy that places humans at the top. To remove that hierarchy in our profession and make it less human centered forces us to see the interconnection that people have with the world. One of my goals is to galvanize more social workers into this work, however it shapes out for them. We’re not prescribing certain interventions but are just suggesting that they get involved. There are so many social workers out there, and our profession can certainly make a dent and push the environmental justice movement forward.

Mariann Bischoff: Getting more people involved is a goal. One of the problems is that climate change and environmental degradation are such huge issues that people can feel demoralized by them. Whatever changes people are making individually, from lowering the heat to recycling, might feel like it’s not making a difference. We have to help people see how it is making a difference and also help them see the connection between Earth and its inhabitants. This work can seem like a huge uphill battle, but it can become something that can be nourishing when you are aware of your connection with other people that are working on the same issue in different ways.

RUSSW: How can people get involved in this work?

CM: We’re not the first to suggest that environmental justice or the environment should be included in social work, and we want to give credit where credit is due. But what I grapple with is there’s no clear-cut pathway. While that can be seen as a challenge, it does give us an opportunity for social workers to innovate. Because this issue is so large, the work needs to be broken down into smaller, actionable items that can be infused into the work that social workers already do. One concrete example for practitioners is to change their assessment to include questions like “How have environmental injustices impacted your life?” Just incorporating this concept into practices that we already do is one easy way to do it.

MB: People can get involved on a micro level, a mezzo level, and a macro level. In the course we teach on environmental justice, we have students do an intervention assignment. One student was inspired by the class to start a community garden. Another student did a lot of research on plastics, and it changed how she relates to plastics, but she’s also very interested in doing advocacy work related to plastics. The personal level is important.

RUSSW: What are some of the challenges you face doing this work?

CM: Some of the challenges are personal. But of course, these personal challenges are brought on by structural forces. I’m talking specifically about imposter syndrome. It’s something that I grapple with but working with Mariann is enriching. She reminds me of what I know.

Another challenge is the fact that the issue of the environment has typically been addressed by biological and environmental scientists, so carving a niche for the social work profession is both an opportunity and a challenge. Mariann and I were not at a conference mainly for scientists, and we asked the organizer how social workers could get involved. His response was to just show up, just be there. What’s important is getting my voice heard, as a woman of color, but then also getting my voice heard as a representative of social work. These are the challenges. Luckily, all of the scientists that we’ve been working with have been very open, and they want to hear from us. It’s a matter of finding that connection and creating those networks and developing a coalition.

MB: I don’t call it imposter syndrome, but it’s the same thing. It’s connected to oppressive systems, so I don’t personalize it quite as much. For example, one of the challenges in teaching the work and how we approach teaching it is making sure not to teach at the students but to instead create a collaborative community environment where everyone’s voice is important. It seems like a radical approach, and it’s hard for me because I sometimes think “real” teachers lecture from PowerPoints. It’s unhelpful and inefficient thinking, but I keep having those thoughts. Creating a place for people to believe in themselves and further their wisdom and lived experiences, to come out and mingle with other people, is a bit of a challenge from a pedagogical standpoint.

RUSSW: What is your approach to teaching, Christine?

CM: I’m in the doctoral program at the Graduate School of Education, and if I had to label my teaching pedagogies, the one that’s overarching is the trauma-informed teaching practices. I recognize that we’re in a pandemic, and it’s creating turmoil for students. I try to acknowledge that trauma while encouraging them to learn. I try to create a classroom space that’s safe, where they feel like they can go to and just be a student or part of the classroom community for the time that we have together.

RUSSW: What do you enjoy most about teaching environmental justice and social work?

CM: The course is so genuine to who we are, and the assignments are so exciting to me. The first assignment we asked students to complete was a mind map, and we asked them to do more creative things like produce videos, draw pictures, and write poems. I look at their responses, and I’m blown away. Many of the students haven’t done this kind of creative work in years. That brings me joy.

MB: It’s so profound that it can be hard to put it into words. We’re seeing students reconnect with themselves and feel that their voice really matters.

RUSSW: What do you think social work’s role should be in environmental justice?

CM: A lot of our work is facilitating different groups to come together. Social workers have really good people skills and community organizing skills, so we could be in a room with a group of scientists, and our role could be to move discussions forward and create spaces for them to connect.

CM: When I think about environmental justice, I see it as synonymous with economic, racial, and social justice. Much of the work social workers are already doing is well on its way to addressing environmental injustices, but we need to do it more intentionally. Our code of ethics provides the foundation, but we just have to shift it a bit so we humanize each other at the top of the invisible hierarchy.

RUSSW: What are some of the opportunities that exist in bringing environmental justice and social work together?

CM: Social workers are already placed in a lot of the areas where environmental injustices are occurring, so it’s a matter of including the environmental justice work into your existing practice. People should also be more aware of what’s going on environmentally and campaigning for things they believe in.

MB: One opportunity is within field education by placing students in organizations that work on environmental justice issues. It can create opportunities to develop relationships with organizations that work on environmental justice and keeping social work values alive in places that don’t primarily focus on social work.
For years, the Rutgers School of Social Work Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) program has transformed legions of experienced clinical social workers into leaders who promote community, family, and connect with well-being. Students are trained to develop and disseminate clinical knowledge through peer-reviewed journal articles, national and international conference presentations, teaching, supervision, and innovative multimedia projects.

The multimedia project is a required component of a portfolio that students must complete in their final year of study. With guidance and support from Teaching Instructor Carol Cassidy, an educator and award-winning documentarian, students are taught to use video, audio, data visualizations, and other digital tools to advance human understanding while connecting with and serving their chosen audiences. By producing a dynamic, interactive multimedia project that synthesizes their scholarships, students may work accessible and useful to a global audience.

The multimedia project offers an innovative way to widely disseminate scholarly information to various audiences. Through these digital means, knowledge doesn’t remain hidden in academic journals but instead becomes accessible to other clinical professionals, policy makers, and the lay public,” said Michael LaSala, Professor and Director of the DSW Program.

“Self-care and Elder Care: How to Help a Caregiver Care for Themselves while They Care for an Elderly Person” by Melissa DeDominicis

“Unlocking Homelessness in the Classroom” by Tara Ryan-Cisgender Providers” by Kayti Protos

“Thinking About Getting Your Doctor of Social Work Degree [DSW]?” by Micaela Costa

“We hope you find lasting pride in Rutgers dynamic and determined students and faculty which otherwise would not be possible. Your contributions create opportunities for our innovative multimedia projects.

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Thank you!

We appreciate our alumni and friends who made gifts between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. Your contributions create opportunities for our dynamic and determined students and faculty which otherwise would not be possible.

We hope you find lasting pride in Rutgers School of Social Work.

If you would like to learn more about our alumni and friends who made gifts between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, please note that names listed are as they were entered at the time of the gift. Questions or changes can be directed to Madison Molter at mmolter@ssw.rutgers.edu.

To learn more, and for links to recent graduates’ multimedia projects, visit dsw.rutgers.edu.

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We extend our deepest sympathy to the loved ones of the deceased alumni and friends listed below whose passing has been shared with the School between February through June 2021.

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In the daytime, Richard Cohen, SSW’99 works with children and adolescents in their homes or in a variety of settings serving as a family therapist, clinical and administrative director. He also served as the 2016-2017 Policy Forum Chair of the National Association of Social Workers, policy director of Social Work Today, and is currently serving on the Board of Directors of the Council for Social Work Education. Richard Cohen is a noted author and has written extensively on challenges faced by children and families and the importance of their presence at decision-making tables. His book, “The Warning” was published in 2019 and earned the Helen Wilkin Award for Best Book of the Year in the field of social work.

In the evening, he writes. Just released, “FOREVER SILENCED” is a psychological thriller and a follow-up to his nonfiction work, “THE WARNING.” In this novel, he continues to address significant concerns faced by women and children including intimate partner violence, child abuse, bullying and family conflicts.

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