



UNIVERSITY of
SOUTH FLORIDA

College of Behavioral & Community Sciences
School of Social Work

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA **SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK** 2024 ANNUAL NEWSLETTER





LETTER FROM

The Director

Dear USF social work community,

As we reflect on the remarkable accomplishments and contributions of the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the collective efforts of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners. Together, we continue to shape the future of social work while making meaningful impacts locally, nationally, and globally.

Our faculty and students have continued to shine, with groundbreaking research, impactful community partnerships, and dynamic classroom engagement. Highlights include new grant-funded projects addressing mental health disparities, faculty-authored publications shaping the future of social work practice, and student-led initiatives promoting advocacy and inclusion.

This year, we've strengthened connections between our Tampa, Sarasota-Manatee, and online programs, ensuring consistency and collaboration across all cohorts. Our alumni network continues to grow, with graduates making significant contributions in areas ranging from clinical practice to macro-level policy work.

As we plan for the coming year, we remain committed to fostering a learning environment that prioritizes cultural humility, evidence-based practice, and a balance of support and challenge. Our upcoming initiatives include expanded simulation-based learning opportunities, a peer mentorship program for online students, and new professional development workshops designed to prepare students for leadership roles in social work.

To our students, thank you for your dedication to learning and for bringing your passion and unique perspectives to the classroom. To our faculty and staff, your unwavering commitment to teaching, mentorship, and service inspires us all. To our alumni and community partners, thank you for being ambassadors of our school and for embodying the core values of our profession.

Together, we are shaping the future of social work, one step at a time. Thank you for being a part of our journey.

With gratitude and determination,

Chris Simmons, PhD, LCSW

Interim Director
USF School of Social Work

POINTS OF PRIDE

OF THE USF SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

👉 National Recognition:

- The School of Social Work Master of Social Work program advanced 11 spots in the U.S. News & World Report rankings, from 94 to 83.
- Accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

👉 Diverse Programs:

- BSW, MSW, and PhD programs tailored to prepare students for leadership roles in clinical practice, policy advocacy, and academia
- Pioneering online MSW program designed for working professionals, combining flexibility with academic rigor

👉 Interdisciplinary Collaboration:

- Strong partnerships with USF's health sciences, education, and public health schools, fostering innovative, holistic approaches to care
- Faculty and students contribute to initiatives like the BRIDGE Healthcare Clinic, providing interdisciplinary care to underserved populations.

👉 Research Excellence:

- Faculty members are nationally and internationally recognized for research in areas such as trauma, mental health, health disparities, child welfare, and aging.
- Faculty and student research contributes to practice-informed policies and cutting-edge interventions.

👉 Community Engagement:

- Extensive field education network with over 300 agency partnerships throughout Florida
- Engagement in community-focused initiatives addressing homelessness, addiction, domestic violence, and refugee resettlement

👉 Commitment to Social Justice:

- Strong emphasis on anti-racism, cultural humility, and advocacy for equity within social work education and practice
- Dedicated courses and research addressing social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion

👉 Student Success:

- Active student organizations like the Social Work Society and Phi Alpha Honor Society that foster leadership and professional development

👉 Outstanding Faculty:

- Faculty who are recognized leaders in clinical practice, policy, and research, receiving numerous grants, awards, and publications
- Faculty committed to mentorship and student growth, ensuring personalized learning experiences

👉 Innovative Teaching Methods:

- Use of simulation-based learning to provide realistic practice environments
- Incorporation of technology and evidence-based practices into the curriculum

👉 Global Impact:

- Opportunities for students to participate in study abroad and international research programs
- Faculty-led initiatives addressing global social work challenges, such as migration, human trafficking, and disaster relief

👉 Alumni Achievements:

- Graduates employed in leadership roles across healthcare, education, government, and nonprofit sectors
- Alumni actively shaping social work policy and practice locally, nationally, and globally

👉 Commitment to Health and Well-Being:

- Collaboration with organizations like the Moffitt Cancer Center and local Veterans Affairs hospitals to support vulnerable populations
- Integration of positive psychology and strengths-based practices in training and community initiatives
- Launch of the Corner for a Little Mindfulness (CALM) program, a cutting-edge effort integrating mindfulness practices into social work education. CALM promotes student and community well-being by fostering resilience, emotional regulation, and holistic self-care strategies, which are core components of effective social work practice.

“These achievements reflect the School of Social Work’s commitment to excellence in education, impactful research, and transformative community service.”

-Chris Simmons, PhD, LCSW

Events

BUILDING BOUNDLESS BULLS

Faculty and students participated in the 6th Annual College of Public Health Activist Lab Bootcamp in February. Associate in Research Chris Groeber, MSW, led the Suicide Prevention for BIPOC Youth group. Associate Professor Jerome Galea, PhD, LCSW, as well as Jacqueline Houston, an Activist Lab Student Advisory Board member, helped facilitate the bootcamp, which focused on suicide prevention. Attendees learned about public health issues and strategies for change and discussed the important tenets and strategies related to successful public health advocacy, policy-making, and communication related to suicide prevention.

During USF Health's Fresh Check Day held in the USF WELL courtyard, School of Social Work staff taught students about the Corner for a Little Mindfulness (CALM). The team's table focused on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's eight dimensions of wellness, which CALM is based off of. Students created their own self-care bags with symbolic items to represent each of the eight dimensions. They chose between small notebooks to help boost their intellectual wellness, thank you and appreciation cards for their social wellness, and fidget toys for emotional wellness.

In April, eighty students, including many Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work students, attended the School of Social Work job fair. The job fair provided an opportunity for students to meet with the 50 professionals from 28 community agencies that were represented. Professionals from several agencies noted that students were well-prepared, intelligent, and "ready to be hired." Assistant Instructor Akanke Omorayo-Adenrele, MSW, Academic Program Specialist Valentina Arcila, and the school's academic support team and field department organized the event.

Arcila also represented the School of Social Work alongside Lianna Hernandez, MSW, RCSWI, at the 4th annual Health Professions Week Kick-off event. This was the first year the school has been invited to participate in the event, which is a reflection of the growing connections between USF Health and Vickie Lynn, PhD, MSW, MPH.

Graduating students of the Bachelor of Social Work program were honored and welcomed into the profession at the program's pinning ceremonies. The School of Social Work hosted combined ceremonies that included both the in-person and the online programs, giving some students and professors the opportunity to see each other face-to-face for the first time. Pinning ceremonies are held before graduation each spring and fall semester to celebrate BSW graduates, induct members of USF's chapter of the Phi Alpha Honor Society, and recognize those involved in USF's Social Work Society.



Valentina Arcila, Petya Figueiredo, Lianna Hernandez, and Cat Tuong Le share resources at USF Health's Fresh Check Day.



Chris Groeber and Riaan van Zyl speak at the "Listening to Connect" event in Sarasota.



Students gather at the NASW Conference in Orlando.

ENGAGING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The School of Social Work participated in a high school outreach event, hosting 25 seniors in the Tampa Bay Technical High School Academy of Health Professions. During the two-day workshop, the students learned about the flexibility of the social work profession, how social workers interact with other health professions, child welfare work, ethical dilemmas, and how to recognize signs of stress/burnout and ways to cope.

In February, faculty attended the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay's Cup of Compassion event. Clara Reynolds, MBA, LCSW, chief executive officer of the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, is a member of the school's Professional Advisory Council, which helps ensure that the school's programs are responsive to the needs of the profession and strengthens the relationships between the school and the public, private, and non-profit sectors of social work practice.

Over the summer, faculty, staff, and students marched alongside thousands in the 2024 Tampa Pride Parade. With banners held high, they celebrated diversity and inclusion, embodying the school's commitment to social justice and safety for all.

The School of Social Work sponsored the "Listening to Connect" event, which preceded the Safe Children Coalition conference. Supported also by the Duvall Family Studies Foundation, the event focused on the collective stories of daily practice with children, youth, families, and the community. Multiple representatives of the School of Social Work also participated in the Safe Children Coalition conference, leading workshops and presenting their research findings.

MAKING A STATEWIDE IMPACT

Sixty-one USF social work students traveled to Tallahassee for Legislative Education and Advocacy Days, where they presented at a training, listened in on committee meetings, and met with legislators at the Florida Capitol. Master of Social Work students were selected to present at the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) training on one of NASW's priority bills, SB 0068 Social Work Compact. The Social Work Compact would allow social workers to more freely provide services to clients outside of their home state, supporting flexibility for traveling licensed social workers.

In June, faculty and students attended the Florida Chapter of the NASW Conference in Orlando. Assistant Professor Dasha Rhodes, PhD, LMSW, and MSW student Janaya Smith presented their project, "Social Work Considerations for Working with Police Officers." Professor Alison Salloum, PhD, LCSW, also presented at the conference, sharing her work titled, "Stepping Together for Children after Trauma." Pedro Serrano-Mejia, MSW, was awarded the NASW Florida Student of the Year Award. Current Project iSED and Project MABAS scholars also attended the conference and the student summit.

REACHING BEYOND BORDERS

During the month of May, students, faculty, and staff contributed to the school's donation drive to support relief efforts in communities in Brazil that experienced record rainfall resulting in a flooding emergency. The donations made a difference in the lives of the people of Rio Grande do Sul.

In the same month, an interdisciplinary group of USF students, including social work students, participated in a week-long immersive summer course designed to provide insight on the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The students traveled across portions of the "Civil Rights Trail" in Alabama, which included visits to historical sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma.



Spring 2024 graduates of the Bachelor of Social Work program celebrate their achievements at the pinning ceremony held in May.

Field Department

The field department is managing a comprehensive network of approximately 750 community partners, including strategically reaching out to 51 out-of-state organizations and onboarding 44 new community partners with new affiliation agreements in 2024.

The USF School of Social Work's field placement coordination focuses on comprehensive logistics management, working on smooth integration of students into community sites. It provides targeted support to students placed in community sites, offering guidance, resources, and ongoing communication to facilitate successful internship experiences. The team continuously works to update and improve field community partnerships through proactive relationship building and responsive communication.



Akanke Omorayo-Adenrele, MSW, oversees the field department and field placements.

Director of Field Education: Akanke Omorayo-Adenrele, MSW

Akanke Omorayo-Adenrele, MSW, is an instructor and field coordinator for the online MSW program. Previously, Omorayo-Adenrele worked with the Center for the Education of Women: "Women of Color in the Academy Project," developing programs for female faculty and graduate students of color.

Omorayo-Adenrele served as an MSW field coordinator for the face-to-face and online Master of Social Work program at the Indiana University School of Social Work. Prior to returning to online education, she was the MSW field director at the University of North Florida. Omorayo-Adenrele emphasized clinical and critical thinking are both essential social work skills when working at any level of practice. She used her skills to work on her macro social work interest.

Her work and service interest are factors affecting immigrant and refugee women within social, political, and economical context. Lately, she is committed to unpacking anti-racism practice in social work. Omorayo-Adenrele serves on the NASW-FL and Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) sub-committee on diversity and inclusion and efforts to focus on macro practice.

Social Work Field Education Awards:

Field Instructor of the Year: Marianna Beristain Mayol, HCA Florida West Tampa Hospital

Field Agency of the Year: Bay Area Behavioral Services

A Special Celebration for our Social Work Community

The School of Social Work held a celebration of Social Work Month that followed the NASW theme of Empowering Social Workers: Inspiring Action, Leading Change. Over 100 social workers attended the event at the Children's Board of Hillsborough County.

Multiple awards were given out, and three retiring faculty were honored: Riaan van Zyl, PhD; Guitele Rahill, PhD, LCSW; and Iraida Carrion, PhD, LCSW. Rahill was also inducted into the Social Work Hall of Fame alongside NASW Florida Executive Director Dawn Brown, MSW, and Crisis Center of Tampa Bay President and CEO Clara Reynolds, MBA. Community Awards and Social Work Field Education Awards were given out at the event, and USF BRIDGE Clinic preceptors and directors were also recognized.



Riaan van Zyl speaks to the full room.



Alison Salloum, Manisha Joshi, Iraida Carrion, and Guitele Rahill attend the celebration.

Projects

The School of Social Work's AI taskforce successfully completed Phase 1 of its Virtual Simulation Pilot Project.

This initiative is designed to enhance social work education by providing students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge and master essential competencies necessary for practice in diverse settings, including behavioral health, mental health, healthcare, schools, substance abuse, and the criminal justice system. These simulations facilitate the improvement of practice skills both prior to and during field internships. Additionally, experienced social workers can benefit from these virtual simulations as they explore new practice areas or transition between different settings.

This project represents a significant advancement in integrating advanced virtual simulation technology into the social work curriculum, thereby positioning the school as a leader in innovative educational practices.

Phase 1 of the Virtual Simulation Pilot Project has indicated that this approach holds promise but warrants further exploration with a larger sample and implementation-related improvements. Consequently, the School of Social Work's AI taskforce will conduct Phase 2 with a new cohort of first year MSW students in fall 2024. As the taskforce prepares to expand this initiative, the team envisions a future where social work students and practicing professionals have access to the best educational tools and resources. Taskforce members include Manisha Joshi, PhD, MPH, MSW; Riaan van Zyl, PhD; Chris Simmons, PhD, LCSW; Lisa Macri, PhD, MSW; and Vickie Lynn, PhD, MSW, MPH.



Students can conduct simulated therapy sessions online.

Chris Simmons reflects on his 10-year anniversary as the social work faculty lead of the BRIDGE Healthcare Clinic

As we close another year at the BRIDGE Healthcare Clinic, I am thrilled to share the accomplishments that have made this year particularly meaningful. The Building Relationships and Initiatives Dedicated to Gaining Equality (BRIDGE) Clinic continues to stand as a testament to the power of collaboration, innovation, and service — providing critical care to our community while fostering interprofessional education and advancing impactful research.

This year, our teaching mission has flourished. With the guidance of dedicated faculty like myself, as I celebrate ten incredible years as faculty director for social work at BRIDGE, Clara Reynolds, MSW, MBA, LCSW; Gillian Penn, MSW, LCSW; Kim Roberts, MSW, LCSW; Latisha Christensen, MSW, LCSW; Herlene Beausejour, MSW, LCSW; and Dharti Atchison, MSW, LCSW, we have equipped students with the skills and confidence to serve as compassionate, culturally responsive practitioners. The efforts of our Social Work Student Directors Sarahi Rogers and Anahi Cenicerros (spring 2024) and Sydni Smith and Hailey Kaufman (fall 2024) have ensured that the student experience at BRIDGE is one of the most enriching. Their leadership inspires all of us to strive for excellence.

On the research front, BRIDGE continues to contribute to the evidence base that informs health care delivery for underserved populations. Our clinic has been a hub for innovation, enabling students and faculty to engage in culturally informed practice that enhances patient care and addresses social determinants of health. These endeavors not only advance the clinic's mission but also position BRIDGE as a leader in community-based health care research. These achievements are possible thanks to the selfless contributions of our volunteer staff and preceptors, whose expertise and generosity allow us to continue this vital work.

As we celebrate this year's successes, we are reminded of the profound impact of teaching, research, and service on our community and our students. Together, we are not only addressing health disparities but also shaping the future of healthcare through education and innovation.

Thank you for your continued support of the BRIDGE Healthcare Clinic. We look forward to another year of partnership and progress as we work toward a healthier, more equitable future.

Student Highlights

DOCTORAL

Emma "Rose" Stevenson, MSW, joined the PhD program in fall 2024. She is interested in researching treatment for individuals who have engaged in inappropriate or abusive sexual behaviors, treatment needs for special populations of sex offenders, and strategies to improve successful reintegration for returning citizens. She earned her bachelor's degree in psychological and brain sciences and criminal justice from George Washington University and her MSW from USF. Stevenson has worked at People Empowering & Restoring Communities (PERC) in transitional housing case management, court-ordered mental health and anger management evaluation, and as an outpatient counselor in PERC's sex offender treatment program.

Stephanie Rosado, MSW, CWHC, co-hosted an episode of Live Yes! With Arthritis, wherein she discussed the disparity in health care in the U.S. with Angela Chun, MD. The episode focuses on why it's important to build and nurture more diverse rheumatology networks, how patients and physicians can benefit, and what is being done to fill the gap. Rosado also spoke with Stacy Courtney in another episode of the podcast, in which the two discussed experiencing fear, stress, anxiety when talking to physicians and how one can communicate with a health care provider more effectively. In March, Rosado successfully defended her dissertation and earned her doctoral degree in social work.

Britani Holland, MSW, LCSW, successfully defended her dissertation proposal titled "Public Stigma Toward Adult Survivors of Adverse Childhood Experiences." Holland's research focuses on self-stigma.

Tara Matta-Singh, MSW, LCSW, defended her dissertation proposal titled "Social Convoys in Caregiving: Investigating Whether Giving or Receiving Support Impacts Maltreated and Non-Maltreated Caregivers' Well-Being." She focuses her research in the areas of geriatric mental health and neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, Lewy body dementia, and Parkinson's disease.



PhD students and faculty celebrate the successful dissertation proposal defense of Britani Holland.



Pedro Serrano-Mejia, Isabel Adamus, and Sydni Smith hold their Health Equity Innovation awards at the National CLARION Case Competition.



Students engage with social work professionals at a job fair held on the Tampa campus.

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

Pedro Serrano-Mejia and Sydni Smith, members of USF's team at this year's National CLARION Case Competition in Minnesota, were awarded the Health Equity Innovation Award. The team, which also included medical student Isabel Adamus, presented "Vida Connect - Addressing Health Disparities, Pandemic Preparedness, and Vaccine Hesitancy in the Dakota County, MN School System." The team also won this year's USF Health local CLARION Case Competition.

Four members of the USF Social Work Society, Jacqueline Houston, Pedro Serrano-Mejia, Jordan Flatt, and Anice Altema (BSW student), have been named VOT-ER Civic Health Fellows for the 2024 cohort. The formation of this team is the Social Work Society's most recent legislative initiative.

Jacqueline Houston competed at the 2024 Future of Florida Summit, hosted and organized by the University of Florida Bob Graham Center for Public Service. Houston was also accepted as a Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Policy Scholar at the USF Center of Excellence in Maternal and Child Health. Over the summer, she joined a new translational research and policy program, "Translating MCH Research into Policy," which trains students in power-brokering for targeted maternal and child health policy change. Houston also received the Student Honorary Award for Research & Practice from the USF College of Public Health to support her travel and poster presentation at the American Public Health Association conference.

MSW students Kristin Dawes and Nicole Guittard were recognized at the Lavender Ceremony and received certificates of achievement. The Lavender Ceremony is an opportunity for LGBTQ+ students at the university to participate in a graduation ceremony that celebrates their community.

Faculty, staff, and students participated in the 7th annual Interprofessional Education and Practice Day hosted by USF Health, and MSW student Sandra Accilien was on the overall winning team of the "Iron Chef" style cook-off. Sydni Smith, Andrea Valenzuela, and Burcu Guldiken's teams were recognized for their menu development, taste, and presentation of food.

BACHELOR OF SOCIAL WORK

Katelyn Baldwin and Sabrina Sengdao were selected as Florida High Tech Corridor scholars. Under the mentorship of Manisha Joshi, PhD, Baldwin worked on a systematic review of the factors impacting participation in food assistance programs. Sengdao worked with Vickie Lynn, PhD, on an examination of how caregivers navigate grief following a person's death by substance use and the effects of support received on well-being.

Nuavia Stewart, Taylor Reichelderfer, and Emily Hobbs were awarded College of Behavioral and Community Sciences Undergraduate Research Assistantships to conduct research in fall 2024 under the mentorship of Assistant Professor Dasha Rhodes, PhD. Matthew Bernucca was awarded an assistantship to conduct research under the mentorship of Manisha Joshi in spring 2025.

Graduating students of the BSW program were welcomed into the profession at the program's pinning ceremony in December. Additionally, students receiving child welfare certification were recognized and members of Phi Alpha National Honor Society for Social Work Students and the Social Work Society were honored.

ALUMNI

A USF Master of Social Work graduate was recognized as one of the USF Fast 56 award recipients. Kedine Johns, '08, now serves as a controller of Sky Limit Crane & Rigging.





Alison Salloum oversees the School of Social Work's involvement in both projects.

Project iSED & Project MABAS

The School of Social Work has two school social worker training and tuition award programs: Project iSED and Project MABAS.

Professor Alison Salloum, PhD, is the co-director for both of these programs in collaboration with the USF Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) master's program. These training programs are in partnership with Florida school districts: Hillsborough County Public Schools, Pasco County Public Schools, Pinellas County Public Schools, and Manatee County Public Schools.

Project iSED: Advancing Interdisciplinary Services for Students with Severe Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Project iSED aims to prepare students to serve as either school social workers or Board-Certified Behavior Analysts who can collaboratively design and deliver evidence-based instruction and intensive individualized interventions and supports for children with severe emotional and behavioral disorders in natural environments, classrooms, and schools. Project iSED is a 5-year, \$1.9 million grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (H325K200051).

Project MABAS: Enhancing the Promotion of Mental Health Wellbeing of Children and Youth in High-Need Schools through Preparing School-Based Behavior Analysts and Social Workers

Project MABAS aims to enhance the promotion of mental health well-being of children and youth with or at risk for behavioral and mental health challenges by preparing 40 high-quality school-based behavior analysts and social workers from diverse backgrounds to promote inclusive practices. Project MABAS is a 5-year, \$3.9 million grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools (S184X230042).

Project iSED: Cohort 4



Rachel Gonzalez
Internship: Pasco County Schools
Field Instructor: Jennifer Sloan, MSW

Working with kids has always been a passion of mine, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to be interning in the school setting. I am very excited to be a part of Project iSED, and to support children through interdisciplinary collaboration between social work and ABA practices. Project iSED has equipped me with opportunities to be an effective school social worker, while making a positive impact on the students.

Project MABAS: Cohort 2



Moya B Gordon
Internship: Hillsborough County Public Schools
Field Instructor: Melissa Johnston-Enzor, LCSW-QS

Being a Project MABAS scholar provides me with the ability to pursue a post-baccalaureate degree to advance my academic and professional journey without financial constraints. I have been provided with the opportunity to attend professional conferences, expand my knowledge of children's mental health via the opportunity of taking additional courses, and challenge myself outside of the classroom by collaborating with interdisciplinary teams. This opportunity marks my first venture into school social work, and I am excited to contribute to the dynamic educational environment, making meaningful impact on young lives. As a Project MABAS scholar, I am confident in my ability to make a meaningful difference!



Sydni Smith
Internship: Hillsborough County Public Schools
Supervisor: Jadell Patricio, MSW

As a Tampa native, I earned my bachelor's degree in psychology at USF. Upon graduation, I was a research assistant, then a registered behavior technician before becoming a Master of Social Work student. I have always had a passion for building community relations in effort to support children and families in need as I dedicate my time to various nonprofits and organizations in the Tampa area. Well into my second year, I am dedicated to Project MABAS as this program guides me on the right path to give back to children, families, and my community. I am grateful for this opportunity of being a scholar.

Project MABAS: Cohort 2



Isabella Almeder

I am a 21-year-old Master of Social Work student at USF. I graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University in May 2024 with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a minor in education. Although I have always wanted to work with children, working as a student teacher intern for two years is what made me recognize my calling to become a school social worker. I am truly honored to be a Project MABAS scholar and am blessed to have this opportunity. I am looking forward to developing new skills to use in my career and being exposed to different learning experiences. I am excited to see what the future holds!



Avery Bubolz

I have worked in schools for my entire working life, and I cannot wait for the opportunities that being a Project MABAS scholar will provide me. I look forward to getting back into schools and engaging with my community to help students and families. Project MABAS has given me the opportunity to expand my knowledge and skills and I am very honored to be a part of this program and team.



Melany Silver Espinosa

My bachelor's degree is in sociology with a concentration in applied behavior analysis. My background is in behavioral healthcare, and in my work, I found myself wanting to provide holistic wellness and services to children and teenagers that are offered by social work. Part of this holistic care is providing children access to resources to promote better outcomes in terms of learning, supportive relationships, and reduced stress. I am thrilled to have the privilege of being part of the MABAS scholarship, and due to the opportunities provided by the program, my future as a social worker looks brighter than I could have ever expected!



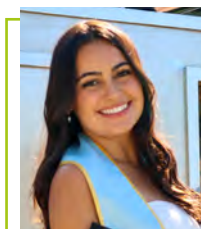
Joanne Neston

I am honored to be a Project MABAS scholar at USF, where I previously earned my bachelor's degrees in psychology and English creative writing. With Project MABAS' support, I can pursue my Master of Social Work and my passion for working with children in schools. Driven by my love for my nieces and nephews, I believe every child deserves compassionate guidance and support. Being part of Project MABAS empowers me to make a positive impact and help shape the future generation.



Jayla Nickeo

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to represent the Project MABAS program and to leverage this experience to further my education and professional development. I recently graduated from Florida A&M University with a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology and have extensive experience working with children, a passion I have nurtured throughout my career. I strongly believe that children are the foundation of our future, and it is essential that we support and empower them to reach their fullest potential. I am genuinely excited to be part of a program that provides a platform to inspire and uplift the next generation.



Emily Pereira

I am excited to be selected as a Project MABAS scholar and intern with Pinellas County as a school social worker. Project MABAS will help equip me with skills I need to fulfill my passion of helping children. I can't wait to begin putting my skills to work and help make a change.



Ciera Thigpen

I am deeply honored to have been selected as a Project MABAS scholar and to have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to my community. I earned my bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Florida A&M University, where I had the privilege of working closely with my community and cultivating a strong passion for supporting children in educational settings. I am excited to create an environment where children feel both seen and safe. I look forward to the impactful work I will undertake as a Project MABAS scholar and to witnessing the positive outcomes for both myself and the children I serve.

Faculty & Staff Highlights

USF School of Social Work faculty and staff made an indelible impact locally, nationally, and internationally in 2024, and many have been honored with awards and leadership roles in recognition of their achievements. The USF School of Social Work is proud to be home to so many outstanding leaders in the field of social work.

Under the direction of Associate Professor **Iraida Carrion, PhD, LCSW**, and Associate Professor **Manisha Joshi, PhD, MPH, MSW**, the School of Social Work has organized a two-year project and networking venture with the University of Alicante in Spain, the University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf in Germany, and the University of Lapland in Finland. The project has been accepted in the Educational Science Institute of the University of Alicante as an approved project. It will facilitate networking and international dialogues on social work, social services, and social policy, as well as collaboration on the development of coursework.

Assistant Professor **Dasha Rhodes, PhD, LMSW**, was selected as the co-chair of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Student Presentations Track for January 2024 through December 2026. The Student Presentations Track provides BSW, MSW, and doctoral students opportunities to share their experiences, gain connections for their postgraduate path, and foster mentorships.

Assistant Professor of Instruction **David Kilmnick, PhD, MSW**, helped establish the USF Pride Employee Resource Group: LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff Association. Kilmnick is the contact with USF Human Resources and serves on the leadership team working with faculty from the Muma College of Business and USF Health. Kilmnick also received an award for "Outstanding Faculty Contribution to LGBTQ Life at USF" at the USF Lavender Ceremony. He was also appointed as a CSWE Board of Accreditation site visitor. In this role he will be reviewing programs' self-studies, conducting visits, and writing site visit reports on behalf of CSWE.

Associate Professor **Jerome Galea, PhD, LCSW**, joined the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as the agency's mental health coordinator. In this position, Galea works to promote the integration of mental health and psychosocial support practices throughout the agency, and leads engagement with global partners, partner governments, donors, philanthropy, and local organizations. Galea also is serving as the lead guest editor for the special issue "Self-harm and Suicide: A Global Priority" in Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health. In November, Galea visited the San Fernando School of Medicine in Lima, Peru, to explore possible inter-institutional cooperation and alliances to strengthen mental health initiatives in the university community.

Assistant Professor **Jeongsuk Kim, PhD**, was selected as the recipient of the 2024 USF Sarasota-Manatee Faculty Excellence Award for her outstanding contributions in researching gender violence and suicide risk. Kim's research focuses on violence against women and children, including intimate partner violence, child abuse, and human trafficking.

Led by Assistant Professor of Instruction **Kerry Littlewood, PhD**, the KIN-TECH™ Kinship Navigator program, which is also implemented by the Children's Home Network and Larry Cooper, MSW, LCSW, has been rated as a research-supported program by the federal Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse. This rating means that states and jurisdictions that replicate this model can be reimbursed up to 50% by federal money, even if they don't have a Family First Prevention Services Act plan.

Assistant Professor of Instruction **Mayaan Lawental, PhD, MSW**, was elected chair of the USF Faculty Council on Student Admissions. This council advises the provost and senior vice president for USF Health or their designees on matters pertaining to the establishment and maintenance of policies, principles, and regulations affecting the selection and admission of undergraduate students to USF.

Academic Advisor **Justine Leigh, MSW, LCSW**, was awarded an Employee Recognition Award by the USF College of Behavioral and Community Sciences. She also was chosen to be the chair of the Professional Development Committee for the USF Council on Academic Advising. As the chair, Leigh will work to improve the effectiveness, integration, and impact of academic advising on student success and USF's goals.



Jerome Galea gestures as he speaks to leadership of the San Fernando School of Medicine in Lima, Peru.



Jeongsuk Kim receives the 2024 USF Sarasota-Manatee Faculty Excellence Award.



Justine Leigh helped organize the donation drive that supported those affected by floods in Brazil.

GRANTS & CONTRACTS

Professor **Alison Salloum, PhD**, is co-PI on a \$2 million four-year grant to address chronic school absenteeism of students in grades 3-8 with and at risk for disabilities. The Stepped Care Approach for Addressing Youth-Motivated School Refusal Behaviors (STAY) intervention, an Institute of Education Sciences funded research grant, will integrate cognitive behavior therapy strategies with functional behavior assessments. Salloum is working alongside faculty from the USF Department of Child and Family Studies and College of Education.

Associate in Research **Chris Groeber, MSW**, and his team received two training contracts that began in July 2024. The Family Support Services of Suncoast awarded him over \$600,000, and the Children's Network of Hillsborough, LLC, awarded him nearly \$1 million in funding to support his efforts.

PUBLICATIONS

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Lynn, V. A., & Lennon-Dearing, R. (2024). Putting people first: the power of inclusive language. *Journal of HIV/AIDS & Social Services*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15381501.2024.2390923>

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Salloum, A., Ormhaug, S. M., Jensen, T.K., Skjærvø, I., & Storch, E.A. (2024). Stepped care cognitive behavioral therapy for children after trauma. *Advances in Psychiatry and Behavioral Health*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2667382724000073?via%3Dihub>

Salloum, A. & White, M. (2024). Group Work with Children and Adolescents in Response to Community Violence and/or Loss. In C. Knight and G. Greif (eds). *A Handbook of Contemporary Group Work Practice: Promoting Resilience and Empowerment in a Complex World*. Oxford University Press ISBN:9780197657928 <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/a-handbook-of-contemporary-group-work-practice-9780197657928>

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New Faculty & Promotions

In 2024, the School of Social Work welcomed many passionate faculty engaged in teaching, research, and social work practice and thanked those retiring for their dedication and service.

The new faculty members bring their passion and knowledge of social work to the classroom and engage with students and community partners to provide innovative research opportunities.

Former School of Social Work Director celebrated for lasting legacy; Interim Director welcomed

In August, faculty, staff, and students gathered to celebrate the retirement of Riaan van Zyl, PhD. The event included a panel, wherein van Zyl was joined by Jim Clark, PhD, MSW, Florida State University (FSU) provost and former dean of the FSU College of Social Work, and Bruce Thyer, PhD, LCSW, BCBA-D, FSU Distinguished Research Professor. The three speakers, who have been friends and colleagues for over 30 years, provided commentary on the state of social work research and practice, and other contemporary developments in professional social work education.

Chris Simmons, PhD, LCSW, began serving in the position of interim director of the School of Social Work on Aug. 12. Simmons is an associate professor of instruction.

The Search for a New Director Continues

The school continues to search for a new director to provide vision, leadership, and administrative direction to the School of Social Work. A successful candidate will support the school as it prepares graduates to achieve excellence as professionals and leaders in social work practice, research, and education. More information about the role and its responsibilities can be found at usf.edu/careers.



Dharti Atchison, LCSW
Assistant Instructor

Atchison has worked in various community-based settings in which she has served families and couples, addressed issues related to homelessness and crises, and has worked in various medical settings.



Khalilah Caines, PhD, LCSW
Visiting Assistant Professor of Instruction

As a practitioner, Caines has more than 20 years of experience working with adolescents and families impacted by trauma and uses this experience in her work as an educator to provide a holistic and student-centered approach to teaching and learning.



Daniel Horn, PhD, MSW
Visiting Assistant Professor of Instruction

Horn brings a wealth of experience in policy analysis, macro practice, and research and evaluation in social work. His career has been deeply shaped by his commitment to social and economic justice, with particular expertise in homelessness, housing solutions, and economic empowerment.



Soonhyung Kwon, PhD, MSW, MA
Assistant Professor

Kwon's research portfolio focuses on exploring the intersection of anti-oppression and health disparities, and the delivery of technology-based interventions intended to boost the positive psychological well-being of marginalized and/or minoritized older adults.



Kathryn (Kate) McCormic, DSW, LCSW, QS
Assistant Professor of Instruction

McCormic has worked in a variety of settings, from child welfare, hospice, community mental health, and the public school system as a clinician and administrator. Her research interests include risk and protective factors and the relationship between resiliency in academic achievement. She will also serve as an MSW field coordinator.



Dane Minnick, PhD, MSW
Assistant Professor

Minnick is a social work and public health researcher, educator, and community interventionist who specializes in developing environmental strategies, community coalitions, and public partnerships to address substance misuse. He also serves as the Evelyn Duvall Endowed Chair in Family Development on the Sarasota-Manatee campus.



Brittany Peters, DSW, LCSW
Visiting Assistant Professor

Peters has extensive background in behavioral health and community mental health and is passionate about advancing minority mental health and challenging policies that affect black and brown communities.



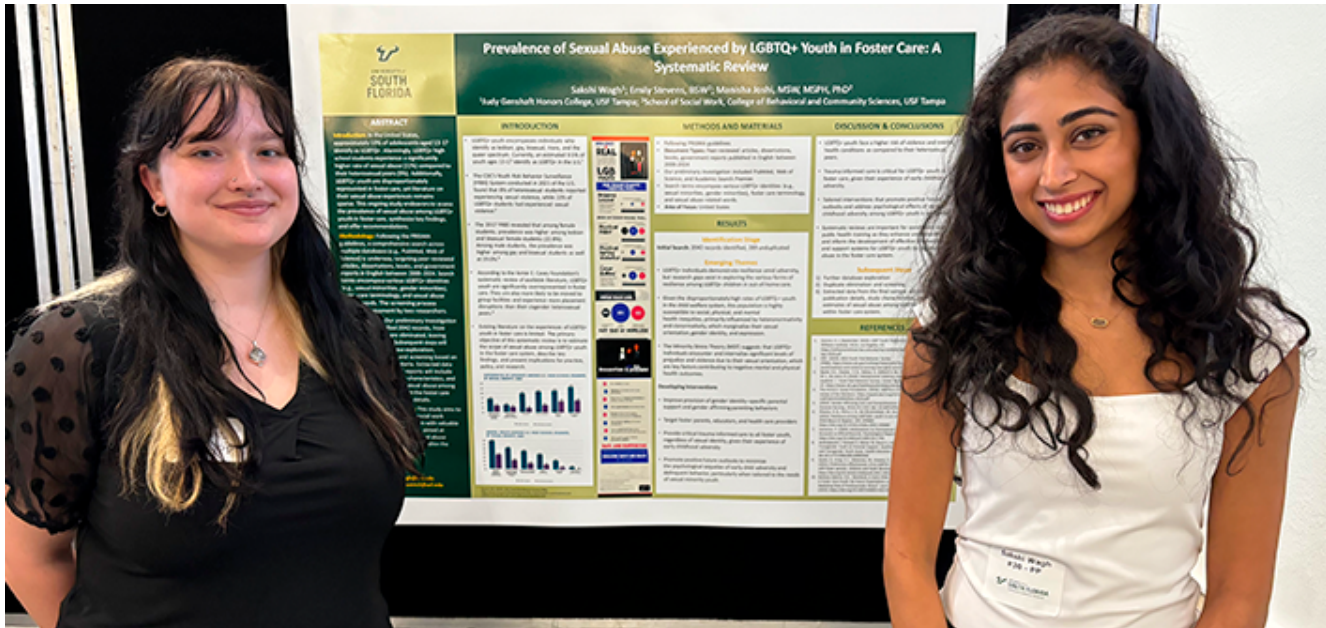
Tiffany Randall, DSW, LCSW
Assistant Professor of Instruction

Randall is a Wabanaki tribal member who has spent several years advocating for social justice for the Wabanaki tribes of Maine. She also serves as an online MSW field coordinator.



John Rutledge, MSW
Assistant Instructor

Rutledge offers a diverse background in community based social work which has included child welfare, family systems, chronic disease, and illness, as well as end of life and palliative care.



Emily Stevens and Sakshi Wagh present their research, which earned the Best in Social Sciences award.

PRESENTATIONS

Assistant Professor Jennifer Roth, MSW, LCSW, staff members Lianna Hernandez, MSW, RCSWI, and Petya Figueredo, and social work students Keshanie Torrence and Sonia Pitts presented on Corner for a Little Mindfulness (CALM) at the 76th Annual Virtual Conference of the Florida Association of School Social Workers. The group discussed CALM's approach to self-care tools and navigating burnout.

In February, Stephanie Rosado, PhD, presented "Preliminary results presentation of osteoarthritis, social role participation, and satisfaction with life: A quantitative study informed by the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC)" at the Florida Education Fund McKnight Doctoral Fellowship Annual Conference.

At the 2024 Graduate Research Symposium, MSW student Sydni Smith presented "Visual Modeling Promotes Workplace Equity for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder." Cleo Morris, a doctoral student in Behavioral and Community Sciences, and MSW students Rachel Walker and Rachel Gousie, gave the poster presentation: "School-based Bereavement Interventions for Children: A Scoping Review." Professor Alison Salloum, PhD, worked with the students on this study.

In April, social work students participated in the OneUSF Undergraduate Research Conference. Master of Social Work student Emily Stevens won the Best in Social Sciences award alongside biomedical sciences student Sakshi Wagh. Both students are associated with the Social Work Interdisciplinary Research Lab and were mentored by Associate Professor Manisha Joshi, PhD, MSW, MPH. Social work undergraduates Erika Gonzalez Munos, Sabrina Sengdao, and Katelyn Baldwin also presented their research at the conference. Gonzalez Munos presented "The Impact of Low Family Support on Opioid Misuse Among Justice-Involved Adolescents." Sengado shared her findings of an investigation of how caregivers navigate grief and the effects of support received on well-being, and Baldwin presented a systematic review of the factors that impact participation in food assistance programs.

During the same month, Assistant Professor of Instruction Kerry Littlewood, PhD, was selected to present at the USF Celebration of Teaching hosted by the USF Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning. Littlewood's poster, "Liberating Structures to Promote Equity in the Classroom," spurred conversations from attendees who were eager to hear about innovations being implemented in the School of Social Work classrooms to structurally improve the way it distributes power and encourages engagement using equitable approaches.

In May, two online MSW students presented research that they conducted about the importance of inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ youth in the child welfare system at the Safe Children Coalition Conference. Shawn Fox and Valerie Teachout presented alongside Assistant Professor of Instruction David Kilmnick, PhD, to provide insights that might help child welfare professionals foster welcoming environments for all individuals in their care.

Social work faculty, staff, and students attend the 7th annual Interprofessional Education and Practice Day hosted by USF Health.



At the NASW-FL annual conference, Professor Alison Salloum, PhD, presented "Stepping Together for Children after Trauma." Dasha Rhodes, PhD, presented "Social Work Considerations for Working with Police Officers."

Iradia Carrion, PhD, traveled to multiple countries to share her research findings. In June, Carrion presented at the 13th International Conference on Chicano Literature and Latino Studies in Spain, and in September, she presented at the 25th International Psycho-Oncology Society World Congress of Psycho-Oncology in Maastricht, Netherlands. In the Netherlands, she shared "Perception of support received by caregivers in older people with cancer during their journey and subsequent self-care" and "Sexuality assessment in breast cancer survivors (BCS): Barriers and opportunities."

Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health concurrent degree student Jacqueline Houston presented "Associations between child and adolescent sexual abuse, non-partner sexual violence, forced displacement, and positive childhood experiences in a sample of urban Haiti residents" at the American Public Health Association conference in Minneapolis. Social work faculty Guitele Rahill, PhD, and Manisha Joshi, PhD, are co-authors.



Dasha Rhodes, Dawn Brown, and Alison Salloum take a selfie at the NASW-FL Conference.



David Kilmnick, Valerie Teachout, and Shawn Fox present their research.

A Special Thank You
to the USF School of Social Work Professional Advisory Committee



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