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Alumna Alexis Miesen ’04MS made an unusual detour en route to her career goal of working with economically distressed African communities. Tired of relying on corporations to fund community work, Miesen and a business partner started an eco-friendly, organic ice cream shop in Brooklyn.

Three years later, Blue Marble Ice Cream has been such a smashing success that it has enabled the partners to launch a nonprofit venture and open the “first-ever” ice cream parlor in Butare, Rwanda. Today it is empowering local women with a cool and delicious means of support.

Running a profitable ice cream business may not be the typical career path of the social worker of old. Yet Miesen’s story is emblematic of the aspirations and ambitions of a new generation of graduates. Some go on to work in community organizing, a traditional social work field made popular again by a young Barack Obama; others opt for jobs in government agencies, human resources departments of universities and hospitals, the social responsibility offices of large corporations, labor unions, and clinical settings.

At the PhD level, graduates are heavily recruited by leading universities as well as by governments and quasi-governmental organizations. They value the education they receive and the mentoring and opportunities provided through the collaborative efforts of Julien Teitler, chair of the doctoral program, and Allen Zweben, associate dean for research and academic affairs. Another notable success story is that of Jared Bernstein ’94PhD, a senior economic adviser to Vice President Joe Biden.

Yet the fundamental calling of the School’s more than 800 students each year is the same as that of previous generations: transforming communities, organizations, and people’s lives, whether from a perch in the White House, in an ice cream shop in Rwanda, or in Columbia University’s neighboring Harlem community.

This mission of bettering society dates back to the founding of the nation’s oldest school of social work in 1898 and continues to the present day to ensure that CSSW graduates become influential leaders in the field of social work.

The tradition of distinguished service is everywhere in evidence among the faculty and the administration. Today, the legacy continues with a faculty whose highly acclaimed, multidisciplinary work spans diverse fields including economics, sociology, public administration, neuroscience, psychiatry, medicine, and law. Among them are the faculty and administrators featured in this issue of Spectrum.

Working with colleagues in other Columbia departments and universities around the world, many of our distinguished scholars and practitioners have established centers focused on the family; urban demography; innovations in the workplace; the role of fathers in the lives of their children; and HIV and drug abuse intervention and prevention, to name just a few.

In the past year alone, four long-time faculty members received high honors for their outstanding contributions to the field. Drs. Irwin Garfinkel, Sheila Kamerman, David Fanshel, and Barbara Berkman were inducted into the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. Also last spring, Professor Sheila Akabas was honored by the National Network for Social Work Managers for her lifetime contributions in the area of social work management.

The tradition of excellence is alive and well in the faculty. Earlier this year, Dr. Rogério Pinto received an Early Career Achievement Award from the Society for Social Work Research for his innovative approach to HIV and substance abuse prevention programs among racial and ethnic minority populations in New York and Brazil.

Dr. Pinto’s binational and bilingual research exemplifies the School’s growing emphasis on global partnerships to advance social work here and abroad. One such example is the Global Health Research Center for Central Asia, a multidisciplinary team of experts and students led by Drs. Nabila El-Bassel and Louisa Gilbert along with Professor Steven Schinke. With two offices in Kazakhstan, the Center conducts research in marketplaces and villages alike, and provides professional training to address such global health challenges as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and hepatitis C.

In another corner of the world, Associate Professor Fred Ssewamala has studied whether something as basic as encouraging poor youth in the developing world to save money might lead to improvements in their economic status, health, and education. Ssewamala is a co-investigator,
Work Adapts to Challenges of New Millennium

working with Washington University’s Michael Sherraden, on a $12.5 million grant from the MasterCard Foundation to examine the social utility of savings accounts in Kenya, Ghana, Colombia, and Nepal, where some 170,000 young people are expected to reap the benefits.

Ssewamala’s research on vulnerable children resonates with that of Professor Jane Waldfogel, who spent a year at the London School of Economics studying Great Britain’s approach to child poverty.

Her research, published this year by the Russell Sage Foundation under the title Britain’s War on Poverty, found that New Labour’s decision to boost support for working families and expand child health programs was more successful in lifting children out of poverty than the work-oriented approach of U.S. welfare reform.

Childhood poverty is just one of a multitude of research interests of the faculty. Others include aging and bereavement, mental health and disabilities, immigrant services, domestic violence and substance abuse, homelessness, social work education, and issues related to the workplace.

The faculty’s all-encompassing scholarship is mirrored in an increasingly diverse student population with a similarly broad range of interests. About a third of the student body is comprised of people of color, with more than 10 percent from foreign countries. Students range in age from their early 20s to 50s, arriving with degrees from more than 90 undergraduate and graduate institutions. A significant number matriculate after substantial experience in the workplace, with some looking to launch a new career.

Even before they graduate, students are mobilized for action, and many join one of the School’s 24+ student caucuses to explore issues and concerns of personal and professional interest. One such caucus was formed earlier this year to respond to the devastating earthquake in Haiti; some others are focused on the shared experience of being black, Hispanic, Asian, gay or lesbian, or a nontraditional student.

Students’ outstanding work wins them many accolades every year, including membership in the prestigious Presidential Management Fellows program. Fellows receive two-year paid internships in the federal government, which can lead to highly visible positions in the agencies that determine public policies and programs.

In the end, because the School is only as good as the students who will become the next generation of leaders in the social work field, the faculty has fully committed the institution to a range of assistance programs, including financial aid, career counseling, and academic support.

At the Writing Center, students can find answers to questions about grammar and punctuation, and hone their ability to develop, clarify, and organize ideas. The Willma and Albert Musher Student Computing Center provides access to dozens of computers, high-definition scanners, and high-speed printers.

In the crucial area of job placement, the Office of Career and Leadership Development helps students negotiate the challenges of long-distance job searches, career fairs, networking and informational interviews, references and resumes, and salary negotiations.

As the School prepares to enter the second decade of the 21st century, students are proving they are more than ready to handle whatever challenges await them.

In 2009, graduate student Julianna Gwiszcz won the Georgia L. McMurray Award from the New York City Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the fifth consecutive year that a Columbia student has won the coveted prize.

Within months, she had landed a job at a university in Philadelphia, where she is the director of a new campus initiative set up to help students connect theory and practice, reach out to the community, and make a commitment to others.

Sound familiar? Each component of the program—connection, community, commitment—mirrors the core values she would have encountered as she pursued her master’s degree in social work on the Morningside Heights campus of CUSSW.

Gwiszcz reflected on how her graduate education had prepared her for the challenges of the workplace in the 21st century. “There were so many partnerships at Columbia with agencies and within the University. This gave opportunities to students to pursue things that interest them personally and professionally,” she said, adding that the faculty and staff are “a tremendous resource. They serve as students’ primary connection to the work we will do in the future.”

Just as the School has enormous pride in its roots, it has tremendous excitement about the future.

The very best to you,

Jeanette C. Takamura
Dean and Professor
From 10 Downing Street
Dr. Jane Waldfogel had a front row seat in London in 1999 when former Prime Minister Tony Blair pledged to end child poverty in Britain.

“The antipoverty reforms were so unprecedented, it occurred to me even as they were unfolding that these reforms were a once-in-a-lifetime initiative,” says Dr. Waldfogel, professor of social work and public affairs at the School and a visiting professor at the London School of Economics.

Her latest book, *Britain’s War on Poverty* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), is the result of 10 years of research and experience as an adviser to government officials. It examines Britain’s successful reforms and holds out hope that the United States can learn from Britain’s example and significantly reduce childhood poverty with the proper investment of resources.

Here in the United States, Dr. Waldfogel was part of a select group of experts invited to attend the White House Forum on Workplace Flexibility in March, which focused on the changing American workforce.

“It was an incredibly exciting event,” says Dr. Waldfogel. “The First Lady spoke at length about work-family issues and her commitment, and why workplace flexibility is important for families. President Obama spoke about his commitment and what he’s doing within the Executive Office to promote flexibility.”

Dr. Waldfogel is a co-director of the Columbia Population Research Center and principal investigator of Work-Family Policies and Child and Family Well-Being. The project, which is funded by a grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, is studying how public policies influence parental employment and child care arrangements.

As one of the nation’s leading experts on poverty, Dr. Waldfogel heads a faculty-student team at the School, working to improve the federal poverty measure, which hasn’t been updated significantly since it was devised in the early 1960s by Social Security Administration statistician Mollie Orshansky. The team, whose work is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies, includes Drs. Irwin Garfinkel and Neeraj Kaushal as well as master’s and doctoral-level students.

“We wanted to have a real-world policy analysis project that students could work on with us, and this one certainly fits that bill,” says Dr. Waldfogel. “It’s involved a lot of contact with policymakers and advocates in Washington as well as researchers across the country. It’s been a great experience for all of us.”

By Anna Mantzaris

Demonstrators listen to speakers at a rally staged by The Campaign to End Child Poverty in Trafalgar Square in central London, October 4, 2008.
Four Faculty Members
Honored for Lifetime Achievement

By Anna Mantzaris

The School of Social Work has always taken great pride in its faculty. Legends in the field such as Mary Richmond, Gordon Hamilton, Marion Kenworthy have been associated with the School since its earliest years.

This year, their legacy was honored when four senior faculty—Drs. Sheila Kamerman, David Fanshel, Irwin Garfinkel and Barbara Berkman—were recognized for their outstanding contributions to the profession and inducted into the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. Their lifelong achievements exemplify the vitality of the School’s academic roots as well as the intellectual leadership they have provided for decades.

For more than thirty years, nearly all social work students have read at least one article or book by Dr. Kamerman and her CUSSW mentor, social policy legend Alfred J. Kahn. Dr. Kamerman, the Compton Foundation Centennial Professor of Social Work, has been a force in her own right. She currently serves as co-director of Columbia’s Institute for Child and Family Policy and the Cross-National Studies Research Program. Her own research on children and families has led to consulting work for organizations including UNICEF, and the impact she has had on policy in the U.S. and abroad has made her a role model for her peers.

Dr.Fanshel’s name is synonymous with groundbreaking research in foster care. A retired CUSSW professor (1962–1993), Dr. Fanshel amassed an impressive body of work that includes a major longitudinal study in the 1960s about foster care in America, and he has received numerous awards and honors, including the Society for Social Work and Research’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004. In the ‘70s he collaborated with noted linguist William Labov on a study of psychotherapy as discourse. A pioneer in parental visitation, transracial adoption, and the placement of children in stable homes, Dr. Fanshel was invited to testify before the U.S. Senate about children in foster care.

Dr. Garfinkel, the Mitchell I. Ginsberg Professor of Contemporary Urban Problems and co-director of the Columbia Population Research Center, is a trained economist and prolific author. His latest work, co-authored with Lee Rainwater and Timothy Smeeding, is titled Wealth and Welfare States: Is America Laggard or Leader? (Oxford University Press, 2010). It compares the welfare state in the United States to those in other developed nations. In addition to his scholarship, Dr. Garfinkel has been honored for his teaching. In 2005 he became the first CUSSW faculty member to receive the Faculty Mentoring Award from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Berkman, the Helen Rehr/Ruth Fizdale Professor of Health and Mental Health, has been a leader in the field of gerontology. Previously, she directed the Abrams Interdisciplinary Research Program at Massachusetts General Hospital and was associate director of the Harvard Geriatric Education Center at Harvard Medical School. Last year, she received a lifetime achievement award from the Gerontological Society of America. Dr. Berkman has directed numerous research projects about geriatric care and is principal investigator and director of the John A. Hartford Foundation’s Geriatric Social Work Faculty Scholars Program.

CUSSW Dean Jeanette C. Takamura says, “We are proud of each of the inductees and pleased that their longstanding contributions to the profession have been acknowledged.”

For more than 30 years, nearly all social work students have read at least one article or book by Dr. Sheila Kamerman and her CUSSW mentor, social policy legend Alfred J. Kahn.
In 1969, Dr. Akabas was one of the founders of the School of Social Work’s Workplace Center, a nationally recognized center for innovation and best practices related to work. An exemplary teacher and researcher, she has been instrumental in developing the social worker’s role in the workplace through her placement of CUSSW alumni in influential positions in corporations, labor unions, nonprofit organizations, and government.

In February 2010, Dr. Akabas handed the reins of the Workplace Center over to Dr. Lauren Gates, a senior research scientist at the School with whom she has collaborated for more than 20 years. Dr. Akabas remains as director emeritus and will continue to be engaged in the center’s important initiatives. She will also continue as chair of the Social Enterprise Administration method of practice and the World of Work field of practice. In this capacity, she mentors students in workforce management issues, including barriers to employment; employee assistance programs, and other services for workers and their dependents; collective bargaining; workplace discrimination and equal opportunity; and legislation related to work and social welfare.

Former student Philip Berry ’75MS recalls her dedication to social work management. “She has kept the field of social work management moving ahead, always marching towards a more equitable and sustainable workplace, particularly for individuals with disabilities,” he said.

A lifelong champion of social justice in the workplace, Dr. Akabas was recently presented with the Mark Moses Distinguished Fellowship Award from the National Network for Social Work Managers for her invaluable contributions to the field.
A Policy Icon:  
Irwin Garfinkel

By Anna Mantzaris

Some societies have measured wealth and status by the number of offspring or protégés one has. By this measure, Dr. Irwin Garfinkel, the Mitchell I. Ginsberg Professor of Contemporary Urban Problems, would be regarded as a wealthy man.

“We were the leader in the provision of mass public education for most of our history,” says Dr. Garfinkel, who stresses the importance of “getting the story straight” and says the United States is losing its lead. “Other rich nations, and even developing nations, have caught up or are surpassing us. We’ve got cause for concern.”

Dr. Garfinkel and his wife, Dr. Sara McLanahan, the William S. Tod Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University, are co-principal investigators of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. That groundbreaking study, which focuses on disadvantaged families with low-income fathers, was conceived in collaboration with Professor Ronald Mincy, the School’s Maurice V. Russell Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice.

In addition to his diverse research interests and public speaking engagements, Dr. Garfinkel is the consummate teacher, making his CUSSW students a top priority. In 2005, Professor Garfinkel was the first CUSSW faculty member to receive the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Mentoring Award. “For me that was a wonderful award,” says Dr. Garfinkel. “I have five children, and I have dozens of intellectual offspring, whom I now regard to be valued colleagues. They are the great delights of my life and make me confident of the future.”
“I have dozens of intellectual offspring, whom I now regard to be valued colleagues. They are the great delights of my life and make me confident of the future.”
The Columbia Population Research Center brings together scholars from a wide range of fields, including epidemiology, psychology, economics, sociology, social work, and public health. The common goal is to promote the health and well-being of vulnerable populations in Columbia’s backyard of New York City and in more than 50 countries in the developing world.

Researchers focus on four areas: children, youth, and families; HIV/AIDS and reproductive health; immigration and migration; and urbanism. The research takes place under the direction of a steering committee comprised of representatives from the School of Social Work, the Mailman School of Public Health, Teachers College, and Columbia’s Departments of Economics and Sociology.

“The initiative for the Center came out of CUSSW,” says Dr. Irwin Garfinkel, the School’s Mitchell I. Ginsberg Professor of Contemporary Urban Problems, who developed the idea with his colleague Dr. Jane Waldfogel, professor of social work and public affairs. Garfinkel is a co-director of the Center, along with Dr. Constance A. Nathanson, professor of clinical sociomedical sciences at the Mailman School of Public Health.

Students from across the University provide research assistance and attend seminars at the Center, while CUSSW students can use it to fulfill field placement requirements. Last year, five CUSSW students completed...
Ensuring Quality in Research

By Jessica Troiano

Three years ago, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) began an overhaul of its peer-review process. Panels or study sections of scientists judge the merits of submitted research grant applications and recommend the most worthy projects for funding.

As chair and a permanent member of the Risk, Prevention, and Intervention for Addictions study section, Dr. Steven Schinke has had an insider’s perspective of the revamped review process.

“NIH is committed to funding innovative, sustainable, high-impact research that will improve the nation’s health.” - STEVEN SCHINKE

Students play a very important role,” explains Dr. Julien Teitler, associate professor of social work and sociology at CUSSW and co-director of two of the Center’s service areas: Computing, Data, Information, and Methodology.

The Center’s projects span the globe, often mirroring the interests of policymakers. Examples include a working group on Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing; the health challenges of Dominicans who migrate between New York City and the Dominican Republic; the social factors that shape married women’s risk of HIV/AIDS; and land use and infrastructure decisions in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Center’s multidisciplinary and global focus has led to an unusually productive relationship with the School of Social Work. “It is very exciting to have a population research center at Columbia that conducts research in four domains that are so central to the social work profession,” Dr. Garfinkel explains.

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Two CUSSW Faculty Recognized for Outstanding Teaching

By Anna Mantzaris

Dr. Michelle Ballan believes that being a lifelong mentor to her students is one of her key responsibilities as a professor. This year, her dedication was recognized with the Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching.

“Receiving this award has been the defining moment of my professional career,” says Dr. Ballan, an assistant professor at the School of Social Work who specializes in sexuality education for children and adults with developmental disabilities.

“This award formally acknowledges the needs of students with disabilities, the importance of expertise of faculty around disabilities, and the role of social work educators in cultivating professional social workers.”

Dr. Ballan, who was twice selected Professor of the Year by the CUSSW student body, notes that her mentoring relationships with her students continue even after they graduate. “It is an honor to work with my colleagues at different points in their careers, from master’s students to clinical social workers, directors of clinical programs, doctoral students, and eventually as faculty colleagues,” she says.

In 2006 she received a two-year Sibnerman Faculty Grant for social work educators to study effective communication strategies for parent instruction on sexuality for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders.

In 2009, Dr. Ballan formed a partnership between CUSSW and the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, to provide opportunities for students to engage in community-oriented practice and research with individuals who have developmental disabilities and their families. Also last year, she created a four-week module on disabilities for the course Human Behavior and the Social Environment.

Dr. Ballan is co-chair of the Disability Studies seminar, which was founded at Columbia in 2003 to take a broad, interdisciplinary approach to his many devotees in the School of Social Work, invests heavily in ensuring that students write rigorous research applications and in preparing them for the job market.”

Dr. Teitler, who received the award in May at the GSAS Convocation, is currently working with students on research projects that include a study of immigrant health in the United States and a project using Google Street View to measure neighborhood characteristics.

“As Dr. Teitler’s own perspective is multidisciplinary, he brings to his mentoring a wide, enriched perspective of how our doctoral students might best strengthen and advance their individual courses of study,”
“Many things are happening in labs without community participation, and at the end of the day we still see a lot of hypertension, diabetes, and HIV, all health risks that are preventable,” he says. “Instead of getting better, people often actually see a worsening of their health.”

The Society for Social Work Research recognized Dr. Pinto’s doctoral research with its Outstanding Dissertation Award in 2004 for his paper “Factors that Influence African-American Women’s Participation in HIV Prevention Programs: An Ecological Perspective.” This year, Dr. Pinto, an assistant professor at the School of Social Work, received yet another award from the Society: the Deborah K. Padgett Early Career Award, given to individuals who are doing innovative, rigorous research and having a notable impact on their field and profession.

Dr. Pinto has spent the last three years developing facilitative relationships with secretaries of health, mayors, and local coordinators in the Brazil Family Health Program. He and his research partners have interviewed nearly 300 Brazilians working for the program, including community health workers, physicians, and nurses.

“The idea is not to have an entire community agreeing—this would be impossible—but to have the needs of a community reflected in the research I do,” he says.
Suicide Risk and Treatment Engagement

By Jessica Troiano

Dr. Dana Lizardi studies the intractable problem of suicide, which, despite major advances in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health, accounts for more fatalities each year than HIV or liver disease. “It’s still a huge problem and we’re not getting to the root of it,” says Dr. Lizardi, an assistant professor at the School of Social Work.

The problem is not a lack of effective treatments but the gap between treatment and those who need it most, she says. She cites a statistic that over 60 percent of people who attempt suicide after being released from the hospital do not attend their first outpatient appointment. Her research focuses on treatment engagement, or how to get individuals at-risk of suicide into treatment.

One of Dr. Lizardi’s research studies, funded by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, tests interventions for individuals admitted to emergency rooms following suicide attempts. The study uses motivational interviewing and follow-up phone calls to keep at-risk individuals involved in therapy. Another study, funded by NARSAD (National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression), is testing the feasibility of such interventions in a busy, urban emergency room.

These studies try to engage clients in their own recovery and help them develop skills to deal with their problems. Dr. Lizardi says individuals at-risk of suicide have difficulty solving problems and generating solutions. “Everything seems hopeless,” she says. “It’s often said that people who attempt suicide seem happier in the days or weeks before. It’s kind of a relief when they make the decision to kill themselves.”

Dr. Lizardi’s focus is helping clients find their own way out of suffering, apart from ending their lives. “We can help them find reasons not to engage in suicidal behavior,” Dr. Lizardi says. “We can help them develop their own solutions and their own reasons to live.”
The Social Intervention Group (SIG) was founded in 1990 when a diagnosis of AIDS was still considered a death sentence. Its mission was to conduct drug abuse interventions and study whether that had an effect on HIV transmission. Since then the multidisciplinary research center led by Dr. Nabila El-Bassel has been at the forefront of research into prevention interventions that target populations at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

What has set SIG apart from other organizations dealing with HIV/AIDS is that it addresses the overlapping problems that can lead to HIV/STI transmission: interpersonal violence (IPV), drug abuse, lack of health care access, and incarceration and recidivism. As a result of this work, Dr. El-Bassel has been extensively funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). With funding from the Institutes, SIG has also trained racial and ethnic minority researchers and faculty on issues of mental health and HIV.

Dr. El-Bassel was the principal investigator of Project Connect, one of the first couples-based HIV/AIDS interventions in the U.S. By reframing safe sex as a couple’s responsibility, the intervention emphasized the importance of communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills instead of relegating the responsibility of STD protection to an individual. Couples interventions have since become the focus of many of SIG’s domestic and international studies.

In addition to Dr. El-Bassel, Co-director Dr. Louisa Gilbert and Associate Directors Drs. Susan Witte and Elwin Wu each bring their unique perspectives and focus to SIG. Dr. Gilbert designs interventions for women addressing IPV and other co-occurring traumas. Dr. Wu’s research examines populations whose behaviors place others at risk of health and psychosocial problems. Dr. Witte’s research has focused on female contraception and the use of multimedia in couples’ interventions.

As it enters its third decade, SIG is focused on training as well as disseminating scientifically proven practices key to reducing AIDS transmission. In particular, SIG focuses on underserved populations such as those in and affected by the criminal justice system. As treatments for the disease continue to evolve, SIG will adapt its trainings, interventions, and platforms to decrease transmission among vulnerable populations.
Designing and Disseminating
HIV Research

By Sara E. Miller

In college, Dr. Susan Witte spent her class time in public policy courses and her personal time on the Duke University crew team. She enjoyed the intense, single-minded teamwork required in crew.

Although she left behind that world of competitive sports when she graduated, Dr. Witte hoped to again be part of a team focused on a common goal.

As a newly tenured member of the School of Social Work faculty, Dr. Witte has gotten her wish. She traces her interest in HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention research to her college days. “I had graduated with a degree in women’s studies and public policy, and I was drawn to what was, at that time, this terminal illness tied to intimacy … that stigmatized hemophiliac children … that was steeped in sexuality and gender-based issues,” she says.

She worked first as a volunteer at AIDS Related Community Services in Elmsford, N.Y., and then as a clinical practitioner, but soon realized that she could have more of an effect on policy and programming as a researcher.

For more than 15 years, Dr. Witte has worked with Dr. Nabila El-Bassel at the Social Intervention Group (SIG). She and SIG have received funding from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) for Project Connect, a couples-based intervention for HIV prevention that has been adopted by 80 clinics in New York State.

“Dr. Witte is committed to advance the science of HIV dissemination research by studying the process of implementation of evidenced-based prevention models in real-world settings,” Dr. El-Bassel says. “The findings of this [Project Connect] research will make a strong contribution to HIV dissemination research and the field.”

Funded by the NIMH, National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Institute on Drug Abuse, among others, Dr. Witte is developing interactive, computer-based modules based upon evidence-based prevention techniques that enable clients to actively participate in their own health education.

Her international work in Mongolia has led to reductions in transmission among sex workers and has influenced the Mongolian public health agenda. Dr. Witte says her research there and in Kazakhstan has had a great impact on her work. “My experiences in Central Asia have required me to revisit my understanding of cultural competency and to realize how ethnocentric my practices were,” she says. “These challenges continuously remind me to listen more intently and ask more questions, both in research and in teaching.”

Dr. Witte uses the successes and the challenges that arise in her domestic and international research as case studies in her courses, enabling her to bridge the gap between theory and the real world with her students.

“When I can give [students] examples of our faulty assumptions in research, I think I become more accessible as a faculty member,” she says. “I know that I am making a difference when they are empowered to put into practice the critical thinking and constructive criticism that we teach them.”

In some ways Dr. Witte’s career has required some of the same skills she learned on the crew team. Now she’s serving as a coach for a new generation of social scientists. Once again, she’s part of a single-minded team at SIG, striving to achieve its important goals.
Giving Orphans Hope for a Future

By Sara E. Miller

Dr. Fred Ssewamala spent all of three days at his New York City home in the summer of 2010. The rest of the time he was in Africa, where he’s working on a project funded by the MasterCard Foundation to help young people in the developing world establish savings accounts.

An associate professor of social work and international affairs at the School of Social Work, Dr. Ssewamala has garnered global recognition for his work. Among the many awards he has won, the first may have been the most important. At age 17, Dr. Ssewamala received a Ugandan government scholarship based on his national exam scores, which allowed him to attend Makerere University. After graduating with honors, he went on to earn his MSW and PhD in social work from Washington University in St. Louis.

As fortunate as he was, Dr. Ssewamala saw that scholarships are few and far between in developing countries. He set about researching ways to provide brighter futures for youth.

A significant number of children do not have the option of attending school because the opportunity-cost time spent helping their parents earn money is too high.

The main focus of his research is studying whether asset ownership, which enables children to save money for their future, can lead to positive social, economic, and educational outcomes in orphaned and vulnerable young people. “By providing children with a tool that teaches financial management and planning, they will have a more equitable chance at an improved and stable life,” Dr. Ssewamala says. “They will also better understand their self-worth and capabilities.”

“By providing children with a tool that teaches financial management and planning, we will help them have a more equitable chance at an improved and stable life.”

—DR. FRED SSEWAMALA
Immigration and Its Impact:
Figuring Out What the Truth Is

By Susan Cosier

Does competition from foreign nurses drive down the wages of U.S.-born nurses? Associate Professor Neeraj Kaushal studied the question by examining changes in nursing wages, earnings, and employment, hoping to get a useful picture of whether immigration has had the impact that U.S. medical professionals seem to fear it has.

Whatever the results, Dr. Kaushal’s findings are likely to figure into the immigration debates and will have significant implications for the medical professions in the U.S.

A former journalist in India, Dr. Kaushal came to the U.S. to get a doctorate in economics. Besides being a member of the faculty at the School of Social Work, she is also a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Dr. Kaushal’s research, which has been funded by the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, focuses on labor and health economics. Her areas of interest include immigration, welfare reform, and poverty and family expenditures, including the possible relationship between food stamps and obesity.

“T study issues that affect our clients. I investigate policies that have short-term or long-term consequences for low-income families,” she says. “A better understanding of the issues and policies I study can provide social work professionals with insights that can better inform their practice and the development of both programs and policies.”

Establishing a Global Center Network

By Sara E. Miller

Columbia recently opened four independently chartered regional centers in the Middle East (Amman), East Asia (Beijing), South Asia (Mumbai), and Europe (Paris). The centers, which are not intended to duplicate the Morningside Heights campus experience, represent and support all Columbia student and faculty—including those from the School of Social Work—in their research, training and service commitments with communities around the globe.

“The Global Centers network, though still in its infancy, is demonstrating its value to faculty and students engaged in extending and deepening Columbia’s presence around the world,” says Kenneth Prewitt, vice president for the centers. Dean Jeanette Takamura has noted that the Centers provide an important continuing presence for the School’s collaborations with organizations, universities, and professionals committed to social development and professional education that can lead to quality of life improvements for the people of their nation and region. University President Lee Bollinger’s vision for the Centers has resulted in multidimensional gains for both Columbia and for the regions which the Centers call home.

CUSSW has had great success working through the Global Center in the Middle East, with center director Dr. Safwan Masri and his staff opening doors and providing continuity for important relationships in the region.

In the instance of the Middle East Research Center, CUSSW has welcomed the opportunity presented to collaborate with other CU schools including the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation and the Mailman School of Public Health. For example, a School of Architecture project calls for building a community center in one of Amman’s poorest neighborhoods. Architecture students involved in the project invited CUSSW’s Dr. Rogerio Pinto to guest lecture in one of their courses before they left for Jordan. They were interested in his research specialty: engaging local populations in research initiatives.

The School’s students have also been eager to take advantage of the Centers. Doctoral candidate Yamile Marti worked with the Middle East Center to facilitate a summer internship with a local welfare organization. After interviews with Jordanian organizations, she chose to work with the King Hussein Cancer Center.

“I participated in staff meetings, support groups, case discussion and committee meetings and I gave two lectures to the social work staff,” she says. Ms. Marti also had the opportunity to meet the director of Jordan’s Family Protection Department.

As international programs for the Centers expand, CUSSW looks forward to more interdisciplinary collaborations and opportunities.
Mentoring, he says, has been a way to “return some serious favors from people who helped me.”

A former Ford Foundation program officer who joined the CUSSW faculty in 2001, Dr. Mincy is best known for his groundbreaking research on disadvantaged families with low-income fathers, including ex-offenders and non-custodial fathers.

He is the director of the School’s Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-Being. The Center’s mission is to expand knowledge on the role of fathers and father figures in the lives of disadvantaged children and the processes by which nonresident fathers affect child development and family well-being.

Dr. Mincy’s work with students grew out of the important role of mentorship in his own career.

His approach to mentoring his students is, “I will provide you with evidence that I respect you and care about you and I’m concerned about your professional development,” he says. And he expects his students to extend the same courtesy to him.

Dr. Mincy, who earned a bachelor’s degree from Harvard and a PhD at MIT, recalls what it was like to make his way in academia without such mentoring.

“I know what it felt like being a student very interested in the work I was doing, but not getting the same quality or depth of guidance as student peers who were relatively privileged,” he says.

Now 58, he says he hopes to train a new generation of social scientists who will carry on his vital research in the area of responsible fatherhood.

“In my heart of hearts, I’m looking at the resources that fathers represent as really being wasted and thinking, this is not a good thing for our society or for these individuals and their children,” he says.
Who Knows the Value of a Mentor Firsthand
The colorful invitations are a call from student leaders to new and returning students to expand on what they have learned in classes, engage with their colleagues, and pursue the passions that brought them to the School. Organized by similar interests and dedicated to in-depth analyses of issues and to advocacy, students have made the 24+ caucuses and the Student Union Executive Board (SUEB) an important part of their lives.

SUEB plays a key role in reviewing and approving all proposals for new caucuses and also grants funding for events. The Board serves as the official representative of CUSSW students and makes recommendations to administrators and professors concerning student interests.

Jenni Kurosman, the program and events coordinator for Student Services, says the caucuses are an indication of the level of social awareness at Columbia.

“CUSSW's student groups are comprised of some of the most proactive and enthusiastic students anywhere. Over 150 events were sponsored by them this past school year,” she says. “From raising awareness to raising money for important issues to organizing panels of top-notch experts in areas of interest or simply organizing fun activities, they are a great source of positive energy within our School.”

While some caucuses were founded long ago, groups such as CUSSW Helps Haiti organized within days after the devastating January 2010 earthquake that killed up to 300,000 people and left an estimated 1.6 million homeless. CUSSW Helps Haiti raised more than $2,000 and collected 12 barrels of clothing for victims. One of its members, Lauren Thompson, president of the Black Caucus, plans to hold awareness events in the fall to bring attention to issues facing the Haitian-American community in Harlem and at Columbia.

The Men's Caucus worked with alumnus Daniel Hekman '09, a former caucus member who now works for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, on a program titled Investing in Fathers, Investing in Families: An Educational Forum for Human Service Graduate Students. The forum, open to any New York–area graduate student in social work, public health, family law, and education, is just one example of how the caucuses facilitate dialogue about social issues. Over three days a panel of scholars explored the history of the responsible father's movement. Dr. Ronald Mincy, the School's Maurice V. Russell Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice, spoke about strengthening families through stronger fatherhood. The final day of the forum featured a workshop that covered practical skills for working with fathers and families.

Whether students are returning to school after years in the workforce or coming straight from undergraduate institutions, the caucuses reflect their eagerness to delve into the issues that brought them to social work in the first place. With their passion for advocacy, practice, and education, they are adamant about not waiting for graduation to signal their contributions as social workers.
In 2008, Her Royal Majesty Queen Rania of Jordan, a champion for women and child welfare in Jordan and the world, approached CUSSW to begin the professionalization of social work in Jordan. Her interest in this initiative stems from her commitment to social policy reforms as well as to increasing the capacity (through the provision of training and educational opportunities) of those who are delivering, planning for, and administering social service programs.

Jordan’s case workers typically are responsible for 250 to 400 cases. However, the case workers do not have education or training requirements as prerequisites for their employment, and social intervention and other procedures are not standardized from one agency to the next.

With the assistance of Dr. Safwan Masri, director of the Columbia University Middle East Research Center (CUMERC), and his staff, Dean Jeannette Takamura and Professor Nabila El-Bassel designed a special program for Jordan. After several meetings and roundtables with key local stakeholders and various organizations, the Jordan Social Work Education for Excellence Program (JSWEEP) was established in 2008.

JSWEEP’s long-term vision is to have Jordanian institutions that offer social work education to impart evidence-based knowledge and skills for micro, mezzo, and macro practice for its nation’s cadre of social workers. In the short term, Dean Takamura and Professor El-Bassel, co-directors of JSWEEP, outlined a series of initiatives designed to improve services, train workers in best-practices, and assess programming.

On-the-ground training of line workers and their supervisors has been provided by CUSSW Assistant Professors Robin Gearing, Michael MacKenzie, and Craig Schwalbe, whose areas of specialization are aligned with Her Royal Majesty’s target areas of child development and protection, juvenile justice, mental health, and family violence. Together, the group developed a Foundations for Social Work Practice intensive based on the 13-week course that all first-semester students take at CUSSW. More than 200 participants from over 20 Jordanian governmental and non-governmental agencies have taken the course. Participants have enthusiastically returned for specialized courses, developed and delivered in February 2010 by Drs. Aimee Campbell (’08PhD), Israa Al-Khasawneh (2009–10 Jordanian Fulbright Visiting Scholar), and Meghan O’Connor (’07MS).

Most recently, CUSSW Professor Rogério Pinto provided a lecture to the urban planning students at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation’s SLUM Lab Studio, who, in advance of their trip to Jordan, are working to develop plans for a community center in one of the poorest Amman neighborhoods. Professor Pinto discussed ways that the students could engage local populations in their research.

Dr. Gearing, MacKenzie, and Schwalbe are developing a community-based research initiative that will involve developmental screening and psychosocial needs assessments of children residing in children’s centers or juvenile detention facilities. The findings from their study will describe the baseline prevalence of psychosocial and developmental problems and risk factors within these populations, and data from the developmental screening and needs assessment study will contribute to service delivery improvements. Community-based programs will be focused on well-defined psychosocial needs and risk factors with a high probability of reducing risks for child maltreatment and adolescent delinquency.

This fall, JSWEEP and the Open Society Institute (OSI) will work with Jordanian universities to enable mutual learning and collaborations between CUSSW, the Jordan Ministry of Social Development, and select schools of social work in Jordan. OSI has awarded a grant to JSWEEP to fund a visit by a Jordanian group to CUSSW. The group will audit classes, meet with faculty, and visit New York City agencies. While several Jordanian universities have social work programs, their curriculum is heavy in sociological theory; practice skills are seldom taught.

Little or no attention is given by workers to mental health assessments or treating victims of trauma and family violence using evidence-based approaches. However, Jordanian professors who met with Dean Takamura and Professor El-Bassel expressed a strong desire to incorporate evidence-based practice into their educational programs in order to prepare professional leaders of the highest caliber. Dr. Al-Khasawneh, who recently returned to her position at Hashemite University as a professor in nursing after a year of conducting research at CUSSW, will continue working with JSWEEP to create primary care physician training modules on methods for identifying, assessing, and treating victims of family violence.

The School looks to Jordan’s future and its budding social work profession with great anticipation.
Dr. Vicki Lens was a public interest lawyer for 15 years before earning a PhD in social work. So she saw firsthand the inequities in welfare services.

In her scholarly research, the newly tenured associate professor at the School of Social Work focuses on issues of administrative justice in public welfare bureaucracies. She seeks to measure levels of fear, skepticism, powerlessness, and stigmatization that clients may feel when they seek public assistance and other benefits.

Dr. Lens has published nearly three dozen articles on administrative fair hearings, welfare reform, and other policies, procedures, and processes. Dr. Lens’ research utilizes qualitative analytical methods. Her analysis of the administrative, social, and legal processes that impede or ensure the distribution of public benefits exposes all-too-common fears and doubts that keep clients from pursuing appeal denials when benefits are denied. It is not uncommon for clients to reveal that they felt mistreated by workers. Such feelings, even if misperceived, influence whether clients choose to appeal denials.

Dr. Lens has been instrumental in developing the policy practice method offering for second-year students, in which students learn to collect and analyze relevant data and develop policy options. “One of the most important things I have learned from her is the value of using case studies to illustrate policy dilemmas and how a policymaker resolved them,” says her mentor and colleague Dr. Jane Waldfogel. “The method is used widely in policy schools but less often in social work schools.”

In addition to her classroom teaching, Dr. Lens has helped master’s and doctoral-level policy students prepare for the School’s annual Capstone Competition. She is the faculty coordinator for dual-degree law and social work students. She co-teaches a qualitative methods course to doctoral students with Dr. Denise Burnett, a professor of social work.

Dr. Allen Zweben, associate dean for research and academic affairs, says, “The topic of fair hearings has not been given much attention in policy research and she made a compelling case for National Science Foundation funding.”

With her extensive background in legal aid, public advocacy, and consumer affairs, Dr. Lens is now training a new generation of researchers interested in the intersection of law and social work.
Social Work
Writing Center

By Jessica Troiano

From first-year students puzzling over a Human Behavior in the Social Environment assignment to those trying to master the finer points of APA style, many social work students find support and guidance at the School’s Writing Center. Headed by Director Warren Green, the Center works with master’s and doctoral students to help them achieve excellence in their written work.

Students often drop by before starting on their papers, Mr. Green says. “A lot of what we do is to work with students as they think through approaches to an assignment,” he says. For students whose backgrounds are in the humanities and other disciplines, writing a social science paper can be a new challenge. The Center’s tutors help them throughout the process—from narrowing their topic to developing an argument and fine-tuning their grammar and usage of APA style.

The center’s staff sees more than 200 students during the academic year. Mr. Green says he sees dramatic improvement in writing quality even in a short period of time. “It appears to be a valuable experience for those who come to see us,” he says. “It makes students aware of their own thinking and how to articulate that thinking. They are all seriously striving to be the best they can be.”

Throughout the year, Mr. Green sees examples of excellent student work that he may recommend for submission to the Columbia Social Work Review, an annual journal written and edited by CUSSW students. In the most recent issue, writers tackled issues ranging from the privatization of nonprofits to an analysis of evidence-based practice in social work. Through this effort, students provide their peers with critical feedback, much as Mr. Green and his staff do for so many students. Lauren Harris, a member of the Review’s editorial board, describes her editorial work as an opportunity to explore new ideas. “The editing process requires a total immersion in the subject matter,” Ms. Harris says, “and since my primary article for review was on mental health courts, it actually ended up opening a whole new field of interest for me.”

As Mr. Green says, “The more the Center can help students be involved in the critical analysis of their work and that of their colleagues, the better we are.”

“The more the Center can help students be involved in the critical analysis of their work and that of their colleagues, the better we are.”

Left to right: Warren Green, Maria Tamano, Lauren Harris, Phillip Marotta
Our alumni are leaders in a full spectrum of fields, from homelessness to HIV prevention, in a wide range of positions, from clinicians to advocates. Here are just a few of the alumni who bring us great pride.

Susan Nayowith ’84MS, an active member of CUSSW’s alumni association, leads the Office of Client Advocacy, Policy and Planning at the NYC Department of Homeless Services. Dr. Nayowith was recently named president-elect of NASW-NYC and was awarded a Columbia University alumni medal in 2006.

Brenda Johnson Gallagher ’97MS received an alumni medal at this year’s Columbia University Commencement Exercises. Ms. Gallagher is president of the Frank and Brenda Gallagher Family Foundation. She has supported the School as a member of the Dean’s Advisory Council, the Alumni Association Board and Development Committee, among a list of other volunteer activities. Ms. Gallagher is also a board member of many nonprofits.

Cynthia Stuen ’83MS ’87DSW, senior vice president for policy, evaluation and education at Lighthouse International, advocates for policies to preserve sight and to prevent disability due to vision impairment. Dr. Stuen, whose professional career has been in the field of aging, just finished her term as chair of the American Society on Aging, she is a fellow at the Gerontological Society of America and the New York Academy of Medicine.

Elizabeth Lee ’05MS and Marcella J Tillet ’03MS won the 2009 Emerging Leaders Award from the NASW—NYC Chapter. Ms. Lee is the intergenerational program director at VISIONS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The program trains high school seniors to assist blind older persons at home and in their community. Ms. Lee also coordinates outreach and public education on blindness programs.

Ms. Tillet has worked in the U.S. and abroad in the HIV/AIDS prevention field. A former Peace Corps volunteer, Ms. Tillet currently coordinates the Osborne Association’s HIV prevention education programs for female partners of incarcerated men. She is also active in several workgroups focused on HIV/AIDS prevention and women’s issues.
Students Tackle Isms

By Anna Bahney

Throughout their two years at the School, students are encouraged to engage with those who may be different by recognizing individual and group strengths and resilience. They are urged to think critically and learn to challenge bias, prejudice, and discrimination that are inescapable in the larger world in which social workers and the people with whom they work exist.

Special attention to these issues and dynamics are at the heart of the Isms Laboratory, a course elective conceptualized and organized by Assistant Professor Elwin Wu. It may be the only one of its kind to focus specifically on the isms that shape our thoughts, actions, and interactions and that have wide-ranging ramifications.

Students themselves, not the professor, become the most valuable source of information in the class, says Dr. Wu. “There is a real emphasis on having students drive the topics,” he says. “The critical analysis of their own identities and knowledge of how that might affect their relationships with those on whose behalf they work is essential for a social worker.”

Dr. Wu believes that in the end, the course work prepares students well for life.

“It is much less important to teach people Skill A, Item B, Piece of Information C, than to ensure they become learners themselves,” he says. “After graduation, they will not have the luxury of a classroom and professor as they challenge ‘isms.’ Having the skill and capability to function effectively while not necessarily feeling ‘safe’ will make them more capable agents of change in the real world.”

The Isms Laboratory builds upon work that begins the very first day of the Orientation Program for Incoming Students. New students are engaged in critical conversations about diversity and difference practices through the Self-Awareness Program led by Dr. Peggy O’Neill, senior lecturer, and a team of second-year students who work with her. It provides a unique opportunity for entering students to explore their own experiences and awareness—or lack thereof—for racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice.

All students have additional options through which they can continue their explorations. Among these are the 24 student caucuses that focus on many of the isms as well as other interest areas and the special guest lectures and the student planned Community Day held each semester.

From start to finish, students at the School are reminded that their development as professionals will require that they grow in their own self-awareness and in their ability to work within diverse contexts with people who may be different from them.

Field Agency Focus: Palladia

By Sara E. Miller

The CUSSW Department of Field Education works with 600 agencies to place more than 800 master’s degree students in internships annually. Among the community-based agencies with which the department and other faculty members work, Harlem-based Palladia, Inc., stands out as a model for training students, typically transitioning two students each year to full-time positions after graduation.

Palladia, one of the largest not-for-profit social service agencies in New York City, offers a range of innovative programs in the fields of substance abuse, homelessness, HIV, mental health and trauma, domestic violence, and criminal justice services. Founded in 1970, Palladia has partnered with the School for more than three decades. Palladia staff participate in workshops and panels, and provide field placements and employment opportunities to our students and alumni. Diane Bonavota, vice president of the Office of Program Planning and Development, notes that Columbia students are well prepared by their academic work with its emphasis on critical thinking skills. “They hit the ground running,” she says. “They have a broad perspective on human services and social work, and a firm commitment to make change happen, and they are particularly interested in organizational capacity-building in support of quality services.”

On average, four students who have chosen as their practice method the Self-Awareness Program led by Dr. Peggy O’Neill, senior lecturer, and a team of second-year students who work with her. It provides a unique opportunity for entering students to explore their own experiences and awareness—or lack thereof—for racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice.

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From start to finish, students at the School are reminded that their development as professionals will require that they grow in their own self-awareness and in their ability to work within diverse contexts with people who may be different from them.