

# MOSAICS

## Vet's Best Friend

Research investigates effect shelter dog rehabilitation has on combat veterans



## Ali Kadhum Organizing in a New Land



## PhD Student Profiles

Asli Yalim & Nurit  
Fischer Shemer

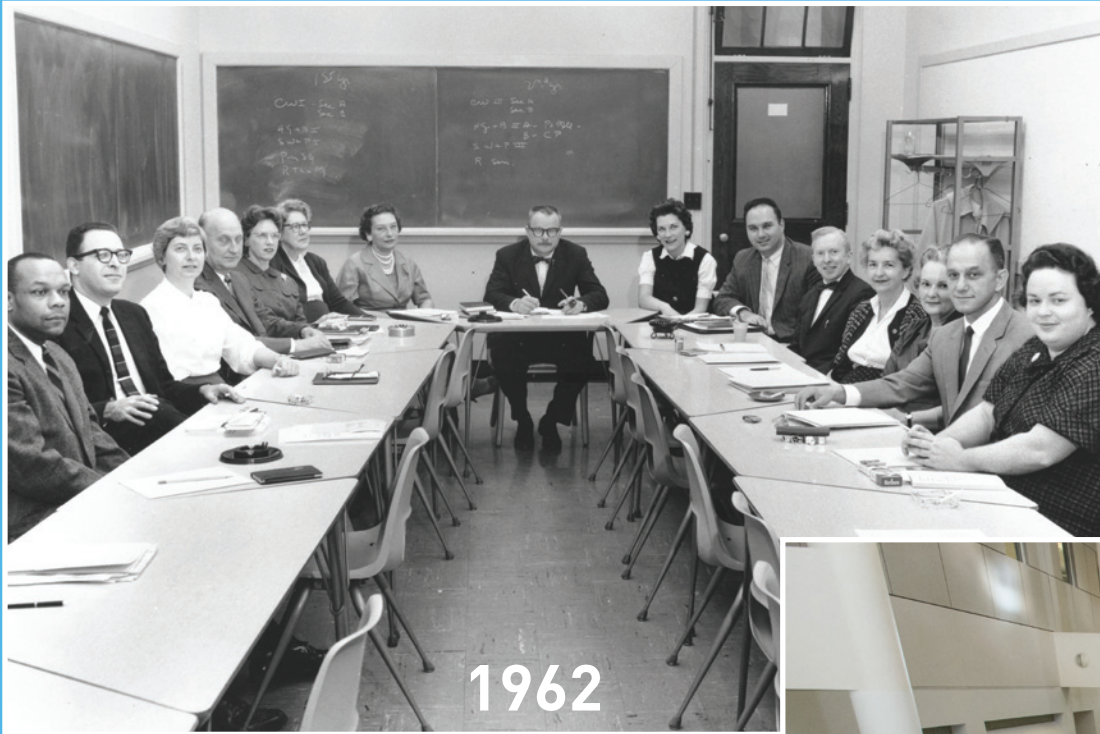


SPRING 2015



# 1934-2014

## EVOLVING FOR 80 YEARS



1962



2014

Faculty & Students

11 full-time  
faculty  
members

1962

28 full-time  
faculty  
members

2014

### BUFFALO MAKES NATIONAL NEWS

Photo Credit: Derek Gee, The Buffalo News



### #SNOWEMBER

A wall of snow set over Lake Erie on Nov. 18, 2014, and delivered a highly unusual amount of blowing and dangerous snow in some Western New York regions, making it one of the few times UB has ever been closed.



## FROM DEAN NANCY J. SMYTH

Social work is the profession for the 21st century. We are skilled in: facilitating community engagement across diverse groups of people; analyzing complex social systems; and intervening with individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations, or social policies, depending on what's needed. We understand the importance of understanding the social, cultural and environmental context of behavior. We know the value of empathy, diversity and of social justice. And we understand the impact of trauma and human rights violations.

We only need two additional skill sets to position us as leaders for this century: we need to 1) be technology savvy, that is, utilize our skills in a world where the integration of digital technologies offers both opportunities and challenges; and 2) integrate business and entrepreneurial savvy with our other professional skills and values.

Technological savvy is needed because it reflects the reality of the world. Even in developing nations, digital communication technologies, such as mobile phones, are invaluable for health services delivery, social action and economic opportunities. Social workers need to be adept at employing all forms of digital technologies to access best practices and research outcomes, build global professional networks, advocate and organize for social change. We regularly help clients use these technologies to meet their goals, such as connecting to support networks, learning new skills, and promoting health and mental health.

Social workers clearly need both entrepreneurial and business savvy in the current economic and policy environment in order for nonprofits to be strategic and effective enough to survive. Many nonprofits are turning to non-social work business professionals, who rarely share our vision and values, to help run their organizations. Linking social workers with the knowledge and skills needed to meet management and leadership needs can reverse the loss of this important organizational role by expanding the business savvy of social workers.

We recognized how critical this need is when we took on the challenge of how best to educate social workers with both sets of skills. This issue of Mosaics mentions two activities that mark our first steps in this effort: our groundbreaking conference this past fall, Transformational Leadership and Entrepreneurial Thinking for Nonprofits: Moving from Surviving to Thriving and the launching of our Technology in Social Work Resource Center — [socialwork.buffalo.edu/techresources](http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/techresources). If you're interested, you can view the conference keynote talks on our web at — [socialwork.buffalo.edu/nonprofit-conference](http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/nonprofit-conference). We are excited to be moving ahead on these important initiatives for our profession -- I hope you will be excited, as well, and will check out some of these beginning resources.



NANCY J. SMYTH, PHD, LCSW

# MOSAICS

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The University at Buffalo is a premier research-intensive public university, the largest and most comprehensive campus in the State University of New York. UB's more than 29,000 students pursue their academic interests through more than 390 undergraduate, graduate and professional degree programs. Founded in 1846, the University at Buffalo is a member of the Association of American Universities.

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# VET'S BEST FRIEND

Research investigates effect shelter dog rehabilitation has on combat veterans



Research Professor Thomas Nochajski

Those normally part of the bustling traffic of the UB Student Union were halted in their hurried tracks during a lunchtime last year by the presence of two shelter dogs at an exhibit table. They were, in a sense, manning an exhibit for an organization called Dog Tags Niagara with their human companions who were military veterans.

Jacob Silver, a junior in biomedical sciences, was among those who paused. A Marine Corps veteran himself carrying on his education after two tours in Afghanistan, he struck up a conversation with Mike, an Iraq war veteran dealing with transition and adjustment to civilian life, who proceeded to explain how Dog Tags turned his life around, and how it's doing the same for fellow vets experiencing the after-effects of combat. The dogs looked as though they wanted to extol the benefits of the program as well.

Thinking the mission of Dog Tags Niagara would make for a highly relevant research project, the pre-med student began to send emails out to various UB departments, eventually grabbing the attention of SSW Research Professor Thomas Nochajski.

Nochajski felt that the research idea would be fitting for the Joining Forces-UB program, a collaborative project between the SSW and the UB School of Nursing aimed at training students to better care for veterans coming to them in a health care setting, whether for their mental or physical health.

"The other part of this is that we wanted to do research in the community with families and veterans outside of the Veterans Administration (VA) system because most of what you see about veterans tends to come from either VAs themselves or VA-sponsored research," he relates. "We wanted to go outside of that because we know that the large portion of veterans don't get their care from the VA. They go to private providers."

As a wounded Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War, Nochajski knows combat. "But I also know that combat is an individual thing. The overall traumatic experience is the same, it's how that gets interpreted by the individuals. That has a big role in this," he explains.

Joe Ruzala, an Army Vietnam veteran, helped launch the Dog Tags Niagara program at the Niagara County SPCA on Veterans Day 2013. Its mission is to heal the wounded soldier whose damages are unseen, and to heal the wounded animal whose trust has been broken.

A passionate advocate of the program's benefits, Ruzala indicates the Dog Tags logo features a shield with a

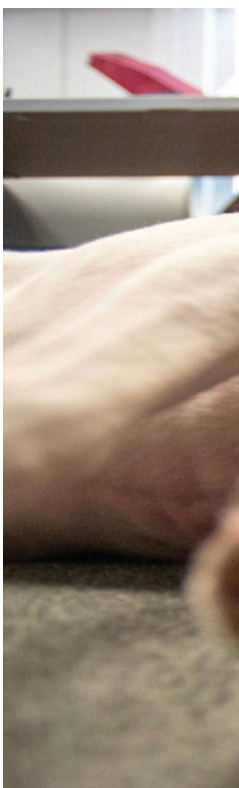
*"This is a low-pressure way for the veterans to connect with another living creature."*

silhouette of a pit bull looking up to a silhouette of a soldier framed by a banner stating, "Freedom's best friend to man's best friend." The pit bull, he acknowledges, has become the "throwaway dog" of today. The Niagara County shelter, like most others, is filled with the breed. He draws an analogy to how the

veteran feels. "When they come home, they don't fit. They identify with pit bulls because they're going through the same darn thing, so there's common ground there."

The veterans work with the abused or abandoned dogs at the shelter, making regular visits with the intent of rehabilitating the dogs for adoption. In the process, they are helping themselves. Nochajski calls it a "two-way street of healing." He is researching the effects of this project on both the veterans and dogs through a series of interviews with the participating veterans, SPCA staff, and those who have adopted the dogs. Silver is glad to be included in the research interviews, as is Brad Linn, doctoral student graduate research assistant.

"This is a low-pressure way for the veterans to connect with another living creature. If they're having a bad





day or feeling kind of blue, they'll go to the SPCA and work with the dog. There's something about that process that's really helpful for the vet," says Linn. "A lot of these guys are struggling with their identity. They're not in the service anymore, so they're trying to find themselves again and incorporate their experience in the military into their identity."

Nochajski indicates that the preliminary research results support what might be expected given the literature and research on pet therapy. "When the vets get the dogs, the vets are in a situation where they feel like they've been abused and tossed away. The dogs are in the same situation. So they can communicate," he observes.

Associate Professor Lisa Butler, principal investigator of Joining Forces-UB, feels the Dog Tags project is particularly fitting for the program's objectives. "By bringing a focus to veteran, service member and military family research at UB, we hope to bring together interested veteran students and others in the local veteran community to collaborate with first-rate researchers like Dr. Nochajski on research to benefit these populations."

Ruszala happily has been seeing results firsthand as the vets help socialize the outcast dogs. "Not only does the dog begin to mend, we see the vets begin to heal too. What happens is that it gives the vets purpose and that addresses a lot of subjects. Veteran suicides are 22 a day. We know why that happens. If you don't have a reason to get up in the morning, you won't. But if you do, if you're working with (dogs) Ripley, or Toro, or Bubba, and he expects you to be there on Friday, you'll be there on Friday. That's what gives these guys a direction to continue on, and gives them purpose to the point where they can get down into manageable levels and reengage."

- Jim Bisco

*Photos on cover and pages 4 and 5 were taken at a recent Joining Forces Research Brownbag. Nochajski, Dog Tags staff and Jewell the (deaf) dog, a graduate of Dogs Tags and newly certified therapy dog, stole the show!*



## LAURA KELEMEN, MSW '97, LEADS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN NIAGARA COUNTY

Laura Kelemen, MSW '97, has known Niagara County well over the past 15 years through leadership roles for community-based agencies in child advocacy services and youth and family services. A natural progression for her, then, was being named director of mental health services for Niagara County in October.

Her experience with children and families gave her insights into trauma. "We talk about mental health — and I don't like the stigma connected to the term — that so much of trauma and mental health concerns are biologically based. It is all treatable, similar to diabetes and heart disease, and when we look at it differently, I think, it takes some of the stigma away," she says.

To that stigma-breaking end, she is all for tearing down silos and building up integrated provider networks in accordance with the rapidly changing health care landscape, but not at the cost of overlooking anyone. "It's our responsibility to make sure that individuals aren't falling through the cracks, are understanding the services available to them, and provided with choice," she emphasizes.

Originally pursuing chemistry and psychology as an undergraduate at UB, Kelemen was searching for career direction. "By the time I got to my master's degree, I knew I wanted to work in social work, in human services. I had a professor, Nancy Smyth, who is now the dean, say, 'Learn something that you wouldn't naturally gravitate towards as your graduate focus because you will naturally gravitate back towards that which really fuels your passion.'"

The advice from Smyth helped her realize that issues are not singular, that there are many different facets and complications, "which really goes along with the theme that's happening in health care right now in trying to look at a person as a whole."

Kelemen recalls being at the beginning discussions of the trauma-based curriculum at SSW. "EMDR was just in its infancy when I graduated. Thank God the world has developed phenomenally from there," she says. "I've had social work interns who have come through the Institute for Trauma-Informed Care. The background that today's social work students have in looking at things through a trauma-informed lens is a tremendous benefit to the field, and to the people who walk through our door asking for help."

- Jim Bisco





# ALI KADHUM, MSW '14: ORGANIZING IN A NEW — LAND —



“Opportunity here is good.”

Ali Kadhum remembers when he arrived in Buffalo, and he gives the exact date: May 7, 2008.

He and his wife, Emaan Saad, and her daughter, Noor, were lost and a little panicked that day in the Buffalo Niagara International Airport at the end of a journey that had begun two years before when they fled Iraq, and included stays in Iran, Syria and Lebanon.

But when they found their way out of the arrival area, here was a little crowd with a banner reading “Welcome Ali, Noor and Emaan.”

For a refugee, Kadhum says, arriving in a new home is “the moment of hope and future.” The welcome committee from the Church of the Nativity in Tonawanda, New York was his first impression of Buffalo.

Six years later, almost to the day, Kadhum participated in the School of Social Work commencement where he was honored with the Hazeltine T. Clements Memorial Award recognizing a graduating MSW student who demonstrates exceptional concern for human dignity and cultural competency in field placement.

At the same hour Saad was receiving a nursing degree from D’Youville College. He raced from his ceremony to hers.

Kadhum’s story is more than the story of one refugee family settling successfully in a new land. It is the story of a compassionate newcomer using his considerable organizing skills and energy — and now, critically, his training as a social worker in the UB School of School of Work MSW program — to do what he can to make life easier for all refugees arriving in Buffalo.

He is a care coordinator with Jewish Family Services and a case manager with Lake Shore Behavioral Health’s Lower West Side Counseling. After work, he’s a tireless community organizer.

Recently, some 1,500 refugees a year have been resettled in Buffalo — coming from Bhutan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Central African Republic, Cuba, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Liberia, to list recent places of origin. Most arrive traumatized by the events that uprooted them.

Journey’s End Refugee Services helped Kadhum and Saad get oriented in the months after they arrived. Everywhere they turned people were smiling. Even that took getting used to. “We came from a difficult life. We never saw smiles,” Kadhum says. He found a job making portable planetariums at Science First.

A community activist in Iraq — he’d been organizing a charitable foundation before the murder of a colleague finally forced him to flee — Kadhum wanted to volunteer in his new home. He was introduced to Voice Buffalo, an interdenominational community

organization. Voice sent him to a weeklong leadership course in New York City sponsored by the Gamaliel Foundation. Kadhum proudly says Barack Obama once attended the same course.

Back in Buffalo, because language felt like a barrier — he speaks English well, but not as fluently as he speaks Arabic — Kadhum found a base for volunteering with the Buffalo Immigrant and Refugee Empowerment Coalition, where everyone’s English is a second language. In 2009 he became its president, a post he still holds.

The coalition had been focused on six broad areas such as education and housing that affect all refugee communities. When Kadhum polled refugee community leaders about their priorities in late 2013, they responded with 32 specific issues, ranging from how to translate and transfer academic degrees from the homeland, to the need for embassy services such as obtaining birth certificates and visas, to educating parents about children’s rights and what is considered neglect or abuse.

Kadhum believes that ideally each newcomer community would have its own organization to address its own particular needs.

“We don’t have money and we don’t have resources, but we have time,” he says. He used his time — juggling his MSW program, jobs and volunteer work — to found the Iraqi American Society (IAS), now a 503c organization. He credits his SSW faculty advisor, Kathleen Kost, for guidance through the steps of formalizing the nonprofit’s status.

The organization — it welcomes all Arabic-speaking newcomers, not just Iraqis — is pursuing four community-specific priorities that the Iraqi community identified. IAS has organized committees of volunteers to provide case management beyond the six months that settlement agencies can provide; Arabic language instruction for children, because they won’t be receiving that instruction in school; social programs for the purpose of community-building — such as a Thanksgiving celebration for 200 this past fall; and, lastly, a women’s empowerment committee, the first of its kind in any local refugee community.

Kadhum recognizes that the refugee experience is incredibly complex. In instances of forced migration, the newcomer has likely left behind a life of fear, anxiety and trauma. The new life in Buffalo would seem to be less stressful but it requires adjustments to radically different (or completely novel) social services system, cultures, foods, weather, people, languages, concepts of health and health care.

“Many refugees, when they arrive, have no hope,” Kadhum says. “They had an identity and then one day lost everything.” He has recently referred a destitute physician who had come to Buffalo as a refugee and was now facing eviction from his lodgings, to a job counselor who found the man work as a cleaner, which he was grateful to have.

“People start to build again from zero. They want to recapture the dreams they’ve been pursuing since childhood in three or four years,” Kadhum says. “Opportunity here is good.”





For the social worker, no matter how culturally competent, the challenge of making a useful intervention to solve a refugee's problem will probably start with language. Because he works with people from outside the Arabic- and English-speaking worlds, Kadhum often needs the services of a translator to help a client. And when communication is established, the next impediment may be a cultural reluctance to discuss almost anything with a stranger.

Kadhum says that he often sees clients at Lower West Side Counseling first as a case manager only. If those interactions lead to trust, he may be able to offer counseling services when needed. He might find himself working with a woman who says she's never before talked with a man outside her family. Kadhum takes care to explain the professional obligations of a counselor; that what is said in his office doesn't leave the office.

All this before the real work of counseling can begin. And then the counseling itself may be fragmented and slowed by the need for translation and by how unnatural it is to have a client-counselor relationship after a lifetime in a culture that has no comparable point of reference.

At the community level, Kadhum sees refugees making successful adjustments to their new surroundings, but he also sees refugees settling into communities of their countrymen and women, where they can maintain a semblance of familiar life and speak the home language and not English.

He's sympathetic: the community support is good. He says his wife, who was a medical student before she was uprooted, would have been utterly lost beyond the confines of her neighborhood in Bagdad. That was the way of life there. But it doesn't work as well here. For one thing, the children grow up speaking fluent English and are comfortably familiar with the larger community; inevitably they will clash with parents who stay isolated in their home communities.

Saad learned to drive. Now she commutes from Amherst to her job in Buffalo in her own car.

What works (and what doesn't) to help integrate refugees into Buffalo is a topic that research may begin to bring light to. Kadhum plans to be an active consumer of research services offered by the School of Social Work's newly formed Immigrant and Refugee Research Institute, of which he is an advisory board member (*see side bar for story*).

Kadhum hopes to see each refugee community start its own self-help society. To that end, he and others are working with the Buffalo mayor's office to secure a building to house the groups in what would be the Buffalo Community Culture Center.

"This is now my country," he says. "It gives me respect and love and opportunity." He hopes all families who find refuge in Buffalo will one day enjoy the same sense of belonging. He's working to see that they can.

– Judson Mead



Kadhum with Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown at World Refugee Day

## WHAT do we need to know?

*New research support for understanding the newcomer experience.*

A Buffalo social services provider wants to know how past trauma impacts immigrant and refugee families after they have been resettled.

Administrators of a Western New York suburban school district with a rising number of immigrant pupils want to know what they need to know to best serve the newcomers in their schools.

Now they have a place in the School of Social Work to call. Faculty members Wooksoo Kim and Hilary Weaver have established the Immigrant and Refugee Research Institute to find answers to such questions.

The need is considerable. In the past decade, Erie County has welcomed a steady stream of refugees — some 10,000 — and is currently receiving one-third of the refugee flow into New York State, according to a Fall 2014 report by the Buffalo-based Partnership for the Public Good.

Operating under the umbrella of the Buffalo Center for Social Research and occupying shared quarters in Parker Hall, the new institute has begun to attract interest across the UB campus.

For Kim and Weaver, who co-direct the institute, their November 2014 proposal to establish a formal organization was the culmination of conversations in which they found a critical mass of faculty interest. They say the idea for an institute just "bubbled up" — an opportunity waiting to be seized.

They want to build a community research resource, a discovery and knowledge provider. While faculty affiliated with the institute will pursue their own research agendas — Kim's research, for instance, studies how Asian immigrants and descendants change and develop their behaviors in response to the sociocultural environments of the host society — the institute is intended to be responsive to local needs.

"We want to answer questions raised in the community," Weaver says. "This won't only be research intended to increase a body of knowledge — we want to help." The vision is to bring the research power of the school and the university to bear on practical issues in the immediate community. "We will be a hub," she says.

The institute has recruited an advisory board with membership representing immigrant and refugee communities, service providers, and university faculty in social work and other UB schools.

Kim and Weaver are discussing research with local agencies. One model might be to provide needs assessment for an agency, participate in an intervention design, and then provide evaluation. They will offer research services that community and faculty grant-seekers can write into their funding proposals. The institute recently picked up its first research subcontract on a funded project with social work faculty member Yunju Nam.

Eventually the institute hopes to provide connections for faculty into the community, facilitating linkages for researchers who don't have the institute's ready access.

It is the early days, but co-directors Kim and Weaver are already scrambling to keep up with interest, both in the community and among researchers. Clearly the need is there.

– Judson Mead



# WELCOME NEW FACULTY

# 5



**GRETCHEN ELY** Gretchen Ely, a new associate professor with the UBSSW, journeyed into the social work field in a serendipitous way. While she had a concern for social justice from an early age, she opted for an undergraduate degree in Speech Communication with the intention to enter into law school. Upon graduation, however, she got a job as a vocational counselor at a community mental health center, helping individuals with severe and persistent mental illness to find and maintain employment. During her time at the mental health center, she became aware that the work that was most interesting to her seemed to require an

MSW, thus she went on to complete an MSW at Washington University in St. Louis. As an MSW student, she became more interested in macro level social work, and upon graduation she was hired to be part of a program evaluation team that examined the effects of public

welfare programs in Tennessee. This experience developed into a passion for research, which led Ely to pursue a PhD in social work from the University of Tennessee.

Her research focuses on women's health disparities, reproductive health and cancer prevention and control. She arrives in Buffalo with more than ten years of social work teaching experience, most recently from the University of Kentucky. Many of her research projects and publications to date address social and health issues that are specific to central Appalachia, and she looks forward to expanding her research into Western New York. She also serves as a founding advisory board member for the newly formed advocacy organization Social Workers for Reproductive Justice.

Ely's community-focused approach to social work has lent her a unique identity in the field. She is a researcher, an educator, and a practitioner. In each of these roles, however, she is above all else an advocate. Through her research, Ely advocates for the voice of her community that might otherwise be overlooked; through her teaching, she advocates for her students to take initiative and become agents of change after graduation.



**SHAANTA MURSHID** Nadine (Shaanta) Murshid first approached social work from a broad policy perspective. After receiving a Bachelor of Business Administration from James Madison University, she earned a master's degree in Public Policy from Australian National University. While putting these degrees into practice, however, she always felt that there was a critical piece missing from the systems-based discussions; that piece was the human factor. With this conviction, she attended Rutgers University and earned a PhD in Social Work. Deeply interested in global social justice, her dissertation and subsequent

research focused on the microfinance system in Bangladesh and its implications for domestic violence.

"Domestic violence is not just an individual psychological problem," says Murshid. "It's also a systemic problem — the poverty that is

systemic is at the root of a lot of the social issues that I saw [in Bangladesh]. And that's really important to understand. Violence normalizes violence; for people who are going through it, for people who see it. And once that happens — once you've seen violence — the next day it happens, and it's not as bad. That's really the problem with violence. There's no stopping it. Once it's out there, it's out there, and then somebody else will pick it up; somebody else will take on the pattern and exert violence elsewhere."

In addition to her work in Bangladesh, Murshid has also conducted research in Cambodia and Thailand where her primary focus was on development and multilateral-aid. With her global perspective and her passion for getting at the root of violence, she is well-equipped to work with the diverse refugee population here in Buffalo, in which she expresses interest. Murshid is adamant about pursuing research in areas that interest her — a drive that she hopes to instill in her students. "One of the things I truly believe in is if you're not interested in what you study, you're not going to do a good job," says Murshid. "Think about things that affect you; think about things that matter to you. Thinking is the first step towards the rest of your life."



**ELIZABETH BOWEN** Elizabeth Bowen, a new assistant professor, brings an arsenal of direct practice experience to the UBSSW community. After completing her AM in Clinical Social Work from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago in 2004, she spent the next several years working in the field. She invested most of this time in managing supportive housing programs in Chicago for individuals who were both homeless and HIV positive. After years of grappling with the recurring multilayered issues of how one's housing situation can affect one's health, Bowen desired to tackle the question from a broader

research perspective. She pursued a PhD in Social Work from the University of Illinois at Chicago, which she completed in 2014. Bowen is the recipient of various research fellowships, including the Doctoral Fellows Award from the Society for Social Work and Research in 2014. This honor was awarded for her dissertation

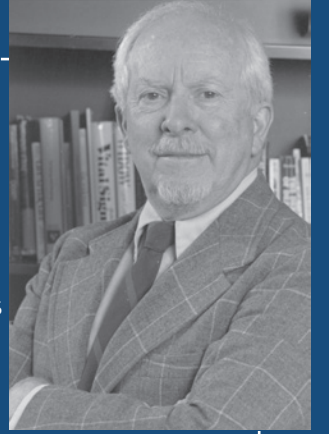
research topic on HIV risk behaviors among residents of single room occupancy housing, which developed out of her years of work on place-based health disparities.

"What I'm interested in is looking at the intersection of homelessness, substance use and addiction, and HIV," states Bowen. "We know those things often go together — I observed this in my practice experience — but you don't always see that intersection addressed. I think that better understanding of trauma and trauma-informed care as well as paying better attention to the social determinants of health could potentially play a huge role in disrupting the cycles we see with homelessness, addiction, and health conditions like HIV/AIDS."

With a keen perception for the reciprocal, multifaceted relationship between housing, addictions, and health already established, Bowen hopes to integrate this approach into her teaching. She seeks to weave together her research, extensive practice experience, and teaching strategies into a rich learning environment for her students; one that is characterized by encouraging critical thinking that can penetrate the many layers of complex problems that social work practitioners face. Search for those unaddressed connections that exist between issues, Bowen suggests, and then advocate for change at multiple levels.



# GERALD MILLER IN MEMORIAM



Gerald J. Miller, World War II veteran and associate professor emeritus of the School of Social Work, passed away on November 28, 2014 at the age of 91. The memories of his life, his career and his legacy are decorated by a recurring pattern: moments of clear conviction that led to altruistic action.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Miller, then a freshman at Hartwick College, hitchhiked to Albany to offer his service to the war effort in the U.S. Army Air Corp Aviation Cadet School. As a member of the Eighth Airforce Division, he received the Distinguished Flying Cross for destroying nine German Luftwaffe aircraft in a single mission. This streak of dedication to causes for the greater good would remain latched onto Miller as he left the army and ventured forward.

While immersed in a successful career as a research associate in atomic energy at the University of Rochester Medical Center, Miller was nudged by the inspiration to make a radical career shift and become involved in social work. After earning an MSW from St. Patrick's College of the University of Ottawa, Miller returned home to Rochester and worked with Catholic Charities for five years.

Miller joined the UBSSW faculty in 1961, where he remained until his retirement from his position as MSW Program Director in 1994. The impression he left upon the School is one of a fierce devotion to social justice, tempered by a gentle nature and compassionate sensitivity for his students. Bonnie Collins, MSW '80 — a former student of Miller — recalls an example of Miller's others-focused kindness. She was late to an exam due to tough winter road conditions. When she rushed into class, anxious from being late and worried that her professor would greet her with disapproval, she was met instead with understanding from Miller, who was simply relieved that she was not hurt. He even suggested that she get a coffee to relax before taking the exam. Miller's default response was that of empathy, patience and humility; he continually searched for ways to elevate his students and colleagues.

It is fitting, then, that when a colleague of Miller's passed away, he did something to honor his friend and keep his memory alive. Paul Edwards, who worked with Miller for more than 20 years at the UBSSW, willed his estate to Miller upon his death. Miller, whose ambitions were always stoked by helping others, used the money from the estate to establish the Paul Edwards and Gerald Miller Scholarship Fund. It was Miller's wish — as well as the wish of his dear friend — to ensure that the future of social work education could continue to thrive. He cherished this fund, requesting that donations be made to the scholarship in lieu of flowers at his wake. Miller's diligent hope to invest in students, which was sustained throughout his abundant life, now resonates in his deeply-felt absence.

**JOHN BAKER** John Baker joined the UBSSW faculty as an assistant professor in Fall 2014 and he brings a unique expertise to the School. He received his PhD in psychology from the University at Buffalo and worked in California as a staff psychologist at Rancho Los Amigos Rehabilitation Medical Center. He has a background in rehabilitation, neuropsychology, and health psychology and his current focus on concussion. He has completed two training fellowships and became a faculty member in the Medical School.



As a member of the Social Work faculty, Baker is continuing with his collaborative research program on concussion. His research program is based in the UB Concussion Management Clinic in the Department of Orthopedics and Sports Medicine. Some of his research projects include neuropsychology and neuroimaging aspects of concussion, returning to school after a concussion, exercise testing and treatment of concussion, the long term effects of concussions, and treatment outcomes. He is currently helping to develop a Return to Learn program, which is designed to help students who have had a concussion return to school. This program emphasizes the need to involve the student's family, school personnel, and the community. It also involves community education and outreach related to concussion. In the future, Baker plans to involve students in his research program, and to integrate it with his teaching and work in the UB Concussion Management Clinic.

**ANNA BALL** Annahita (Anna) Ball brings a passion for school social work and educational policy to the UBSSW faculty as a new assistant professor. After earning bachelor degrees in English Literature and Psychology, Ball remained at Ohio State University to receive an MSW and a PhD in Social Work. She worked as an assistant professor of social work for two years at Louisiana State University. She has been granted several honors, including the Teaching Innovation Award, an award voted on by students to honor excellence in teaching.



"I'm really interested in how teachers fit into school-based mental health services," says Ball. "What do teachers know about children's mental health? How are children's mental health issues related to teachers' own mental health issues?" Ball's sensitivity to the layers of trauma at an interpersonal level are a valuable contribution to the School, as is her ability to ask the important questions. "Most of what schools do is academic, and that's clearly important for schools and education, but we have all these other issues that we know kids come to school with, so how do schools address that?"

An overarching guideline that Ball follows — and one that she hopes her students will adopt — is to be aware of the ever-changing policies that can and will affect her practice and teaching. This is particularly critical in school social work, Ball notes, as educational policies are constantly being discussed and reinvented. Along with awareness, she advocates adaptability; a skill that Ball utilizes when she works with multiple systems at one time. In her research, her practice, and her teaching, Ball strives to open up and strengthen the channels between groups — from students to teachers, teachers to parents, education to mental health services, and, ultimately, between her own students and the various fields in which they will soon work.







Professor and Associate Dean for Research Catherine N. Dulmus was elected a Distinguished Scholar and Fellow in the National Academies of Practice and the Social Work Academy.



American Red Cross selected The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care as a recipient of their Red Ribbon Community Award. Kudos to co-directors Sue Green and Tom Nochajski.

Discussions and strategic planning about implications of digital communication technologies for our school and in our curriculum were launched at a retreat featuring Dr. Faye Mishna, Professor and Dean at University of Toronto.

"How to Flourish in Social Work" self-care poster was released on our website and in a mailing. You may request a copy of the poster at [socialwork.buffalo.edu/self-care](http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/self-care).



Clinical Associate Professor Sue Green named a fellow for Health Leadership Fellows Program of the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York.



Associate Professor Barbara Rittner appointed to the three-year term on the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy Board of Trustees, one of the oldest advocacy groups in the country.



CSWE Annual Program Meeting — Dean Emeritus Lawrence Shulman awarded Significant Lifetime Achievement in Social Work Education Award, and over 70 attendees celebrated with him at our annual chicken wing reception.

A tree planting ceremony event in honor of late adjunct professor Alison Flakes was delayed a week by the now famous Snowvember snows. Alison's tree is on the green between Alfiero and Park Halls on North Campus. Celebrate Alison at [socialwork.buffalo.edu/alison-flakes](http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/alison-flakes).

Beth Kanter and Thomas Ulbrich were keynote speakers at our Office of Continuing Education's "Transformational Leadership and Entrepreneurial Thinking for Nonprofits: Moving From Surviving to Thriving" Conference. Beth Kanter spent an additional day on campus talking to students, faculty and staff about using social media to facilitate change in the world and recording a podcast.



Comings and Goings – Five new faculty joined our growing School (see pages 8 and 9) and Jeffrey Siefert joined SSW as a senior staff assistant in resource management. Assistant Professor Adjoa Robinson left to join Metropolitan State University at Denver.

For the past year, we've participated in Twitter Chats at #MacroSW on alternate Thursdays at 9 p.m. EST, discussing issues relevant to macro social work practice, geared to practitioners at all levels.





# YEAR R 2014 <sup>IN</sup> EVIEW



SSW launched a newly designed website, [socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://socialwork.buffalo.edu).

203

203 students graduate at the 79th Commencement Ceremony (5 Social Welfare PhD, 3 JD/MSW, 3 BA/MSW, 192 MSW)

Dr. Mimi Abramovitz, Bertha Capen Reynolds Professor in Social Policy at the Silberman School of Social Work from Hunter College, spoke at UB on "Unpacking Poverty: Community Loss – A New Social Indicator."



Professor Deborah Waldrop was 2014 William P. Gillick Quality of Life Award recipient by the Alzheimer's Association Western New York Chapter.

UB on the road -- Alumni dinners were held in Washington, D.C. in April, New York City in June, and in Scottsdale, Arizona in December, as well as an alumni reunion in Rochester, New York in April.



Clinical Professor Denise Krause appointed to the New York State Board of Social Work.



Orientation and Welcome-Back Cookout – over 160 new MSW students joined our in-person orientation and cookout, while 25 new online MSW students joined us at an online orientation.

An SSW Alumni and Mentor Mixer was held locally at the Buffalo-Niagara Marriott, and over 60 alumni, mentors and mentees were in attendance. Our Mentoring Program is now in its fourth year.

The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care added Dr. Sandra Bloom, co-creator of the Sanctuary Model, to its advisory board and released an infographic. You may view it here [socialwork.buffalo.edu/trauma-infographic](http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/trauma-infographic).



# ASLI YALIM



*“We are working with diverse populations, so our work should include diverse perspectives”*

Asli Yalim, first-year PhD student, is evidence that when a chosen professional path is the right fit for an individual, the justification for such a choice seems to sprout naturally from a person’s life. Born in Turkey, Yalim completed a bachelor’s degree in Psychology and a master’s degree in Forensic Science while living in Istanbul. She spent four years working in adolescent psychology, intrigued by the rich nature of the mental health field.

Yalim moved to the United States and continued working in the field, all the while feeling that the focus of mental health practice needed to shift away from addressing clients’ problems and their immediate ramifications; she wanted to envelop this approach within a more holistic, healing framework. She began to learn that a degree in social work could equip her with the combination of tools that she was looking

for: a person-centered focus wrapped in a systems-level understanding. Unwilling to remain idle in her pursuit to better serve her clients, Yalim decided to enter the MSW program at Florida State University.

While living in Florida, Yalim recognized that she could use her international background as a strength in her profession. She began to work with refugee populations in Florida; an area of social work that she felt was a particularly good fit for her. “Overemphasizing on mental illnesses does not promote mental health and well-beings of refugees,” Yalim states. “Providing social and economic opportunities for refugees, accepting them as part of our communities, and respecting where they come from will help them feel good about themselves. You will be amazed at what they can accomplish and how resilient they are.”

With this big-picture understanding, Yalim chose to attend the Social Welfare PhD program at UB, where she settled right in. “Buffalo reminds me of Istanbul; I love it here,” Yalim shares. “The small cohort of fellow PhD students is like a tight-knit community.”

The deciding factor in her decision to attend UB, however, was the prospect of continuing her work with refugees, for many of whom Buffalo is a haven. “I want to do my research with the kind of perspective that takes into account social, political, and cultural factors of mental health, which I believe play a larger role in refugee mental health. We need to be aware that the refugees already have personal strengths and resources. Our role is to put some effort to explore them and help them come into play.”

# Nurit Fischer Shemer

Nurit Fischer Shemer did not set out to work directly in social welfare. Originally from Israel, she earned a BSc in Pharmacy from The Hebrew University and an MAEd in Science and Technology Education from Ben-Gurion University. While these degree titles are not explicitly linked to an interest in social work, Shemer admits that her passions were always bent toward helping others. As an Officer in the Israeli army, Shemer served as the Pharmacist for the Northern region of Israel, but was eventually dismayed by the focus shifting from helping people to treating problems.

She moved to the United States and began working as a translator as she is a polyglot speaking a number of languages besides English and Hebrew. “One day I had a client in social services in downtown Buffalo. It was the second or third time I had interpreted for that client,” recalls Shemer. “While I was interpreting, I lifted my head and saw this nice social work diploma and thought, ‘Why should I just be the interpreter? I can be the social worker.’”

With this resolution, Shemer quickly applied to the UBSSW’s MSW program, which led directly to where she currently stands: as a second-year student in the Social Welfare

PhD program. Her area of research is one that is so deeply rooted in history, and yet still so urgently relevant and ongoing. Shemer focuses on the multigenerational impact of trauma, with an emphasis on the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. While she is interested in investigating the pathology associated with trauma, Shemer is adamant to anchor her research in a strengths-based perspective. She is captivated by how individuals experience trauma differently, how it affects them uniquely, and how they each find ways toward resiliency, toward healing. Her goal is to begin a pilot study next summer interviewing second generation Holocaust survivors.

In addition to her research, Shemer works as a Teaching Assistant for Psychopathology, a course heavily subscribed by social work students as well as students in a variety of allied health disciplines, education, and law. She is bringing her expertise as

a pharmacist to the course by developing materials on psychopharmacology for mental health practitioners. In keeping with her personal philosophy and her research interests, Shemer is also developing coping strategy modules that will be integrated into the usual coursework.

In all that she does, Shemer finds ways to invest in future generations, and the resulting efforts are often fed right back into the UBSSW community, creating an atmosphere of support and safety. “I’m working on a resource book that was originally for MSWs, but we are in the process of expanding it for PhD students as well,” says Shemer. She has developed a group, called Newcomers, which offers support for incoming international students as they face the difficulties of adjusting to a new language and culture, all while facing the high-stress environment that is inherent to any graduate program.



*“Why should I just be the interpreter?  
I can be the social worker.”*







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for Florida based social work, nursing and public health donors and alumni was hosted by Associate Professor Barbara & Peter Rittner, Dean Smyth and Mary Glenn.



**59%** of donors are from WNY

of donors are '80's alumni **14%**

**\$279** is the current average gift

**31%** increase in donors in 2014

**32** alumni/donors have been supporting the school consistently for 20 years or more. Talk about loyalty!

**14 & 15**





## *I'm thankful.*



**Travis Hales** wants to bring about social change. He came to UB from a small, rural town and earned a BA in English and philosophy, fields that gave him a unique perspective on social problems. He decided to apply the critical thinking skills those programs taught him to a new field: social work. Scholarships and academic awards supported through private giving have helped Travis earn an MSW, and "the support and devotion of UB's School of Social Work faculty" convinced him to pursue a PhD in social work. He plans to go on to work with human service organizations to enhance services delivered to society's most vulnerable people.

The **best public universities** have the strongest private support.