

MOSAICS

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DEAN'S COLUMN



Dear Alumni and Friends,

During my first role as a social worker at the Darlington County Department of Social Services in South Carolina, I worked to strengthen families' bonds, often bridging child welfare and adult services in my direct practice. In some instances, while addressing children's needs during home visits, I would encounter aging relatives who might need a helping hand or have a story to tell.

After all these years — and particularly after seeing older members of my own network pass away recently — I am reminded of these chance encounters and the lessons they shared, the phrase "words of wisdom" illuminated by these treasured episodes.

There was Lizzie James (a pseudonym), whom I met through Meals on Wheels. Every time we delivered her lunch, I found myself being fed by her amazing smile and sense of warmth and gratitude. Then there was John Mackie (another pseudonym), who promised to look out for his grandchildren and encourage his son to "do the right thing, be present and show up for his kids." For me, "doing the right thing" means surveying a situation and being attentive to what's needed. I still have enormous respect for Mr. Mackie, a senior who offered what he could through kinship love.

We all know the mentorship that older generations can offer, but do we really stop to listen and think about their messages?

At the same time, as people live longer, the question becomes: Are folks aging with grace and dignity? Are special and tailored services needed for our diverse aging population — that answer is yes!

Since 1965, the Older Americans Act (OAA) has provided for the organization and delivery of social and nutrition services to those requiring such support. OAA funding, however, has not kept up with inflation and population growth, and in 2026, the OAA faces significant reorganization and funding insecurity. Since social workers provide many of these services, the National Association of Social Workers has urged Congress to fully fund the OAA to meet the needs of the vulnerable in our society. As advocates, we, too, must rally for greater funding for our aging population.

We have much to learn from the life experiences of those in their senior years. As social workers, we must continue our quest to provide them with the quality services and tailored support necessary to maintain their human dignity.

In camaraderie and solidarity,

Keith A. Alford, PhD, ACSW
Dean and Professor

MOSAICS

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

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GOOD NEWS

Faculty honored for research and impact

Congratulations to our School of Social Work faculty colleagues who received major awards recently for their research and impact.

Susan A. Green, clinical professor and co-director of the school's Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care (ITTIC), was named to the Fulbright Specialist Roster for a three-year tenure. Part of the U.S. Department of State, the Fulbright Specialist program pairs U.S. academics and professionals with host institutions abroad to share expertise, strengthen international ties and help institutions build capacity.

"Trauma exists everywhere," Green says. "I can bring everything we do at ITTIC into these engagement opportunities — providing foundational training, promoting trauma-sensitive practices, building trauma-informed organizations, and more."

The Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) lauded three UB faculty members at its conference in January.

Annahita Ball and Yunju Nam, both associate professors, were inducted as SSWR fellows, in recognition of their efforts to advance, disseminate and translate research that addresses issues of social work practice and policy to promote a diverse, equitable and just society.

An expert on school social work, Ball studies how schools, families and communities can partner to provide services that foster positive youth development and promote equity in education. Meanwhile, Nam studies economic inequality and social policies and is an internationally recognized expert on language access for individuals with limited English proficiency.

Finally, SSWR honored Associate Professor Nadine Shaanta Murshid for her book, *Intimacies of Violence: Reading Transnational Middle-Class Women in Bangladeshi America*. Murshid received the honorable mention for the 2026 SSWR Book Award for Best Scholarly Book Published.



Susan A. Green



Annahita Ball



Yunju Nam

Nadine
Shaanta Murshid

Listen now at
[inSocialWork.org](https://www.inSocialWork.org)

ON THE PODCAST

A journey to joy

"You don't have to earn joy, you don't have to have money to have joy. You don't have to do anything in order to know that it exists within you."

— **Desmond Upton Patton, PhD**, of the University of Pennsylvania, during a conversation on joy as an intentional practice that can act as an intervention for trauma and grief and a sustaining practice that nurtures resilience and connection.

HIGHLIGHTS

MEET THE TEAM

Welcoming our newest faculty member

Last fall, the School of Social Work welcomed Robyn Wiktorski-Reynolds, LMSW, to our faculty as a clinical assistant professor. Prior to joining UB, she served as vice president of clinical operations at Crisis Services, overseeing all clinical services to ensure 24/7 excellence at the Buffalo-based crisis center.



Robyn Wiktorski-Reynolds teaches a case scenario last fall.

Photo: Meredith Forrest Kulwicki

Tell us about your research or professional interests. What are you working on now?

RWR: My interests are anchored in social work management, specifically the beneficial impact that trauma-informed and human rights perspectives can have on social workers, programs and organizations, as well as the collective influence these perspectives can have on creating more socially just and equitable policies.

Prior to full-time academia, I spent 24 years in community-based nonprofits, with an emphasis in crisis intervention-related organizations and programs. The last three years I served as an adjunct in the school instructing Interventions I and II. I am looking forward to working with faculty in meaningful, collaborative ways using my expertise and knowledge for the betterment of the profession.

What are you passionate about?

RWR: Building a positive and safe culture for students in the classroom is very important to me. I also am a firm believer of self-awareness in the work, whether that is with students, clients, colleagues, etc. To that end, using a trauma-informed approach with staff supervision and organizational management is another passion of mine. Advocacy at all levels is something I promote with social workers, specifically how we can operationalize this on a micro, mezzo or macro level.

What do you like to do for fun or self-care?

RWR: I really enjoy spending time with my husband, our teenagers and our dogs. We do a lot of outdoor activities together, including camping, hiking, kayaking, swimming and outdoor concerts. I love a good road trip and adventuring. In my downtime, I really enjoy reading, yoga, catching up with friends, attempting to have a green thumb and taking a solid nap.

BIG PICTURE

Joy and connection

At the School of Social Work's first-ever swap meet last fall, our alumni, students, faculty and staff enjoyed an evening of networking and picked up a few new-to-you items. Thanks to all who joined us!

Photos: Meredith Forrest Kulwicki



GOOD NEWS

MSW/PhD student earns CSWE fellowship

Tiffany J. Nhan, an MSW/PhD student in the School of Social Work, has been selected for the Minority Fellowship from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the fellowship supports students focused on reducing health disparities and improving mental health outcomes for underserved populations.

Nhan describes her work as intentionally understanding the intersection between historical and societal systems of oppression, personal identity and traumatic experiences, mental well-being, and the resilience of marginalized groups. Exploring these topics is personal for Nhan, whose family resettled to the United States from Vietnam as refugees before she was born.

The master's fellowship will help her complete the MSW portion of her dual degree, including an upcoming summer practicum experience in Vietnam.

"Social work feels like a calling to me. It is not just a job," Nhan says. "My research, my clinical work and my engagement with the community is an act of resistance and a way to honor my ancestors who paved the way to give me this life."



Tiffany J. Nhan holds a 1997 photo of her family, who had resettled in the U.S. three years prior, reuniting with her uncle at the airport.

Photo: Meredith Forrest Kulwicki



Stay connected. Update your contact information so you'll be notified about future events like this, or send us a message and let us know what's new.

Sobota says goodbye

BY MATTHEW BIDDLE



After 25 years on the School of Social Work faculty, Peter Sobota will retire this spring.

An alumnus himself with a BA and MSW from UB, Sobota has taught countless students on topics ranging from interventions, trauma and human rights to motivational interviewing and civic engagement. He has been honored three times with the student-voted Outstanding Faculty Teaching Award.

Sobota is also the longtime host of the school's podcast, inSocialWork.®

Before he packs his office, Sobota sat down to reflect on his career and what he learned along the way.



Sobota nominated Cate Bearss, MSW '22, for the National Association of Social Workers Award, and at the ceremony, presented her with a dictionary with her picture pasted under "social worker."

Page 6 Photos: Onion Studio

Tell us your origin story as a social worker Why did you go into this profession?

Peter Sobota: I've always been kind of rebellious or contrary, and that helped me see how the world didn't work for a lot of people, including people I knew. I grew up in a working-class neighborhood, where we were free-range — our parents worked, so when we came home it was mayhem. People would see me doing something foolish 12 blocks away and let my parents know; I didn't like it at the time, but it kept me out of trouble and showed how important community can be.

Once I got to UB, I felt lucky to be in college. This was my opportunity to learn, so I read everything and did everything. Social work fit with the idea that I could make a living and still be consistent with my values. Forty-one years later, I have no regrets. I'm retiring, but I'm not counting down the days.

After working in practice, why did you return to UB to teach?

PS: Well, that wasn't planned, but in hindsight it all makes sense. After I graduated, I did a lot of clinical work but eventually realized that systemic issues that maintain problems would keep individual clients in a never-ending supply. So, I wanted to intervene at community and organizational levels to be more efficient and try to change systems.

I lucked my way into a job at the Postal Service, where I did consulting around workplace behavior. I wasn't doing traditional social work, but I would talk about attachment theory or trauma or systems theory — without using those terms — and people listened and implemented changes. After that, I did similar work at Motorola for five years — and then Motorola imploded. I was friends with Charles Syms (emeritus faculty member pictured in alumni photo below), who said the school was looking for another clinical faculty. I needed a job, so I applied. It was totally serendipitous.

What will you miss most when you retire?

PS: I've enjoyed living in a world of ideas with smart, like-minded faculty and staff. It's the ultimate example of lifelong learning. How many jobs pay you to read and learn new stuff?

Social work students are incredibly open, and I've appreciated the students who've given me constructive feedback and made me a better instructor and a more well-rounded person in many ways.

Many are so bright that I just can't wait to see what they do once they get out in the field. And then, they'll contact me 10 years later, telling me about something I said in class that they still think about — that makes you want to come to work the next day.

What do you hope students have learned from you?

PS: I've tried to promote freedom of thought and to question the status quo, including what you're learning about while you're learning it.

I also want students to understand that the only limit to what they can do as social workers is themselves. I have a former student who went into school social work and built the social work program at a new charter school. Now, she is an assistant principal.

I don't understand why more social workers don't become administrators or journalists or organizational consultants. As a practitioner, I probably did the most useful work at the Postal Service and Motorola because I helped people keep their jobs so they could raise their kids and pay off their house. I was an advocate, a broker. I felt incredibly useful and could never have planned that.

What will you remember about hosting our inSocialWork podcast?

PS: I've loved pursuing my interests and finding all kinds of experts — not just social workers but also physicians, attorneys, activists, people who espouse social work values.

For one episode, I remember reading a letter to the editor in *The New Yorker* that struck me, so I called her up. She was a journalist, but in her spare time, she went to raves and did harm reduction, helping people test their drugs before they went in. She was doing a practical form of service in an open-minded way, and it was fascinating. I've loved meeting people like that and giving them a chance to showcase what they know or do.

How has the profession changed during your career, and where should it go from here?

PS: I've had a 41-year lovers' quarrel with social work, in that I'm proud to be a social worker, but we are almost always our own worst enemy. When social work went searching for status and better salaries, we hooked ourselves to clinical work and licensure — and those have been good things. We're now the largest providers of behavioral and mental health services in the country. But we hitched our wagon so exclusively to that medical model that we got away from some of our roots.

It's encouraging that more students want to work on systems at the macro level because social work is under attack. We're living in interesting times, and if we're not part of the solution, shame on us. We've got to advocate and accumulate power and influence — and don't apologize for it. A return to radical social work would not be a bad idea right now. ●

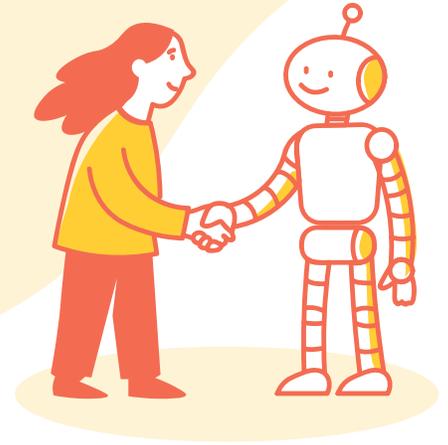
Sobota celebrates with new grads and Dean Alford at commencement, and reconnects with alumni at a UB event at Larkinsville.





Working to make tech safer and more healing

BY JANA EISENBERG



Social workers think a lot about trauma – and use a trauma-informed lens to shape our relationships, communication style and understanding of our practice. But how often do we apply that trauma-informed lens to technology?

As technology exerts an increasingly dominant influence on the field, how can social workers shape the tech we use every day – from the websites and forms our clients navigate to the tools we use in clinical work, training and more? For the first time, the School of Social Work’s Office of Continuing Education is addressing the topic through a self-study training titled, “Introduction to Trauma-Informed Technology and the Vital Role Clinicians Play.”

Carol F. Scott, PhD ’19, and Melissa Eggleston recorded the training and are the co-founders of Trauma-Informed Technology, a consultancy that offers training and education with the goal of working toward a world where tech “is helpful and healing instead of harmful.”

Why is this a topic that social workers are interested in and the school wants to educate our constituencies about?

Carol F. Scott: Social work is interested in technology for a few reasons. First, it’s becoming more embedded in our daily lives, especially with AI. The pandemic changed a lot of things, including social work; using technology was the only way we could see clients or teach. That made the entire field acknowledge that social workers – students, educators, practitioners – must both use technology and be comfortable with it.

Melissa Eggleston: I try to help people understand the importance of the tech and social work connection, for example, by noting that often the first interaction for a potential client is visiting your website or filling out an online form. That first interaction needs to be positive, healing and trauma-informed. So part of our job is connecting the dots between the great clinical work that social workers do and applying a trauma-informed perspective to all types of technology as well.

It seems like a big ask for social work practitioners and educators to add thinking about how the technology itself affects students or clients.

CS: Like me, and the UB School of Social Work, many social workers eat, sleep and breathe a trauma-informed and human rights perspective. Applying it to technology just makes sense.

ME: In 2024, the World Health Organization determined that technology is a digital determinant of health. If you are using the technology, you need to think about how it affects people.



Carol F. Scott



Melissa Eggleston



How can technology unintentionally cause harm?

CS: If someone is experiencing intimate partner violence or is a youth looking for LGBTQ+ services, and if a website isn't trauma-informed in the layout and design, it can be hard for users to quickly find helpful resources, which leads them to get discouraged.

But engineers and designers are not out to get people; sometimes they don't know or have the time to think carefully. Little changes can make a difference; reducing harm includes something like adding a "quick exit" button to a website, so that if someone comes along, a visitor can just click it and the page is gone, and the website becomes less harmful and more healing.

ME: Another way that tech can cause harm is if it's not mobile-friendly. Many people access things primarily through a smartphone. It's easy to shop on your phone, but when it comes to social services, there may accidentally be a lot of friction. A user might need to find a computer to access it, or if there's a binary gender drop-down and the person doesn't identify with those categories, they already feel like "these people aren't going to get me."

How could the tech world think about this?

ME: The last decade has seen a movement toward ethical technology in general — aiming for "trauma-informed" gives technology designers a framework to help make tech more equitable, more ethical and safer. And more and more consumers are demanding it.

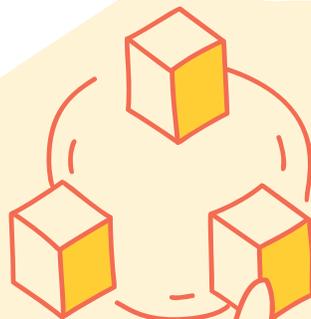
CS: The example I use to advocate for safer technology is the car industry. At first, there was fear that people wouldn't drive cars with seat belts. But now we can't imagine driving a car not just without a seat belt, but airbags and cameras too. People will use the car (or the technology) more if they know it's safer — if they know you're trying.

How can social workers evaluate the tech they're using to shape healthier digital tools?

ME: It can be as simple as thinking about an online form you're asking somebody to fill out. How could it be more trustworthy and transparent? Why are you asking these questions? Is there somebody to call if they have trouble or become worried about the information they're disclosing? These are fundamental things that help build trust. It's about collaboration between technology and social work.

CS: Social workers are, by nature, evaluators. We can ask: Is this tech helping or harming my clients? Is there something better? Or, if you don't have a choice of what tech to use, ask: How can I help make this better?

In this training and in our business, we encourage social workers to use their knowledge and expertise — think of system-level changes and the principles of social work. Tech can make people feel disempowered. But we can all start with baby steps. Make notes of what might work better. Try to meet someone in your IT department. They're interested in learning how to do better. ●



Dive deeper

Explore how you can partner with tech designers to create human-centered, trauma-informed technology that's healing — not harmful. Earn 1.75 ASWB ACE or 2.25 NYSED CEs through an online self-study training from our Office of Continuing Education.



The Moynihan Report:

Examining its legacy 60 years later

BY ANN WHITCHER GENTZKE
PHOTOS BY TOM WOLF



Sixty years after its release, the influential and controversial Moynihan Report of 1965 continues to reverberate in the nation's social welfare policy to the detriment of those it was supposed to help – poor Black people, as opposed to all poor people in the U.S.

This was the consensus view of panelists participating in "The Moynihan Report at 60: Impact and Reflection," a symposium and training program presented by the School of Social Work last fall.

The interdisciplinary panel, representing five UB schools, was moderated by Dean Keith A. Alford, who briefly traced the report's history and outlined key points for discussion. The symposium was attended by more than 200 faculty, alumni and community members who participated in person and online.

"The Moynihan Report served as a document to define the Negro family," Alford told those assembled. "Many would say that the definition of the family in the Moynihan Report did not fully convey the Black family's experience. As we know, families come in all forms, playing a pivotal role in the child-rearing process.

"On the 60th anniversary, we will look at the report's impact and engage in reflection. What has changed for the better or for the worse? Where can we see social work, for instance, and other applied professions, in reference to the impact of the report?"

To address these questions, Alford called on the invited panelists: Filomena Critelli, associate professor in the School of Social Work; Brittany Jones, assistant professor in the Graduate School of Education; David Milling, associate professor in the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences; Athena Mutua, professor in the School of Law; and Henry Louis Taylor Jr., professor in the School of Architecture and Planning. Each panelist gave a statement reflecting on the report's impact as the discussion ensued.

Grabbing headlines

Authored by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927-2003), the former U.S. senator from New York who was then assistant secretary of labor in the Johnson Administration, the report gathered a slew of statistics to argue “the fundamental problem ... is that of family structure.” When the report was leaked and discussed in a syndicated newspaper column, it exploded on the national scene, causing dismay among critics who feared it drew on stereotypes and reflected racist suppositions.

“One of the reasons why the Moynihan Report blew up in Moynihan’s face is the document was never meant for public perusal,” journalist and author Ta-Nehisi Coates said in a 2024 PBS clip shown at the beginning of the program. “It is written in a very bombastic way. It was written to get the attention of politicians.”

In fact, it got the attention of the nation and the world, Alford remarked before the panelists were introduced.

The Moynihan Report — officially “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” — came at a critical point in U.S. history, said Critelli, associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion. “It was 1965 and the Civil Rights Movement had reached a pivotal moment. Lyndon Johnson was prepared to endorse the next and more profound stage in the battle for civil rights. ... The War



on Poverty was underway and with it came a significant expansion of the country’s social welfare system.”

At the time, many scholars determined that Moynihan’s main point was the concern about the number of women who were accessing public assistance under the program known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

“Moynihan looked at this, I think, in a very narrow frame, and drew really broad conclusions from the data,” said Critelli.

Moreover, the Moynihan Report reinforced racial stereotypes of the matriarch and “welfare mother,” while portraying female headed households as aberrant in some way, she added.



Moynihan Report event speakers left to right: Henry Louis Taylor Jr., Athena Mutua, Filomena Critelli, Brittany Jones, David Milling, Keith A. Alford.

Implications for education, medicine and beyond

For her part, Jones, a former high school social studies teacher who worked in predominately Black school districts, said the report “institutionalized the belief that Black children’s struggles were rooted in their families, rather than in systemic racism.” Resulting harms included policy responses that “pathologize Black families rather than addressing school segregation, unequal funding, exclusionary discipline and curricular erasure.”

Another lingering effect, Jones said, is the narrowed responsiveness of educators, who whether consciously or from some underlying belief, “absorb narratives and enact pedagogies that reflect dispositions of deficiency, rather than recognizing the brilliance, resilience and cultural wealth of Black communities.”

Milling, a primary care physician at ECMC, reflected on the report’s impact as it relates to the realities of treating patients, as well as larger socioeconomic issues the report mostly ignored.

“What is it about the breakdown in the family that they thought was the root cause?” Milling asked. He noted that this “tangle of pathology” — the report’s actual wording in a chapter heading — “led to poverty, crime and welfare dependency that became so ingrained in the conversation that we are still dealing with the aftereffects of this 60 years later.”

Policy implications that were raised in the report to strengthen the Black family really didn’t help, he argued. “What we should have been doing was to really address structural barriers like employment, housing and education.”

As for maternal mortality, Milling noted that a Black woman living today, whether she has a graduate degree, is married or lives in the suburbs and has access to care, “it’s still a fact that she’s going to have worse outcomes than her white counterparts. ... We’re going to have to continue to think about social and environmental factors related to poverty and income, education, housing and neighborhoods, environmental hazards, access to care, transportation and recreation facilities to help us to move the needle here. This is not just simply about marriage and a family unit.”

“The Moynihan Report was on to something in identifying the family structure as shaping behaviors ... but it had a lot of the pieces wrong,” said Mutua, the Floyd H. & Hilda L. Hurst Faculty Scholar in the School of Law. “First of all, in terms of looking at parents, they have a role. Relatives have a really big role, and bigger roles than we might think. But ultimately, it is this idea of family causing inequality that is the tail wagging the dog.”

In Mutua’s view, the Moynihan Report also ignores the realities of what Stephen Menendian, research director of UC Berkeley’s Othering & Belonging Institute, calls “structural racism” in his recent book of the same name.

“Menendian says racial inequality is largely structured by our social arrangements, and that structural racism is the callous neglect to attend to that reality,” Mutua noted. “Menendian suggests that place and racial segregation inform the structure of opportunity in the United States, and that the metropolitan area, municipal policies and the neighborhood, along with things like economic segregation, social networks and the family, really structure opportunity in the United States.”



“The definition of the family in the Moynihan Report did not fully convey the Black family’s experience. As we know, families come in all forms.”

Keith A. Alford
Dean
School of Social Work



‘Inventing the crisis’

Taylor’s assessment of the 1965 document was blunt and unyielding: “If legally and constitutionally, Jim Crow had fallen and the nation’s racial discrimination abolished, why were Blacks still locked in the economic basement? The government called on Daniel Patrick Moynihan to answer this provocative question, and he responded by inventing the crisis of the Negro family and identifying its breakdown as the root cause of the ongoing concentration of Black people in that economic basement.”

Taylor argued that the report was propaganda designed to hide the reality that Blacks were an oppressed and exploited people.

In a Q&A that followed the individual presentations, panelists fielded questions from the moderator and audience members.

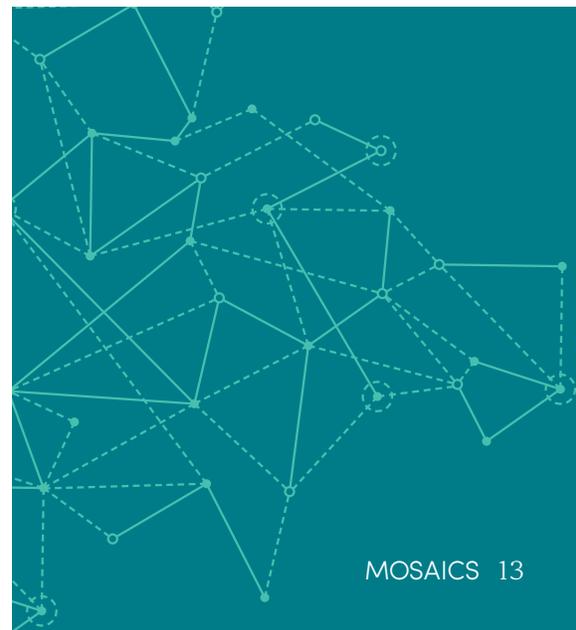
Responding to a question from Alford, Taylor noted that in the aftermath of the report, liberal scholars, including those from the Black community, went on “a wild goose chase,” looking at family issues and cultural deficits, rather than examining the structural deficiencies and economic conditions confronting the Black community. This phenomenon persists today and will continue unabated without a “radical transformation of U.S. capitalism” and neighborhood organizing, he said.

“How did Moynihan know what was going on in the Black community anyway?” Taylor asked, eliciting laughter from the audience and panel.

“We have learned from our history that we go inside of these neighborhoods, and we start organizing them around making the radical changes that we need. You will see people begin to change. You will see the world begin to change.” ●

“The government called on Daniel Patrick Moynihan to answer this provocative question, and he responded by inventing the crisis of the Negro family and identifying its breakdown as the root cause of the ongoing concentration of Black people in that economic basement.”

Henry Louis Taylor Jr.
Professor
School of Architecture and Planning



Service to country and community

BY DEVON DAMS-O'CONNOR



Photo: Meredith Forrest Kulwicki

What do the military, photography and social work have in common? Quite a bit, according to Rob Healy, a UB MSW student and combat veteran who found support and a second career through photography.



We're proud to showcase MSW student Rob Healy's artwork in this story. Above, he and his son, Lucas, worked together on this double exposure to convey the feeling of detachment that many veterans feel upon returning from deployment.



Service first

When Healy says he comes from a military family, it's not a term he uses lightly. Both of his grandfathers served, and so did his father, brother, aunt, uncle and five cousins in his generation alone. His family's duty lineage stretches back to the American Revolution.

Healy was a military brat who grew up on bases, where the value of service was of the utmost importance. A central tenet of the Healy house was simple: If you have the ability do good, you have the obligation to do good.

Healy enlisted in the U.S. Air Force Reserves at 17 while pursuing his undergraduate degree at UB and spent nine years as an airman in air operations and logistics — or, as he puts it, “FedEx with guns.” He was deployed three times between semesters, to Kyrgyzstan in 2006, Iraq in 2008 and Kuwait from 2009–2010. His work required acute attention to detail in dangerous situations, like rigging parachutes for air drops in combat zones.

Life through a different lens

Healy's first camera was a Canon Rebel 35mm that he bought with deployment money. That camera was destroyed during deployment, and Healy let photography go for about a decade.

When he finally picked up another camera, it was to calm what was behind the lens more than to capture what was in front of it.

In 2019, Healy was feeling numb, apathetic and stuck in a job that didn't give him purpose — a stark contrast to the structure and mission of military life. Then, he found the Odyssey Project, an intensive, 12-week photography workshop to help veterans reintegrate to civilian life and find connection, creativity and healing through photography. Three months into Odyssey, Healy began to feel differently.

"Photography brought me back to myself," he explains. "It made me more present in my interactions and forced me to slow down, observe, pause and appreciate. The group wasn't about the losses, tragedies or trauma we all experienced — it was more about belly laughs and noticing the little things."

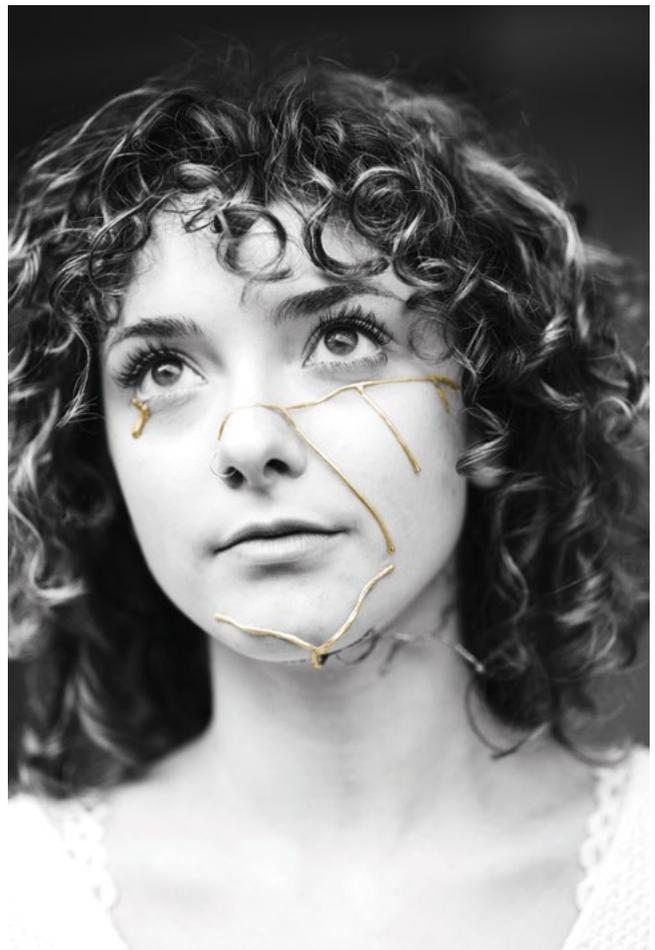
He began working on a photography project with his son, who was five years old and learning to navigate the world with mild cerebral palsy. Together, they documented his mobility journey, experimented with double exposure and got a little silly enjoying time together.

The workshop culminated in an exhibition that remains the group's most-attended show to date.

Afterward, Healy continued as a peer mentor with the program, which received funding to host a second workshop and provide a camera for every participant to keep. More veterans heard about Odyssey and wanted in — including Healy's father. Sessions scheduled until 9 p.m. ran to midnight, as members bonded over shared pasts and current projects.

For many, says Healy, the club was the only place veterans could surround themselves with people who understood complex military experiences without explanation.

"Sometimes it felt like being back in a unit — with the same horrible jokes," says Healy.





Healy's work often explores themes of family, trauma and the transition to civilian life. At far left, MSW student Gabby Kirsh models Kintsugi, a Japanese art form of repairing "broken" things to make them beautiful. Next, Healy says, "Many Buffalonians associate the Peace Bridge with home, but Joining Forces-UB and the Veterans and Military Family Focus program felt like home when I enrolled."

Below, Lucas is Healy's "anchor to the world." In this cyanotype print, Healy captures the challenge of opening himself up to bond with his son while letting in the pain of the past.



The path to purpose

Through Odyssey, Healy realized the impact he could have working with people and began a new mission toward a different type of service.

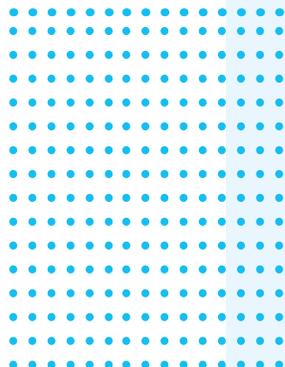
With help from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Veteran Readiness and Employment program, which provides career counseling and covers educational expenses, Healy enrolled in the School of Social Work's Master of Social Work program. His goal is to become a social worker who serves veterans and their caregivers to offer the support many veterans don't have.

"When my family gets together for a holiday, everyone is military and it's basically a VFW pop-up," explains Healy. "Not everyone has this level of support, being surrounded by people who know the lingo, the lifestyle and the experiences, so I try to create it everywhere I go."

A few weeks into classes, Healy met Dan Ryan, director of Veterans Services at UB, who casually mentioned that he wished an MSW student could implement opportunities like Odyssey for UB veterans — not knowing Healy was an MSW student himself. Healy joined UB Veterans Services as its first MSW intern for his foundation year practicum.

Healy adds a social work perspective to everything the office does. He's developing a cultural competency training program for civilians who work with veterans in education and health care. He's working on new services for student veterans on campus, like counselors who can offer support during exams and other stressors. While continuing to run photography workshops, Healy represents UB at local veterans' events, networks with similar offices at nearby schools and helps first-year student veterans acclimate to life at UB.

One of those students happens to be a familiar face from Odyssey — a veteran, like Healy, who found clarity through photography and chose to pursue a new purpose at UB. ●



What sparks *joy*?

COMPILED AND EDITED BY SARAH J. WATSON

Joy seems to be hard to come by some days; it can be fleeting and hard to focus on. To help you think about this, we asked our alumni to tell us about their favorite moments. We hope this inspires you to find what sparks joy in your life. View more submissions at socialwork.buffalo.edu/joy.

Activities and moments of self-care

"Once a month, I get my nails done, and it is the one thing I splurge on for myself. It gives me joy to have fancy nails; it is like a tiny art gallery on my hands every time I see them."

KELLY ZAKY, MBA/MSW '22



"Quiet prayer time — this refuels me, especially at the end of the day."

SR. ROSEMARY M. SHERMAN, MSW '92



"Hiking. Hands down every time. Getting into nature, unplugging and enjoying the simple pleasure of putting one foot in front of another."

DENISE HICKS, MSW '06



"Playing pickleball with friends who are also fellow UB MSW graduates!"

AMY MORRIS, MSW '94



"I'm the soccer coach for my two sons, Ari and Hugo (pictured). While it can feel overwhelming in the moment, being able to witness them grow, learn, develop, be part of a team, succeed, fail and have fun sparks a deep joy in me."

MICHAEL R. LYNCH, MSW '10, CLINICAL ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

"What sparks joy for me outside of the office is baking and theater. Together, they offer me balance, inspiration and a meaningful way to recharge outside of work."

STEVEN MAISONET, MSW '19



"I love friends and family time. They are the fuel to my engine, and being around them listening to music, dancing, eating and sharing stories sparks my joy."

ESTHER ANNAN, MSW '06



"My family — when we can laugh and feel safe and secure with one another, free to be our true selves, letting the troubles of the world stay outside our walls, even if only for a brief moment."

JOYELLE M. TEDESCHI, MSW '08

"Spending time with my friends and family brings me the most joy. They provide me with the support I need in every situation, from quiet conversations to hilarious moments that make me laugh until I cry."

CORINNE FIEGL, MSW '20

Travel

"Vacationing with my family or with friends! Traveling is a great way to spend time with loved ones, relax and adventure."

MARGIE QUARTLEY, MSW '89,
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF
PRACTICUM EDUCATION



"Travel sparks joy for me because it's all about discovery — new cultures, new perspectives, new ways of seeing the world."

LAURA LEWIS, MSW '94,
CLINICAL ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Friends and family



A little bit of everything

"The question sparked joy, just thinking about family, waking up to my fur babies every morning, friends, vacations, cultural events, baking, cooking and being out in nature."

NANCY KRTEK, MSW '00



"I get joy from cooking, especially international foods I learned about on my travels, and seeing art or a film that reminds me of beauty in the world and human potential."

FILOMENA CRITELLI, MSW '77,
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

"Nature walks, running, kayaking, alpine and cross-country skiing, reading thought-provoking books, time with family and friends, murder mysteries, listening to stimulating podcasts, making art, treasure-hunting at estate sales, hot-tubbing, feeding and watching the birds in my yard."

JENNIFER M. CARLSON, MSW '94





Dean Alford named NASW Social Work Pioneer

Keith A. Alford, dean of the School of Social Work, is set to receive one of social work's highest honors.

In June, Alford will be inducted by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) as an NASW Social Work Pioneer. The program honors social workers who have enriched their profession and improved social and human conditions through their dedication, commitment and determination.

Alford has devoted his professional life to serving and researching the needs of children and families. He studies culturally specific service delivery for special populations, family mental health, rites of passage programming for adolescent African American males, kinship care and child welfare interventions.

Central to Alford's leadership philosophy is the idea that "to be trauma-informed, one has to be racially informed." As dean, he is steering the integration of racial trauma into the school's established trauma-informed and human rights framework.

"I am deeply grateful for this recognition," he says. "As social workers, we know our mission is to uplift others and to continually strive toward improving the human condition. This honor renews my resolve to stay the course. Our work is never finished, and our determination must remain steadfast."



Scan to watch

Social work is vital

Social workers uplift individuals and advocate for the most vulnerable members of society. We draw from trauma-informed and human rights perspectives to solve big problems and transform communities.

At the School of Social Work, we dig in — and our research makes life better. Check out our new video series at socialwork.buffalo.edu/vital