



UNIVERSITY of MARYLAND
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

RESILIENCE

Reclaiming Our Power Through
Innovation, Research, and Education



2025 IMPACT REPORT

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kelli Johnson, Director, Marketing and Strategic Communications

CONTRIBUTORS

Anita Bryant, Media and Public Relations Manager

Fulvio Cativo, Associate Dean, External Affairs and Development

Neijma Celestine-Donnor, Associate Dean, Access and Strategic Initiatives

EDITING AND DESIGN COORDINATION

Joanne Morrison, Julie Bower, Jen Badie, and Lou Cortina, Office of Communications and Public Affairs, University of Maryland, Baltimore

UNITY WEEK/IMPACT REPORT COMMITTEE

Anita Bryant

Fulvio Cativo

Neijma Celestine-Donnor

Eugena Ferguson

Kelli Johnson

Nickole Scroggins

Connie Sgarlata



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Greetings from Dean Judy Postmus

Dear Social Work Community:

Thank you for taking the time to read our 2025 Impact Report anchored in the theme **Resilience: Reclaiming Our Power Through Innovation, Research, and Education**. This theme reflects the hard work and commitment of University of Maryland School of Social Work (UMSSW) faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, and supporters who tirelessly uphold the mantle and values of social work despite an incredibly challenging year filled with economic and political uncertainties.

UMSSW remains at the forefront of higher education. This is evident in the increased enrollment for our Master of Social Work Program and overwhelming response to our new Doctor of Social Work Program. We continue to bridge the gap to strengthen pathways and provide access to advanced-level curricula and continuing professional education opportunities for dedicated students and social workers.

Through community partnerships and collaboration with local and state agencies, UMSSW serves as a reputable leader by providing nearly 330,000 service hours; evaluating and informing policies impacting individuals, children, and families; and conducting workshops, training, and groundbreaking research.

Our success comes with great sacrifice of time and talent, tough decisions, and steadfastness as we continue to navigate an ever-changing and complex environment. Your support is more vital than ever. Together, we can overcome the many obstacles affecting higher education and our global economy and continue to build a legacy of impact and social justice.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judy Postmus". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Judy L. Postmus, PhD, ACSW

Dean and Professor

Rising to the Challenge: The UMSSW Model for Resilient Research

The UMSSW research community has shown extraordinary resilience, innovation, and commitment to advancing knowledge despite a shifting and uncertain higher education landscape. UMSSW researchers are navigating unprecedented funding and policy challenges, leaning into collaboration, strategic action, and the school's unwavering mission of social justice.

At the heart of this resilience is a focus on foundational values and transformative partnerships. This academic year, the associate dean for research (ADR) streamlined goals to center faculty, staff, and student well-being; spark research collaborations; and help all members build sustainable, meaningful research careers. The school's dedication to working on new discoveries was highlighted when UMSSW research faculty members were spotlighted in the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) "Breakthroughs Can't Wait" campaign. Their inclusion demonstrates an ongoing commitment to securing enhanced resources and state-of-the-art infrastructure and fostering meaningful public impact.

Navigating the Current Climate with Strategic Action

With traditional funding sources under strain and programmatic support threatened, UMSSW forged new pathways to sustain productivity and morale. The ADR team coordinated regular Research Community Meetings, "drop-in" office hours, and mentorship networks to boost proposal submissions and enhance researcher support. Adaptation became a collective priority — with faculty, staff, and students drawing on innovative training opportunities, working as a team to support grant writing, and developing opportunities for collaboration focused on celebrating what brings us joy in our scholarship to keep the work going.

Social Justice "Just" Research Day Explores Promises and Pitfalls

UMSSW's annual Social Justice "Just" Research Day, co-sponsored by the Associate Dean of Research Office and the Daniel Thursz Distinguished Professorship of Social Justice led by Corey Shdaimah, LLB, LLM, PhD, drew over 100 attendees April 30 for a day of poster sessions, networking, and dialogue on advancing social justice through research. Participants and attendees represented the seven UMB schools and community partnerships engaged in research at UMB. Breakout sessions on "Justice in Research Design" and "Sharing and Sustaining Just Research" highlighted ethical collaboration, equitable dissemination, and strategies for sustaining justice-centered scholarship.



Our research thrives because we remain grounded in social work's core values including justice, equity, collaboration, and community partnership. Even in these challenging times, we are finding creative ways to sustain our research that serves communities and the profession and never losing sight of why we do this work."

— **Jodi J. Frey, MSW '98, PhD '04**
*Professor and Associate Dean
for Research*

The Thursz Plenary Lecture united panelists, alumni, and faculty from UMSSW and UMB schools to explore the mission of just research, inspiring reflection and reaffirming UMSSW's commitment to developing scholars dedicated to community-driven change.

Ultimately, "Just" Research Day celebrated scholarship that uplifts community needs, amplifies the power of evidence to drive social change, and forges new connections — reminding all that, even amid ongoing turbulence, collective breakthroughs in justice and knowledge cannot wait. Planning is already in the works for future Social Justice Research Days, including a new co-sponsor, the Richard P. Barth Professorship of Children's Services led by Bethany Lee, PhD, MSW.



In addition to the research posters, participants had the opportunity to engage in enriching discussions combining research and practice through the Thursz Social Justice Lecture Series. The Thursz Plenary Lecture Panel that capped 'Just' Research Day builds upon the rich legacy of Daniel Thursz, former dean and champion of social justice."

— **Corey Shdaimah, LLB, LLM, PhD**
*Daniel Thursz Distinguished
Professor of Social Justice*

RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2024-25

Overall Impact

- Amplified faculty scholarship with 119 publications in Fiscal Year 2025, 81 percent aligned with Access, Collaboration, Engagement, and Strategy (ACES) priorities

Funding and Awards

- Submitted 129 proposals totaling \$59.5 million; secured 113 awards worth \$27.7 million in obligated funds
- Sustained major support from the Maryland Department of Human Services among other state and federal organizations

Research Culture and Collaboration

- Hosted 17 principal investigator meetings, nine Research Community Meetings, and more than 55 individual mentoring sessions to strengthen grant writing and management
- Expanded cross-school partnerships and hosted 12 national ADR meetings, positioning UMSSW as a national leader in social work research

Education, Training, and Mentoring

- Delivered eight Lunchtime Research Seminars and sponsored or co-sponsored several research methods training workshops, exceeding attendance goals and highlighting justice-centered research

Communication and Dissemination

- Published 45 issues of UMSSW Research Week (22 percent readership growth) and added new funding and training resources to the UMSSW Research Hub

Core Impact

In this climate, UMSSW's researchers — grounded in perseverance and collaboration — continue to innovate, educate, and serve, driving discoveries that strengthen the field of social work and create lasting impact for the communities they champion. Looking ahead, FY26 goals center on increasing support for grant writing and submission success; fostering research collaborations across faculty, staff, and students; and cultivating joy, meaning, and sustainability in research careers.

Meeting the Growing Demand for Social Work Scholars, Researchers, and Leaders

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, overall employment of social workers is projected to grow 6 percent from 2024 to 2034 — faster than the average for all other occupations. UMSSW is meeting the growing demand for social workers by providing robust course curricula and real-world experiences at the bachelor, master, and doctoral degree levels. This comprehensive continuum of education and training equips the next generation of social workers to handle society's most pressing issues.

Strengthening Pathways for Future Social Workers

Individuals who completed their Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree within the last five years can earn a Master of Social Work (MSW) in as little as one to two years through UMSSW's **Advanced Standing MSW Program**. The 36-credit Advanced Standing Program builds from the BSW foundational-level coursework and practicum experience, making it easier for BSW students to take the next step in their matriculation to MSW-level coursework and advanced practicum placement.

UMSSW recently expanded the Advanced Standing MSW Program to include a 100 percent online option with an in-person advanced practicum. BSW students who meet the Advanced Standing requirements have the option to select the 36-credit Hybrid Advanced Standing Program at UMSSW's Baltimore campus or the Universities at Shady Grove, or the new 36-credit Online Advanced Standing Program.

By expanding program options and decreasing the time to earn an MSW degree, UMSSW is strengthening pathways for future social workers.

"Those connections have been pivotal to me because they fostered and nurtured my interest in academics in general," said Yancy Padilla, a UMSSW PhD student who shares her experience matriculating from BSW to MSW to PhD.

Scan the QR code to hear more from Yancy Padilla and learn more about the Advanced Standing MSW Program.

Enrollment for MSW Program Grows

UMSSW experienced a significant increase in enrollment to the MSW program. From fall 2024 to fall 2025, MSW enrollment increased by 20 percent, accounting for 844 new and returning students compared to 704 students in the previous year. Efforts from the UMSSW marketing, admissions, and registration teams contributed to the increase in enrollment, including outreach to students who had taken a leave of absence.

The increase in applications received for the MSW program signals heightened interest in advanced-level social work education and the value of a UMSSW social work degree. In the midst of challenging economic and political times, the uptick in enrollment numbers is promising and reminiscent of pre-pandemic student enrollment and involvement.



With a fully staffed team, we were able to proactively reengage with students who initially expressed interest in our program but were unable to apply or continue due to incomplete applications. By providing thorough customer service and streamlining processes in partnership with other departments within the UMSSW, we were able to see more complete applications. This achievement reflects the dedication of our admissions and enrollment teams and the commitment of students who are eager to make an impact in their communities."

— **Danielle White, MBA, MS**
Associate Dean, Admissions and Enrollment



MSW ADMISSIONS BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- Reviewed, admitted, and enrolled 83 new applicants for the Spring 2025 semester
- Reviewed, admitted, and enrolled 422 new applicants for the Fall 2025 semester
- 835 MSW applications submitted for FY25
- Hosted 45 information sessions for prospective students with over 2,000 in attendance



Fellowship Programs Provide Training and Financial Support to Social Work Students

The cost of a higher education degree is often a deciding factor for students. UMSSW offers a variety of fellowship programs with specialized training and monetary stipends funded by grants and generous donors to help make graduate school more affordable for MSW and PhD students. Additionally, fellowship programs provide career placement and postgraduate job security for students.

- The **Behavioral Health Workforce Integration Service and Education (BHWISE) Fellowships** provided \$837,000 in support to 67 students committed to providing behavioral health and substance use disorder service to individuals in underserved communities across four fellowship programs. BHWISE also provided free category 1 continuing education units (CEUs) to 114 practicum supervisors on integrated behavioral health topics such as “First Episode Psychosis,” “Gender-Affirming Social Work Practice,” and “The Current Mental Health Climate of Individuals Identifying as LGBTQ+.”
- The **Child Welfare Fellowship** provided training to 65 students interested in pursuing social work careers helping children and families in Maryland across three programs, including a cohort of BSW students from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), with a total of \$580,000 in financial support through stipends during AY 2024-25.
- The **Montgomery County-based Child Welfare Fellowship Program** provided a total of \$140,000 in stipends in 2025 to seven students who all graduated, passed the licensing exam, and are currently working for Montgomery County Child Welfare. Two students are participating in the fellowship program this year.

In addition to fellowship opportunities, UMSSW offered approximately \$178,000 in endowed scholarships in AY 2024-25.

All Hands On Deck: Practicum Offers Real-World, Hands-On Experience for Social Work Students

An influx of MSW student enrollment means increasing practicum placements for UMSSW’s Office of Practicum Education (OPE). The small but mighty team was challenged with placing 659 MSW students for AY 2024-25 and an additional 170 students for fall 2025. The team conducted outreach to agency partners, practicum instructors, UMSSW alumni, and the larger social work community to meet the growing demand for practicum placement resulting from the increase in student enrollment. In addition to recruiting 97 new agencies, OPE introduced a Learning Lab for foundation students.

Learning Lab

The required Learning Lab familiarizes foundation students with the practicum process, assignments, expectations, and introductory skills. The two-day learning experience includes a thorough review of the National Association

of Social Workers Code of Ethics, a practicum instructor panel discussion, seminar instructor introductions and learning activities, role playing, and reflection assignments. During the Learning Lab, foundation students also practice basic skills with “Charlie,” an interactive avatar simulation of a client intake interview that provides real-time feedback.

OFFICE OF PRACTICUM EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- Placed 608 MSW students (311 advanced and 297 foundation) in 291 community agencies with 316 practicum instructors
- Placed 51 students from the online MSW program into foundation and advanced placements
- Students provided 329,720 hours of service to constituents in 291 community-based agencies throughout Maryland and neighboring regions
- 46 placement agencies provided over \$270,293 in compensation through stipends or wages to 95 students for their work in placements (this does not include Child Welfare or BHWISE fellows)
- Recruited 97 new agencies
- Provided five orientations for 168 new practicum instructors
- Provided six professional development training courses for 846 practicum instructors
- Provided four orientations to 373 new MSW students



OPE wanted to ensure all foundation students begin practicum with a consistent and clear orientation to experiential learning in addition to any additional orientation provided directly by practicum agencies. Foundation students will now have a strong basic skill set, clarity on expectations of and from the agencies where they are placed, and understanding of assignments to guide their learning before their first day of practicum.”

— **Laura Loessner, MSW, LCSW-C**
*Clinical Associate Professor and
Director of Practicum Education*



Office of Practicum Education, left to right: Esther Carlson, Angela Jachelski, Donna Earling, Laura Loessner, Denise Chop, Caron Cox-Branch, Gisele Ferretto, and Madge Henderson

New Name. New Tools. New Agency Partners. Same Focus.

The Office of Practicum Education changed its name from Field Education to Practicum Education. The term “practicum” is more descriptive of experiential learning for MSW students.

Double the Doctoral Degree Options

After years of planning and dialogue, the Maryland Higher Education Commission approved the launch of UMSSW's **Doctor of Social Work (DSW) Program**. The DSW Program started accepting applications in fall 2025 with students starting the program in fall 2026. The DSW Program is a three-year advanced degree program for experienced social workers that focuses on clinical practice, supervision, leadership, and teaching. The in-person, intensive educational module will bring together a cohort of 15 to 18 students one weekend per month during the fall and spring semesters.

The DSW Program differs from UMSSW's Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Program that prepares MSW-trained social workers to become social work scientists and use their research skills to build knowledge for the field. The DSW Program emphasizes the day-to-day practice of clinical social work in a variety of settings. Both doctoral programs are located on UMSSW's Baltimore campus, a prime location for interprofessional collaboration as UMSSW is one of six health and human services professional schools on UMB's campus in addition to the interdisciplinary School of Graduate Studies.



The launch of the Doctor of Social Work (DSW) Program marks a transformative moment for UMSSW. Designed for experienced social workers, our DSW offers a rigorous, practice-focused pathway to deepen clinical expertise, expand leadership capacity, and prepare the next generation of social work educators. With its intensive weekend format and cohort model, the program reflects our commitment to accessible, high-impact doctoral education."

— **Samantha Fuld, DSW, MSW, LCSW-C**

*Clinical Associate Professor and
DSW Program Associate Director*

DSW PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- 677 requests for more information
- Six information sessions with 102 total attendees
- 67 prospective students started applications
- 34 completed applications

PHD PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- Three virtual open house events
- Received 42 completed applications, compared to 33 last year
- Five PhD graduates honored at the School of Graduate Studies Hooding Ceremony
- UMSSW PhD students contributed to approximately 40 publications and presentations
- Recent graduates serve in faculty positions at social work programs around the globe, as well as work in federal government roles or with policy and research firms



Enhancing the Student Experience from Start to Finish

Strategic Enrollment Management, spearheaded by **Amanda Lehning, MSW, PhD**, senior associate dean for academic affairs, is a multidisciplinary committee consisting of UMSSW representatives from admissions, academic and student affairs, strategic initiatives, access and support, communications, and alumni relations. The committee meets regularly to discuss the student experience from submitting an application to graduation, licensure, and practicing as alumni. This comprehensive approach ensures collaboration and thoughtful, strategic consideration to meet the needs of students and growing demand for social workers.

Enrollment management efforts include developing programs, grounded in data, that enhance student experience. An example is a new pilot initiative that streamlined the application process for BSW students at UMBC who want to enter the MSW program starting in fall 2026.



This pilot initiative is designed to make the transition from UMBC's BSW program to UMB's MSW program as seamless as possible. UMBC graduates will benefit from a simplified application experience that recognizes the strong preparation they receive and supports their continued journey into the social work profession."

— **Amanda Lehning, MSW, PhD**
*Senior Associate Dean
for Academic Affairs*

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- Scheduled and assigned a total of 215 MSW courses (95 courses in fall 2024, 98 in spring 2025, 22 in summer 2025)
- Hired, onboarded, and supported the development of 12 new adjunct/PhD instructors
- Chaired and coordinated the Scholarship Committee, reviewed 369 applications for foundation and advanced scholarships, and organized multiple scholarship/fellowship information sessions
- Supported the work of the Master's Program and the Curriculum committees to revise the assessment process in compliance with the Council on Social Work Education 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards



Exploring Professional Pathways Within Social Work

UMSSW provides students with comprehensive career development opportunities through the Office of Student Affairs. These include licensure and exam preparation, résumé and interview training, and access to UMSSW's extensive job network.

Under the **Professional Pathways ... Building Your Social Work Future Series**, the Office of Student Affairs organized multiple events tailored to various practice areas such as outpatient community behavioral health, hospitals and health care, school-based settings, and state and federal opportunities. This new format introduced in 2024 on UMSSW's Baltimore campus connects social work students with agencies and alumni offering job opportunities.



STUDENT AFFAIRS BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- Coordinated and supported new student orientations across the MSW program. The Baltimore campus orientation welcomed 383 new MSW students, the Universities at Shady Grove campus orientation welcomed 113 new MSW students, and the Online Campus welcomed 68 new students.
- Helped to restructure UMB's wider orientation for all new students in UMB's six professional schools and the interdisciplinary School of Graduate Studies
- Implemented a new Mental Health First Aid Training for foundation students with 130 attendees
- Hosted an "Are You Financially Prepared for Graduate School?" session attended by 134 students
- Conducted and facilitated nearly 500 one-on-one and group academic advising meetings with approximately 50 percent of the MSW student population across UMSSW's three campuses
- Coordinated Convocation 2025 in partnership with departments across UMSSW celebrating 300 graduates

OASIS: Driving Strategic Change and Impact at UMSSW

UMSSW's Office of Access, Strategic Initiatives, and Support (OASIS) serves as a catalyst for collaboration, innovation, and transformative change. True to its name, OASIS provides a space of refuge and renewal, removing barriers, fostering belonging, and advancing strategic initiatives aligned with core social work values. OASIS partners with UMSSW faculty, staff, and the Student Leadership Coalition to develop and implement high-impact programming across four strategic pillars: **Access, Collaboration, Engagement, and Strategy.**

The team's commitment to excellence and educational justice has earned significant institutional recognition, including UMB's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Award for initiatives such as the Annual Summit on Disability Justice, the Book Lending Program, the Unity Week Lecture, and the Dialogue and Engagement Learning Series.

This recognition reflects OASIS' significant impact across the UMSSW community, with programming that reaches hundreds of stakeholders annually.

The Annual Summit on Disability Justice convened nearly 100 educators, practitioners, activists, and students to advance critical strategies, with participants praising the inclusion of diverse community voices. The fourth annual JEDI Awards recognized school and community members for outstanding contributions to social justice and advocacy work. OASIS' programs, events, and initiatives this year have engaged approximately 700 participants. Additionally, OASIS' newly launched Bridging Success Scholarship directly addresses financial barriers to professional advancement by supporting 100 students with Association of Social Work Boards licensure application fees and exam preparation supplies.

At a time when higher education and social work are facing unprecedented challenges, OASIS has responded with proactive solutions that demonstrate strategic action and commitment and continues to find innovative ways to foster collaboration and support while navigating external and internal challenges. It has hosted 10 trainings and events to support stakeholders in responding to current challenges and collaborated to develop the Policy Hub, a centralized tracking system monitoring executive actions, legislation, policies, and directives impacting social work and higher education.

Complementing this resource, OASIS staff also collaborated to develop policy briefs that translated complex legislation into actionable insights along with strategic recommendations. Three editions have been disseminated, generating over 800 views among faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders. OASIS ensures that the school not only preserves its values during these challenging times but also actively strengthens them.



From left to right, OASIS team members Shekinah Davis, Neijma Celestine-Donnor, and Julia Scott



They continue to push the envelope, keeping us informed and accountable to our social work principles and leading several initiatives. The team is integral to the School of Social Work."

— **Judy L. Postmus, PhD, ACSW**
Dean and Professor

OASIS BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- 15 training workshops delivered, engaging nearly 400 participants across topics including “Intercultural Communication in the Workplace,” “Understanding Ableism in Social Work Practice,” and “Understanding Federal Legislation Impacting Higher Education and Social Work”

- 90 percent of participants reported improved behaviors and attitudes
- 95 percent of participants reported improved knowledge and skills

Signature Events

- Four major events hosted: Unity Week Lecture, JEDI Awards, Annual Summit on Disability Justice, and Professional Development Day
- Approximately 300 total attendees, including UMSSW students, faculty, staff, and community members

Strategic Initiatives and Resources

- Bridging Success Scholarship: Awarded support to 100 students for LMSW application fees and exam study supplies, directly removing financial barriers to licensure
- Policy Briefs: Designed to track key developments including executive actions, legislation, policies, and directives impacting higher education and social work practice — 884 total views
- The Collaborative Newsletter: Monthly publication keeping the community informed on efforts around Access, Collaboration, Engagement, and Strategy — 850 total views

Bottom-Line Impact

Through strategic programming, targeted resources, and innovative communications, OASIS has engaged over 1,500 individuals while providing critical financial support and timely information to the UMSSW community.



The OASIS team received the leadership award at the University of Maryland, Baltimore’s 2025 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Black History Month Celebration.

Institute for Innovation and Implementation: Improving the Well-Being of Children and Families from the START

The Institute for Innovation and Implementation's Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START) is an evidenced-based intervention that uplifts families impacted by parental substance use disorder. Grounded in principles of rapid access to treatment, family-centered practice, and recovery-oriented systems of care, START brings together child welfare professionals, behavioral health providers, and peer mentors with lived experience to improve outcomes for both parents and children.

For the first time, the team planned and hosted the annual START Convening at the Howard County Department of Social Services, bringing together six Maryland START counties, the Social Security Administration, stakeholders, and partners. Under the theme, "From Evidence to Impact: Best Practices in Overdose Response," the 2025 START Convening was filled with learning, laughter, and meaningful connection celebrating the collective mission of START centers across the state.

"This year was a milestone for the Institute, as we took the lead role in planning and executing the 2025 START Convening. This was a huge undertaking and important for our growth and for sustainability of START in Maryland," said Lauren Coleman, MSW, evidence-based programs training and technical assistance manager, Institute for Innovation and Implementation.

START is one of many programs within the Institute for Innovation and Implementation that uses evidence-based practices to strengthen and positively impact the lives of children and families in Maryland and beyond.

Learn more about the Institute by scanning the QR code.



THE INSTITUTE FOR INNOVATION AND IMPLEMENTATION BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- Over 250 unique training events for more than 4,000 individuals
- Trained 180 new child welfare workers
- Reviewed 128 child welfare cases, conducted 697 interviews, and held 28 focus groups to improve welfare accountability
- Validated juvenile justice assessment and intake decision tools
- Evaluated ABC Home Visiting Program and Pyramid Model Implementation
- Launched an infant/early childhood mental health endorsement program with 200 attendees
- Continued \$10 million in funding including expanded contracts with the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services

Center for Restorative Change

The Center for Restorative Change at UMSSW brings together the Rise Early Learning and Family Support Center, B'more for Healthy Babies Upton/Druid Heights, Family Connections, and the Positive Schools Center to offer vital training, resources, and support for individuals, families, and organizations in Baltimore. Through these integrated efforts, the center helps foster early childhood development, promote maternal and child health, strengthen family relationships, and create positive school environments — supporting the community to restore hope and build brighter futures.

Marking 10 Years of the Positive Schools Center's Leadership in Restorative Practice and Social Change

For a decade, the Positive Schools Center (PSC) at the Center for Restorative Change has embodied resilience through sustained innovation in education, holistic school partnerships, and community engagement. Since its inception, PSC has partnered with school leaders, staff, and communities to create nurturing, trauma-responsive environments grounded in five foundational strategies: Human-Centered Engagement; Restorative and Healing Practices; Trauma-Responsive Educational Approaches; Social and Emotional Learning; and Student, Family, and Community Voice.

PSC's impact extends to:

- Supporting up to 900 teachers and staff, touching the lives of over 8,200 students — impacting approximately 10 percent of Baltimore City schools
- Serving 11 Community Schools and nine Intensive Climate Cohort Schools and facilitating programs like Next Generation Scholars that open college and career pathways for students in grades seven to 12
- Delivering 87 targeted staff trainings, 80 school leader coaching sessions, and more than 100 restorative “circle” sessions to transform school climate and relationships
- Establishing partnerships with over 187 community organizations, enriching student opportunities in academics, health, social support, and youth development



Educators should not have to carry the torch of our children alone. The combination of educators and social workers is pure magic.”

—Wendy Shaia, EdD, MSW

*Clinical Professor and
Executive Director of the
Center for Restorative Change*

Scan the QR code to hear from one of the Positive Schools Center's partners.



Research, Innovation, and Advocacy

PSC’s research-backed model and ongoing data collection ensure that work remains relevant and responsive. The center continues to quarterback collective workshops, conduct 716 one-on-one advising sessions for youth, and innovate through college and career readiness experiences.

Professional development, advocacy at the state level, and thought leadership through collaborative research have positioned PSC as an anchor for trauma-responsive, equity-driven education reform in Maryland and beyond.

Creating Lasting Impact

A defining achievement of PSC has been its commitment to helping schools and communities transition from short-term interventions to lasting empowerment and systemic change. Community Schools collaborating with PSC have reported improved attendance and an increased sense of safety and trust among students — even during times of uncertainty. PSC’s programs emphasize sustainable resource access for families, with ongoing connections to groceries, career opportunities, and resilient partnerships that continue well beyond individual crises.

Intensive Climate Cohorts and restorative practices promoted by PSC have contributed to demonstrable improvements in both staff and student well-being, resulting in measurable shifts in school culture — 95 percent of partner schools reported a more supportive, understanding environment. Additionally, PSC’s leadership in the Elijah Cummings Healing City Act Trauma-Informed Care trainings further cements its impact in advancing equitable, trauma-responsive practices at a systemwide level.

PSC’s evolution sets a standard for embedding trauma-informed, relationship-centric interventions across public education and offers a blueprint for how universities and communities can lead transformative change into the next decade.

Learn more about Center for Restorative Change programs by scanning the QR code.



CENTER FOR RESTORATIVE CHANGE BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- 875 families positively impacted by Family Connections programming
- 93 percent of B’more for Healthy Babies Upton/Druid Heights program participants had a full-term birth, and 87 percent completed prenatal and parenting groups
- Rise Early Learning and Family Support Center enrolled 54 children, exceeding the startup goal of 20 families
- 4,397 community members engaged with Positive Schools Center initiatives

Embracing Change Through Technology

Artificial Intelligence Reshaping Research, Learning, and Practice

At UMSSW, faculty and staff are pioneering ways to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into research, teaching, and practice, ensuring that innovation aligns with social work's core values and ethics.

Jay Unick, PhD, MSW, professor and behavioral science researcher, uses AI to streamline data analysis, synthesize literature, and explore new frontiers in behavioral health measurement.

"AI allows us to personalize assessments in ways we never could before," he said. "We can tailor questions and track meaningful change over time to reflect what truly matters to everyone, whether it's family, health, or personal passions."

This personalization is more than theoretical. AI's ability to extract structured data from narrative interviews opens doors to more accurate, person-centered care. Yet, Unick cautions that social workers must be at the table as these technologies evolve. "If we're not involved in building these systems, they won't reflect our social work principles and values," he said.

On the teaching front, **Mary Hodorowicz, PhD, MSW**, clinical assistant professor, collaborates with teams across UMSSW on structured and AI-powered simulations to help students practice clinical skills in a safe, guided environment.

UMSSW was the first school of social work in the country to adopt the Dialogue Trainer platform, a simulation tool developed in the Netherlands. Since 2019, it has expanded to include motivational interviewing modules, child welfare training, and even virtual reality experiences.

Looking ahead, UMSSW faculty and staff envision broader use of AI from automating administrative tasks to developing continuing professional education, certificates, and programs in social work and AI. But they also emphasize ethical stewardship. AI requires financial resources, energy, data, and infrastructure that can potentially impact marginalized communities.



We've seen students grow tremendously through these simulations. They learn to navigate complex interactions, reflect on their communication style, and build confidence."

— **Mary Hodorowicz, PhD, MSW**
Clinical Assistant Professor



“We must be mindful of how and where we use AI,” Hodorowicz said. “It’s a powerful tool, but it’s not without cost or caution.”

As AI continues to evolve, UMSSW is laying the groundwork for thoughtful, values-driven integration. Whether through innovative simulations, personalized assessments, or ethical advocacy, the message is clear: Social work belongs in the future of AI.

Connect with Jay Unick and Mary Hodorowicz by scanning the QR codes.



In addition to using AI and the latest technologies, UMSSW faculty and staff work collaboratively to advance the school's mission and vision through administrative support, IT and instructional design resources, and event coordination.

IDEA TEAM BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- Supported over 241 course sections
- Completed over 529 help tickets for faculty, students, and staff
- Collaborated on and ran two workshops on AI

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- 205 unique work orders processed by facilities management
- Supported 25 major events held at UMSSW that brought together UMSSW faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners
- Developed systems, processes, and partnerships to enhance reporting and transaction logging and improve post-award management, allocation, and distribution of funds for UMSSW research, programs, faculty, and staff

Coming Full Circle: A Conversation with Connie Sgarlata

We are excited to welcome **Connie Sgarlata, MSW**, a proud UMSSW alumna, back to the school as the associate director of development and alumni relations. In this Q&A, she shares more about her journey returning to her alma mater and her vision for alumni engagement.



Can you share a bit about your background and how you arrived back at the School of Social Work?

Coming back to the School of Social Work feels like returning to my roots. It's what brought me to Maryland in the first place. I graduated in 1989 and spent the next 25 years working in social work, starting as a clinician and eventually becoming the director at Family and Children Services in Central Maryland. My focus was trauma treatment, especially working with children who had been abused. Eventually, I transitioned into donor relations and higher education, spending 11 years at a small liberal arts college in Westminster. There, I began working with students to obtain internships and engage in experiential learning opportunities. I later moved into a donor relations and stewardship role.

How have your past experiences shaped your current role?

Everything I've done from clinical work, program management, and grant writing to donor relations feels like it's coming together. My background helps me understand the needs of social workers and students. I've seen firsthand how impactful internships and community engagement can be. I enjoy networking and connecting people, which is essential in donor and alumni relations.

What's your vision for alumni and donor relations at the School of Social Work?

I want to help alumni and donors see the real impact of their gifts and how students are changing communities and the world. Alumni engagement is key. Read the newsletters, attend events virtually or in person, and connect with students. Hearing their stories is powerful. My goal is to share those stories and build stronger relationships.

Alumni can give financially, but also with their time and expertise. Serving as practicum instructors is another great way to give back. It's a win-win: Students gain experience, and alumni stay connected to the school and its resources.

What excites you about the future of social work and the School of Social Work?

The new building is exciting. It symbolizes growth and progress. I also love how social work is increasingly integrated with other disciplines like law, nursing, and medicine. Social workers are showing up in more places, making a difference in schools, clinics, and communities. The profession has evolved beyond just clinical or macro tracks, offering students more paths to make an impact. Coming back to the school and reconnecting with alumni, donors, and students excites me. I am looking forward to showcasing the impact of social work.

Visit ssw.umaryland.edu/alumni to learn more about Alumni Engagement Events and Opportunities.

Alumni Spotlight: MSW '07 Alum Named Acting Secretary of Maryland Department of Budget and Management



Gov. Wes Moore has appointed **Yaakov “Jake” Weissmann, JD, MSW '07**, as acting secretary of the Maryland Department of Budget and Management. A graduate of UMSSW and the University of Baltimore School of Law, Weissmann earned his bachelor’s degree in psychology and social work from UMBC. Weissmann most recently served as vice president for government relations and community affairs at UMBC, where he led efforts to strengthen partnerships with policymakers and secure operating and capital funding for the institution.

“I am humbled and excited to serve under Governor Moore and to honor his administration’s commitment to fiscal responsibility, even during deeply challenging times,” Weissmann said in a statement from the governor’s office. “Working in collaboration with our partners in the Maryland General Assembly, we will ensure the steady management and administration of a balanced budget that delivers for all Marylanders.”

Ongoing Development and Education for Social Workers and Other Professionals

UMSSW's Office of Continuing Professional Education is one of the largest in the country, offering more than 100 workshops per year with topics including children and family services, aging, professional development, financial social work, and substance use disorders. The office also offers certificate and intensive programs such as the Human-Centered Leadership in Health and Human Services Certificate Program and the Clinician to CEO Entrepreneurship Intensive.

Elevating Leadership with a Human-Centered Approach

In today's rapidly evolving health and human services landscape, leadership demands more than just strategic thinking. Leadership requires empathy, equity, and resilience. The **Human-Centered Leadership in Health and Human Services Certificate Program** is designed to meet this need, equipping professionals with the mindset and tools to lead with purpose and compassion.

This yearlong, online certificate program is ideal for individuals and teams seeking to deepen their leadership capacity. Built around five core pillars — Mindful Self-Awareness, Authenticity and Meaning, Relational Equity, Agility, and Resilience — the Human-Centered Leadership in Health and Human Services Certificate Program fosters personal growth and organizational impact. Participants engage in monthly workshops, coaching sessions, and assessments, culminating in 50 hours of training and 44 CEUs for social workers.

The program is ideal for emerging health and human services leaders or seasoned professionals. The cohort-based model encourages peer learning and collaboration. Participants will benefit from one-on-one coaching and access to networking opportunities.

Learn more about the Human-Centered Leadership in Health and Human Services Certificate Program by scanning the QR code.



CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS FOR AY 2024-25

- 247 workshops offered
- 9,592 participants
- 93 certificate program participants

Supporting and Strengthening the Development of Mental Health Practices

The **Clinician to CEO Entrepreneurship Intensive** is a hybrid, transformative five-day seminar designed for therapists, coaches, and mental health professionals who are ready to evolve from service provider to business owner. This experience bridges the gap between clinical expertise and entrepreneurial success without the burnout, confusion, or guesswork. Each session is led by proven entrepreneurs who have built thriving practices,

consulting firms, and wellness brands. Participants gain insider knowledge, avoid common pitfalls, and receive actionable tools to launch or grow an aligned, ethical, and financially sound business.

Learn more about the Clinician to CEO Entrepreneurship Intensive by scanning the QR code.



Continuing Education and Certificate programs are open to all professions and industries. CEUs are available for social workers.

Providing Financial Resources and Wellness

The Financial Social Work Initiative (FSWI) at UMSSW aims to train new and practicing social workers in the field of financial social work to increase their skill set and efficacy in working with clients in financial distress, and to advocate for greater financial and social stability and social and economic justice for individuals and communities. Chaired by **Seantè Hatcher, LCSW-C**, assistant dean of continuing professional education, FSWI enhances the unique and longstanding role social workers possess in helping clients and communities stabilize and improve their outcomes and quality of life through the development of direct service initiatives, educational content, capacity building, and evidence-based practice.

“In these economically uncertain times, the Financial Social Work Initiative stands as a vital resource for both students and the broader community,” Hatcher said. “Whether it’s through workshops, financial literacy resources, or access to community partners, FSWI is committed to fostering financial well-being and stability. We believe that when people are equipped with knowledge and support, they are better positioned to thrive in today’s complex financial landscape.”

In addition to FSWI, the school offers a Financial Social Work Certificate Program under the Office of Continuing Professional Education. Similar to other certificate programs, the Financial Social Work Certificate is a cohort program where participants learn tools and skills to assess and address financial capability and resources at the individual, family, and community level over 16 half-day sessions.

Learn more about the Financial Social Work Initiative by scanning the QR code.



UMSSW Accolades



Barth Honored as Distinguished University Professor

Richard P. Barth, PhD, MSW, former dean and esteemed faculty member at UMSSW, was named a Distinguished University Professor — the highest faculty honor awarded by UMB.

The honor recognizes Barth's decades-long leadership, scholarship, and commitment to advancing social work and public service. Barth joined UMB in 2006 as dean of UMSSW, serving in that role until 2020. Under his leadership,

the school was recognized widely for its pioneering research, as well as programs in child welfare and behavioral health. He has continued to shape the field as a faculty member, mentor, and thought leader.

“UMB has been exceptionally supportive of my scholarship, which has continued to improve during my nearly 20 years here as I learn from colleagues across all the schools,” Barth said. “I am grateful for UMB’s ongoing support of clinical and translational research that does the vital work of putting our best ideas for lifting up humanity against the downward spiraling forces around us. I am confident that I have helped create safer children, healthier families, and a stronger society, and look forward to continuing that work under this august title.”



Celebrating 40 Years of Commitment and Service

Geoffrey Greif, PhD, MSW, a UMB Distinguished University Professor, recently retired after celebrating 40 years of exemplary service and leadership. Since joining UMSSW in 1984, Greif has shaped the field through influential research on family therapy, adult relationships, and social justice, publishing more than 175 articles and 15 books. He has played key roles in faculty governance and community engagement, chaired statewide commissions, and helped launch innovative dual-degree programs. Recognized with nearly 30 teaching awards and major honors, Greif’s work continues to inspire students and advance social work education at UMSSW and beyond. In January, he was named a Distinguished Professor Emeritus.

UMSSW Faculty and Staff Accolades and Accomplishments

Congratulations to UMSSW faculty and staff for over 100 mentions in the Laurels section of the 2025 UMB *President's Message* newsletters, including awards, panel discussions, presentations, promotions, and publications. Below are a few highlights from the many publications, awards, and accolades from UMSSW faculty, staff, and students.

Publications

Richard P. Barth, PhD, MSW, Distinguished University Professor, co-authored "Satisfaction with Child Welfare Workers and Services: Reports from Mothers Receiving Child Welfare Services," published in the *Journal of Public Child Welfare*.

Lisa Berlin, PhD, MS, Alison L. Richman Professor of Children and Families, co-authored a randomized controlled trial on maternal psychological risk and attachment-based intervention effects on mother-toddler mutuality and toddler behavior problems, published in *Prevention Science*.

Iris Cardenas, PhD, assistant professor, co-authored "The Association Between Immigration Status-Related Intimate Partner Violence and Financial Strain Among Women," published in the *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*.



Sarah Dababnah, PhD, MPH, MSW, associate professor, co-authored three publications highlighting autism research:

- "Training and Pilot Implementation of the World Health Organization's Caregiver Skills Training Program in

Egypt," published in *Research in Autism*

- Study of a strengths-based education program for Diné (Navajo) families of autistic children, published in *Research in Autism*
- "Characteristics of Service Utilization Among Chinese and Korean American Autistic Children," published in the *Journal of Asian Health*

Laurie Graham, PhD, MSW, assistant professor, co-authored a quasi-experimental evaluation of a youth participatory action research project on opioid prevention in the *American Journal of Community Psychology* and a piece on bystander approaches to sexual and relationship violence for youth-supporting adults in the *Journal of Family Violence*.

Brook Kearley, PhD, research associate professor, was co-author on a major *Critical Public Health* article on drug decriminalization and Black civil society perspectives.

Ericka Lewis, PhD, LMSW, assistant professor, co-authored work on a web-based program targeting anxiety risk in young children and parents in the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* and an article on Black father involvement in education amid systemic inequities in *Child Welfare*.

Laura Loessner, MSW, LCSW-C, clinical associate professor and director of practicum education, edited and co-authored "Social Work Field Instruction in Modern Practice: A Handbook."

Tural Mammadli, Linda Jeanne Mack, Yali Deng, Tharyn Giovanni, and Simpson Kamugisha, all PhD candidates, co-authored "Substance Use Among Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth and Young Adults Living in the US: A Systematic Review," published in *Social Science & Medicine*.

Tiffany L. Martoccio, MA, PhD student, co-authored *Prevention Science* work on attachment-based interventions and toddler outcomes.

Lynn Murphy Michalopoulos, PhD, associate professor and director of global initiatives, co-authored "The Development and Validation of the Global Post Trauma Symptom Scale-Uganda Among Trauma-Affected Adults," published in the *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*.

Judy L. Postmus, PhD, ACSW, dean and professor, co-authored "Economic Abuse and Depression: Is Financial Strain a Missing Mediator?" published in the *Journal of Family Violence*.

Theda Rose, PhD, associate professor, co-authored "Socio-Ecological Domains and Adolescent Mental Health: An Application of the Dual-Factor Model," published in the *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.

Paul Sacco, PhD, MSW, professor, co-authored "Assessing the Risk of Problem Gambling Among Lottery Loyalty Program Members: A Machine Learning Approach," published in *Addictive Behaviors*.

Corey Shdaimah, PhD, LLM, Daniel Thursz Distinguished Professor of Social Justice, co-authored "Exploring Black Civil Society Perspectives of Drug Decriminalization Reforms in the Baltimore Context: A Participatory Qualitative Study," published in *Critical Public Health*, and the chapter "Value Conflicts: How US Social Workers Manage the Ethics of Outsider Practice" in *Hybrid Social Work: Contested Knowledge, Fragile Collaboration and Social Citizenship*.

Fernando Wagner, ScD, MPH, professor, co-authored a response article on loneliness and cognitive function in older adults in Latin America, published in *Archives of Medical Research*.

Darren Whitfield, PhD, MSW, associate professor, and **Tural Mammadli**, PhD candidate, co-authored “More Than Taking a Pill: The Effects of Intersectional Microaggressions on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Adherence Among Black MSM,” published in the *Journal of HIV/AIDS & Social Services*.

Peiyuan Zhang, MSW, PhD student, co-authored “Culturally Tailored Community Brain Health Education for Chinese Americans Aged 50 or Above,” published in the *Journal of Applied Gerontology*.

Presentations

Christopher Fogarty, Julia Scott, MSW, and **Dawn Shafer, PhD, LCSW-C**, UMSSW Accessibility Advisory Group members, and **Alexis Guethler, PhD**, instructional designer, IDEA Team, and UMSSW Accessibility Advisory Group member, co-presented the poster “Building Capacity for Universal Design at the School of Social Work” at the UMB Leaders in Education: Academy of Presidential Scholars’ Symposium.

Jodi Frey, PhD, LCSW-C, CEAP, professor and associate dean for research, served as a panelist for the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists webinar “Speaking About the Unspoken: Workplace Suicide Risk Reduction.”

Krysten Garcia, MPH, research analyst, co-led two panels at the National Association of Welfare Research and Statistics (NAWRS) 2025 Biennial Conference on findings and policy recommendations regarding Maryland’s cash welfare program through a trauma-informed care lens, and was selected to present racial equity research on Maryland’s cash welfare program at the 2025 NAWRS Workshop in Charlotte, N.C.

Alexis Guethler, PhD, instructional designer, IDEA Team, and UMSSW Accessibility Advisory Group member, presented “Reflective Self-Regulated Learning Interventions in Online Environments” at the UMB Leaders in Education: Academy of Presidential Scholars’ Symposium.

Karen Hopkins, PhD, professor, presented “Balancing Act: Supervisors’ and Managers’ Experiences and Strategies in a Volatile Human Service Environment” at the Network for Social Work Management Annual Conference.

Bethany Lee, PhD, MSW, professor, served as a keynote panelist and co-led the workshop “Shared Family Care: A Holistic Approach to Keeping Families Together” at the Association of Children’s Residential Centers’ Annual Conference in Boston.

Lynn Murphy Michalopoulos, PhD, associate professor and director of global initiatives, co-authored and disseminated work on the Global Post Trauma Symptom Scale-Uganda for trauma-affected adults.

Howard A. Palley, PhD, professor emeritus, presented comments on the public/private sector mix in health care delivery to Doctor of Social Science students at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School.

David Robertson, MSW, MA, PhD student, was selected for the Council on Social Work Education’s 2025-26 Minority Fellowship Program for doctoral students.

Michael Schlossman, PhD, assistant professor, Institute for Innovation and Implementation, co-authored the Detention Risk Assessment Instrument Validation Study Report: 2025 Update, reflecting ongoing evaluation support for Maryland’s juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

Jay Unick, PhD, MSW, professor, contributed expertise on homelessness trends in Maryland highlighted through media and professional engagement.

Media

Richard P. Barth, PhD, MSW, Distinguished University Professor, was quoted in a *Capital Gazette* article on the overdose death of a Glen Burnie toddler and systemic failures in her case and in “Child Welfare and Protection: Understanding the Social Worker’s Role” in the spring issue of *Social Work Advocates*.

Jodi Frey, PhD, LCSW-C, CEAP, professor and associate dean for research, was quoted in a HigherEdJobs.com article on mental health and well-being tips for male faculty and staff.

Geoffrey Greif, PhD, MSW, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, was quoted in a Kiplinger.com piece on how sibling bonds change over time and how to safeguard them, and in a Vox.com article on whether adults need to stay friends with their siblings.



Paul Sacco, PhD, professor, was quoted in a *New York Times* article on how the risks of drinking increase in older age.

Lauren Schuyler, PhD, assistant research director, Family Welfare Research and Training Group, was quoted in a *Newsweek* article on how SNAP changes could impact teenagers and in “Dismantling the Social Safety Net” in *Social Work Today*.

Stacey Wilson, LCSW-C, clinician and practicum instructor, Center for Restorative Change, was quoted in a WMAR2News.com story on Baltimore communities providing school supplies for students.

Other (Awards, Fellowships, Roles)



Lisa Berlin, PhD, MS, Alison L. Richman Professor of Children and Families, was awarded the James McKeen Cattell Fund Sabbatical Fund Fellowship for 2025-26.

John Cagle, PhD, MSW, professor, was selected as a fellow of the University Psychedelic Education Program, contributing to curriculum development in psychedelic education at the master’s level.

Kerri Evans, PhD, LCSW, associate professor, received the Council on Social Work Education’s Council on Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Diversity Faculty Award recognizing outstanding junior faculty scholarship.

Krysten Garcia, MPH, research analyst, was recognized for leadership in racial equity research and trauma-informed evaluation of Maryland’s cash welfare program.

Megan Meyer, PhD, associate professor, was selected as a fellow of the University Psychedelic Education Program, helping integrate evidence-based psychedelic content into social work and nursing curricula.

Construction of New School of Social Work Building Reaches the Halfway Mark

UMSSW reached a pivotal milestone in the construction of the new School of Social Work building that is slated to open in 2027. During a topping-off ceremony, **UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, and **Dean Judy L. Postmus, PhD, ACSW**, recognized the hard work and dedication of the Whiting-Turner construction team as they celebrated placing the final beam on the exterior of the building. Attendees watched in excitement as the beam — signed by UMSSW students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners — was lifted and placed on the building, marking the halfway point in the construction timeline.

“Our new School of Social Work building stands as a powerful investment in people — our students, faculty, and staff, and all they serve,” Jarrell said during the ceremony.

The new School of Social Work building will be the most energy-efficient building in the state, and the first building in downtown Baltimore and the University System of Maryland projected to be certified operational net-zero carbon emissions, using geo-exchange technology. The 125,000-square-foot building will include:

- 10 classrooms
- Two media labs
- Six simulation rooms
- Multiple conference, small meeting, and huddle rooms
- Indoor and outdoor assembly spaces

As construction of the new building progresses, UMSSW community members will have opportunities to take a tour and learn more about the new School of Social Work building. Learn more by scanning the QR code.



This project represents far more than a building. It is an emblem of our school’s values and a lasting, physical expression of social work’s commitment to equity, community partnership, and environmental justice for decades and generations to come.”

— **Judy L. Postmus, PhD, ACSW**
Dean and Professor





Maryland, Baltimore
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