

The Change Agent

The Newsletter for Millersville University's School of Social Work



A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dr. Karen Rice, Department Chair

I am honored to share with you some highlights from the Fall 2025 academic semester that speak to both the university's (exploration, professionalism, public mission, inclusion, integrity, compassion) and social work profession's values (competence, service, dignity and worth of the individual, integrity, social justice, importance of human relationships). For example, our faculty, students, and alumni showcased how, as social workers we demonstrate professionalism by engaging potential students in career exploration; what it means to provide service to others while developing their own professional skills; and how engaging in educational events can foster our social justice advocacy skills.

Social work is a values-based profession whose professionals engage in lifelong learning in order to positively affect the lives of individuals, families, and groups, and the environments of organizations and communities. Be sure to check out the professional scholarship from our community of learners. I hope you will be just as inspired by what you read as I was.

Together, we can, Be The CHANGE.

Karen Rice, PhD, LSW, ACSW



Millersville University
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
BASW • MSW • DSW

EXPLORATION/COMPETENCE

HOME AND SCHOOL VISITOR CERTIFICATE GRADUATES FROM ERIE SCHOOL DISTRICT

In Fall 2023, a cohort of twenty candidates began the Home and School Visitor (HSV) Certification Program. The second cohort of ten students, which started in Spring 2024, is now on track to graduate with the HSV certification in Spring 2026.

We are excited for the opportunity to once again offer this program to a second group of Erie School District professionals, in collaboration with our colleagues in the Departments of Educational Foundations; Early, Middle, and Exceptional Education; and Special Education.

Supporting the professional development and specialization of professionals who work to meet the needs of students and families in PK–12 continues to be an exciting innovation within the School of Social Work.

Learn more about the Home and School Visitor (HSV) and Post-Master's School Social Work (SSW) Certification Programs by visiting our website: ([Post Graduate Certificate Options](#) | [Millersville University](#)).

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us—we are always happy to assist.



Thomas Danias--HSV Certification Student

“

"THE MILLERSVILLE HSV/SSW PROGRAM HAS PLAYED A BIG PART IN ENHANCING MY SKILLS IN BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION, AND TRAUMA INFORMED CARE. IT HAS PREPARED ME TO APPLY AND UTILIZE EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES AND EXPLORE THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION WITH TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND FAMILIES TO SUPPORT ACADEMICS AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUCCESS."

--THOMAS DANIAS

”

PROFESSIONALISM/ DIGNITY AND WORTH OF INDIVIDUALS

INSPIRING FUTURE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALS

Dr. Jen Frank, along with two BASW students, visited Penn Manor High School's Counseling Department to lead an engaging and interactive seminar on the professional of social work and what it entails to be a social worker. The seminar provided potential students insight into the field of social work, highlighting the range of career options available as a social worker, and encouraged students to reflect on the career pathways that aligned with their interests and passions.

We look forward to ongoing opportunities to collaborate with our colleagues at Penn Manor as we work together to support the career development of future Marauders.

Learn more about our [BASW Program](#).

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WE APPRECIATED THE
OPPORTUNITY TO
CONNECT WITH PENN
MANOR HIGH SCHOOL
AND TO SUPPORT
STUDENTS AS THEY
EXPLORE MEANINGFUL
CAREERS DEDICATED TO
SERVICE, ADVOCACY,
AND COMMUNITY WELL-
BEING-DR. JEN FRANK

”



PROFESSIONALISM/ DIGNITY AND WORTH OF INDIVIDUALS

SOCIAL WORK DOCTORATE STUDENTS ARE PUBLISHED

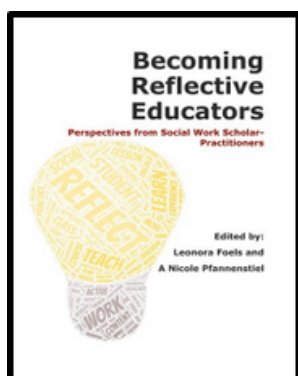
We are pleased to share that a group of doctorate students published a book with the support of **Dr. Leonora Foels** and Dr. A. Nicole Pfannenstiel called *Becoming Reflective Educators: Perspectives from Social Work Scholar-Practitioners*. These doctoral students authored chapters and peer-reviewed submitted chapters.

This publication highlights how writing, as a process, benefits from reflection, practice, reading, and clear goals. It describes a doctoral-level social work course that extended peer-to-peer support beyond the classroom, modeling the collaborative and mentoring relationships common among faculty and scholars. Drawing on the pedagogical approaches of Foels and Pfannenstiel, the course created opportunities for students to pursue graduate-level skill development such as publishing research, engaging in the peer review process, and preparing manuscripts. The opening chapters of the book introduce key theories of graduate pedagogy and outline the course design, while the later chapters feature student reflections on their personal and academic growth throughout the experience.

The book can be found in the two largest open educational resource (OER) repositories in the nation. We invite you to read the book and share it with other colleagues and friends through this short link: <https://bit.ly/43CrodV>.

Congratulations to these doctorate students on their publication!

Learn more about our [DSW Program](#).



Author reflections on the publication of this book:

"It was wonderful to see my work published, and as a well-trained doctoral student I immediately started editing it again." ~ Jordan Henning

"Popped it straight into my CV. Practical, relevant, useful, and appreciated." ~ Deborah DiGennaro

"It's incredibly rewarding to see our shared efforts take form in publication. It's a testament to the dedication, collaboration, and perseverance of the whole cohort!" ~ Kelly Goff

"Feeling proud of myself for this work was one thing. Seeing how excited my family and friends were made it even more special." ~ Emily Drueding

"I didn't expect to feel so much inspiration after seeing my name, authoring a chapter, in a published book! Now I have the confidence and ambition to consider academic writing as a possibility, not a pipe dream." ~ Kayla Weiler

"From one day to today! There was a time when I believed seeing my work published belonged to the distant future. Today, that moment is here. My chapter represents more than just a reflection, it's a milestone that fills me with confidence, ambition, and deep gratitude for every step of the journey." ~ Jayda Fields

"When passionate minds come together, transformation begins. *Becoming Reflective Educators* is more than a book...it's a movement toward inspired, intentional teaching." ~ Layna Smith



PUBLIC MISSION/SERVICE

Professionalism and Community Collaboration

On November 7, 2025, BASW and MSW students participated in the Touchstone Foundation Student Symposium, both as learners and mentors to high school students.

Throughout the day, high school and college students, along with early career mental health professionals came together to share and discuss their career pathways and what to consider as you enter or begin your professional journey.

The School of Social Work was a proud sponsor of the event and welcomed the opportunity to support the academic journey of mental health professionals.



Learn More About
our [MSW Program](#)



PUBLIC MISSION/SERVICE

Dr. Karen Rice Appointed to Council on Social Work Education's Board of Accreditation

On July 1, 2025, **Dr. Karen Rice** was appointed to a three-year term on CSWE's Board of Accreditation (BOA). The work of the Board of Accreditation fulfills the critically important function of maintaining and advocating for quality in social work education through its accreditation/candidacy process of more than 962 social work programs in the United States and its territories. In addition, the BOA acts as the policy body for developing and interpreting accreditation standards and assuring that policies and procedures are fairly and consistently applied to all social work programs.



Dr. Rice's appointment to the BOA is a testament to her outstanding reputation and the trust placed in her abilities by the social work community and recognizes her expertise, dedication, and significant contributions to the field of social work. Dr. Rice's expertise and insights will be invaluable in promoting excellence and advancing the quality of social work programs nationwide.

Learn More About
the School of
Social Work

MSW Students Awarded for Their Service in Mental Health Care

MSW students, **Jacquelyn Palm** and **Samantha Bare** are 2025 recipients of the John F. Steinman Fellowship. They received the award not just for their commitment to pursue a career in social work, but for their dedication to work in the mental/behavioral health field. Congratulations, Jackie and Sam!



PUBLIC MISSION/SERVICE

School of Social Work Hosts First Ever Sold Out PASSWP Conference

We are proud to share the success of this year's two-day PASSWP (Pennsylvania Association of School Social Work Personnel) Conference, which hosted 250 participants, 25 presenters, and 10 vendors who support youth and their families. Additionally, 23 BASW and MSW students were able to attend the conference at no cost thanks to the School's sponsorship, allowing the students to engage with current research, practice-informed presentations, and professionals working in schools and youth-serving settings.

The conference opened with a powerful keynote address by Dr. Joseph Birli, CEO of Bethany Children's Home. Dr. Birli's presentation centered on hope and healing, emphasizing that individuals who have experienced trauma can recover and thrive when supported by compassionate, skilled professionals, such as school social workers.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all school social workers and conference participants to their dedication to supporting youth and their families. Your commitment plays a vital role in promoting resilience, healing, and overall well-being in our schools and communities.



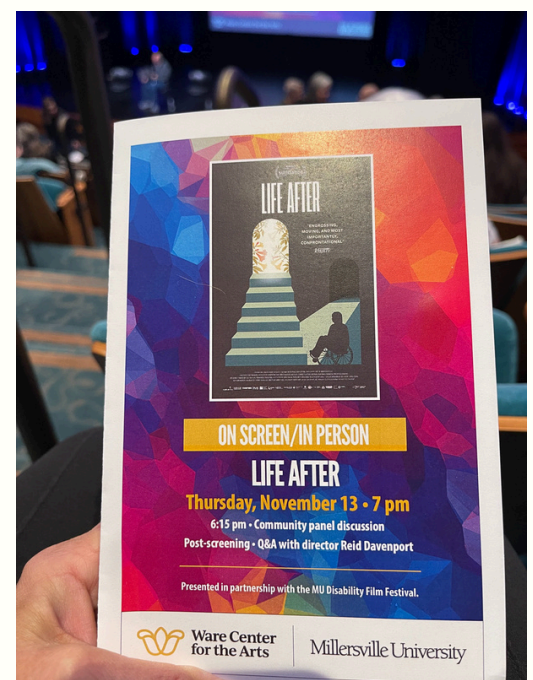
INCLUSION/SOCIAL JUSTICE

Reflection on Life After

BASW students in our First Year Experience course taught by **Dr. Jen Frank** were able to meet with and interview the filmmaker, Reid Davenport. Reid, a disabled filmmaker investigates assisted dying and uncovers how ableism, policy, and systemic failures can make death seem like the only option. The film, *Life After* was screened at MU's Ware Center and some members of the class attended the event.

I ATTENDED A SCREENING OF LIFE AFTER AND WAS TRULY MOVED. THERE WERE SO MANY TAKEAWAYS, BUT THE BIGGEST FOR ME WAS RECONIZING HOW OFTEN DISABILITY IS VIEWED THROUGH A LENS OF SUFFERING, RATHER THAN THROUGH AS APPRECIATION OF INDIVIDUALS' STRENGTHS AND VALUE IN THE SAME WAY WE VIEW NON DISABLED PEOPLE. THE FILM ALSO HIGHLIGHTED HOW FEW OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICES EXIST TO PUSH BACK AGAINST THIS OPPRESSIVE VIEWPOINT. I AM DEEPLY THANKFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENTER INTO THESE STRUGGLES, EVEN IF ONLY IN A SMALL WAY. I HOPE YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO WATCH LIFE AFTER--IT IS TRULY LIFE CHANGING.

--MARY DREISBACH



INTEGRITY

MU SSW Represented at the NASW National Conference

During the week of July 16th, MSW graduates, Alexis Stengel and Evelyn Morales had the opportunity to travel to Chicago, Illinois to present their research on Civic Engagement Among Undergraduate Students at the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) National Conference. The research was conducted in collaboration with the Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership (CCRL) under the faculty mentorship of Dr. Laura Granruth.

Evelyn Morales shares her reflection of the experience:

“This experience would not have been possible without the generous support of the Millersville University School of Social Work, the Office of University Relations and Strategic Initiatives, the College of Education and Human Services, Millersville University College, and the numerous student funding opportunities available through the university. We also extend our sincere thanks to the Office of Grants, Sponsored Programs & Research and the College of Science and Technology for their assistance in printing our poster presentation.

The conference welcomed over 2,400 social workers from across the country and featured a wide array of sessions, all thoughtfully aligned with current events. Some of the most impactful sessions for me focused on artificial intelligence in social work, the intersection of social media and practice, innovative research methods, community organizing, and strategies for publishing in the NASW Journal. One of my favorite sessions was on community organizing, which brought together inspiring leaders to share their journeys into leadership, the power of inter-professional collaboration, and how they are evolving their organizing strategies in response to today’s national challenges.

We were also honored to hear from several leaders, including Pennsylvania State Representative Malcolm Kenyatta, Illinois State Senator Karina Villa, Congresswoman Delia Ramirez, and Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq., Executive Director of the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, just to name a few. They each shared their personal journey into leadership, gave insight on what they are seeing on the ground, and gave us a call to action in advocacy as social workers.

INTEGRITY

MU SSW Represented at the NASW National Conference Continued

Beyond the conference, I had the chance to explore the city of Chicago. I took in breathtaking views from 1,353 feet up in the Willis Tower, enjoyed an architectural river cruise, visited Navy Pier and Lake Michigan, and enjoyed some incredible local cuisine. Experiencing this Midwestern city enriched my cultural understanding and deepened my appreciation of diverse communities.

The conference could not have come at a better time. It served as an energizing launch into my post-MSW career and reaffirmed my commitment to advancing social justice during a period of significant change in our federal landscape. I left the conference not only inspired but also motivated to engage more deeply in social work research--with the goal of someday contributing to the NASW Journal myself.

Thank you again for the opportunity to attend this transformative event and for the support that made it all possible!"



COMPASSION/IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Student Gratitudes

In the beginning of the 2025 fall semester, nine students were grouped in a cohort that, through the process of learning together, learned about each other, and built relationships. One of the most memorable events was the student-led surprise celebration of a peer's soon-to-be-born baby for **Instructor Heberlein and Drs. Foels and Ogongi**. Instructor Heberlein indicated that "the shared joy we experienced supporting and celebrating together was palpable." She added that "I just can't imagine experiencing [this] the same way in a Zoom room. Plus, virtual snacks just don't do it for me." Dr. Foels described that students and faculty spend some time interacting with one another, snacking on goodies, and excitedly watched the expectant mother open baby gifts who later expressed her deepest appreciation and feeling overwhelmed by the kindness shared by everyone through tears of joy. Dr. Ogongi expressed that it was heartwarming to witness students rally around a peer with such care and intention. The student at the center of this moment expressed deep gratitude for the warmth and support she received, reminding us how powerful community, presence, and shared humanity can be in our learning spaces. To sum up such a wonderful experience all the way around, below are the thoughtful sentiments and reflections of our students - community of learners.

"As social workers we strive to strengthen the communities around our clients. It was nice to take a moment to strengthen our community as classmates and come together to celebrate new life. Congratulations to Gifty and her baby girl!"

– Kyra Brown

"It was wonderful to come together as classmates and friends to celebrate Gifty's baby girl! Social work — bringing people together while celebrating one's individual journey." -

Jessa Collier

"It is great to be able to form a community around our classmate, Gifty. This program has brought us close through academics and new journeys." – Ebony Grant

"I think it was awesome that we got the chance to celebrate Gifty in a setting that meant so much more than just class." – Sydney Ohl

"Gifty is a kind, caring, and compassionate individual whose contributions to the Integrated Studies Program here at Millersville are invaluable. I am proud to have her as a permanent fixture in our MSW cohort!" –

Michael "Mike" Perrotti

"I just liked that we got to slow down and be people/make connections with each other, rather than just constantly working." – Samantha Bare
"Congratulations, Gifty, on your baby girl! I am thrilled for you and excited to see what this new chapter of motherhood brings. It was so special to take a moment in class to celebrate and surprise you and your baby girl. You are going to be an amazing mother!"

I also want to extend a heartfelt thank-you to our incredible cohort. Who consistently show up for one another, and it was beautiful to see that reflected in this celebration. I appreciate sharing space with all of you and learning together through our interests, life experiences, and passions, all the while practicing vulnerability and authenticity.

A big shoutout to Dr. Foels and Andrea for fostering and facilitating the kind of class environment where these connections can grow and thrive. It truly speaks to the values of our profession and the importance of human relationships." – Elizabeth

"Liz" Poole

"Celebrating Gifty was such a joy. She's going to be an amazing mom! Wishing her and her baby so much happiness." – Kipa Shrestha



COMPASSION/IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Student Fund to Support Students' Persistence and Graduation

In response to the increasing barriers preventing students from persisting to graduation, **Dr. Karen Rice** launched the **Student Support Fund** within the School of Social Work. The initial funds for the Student Support Fund came from sales of the 2026 Mindfulness Calendar.

The Mindfulness Calendar invites individuals to engage in various mindfulness practices that increase presence, reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, enhance focus, increase self-compassion, and improve both mental and physical health. Each month features a new mindfulness technique that individuals can choose to practice. Whether the mindfulness technique is done as described, modified, or skipped, the goal is to do what allows you to focus on the here and now by intentionally focusing on your thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

You can still get a copy of the 2026 Mindfulness Calendar. All proceeds benefit our social work students by helping them overcome non-academic barriers to completing their degree, such as food insecurity, housing instability, transportation challenges, and clearance-related expenses.

We wish to extend a heartfelt appreciation to our sponsors: Move Forward Counseling, Willow Valley Communities, Unwind the Mind Counseling, and Lone Oak Animal-Assisted Therapeutic and Educational Services, Inc. To all who have purchased a calendar (or plan to), thank you for supporting our students, our mission, and the future of social work. Happy 2026! Here's to living life more intentionally, one mindfulness practice at a time.

ORDER YOUR 2026 MINDFULNESS
CALENDAR TODAY!



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

DSW ALUMNA PRESENTS AT 2025 Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) Summit

Dr. Dianna Montgomery, an alumna of Millersville University of Pennsylvania, presented in two different sessions at the 2025 PASSHE Summit. Her work drew from her teaching experiences and doctoral work at Millersville University. She sees the importance of mentorship and connection in the process of applying and preparing for a conference as a new-graduate/early career faculty member. Through this work, and through extending her doctoral connections she has developed professional partnerships from the experience.

Dr. Montgomery co-led a virtual workshop with **Dr. Foels** titled *Let's Talk About Navigating 'Difficult Differences': Active Learning Strategies for Creating an Inclusive and Transformative Learning Environment*. It was designed to be highly participatory and experiential, using active learning strategies to foster conversations, reflection, and collaborative learning an interactive workshop.

Later Dr. Montgomery joined Drs. Pfannenstiel, Foels, and **Ogongi** for a virtual panel discussion on *Inclusive Graduate Pedagogy: Drawing Attention to Overlooked Student Populations*. This panel presentation offered advice and pedagogical discussion applicable to face-to-face classes, online synchronous and asynchronous classes, and research spaces beyond the classroom. This panel demonstrated how graduate pedagogy should offer professional development and what that can look like.



After considering her doctoral studies and experiences, Dr. Montgomery stated, “presenting at the 2025 PASSHE Summit represented an extension of the mentorship relationships formed during my doctoral program at Millersville University. The experience reinforced the importance of choosing dissertation chairs and committee members who will invest in your growth beyond graduation. My advice to current and future doctoral students: Make every assignment count by connecting coursework to your dissertation topic whenever possible, this keeps your research focused and ensures every paper contributes meaningfully to your final product.”

NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

School of Social Work Welcomes New Practicum Director

Hello! My name is Jostalynn Parry and I am the Practicum Director for the School of Social Work at Millersville. I was hired at Millersville University as the Assistant Practicum Coordinator and PRIME Grant Coordinator for the School of Social Work in November 2021 and moved into the role of Practicum Director in May 2025. I have also been an adjunct professor for the School of Social Work since fall 2024 teaching courses related to research methods, program evaluation, and social welfare policy. I am an alum at Millersville University graduating with my BSW in 2013 and with my MSW in 2019.

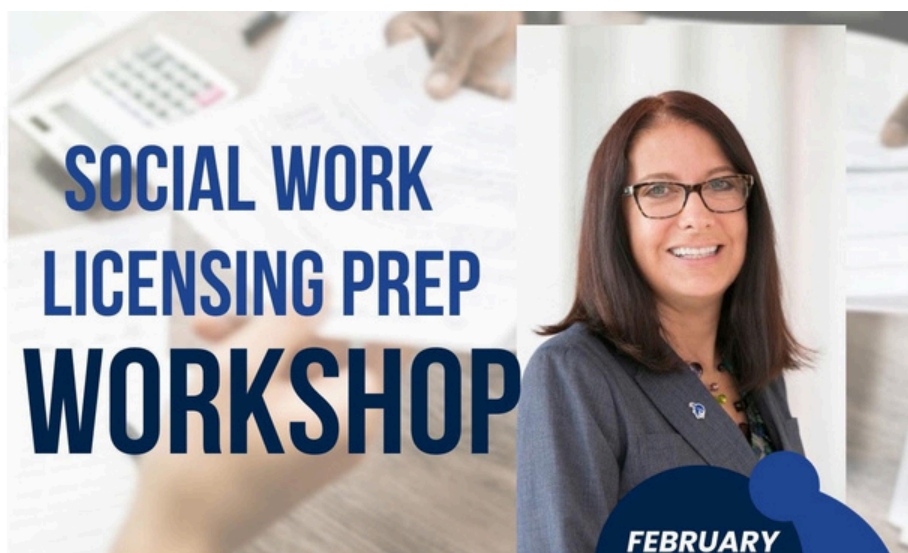


Prior to joining the team at Millersville University, I held various positions within Community Action Partnership of Lancaster County where I was able to support individuals and families seeking services with case management, workforce development, and long-term goal planning. My time at CAP provided the opportunity to gain experience in not only working directly with individuals and families, but also with community advocacy, community education, program development, and program management.

I am excited to continue my professional journey within the School of Social Work as the Practicum Director, and I am lucky to have had a couple of years to learn from my colleagues the best practices to serve social work students entering practicum. I will be incorporating more opportunities for students to feel professionally and personally prepared to enter the field, including meeting individually with the students, holding informational sessions and resume workshops and continuing the Human Services Job Fair. Practicum education is the signature pedagogy of social work and is a collaborative process between students, faculty, and the community, so there will also be a focus on ensuring all stakeholders in the practicum process feel supported. Feel free to email or stop by my office (Stayer 327) if you have any questions or just want to connect!

NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Register for Licensure Exam Workshop



Time: 9:00am-4:30pm

Location: Virtual

Presenter: Dawn

Apgar, PhD, LSW, ACSW

Fee: \$90 for community members and alumni
\$45 for students



**Don't wait until
the last minute.
Limited space!**

REGISTER TODAY!



Millersville University
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
BASW•MSW•DSW

Questions? Email
swfieldeducation@millersville.edu

Prepare to pass your Bachelors, Masters, or Clinical exam for social work licensing with this one-day workshop. The six-hour virtual session covers key exam content and includes access to ExamPrepConnect, featuring games and flashcards.

CEs for those who attend for the LCSW training

Sponsored by the Millersville University School of Social Work

**MILLERSVILLE
UNIVERSITY'S SCHOOL
OF SOCIAL WORK IS
HOLDING A LICENSURE
PREP WORKSHOP
HOSTED BY DR. DAWN
APGAR!**

**THERE ARE TWO
DIFFERENT DATES
AVAILABLE, 2/14/26
AND 2/21/26, BOTH
FROM 9AM-4:30PM.**

**THIS VIRTUAL
WORKSHOP WILL HELP
PREPARE YOU TO PASS
EITHER YOUR LBSW,
LSW, OR LCSW EXAM.**

**REGISTER TODAY!!
FEBRUARY 14, 2026
REGISTRATION LINK**

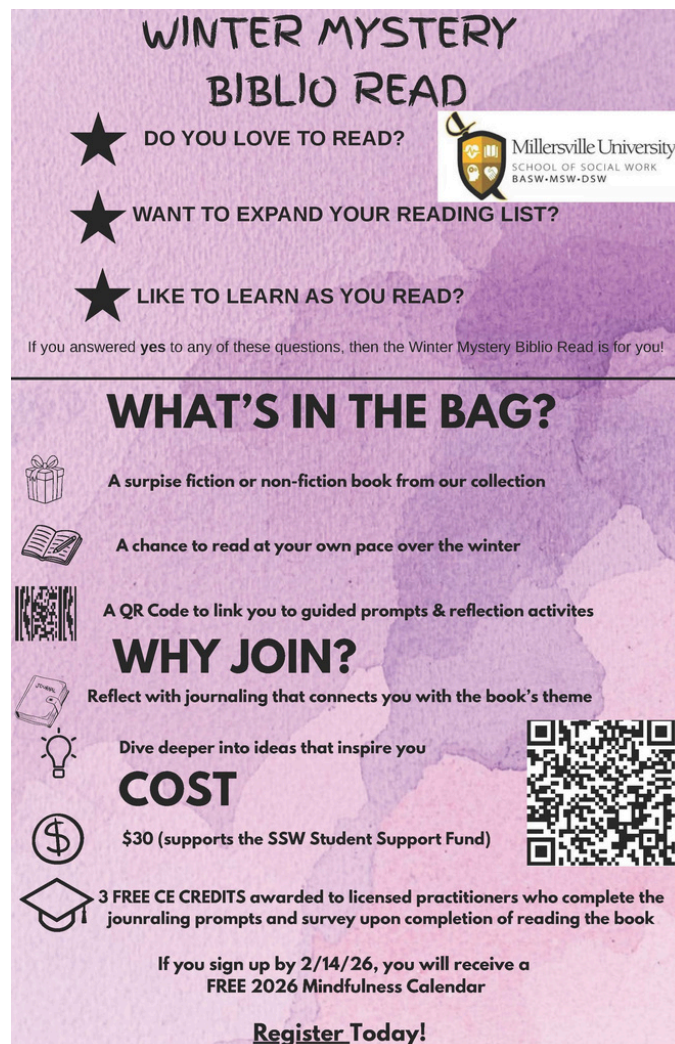
**FEBRUARY 21, 2026
REGISTRATION LINK**

NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Sign Up to Participate in the Winter Mystery Biblio Read

Once again, we are inviting you to join us this winter for a mystery read. We will send you a fictional or non-fictional book to read along with other items and prompts that encourage you to engage with the content, themes, characters, feelings, and/or setting of the book. Continuing education credits are available for those interested. All proceeds go toward the Student Support Fund.

Sign up by 2/14/26 and receive a FREE 2026 Mindfulness Calendar along with your mystery read!



**WINTER MYSTERY
BIBLIO READ**




★ DO YOU LOVE TO READ?

★ WANT TO EXPAND YOUR READING LIST?



★ LIKE TO LEARN AS YOU READ?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then the Winter Mystery Biblio Read is for you!



WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

-  A surprise fiction or non-fiction book from our collection
-  A chance to read at your own pace over the winter
-  A QR Code to link you to guided prompts & reflection activities

WHY JOIN?

-  Reflect with journaling that connects you with the book's theme
-  Dive deeper into ideas that inspire you


COST

-  \$30 (supports the SSW Student Support Fund)
-  3 FREE CE CREDITS awarded to licensed practitioners who complete the journaling prompts and survey upon completion of reading the book

If you sign up by 2/14/26, you will receive a
FREE 2026 Mindfulness Calendar

Register Today!

Millersville University
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
BASW-MSW-DSW



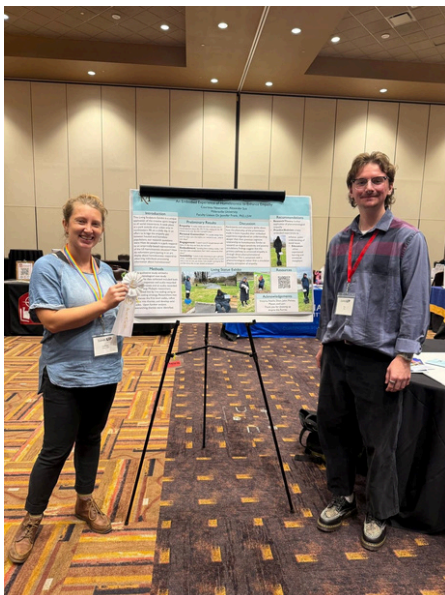
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOLARSHIP ACTIVITIES

MU SSW Represented at the NASW-PA Conference

On October 5-8, 2025, **Dr. Jen Frank** attended the NASW-PA Conference in the Pocono Mountains. She presented original research at the conference with a project called *Meals on the Go: Exploring the Navigation of Charitable Food While Homeless*, along with co-researcher **Dawn Watson**, MSW alumnus, Neighbor Insights & Qualitative Research Specialist of the Central PA Food Bank, and current PhD Student at Byrn Mawr College.

Dr. Frank also was thrilled to host two groups of students presenting research during the student poster presentation. **Courtney Newcomer** and **Alexander Suit**, BASW students in the online degree completion option, shared their project: *Here but not Here: An Embodied Experience of Homelessness to Enhance Empathy*. **JD Dombrowski** and **Calena Rodriguez**, MSW students, shared their research poster: *Discrimination of Transgender and Gender-Diverse People in the United States: Issues of Power and Social Control through Medicalization*.

Of note, **Courtney and Alex** were awarded **third place** in the poster competition for their work! All of the Millersville University students did an incredible job showcasing their research.



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR FALL 2025 GRADUATES!



BASW Graduates



Dr. Pamela Carr with Dissertation Chair, Dr. Karen Rice

Connect on:

[MU SSW Facebook](#) (link)

[Learning Institute](#) (link)

[Instagram](#) (link)

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MU SSW ALUMNI

Stay connected! We love to hear from our alumni and feature the great work you are doing! [Email Us!](#)