Embracing Excellence
Embracing Excellence

It’s been a little over a year since I became the Director of the Division of Social Work, and what a dynamic year it’s been! From redesigning our website and utilizing social media to having two very successful faculty searches and instituting a new development campaign, we are a program on the move. I am particularly proud of all the hard work our faculty does in the service of embracing excellence for our students and the citizens of Wyoming.

“Social Works” is our new annual magazine that highlights the stellar work of our students and faculty. Rather than just send out a typical newsletter each year, we wanted to provide you with a publication that is more feature-oriented. The theme for our inaugural magazine is Embracing Excellence, which reflects the theme that the Division has adopted as well. We are particularly pleased to welcome the addition of two new faculty members who are already having a positive impact at the Division – Assistant Professor Amy Castro Baker and Assistant Lecturer Kari Velzke. I am sure you will find their stories quite interesting. Recent MSW graduate Brittany Wienholz illustrates the high degree of scholarship our students produce in her article on trauma in the frontier west, and current BSW student Misty Heil shares her research on media portrayal of sex workers.

If you are interested in supporting the mission of the Division, our new giving pages at www.uwyo.edu/socialwork/giving-pages provides information on six different initiatives you can choose from.
The Division of Social Work Touring Wyoming

“As a public university, service to Wyoming is a key aspect of the mission of the University of Wyoming. The same is true for the Division of Social Work. Given that many of our social work students come from all areas in Wyoming, the Division has a responsibility to reach out and give people the opportunity to hear of all the great things our students and faculty are doing in addition to being able to give input on how the Division can better serve the needs of the state, nation, and world,” according to Division Director Donna Leigh Bliss.

2014 Road Trips

The idea of launching a series of road trips to various towns in Wyoming was one of the early initiatives that Director Bliss set into motion after she came to the Division of Social Work in July 2013. According to Director Bliss, “The idea was inspired by tailgates during the football season. I had just bought a motor home and thought it would be an interesting idea to travel throughout Wyoming to share what we were doing and develop stronger relationships with our citizens. The first road trip to Riverton in September 2013 was met with enthusiasm from the community. After that, we decided how to visit other towns throughout the state.”

One of the exciting aspects of these road trips has been the feedback from people who are interested in getting a MSW degree from UW but weren’t sure if it was possible without living in Laramie. This feedback has led to the redesign of the MSW Admissions web page so that prospective students who live outside the Laramie area can see that it is quite possible.

2015 Road Trips

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Reaching Out: Spotlight on Laramie

September is Recovery Month

Reaching Out: Spotlight on Laramie was an MSW student initiative project held at the Albany County Library on September 13th, 2014. The event introduced a new community resource recoverylaramie.org sponsored by the University of Wyoming’s Division of Social Work and research gathered by MSW student Amber Donais. The event was developed as an outreach for law enforcement, treatment professionals, support groups, and individuals in the Laramie community to support awareness community connectedness, help identify community concerns and the negative impact from substance abuse to support recovery. Presentations were provided by Commander Mitchell Cushman of the City of Laramie Police Department, Desi Salmons of Ivinson Hospital Behavioral and Mental Health department, Stephanie Bachstelle of University of Wyoming’s Counseling Services and the Aware Program, Teresa Jacobs-Castano of the Clinic of Mental Health and Wellness; and members from 12 step programs Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, and Narcotics Anonymous.

Areas of concern for the Laramie community were severity of alcohol abuse and more recent trends of abuse and overdose from prescription medications, marijuana and heroin. Current treatment is focused on empowering individuals and strengthening both individual and family support systems. The Reaching Out: Spotlight on Laramie event was informative and allowed insight to the problematic issues facing law enforcement, treatment providers, and the community. The focus of the event was to embrace local agencies and organizations directly involved with individuals and families supporting positive life changes, which are necessary for individual recovery process.

MSW Student Amber Donais gives overview of recoverylaramie.org

UW-Casper Social Work Students
Step Up for Kids!

Casper Social Work students attended the 7th Annual Step Up for Kids Day, September 16th, 2014. Step Up for Kids is a community event raising awareness on issues facing Wyoming children. This year’s focus was on homeless youth, with Greta Hinderliter of Natrona County School district, highlighting the major educational obstacles homeless youth face. Natrona County had 403 homeless children attending school last year. The event called all those in attendance and all community members to advocate for youth and to volunteer their time to children’s organizations.

http://www.everychildmatters.org/national-activities/step-up-for-kids
In attendance were approximately 200 social work practitioners statewide, including 35 students from the Division of Social Work at the University of Wyoming. These students are in the Bachelor of Social Work Program at either Casper or Laramie, or are Master of Social Work students. They received scholarships from the Division to attend this year’s conference and described it as “an invaluable learning experience”. The Division plans to offer scholarships again next year, so as to continue to encourage students to share in the knowledge and experience offered at the NASW Conference.

Also new from the Division of Social Work this year was the Reception, hosted Thursday night after the conference. Attendees were encouraged to mingle in a casual atmosphere among displays of student and faculty scholarship from the Division, and reconnect with old friends and colleagues, as well as make some new connections. A source of pride for the Division is its continued tradition of excellence in the form of its faculty. Three faculty members presented at the conference: Assistant Professor Valerie Thompson-Ebanks, Ph.D. spoke about destigmatizing disability and fostering social justice and human rights; and Instructors Liz Dole-Izzo and Bethany Cutts presented on the specifics of the Division’s Practicum and how the supervisor develops a relationship with their students.

May 9, 2014: The Hilton Garden Inn was jam-packed with BSW and MSW students, their families, and friends, to celebrate their upcoming graduation. A crowd of nearly 150 people enjoyed listening to a string quartet, viewing mounted posters that contained some photos and quotes of our graduates, and had the opportunity to savor the sense of accomplishment that only graduation can bring.

The Graduation Reception was hosted by the Division of Social Work in response to a survey of students who overwhelmingly wanted to have some sort of reception before the main commencement ceremony. According to the Director of the Division of Social Work, Donna Leigh Bliss, “Our faculty and staff worked hard to put together this impressive event. Students loved the reception and family members told me how much it meant to them to be able to share the experience with their loved ones who were graduating. Given how positive the response has been, I see this as something we will provide for our students every year.”
The Voices of Those who have

Endured:
The Paradoxical Nature of Trauma in the Frontier West

Research and Article by Brittany Wienholz

As a recent graduate of the MSW Program at UW, I am a new inductee into the world of advocacy and best practice with vulnerable clients. As someone who lacks first-hand knowledge of the many traumas experienced by clients, I felt compelled to gain understanding of those who have endured, so to better attune and support them on their healing journeys. This lead me to my thesis research, *Journeys After Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Phenomenological Study in a Frontier Region*, which provided an exploratory analysis with the aim of increasing awareness, informed by survivors themselves. The findings expand light on this historically secretive topic, in the frontier where independence and strength are expected and crucial for survival.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a particularly virulent form of trauma affecting survivors’ overall well-beings. The prevalence of CSA is estimated to affect 11% of the global, and 10% of the U.S. population. Healing journeys have been described as complex and enduring; however, little research has explored the journeys of those living in the frontier west. Wyoming, with a population of .17 people per square mile, has the second lowest population density in the United States, and so presents a geographic context and culture uniquely its own. Social Workers, therefore, have an imperative to aide survivors in their healing journeys by becoming more aware of the effects of, and needs after, such trauma.

For my study, I interviewed 10 adults between the ages of 21-80, female and male, all living in the frontier west. The findings highlighted themes of dualism in the wake of trauma. The theme of connectedness (to others, a higher power, through parenting, mattering to others and society, and the use of sexual relationships) encompassed support, as well as struggle. Ongoing betrayal (by family, perpetrators, societal discrimination and “the system”) was also evident across stories. After losing control through exploitation, survivors also had a heightened need for control. The frontier west appeared paradoxical where safety and trust were inherent in small towns and solace was found in open spaces, while at the same time, the frontier contributed to issues with confidentiality, safety, isolation and lack of services.

*Brittany presenting her Thesis Project*
The most consistent advice offered to professionals, by participants in my study, was to listen to survivors’ stories and “don’t act like you know if you never experienced it.” Many urged for compassion without judgment, and requested professionals to “tell us we will be okay.” One participant advocated for professionals to refrain from “threatening” hospitalization when survivors discuss thoughts of self-harm, because it breached trust. In terms of protecting children, participants advocated for professionals to recognize the children who are fighting, isolating, are dirty, cheating in school, sexualized, or perfectionistic. In addition, another stated immediate removal of perpetrators from the child is paramount, as he did not receive this safety. Lastly, one participant urged, “You’re going to see a lot of crap, but don’t get hardened.”

“Healing doesn’t mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives.”

Unknown

As social workers we come to this field for a myriad of reasons, unified in our desire to impact lives for the better. We have our work cut out for us. And so, I leave us to ponder the words of Dr. George Brandon, who concluded the 2014 International Trauma Conference in Boston, Massachusetts: “It’s not the person who has stood and looked on who knows what [trauma] is; it is the person who has endured.” This concept reverberates through my mind as I approach my new work with survivors of trauma, recognizing their perspectives as expertise. Their stories of struggle and resilience reflect a society that begs for change and increased compassion from the individual to the political.

I have had the great pleasure and opportunity to carry out independent research this summer with a dynamic group of women who live in Denver Colorado. The Social Work Department at the University provided me with financial support to travel to Denver over the summer in addition to equipment needed to carry out recorded interviews and transcription.

The purpose of my research is to identify themes presented in print news regarding prostitution, in addition to the language used to describe the women and their particular life situations. The way in which the general public understands prostitution is highly influenced by the themes presented in media, and more specifically print news. These themes further influence laws, policies, and programs designed to address prostitution.

I am working under the direct supervision of Dr. Susan Dewey from the Gender and Women’s Studies Department and partnering with a program that provides housing, among other services, to women coming off of the street. This summer I was able to stay in Denver and volunteer at this facility. The women have been so gracious to allow me to spend time with them talking about their lives and experiences. I engage in activities with the women, such as group counseling sessions, volunteer experiences, and facilitated self-care activities, such as painting our nails and facials. In addition to my time with the women in the program, I also participated in outreach to women still working on the street. I personally assembled and handed out over 200 hygiene packs with items such as: toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, feminine products, condoms, etcetera.

Currently I am organizing information from over 250 news articles. I will continue to work with the women and carry out interviews once I am able to decipher the preliminary theme findings. I will continue to move through this project so that I may publish my results, with the support of my gracious funders and mentors.
The Division of Social Work is pleased to welcome

Amy Castro Baker, Ph.D.

as an Assistant Professor

Amy and her family have recently moved from New York, where Amy has completed her Ph.D. at Hunter College. Amy was recently published in Social Science and Medicine, for her article concerning mortgage strain among African-American homeowners.

Previously, Amy worked with the Honorable Marjorie Margolies and Women’s Campaign International to train women as political candidates in South Africa. Amy is looking forward to introducing her students to what she learned about media literacy and identifying how the public perception impacts agencies and clients in the field.

Amy is excited to be in Wyoming and is ready to immerse herself in local social issues. She feels that the University of Wyoming is the perfect place for her as it is a strong research university but is dedicated to giving back to the state. She believes that because the state has such a small population base, the students she teaches will have a chance to impact their communities and the state in a very real way.

In addition to the exciting opportunities that await Amy as a professor and researcher, she is thrilled to be close to the mountains, as she enjoys skiing, trail running, and climbing. She says she often hits the trails at sunrise before coming to class. She is also a fan of smart, well-written television such as the Daily Show with Jon Stewart, Mad Men, The Wire, Boardwalk Empire and all films by Ken Burns.

Amy is thrilled to be close to the mountains as she enjoys skiing, trail running, and climbing.

Social Work Stars
Shine at First Showcase Reception

Approximately 50 alumni, faculty, students, staff, College of Health Sciences colleagues, and community supporters helped to celebrate Social Work Month by attending the first Showcase Reception hosted by the Division of Social Work at the Hilton Garden Inn on March 8, 2014.
Kari Velzke, MSW

Brings International Focus to the Division of Social Work

The Division of Social Work is very pleased to have Assistant Lecturer Kari D. Velzke joining the Division at our UW-Casper location this year. Kari is joining us from the University of Stirling in Scotland, where she is currently a Ph.D. candidate. Kari has worked for a number of years as a Research Assistant in the Dementia Knowledge Exchange at the University of Stirling. She has also had the opportunity to teach in locations such as South Africa, England, and Scotland.

Kari is the Editor-In-Chief of the *International Journal of School Social Work*, an innovative, open-access online journal. She is also on the International Committee on School Social Work Collaborations, working to establish an international school social work credential. Kari also has a forthcoming publication in the *Nursing Older People Journal*, and she is expecting to submit several more publications over the coming year.

With her many qualifications, Kari chose the University of Wyoming as her home because of the lifestyle offered in the west, as well as our access to a plethora of outdoor activities. Kari enjoys a number of hobbies, including hiking, camping, canoeing, fishing, skiing, snowmobiling, dog sledding, and Muay Thai boxing, in addition to reading, painting, and playing the harp and the piano.

**Kari is joining us from the University of Stirling in Scotland, where she is currently a Ph.D. candidate . . . She has also had the opportunity to teach in locations such as South Africa, England, and Scotland.**

Attendees were able to enjoy the festive environment which featured an assortment of delicious foods and desserts placed next to lighted poster and video displays that showcased student and faculty initiatives. One attendee characterized the event as “New York City art gallery meets Wyoming’s High Western Plains.”

According to Division of Social Work Director Donna Leigh Bliss, “We didn’t know what to expect when we were planning the event, but were very pleased with how it turned out. Our faculty, staff, and students did a fabulous job making this event such a success.”

Watch highlights of our Showcase Reception: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymWF_K5BzaA
Publications & Presentations

Neely Mahapatra and Mona Schatz
*Domestic Violence: Prevalence Among South Asian Migrant Women.*

Valerie Thompson-Ebanks
*Disability Disclosure Among College Students with Psychiatric Disabilities in Professional Majors: Risks and Implications for Rural Communities.*
Accepted for publication in *Journal of Continuing Education.*

Neely Mahapatra, M. Faulkner, and Mona Schatz
Accepted for publication in *Critical Social Work.*

Kari Velzke
*Changing the Culture of Dementia Care: An Evaluation of Best Practice in Dementia Care Learning Programme Designed for Healthcare Assistants.*
Accepted for publication in *Nursing Older People.*

*Fragile Health and Fragile Wealth: Mortgage Strain Among African American Homeowners.*
Published in *Social Science & Medicine,* October 2014.

Donna Leigh Bliss, Edward Pecukonis, and Mary Snyder-Vogel
Published in *Human Services Organizations Management, Leadership & Governance,* January 2014.

Neely Mahapatra and Mona Schatz
*Local to Global: Social Networking Among Social Work/Health Sciences Students.*

Valerie Thompson-Ebanks and Deborah Valentine
You Can Help Support the Division of Social Work

Please accept my/our gift to the Division of Social Work in the amount of:

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- $250
- $500
- $1,000
- $2,000
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This gift is designated for:

- The Kay L. Cox Memorial Scholarship provides scholarship support, with preference to non-traditional social work students and/or students with financial need.
- The James Wiebler Memorial Fund for Excellence was established in 1996 in honor of James Wiebler Ph.D., first Director of the Division of Social Work, to promote social work education.
- The Lenore N. & Robert P. Palmer Social Work Scholarship was established in 2012 and provides scholarships to social work majors.
- The World is their Classroom was established in 2013 to support students in study abroad opportunities.
- Social Work Excellence Endowment, established to promote social work excellence in teaching and research endeavors as well as external educational opportunities.
- Gifts to the Division of Social Work support the program’s educational goals. Funds may be used to support students, faculty, and division programs.

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Phone: Call the University of Wyoming Foundations during business hours: (307) 766-6300 or (888) 831-7795

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Laramie, WY 82070

- Yes, please send me information about planned giving (wills, trusts, etc.).
- Yes, UW is named in my will.
- Yes, my company matches my gifts. I have included a form from my company.

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Thank you. Your gift is tax-deductible as provided by law.
March 7, 2015
2nd Annual
Showcase Reception
The Hilton Garden Inn
Laramie, Wyoming