



MSW Program at West Chester University

Embracing new approaches to social work practice

Research has pointed to new findings that affect how social workers learn in the classroom and practice in the field. Read on to see how the MSW Program is integrating this new knowledge into our teaching.

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Students raising awareness of childhood trauma's effect on health

*Field placements behind the
scenes of Chester County ACEs
Coalition*



Social work students at WCU are playing an instrumental role with a new organization that is spreading knowledge about the wide-ranging impact of childhood trauma.

*MSW student Wendy Myers and
BSW student Amanda Maylath. Photo
courtesy Home of the Sparrow.*

[Home of the Sparrow](#), an agency that serves women facing housing insecurity, launched the [Chester County ACEs Coalition](#) earlier this year. One of the coalition's goals is to spread awareness of pivotal scientific findings about [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#), referred to as ACEs.

Studies have found that people whose backgrounds include multiple ACEs are more likely to have certain illnesses and take part in risky behaviors. ACEs include traumas such as having a parent with a mental illness, witnessing domestic violence, and experiencing child abuse. Adults can answer 10 questions about

their childhoods to learn their [ACE Scores](#).

Wendy Myers, MSW '18, and Amanda Maylath, BSW '17, are working on the Chester County ACEs Coalition through their field placements at Home of the Sparrow. Among other duties, Myers set up its website and continues to enhance it. Maylath is conducting research and working on documents for the coalition's workshops.

"I find it interesting how the number you get on the ACE Score assessment can influence your outcomes," Maylath says.

Myers is fascinated by the research showing the continuing impact of childhood trauma. Even more important, she says, is research showing how people who experience ACEs can heal and become more resilient.

"Of course that type of continuous stress has an effect," Myers says. "We can address that in a complete, more compassionate way, as long as we have the right training."

The MSW Program is organizing a screening of [Paper Tigers](#), a documentary set at a high school where many students have experienced a host of ACEs. The screening is scheduled for the morning of Tuesday, Nov. 29. A panel discussion will follow.

Social Work Practice examinations will include simulated clinical scenarios

Pilot project to start this fall on campus in West Chester



Dr. Amber Holbrook

MSW students completing the first semester of field experience will have a new piece of their final evaluations this fall: A simulated session with a real person.

During the last two weeks of the fall semester, students taking Social Work Practice I at the campus in West Chester will engage in a 15-minute session with a WCU theatre major. The theatre students will be directed to act as a client in a scenario designed by MSW faculty. For



Dr. Julie Tennille

example, the "client" may be an individual in a hospital emergency room for a problem related to substance abuse.

Students will be able to choose the setting in which they will work with a client, but will not know about the simulated clients' backgrounds before the exam.

MSW students will also complete a reflection on the experience as part of the pilot project.

"We want them to demonstrate empathy," says Dr. Julie Tennille, MSW assistant professor. "We want them to be able to reinforce that the client has autonomy."

Dr. Amber Holbrook, another MSW assistant professor working on the pilot project, says it will give faculty a direct way to evaluate students' clinical skills.

"It's not only a way to assess their skills, but also an educational exercise," Holbrook says. "[The literature](#) says that students actually learn as they go through these scenarios."

The experience will also benefit the theatre majors who participate. Some theatre graduates work as standardized patients at medical schools, and taking part with the MSW Program project will help them prepare for those roles.

Faculty present at state social work conference

Three MSW faculty members presented this month at the National Association of Social Workers - Pennsylvania Chapter / Pennsylvania Association for Undergraduate Social Work Education [annual conference](#) in King of Prussia. Here are their presentation topics:

- Social Media & Social Movements (**Akbar, G.**, Ezell, A., & Mendez, N.)
 - Navigating Difficult Conversations at End of Life (**Gonzalez, A.**)
 - Mindfulness in Clinical Work (**Myers, M.**)
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