Hunter’s School of Social Work celebrates its 50th anniversary with exciting news. Thanks to the largest single gift ever made to CUNY, $40 million from the Community Trust, the School of Social Work is moving into a brand-new, environmentally friendly, tech-enhanced building in East Harlem.

The new building is scheduled to open in September 2011. The school will be renamed the Lois V. and Samuel J. Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College after the project’s benefactors, who also built and own the HCSSW current building at 79th Street. The new $135 million building will be located between 118th St. and 119th St. on Third Avenue. The N.Y. State Legislature provided an additional $80 million for construction.

Under the deal, the Silberman Fund is also establishing a $20 million social work grant program.

The state-of-the-art building will feature twice the current number of classrooms as well as research space. The new CUNY School of Public Health and the library at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO) will also relocate to the building.

School of Social Work Dean Jacqueline Mondros called the move “perfect for the school,” whose national prominence has risen along with its reputation for training top-flight social workers. The community will benefit from the presence of the school, Mondros said, while the school will benefit from Harlem.

“It’s a chance to live our mission,” Mondros added. “Social work is all about enhancing communities and the people in them. To have a community in which to work, that needs us and wants us, and which we need and want — it’s a synergistic moment. We’re very excited about it.”

Some 97 percent of the school’s students come from New York City, and most work in the city after graduation, Mondros said.

“We’re not ivory tower. We’re interested in being good neighbors and good partners.”

The new building will use natural light to enhance energy efficiency. Its facilities will surround an inner courtyard and include patios and gathering spaces. The ground floor will be designed to engage the community with sidewalk access, an art gallery, and an Internet café.

The new facility will allow the school to increase its current enrollment of 850 master’s students and 100 doctoral candidates.

“We are grateful to CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein whose leadership and support made this building possible. Moving to East Harlem will provide the school with a unique opportunity to expand our mission,” said Hunter President Jennifer J. Raab. “We are more than up for the challenge. As ‘the social work school for New York,’ we continue to provide city agencies and departments with outstanding practitioners, community leaders, and researchers.”
Message from the President

It is my pleasure to inform you about what is probably the most significant news in the 50 years of the Hunter College School of Social Work. Thanks to the largest single gift in CUNY history — $40 million from the Community Trust — construction will soon begin on our new home, a state-of-the-art building in East Harlem. The New York State legislature provided an additional $80 million, the largest infusion of public funding for Hunter since the addition of the East and West Buildings at the 68th Street campus in the mid-1980s.

Occupying the block between 118th St. and 119th St. on Third Avenue will allow us to expand our mission and be a force for change in the living laboratory of East Harlem, where we will establish partnerships with community-based social service providers to have a direct and immediate impact on the lives of the neighborhood’s residents. It will also enable us to address New York City’s health crises through an interdisciplinary alliance with CUNY’s new School of Public Health at Hunter, which will also be located in the building.

It is because of the legacy of our graduates that this project is possible. We want to thank all of you for continuing to care for the future of New York.

Jennifer J. Raab

Message from the Dean

This newsletter reflects Hunter’s exceptional legacy in social work education. Our past is represented by the retirement of Florence Vigilante, one of the school’s most admired teachers and clinical practitioners. The present is told in the stories of our new faculty members, and in the important contributions being made by our graduates Jared Bernstein at the White House and Marianne Schretzman in city government, and by the community organizing class of 1999, who continue to selflessly raise scholarship support in memory of Amy Watkins.

The promise of our future is expressed in our new state-of-the-art building in East Harlem, a result of the historical and ongoing generosity of the Silverman family and the New York Community Trust and the commitment of Hunter and CUNY to strengthen HCSSW as the premier school of social work.

As alumni, I know you join me in my admiration for our illustrious past, pride in the vibrancy of present faculty and students, and enthusiasm for living our future with agencies, organizations, and residents as we prepare to move to East Harlem.

Jacqueline B. Moadros

Biden Appoints Hunter Grad to Top Advisory Post in the White House

Vice President Joseph Biden has named Jared Bernstein (MSW ’86) as his chief economic advisor. Jared Bernstein is an acclaimed economist and a proven, passionate advocate for raising the voices of middle-class families, Biden said when making the announcement. “His expertise and background in a wide range of domestic and international economic policies will be an invaluable asset to the Obama-Biden Administration.”

“It’s an honor to have him on my team,” Biden added.

Bernstein, formerly of the Economic Policy Institute, is an expert in income disparity, low-wage labor markets, and poverty issues. During the Clinton Administration, from 1995 to 1996, he was deputy chief economist for the Department of Labor. Bernstein says he has great memories of Hunter: “Some of my most meaningful and lasting experiences came from the casework and group work I did,” Bernstein wrote in an email. “I vividly remember my first case, and while I fear I didn’t help [the client] much, I can absolutely assert that they helped me learn, firsthand, about the social and economic injustices they faced.

“This is a time for social workers, who always give so much,” he continued. “Just as you think you’ve given everything you have, you have to be more than you think you can be, and do more than you think you can do.”

Schretzman previously served as deputy commissioner for the Division of Policy and Planning at the Department of Homeless Services and as deputy assistant commissioner at the Administration for Children’s Services. She earned her doctorate in social welfare from the CUNY Graduate Center.
Young children, mothers, and pregnant women often don’t get the mental-health care they need, and that’s the primary focus of study for Mary Cavaleri. Cavaleri is working on developing community-based interventions to increase access to treatment and services.

“For young children, typically the caretaker is the gatekeeper for the receipt of services,” Cavaleri said, “When the caretaker has hit or one mental-health issue, it compounds the problem.”

Cavaleri earned an MSW and PhD at New York University. In addition to studying depression in new and expectant mothers, she has worked in clinical work with young children with behavior disorders.

It is estimated that 26 percent of children need mental-health services, including 60 percent of the children in low-income communities. Cavaleri said. She added that half of those younger never get treatment, and three-quarters drop out of treatment too early.

Stigmas, perceptions, and bad experiences in the realm of mental-health treatment are all problems, Cavaleri said.

Meet Our New Faculty

Professor Michael A. Lewis is an advocate for the poor and co-founder of the U.S. Basic Income Guarantee Network (USBIG), a cooperative of academics and activists that seeks to establish a minimum salary in order to ameliorate poverty. “The current welfare system is more concerned with enforcing work than helping the poor, and I think that’s bad,” Lewis said.

Lewis teaches social policy and has written about income-support policy, civic engagement, and social networks. He also works as a statistician for researchers. Lewis was formerly a community organizer as a statistician for researchers. He is a prominent member of the University of California-Berkeley. He feels so lucky to be at Hunter,” Giunta said. “What I love about the school is the rich diversity, experience, and talents brought by the students.”

Deborah L. Tolman is paving new ground in the study of gender and sexuality, bringing an exciting expertise to the doctoral faculty at the School of Social Work.

School of Social Work

The founding director of San Francisco’s Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality and former professor of sexuality studies at San Francisco State, Tolman will also teach courses in research methodology. Tolman calls sexuality the “elephant in the room” in relation to social work. “There isn’t a lot of elaborated work on sexuality in social work, but sexuality is an element of what every social worker comes in contact with,” Tolman said.

Mixing qualitative and quantitative research methods and devising effective ways to win grants are other areas of expertise Tolman brings to Hunter. “When doing research, methods are your tool. My goal is to expand the students’ tool box,” she said, “You’re only as good a researcher as the questions you can ask and answer.”

Tolman holds a doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard. Harvard’s Distinguished Doctoral Student Award about Sexuality (Harvard University Press, 2002) was awarded the 2003 Distinguished Book Award from the Association for Women in Psychology.

I feel so lucky to be at Hunter,” Giunta said. “What I love about the school is the rich diversity, experience, and talents brought by the students.” — Nancy Giunta

Assistant Professor Nancy Giunta brings an expertise in aging to Hunter. The study of the effects of long-term care often falls on family members, and that’s something that needs to focus on those caretakers who will need support, Giunta said. With the maturing of baby boomers, the number of U.S. seniors will probably more than double, from 30 million in 2000 to an estimated 75 million by 2030.

School of Social Work Goes Global

With projects and partnerships in Nigeria, Vietnam, and Puerto Rico — and development of a viral international protocol for use in national disasters and wars — the School of Social Work is taking its expertise overseas.

To address the critical needs of distressed children in Nigeria, Professor Darrell Wheeler, along with professor Willis Tollever and Antonio Young, is using a $250,000 grant from the American International Health Alliance to train Nigerian social workers in case management, leadership, and other skills needed for the care of orphans and vulnerable children.

The program hopes to expand the capacity of the Federal University of Social Work, Enugu, and the University of Nigeria to help children with HIV.


“The goal isn’t for the Americans to come in and say, ‘This is how you should do it,’” Wheeler said. “Our hope is that the partnership will build strength on both sides.”

Also involved in international projects is Professor Martha Bragin, who was one of 28 Nigerian officials on a project to help Nigerian officials on a project to help children from getting separated from the family at all costs, even when people are getting treated.

For instance, she said, police can be used to help Vietnam develop a social-work profession after the switch from communism to a market economy.

This impetus for her work, she said, came from Vietnamese officials who wanted to protect children from the economic transition.

Efforts are also underway at Hunter to develop a partnership with the University of Puerto Rico to collaborate on issues of disability and autism spectrum disorder.

“We will look for opportunities to engage in research and training between the two institutions, and hope for an exchange of scholars,” Professor Wheeler said.

Wheeler emphasized that the international initiatives are a logical step for Hunter. “I think it’s a reflection of the school’s commitment. The guidelines have been delivered to a large number of governmental and nongovernmental agencies, from UNICEF to local police organizations, that respond to national emergencies. At a conference to be held in Beijing in May, Bragin will present the guidelines and discuss how they should be taught to social workers.

“These are a standard of practice for the protection of small children,” Bragin said, adding, “It’s essential to keep children from getting separated from the family at all costs, even when people are getting treated with knives.”

“Dr. Martha Bragin (l) has traveled the world to help establish best practices in dealing with victims of armed conflict and other emergencies,” Bragin said. “Dr. Darrell Wheeler (r) enjoys visiting with Nigerian officials on a project to help the plight of orphans.”

EAP Founder Florence Vigilante Retires

H unter bid a hearty farewell to Dr. Florence Vigilante, who retired at age 81 after 42 years at the School of Social Work.

“Hunter has been a glorious experience for me,” said Vigilante, a casework professor. “I greatly enjoyed working and continually learning in an academic environment. And I made wonderful friends.”

Vigilante came to the school in 1967 as an admissions interviewer and soon became Director of Admissions. In 1983, she created the school’s Employee Assistance Program to provide free counseling for Hunter employees, their families and significant others. She was also the chairperson of the casework sequence, a post she held for 18 years. And Vigilante is the longtime senior editor of the Journal of Teaching in Social Work.

In retirement, Vigilante said she’s looking forward to having time to write about research and teaching. She also plans to travel and volunteer. She also plans to travel and volunteer the world to help establish best practices in dealing with victims of armed conflict and other emergencies.”

“I greatly enjoyed working and continually learning in an academic environment. And I made wonderful friends.” — Florence Vigilante
under the tutelage of their professor, Dr. Stephen Burghardt. “We expected to see her in class and instead we heard she was killed to death. We were in total shock,” said Chana Widawski, a founding member of the committee. “But we're social workers. We turn shock and anger into action, and that’s what we did.”

Burghardt said he told the group to start slowly. “They said, ‘No way’ and raised $25,000 that first year. The group has raised more than $90,000 for an annual community-organizing scholarship to Hunter, including two gifts totaling $20,000 from Yoko Ono. On March 24, the committee held a tenth-anniversary commemorative fund-raising event at Hunter.

Burghardt said the diverse people who've come out to support the committee represent a “belief about what our America can be.”

“It's a belief that, yes, our America can be about a multiracial, multicultural world,” Burghardt added. “This is what Amy stood for, the possibility of what our world can be.”

Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes, who committed the crime, called the murder “a great fit.”

“People didn’t get it. They do now, folks!” Mondros said at the Amy Watkins Scholarship Committee event.

Applications to Hunter's community organizing program are open up to April 1, from 103 applications last year to 180 this year — for 48 places. Hunter has the largest community-organizing program in the country, Mondros said.

Indeed, community organizers are that hard-to-define mix of social workers and activists, folks who believe that organization and action are needed to address society's ills.

“I'm a community organizer,” Mondros said. “When people used to ask my dad what I did, he'd say, ‘She makes trouble.’”

Marc Cheena (MSW ’78) is a recipient of the University of Pittsburgh's Institute of Politics Coleman Award for Excellence in Community Service. The Coleman Award recognizes community leaders for their contributions to the Western Pennsylvania region. Cheena has served as the director of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services for 10 years.

Bethany Jankunis (MSW ’99) has been named to City Hall Newspaper’s “Top 40 Under 40.”

The Next Generation of Political Leaders in New York City for 2008. Jankunis is the chief of staff for Assemblymember Deborah Glick. Jankunis received her law degree from Fordham University, where she was the Stein Public Interest Scholar.

Gary Parker (MSW ’00) is director of government and community affairs for New York University. He advocates on the city and state level for student aid and money for research and development projects.

Michael Meade (MSW ’05) is deputy chief of staff for State Senator Eric Schneiderman. Meade says he was always interested in social justice and community organizing, so working in education, transportation, and disability issues.

Jessica Silver (MSW ’05) is deputy director of constituent affairs and community service directors for Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. She works with community organizers to engage Manhattanites on such issues as housing, schools, and transit.

Jessie R. Bodine (MSW ’07) is the director of constituent services and policy for New York City Councilwoman Gale Brewer. Bodine helped with the effort to bar the bedbug epidemic in NYC. She is now helping Brewer work on rat control issues. Previously, Bodine interned for State Senator Liz Krueger.

Jhoom Kim (MSW ’08) works for State Senator Eric Schneiderman as a community liaison to the Upper West Side. Kim works on education, transportation, and disability issues.

Yurelapi Rivera (MSW ’08) serves as constituent services coordinator in State Senator Eric Schneiderman’s office, where she handles a large volume of case work.

Katrina Butler (MSW ’99) is a sentencing advocate for the Brooklyn Defender Services, a non-profit that provides indigent defense. She helps clients obtain services after they are arrested.

Micheal Meade (MSW ’09), Yurelapi Rivera (MSW ’08), and Jhoom Kim (MSW ’08) work for State Senator Eric Schneiderman, a Democrat representing the Upper West Side, West Harlem, Washington Heights, Inwood, Marble Hill, and Roscóway.

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City University of New York Matthew Goldstein, Chancellor

Hunter College Jennifer J. Rusk, President

Hunter College School of Social Work Jacqueline B. Mondros, Dean

The City University of New York

SSW Alums Pursue Careers in Government

2009: The Year of the Community Organizer

When Americans learned Barack Obama was once a community organizer in Chicago, many (including Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin) were confused. What’s a community organizer? This is a gnawing question for social workers. But Obama changed all that, said SSW Dean Jacqueline Mondros.

“People didn’t get it. They do now, folks!” Mondros said at the Amy Watkins Scholarship Committee event. Applications to Hunter's community organizing program are up 75 percent, this year — for 40 places. Hunter has the largest community-organizing program in the country, Mondros said.

Indeed, community organizers are that hard-to-define mix of social workers and activists, folks who believe that organization and action are needed to address society's ills.

“I’m a community organizer,” Mondros said. “When people used to ask my dad what I did, he'd say, ‘She makes trouble.’”

Students held a candlelight vigil on her street. Watkins' Hunter classmates were not holding a candlelight vigil on her street. Watkins, a Kansas native, was studying to get her MSW and working as a community organizer in Chicago, many (including Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin) were confused. What’s a community organizer? This is a gnawing question for social workers. But Obama changed all that, said SSW Dean Jacqueline Mondros.

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Hunter’s School of Social Work Top-Ranked Nationally

The Hunter School of Social Work was ranked in the Top 10 nationally in the Winter ’09 issue of the Journal of Social Work Education.

The rankings came soon after Hunter College was named No. 8 in the nation among “Best Value” public colleges for 2009, according to The Princeton Review and USA Today.

Hunter’s doctoral program in social work, offered in conjunction with the CUNY Graduate Center, was ranked fourth in the nation, while the MSW program was ranked seventh. The article graded graduate schools by selectivity — how many students apply, how many are selected, and how many of the selected students choose to attend that school. It also provided rankings based on publication rates and reputation.

“This is really good news,” said Dean Jacqueline Mondros. “It shows you how strong we are compared with other schools.”

For years, national rankings for schools of social work were based on opinions from deans and on other subjective markers. “It was a popularity contest without any basis of data,” Mondros said.

In the selectivity ranking, NYU’s MSW program came in 72nd; its PhD program, 31st. Columbia’s MSW program was ranked 89th; its PhD program, 19th.

The new benchmarks are part of an effort by the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work to create a more rigorous national assessment system.

Hunter’s PhD program admitted 30 percent of its applicants, and 87 percent of those accepted chose to attend Hunter. Along with the University of Iowa, this was the highest enrollment rate of any school. For MSWs, Hunter accepted 35 percent, with 67 percent of those students attending.

NATIONAL RANKINGS BY SELECTIVITY *

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