This fall, GSS celebrated the start of a new academic year with a graduation ceremony for the classes of 2020 and 2021.
8 Back to School

The GSS Classes of 2020 and 2021 came back to campus for their much-anticipated in-person graduation. Check out a gallery of our favorite moments.

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Dear GSS Community,

This year the Graduate School of Social Service (GSS) started the fall semester with a graduation celebration! On September 18, we welcomed back to campus the GSS classes of 2020 and 2021 for a long-overdue in-person graduation ceremony. I want to acknowledge how very proud I am of everyone’s ability to adapt quickly and efficiently to new modes of learning and connecting since March 2020—including two virtual diploma ceremonies. Nevertheless, we heard our students’ voices and desires to be with their classmates together in person to celebrate all they’ve accomplished.

It was a beautiful day for a campus ceremony and an absolute joy for me to welcome home graduates, family, and friends from the classes of 2020 and 2021. Congratulations to all our graduates, and as our student speaker Shaniqua Orr said so poignantly at the ceremony, you all are conquerors. In this magazine, we have shared snapshots of our gathering—plus so much more from our community.

I think it’s fair to say that this academic year is shaping up to be another unique experience in the history of GSS. As more and more students, faculty, and administrators make their way back to campus, it’s wonderful to experience the renewed energy and sense of community they bring with them. It is always our goal at GSS to make sure each of our students receives a personalized and special educational experience. I thank everyone who continues to support our mission to educate the social work leaders and changemakers of the future. As the Dean of GSS, it is always an honor and a privilege to witness our students transform into confident, compassionate, and skilled professionals. I’m especially proud and grateful that they have chosen Fordham to start their social work journeys.

Already there have been so many positive events and changes to mark our back-to-school experience. Nevertheless, we have not forgotten about the realities of our current context. Even with the monumental scientific strides in vaccinations, the Delta and other COVID-19 variants are a very real challenge for all of us. Fordham University is committed to the safety of everyone on campus, and is taking every precaution necessary to protect our community while providing the best educational experience possible. It is a delicate, but necessary, balance. Throughout the pandemic, the well-being of our students, faculty, and staff has been at the forefront of our decision-making and continues to be our main priority.

As the GSS community moves into the new academic year, we will continue to address together the challenges of the ongoing global pandemic and global awakening to the realities of racism and oppression. More than ever, our world needs social workers committed to creating a better future for us all.

We are excited to watch our students continue to thrive throughout this academic year, and thank all of our talented faculty who are guiding them through a transformative educational experience.

To our esteemed GSS alumni, we hope the images and stories in this magazine invoke a feeling of nostalgic pride and happiness—and a strong sense of optimism about the future.

With pride and appreciation,

Debra M. McPhee, Ph.D.
Dean
Fordham University
Graduate School of Social Service
Abigail Ross, Ph.D., assistant professor of social work, along with several members of the Graduate School of Social Service faculty and staff, were awarded nearly $1.9 million in federal funding in June from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as part of a project called PIPELINE for Youth Health (Prioritizing Integrated Care, Prevention and Equity: Leading Interprofessional NYC-Based Efforts for Youth Health).

The project aims to train social workers from diverse backgrounds to work with young people facing health and mental health issues. A full 60% of the funds will go toward supporting students at GSS.

PANDEMIC EXACERBATED HEALTH CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

“While we are not yet on the other side of COVID-19, we know that this pandemic—which is likely the largest public health crisis we will see in our lifetimes—has been nothing short of a collective trauma,” said Ross, who spearheaded the grant effort and is the principal investigator.

“It has disproportionately affected communities of color and has placed New York City’s youngest residents at risk of a host of adverse health and behavioral health outcomes. To mitigate these challenges, there is a dire need for a well-prepared behavioral health social work workforce equipped with skills in prevention, interprofessional practice, and health equity that mirrors the population most affected.”
ADDRESSING NEED FOR SOCIAL WORKERS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

The project, which is part of HRSA’s Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training Program for Professionals, sets out to address workforce shortages in social work and lack of diversity in the profession while equipping workers with skills designed to address the potential impact of adverse childhood experiences, said Debra McPhee, Ph.D., dean of the Graduate School of Social Service.

“The overarching goal of PIPELINE for Youth Health is to create a sustainable pipeline of racially and ethnically diverse behavioral health practitioners equipped with the skills needed to work effectively with youth,” said McPhee.

Each year, a total of 27 student fellows—26 MSW students and one doctoral candidate—will be supported with stipends to offset the cost of tuition while they participate in a specialized training program that prioritizes prevention, integrated care, and health equity for underserved young people. The project has been funded for five years; approximately 75% of the student fellowship slots are reserved for students of color.

The PIPELINE for Youth Health team is led by Ross and includes Binta Alleyne-Green, Ph.D., associate professor; Larry Farmer, Ph.D., associate professor; Janna Heyman, Ph.D., professor and Henry C. Ravazzin Chair; Christie Hunnicut, director of field education; Liz Matthews, Ph.D., assistant professor; Yvette Sealy, Ph.D., associate professor; Linda White-Ryan, Ph.D., associate dean of students; and Anne Williams-Isom, D.Min., professor and Dumpson Chair in Child Welfare.

Ross said the new training program will prioritize prevention, integrated care and interprofessional practice, and health equity in the youth behavioral health workforce. The program began this fall, with students participating in required coursework; a PIPELINE Integrative Seminar; and a special speaker series featuring innovations in prevention-oriented practice with children, youth, and their families.

“**There is a dire need for a well-prepared behavioral health social work workforce equipped with skills in prevention, interprofessional practice, and health equity that mirrors the population most affected.**”

ABIGAIL ROSS

“We were already facing a major shortage of youth behavioral health practitioners here in New York City even before COVID-19 emerged. The need is now greater than ever,” said Ross. “I am very excited to work with the PIPELINE for Youth Health team to develop and implement a specialized behavioral health training program that will greatly enhance the social work workforce dedicated to serving the children, youth, and families of New York City.”
Her Migrant Hub: A Resource by and for Women Asylum Seekers

Fordham faculty and students worked with women asylum seekers to design a new website that helps this vulnerable population gain access to health care services and other resources in New York City. Women can use the website to understand their rights in the U.S. and to find local medical practices that will accept them regardless of their immigration status—and they can do it all anonymously.

“The idea is to support women who are seeking asylum and to make their transition and waiting period more bearable and sustainable,” said Marciana L. Popescu, Ph.D., website co-founder and associate professor at GSS. “We want the ability to preserve confidentiality and anonymity for online visitors. This is extremely important because we’re dealing with a population that lives in fear.”

More than 79 million people are displaced worldwide, according to a 2020 report from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and more than half are women. Tens of thousands are in New York City alone. Few attempt to seek health care services in fear of deportation, and the pandemic has worsened the situation, especially for women asylum seekers, said Popescu.

Her Migrant Hub was built thanks to a $150,000 grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation. In addition to accessing resources on the site, asylum seekers can share best practices and meet women who have experienced similar struggles. The project began in January; the website was launched in late June in honor of World Refugee Day.
SHOWING THE EXPERTS WHAT’S MISSING

The website was developed by a team of about 20 people, including a Fordham graduate student and an alumnus. Because Her Migrant Hub was developed in conjunction with the target audience—the women asylum seekers themselves—it is unlike many resources developed by experts and scholars, said Popescu and Alonzo.

“They are teaching us what it means to be an asylum seeker, to live in NYC and not be able to get the services you need,” said Alonzo. “They are looking at the website and saying, ‘This is what we’re missing.’” Among them is Marthe Kiemde, 36, who fled political persecution in Burkina Faso with her husband while pregnant in 2016. She said that during their first four years in the U.S., they raised their newborn in New York City shelters, where they also received career training and got back on their feet.

“I know many immigrant women who are struggling right now. They don’t know where to go to get any services, especially in health care. They are afraid to go because they don’t have any papers. ... But this website is secure,” said Kiemde, who helped research immigration and childcare policies for Her Migrant Hub and now works as a hospital dietary associate. “With this program, we’re going to help many, many women.”

Another website collaborator is Vanessa Rosales-Linares, 40, an asylum seeker from Venezuela.

She said she was an anesthesiologist who fled her native country in 2017 with her husband and 8-year-old daughter after giving medical treatment to government protesters and fearing punishment from political leaders. Rosales-Linares said she now wants to help people who were once in her position.

“[The website has] good information because it’s from many people who have in the past had the same problems. They are telling their histories and teaching how to improve their situation for new immigrants,” said Rosales-Linares, a website designer for Her Migrant Hub and a nursing student at Lehman College.

‘A WINDOW INTO WHAT IS HAPPENING’

In addition to providing local health care resources, Her Migrant Hub simplifies the asylum-seeking process and describes an asylum seeker’s rights in New York City through text and graphics. It also provides an online forum where women asylum seekers and allies can share their experiences and read stories that help them feel less alone, said Popescu and Alonzo.

This fall, the website will launch several new features, including expanded translation services; a workshop webinar series designed and co-taught by women asylum seekers; and Her Migrant World, an educational page that takes a deeper look at global migration and the people at the center of it all.

“We hope that Her Migrant World will be a window into what is happening and why people take so many risks to come here and the reality on the ground,” Popescu said.

‘THIS FEELS LIKE HOME’

After project funding ends in December, Popescu said she is confident that her team will continue to make a difference in the lives of women asylum seekers across the city. Within their team, they have also found a home.

“We talk all the time. All our joys and sorrows started to be shared in the group, so the group provides support,” said Popescu, adding that they chat via WhatsApp. “At our second meeting or so when we first met, one of the women said, ‘This feels like home.’”
“We are indeed conquerors!”

On September 18, 2021, Fordham University welcomed back the Graduate School of Social Service classes of 2020 and 2021 for an in-person diploma ceremony, celebrated on Edwards Parade at the Rose Hill campus.

After two years of virtual graduation ceremonies, GSS was able to safely invite all the graduates back to enjoy their accomplishments alongside fellow classmates and colleagues.

A passionate speech from Class of 2021 graduate Shaniqua Orr set the tone for a long-awaited display of jubilance.

“Beginning March 2020, all of Fordham and the world experienced a traumatic life-changing event that affected us to our core,” Orr said. “Yet, in spite of all the many challenges we as a class experienced from start to finish, we are still here. We survived. We are indeed conquerors.”
Keep It Simple, but SIGNIFICANT!
Research Roundup
Sameena Azhar, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor Sameena Azhar published “Navigating Intersectional Stigma: Strategies for Coping Among Cisgender Women of Color” in Qualitative Health Research.

Jordan DeVylder, Ph.D.
Associate Professor Jordan DeVylder earned a Fulbright Fellowship for the spring ’22 semester. He will be affiliated with the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Medical Science.

Rahbel Rahman, Ph.D.

Lauri Goldkind, Ph.D.

Jenn Lilly, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor Jenn Lilly published “All Work and No Play: Indigenous Women ‘Pulling the Weight’ in Home Life” in the Social Service Review.

G. Lawrence Farmer, Ph.D.
Associate Professor G. Lawrence Farmer published “Instructional Interactions and Literacy: Supporting Classroom Instruction Through Teacher Social-Emotional Skill Development” in the Handbook of Research on Supporting Social and Emotional Development Through Literacy Education.

Laura Wernick, Ph.D.
Associate Professor Laura Wernick published “Influence of multicultural curriculum and role models on high school students’ willingness to intervene in anti-LGBTQ harassment” in the Children and Youth Service Review.

Elizabeth Matthews, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor Elizabeth Matthews is working alongside Principal Investigator (PI) and NYU Silver School of Social Work Professor Victoria Stanhope on a new project using Natural Language Processing to examine Collaborative Documentation.

Binta Alleyne-Green, Ph.D.
Associate Professor Binta Alleyne-Green was selected by the Council on Social Work Education to serve on the National Nominating Committee as a Graduate Faculty Representative.
Student & Alumni Spotlights

MSW student Mackenzie Lerario published a landmark study on acute stroke care in the *New England Journal of Medicine* titled “Prospective, Multicenter, Controlled Trial of Mobile Stroke Units.”

Additionally, this summer, alongside GSS Professor Tina Maschi, Ph.D., Lerario helped create, organize, and execute the first-ever Greenburgh Human Rights Pride Rally in Patriot Park, located in Greenburgh, N.Y.

The Hon. Richard M. Berman, a 1996 GSS graduate, recently wrote an article that asserts the importance of increased judicial involvement in supervised release programs to ensure the successful reentry of supervisees.

The article, titled “Federal Court Involvement in Supervised Release,” appeared in *The Regulatory Review*—a publication of the University of Pennsylvania’s regulatory program. It discussed “supervised release,” which the U.S. Sentencing Commission defines as a “unique type of post-confinement monitoring that is overseen by federal district courts with the assistance of federal probation officers.”

Doctoral student Tanzilya Oren earned the 2021 Community Partnership Action Award from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

The award, announced by the CSWE’s Commission for Diversity and Social & Economic Justice, honors the “contributions of schools and departments of social work and social work students (BSW, MSW, PhD/DSW) in advancing community partnership action.” It will be presented at the Carl A. Scott Memorial Lecture at this year’s Annual Program Meeting, which will take place from Nov. 4 to 7, 2021 in Orlando, FL.
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Fordham GSS

Opportunities to get involved!

GSS Black Alumni Caucus
The GSS Black Alumni Caucus is a virtual meeting for self-identified Black alumni of Fordham University’s Graduate School of Social Service (GSS). Fordham GSS is holding space for you to connect with other Black alumni and with GSS in order to create a relaxed and affirming environment for social support, educational activities, resource sharing, community building, and activism.

GSS Black Student Caucus
The GSS Black Student Caucus is a virtual meeting for self-identified Black students of Fordham University’s Graduate School of Social Service (GSS). Fordham GSS is holding space for you to connect with other Black students and with GSS in order to create a relaxed and affirming environment for social, support, mentorship, and activism activities.

GSS Students and Alumni Challenging Anti-Black Racism Caucus
The Students and Alumni Challenging Anti-Black Racism Caucus is focused on doing introspective work as students and alumni collectively challenge white supremacy.

Scan here to visit the events calendar and join us at our meetings!
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Fordham GSS

Opportunities to get involved!

Action Committee for Racial and Social Justice

A mechanism through which GSS community members can engage in coordinated efforts that promote antiracism using an intersectional lens and address social and economic injustice, specifically white supremacy within our own institutions as well as the larger social contexts of New York City, the United States, and globally.

Community Building Subcommittee

The Community Building Subcommittee, a subcommittee of the Action Committee for Racial and Social Justice, is made up of students, alumni, staff, and faculty who devise, plan, and implement activities that support GSS community building and antiracism.

Activism Subcommittee

The Activism Subcommittee, a subcommittee of the Action Committee for Racial and Social Justice, provides a mechanism through which GSS community members can engage in coordinated advocacy efforts that promote antiracism. We engage in these efforts using an intersectional lens and seek to address social injustice, specifically white supremacy, within our own institutions (GSS and Fordham University) as well as the larger social contexts of our surrounding city, state, and country.

The GSS Mission

The mission of the Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service is to educate students to promote human rights and social justice globally by advancing economic, political, social, physical, mental, spiritual, and educational well being.

These groups (as well as other DEI initiatives and groups at GSS) were created to provide a mechanism through which GSS community members can engage in coordinated efforts that promote antiracism using an intersectional lens and address social injustice, specifically white supremacy within our own institutions as well as the larger social contexts of New York City, the United States, and globally.

Scan here to visit the events calendar and join us at our meetings!
When Rina Goldstein, GSS ’21, graduated with her MSW in May 2021, her mind was elsewhere. As she heard her name read aloud, her thoughts rested on the safety of her family, her brothers, and her grandparents. A Jewish person in a time of rising antisemitism in America, Goldstein couldn’t help but fear for the ones she loved, and for herself.

This fear, Goldstein said, persists today—and she voiced her concerns to GSS.

“I have remained so silent for so long, not wanting to attract attention to my pain,” she wrote in an email to GSS administration. “I don’t know what the solution is, but ... I have always appreciated Fordham’s progressive stance on fighting injustice.”

GSS as an institution does not tolerate hate of any kind, and stands in solidarity against all forms of prejudice, oppression, and violence. We sat down with Goldstein to make sure her story is heard.

A LEARNED PERSPECTIVE

Growing up in New Jersey, Goldstein said she regularly faced discrimination due to her religious beliefs. She encountered slurs, threats, and harassment on several occasions.

“As a little kid, I wanted to believe people liked me,” Goldstein said, and added that her younger self also wanted to believe there was no religious bias involved.

On encountering microaggressions throughout childhood, Goldstein thought people may have had their own explanations for acting in such a way. “I’d think to myself, it’s justified, and I would come up with excuses for them.”

Goldstein saw her family as a group of loving, harmless people. But there were others around her who didn’t, and it became more apparent as time went on. She recalled a scene from childhood: A passing car fired paintballs at her family as they stood on a New Jersey street corner. The shooter’s motivation? Goldstein believes it had to do with her family’s traditional Jewish clothing.
“At first I laughed at someone shooting paintballs at us, and then it occurred to me once we were home—that was kind of dangerous,” she said. “We were little kids. I wondered why they’d do that.”

As she got older, these incidents appeared in a new light. Goldstein stopped making excuses for her tormentors and recognized targeted malice.

“Over the years it started occurring to me that these weren’t isolated incidents,” she said. “They weren’t coincidences. There was a reason these things would happen.”

A CONSTANT FEAR
For years, Goldstein saw her older relatives suffer from post-traumatic stress brought on by the Holocaust. Her great-grandmother would wake screaming in the night, and had cried about her childhood world being “wiped out.”

The hate Goldstein experienced in her own life blended with this secondhand trauma from her grandparents. Growing up, Goldstein feared the possibility of another Holocaust.

“I used to think to myself: Which of my friends could I rely on to save me? Which part of my house would I be able to hide in? Which one of my siblings would I save first?” she said. “These are the thoughts that played in my head.”

Goldstein said now she can’t open a social media app without facing some sort of antisemitic message.

“I see teens on TikTok making fun of Anne Frank,” she said. “I see them joking about ‘giving the Jews a shower.’”

The research supports that this isn’t an isolated experience. In an article titled “Addressing Anti-Semitism in Social Work Education,” GSS Professor Carole Cox, Ph.D., reported that a state-by-state survey in the U.S. found that nearly half of all respondents aged 18-35 had seen social media messages related to Holocaust-denial.

“Such denial is particularly troubling, as in itself, it spreads and justifies antisemitic beliefs, hate, and acts,” Cox wrote.
“Over the years it started occurring to me that these weren’t isolated incidents,” she said. “They weren’t coincidences. There was a reason these things would happen.”

—RINA GOLDSTEIN, GSS ’21

Goldstein sees stories on the news of violent hate crimes right outside her door, and it makes her act with extreme caution. She said she is not comfortable with the idea of her siblings wearing religious head coverings in New York.

“Because I see the looks they get,” she said.

A PERSISTING HISTORY
Cox details in her article the history of antisemitism dating back to the Old Testament. Her findings show anti-Semitic hate crimes in the US jumped 48% from 2016 to 2018. Additionally, a 2020 poll found 61% of Americans agreed with at least one antisemitic statement.

Goldstein said it’s this type of mistreatment that caused her to pursue an MSW degree. She wants to help others who experience inequities.

“I can never fully put myself in someone else’s experience, but I think I can visualize it a bit better having experienced discrimination of my own,” she said. “I can understand the fear for being different.”

ADVOCATING AGAINST HATE
Joseph M. McShane, S.J., president of Fordham, released a message to the University community in May denouncing the antisemitism and anti-Muslim acts taking place in our country. In the piece, Father McShane detailed the story of Joseph Borgen, a Jewish man attacked by protestors in Times Square.

“Violence inspired by antisemitism (as is apparently the case with Mr. Borgen), or because of any kind of racial or religious hatred, is especially appalling,” Father McShane wrote. “I know you all join me in opposing the violent actions of mobs inspired by the current conflict in Israel and Gaza, and in working toward a world in which justice and understanding prevails among the warring factions.”

Goldstein understands people will have differing opinions on foreign affairs. But when she sees a picture of a sign on the R train that says, “No Jews,” the situation has gone much further than a difference of opinion. She is asking the broader community to stand with her and oppose these acts of hate as we all work toward a more just and understanding future.
Upcoming Continuing Education!

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