



## MSW Program at West Chester University

### Fall 2015 Update

This fall the MSW Program welcomed two new assistant professors and more than 100 new students. We are thrilled to see how our students, alumni, faculty, and staff are empowering clients and advancing social justice in the Philadelphia area and beyond.

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**Ginneh Akbar,**  
**MSW, DSW, LSW**  
*Assistant Professor*



Dr. Akbar was recently hired as an assistant professor with the MSW Program. She has committed her social work practice to improving the welfare of children in metropolitan areas. She has provided clinical services in the areas of community mental health, child

welfare agencies, and early intervention / infant mental health. Akbar is experienced in using evidence-based, trauma-focused interventions with her clients, as well as assessing and advocating for the needs of children on the autism spectrum.

She received her MSW from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County and her DSW from the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include ethics in child welfare social work and organizational trauma in helping professions.

Akbar taught at the University of Pennsylvania and West Chester University before joining the MSW Program at WCU as a full-time faculty member.

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**Angela Lavery,**  
**MSW, PhD, LCSW, FT**  
*Assistant Professor*



Dr. Lavery is joining the MSW Program this year as an assistant professor. She has worked as a licensed clinical social worker in a variety of settings, including hospices, senior centers, and correctional facilities. She has also worked with survivors of crime. Before pursuing her doctorate, she was the assistant director of the Wyoming Geriatric Education Center.

She earned her MSW at the University of Wyoming and her PhD at the University of Denver. Her academic and research interests include gerontology, end-of-life care, elder abuse and neglect, grief and bereavement, aging in place, and older adults' housing needs.

Lavery is a fellow in thanatology -- the study of death, dying, grief, and bereavement -- through the Association for Death Education and Counseling.

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## **Teaching award shared with MSW students**

This year Dr. Nadine Bean received WCU's Lindback Distinguished Teaching Award, which recognizes faculty who make a strong impact on their students' knowledge. The other faculty in the MSW Program nominated her for the

award.

All students in the MSW Program benefit from Bean's dedication to teaching cutting-edge social work theory practice. Four students also got a boost from a share of the stipend Bean received as part of the Lindback Award.

"I am and always have been inspired by the dedication and depth of experiences -- life, work, and school -- that our students bring to the program," Bean says. "I am also very passionate about supporting students who are in integrated health placements -- behavioral health and primary care."

She shared the award with these students:



**John Grove, MSW '16:** Grove decided to earn an MSW after working in television for several years. "It dawned on me that something was missing in my life," he says. "I realized that to truly grasp personal happiness, I had to try to focus on helping others. Now Grove is completing a field placement at [Project H.O.P.E.](#), which serves the homeless in Camden County, New Jersey. He is a student at WCU's

campus in West Chester.

**Stephanie Owens, MSW '16:** Owens has worked with children and youth throughout her career and is earning an MSW to expand her opportunities in that field. She attends classes at WCU's Philadelphia campus. Her field placement is at the [Hall-Mercer Community Behavioral Health Center](#) in Center City, where she provides psychotherapy, co-facilitates groups, and teaches life skills. Owens plans to be a therapist for children, youth, and young adults after she graduates.



**Asha Sahijwani, MSW '16:** Sahijwani works with children in foster care as part of her field placement at the [TLC Clinic](#), which is part of the Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital. "The spirit of service and giving has been passed down through generations in my family," says Sahijwani, an MSW student at WCU's campus in West Chester.

"Becoming a social worker was a very natural choice

for me." She also teaches yoga and hopes to integrate yoga into her practice.

**Tiffany Samuels-Lewis, MSW '17:** Samuels-Lewis works for Philadelphia's [Department of Human Services](#), serving as a liaison between the department and the schools attended by children in DHS care. She has an MBA in Health Administration from Eastern University and is working toward an MSW at WCU's Philadelphia campus. She says an MSW will help her in her work with DHS. "Hopefully, I can touch someone, like Dr. Bean has, in my career," Samuels-Lewis says.



## Alum spreads awareness of student veteran experience

Tyler Norris, MSW '15, earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at WCU after serving five years in the U.S. Marine Corps. As a student veteran and while completing an MSW field placement at the Coatesville Veterans Affairs Medical Center, he noticed a disconnect between the veteran experience and civilians' understanding of it. Conversations with other student veterans showed the challenges of transitioning to college after the camaraderie of the military.

"They've come out of this experience into ambiguity, and they're trying to find themselves again, much like a high school graduate would," says Norris, who is now a mobile therapist for Holcomb Behavioral Health Systems.

Norris developed a Veterans Cultural Awareness Training and worked with the WCU Veterans Center to present it in November at the Twardowski Career Development Center. He and other student veterans shared their experiences and guidance on interacting with those who have served:

- Ask veterans about their experience. Be ready for them to share as they prefer.
- Call veterans servicemen or servicewomen, not soldiers. Someone who served in the Army or National Guard is a soldier.
- Avoid asking about anything that could be related to another person's injury or death.

Plans call for more presentations in the future. Contact the [WCU Veterans](#)

## Recent faculty publications

- **Chen, W-Y.**, Propp, J., & Lee, Y. (2015). [Connection Between Adolescent's Exposure to Community Violence and Future Civic Engagement Behaviors During Their Young Adulthood](#). *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 32(1), 45-55.
- Anyikwa, V.A., **Chiarelli-Helminiak, C.M.**, Hodge, D.M., & Wells-Wilbon, R. (2015). [Women Empowering Women](#). *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51(4), 723-737.
- **Holbrook, A.M.**, & Nguyen, V.H. (2015). [Medication-Assisted Treatment for Pregnant Women: A Systematic Review of the Evidence and Implications for Social Work Practice](#). *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 6(1), 1-19.
- **Holbrook, A.M.** (2015). [Methadone versus buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid use in pregnancy: science and stigma](#). *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 41(5), 371-373.
- Lewis, T.O. (2015). [LGBT-Affirming Black Churches' Responses to the HIV/AIDS Crisis](#). *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 34(2), 140-157.

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