

West Chester University honors a history of social justice trailblazing  
at its new urban campus



## Social Work Education at West Chester University

### A Legacy of Social Justice

West Chester University, a nationally acclaimed public institution, is preparing for the first BSW and MSW students to graduate from its new urban campus in Center City Philadelphia. Following a long history of action for social justice, WCU's social work programs opened at the Philadelphia campus in 2013 and 2014. All students in these two programs are trained in evidence-based practice to work collaboratively with individuals, families, and communities, to secure fair and equitable access to resources, opportunities, and community.



**Mildred 'Mit' Joyner,**  
**MSW, LCSW, BCD**

[Blazing the trail](#)



**Darla Spence Coffey,**  
**MSW, PhD**

[Ensuring excellence](#)



**Ann A. Abbott,**  
**MSS, PhD, LCSW**

[Learn more](#)



**Mildred 'Mit' Joyner,  
MSW, LCSW, BCD**  
*Blazing the trail*

A national leader who believes in the centrality of social and economic justice, Mildred 'Mit' Joyner embodies the qualities that distinguish social work education at West Chester University.

Joyner led the university's BSW Program for a quarter-century, starting in 1981. During that time she served as president of the Council on Social Work Education and president of the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors, along with numerous other professional leadership posts. She developed such a reputation as a leader in gerontology that the Association for Gerontology Education in Social Work created a scholarship in her name. Joyner's accomplishments earned her a [Social Work Pioneer](#) designation from the National Association of Social Workers.

She led the process of launching West Chester's MSW Program in response to students' interest in earning master's degrees at an affordable public university. The program graduated its first class of 18 in 1999. As the first MSW program at one of Pennsylvania's 14 state-owned universities, it opened opportunity for graduate-level education to a wide range of students.

Now retired from WCU, Joyner is vice president of NASW. She says the university's strongest asset has been its faculty who are active in major social work organizations while remaining committed to educating future practitioners.

"West Chester has always been at the forefront," Joyner says. "It's nationally known among social workers and in social work education."

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**Darla Spence Coffey,**



## MSW, PhD

### *Ensuring excellence*

As president of the [Council on Social Work Education](#), Darla Spence Coffey plays a role in shaping social work programs across the United States. West Chester University was where she began to flourish as a social work educator and university administrator.

"The thing that's wonderful about West Chester and schools like it is that it's unapologetically and decisively preparing practitioners," Coffey says.

She began teaching in the university's BSW program while finishing her PhD and was hired full-time in the MSW Program in 1998, as it was seeking initial accreditation. After the program became fully accredited, Coffey returned to the BSW program before serving as the university's associate provost and dean of graduate studies. Coffey took over the helm of CSWE in 2012.

She says one aspect that distinguishes WCU's social work programs is their focus on social justice and diversity. This is evident in the program's expansion to Center City Philadelphia, which made a reasonably priced social work education accessible to a broader range of populations. All types of diversity must be represented among social workers -- students and faculty -- who serve diverse groups of clients, Coffey says.

"It matters who stands in front of the classroom. It matters who the students' mentors are," she says. "For too long, I don't think we've paid sufficient attention to the fact that there's a divide between the provider class and the client class."



## Ann A. Abbott, MSS, PhD, LCSW

### *Propelling growth*

Ann A. Abbott came to WCU in 2001 from a post as associate dean in the School of Social Work at Rutgers University. WCU had recently been accredited by the Council on Social Work Education and it had a small MSW program, with six full-time faculty. Some classes had as few as two students.

When she retired in 2013 after a dozen years as director of the MSW Program, it had 16 faculty and about 170 students on two campuses. The best recruitment tool, she says, was word of mouth about the program's quality and orientation.

"We focus on the importance of social action and social justice," Abbott says.

Abbott is a nationally recognized expert on substance abuse, mental health, risk management, malpractice, and social work values and ethics. She served as president of NASW from 1993 to 1995. The association later recognized her as a [Social Work Pioneer](#).

She says WCU makes a true effort to accommodate the needs of students who balance graduate education with work and family obligations, increasing the diversity of those who are able to earn an MSW degree. The university's campus in Philadelphia is one example of this outreach.

The social work programs at WCU continue to be on the leading edge. Our nationally-recognized faculty contribute to the body of knowledge with research that propels conversations on issues of vital importance to society.

## **Greg Tully, MSW, PhD**

### *Moving group work forward*

Group work is an established concept in social work, and it's being applied in new ways all over the world.



Students, faculty, and field instructors West Chester University's social work programs have access to the latest knowledge on this mode of practice through Greg Tully, president of the [International Association for Social Work with Groups](#) and a faculty member in the BSW Program.

In his leadership role, Tully has collaborated with social workers in countries such as Lithuania, China, Germany and Australia, and South Africa. He says new technologies, particularly social media, have created innovative ways to practice group work. For example, women in India are forming groups as a support for launching small businesses. In the United States, the Affordable Care Act has led to community agencies starting groups about health care delivery.

"More and more agencies are aware that group work is an effective method, and it's clearly cost-effective," Tully says.

His [latest research focus](#) is the role that faculty field liaisons play in ensuring that social work students are trained in group work. His next step is to conduct a nationwide study on the topic.

"Group work is a very important practice method," Tully says. "A social work student needs to fully understand how to facilitate a group and what it's like to be part of a group."

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## **Nadine Bean, MSSA, PhD, LCSW**

*Excellence in teaching*



The MSW Program at West Chester University is grounded in the principles of recovery, resiliency, and capacity-building. Nadine Bean is the faculty member primarily responsible for infusing these concepts throughout the MSW curriculum. She collaborated with other faculty to revamp syllabi for required courses, along with creating the elective courses Social Work in Disasters and Social Work with Veterans and Military Families.

Bean's efforts have earned her awards including WCU's Lindback Distinguished Teaching Award and the SAGE/CSWE Award for Innovative Teaching in Social Work Education.

Bean practices contemporary practice methods in her volunteer work as co-captain of Disaster Mental Health services for the American Red Cross in eastern Pennsylvania. She also works with post-9/11 service members,

veterans, and their families on a pro bono basis through [The Soldiers Project](#).

"I vowed I would never be a social work professor who had never seen a client in 25 or 30 years," Bean says. "I'm always inspired by what people have survived and, in some cases, have grown as a result of."

A year ago Bean was a lead organizer of a symposium called [Crossing the Boundaries of Health Disciplines: Promoting Recovery and Resiliency](#). The next step is to work toward establishing a Center on Integrated Health, Recovery and Resiliency at WCU.

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## **Tiffany Lane, MSW, PhD**

### *Empowering vulnerable youth*



One of a social worker's duties is to empower those who belong to historically vulnerable and underserved populations. With this task in mind, Tiffany Lane noticed a lack of data on African-American youth who have aged out of the foster care system. Her research focuses on the post-secondary educational paths of African-American youth who have aged out of the foster care system.

Lane, faculty member in the BSW Program at West Chester University, notes the resilience she's seen in the young adults she has studied, despite past traumas such as emotional and physical abuse. Many of these students went on to college to improve and take control of their lives.

"They were still able to thrive despite their past tribulations," Lane says.

She is continuing her research on this population and hopes to expand her scope to include students of all races who have aged out of foster care. [Most recently](#), she collaborated on a study of African-American youth who aged out of foster care and chose to attend a historically Black university. This study pointed to the need for colleges to have specific programs for students who formerly were in foster care, such as support groups and year-round housing.

"It's a social injustice to ignore the challenges that these youth face," Lane says.



Her service at WCU also focuses on empowering diverse populations. She is President of the [Frederick Douglass Society](#), an organization that is oriented toward self-help and -improvement by providing a collective voice in university affairs.

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## Julie Tennille, MSW, PhD, LSW

### *Intimacy's role in recovery*



Julie Tennille, faculty member in the MSW Program at West Chester University, began her career as a social worker with clients who had HIV and mental illness. This experience showed her that many social workers lacked comfort when it came to talking with clients about sexuality and intimacy. Overlooking these subjects ignores a substantial part of daily life for people with and without mental health conditions.

"This is the final frontier of the recovery movement," she says. "You can't really talk about people's recovery without talking about their intimate relationships."

Tennille is assisting the [Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities](#) on a toolkit for social service providers at multiple levels. It will include resources on how to address sexuality and intimacy with clients and how to create inclusive policies for agencies that serve clients with serious mental health conditions.

At its core, she says, this topic is about seeing clients as having a full life beyond a diagnosis of mental illness. In [her research](#), Tennille has found that providers commonly assume clients are asexual, heterosexual, or too emotionally fragile to date. Social workers who ask clients about this topic -- without first drawing their own conclusions -- often learn that clients are in intimate relationships or would like to be.

"If we're the major providers of behavioral health services, then we'd better be good at this," Tennille says. "It could really have a positive impact on the lives of the people that we serve."

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## Casey Bohrman, MSW, PhD

## *Police and community relations*

In Casey Bohrman's view, the nationwide outrage over unarmed African-Americans dying in police custody can largely be attributed to the human tendency to judge others without thinking.



One of Bohrman's research interests is how police relate to people who have mental illnesses and substance use disorders, particularly how officers decide how to interact with the public. Research for her [doctoral dissertation](#) found that police in Philadelphia were more compassionate toward aggressive people they perceived as having a mental illness than toward people they assumed were using substances -- even if they displayed similar behaviors.

"You have these snap judgments," says Bohrman, faculty member in West Chester University's BSW Program. "You have a real fear of your life, and all these implicit biases that are particularly exacerbated in police matters because they're seeing people at their worst."

Her overall aim is to understand why certain groups, such as African-Americans and people with mental illnesses, are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, and how that can be remedied.

"It creates a range of social problems that social service providers have to deal with," she says.

Bohrman spreads the word about these issues, along with many other social-justice matters, on her [Twitter account](#). She also encourages her students to use Twitter as a tool for advocacy.

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## **Terrence O. Lewis,** **MSW, PhD, LICSW** *Embracing identities*

Many people think belonging to a religious community and identifying with an LGBTQIA community are mutually exclusive. But Terrence O. Lewis, faculty member in West Chester University's MSW Program, stresses that this isn't always the case. Numerous religious denominations welcome those who are LGBTQIA.





People of all sexual orientations and gender identities, and all races, consider themselves spiritual or religious.

[Lewis' research](#) focuses on LGBT relations with predominantly Black churches, which have historically been safe havens for African-Americans. He found Black churches whose leaders allied themselves with the LGBTQIA community lost congregants who believed in traditional ideas. This is particularly important because HIV disproportionately affects African-Americans and sexual minorities.

"Religion and spirituality can either promote health and promote healing, or it can be detrimental," Lewis says.

He says providers must ask clients more questions about their religious and spiritual beliefs and how these can spur recovery.

"We talk a lot about the context of the person and environment," Lewis says. "We need to start calling it a bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment."

As part of his work with the Council on Social Work Education's [Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression](#), Lewis is contributing to a clearinghouse on the best practices for mental health with LGBTQIA clients. The idea is for service providers and researchers to have one place to find the latest resources.