



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
GRACE ABBOTT SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

# GASSW ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022

**BEST**  
GRAD SCHOOLS

**U.S. News** & WORLD REPORT

SOCIAL WORK

2019

**ENGAGED, DIVERSE,  
READY FOR SERVICE.**



# In Loving Memory



## **KERRY BELDIN**

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**1973 - 2022**

Kerry was born Thursday, March 29, 1973 in Columbus, Nebraska. She spent her early years in Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas, and ultimately returned to Nebraska where she received her B.A. in Psychology from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UNL) and her MSW degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), and her doctorate in Social Welfare from Case Western Reserve University.

Kerry served as Associate Professor, Graduate Program Chair, and Interim Director for Grace Abbott School of Social Work (GASSW). UNO honored Kerry's passion for excellence with the Alumni Outstanding Teaching Award in May of 2016 and the Chancellor's Medal in May of 2019 – the highest award bestowed on a faculty member.

If you too, wish to honor the life of Kerry Beldin, watch a movie with Christopher Walken in it, listen to some Barry Manilow, post a sloth meme, or hug a pug....one-eyed or otherwise.

# GASSW FACULTY AND STAFF

## LEADERSHIP

Henry D'Souza, Interim Director

Ellen Rice, Assistant Director

## ACADEMIC ADVISORS

Natalie Floreani, MSW Advisor

Patty Fugitt, BSSW and Pre-SOWK Advisor

## STAFF

Sonia Carbonell, Student Services Administrator

Brian Meints, Office Administrator

## GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

Avery Fleck, Graduate Assistant to the Director

Sueretta Fry, Graduate Assistant to the Program Chair

## GRACE ABBOTT TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

### ACADEMY (GATSA)

Michelle Nelsen, Program and Projects Coordinator

Anurag (Anu) Panithi, GATSA student worker

Susan Reay, GATSA Associate

Katie Robbins-Case, GATSA Associate

## PRACTICUM OFFICE

Theori Kenny, Practicum Specialist

Konnie Kirchner, Practicum Coordinator

Alisha Olson, Senior Practicum Specialist

Katie Robbins-Case, Practicum Specialist

## FACULTY

Aaron Banman, Assistant Professor

Kersten Borer, Instructor

Deborah Circo, Assistant Professor

Sandy Cook-Fong, Assistant Professor

Jeanette Harder, Professor

Liam Heerten-Rodriguez, Assistant Professor

Nancy Kelley, Professor

Susan Reay, Assistant Professor

Lequisha Sims, Instructor

Lisa Smith, Assistant Professor

Emily Soener, Instructor

Peter Szto, Professor

Ciara Warden, Lecturer

Yiwei Zhang, Assistant Professor

## HAIL AND FAREWELL

- May 2021 – Jeff Knapp leaves
- January 2021 - Emily Soener joins as instructor
- August 2021 – Kersten Borer joins as instructor
- January 2022 – Patty Fugitt joins as undergraduate academic advisor
- April 2022 – Anurag (Anu) Panithi joins as GATSA student worker
- May 2022 – Jeanette Harder retires
- May 2022 – Avery Fleck graduates
- May 2022 – Sueretta Fry graduates
- August 2022 – Laurel Sariscsany will join as assistant professor
- August 2022 – Von Nebbitt will join as the director

# STUDENTS BY THE NUMBERS

## Students by Degree

**21** MSW/MPA    **528** MSW    **20** MSW/MSCRCJ

**232**

First generation students

**46**

Students were awarded scholarships totaling \$57,000.

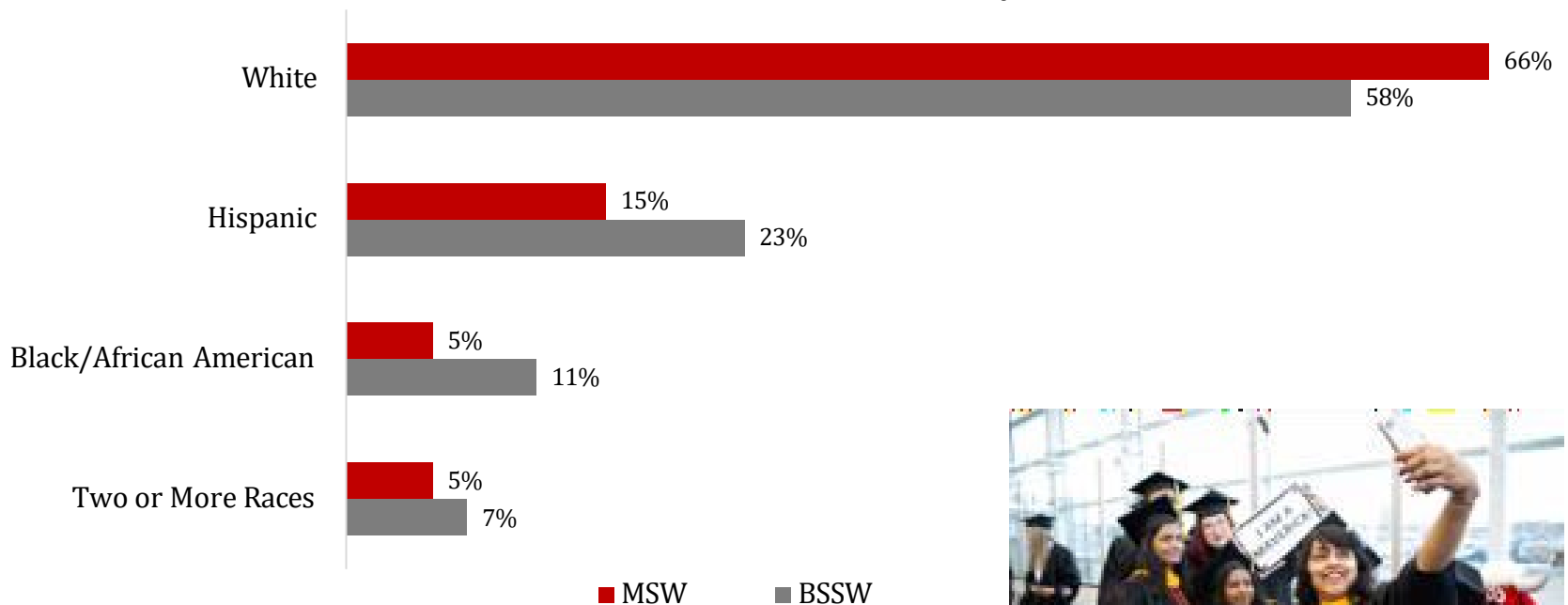
**16** BSSW and **28** MSW students graduated in Fall 2021.

**11%** of enrolled BSSW and MSW students identified as male  
**89%** of students identified as female.

## Student Enrollment



## Student-Identified Ethnicity

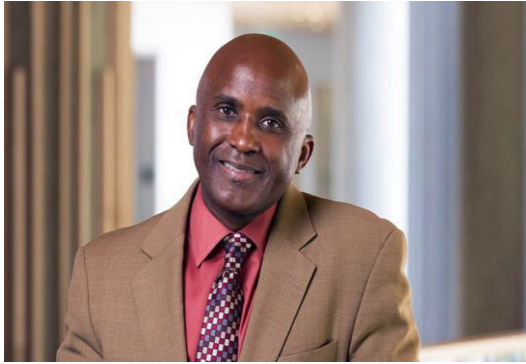


Racial/Ethnic distribution of the students by program for the 2021-2022 year.



# SEARCHES

## Director



**Von Nebbitt, Ph.D.**

The Grace Abbott School of Social Work is pleased to announce Von Nebbitt, Ph.D., will join the school as director on July 01, 2022. Dr. Nebbitt earned his doctorate in social work from Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri and is currently an associate professor there.

In his academic career, Dr. Nebbitt has held leadership positions at Howard University in Washington, DC, Jane Addams College of Social Work in the University of Illinois, Chicago, Illinois, and Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis. He has developed curricula with rigorous research components, collaborated with community partners and government organizations, and secured grants for a variety of projects.

Dr. Nebbitt brings extensive experience working with youth in the juvenile justice system and studying the impact of public housing on youth and families. As a scholar Dr. Nebbitt has an outstanding research and publication record in the areas of community and administrative practice, human behavior and the social environment, and community health and urban development.

GASSW faculty and staff are excited for Dr. Nebbitt to lead their school with a commitment to the students, social justice, community engagement, and research. We are grateful to Dr. Henry D'Souza for stepping in as Interim Director during this transition.



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## Assistant Professor



**Laurel Sariscsany, Ph.D.**

GASSW is delighted to announce Dr. Laurel Sariscsany will join the faculty as an assistant professor on August 15, 2022. Dr. Sariscsany is an UNO alumna and earned her BSSW from GASSW. Dr. Sariscsany earned her Ph.D. in social work from Columbia University, and worked as a policy analyst at OpenSky Policy Institute in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Dr. Sariscsany's research interests include child poverty and earned income tax credits and its impacts. She has conducted research on gender inequality on wealth and income and has provided expert testimony for the Nebraska's unicameral on these issues.

Since 2018, Grace Abbott School of Social Work's (GASSW) continuing education program has provided quality continuing education and professional development opportunities to social workers and licensed mental health professionals. The program has grown steadily with unprecedented enrollment numbers and increased opportunities for community engagement and workforce development. In 2021 and the early 2022, over **3,200 professionals** enrolled in trainings offered by the program. Nearly **9,000 hours** of continuing education for social workers and the behavioral health workers in Nebraska were issued.



With this tremendous growth, GASSW recognized the community and professional workforce needed more than just trainings, and in January 2022, the continuing education program became: **Grace Abbott Training and Supervision Academy (GATSA)**.

Services were expanded and a multi-faceted approach was developed to include training, supervision, and other knowledge acquisition strategies to improve practice outcomes for youth, families, and communities.

GATSA engages subject matter experts from diverse backgrounds and professions within the NU system and throughout the community to support training and collaboration and strengthen partnerships with key community and university stakeholders on workforce development issues with the goal of improving behavioral health service delivery in Nebraska and beyond.

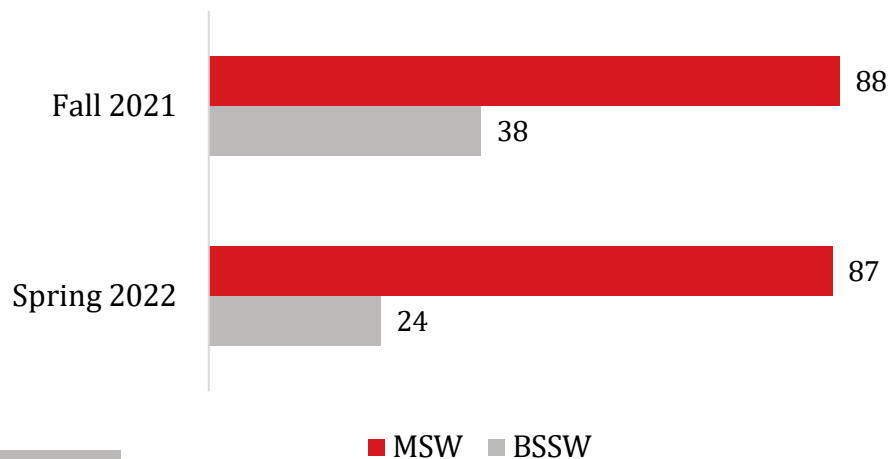




# PRACTICUM



## Students Enrolled in Practicum by Semester



The GASSW practicum office held a virtual practicum fair using the Wonder platform in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022.

During the Fall 2021 fair, **27 agencies** participated, and **25 students** attended. During the Spring 2022 fair, **35 agencies** participated, and **113 students** attended.

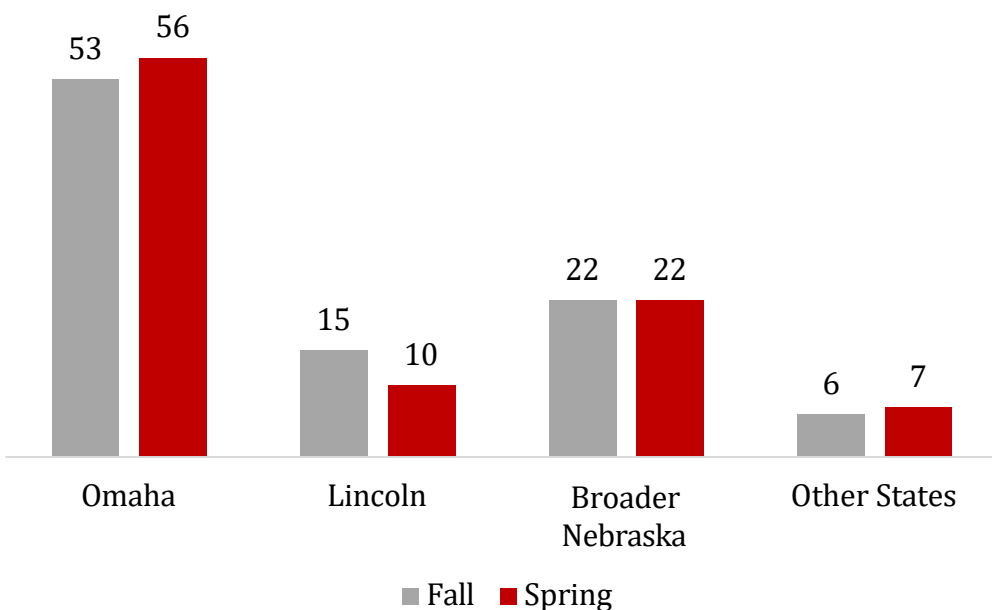
### Practicum Placement

- **Fall 2021:** 135 practicum students (38 BSSW, 97 UNO MSW) were placed in **96** different agencies
- **Spring 2022:** 119 practicum students (24 BSSW, 95 UNO MSW) were placed in **95** different agencies



GASSW Practicum Staff (L-R) Konnie Kirchner, Alisha Olson, Katie Robbins Case, and Theori Kenny.

## Community Partners



# STEPS

**Support and Training for the Evaluation of Programs (STEPS)** is a university-based program evaluation center of the Grace Abbott School of Social Work, with offices located in the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center (CEC). Established in 2011 by GASSW professor Dr. Jeanette Harder, STEPs currently engages nearly **20** graduate students, staff, faculty, and alumni to lead and conduct evaluations and needs assessments across Nebraska.



STEPS has dedicated staff who partner with the **NE DHHS Drug Overdose Prevention** program in assessing pathways to treatment, the needs of first responders, and coroners' practices of screening and reporting on drug overdose deaths and assisting the state in optimizing their collection and use of drug overdose data.



STEPS continues its work with **NE DHHS Rape Prevention and Education** program as well as many nonprofit organizations in Omaha and across the state such as **Child Saving Institute, Catholic Charities, Completely KIDS, and Heartland Family Service.**

STEPS also partners with programs at UNO including **Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI), Inclusive Communities and Omaha Girls Rock.**



# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Nancy Ehlers

I am nominating Nancy because of her care for other students and her persistence for social work values and professionalism. Nancy's thoughtful responses in-class and her attention to detail in her assignments make her an ideal candidate for the student spotlight. She is persistent in her ability to learn, listen, and grow as a student. Nancy pays attention to the needs of other students in class and offers support. Nancy is thoughtful and direct in her interactions with others. Nancy is an excellent student with great interpersonal skills. I'm excited for her to absorb as much information as possible at GASSW and see where it takes her in her social work career.

Susan Reay, Ed.D.  
GASSW Assistant Professor

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Kit Dawdy

Kit is regularly engaged in class, and they ask very thoughtful questions of me as the instructor and the various speakers we have had this semester. Kit does a great job of exemplifying empathy, they are extremely respectful of others and others' opinions, and they are mindful of the words they choose. Kit also displays excellent written work, which is imperative in social work practice. They are also interested in continuous self-improvement to be an effective practitioner in the future.

Kersten Borer, MSW  
GASSW Instructor

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Alecia Keller

I nominate Alecia Keller for the Student Spotlight Award because of their high motivation for going above and beyond learning expectations. They are an Honor's student and are expanding their course project from HBSE I for their Honor's Project. They are expanding that project even further to submit a FUSE grant, which if received, will involve a qualitative study of homeless youth who identify as LGBTQ+ and their religiosity. This work will give Alecia a great opportunity to apply classroom learning from multiple social work courses and to gain valuable professional experience.

Nancy Kelley, Ph.D.  
GASSW Professor

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Grace Nelson

I have seen Grace's genuine dedication and passion toward academics and the field of social work. Within her MSW cohort, Grace is a natural leader, embodies strong social work values, and continually demonstrates critical thinking skills. I have been teaching at the Grace Abbott School of Social Work for over seven years now and through all the students I meet each semester, Grace is unforgettable. Grace is full of compassion, intelligence, humility, and warmth. I will always be one of her biggest supporters in any endeavor she chooses.

Ciara Warden, LISW  
GASSW Instructor

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Dan Kreuzberg

Dan is an outstanding MSW student that I've been lucky to work with the past 2 years on STEPs projects for the NE DHHS Drug Overdose Prevention program. Dan has taken a leadership role in these projects, as well as other projects with community partners, and his approach exemplifies the ideals of social work practice. Dan's leadership, work ethic, and community engagement are deserving of a student spotlight award!

Liam Heerten-Rodriguez, Ph.D.  
GASSW Assistant Professor

# STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

## Student Social Work Organization (SSWO)

During the 2021-2022 academic year, SSWO focused on connecting with various community partners and hearing their expertise related to human service organizations in the Omaha area.

While still facing barriers and challenges brought by the pandemic, SSWO members identified creative opportunities to engage with the community. They have managed to continue their monthly meetings over Zoom and engage in community service opportunities while maintaining social distancing.

Members hosted a food/clothing drive for Open Door Mission and volunteered at Food Bank for the Heartland. In addition, members have participated in their own volunteer projects throughout the academic year while also finding new individual ways to support fellow students and recruit new members. SSWO members have not allowed the pandemic to interfere with their pursuits, and they are excited about what is to come in the 2022-2023 academic year.



## Phi Alpha Honor Society



The Phi Alpha Honor Society members have been creative in their service endeavors throughout the pandemic. Members have volunteered their time at Assure Women’s Center, Pittsburg Lions Club, Keep Grand Island Beautiful City-Wide Clean Up, O.NE Mentoring Academy, in addition to delivering literature and gifts to correctional facilities around the holidays, ringing bells with the Salvation Army, and participating in Nebraska’s first Indigenous People’s Day Celebration at the State Capitol.

The chapter has also partnered with Reach Out and Read, an organization that collaborates with medical clinics across rural Nebraska to deliver developmentally appropriate books to the hands of children and their families.

Phi Alpha held their induction ceremony in March 2022, via Zoom to honor six new members joining the chapter for the 2022-2023 academic year.





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## ENGAGED, DIVERSE, **READY FOR SERVICE.**

The Grace Abbott School of Social Work educates professional social workers to engage in the community and promote social change.

 [SOCIALWORK.UNOMAHA.EDU](https://socialwork.unomaha.edu)

 /UNOSOCIALWORK

### Degree Options

- Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW)
- Master of Social Work (MSW)
- Master of Social Work/Master of Public Administration (MSW/MPA)
- Master of Social Work/Master of Criminology and Criminal Justice (MSW/MSCRCJ)
- Master of Social Work/Master of Public Health (MSW/MPH)

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