

School of Social Work

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER

Black History Month Faculty Spotlight Professor Yvonne Maxwell



Professor Yvonne Maxwell's journey into social work was shaped by "a combination of my family's history of experiencing social injustice and the persistence of it in my life." From an early age, she was attuned to injustice occurring around her and felt called to address it. At just 14 years old, a friend of her father gave her a social work textbook, believing the field matched her interests. That moment introduced her to the profession and set her on a clear path toward San José State University and the School of Social Work.



When she entered the School of Social Work in 1979, she learned that the mission of the school was to prepare social workers with skills and expertise in working with the Latino community. The majority of faculty were members of the Latino community, and there was a concentration in community organizing taught by Professor José Villa. She learned a great deal about community work and was deeply inspired by it. In the late 1980s, Professor Maxwell attended her first National Association of Black Social Workers conference. She was profoundly impacted by seeing African scholars present their work and scholarship on African people. She became a member and later earned a certificate in African Centered Social Work. Reflecting on her early career, she shares that she wishes she had known there were research, frameworks, and theories developed by scholars around the world who were not European or European American.



As an African female professional and educator, Professor Maxwell notes that challenges have been common. Experiences of exclusion, having contributions minimized or marginalized, and having her professional expertise questioned have been regular occurrences. These experiences have shaped her leadership and teaching in many ways.



Professor Maxwell emphasizes that social workers have the skills and knowledge to shape social justice movements and that this is part of our professional role. Our knowledge of systems, how to navigate them, and how to engage groups and communities in collective efforts strengthens effective movements, and she believes this focus must be included in students' academic work. Her advice to current MSW and BASW students, particularly students of color, is to always remember what drew them to social work and not allow places of employment to obscure that vision. She encourages students to develop their skills in service of their people, be champions for their needs, and learn the history of Black social workers in order to build on the work done and lessons learned.



Black History Month Faculty Spotlight Dr. Emily Bruce



Dr. Emily Bruce's journey into social work began with both inspiration and personal reflection. Her mother was a social worker and a powerful influence in her life. At the same time, she was deeply concerned about young people, especially adolescents experiencing difficulties with their parents and peers. Having faced her own challenges during adolescence, she felt she could be helpful to young people navigating similar struggles.

As a junior at UC Davis around 1976, she volunteered at Diogenes Youth Center, earning academic credit for her service. After graduating around 1979, she became a paid employee. Diogenes Youth Services, founded in 1969, focused on runaway, homeless, and at risk youth ages 12 to 17. The agency's philosophy was not to rescue troubled teens, but to actively involve them in solving their problems and conflicts so they could become responsible, contributing members of society. With more than 37 years of service and recognition from organizations including the County Board of Supervisors, Diogenes built a strong reputation for effectiveness. This experience provided her with excellent training and ultimately led her to pursue an MSW at the University of Washington in Seattle. Her mother remained her most important early mentor.



Reflecting on her career, Dr. Bruce notes that when she worked for the county, one of the biggest issues was drug abuse among very young parents who did not know how to provide adequate care for their children. At the time, the drug issue felt like a scourge, yet she observes that it was nothing compared to the drug problems occurring today. When she first began her career, she thought she understood what was happening, but quickly realized that everything was new. While her professional training prepared her well as a social worker, completing her Ph.D. required her to learn how to become an educator. She describes having a tremendous amount to learn in that role and acknowledges there is still more she could learn, even as she transitions into full time retirement.



Her awareness of social justice was shaped during her adolescence amid protests against the U.S. war in Viet Nam, when young people were organizing across the country. As she grew older, particularly in college, her focus turned toward community services and developing a political agenda, even though becoming involved in political aspects was often challenging. Today, she believes social work is more essential than ever in her lifetime. Social workers must ensure that those without resources have access to food, housing, health care, and mental health treatment. She also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the issues faced by people who are not white and those who are poor, noting that advanced degrees such as the Ph.D. require significant economic commitment.



In offering guidance to students, particularly students of color, Dr. Bruce highlights the benefits of entering the profession of social work today. She encourages learning the history of Black women and men who pursued social justice before and throughout the twentieth century, including Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jesse Jackson, among many others. She shares hope for the future of social work, grounded in the belief that people are aspirational. When aspirations are not implemented, it is because we stop making these issues prominent in our discussions and fail to continue addressing them. She believes that once society fully recognizes that racism against people of African descent is not acceptable, it can also recognize and address injustice directed toward poor and non white Americans.



Student Spotlight - Daniel Galvan

This month, we are excited to spotlight Daniel Galvan, who is serving as the President of SWGSA for the 2025–2026 academic year. Daniel’s journey into social work began at an early age, shaped by his family’s experiences navigating the immigration system. Having personally faced housing and food insecurity, Daniel developed a deep commitment to challenging the systemic barriers that prevent individuals and families from accessing basic needs.



His dedication to advocacy and community engagement is reflected in his involvement with SWGSA. During his first year as Social Events Chair, Daniel helped organize charitable events supporting individuals experiencing socioeconomic challenges—work that continues to inform his leadership today.

One of Daniel’s most meaningful field placement experiences took place at the Oakland Unified School District, where he had the opportunity to lead his first peer group for fourth-grade students. This experience was especially impactful because the group was designed for Latinx students who predominantly spoke Spanish at a school that lacked Spanish-speaking staff. Drawing from his own lived experience as a Latino, Daniel was able to connect with students as they explored and developed their cultural identities—an experience he describes as deeply heartwarming.

Daniel hopes to continue working with Latinx communities, providing essential mental and behavioral health services while actively contributing to the destigmatization of mental health within these communities. His advice to incoming and continuing students is simple yet powerful: don’t be afraid to step outside your comfort zone and get involved in new experiences. He reminds us that our time in this program is limited, and it’s important to move forward without regret.

As Daniel looks ahead to graduation and reflects on the current social and political climate, he emphasizes the importance of showing solidarity with those whose voices have been silenced. He believes that through empathy, collaboration, and conviction, we can continue to challenge systems of oppression and work toward meaningful change.



Alumni Spotlight



Ms. Jiewen Janice Huang, LCSW, is a proud member of the first cohort of our ever-growing Online/Hybrid MSW program and an important part of the program's early history. As a student, she served as Student Representative Chair for both the Online/Hybrid and on-campus MSW programs with the Social Work Graduate Students Association (SWGSA), helping to build a strong sense of community, especially for students in the program's first and second cohorts. Her leadership ensured that student voices, particularly those in the online and hybrid format, were meaningfully heard and incorporated into program development. Since graduating, Ms. Huang has built an impressive clinical and leadership career. She served for three years as Co-Chair and Chair of the Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Council, Northern California Chapter of NASW, and for three years as Assistant Regional Director for Region B of the California Chapter of NASW. She is also the only Asian social worker and psychotherapist serving on the National Healthcare Advisory Council of Compassion & Choices, an organization that co-initiated the Life Options Act. She has held this role for six years and continues to serve in this capacity. She is the founder and Lead Practitioner of Present Moment Wellness, LLC/PC LCSW, holds multiple professional certifications, and is currently pursuing an Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership.

Born and raised in Guangzhou, China, and now a proud alumna of San José State University's Online/Hybrid MSW program (Class of 2018), Ms. Huang has devoted her career to serving underserved, marginalized, and oppressed communities across a wide range of settings, including oncology, home health, palliative and hospice care, medical inpatient psychiatry, intensive case management, and primary care behavioral health. Her path to social work began when she struggled to choose a major as an undergraduate. People who knew her well often encouraged her to pursue social work, recognizing her deep desire to help others. Everything became clear the moment she stepped into her first social work class, and she instantly knew it was a calling. Reflecting on that experience, she shares, *"The moment I stepped into my first social work class, I knew I had found where I belonged."* Her undergraduate experience at San José State University's School of Social Work was deeply supportive, grounded in a strong emphasis on culture and diversity and enriched by faculty from diverse backgrounds. That foundation stayed with her and ultimately led her to apply exclusively to SJSU when she decided to pursue her MSW.

At the time, she lived about an hour from campus, and the Online/Hybrid MSW program allowed her to conserve time and energy by eliminating the commute. This flexibility enabled her to focus fully on her studies and internship. She selected the Health and Mental Health concentration, and although the coursework was intensive, it offered rich learning materials and meaningful opportunities to reflect on practice in health and mental health settings. The program provided a strong foundation and opened many doors as she continued her social work journey, shaping both her clinical expertise and leadership development.

Today, as a trilingual psychotherapist and integrative practitioner, Ms. Huang combines evidence-based therapies with complementary healing modalities through Present Moment Wellness, LLC/PC LCSW to support individuals navigating depression, anxiety, trauma, and grief. Recently, she was invited to serve as a Cantonese speaker for the UCSF Osher Center's HOME Project (Honoring Origins in Mindfulness for Equity), thanks to the generous recommendation of her former manager, Ai-May Tan, Program Director of Shanti Project's Cancer Program. The HOME Project creates culturally rooted, language-accessible wellness videos in Cantonese and Spanish to support mind-body health in communities where heritage-language resources remain limited. Being part of this initiative is both humbling and deeply meaningful to her, reflecting her continued commitment to culturally responsive and accessible healing.

To current SJSU MSW students, especially those interested in clinical practice, integrative healing, or leadership, Ms. Huang encourages deep self-awareness and intentional growth. She reminds students that social work is as much about who we are as what we do, and she encourages them to listen to themselves, seek community, advocate when possible, and build a nurturing relationship with themselves so their professional journey can be sustainable and expansive. Outside of work, she recharges by spending time with her Golden Retriever and loved ones, singing karaoke, savoring good food, and powerlifting.

Her work continues to reflect her guiding principle: *"Lifting one another up; being the voice we desire to and can be within our control and power."*

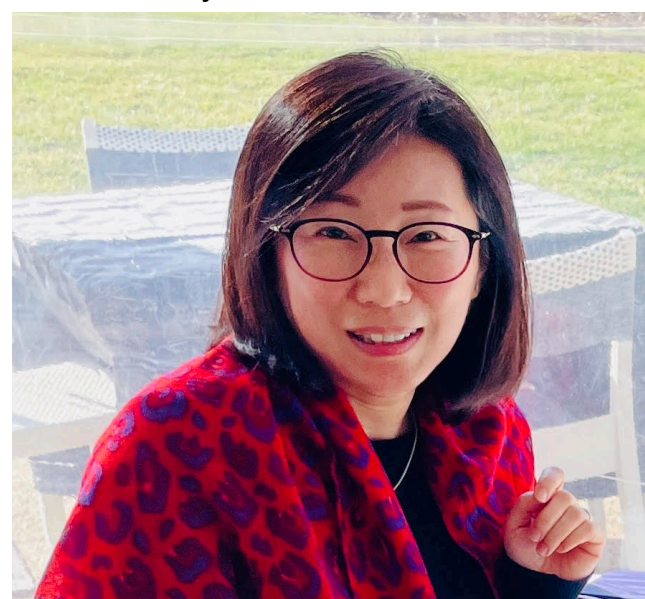
Faculty - Student Spotlight

Under the supervision and mentorship of Dr. Meekyung Han, three outstanding graduates from our SSW MSW program, Thien Dang, Crystal Hoang, and Viviane Pham from the MSW Class of 2024, demonstrated the strength of student led scholarship through a collaborative research project examining the well being of second generation Vietnamese American young adults. The study originated as a faculty led research project by Dr. Han and was later carried out as the students' Social Work 298 capstone project. While each student explored a distinct aspect of the broader topic, the project collectively examined second generation Vietnamese American young adults' perspectives on their upbringing, family relationships, and the supports that help them navigate challenges during this important transitional period.

As part of this work, the student team recruited participants and conducted in-depth qualitative interviews exploring family relationships, intergenerational trauma, cultural conflict, and mental health service use among second-generation Vietnamese American young adults navigating the transition to adulthood. Key findings highlighted the indirect impact of parents' immigration histories; persistent intergenerational and cultural value gaps; participants' evolving understanding of, and reconciliation with, their parents' lived experiences; and ongoing barriers to accessing mental health care, alongside a range of adaptive coping strategies. These findings offer important insights into the unique needs and challenges faced by SGVA young adults and help inform the development of more effective, culturally responsive, family-centered mental health interventions.

Following the students' graduation, the project continued under Dr. Han's leadership, with ongoing collaboration with the graduates and additional input from a family policy specialist to inform policy and practice implications related to culturally responsive mental health services and family-centered interventions. Findings from this project were presented at the 30th Annual Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) Conference in Washington, D.C. (January 14–18, 2026), one of the most prestigious national and international research venues in social work, dedicated to advancing research that promotes a diverse, just, and equitable society.

Dr. Han is deeply proud of Thien Dang, Crystal Hoang, and Viviane Pham, and profoundly grateful for their dedication, perseverance, and teamwork, which were instrumental in producing rigorous, culturally grounded social work scholarship.



2026 NASW-CA Legislative Lobby Days

Lobby Days is a two-day event that educates more than 1,200 students and professionals about important legislation affecting clients and the social work profession. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the legislative process and gain hands-on lobbying experience by engaging with state legislators and/or their staff about key policy issues. The event also highlights applications of Macro Social Work and related career paths.



**April 12–13,
2026**

Interest Form

- More information about Lobby Days 2026 will be shared through upcoming virtual information sessions hosted by NASW representatives (dates and times TBD).
- Students are encouraged to complete the Interest Form to receive updates.



Our NASW Lobby Days Informational Sessions have officially wrapped up

Thank you to everyone who joined us on February 17 and 24. Both sessions went very well, and we truly appreciate you taking the time to learn more about NASW Lobby Days.

It was great to see so many students and social workers come together to talk about advocacy and preparing for April 12 and 13, 2026. We are excited for what is ahead and grateful for your engagement and support.

Social Work Articles

Black History Month: NASW Video

In recognition of Black History Month, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) released a video highlighting the history and contributions of Black social workers to the profession.

The video reflects on the role Black social workers have played in shaping social work practice, education, and leadership across communities. It also acknowledges their impact on advancing equity and expanding access to services in a variety of settings. The message provides historical context and recognizes the ongoing contributions of Black social workers within the field.

To view the full message, see the NASW Black History Month video.

[Link to Video](#)

Worth a Read: NASW Delivers Petition on Federal Degree Classification

On December 22, 2025, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) announced that it delivered a petition to the U.S. Department of Education signed by more than 21,250 social workers.

According to NASW, the petition addresses the Department of Education's proposed rule that would classify social work as a graduate degree rather than a professional degree. NASW states that federal classification affects student loan eligibility limits and may have implications for social work education and workforce development.

In its public statement, NASW also referenced national data concerning mental health workforce shortages and outlined its position regarding the proposed rule. The Department of Education is expected to release further information on the proposed rule in 2026.

[Article](#)

Coming up in March

Celebrate Social Work Month with CSWE's March Webinar Series

In celebration of Social Work Month, CSWE invites you to join its March Webinar Series, inspired by this year's theme, Uplift. Defend. Transform. Throughout March, CSWE is offering a dynamic lineup of free webinars designed to strengthen teaching, leadership, and practice. From immigration and ethical dialogue to AI innovation, recruitment strategy, and behavioral health, these sessions highlight the breadth and impact of social work education today.

Explore the upcoming events below and click on each headline to learn more and register. Don't miss this opportunity to engage, learn, and be inspired!

MARCH 2

Social Work's Grand Challenges and Immigration

Presented by CSWE's Council on the Role and Status of Women in Social Work Education, this timely discussion will explore the Grand Challenges framework and a new working group on immigration, including the group's process and progress.

MARCH 5

Navigating Challenging Conversations

Hosted by CSWE's Center for Diversity, this session examines curiosity as a practice model to foster meaningful dialogue across differences

MARCH 9

AI for the Human Side of Social Work

In partnership with Noodle and the University of Washington's Center for Firearm Injury Prevention, explore how voice-based AI simulations are helping students practice high-stakes conversations

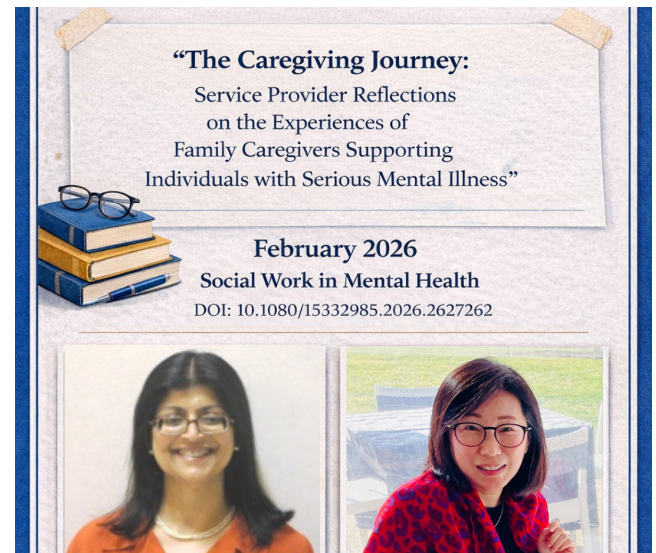
Faculty Publication

We are pleased to celebrate the recent publication by Dr. Sadhna Diwan and Dr. Meekyung Han in *Social Work in Mental Health* (February 2026).

Their article, “The Caregiving Journey: Service Provider Reflections on the Experiences of Family Caregivers Supporting Individuals with Serious Mental Illness,” examines the complex and often overlooked experiences of family caregivers through the lens of service providers. The study sheds light on the emotional, relational, and systemic dimensions of caregiving for individuals living with serious mental illness, while also highlighting implications for social work practice and support systems.

By centering the caregiving journey, this work contributes to a deeper understanding of how professionals can better partner with and support families navigating mental health challenges. The article adds meaningful insight to ongoing conversations about caregiver well-being, service delivery, and mental health equity.

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