

NEWSLETTER

2019
2020

YEAR IN REVIEW

FALL 2019 - SPRING 2020

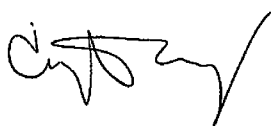
The Department of Social Work welcomed two new faculty in August 2019 when Drs. Lixia Zhang and Rebecca Dickinson became part of our team. You can read more about them within this newsletter.

During the fall semester, UNI students who felt disenfranchised launched the #UNIsnotanAlly campaign. The intent of the campaign was to make public the needs and requests of minority groups on campus. As a result of this campaign, two of our faculty, Dr. Rebecca Dickinson and Libby Fry, organized listening sessions where students met with faculty and administration to discuss their concerns. The sessions were effective to the extent that faculty and staff from other departments contacted Rebecca and Libby for guidance on how to hold sessions with their own students.

The Department of Social Work concluded the 2019-2020 academic year in a much different place than we began. The coronavirus and issues of racial injustice highlighted the spring semester. The police-related death of George Floyd fueled protests while COVID's impact disproportionately affected racial minorities and many lower-income individuals who worked in the service industry. While uncertainty and tensions from these events continue to surround us, the Department of Social Work faculty and staff are committed to ensuring that our students feel safe and have the support to continue their educational trajectories. Our values parallel those of NASW (National Association of Social Workers) and CSWE (Council on Social Work Education) as we recognize and respond to inequalities experienced by students in our program as well as individuals in the community.

The Department of Social Work will continue to support our minority students and faculty as we move into the new academic year. We convened a committee to develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion document for the department and data from the Implicit Survey will be analyzed with an eye toward improvements that will help all students feel welcome and valued.

I continue to be impressed with our students, staff and faculty, and by the leadership and valuable work of our alumni. I encourage each of our alumni to continue updating us on your achievements and accomplishments. I look forward to hearing your news and welcome your questions and comments. You can reach me at cynthia.juby@uni.edu or 319-273-6249.



CINDY JUBY

Head, Department of Social Work



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
University of Northern Iowa

NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

LIXIA ZHANG

Lixia received her MSW and Ph.D. degrees in Social Work from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Prior to coming to the University of Northern Iowa, Lixia worked as a research assistant at UW-Milwaukee on national and state research projects which aimed to improve the health and well-being of disadvantaged children and families. She chose to come to UNI due to the university's reputation of providing a high-quality education for students. She also felt that the Cedar Falls community was a great place to work and live. Very safe, friendly and convenient.

Lixia currently teaches three courses for undergraduate students: Human Behavior and the Social Environment; Social Work Research; Self-care and Stress Management in Helping Professionals. She really enjoys teaching at UNI and stated that her students have been "lovely and amazing!"

Her passion within social work is to help traumatized children and families through her research and cultivation of young social work professionals. Besides Lixia's teaching, she also focuses on research looking at child maltreatment and other negative circumstances that undermine individuals' health and well-being across the life span. She is particularly interested in prevention and intervention strategies to avert childhood trauma or mitigate its effects, especially among disadvantaged children and families.



REBECCA DICKINSON

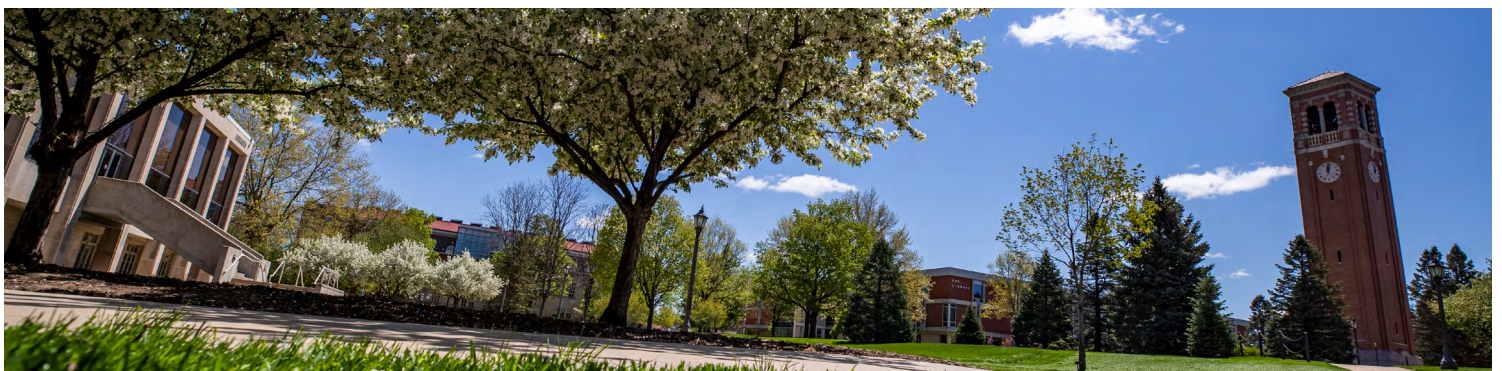
Rebecca received her BA with a double major in Social Work and Criminal Justice from Mount Mercy College in Cedar Rapids, received her MSW from UNI and later went on to receive her Ph.D. in Social Work and MA in Education Measurement and Statistics in 2019 from the University of Iowa.

Prior to coming to UNI, Rebecca primarily practiced as a therapist in rural Iowa, specializing in working with foster/adoptive children and other children who have experienced trauma. She is credentialed as a Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor (RPT-S) and provides training and supervision for play therapists.

Taking a position at UNI allowed Rebecca to stay close to her family and friends. She is very excited about the changes that have been made in recent years to the social work programs and the opportunities for the future. Rebecca is currently teaching the group and families classes at both the undergrad and grad levels, and is excited to be teaching a graduate Introduction to Play Therapy course this summer. She has loved her teaching experiences thus far and has been impressed by her students.

Rebecca's passion within social work is helping kids, especially those who have experienced trauma. She strongly believes in the process of play therapy to treat trauma, not just for kids but also teens and adults. One of her goals is to significantly increase the number of social workers trained in and using play therapy across the country.

Outside of teaching, Rebecca loves to train and show her dogs and getting her certification in Animal-Assisted Play Therapy. She bought an acreage in Cedar Falls and is hoping to add horses in the next year to operate an animal-based private therapy practice!



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

BELLA SIEMS | BSW

Bella Siems is from Hampton, Iowa. This year she is completing her field placement at the Crisis Intervention Service (Mason City, Iowa), helping their Hampton office focus on crises within the area. Her main focus has been advocating within the community and bringing awareness to domestic abuse, sexual assault and survivors of homicide. Bella has been trained to handle crises over the phone when clients call, as well as helping provide resources and counseling to those who stop by the office.

Bella has had an eye opening experience within the social work program at UNI. She has learned so much from faculty, staff and her peers, who are always so kind in helping her learn all her biases and become a better person. What she learned will always stay with her and has given her the drive to help people for the rest of her life. After her time at UNI, Bella will be moving to Bloomington, Indiana as a part of a church plant with the Salt Company. Working within the role of family intervention specialist, she is eager to use the education UNI gave her to care, equip and advocate for families and child welfare.



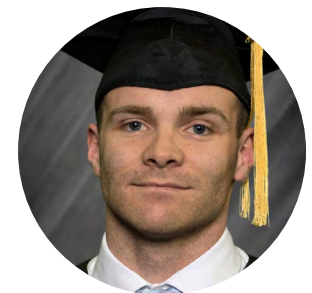
SAM RASMUSSEN | MSW

Sam is from Rowley, Iowa. After graduating from Independence High School, he went on to complete his undergraduate degree in Social Work at UNI in 2018.

Sam completed his field placement at Success Street, Black Hawk Grundy Mental Health's school-based therapy program. Initially, he did a lot of shadowing of his agency supervisor in sessions. As he progressed and became more comfortable, he grew his own caseload of clients. He was then able to provide therapy services to students in the Cedar Falls School District with oversight from his agency supervisor. He is very grateful for the experience he had there.

Sam has had a tremendous experience at UNI. He found the faculty to be very supportive and committed to improving their students' understanding of various trauma-informed principles at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. He also feels extremely fortunate to have had such a great cohort throughout this journey.

Sam plans to take the licensure exam shortly after graduation and then begin the job hunt. He is excited to utilize the skills he has acquired through the trauma-informed specialization program to help with, and treat, individuals who have experienced various levels of trauma. He hopes to apply those skills and interventions to help provide exceptional services to his future clients.



SHELLEY MATTHYS | MSW

Shelley is from Eldridge, Iowa and graduated from North Scott High School. She then completed her undergraduate degree in Social Work and Psychology at UNI in 2019.

Shelley completed her field placement at the UNI Counseling Center. For the first half of the school year, Shelley was mainly assisting students with outside referrals, following up with students who screened positive for being at risk for suicide or after an outside referral was made, and sending out messages to notify students of their appointments. For the second half of the school year, Shelley counseled students one-on-one, using a variety of techniques she had learned both in her graduate and undergraduate studies. Overall, Shelley had a very positive experience at her internship.

Shelley is extremely grateful she decided to attend UNI for her MSW, and has learned much more than she ever thought possible. She is also very thankful she went through a trauma-informed program and knows this will put her at an advantage for her future career. Shelley plans to take the licensure exam and then move to Minneapolis, MN to start her next chapter of her life. Her goal is to become a play therapist and work with children, teenagers and young adults in a clinical setting.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

JUANA HOLLINGSWORTH

After almost eight years at UNI, Juana is pursuing a doctoral degree in higher education administration this fall at Morgan State University. Most recently, she served as UNI's assistant director of diversity recruitment, where she helped create a barrier-free pathway for underrepresented/minority populations. She additionally served as the co-chair for access, inclusion and success for the state of Iowa chapter association of college admissions.

In the spring of 2019, Juana was recognized by the University of Northern Iowa as a *Partner for Student*. The award recognizes staff who demonstrate a clear passion for and commitment to the well-being and success of students. In the fall of 2019, she was recognized and awarded as a woman under 30 in the state of Iowa who works in higher education and embraces women through empowerment and leadership. Lastly, this spring she was a finalist/nominee for *Student Organization Advisor of the Year*, for advising *Ethnic Student Promoters*.

Since a child, Juana has always known she wanted to help people. Getting a degree in social work from UNI has allowed her to do that! Although she is not working in a traditional field of social work, she works with college-aged minority populations, so she must be culturally competent, sensitive and aware of the emotional/mental development of her students. Her background in social work has shown her how to do that!



SHANTILA CASTON

Shantila has been doing some exciting things since graduating from UNI. She worked part-time at Covenant's Women and Midwives Clinic as a case manager, connecting women and families with resources. She additionally worked at Bakari Behavioral Health Inc., an agency that focuses on building resilience in the lives of diverse children and families. Here, her passion for minority mental health blossomed, as she helped provide mental health evaluations and individual therapy to children aged 5 to 20 years old.

Shortly after her time at Bakari Behavioral Health, she worked with The Riverview Center, providing mental health evaluations and individual therapy services to survivors of sexual assault and their families. Then, in January 2017, she accepted the position of mental health therapist and diversity outreach specialist at the UNI Counseling Center. Here, on campus, she conducts mental health evaluations, individual therapy, facilitates a *Women of Color* support group, and has provided supervision to UNI MSW students. She is grateful for the opportunity to normalize, educate and empower the campus community on the importance of underserved populations receiving mental health services.

Shantila has also been honored to sit on multiple mental health panels and provided multiple presentations. In September 2019, she was honored to sit on the planning committee for Hawkeye Community College's annual Cedar Valley Mental Health Summit on Cultural Perspectives. She also had the opportunity to present at this summit on The Impact of Historical Trauma on African Americans. This past March, she received her *Independent Social Worker License*. Her hope is to utilize her new licensure to reach even more people in this community.

Without her social work degree, Shantila would not have been able to impact her community in the way she has. It has provided her with the foundation on what a social worker is by educating her on the fundamentals, preparing her for her career with real life experiences and providing her with support after graduation.



STUDENT SERVICES



MSWSA officers Nicole Valentine, Madison Neece, Maddie Smith, Aweke Tadesse and Sevlja Ademovic, with faculty advisor Steve Onken



MSWSA film screening of *Like Any Other Kid*

MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK STUDENT ASSOCIATION | MSWSA

The MSWSA has been doing some exciting things this academic year! They have made social work themed buttons that were distributed through the Department of Social Work office. **MADISON NEECE** (co-president) and **MADDIE SMITH** (treasurer) led a group of social work students to the capital for *Social Work Day of the Hill*.

NICOLE VALENTINE (co-president) also led an MSW Licensure Exam Study Group to allow MSW students graduating to come together and study for the licensure exam. Their main event for the year was a documentary screening and panel for the film *Like Any Other Kid*.

This year, the MSWSA also updated its organization's constitution to be in compliance with additional UNI requirements. Shifting to the upcoming year, Madison and **SEVLJA ADEMOVIC** (secretary) developed possible activities for the next academic year and submitted a budget for funding to support these activities. Many pictures from their events can be found on the UNI Social Work Facebook page.

MSW ONLINE

Master of Social Work programs are now available **COMPLETELY ONLINE** through UNI at a Distance!

UNI social work alumni are eligible to apply to the "Advanced Standing" track, which prepares students for advanced clinical practice. All other degree holders should consider the "Foundation" track, which provides a broader introduction into the social work field.

Visit distance.uni.edu/socialwork for more information.

UNI at a Distance
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

MORGAN HENDRYX

Morgan has had a wonderful experience working with the Vinton-Shellsburg Community School District. During her time at the school, she had the chance to work with students at the South High School Campus and the alternative program at West Campus.

West Campus offers an alternative setting for students who struggle with traditional class styles and gives them a chance to succeed. She spent the majority of her internship there and developed great relationships with both the students and staff. Each week, Morgan conducted one-on-one student counseling and check-ins, assisted the special education teacher with behavioral outbursts, and talked with the students about their goals and plans for after high school.

Something she found challenging, was garnering the respect of the students due to her age; it was necessary to emphasize from the beginning that she was an authority figure and not a peer. Social work in the school setting was something she hadn't considered before this internship opportunity, and was pleasantly surprised at how much she enjoyed it.

This experience opened her eyes to the importance of social workers in school settings because of the immense pressure that some students face between home life and school. Before, Morgan stated she lacked confidence in her ability to conduct individual counseling, but now has more faith in herself. Morgan is grateful that this experience has allowed her to take the skills she learned in the classroom and use them in real-life situations before entering the social services field.

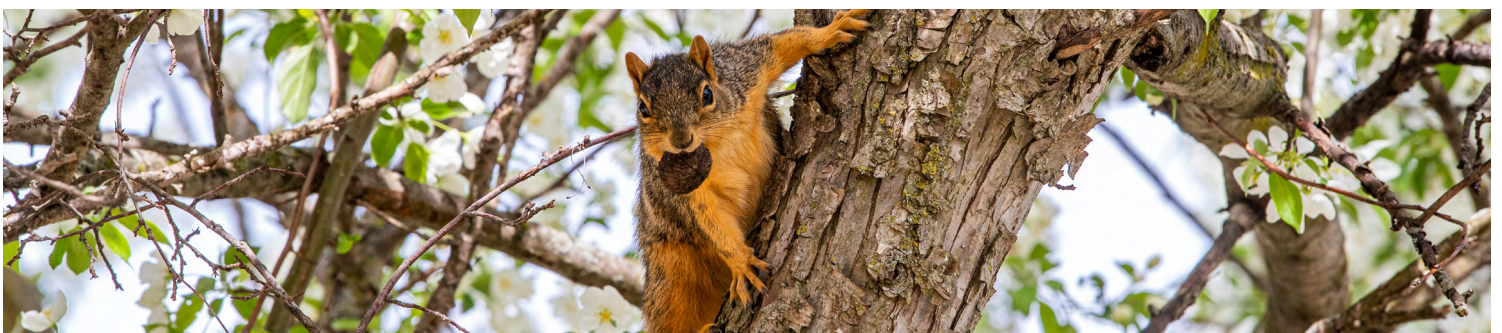


RACHAEL DOLF

Rachael completed her field experience at County Social Services (CSS) under the supervision of April Kiefer. During her time as CSS, she provided clients with referrals and resources in the community that were suitable for their needs. She also did new intakes for clients who had never received services through CSS before and made sure they were eligible for funding through the agency. A majority of her work was case management and crisis planning for those in need of emergency help.

Throughout her internship, Rachael saw challenges in how some of the eligibility guidelines were determined with clients. But, overall, the staff worked well together to determine what would be the best route to choose and meet the clients' needs. The internship gave her the opportunity to build her skills and confidence within social services.

Rachael will take what she has learned in this internship and the program into her future career. It was a great experience and she is grateful for the opportunity from County Social Services and April Kiefer for showing her what case management looks like!



SNAPSHOTS



Social Work Day at the Capitol 2020



Social Work Day at the Capitol 2020



Social Work Ethics Training 2019



Social Work Ethics Training 2019: speaker Tom Eachus, executive director of the Black Hawk-Grundy Mental Health Center



MSW students and instructor Libby Fry at the 2020 MVP Train-the-Trainer training



MSW and BSW students meet with Waterloo Mayor Quentin Hart during Social Work Day at the Capitol 2020



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
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CONNECT WITH US!

Let us know how you're doing, what you're doing and how we can keep in touch!

Update your information at
uni.edu/socialwork/alumni-updates.

