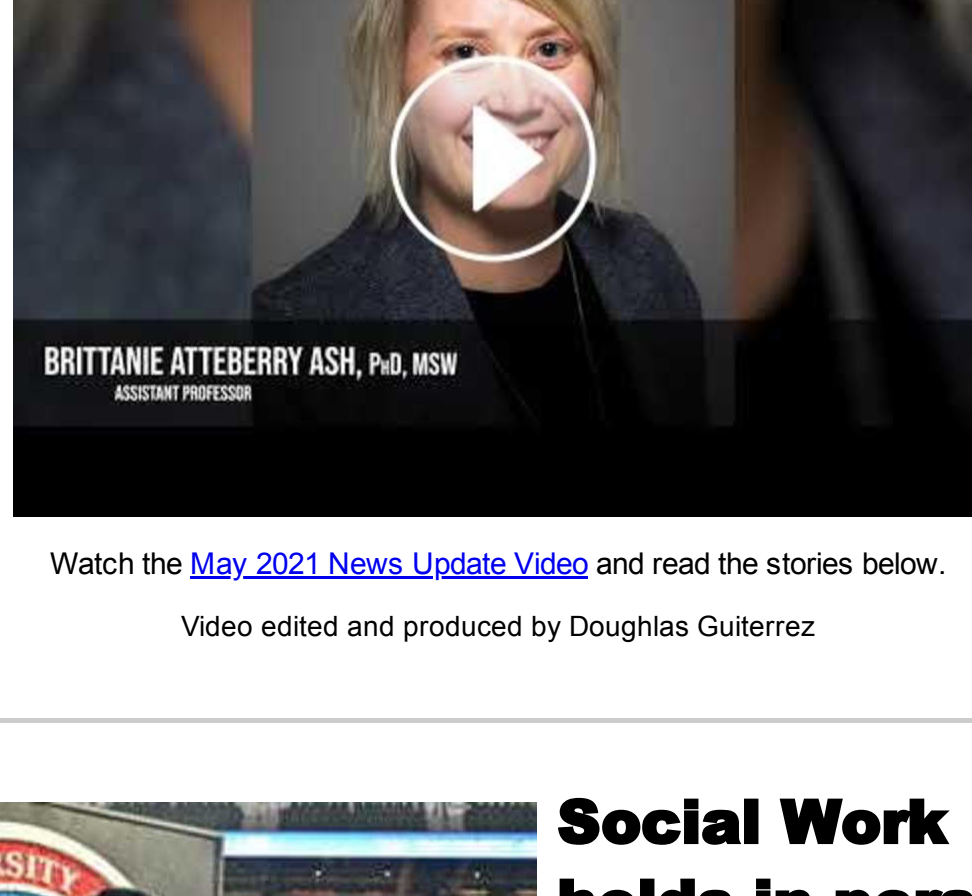
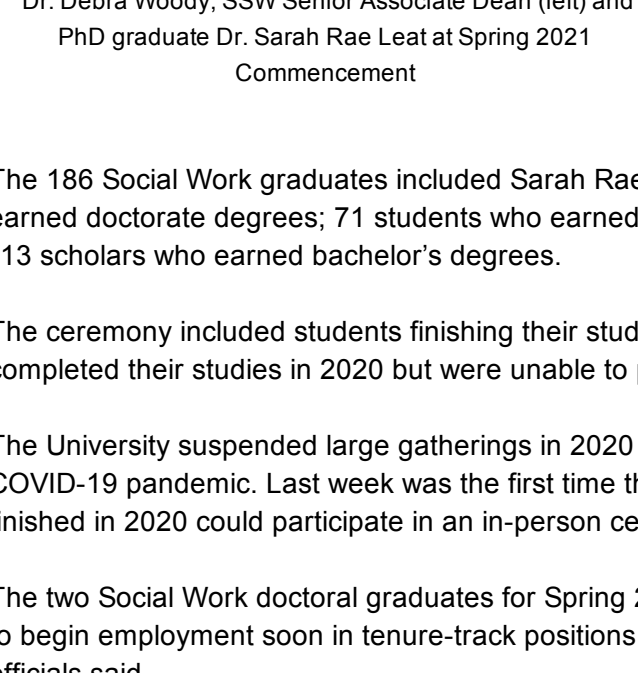


Spring 2021 News Update



Watch the [May 2021 News Update Video](#) and read the stories below.
Video edited and produced by Douglas Guitierrez



Social Work holds in-person commencement at Globe Life Field

By Valerie Fields Hill

Dr. Debra Woody, SSW Senior Associate Dean (left) and PhD graduate Dr. Sarah Rae Leat at Spring 2021 Commencement

Nearly 200 students earned Social Work degrees during an in-person commencement ceremony May 14 at Globe Life Field.

The 186 Social Work graduates included Sarah Rae Leat and Kelli Renee Rogers, both of whom earned doctorate degrees; 71 students who earned Master of Social Work degrees; and 113 scholars who earned bachelor's degrees.

The ceremony included students finishing their studies this semester and students who completed their studies in 2020 but were unable to participate in an in-person ceremony.

The University suspended large gatherings in 2020 due to restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Last week was the first time the more than 600 Social Work graduates who finished in 2020 could participate in an in-person ceremony.

The two Social Work doctoral graduates for Spring 2021 – Leat and Rogers – each are expected to begin employment soon in tenure-track positions at universities outside of Texas, school officials said.

Rogers was recently selected to participate in the inaugural cohort of the Doctoral Student Policy Forum. The forum is sponsored by the Council on Social Work Education's Society for Social Work and Research and the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Student Policy.

The forum will be held virtually June 16-18. It will include educational sessions and Capitol Hill visits. The goal is to strengthen the connection between research and policy. Rogers recently received funding from the National Institute for Transportation and Communities for her research.

Leat received a \$15,000 research grant from NITC to fund her dissertation research. Both Leat and Rogers authored several research journal articles during their time in the doctoral program.

See full story here: [Social Work holds in-person commencement](#)



SSW breaks ground on new building, Smart Hospital

By University Communications

Photo Courtesy of Erik McGregor/Getty Images from article by Them

The University of Texas at Arlington is building a new home to teach and train the next generation of social workers and health care professionals.

UTA leaders broke ground on Feb. 9 on a \$76 million facility that will usher in critical advancements in the field of health care, bringing together the University's celebrated School of Social Work and the College of Nursing and Health Innovation's Smart Hospital.

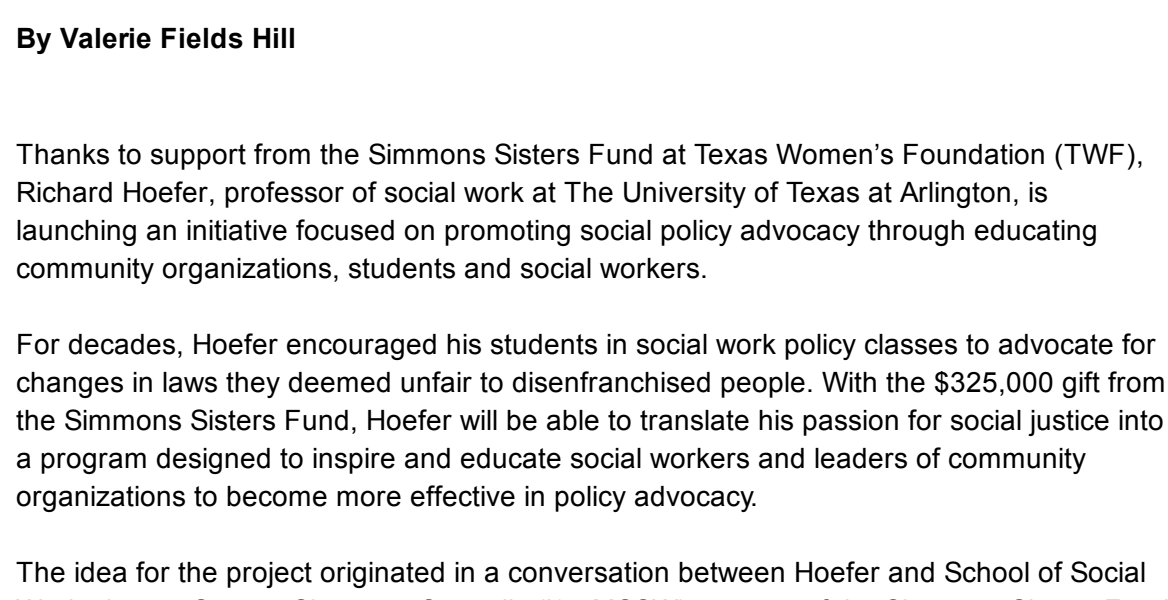
"We are incredibly excited to create this new home for UTA's social work and nursing students, faculty and staff," said Teik Lim, UTA's interim president.

"Collaborative work within this building will set the stage for the future of health care and social work. Research shows that when professionals in social work and nursing collaborate, patients have better outcomes."

The 150,000-square-foot facility will be a state-of-the-art space to serve current and future students. It will also provide room for social work programs to grow and evolve to meet the critical needs of North Texas' communities through enhanced collaboration with health care providers and hospitals. The new building will be a mix of flexible, state-of-the-art, technology-enriched learning spaces; teaching and research labs; simulation learning center; student engagement, study and support spaces; and faculty and staff offices.

Read the rest of the story: [SSW Breaks Ground on New Building & Smart Hospital](#)

Simmons Sisters fund donates \$325K to School of Social Work for advocacy



By Valerie Fields Hill

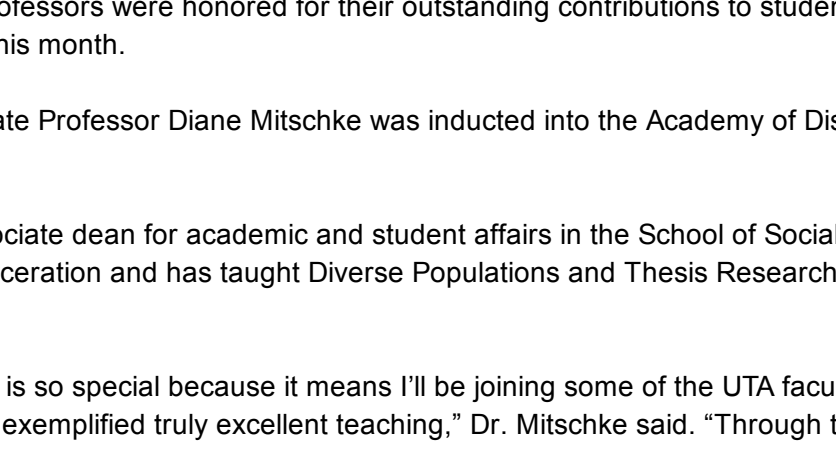
Thanks to support from the Simmons Sisters Fund at Texas Women's Foundation (TWF), Richard Hoefler, professor of social work at The University of Texas at Arlington, is launching an initiative focused on promoting social policy advocacy through educating community organizations, students and social workers.

For decades, Hoefler encouraged his students in social work policy classes to advocate for changes in laws they deemed unfair to disenfranchised people. With the \$325,000 gift from the Simmons Sisters Fund, Hoefler will be able to translate his passion for social justice into a program designed to inspire and educate social workers and leaders of community organizations to become more effective in policy advocacy.

The idea for the project originated in a conversation between Hoefler and School of Social Work alumna Serena Simmons Connelly ('95 MSSW), partner of the Simmons Sisters Fund and vice president of the Harold Simmons Foundation. In early 2020, Connelly shared with Hoefler her desire to see a greater number of students becoming social policy advocates and the two began to work on the concept for a new initiative called SPEAK, or Social Policy, Education, Advocacy and Knowledge. Tragically, while the plan for SPEAK was being finalized, Connelly passed away at the age of 50.

"Serena's life was dedicated to helping the most vulnerable members of our communities," said Connelly's sister Lisa K. Simmons, partner of the Simmons Sisters Fund and president of the Harold Simmons Foundation. "With SPEAK, we know UTA will be able to inspire a new generation of social workers to be passionate, effective social advocates."

Read the rest of the story [Simmons Sisters Fund gives \\$325K to School of Social Work](#).



Two professors receive top teaching awards from university leadership

By Valerie Fields Hill

Two Social Work professors were honored for their outstanding contributions to student learning during a celebration earlier this month.

Social Work Associate Professor Diane Mitschke was inducted into the Academy of Distinguished Teachers.

Dr. Mitschke is associate dean for academic and student affairs in the School of Social Work. She teaches Inequities and Incarceration and has taught Diverse Populations and Thesis Research, among other courses.

"For me, this award is so special because it means I'll be joining some of the UTA faculty who have served as my mentors and exemplified truly excellent teaching," Dr. Mitschke said. "Through teaching, I can help students open doors to new paradigms and new ways of seeing the world."

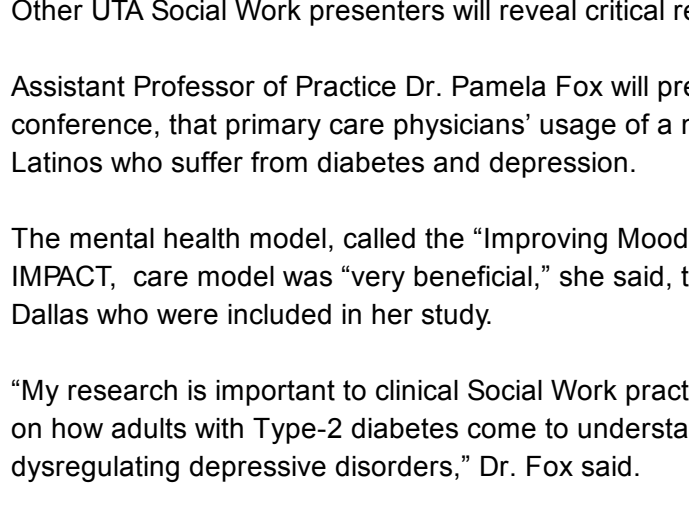
"I'm grateful to have the opportunity to teach in the School of Social Work at UTA and look forward to learning more and giving back through my membership in the Academy of Distinguished Teachers."

Social Work Assistant Professor Rachel Voth Schrag was honored with the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching-Untenured, said Diane M. Lange, chair of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers in an earlier statement.

"Being recognized by our students and faculty means a great deal to me," said Dr. Voth Schrag, who teaches Intimate Partner Violence, Thesis Research and Dissertation courses.

"Over the past year I have repeatedly witnessed our students, faculty, and staff find new ways to support and encourage each other," said Dr. Voth Schrag, who joined the faculty in 2017. "It has been inspiring to work with students and colleagues as we have figured out ways to make teaching and learning more accessible."

Read the rest of the story: [Two professors receive top teaching awards](#)



Professors, students to present ground breaking research at national conference

By Valerie Fields Hill

Dr. Pamela Fox speaking at SSWR conference

School of Social Work faculty, graduate students and alumni will make nearly 60 presentations of critical mental health research at one of the nation's leading behavioral science conferences next week.

The research will be presented during the Society for Social Work and Research 25th Annual Conference, which begins Wednesday, Jan. 20., and continues through Jan. 22. This year's conference, themed "Social Work Science for Social Change," will be virtual.

SSWR, as the organization is referred, was founded 25 years ago and includes Social Workers, academics, students, social welfare professionals and researchers among its members. The professionals gather annually in January to review the most up-to-date research in the Social Work field.

The UTA presenters will offer important studies on behavioral science topics including violence against women, parenting practices among Black fathers and one presentation on the use of a survey to measure parents' abilities to protect children from maltreatment.

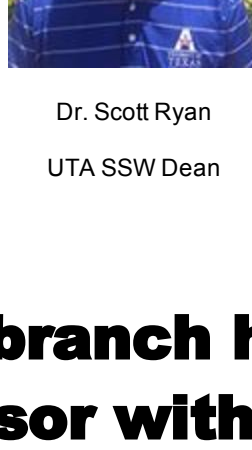
Other UTA Social Work presenters will reveal critical research in mental health.

Assistant Professor of Practice Dr. Pamela Fox will present evidence on Jan. 20, the opening day of the conference, that primary care physicians' usage of a mental health model is helpful to some Blacks and Latinos who suffer from diabetes and depression.

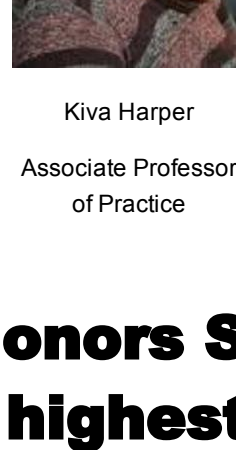
The mental health model, called the "Improving Mood-Promoting Access to Collaborative Treatment," or IMPACT, care model was "very beneficial," she said, to a small sampling of Blacks and Latinos in Southern Dallas who were included in her study.

"My research is important to clinical Social Work practitioners because there is limited research evidence on how adults with Type-2 diabetes are to understand their diabetes distress and their mood dysregulating depressive disorders," Dr. Fox said.

Read the rest of the story: [Professors, students to present ground breaking research](#)



Dr. Scott Ryan
UTA SSW Dean



Kiva Harper
Associate Professor of Practice

NASW local branch honors Social Work dean, professor with highest awards

By Valerie Fields Hill

A Texas Social Work organization will recognize the dean of the School of Social Work and a faculty member with its highest honors during a virtual celebration this week.

The North Central Texas Fort Worth Area Branch of the National Association of Social Workers will honor UTA School of Social Work Dean Scott Ryan and Associate Professor of Practice Kiva Harper with its Lifetime Achievement and Social Worker of the Year awards, respectively.

The two honors are the highest Social Work recognitions given by the branch. The honors recognize outstanding achievements in the profession and noteworthy service in the community and state.

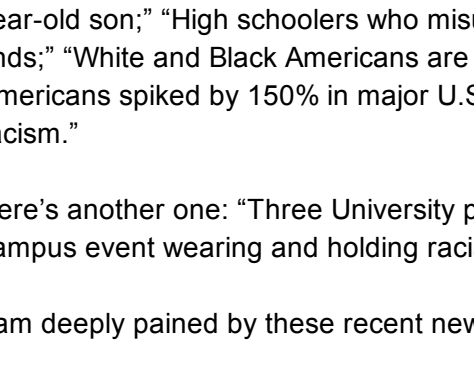
The Lifetime Achievement and Social Worker of the Year honors will be given at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 25, during the branch's 2021 Social Work Awards banquet. The event is part of a virtual watch party. It is free and will premiere on the School of Social Work's Facebook and YouTube pages and on the branch's Facebook page.

"Our steering committee identified some amazing Social Workers and future Social Workers and community members as our 2021 awards recipients," said Angela Lutts, North Central Texas Fort Worth Area Branch chair.

The association is comprised of professional Social Workers, Social Work educators, Social Work university administrators and Social Work students.

Read the rest of the story: [Social work dean, professor honored with highest awards](#)

Dean's statement reflecting on Social Work Month 2021



By Dean Scott Ryan

March is Social Work Month and after going through more than a year dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's theme "Social Workers are Essential" is quite appropriate.

We are living in extremely challenging times and indeed, Social Work is needed. In fact, Social Work is essential to improving our condition.

As I scan news channels online, I can't help but see the headlines through the lens of a Social Worker. Some stick out like a sore thumb: "A Connecticut mother is facing murder charges in the death of her 4-year-old son;" "High schoolers who misuse prescription opioids are at high risk for suicidal behaviors, study finds;" "White and Black Americans are divided over George Floyd's death;" "Hate crimes targeting Asian Americans spiked by 150% in major U.S. cities;" "African Americans see a health-care system infected by racism."

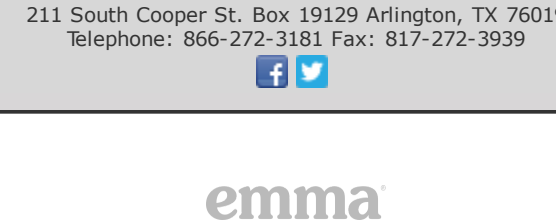
Here's another one: "Three University professors are placed on leave after photos surface of them at campus event wearing and holding racist symbols."

I am deeply pained by these recent news headlines.

Still, as Dean of the School of Social Work, I also am encouraged. I'm encouraged because I believe our communities, more so in recent years, are recognizing that Social Workers are essential. Social Workers are trained, capable and willing to address many of our state and nation's social challenges.

Read the full Dean's Statement on reflecting on [Social Work Month](#)

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