

Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

Second Edition

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On International Social Work and Policy

By: **Dr. Shirley Gatenio-Gabel**

Growing up in an immigrant family undoubtedly influenced my professional interest in different cultures and international social work. I remember the challenges, as a child, of understanding American culture, traditions and even colloquialisms. The greater challenge was convincing my family to incorporate these “foreign” ways without disrespecting their traditional ways of doing things. My goal at the time was to fit in but it turns out that I was learning much more than that.

I study social policies using what is called a comparative approach. This research perspective compares the ways that different countries meet the social and economic needs of their society. I am especially interested in the policies countries develop to meet the changing needs of families with children. This approach means that I need to understand the cultural, political, economic and demographic influences within and across countries. My research helps us understand the different ways that countries respond to similar challenges such as the increased labor force participation of mothers, single-parenthood, developing young children’s assets, etc.. For example, most countries provide paid parental leaves to encourage parents, especially mothers to stay at home after a child is born, and some countries provide good quality and affordable child care options to encourage parents to return to work. Here in the United States we largely leave it to parents to manage this fragile time in the lives of young children on their own and more often than it should, it has negative consequences.

Most of my research has focused on industrialized countries but more recently I have become interested in developing countries. I spent six months living in Bulgaria, a formerly communist country, as a senior Fulbright scholar teaching at two universities, lecturing and researching how emerging child and family policies were affecting minority populations in Bulgaria. I continue to help develop social work education and training there. Living abroad and living the challenges facing Bulgaria was an enriching educational experience for me, an experience that I encourage others to pursue if they can. Since then, I have been studying trends and social protection schemes in Asia, African and Latin America. Over the years, I have been fortunate to share my knowledge as an invited speaker at the World Bank, UNICEF, and Social Work Day at the United Nations and at other international conferences. Recently I was asked to speak at an international expert meeting convened by an advocacy coalition advising the Dutch government on how to allocate international aid to developing countries, particularly in Africa.

To keep current on global issues, especially those relating to child and family policies, I read about social problems affecting countries around the world and keep current on global news. I also find that I learn about other perspectives on social issues by participating in international conferences and by talking to people here and abroad. I am always interested in learning more, so if there is a policy or country you would like to learn more about, let’s do it together!

Child Welfare Immigrant Fellowship Project

By: **Dr. Elaine Congress**
Associate Dean and Co P-I of the Immigrant Project

This year Fordham GSSS received a grant from the New York Community Trust to increase student learning opportunities about immigrants and develop best practices in working with immigrants and their families. The Child Welfare Immigrant Fellowship Project is a multi-system collaboration of the New York Education Consortium, the Administration for Children Services, the NYC Department of Education and the seven schools of social work in New York City. As part of the project, two field units were established, one within ACS, and the other, a school-based field unit at an elementary school in Harlem with students from seven NYC schools of social work.

Melanie Alves is the Fordham student placed at the ACS field unit site and **Alicia Brownell** is the Fordham student placed at the Children of the World school unit where many of the immigrants have come from countries in west Africa. This project has provided the opportunity to generate new knowledge of best practices with immigrant families. In this issue Alicia Brownell one of the Fordham students in the project discusses what she has learned this year about the challenges in engagement of immigrant families.

Engagement of Immigrant Families

By: **Alicia Brownell**
Advanced Year Student
Children of the World Community Fellow

One of the major challenges for the Children of the World Community fellows in this first year has been engaging West African immigrant families in central Harlem. Our placement began with a series of trainings, including material on approaches to reaching diverse populations. A primary task has been learning how to put this information into practice, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

We did not expect it to be easy, especially as a new and unknown organization. We were reaching out to families facing a variety of issues, including multiple marriages and lack of legal status, which made involvement with a strange agency particularly unappealing. Over the course of the year, we developed strategies to help us overcome these barriers. As Camille Evans, an alumna of the earlier Caribbean Project explained, entering into the community and developing some shared experience with clients is especially important. One of the biggest challenges for me was overcoming my inclination to “get straight down to business.” Although I saw my relationship with clients as a professional one, including an element of social rapport in the engagement process created the most successful outcomes. Drinking a cup of tea, sharing some food, or even watching a Ghanaian soap opera together created a connection that formed the foundation of a working relationship. Getting less “work” done in the first few meetings led to a more productive engagement in the longer term.

The Global Social Work Student Association's Learned Lunch

Date: Saturday April 28th *** **Time:** 12:40pm – 1:30pm

Place: Room 713

Special guest speaker Stephanie Asare will be discussing *Social Work International*, an NGO which provides internship opportunities to MSW graduate students.

Please RSVP to mayatsek@gmail.com

Editors: Maya Tsekenis, MSW Student & Dr. Elaine Congress

Please see reverse side.

Fordham University GSSS Students

Comparative Social Work

By: **Hans Menos**

Foundation Year Student

I will be going on a study abroad program to Prague, Czech Republic with Florida State University's School of Social Work this summer. During the six week summer session, I will be taking two courses: **International Child Welfare Practice** and **Qualitative Visual Research in Social Work**. The Visual Research course will focus on the use of photography/videography as a qualitative research tool to capture and evaluate the social issues that came about in central and Eastern Europe since the fall of communism in 1989. I expect to learn a lot about the positive and negative impacts photojournalism can have on public perception and social work practice. The International Child Welfare course is designed to use an ecosystems perspective to provide a comparative framework of knowledge necessary to practice with vulnerable children and their families. I expect to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences in the child protection systems, family services systems, and community caring systems between the United States and Eastern Europe. On a fundamental level, I hope to learn about the role of social work in Eastern Europe and about my peers abroad. Finally, I will be looking towards myself to serve as an exemplar model of what being a social worker in the U.S means to me.

Going Global

By: **Betsy Sherwood**

Foundation Year Student

This May, I will be departing for East Africa. My first stop will be to the 'land of a thousand hills', Rwanda. I will spend a few days in the capital city of Kigali visiting the newly erected genocide memorials. Then, I will be working in Rwaza, a small village with no electricity or running water. My work at the Rwaza Orphanage for the Kinigi Goat Project will be to help orphaned teenagers and young adults who suffered the 1994 genocides. The NGO's goal is to lay the foundation for a mentoring program between the children of the orphanage and young adults from the Goat Project. In June, I will be studying abroad in Nairobi, Kenya via the University of North Carolina, School of Social Work and Faith Based Initiatives. The course will examine social issues, HIV/AIDS, poverty, hunger, health/mental health, and development strategies in Kenya. We will be visiting local and national governmental and non-governmental agencies who are working to address complex social issues. As my departure approaches, I look forward to the prospect of putting my new social work skills to use in a global context.

Global Social Work Day

By: **Maya Tsekenis**

Foundation Year Student

The first annual Global Social Work Day was celebrated at Fordham University on Tuesday March 27, 2007. A special learned lunch was held where faculty addressed advanced year students to discuss international prospects within social work. **Dr. Congress** discussed her role in the International Federation of Social Workers, which has over 82 countries as members; **Dr. Popescu** discussed the role of international agencies and student collaborations and **Dr. Gao**, discussed "The Plight of Laid-Off Workers in Chinese cities". **Dr. Gatenio-Gabel** discussed the importance of international social work and opportunities within it.

The 24th Annual Social Work Day at the United Nations

By: **Joy Bittner**

Foundation Year Student

The 24th annual Social Work Day at the United Nations brought together over 800 social workers and students to learn about "Women and Development: Best Practices." The conference, held on March 23, 2007 at the United Nations headquarters in New York City, was organized by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). The objective for the day was to inform social workers as to the activities at the U.N while exposing the U.N to the profession of social work. As Michael Cronin of IFSW explained, "social work has a long established tradition of involvement at the international level."

Quoting the Chinese proverb, "women hold up half of the sky," Ruth Messinger, the day's first speaker, said that in the developing world women hold up much more than this. Her agency, American Jewish World Services, seeks to unite grassroots organizations which were founded by, run by, and serve women. American Jewish World Services has developed a unique approach using peer exchanges. Peer exchanges are conferences on one central topic where grassroots organizations from around the world are able to learn how their organizations can grow and have the greatest possible impact. Only the grassroots organizations are invited, no outside authorities, making them the experts on the topic resulting in a highly empowering experience.

A natural result of globalization is an increase in migration, particularly in the developing world. Migration is increasingly being feminized as over 50% of migrants are women who primarily find themselves in informal, exploitative jobs. S.K. Guha of UNIFEM, specifically the Asia Pacific and Arab States Section, strives to empower and protect women migrant workers by working at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels. This multi-level approach has resulted in policy changes and new laws promoting gender equality, increased dialogue between sending and receiving countries, and the development of trainings for new migrants. Their strategy to encourage communication between nations serves as a best practice model to other organizations as it helps to remove some of the negative effects of migration for women.

As Jacqueline Moturi Ogega so clearly stated, "social work has a female face." Therefore, the Woman's Mobilization Program of World Religions for Peace seeks to harness the leadership skills and power of African women as a dynamic force for change. Furthermore, as a large percentage of Africa has strong religious beliefs, the faith of these women is viewed as the foundation for their social work. They are able to be bearers of hope because of their belief in a living God. They are "always smiling" even in the face of horrific destruction and despair. This inspiring strength stands out as an example to all other organizations. Even though the women come from a myriad of faith backgrounds, they are able to experience solidarity, shown by the traditional saying, "I am, because you are."

The day concluded with Elizabeth Clark from the National Association of Social Workers who put the words of the three speakers in a social work context. Clark pointed to the Millennium Development Goals of the UN, specifically, to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, as being indispensable to social workers. Without improving the condition of women worldwide, no lasting changes can occur in any other realm. All those who attended Social Work at the U.N Day left with a better understanding of the idea that as agents of change in a profession of hope, social workers can better work to improve the development of women.

Please see reverse side.