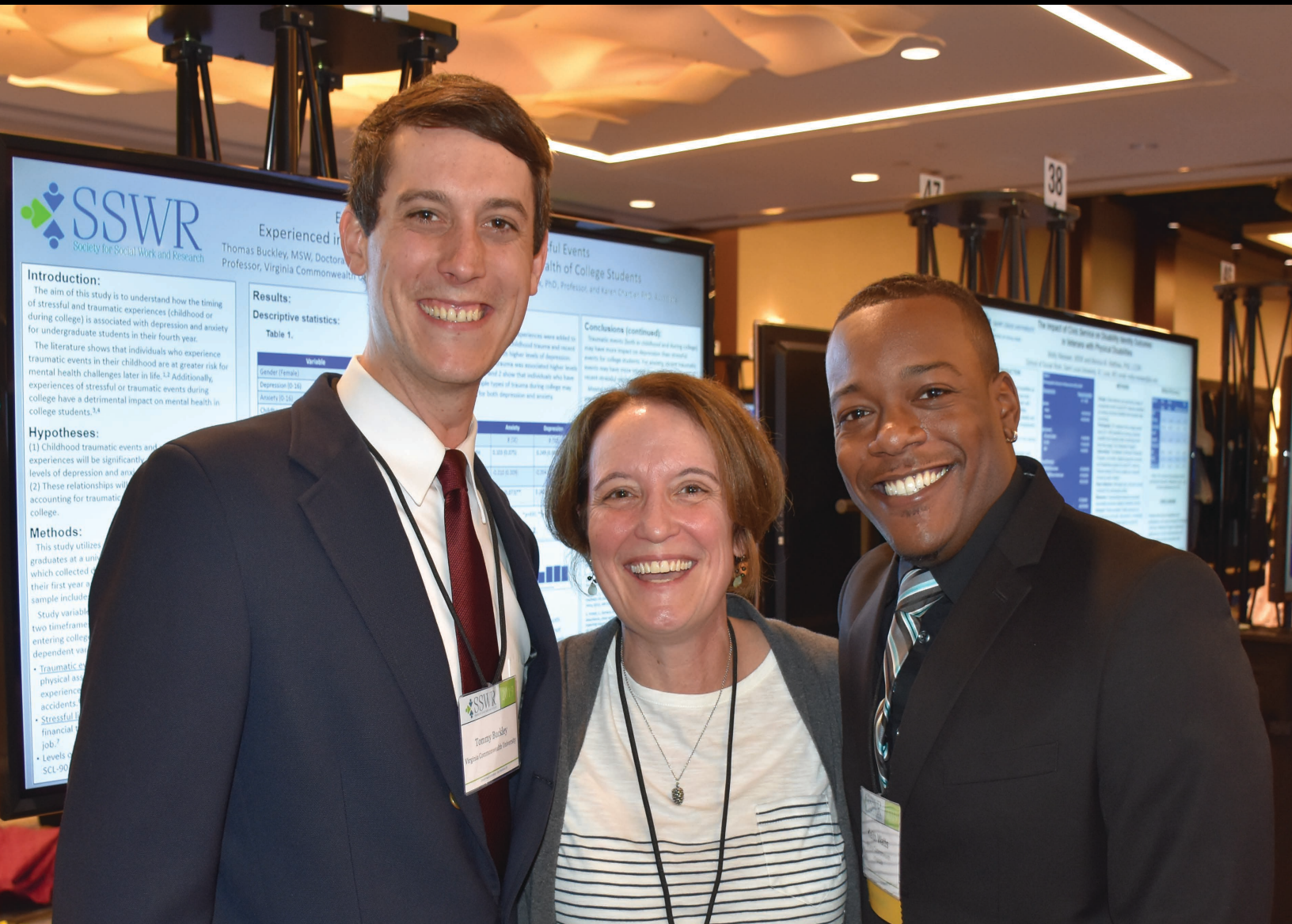


VCU SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN SOCIAL WORK (PH.D.) DEGREE

Virginia's first and foremost social work Ph.D. Program



VCU

School of Social Work

PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to the Virginia Commonwealth University Social Work Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Program. Since 1978, our Ph.D. Program has prepared influential researchers, educators and leaders in the profession. Working collaboratively with a array of accomplished faculty mentors and peers, doctoral students first complete two years of full-time courses in social science theory, research methods and data analysis, and the history and philosophy of the profession and its changing contexts.

Drawing on this foundational knowledge, students then prepare an individualized qualifying examination in a specialized area of interest. The qualifying exam is purposefully designed to lead to a dissertation that demonstrates students' capacity to conduct an independent research project that will further social justice and human well-being by advancing knowledge in and for the profession.

With few exceptions, the VCU Graduate School appoints students to serve as graduate research assistants. These appointments afford them ample opportunities to apply and extend their learning each semester through close faculty mentorship on current research projects. In their third year of the program, students also complete a mentored teaching practicum with a selected faculty member who is teaching a B.S.W. or M.S.W. course that is of interest to them. Upon successful completion of the practicum, students may elect to teach independently in either program.

Our Ph.D. Program uses a holistic admissions process to achieve a diverse study body. This strategy promotes the fuller range of personal and professional experiences needed for cooperative peer learning and critical scholarship. Our graduates are well-prepared to identify, evaluate and address the complexities of current and emergent social problems in settings such as academia, public policy, research and the U.S. military, as well as post-doctoral fellowships. We look forward to your inquiries about our Ph.D. Program and warmly welcome your visit with current students and faculty.

Denise Burnette

DENISE BURNETTE, PH.D.

Program director; professor; Samuel S. Wurtzel Endowed Chair in Social Work; and president of GADE



VCU is one of only 54 universities nationwide designated by the Carnegie Foundation as both "Community Engaged" and "Very High Research Activity."



VCU's Military Student Services offers training for faculty and staff to better support veterans and their families as they transition to academic life. A former School of Social Work faculty member developed the Green Zone at VCU.



The VCU School of Social Work Ph.D. Program is a longstanding member of the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education.



The VCU School of Social Work is ranked 28th in the U.S. News and World Report's most recent rankings of best graduate schools for social work.

ABOUT US

The Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work is the oldest social work program in the American South – founded in 1917 and consistently ranked among the nation’s best by U.S. News and World Report. The School’s Ph.D. Program prepares researchers and educators to develop and apply knowledge that advances social justice, improves human well-being and enhances the profession’s impact on pressing social problems.

The school seeks to prepare a diverse student body whose research, teaching and scholarship will position them for leadership in advancing professional practice, social policy and social work education. To achieve this objective, students will:

1. Conduct and disseminate high-quality research that furthers the knowledge base of the profession.
2. Develop cutting-edge knowledge and skills for social work teaching and learning.
3. Promote social welfare and social justice in and with local, national and global communities.

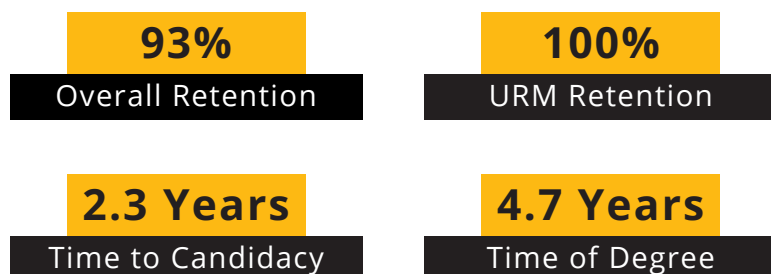
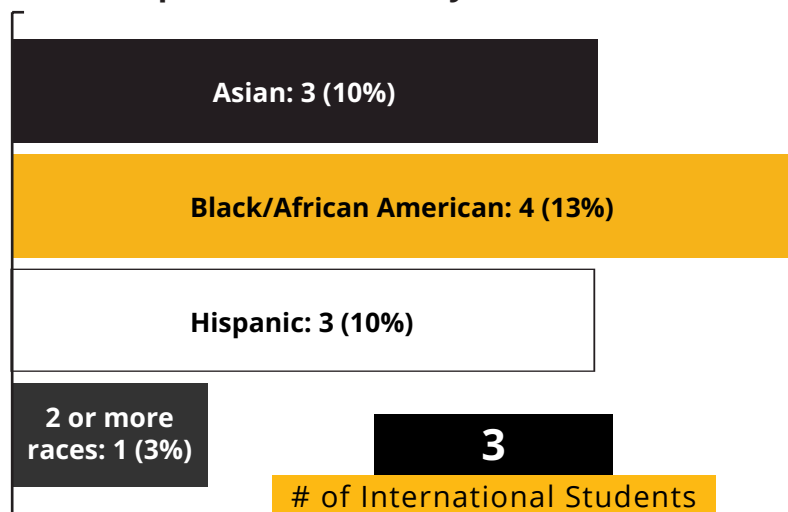
AT A GLANCE: ACADEMIC YEARS 2018-2022

Matriculation across years



Total # of students: 30

Underrepresented minority (URM) students: 11



		Term Total
Fall 2018	Applications	13
	Acceptances	7
	Offers Accepted	2
	Enrolled	2
Fall 2019	Applications	23
	Acceptances	10
	Offers Accepted	7
	Enrolled	6
Fall 2020	Applications	18
	Acceptances	5
	Offers Accepted	3
	Enrolled	4
Fall 2021	Applications	18
	Acceptances	6
	Offers Accepted	4
	Enrolled	4
Fall 2022	Applications	27
	Acceptances	8
	Offers Accepted	6
	Enrolled	5

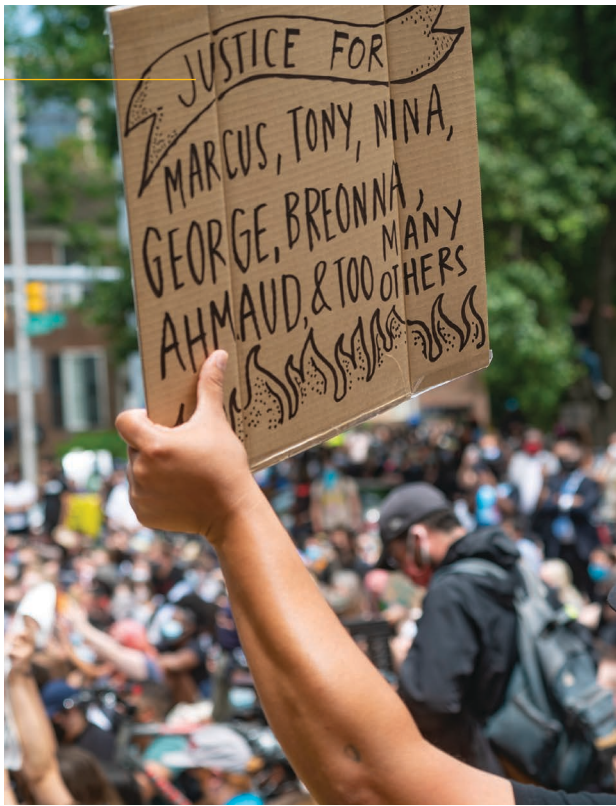
COMMUNITY

Ph.D. students develop relationships with a variety of communities during their tenure in the program. As a Carnegie-designated community-engaged research institution, VCU collaborates with Richmond area and statewide organizations throughout Virginia. Many students volunteer with one or more of 500 local organizations and agencies, and they may collaborate with these entities for their dissertation research.

Doctoral students are also involved in a close-knit community of scholars. They present their work at professional conferences, such as the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) annual meetings. Students are encouraged to participate in doctoral student committees in these and other organizations and to become involved in committees in the School of Social Work and throughout VCU. Social work students and graduates play a vital role in these and other related institutions.

Small cohort sizes allow for intensive faculty-student interaction and close mentorship and foster supportive, collaborative relationships among students in various phases of the program. More advanced students provide individual and group mentorship for incoming cohorts. Faculty throughout the university provide additional mentorship and guidance to our doctoral students.





ABOUT RICHMOND

VCU is located in Virginia's capital city, and the School of Social Work is a short distance from the State Capitol. The James River flows – and crashes, in sections designated as Class IV whitewater rapids – just blocks south of campus. VCU students can participate in whitewater rafting or take advantage of other recreational opportunities in the area through VCU's Outdoor Adventure Program. Bold murals, galleries, museums, restaurants, shopping and diverse neighborhoods create a vibrant and eclectic mosaic where campus and city blend.

SOCIAL WORK PH.D. PROGRAM DETAILS

For more than a century, the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work has prepared students to advance the profession's mission by integrating and applying scientific knowledge and professional skills and values to current and emergent social problems. The Ph.D. Program, which began in 1978, furthers that agenda by preparing doctoral students as research scholars, educators and leaders in the profession.

Because the program is designed with a full-time on-site format, students enjoy individualized mentoring and a highly supportive learning environment. During the first two years of core course work, students take classes in the School of Social Work and other units based on their area of interest. The core curriculum features courses in the history and philosophy of the social work profession; social theory and policy; qualitative and quantitative research methods and data analysis; and teaching.

Upon completing the core course work, students sit for a qualifying examination, which is designed to enable them to demonstrate mastery of core content and the ability to integrate and apply this content to social work concerns and commitments. The qualifying examination serves as the gateway to the dissertation phase of the program, in which students propose, conduct and defend an original research project that advances knowledge and contributes to a more just society.

TEACHING PRACTICUM

After completing their core coursework, students enroll in a social work teaching practicum. They select and work intensively with a full-time faculty member in a mentored classroom teaching experience. Aside from standardized learning objectives, the practicum is individually tailored to enhance students' preparation for teaching based on an assessment of their previous experience, skills and current interests. Approximately 10 hours per week are devoted to the practicum, which includes a bi-monthly seminar. Successful completion of the course qualifies students to teach independently in the M.S.W. and B.S.W. programs.



GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP

For full-time students who are in good academic standing, a [Graduate Research Assistantship](#) (GRA) provides full tuition remission and a competitive stipend in each of their first four years of study. In exchange, students work part-time on faculty research and scholarship. GRA appointments involve intensive faculty mentoring and hands-on experience with a range of research opportunities. The doctoral program director and faculty advisors assist students who remain in the program after four years in identifying sources of support, including [support for dissertation research](#).

ADMISSIONS

Admission to the Ph.D. Program is highly selective. The program is a full-time on-site program, and students are admitted only in the fall semester. Factors considered in admission include demonstrated capacity for critical and creative thinking; ability to synthesize and apply knowledge; clarity of expression; past and potential academic achievement; tenacity and motivation; and “fit” with the VCU Ph.D. Program. Applicants must hold a master’s degree in social work or a closely related discipline. Detailed admission requirements are on the [school website](#).

Individuals who plan to pursue an academic career in social work are advised that the Council on Social Work Education requires faculty who teach required practice courses in accredited programs to hold an M.S.W. and have at least two years of post-M.S.W. or post-B.S.W. professional practice experience. Thus, obtaining an M.S.W. and this experience can be valuable for those who ultimately seek academic positions.

SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID

The School of Social Work has a number of scholarships designated just for Ph.D. students, but numerous graduate scholarship opportunities are available through VCU and state/national sources. Additionally, the doctoral program director and faculty advisors assist students in identifying sources of support for subsequent years, including [support for dissertation research](#).



SOCIAL WORK PH.D.

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS

With nearly 200 alumni, the VCU School of Social Work Ph.D. Program has a long-standing presence throughout higher education, organizations and government.

WHERE YOU FIND OUR PH.D. GRADUATES

Social work Ph.D. graduates can be found working across a variety of settings.

- Academia
- Research institutes and centers
- Government
- Policy institutes and centers
- Military, including Veterans Administration
- Foundations

John Bricout, Ph.D. (he/him)

1998 Ph.D. graduate; professor and director of research, University of Minnesota School of Social Work

Working with top scholars helped shape Dr. Bricout's VCU experience and expanded his research lens. Focusing on employment and community participation on the capabilities and human rights of people with disabilities, he found interdisciplinary mentoring "invaluable."

"I had the opportunity to learn from experts in the School of Social Work, the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, and the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation," he says. "Those mentors continued to stay in touch with me and enrich my development as a scholar and researcher long after I left VCU, continuing to this day."

In Spring 2022, he was named the program's **Making a Difference Alumni Award winner**.



Dalia Khoury, Ph.D. (she/her)

2016 Ph.D. graduate; behavioral health scientist, Research Triangle Institute International

The program prepared Dr. Khoury through myriad opportunities that led to long-lasting connections.

"What I found to be most impactful about my experience were all the research opportunities throughout my tenure in the program," she says. "These included opportunities to publish through my assistantship, opportunities to conduct research through independent study, as well as publications resulting from my dissertation."

Faculty shared the benefits of different career trajectories and helped her build networks that supported her postdoctoral and job searches.

"Across the board, the faculty in the doctoral program is phenomenal. The quality of the mentorship I received – not only from my advisor, but also from other faculty members through assistantships and independent studies – was fantastic, and helped me narrow down my research and career interests to racial/ethnic disparities in access to mental health services. Six years later, I am still in touch with several of the faculty."



Sundania J. W. Wonnum, Ph.D., LCSW (she/her)

2014 Ph.D. graduate; program official, National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities

Mentoring was a key component of Dr. Wonnum's time in the doctoral program.

"The most impactful and enduring aspects of my experience were the instruction and mentoring I received from several of the most accomplished and compassionate social work scholars in graduate education. The relationships I built and the knowledge they imparted have anchored my scholarship and propelled me along my professional path.

"Under the tutelage and continued mentorship of my academic advisor and dissertation chair, I refined my area of study to child behavioral health policy, with focuses on health care access, quality, equity and workforce development."

For prospective students considering the program, she says it's a fit "for any potential scholar that seeks a well-grounded and robust education in research and pedagogy, and their applications across the micro-to-macro spectrum of social work. This program will undoubtedly buttress the success of your career, and the relationships you build will be genuine, impactful and long-lasting."

Hsing-Jung Chen, Ph.D. (she/her)

2009 Ph.D. graduate; associate professor of the Graduate Institute of Social Work, National Taiwan Normal University

There were two degrees of separation to Dr. Chen's initial connection to VCU, but her time in the doctoral program ultimately forged close-knit relationships.

Dr. Chen's graduate advisor, inspired by his own teacher who was a VCU graduate, recommended the doctoral program. "I really appreciate his suggestion and believe I made a life-changing decision," she says.

She became comfortable by being matched with an advisor and senior-level Ph.D. student who shared her research interest, "creating a natural environment for me to discuss my concerns and ask relevant questions.

"Doctoral students have more interactions with their cohorts and instructors, which creates a relatively close relationship. Professors hold high expectations and will provide critical feedback to assist students in becoming independent scholars. I have applied this approach in my mentoring activities.

"I believe the VCU School of Social Work will be ideal for applicants looking for rigorous doctoral training and a supportive community where they can work together to make the world a better place."



SOCIAL WORK PH.D. FACULTY & RESEARCH

The school's distinguished faculty possesses a wide range of substantive and methodological expertise and offers state-of-the-art instruction in social work education. Current examples include:

- Community and organizational partnerships in prevention and intervention research in local, national and international settings.
- Interdisciplinary research in social, behavioral and health sciences, e.g., child and adolescent well-being, interpersonal violence, alcohol and other substance misuse, persons with disabilities, and aging and the life course.
- International collaborative projects, e.g., interpersonal and societal violence and trauma, poverty and inequality, immigrants and refugees in the U.S. and abroad, and population aging and mental health in low-resource settings.

Students are strongly encouraged to draw on the extensive body of faculty expertise within and beyond the School of Social Work for advice and guidance throughout their time in the program.

A wide range of university [institutes and centers](#) complement and strengthen the school's research activities. These entities feature innovative, high-impact advances in the development and application of knowledge in today's world. One example is the C. Kenneth and Dianne [Wright Center for Clinical and Translational Research](#) (CCTR), the first federally funded clinical and translational research center in Virginia. The Wright Center aims to accelerate science that promotes healthy communities, and it provides the commonwealth of Virginia with infrastructure and resources for interdisciplinary human health research.



FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS

Take a closer look at some of our faculty who teach and mentor in the Ph.D. Program.



Matthew Bogenschutz (he/him)
Ph.D. Associate professor

To understand Dr. Bogenschutz's work, you have to understand where he came from.

Growing up, he lived at a summer camp for children with disabilities, run by his parents, where he learned from an early age about the power of inclusion and the importance of belonging. Those lessons have informed every aspect of his career, including his work at VCU. Dr. Bogenschutz currently dedicates his research to helping make policies and services more responsive to the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Along with colleagues from VCU's [Partnership for People with Disabilities](#), Dr. Bogenschutz works on federally funded research to understand how Medicaid expenditures predict health and social outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He also serves as director of the [Virginia Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities program](#).

"Data-informed policymaking is critical if we want to help people with disabilities live fulfilling lives as full partners in their communities. I hope our research plays a role in creating inclusive communities for people with disabilities to live, work and play."

Karen Chartier (she/her)
Ph.D. Associate professor

Family history is a strong indicator of alcohol use disorder (AUD), but Dr. Chartier cautions “genes are not our destiny.”

She explores the intersecting impact of environmental conditions with genetics, including [a study published in the journal Addictive Behaviors](#) and supported by funding from two National Institutes of Health programs.

“I am interested in identifying environmental conditions that increase risk or are protective for individuals who we already know are high-risk for alcohol problems because of family histories,” she says.

Because of the prevalence of the disorder – nearly 15 million people in the U.S. had an AUD according to 2019 data – coupled with a low incidence of treatment, “individuals with alcohol problems are seen in many of the population groups and the systems where social workers find themselves,” she says.

“I think many social work faculty are drawn to issues that have affected their lives or those of their family members. ... It is one of the things I love about this type of research – I get to exchange ideas, continually learn, and collaborate with great people.”



Kyeonmgo Kim (he/him)
Ph.D. Assistant professor

Dr. Kim’s research focuses on aging and mental health, and his [article in Psychiatric Services](#) explored the intersection of older African Americans and mental health care.

In U.S. counties with a higher population of Black residents, those 60 and older were less likely to get mental health treatment, he found.

The study posits these adults were more likely to live in disadvantaged areas with limited access to mental health care, possibly resulting in lower service utilization; and they may distrust medical professionals because of discrimination.

“We know racial and ethnic disparities in mental health and mental health care exist. Particularly, older African Americans have been historically discriminated against in the labor and housing market. As a result, they were less likely to get quality mental health care.”

The Gerontological Society of America awarded Dr. Kim the 2021 Carroll Estates [Rising Star Award](#) for outstanding early career contributions in social research, policy and practice. The Society for Social Work and Research recognized him and two colleagues with an Excellence in Research Award-Honorable Mention in 2020 for a study in Gerontologist on older adults aging in place in gentrifying neighborhoods.



[View more profiles of faculty who teach in the Ph.D. Program](#)



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