

# CROSSLINKS

*A biannual publication of the SCSSW Alumni Association's Alumni of Color Standing Committee*

**Summer 2006**

## WELCOME

As I enter my final year as Chair of the Alumni of Color Standing Committee, I continue to be excited about the renewal of relationships and the building of bridges between current students and alumni of color. During the majority of my tenure, the ACSC committee has focused on revitalizing the mentoring program. Although our goal is to develop an effective program that can ultimately be replicated throughout the Smith community, it is imperative that we continue to fulfill our mission in totality as established in our articles. With the influx of the greatest number ever of students of color entering the School for Social Work, the committee seeks to expand its focus to include retention. Retention success depends on a myriad of dynamics, including the very real issue of financial obligations. According to recently published reports,

students matriculating at U.S. universities are now taking on greater debt. Smith graduate students are no different and it is the goal of the Alumni of Color Standing Committee to assist the School in identifying and providing necessary supports as well as avenues necessarily to ensure that not only will the school continue to increase the number of students of color that it accepts, but that those very same students are able to successfully complete their program of study. Alumni of Color can be instrumental in ensuring that students of color are provided with incentives to complete their education through contributions of time, talent and finances.

*Tanita Cox Teagle, MSW'99*

Chair, Alumni of Color Standing Committee

## A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

This year I have had wonderful opportunities for brief visits with alumni of color during my presentations to alumni in various cities across the country. The brief conversations with alumni have been quite affirming of the education they received at the School. While no one avoided speaking about the intensity and challenges of our program, each person witnessed the importance of a Smith clinical social work education for their current practice and career objectives. Their interest in supporting the next generation of Smith students of color was laudable. Someone reminded me of how I often speak about my belief and experience that the ability of students of color to successfully complete the program is the result not only of their personal capacities but of the paths created and the support of those who came before them. The many mentoring, financial and other contributions alumni of color make both sustain and strengthen the next generation of clinical social workers of color from Smith.

The purpose of my visits to alumni groups has been to provide an update on the School and to speak about my vision for the future. It is a vision of *Stability and Transformation* that honors the theories that inform our relationally based practice as we engage multicultural and international perspectives in the work we do. It is a vision that is responsive to the changing needs in our world and in practice with vulnerable populations. It is a vision that speaks to our historical roots, strengths and possibilities.

You will find the elements of my vision in the Spring 2006 *In Depth*. I trust that you will continue to support the School through financial contributions, recruiting new students, mentoring current students and maintaining strong connections with one another.

*Carolyn Jacobs*

Dean and Elizabeth Marting Treuhaft Professor

## ALUMNI ASSOCIATION ENCOURAGES RESEARCH ON ISSUES RELATED TO PEOPLE OF COLOR -- HISTORY OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION THESIS GRANTS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR

In 1987, the School for Social Work held the "Minority Alumni Conference." Many ideas, concerns and recommendations came out of that conference. Critical to that meeting was not only the vision of historical continuity in documenting the journey of students of color at Smith College School for Social Work, but also the opportunity to further research as it relates to people of color. A

subsequent recommendation was one that "the history of the minority presence at Smith, as well as the contributions of minority faculty and graduates to the profession be documented. The Alumni Association Executive Committee has a long history of interest in and support for the Social Work Archives and wanted to impact upon this recommendation in some way. As a first step, \$500 of the

Special Activities Fund was earmarked to support a thesis project by a minority student or students. The purpose of the thesis project would be to document the ethnic minority experience of students and /or alumni at the Smith College School for Social Work. Additionally, guidelines were developed in order to collect and preserve the personal papers of minority students and materials associated with the Third World Council," Smith College School for Social Work Journal, Fall 1987.

Unfortunately this award does not always get presented each year as it sporadically attracts applicants. Past recipients of this thesis award were: Valerie Richards, MSW'90, Janet Saxon, MSW'91, Linda Williams, MSW'92, Jacqueline Gray McDonald, MSW'93, Katherine A. Oscar, MSW'94, Donna C. Schmidt, MSW'95, Lisa Werkmeister Rozas, MSW'96, PhD'03, Nikol Nabors-Glass, MSW'97, Lisa Moore, MSW'98 and Michelle Oliva, MSW'00.

In 2000, the Alumni Association introduced several changes to the award application process in the hopes that more students would apply for all three awards, but in particular hoping to attract more interest in this particular

thesis project. Still, the award remains challenged in attracting thesis applicants. It is the hope of the Alumni Association that through increased awareness, alumni, faculty and staff can be instrumental in creating more interest in the documentation and research of the community of color's experience at Smith SSW.

**Description - Alumni/Student of Color Research Thesis Grant:** This \$500 grant was established to underscore the Association's interest in documenting the historical experience of students of color at the School for Social Work. The grant will be awarded to the student whose thesis proposal best explores the history of alumni/students of color at the School. Proposal foci can include but are not limited to: alumni of color as a whole; specific groups of alumni of color; alumni of color by graduation year; the formal and informal organization of alumni/students of color; individual contributions of alumni of color (including oral histories); etc. For example, a thesis title may be, "A Comparative Analysis of Theoretical Orientation of Alumni of Color from 1970-1980" or "Community-Based Practice vs. Private Practice among Alumni of Color: Meeting the Needs of African American Families." All students are encouraged to apply.

## THANK YOU

The Smith College School for Social Work Alumni Association would like to extend a sincere thanks to Ludley Howard, MSW'90 for serving on the Alumni of Color

Standing Committee for the past three years. Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication!

## COURTESIES OF THE COLLEGE EXTENDED TO SSW ALUMNI

You may be familiar with the professional networks and alumni/student gatherings sponsored by SSW alumni groups across the country, but you may not be as familiar with the services available to SSW alumni from the College.

### In the Area?

For those who are local, alumni can access a number of campus services and facilities. By simply securing a campus OneCard, alumni can borrow books from the library, access the Fitness Center and Athletic Facilities, or even borrow a canoe to row on Paradise Pond. To secure a OneCard, contact Andrew Weir (x 3082 or [aweir@email.smith.edu](mailto:aweir@email.smith.edu)) for ID requirements and an

appointment. (Be sure to consult with the various facilities to review regulations which might apply to alumni usage.)

### Online Alumni Directory/Lifetime Email

The Smith College Alumnae Association maintains an online directory of all alumni, including SSW alumni. This directory allows alumni to search for Smith friends by name, class, geography, profession or to even do a custom search (i.e., by class or geography). Alumni can also update their own data online. The database is updated every other week. All alumni have a special ID number which provides access to the online directly. You can get your ID by calling the SSW alumni office at (413) 585-4290 or by emailing the School at [sswalum@email.smith.edu](mailto:sswalum@email.smith.edu).

## 2006 ALUMNI ASSOCIATION THESIS GRANT RECIPIENT



The 2006 Alumni Association Thesis Grant has been awarded to **Myrtho Gardiner, A06** for his thesis entitled "Can Individuals Develop an addiction to the Lifestyle or Behavior Associated with the Distribution of Narcotics?: A Theoretical Analysis of Criminal Behavior Using Social Learning and Moral Models."

Congratulations Myrtho for a job well done!

**Myrtho Gardiner, A06**

## MENTORING: CAN YOU EMBRACE THIS EXPERIENCE?

By Nelly Rojas Schwan, MSW'88

One of the primary activities of the Alumni of Color of the School of Social Work is mentoring students of color, a very tangible way of offering support to those starting in the profession.

Often we talk about the benefits for the student, but as we talk to mentors we realize that mentoring is just as positive and enriching of an experience for those of us who embrace this opportunity. To learn more about what mentoring brings to students of color we talked to Elvira Muñoz, a 4 year veteran in mentoring. Elvira lives and works in Southern California, and mentoring certainly contributes to strengthen her connection to our alma mater.

Elvira's interest in mentoring goes back to her days as a student, and the positive experience she had with mentors. "I went to cities where I knew no-one, and Smith alumni were so gracious and generous in welcoming me and making me feel like a part of their family, and helping me to establish myself.... I became a mentor, because I identified with the students coming to a new community to start their internship and needing support... I received such wonderful support when I needed it, that I had to do my part by becoming a mentor myself."

We are also finding a range of approaches; some mentors do it once or sporadically; others "get hooked" on the experience. Elvira has mentored a number of students over the years. She says that "I have just really enjoyed getting to know the women that I've been able to mentor. Every experience is different but special." This year she is mentoring not one, but two interns.

Elvira has found her mentoring experiences professionally enriching. Their concerns about clients or work situations are stimulating and at times challenging; the mentor comes out of the experience with increased knowledge and experience of the particular challenges in the field.

Mentoring a person of the same ethnicity exposes you to the diversity within your own culture, and also the cross

cultural issues to which the interns are exposed, not only in their work with clients but also in their supervisory and collegial relationships.

We asked Elvira how mentoring interfaces with the supervisory relationship. She indicates that mentoring can be very helpful in bridging differences when there are challenges in the supervisory relationship. Mentors can lend support and validation if appropriate, and assist interns to clarify their thoughts helping to decrease their anxiety, "be a sounding board, encouraging them to have an open communication, because at times it can be pretty intimidating to talk about certain issues with your supervisor. Mentors can be invaluable to students".

In terms of advice for potential mentors Elvira indicates they need to be clear on what they can offer, including how they can be available. Elvira adds that every mentor can make a very special and unique contribution to an intern. Every relationship is unique. Students appreciate and value the mentoring experience. It strengthens their professional growth.

Elvira indicates that her mentoring relationships "often go beyond Smith. I continue to have relationships with some of them. They're a part of my life, and they've gotten to know my family, my children. You just can develop life-long relationships that enrich your life and your family's life. It also happened with my own mentor."

Talking to Elvira about her experience, one comes to realize that mentoring is just as enriching and as positive an experience for the mentor as it is for the intern. As alumni we are fortunate to have the opportunity to engage in this relationship. There is a student of color that would benefit from your experience, your wisdom. Are you ready to embrace this experience?

If you are interested, please contact Tanita Cox Teagle at or [tanitaonline@yahoo.com](mailto:tanitaonline@yahoo.com) .

## SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Please send your email address to the Office of Alumni Affairs, if you would prefer to have future Crosslinks newsletters emailed to you. The email address to send your address to is [sswalum@email.smith.edu](mailto:sswalum@email.smith.edu) .

**Smith College School for Social Work**  
Alumni Association  
Lilly Hall  
Northampton, MA 01063  
[sswalum@email.smith.edu](mailto:sswalum@email.smith.edu)

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## *CROSSLINKS*

*News from the Smith College School for Social Work Alumni of Color Standing Committee*

**2006 -2007**

### **Alumni of Color Standing Committee**

Chair	Tanita Cox, MSW'99	<a href="mailto:tanitacoxonline@yahoo.com">tanitacoxonline@yahoo.com</a>
Native American Representative	Starr Wood, MSW'90, Ph.D.'00	<a href="mailto:sawood@albany.edu">sawood@albany.edu</a>
African Diaspora Representative	Alistair Blake, MSW'99	<a href="mailto:alistair.blake@nyu.edu">alistair.blake@nyu.edu</a>
African Diaspora Representative	Vacant	
Latina Representative	Nelly Schwan, CRT'88, ABD'93	<a href="mailto:nschwan@villageforchildren.org">nschwan@villageforchildren.org</a>
Latino Representative	Alejandro Luciano, MSW'05	<a href="mailto:aaluciano@mac.com">aaluciano@mac.com</a>
Asian Representative	Sujin Lee, MSW'04	<a href="mailto:slee0109@yahoo.com">slee0109@yahoo.com</a>

If you are interested in, or would like to recommend someone for a vacancy, please contact Tanita Cox Teagle at [tanitacoxonline@yahoo.com](mailto:tanitacoxonline@yahoo.com)