

SOCIAL WORK NEWSLETTER

Fall 2026

A LETTER FROM SYLVIA BEKELE

Dear Social Work Community,

As we move through this winter season, I have found myself returning to a simple truth: to walk on water, Peter had to get off the boat first.
That image captures the very heart of what we do as social workers. As social workers, we are often drawn toward uncomfortable situations. We are trained to enter the hardest, most vulnerable spaces of the human experience, places that often feel uncertain or overwhelming. To go there, we have to be willing to leave the safety and comfort of the boat behind.

Stepping onto the water requires courage, yes, but perhaps even more importantly, it requires humility. We do not enter someone else's hard place with all the answers or as the hero of their story. We step out with open hands, a willingness to listen, and the grace to recognize our own limits while trusting that we are called to be present. When Peter finally had the faith to take that step over the edge, he did something that seemed completely impossible. **To me, that is social work at its finest—and it is my deepest hope that our students leave Eastern prepared to take that exact step. #getofftheboat**

As I look at where we are as a department, I am humbled by the season of flourishing growth we are experiencing right now. None of this happens in isolation!
To our students: Thank you for your courage in the classroom and in your internship placements, and for your willingness to lean into the discomfort of learning and serving.
To our faculty and staff: Thank you for your tireless dedication, mentorship, and care that anchor this department every single day. It is a pleasure to work with each of you!
To our administration: Thank you for championing our mission and supporting the vision that allows this program to thrive; we are so grateful to be a part of Eastern University's mission of faith, reason, and justice.
As we look ahead to the coming months, may we continue to lead with humility, serve with courage, and never be afraid to step out of the boat.

Kindly,
Dr. Bekele



WE'RE GROWING

Over the past year, our MSW program has seen tremendous growth! We've welcomed our largest new group of students this fall, and our department is expanding right alongside them. By bringing on new faculty and creating dedicated staff roles, we're ensuring our students receive exceptional guidance and mentorship throughout their time at Eastern. With the demand for skilled social workers growing rapidly in healthcare, mental health, and community advocacy, our expanding team brings incredible energy and enthusiasm to their work every day, helping our program flourish on all fronts.

Faculty Spotlight:



Dr. Jack Gatti Hilton presented at the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) conference on the intersection of mental health, faith, and stigma within conservative Christian communities. Drawing on findings from a 16-article systematic literature review, his presentation explored how religious stigma, shame, and treatment ambivalence can create barriers to mental health care. He also introduced his P.A.T.H. Model® (Presence, Alignment, Truth, Healing), a neuroscience-informed, faith-integrated clinical framework designed to help clinicians honor clients' spiritual beliefs while providing ethical, evidence-informed mental health care.
The presentation emphasized the importance of reducing shame, reframing treatment ambivalence, and bridging the gap between faith and psychological healing



Congratulations to Dr. Sarah Quinter Kim for her recently published new peer-reviewed studies that advance critical conversations in social work policy and clinical practice.

- "Youth Who Remain in Care: Exploring Factors Influencing Participation in Extended Foster Care" Published in Child Abuse & Neglect
- "The Barriers and Facilitators to Substance Use Disorder Treatment in Northern New Mexico: A Peer Support Worker's Perspective"

Published in Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions
We are proud to celebrate Dr. Quinter Kim's dedication to impactful, community-centered research and her ongoing contributions to the social work profession.



Internship Updates & Important Dates

Summer 2026 Cohort: Internship experiences begin in January! We are excited for our students as they take this next step in their MSW journey.

Fall 2026 Cohort: Internship Information Sessions are coming up! Students preparing for their Summer 2027 internships should plan to attend ONE of the following sessions:

- Thursday, January 14, 2027 | 8:00–9:00 PM
- Friday, January 15, 2027 | 12:00–1:00 PM
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Please select the session that works best for your schedule. You only need to attend one session.

Stay Connected with Eastern Socail Work!

Follow us on Instagram **@easternsocialwork** to keep up with the latest program updates and student highlights.
Want to be featured in a Student Spotlight?
We'd love to share your journey! Send your MSW reflections, field experiences, or photos of you and your loved ones to @MSWadvising.

- Follow: @easternsocialwork
- Get featured: @MSWadvising

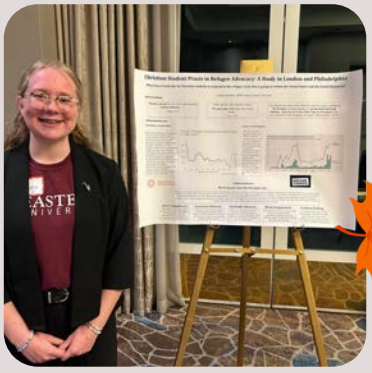
BSW Program News

As the semester winds down, the finish line is officially in sight! Whether you are tackling final projects or checking off the remaining assignments, we want to recognize all the hard work you have put in so far. A big shout-out to our transfer students completing their very first term with us: stepping into a new campus is a big deal, and your presence and perspective have made our community stronger.

With deadlines and finals approaching, remember to take care of yourself, support one another, and let's finish the term strong!



Eastern University juniors Cathleen Saunders and Sydni Scott traveled to California for NACSW's 76th Annual Convention! Serving as NACSW's BSW Student Representative and Board Member, Cathleen helped lead the conference experience by building student networks, running social media, and leading Saturday devotions.





Making Strides for Mental Health in Philly On October 17th, our students and faculty joined hands with the community at the annual **NAMI Walk** in Philadelphia. NAMI provides free, life-changing support and resources to anyone struggling with mental health, working tirelessly to erase the stigma surrounding it. By completing the annual 1.5-mile walk, our students helped raise vital awareness and promote education for mental health advocacy. Thank you to everyone who supported this meaningful tradition!



SSWA

All BSW students and Social Welfare minors are invited to join SSWA (Student Social Work Association). Meetings and events are scheduled often. If you would like more infomation on joining, please contact Tauryn Gild at tauryn.gild@eastern.edu or come to a meeting.

SSWA Regular Meetings
1:00 PM
Wednesdays
McInnis 329



Show Your Eastern Social Work Pride

Looking to gear up in style? The Student Social Work Association (SSWA) has launched an online store through Prep Sportswear, featuring a wide variety of custom Eastern t-shirts, hats, and hoodies.

Whether you're a student, faculty member, or family supporter, you'll find plenty of designs and color options to choose from—plus regular discount codes to help you save.

Prepsportswear.com

On the webite, select Eastern University then choose Social Work under the Activities section

Eastern's Annual Homecoming Weekend



On Saturday, October 11th, the EU community gathered to celebrate Homecoming. Students, faculty, and alumni came together on campus for a wonderful day filled with school spirit, festivities, and shared memories that highlighted the institution's strong sense of tradition and connection.





Upcoming Event:

On December 2nd from 12:00-2:00 PM SSWA will host a fundraiser in the Walton Library Lobby. Students will sell hot chocolate to raise funds for the BSW Student Travel Assistance Fund. We hope you will consider supporting this worthwhile event.





As we head into the Thanksgiving break, we want to pause and say thank you to the heart of our community: our dedicated students and accomplished alumni.

Whether you're on studying on campus, online, or working in your community, your drive continues to inspire us every day.

We hope this break gives you a well-deserved opportunity to step back, recharge, and celebrate with family and friends. Wishing our entire community a restful, happy, and safe Thanksgiving!

Considering an MSW?

Learn more at one of our online Info Sessions.
Sessions are scheduled monthly and registration is required.



To sign-up for our next one visit https://www.eastern.edu/open-houses-graduate-adult

Meet the Social Work Department



Dr. Sylvia Bekele, Department Chair, MSW Program Director, Assistant Professor of Social Work



Kimberly Bass, BSW Program Director, Lecturer of Social Work



Brittany DiBella, Assistant BSW Program Director, Lecturer of Social Work



Christyn Dodla, Internship Director, Lecturer of Social Work



Dr. Jack Gatti Hilton, Assistant Professor of Social Work



Kristen Hong, Academic Advising Manager, Affiliate Faculty



Joy Bowman Lim, Affiliate Faculty, Lead Internship Supervisor



Sierra Winslow Fegely, Student Success Advisor, Affiliate Faculty



Dr. Sarah Quinter Kim, Assistant Professor of Social Work



Lexy Maratellos, Internship Coordinator, Affiliate Faculty



Noah Zegstroo, Lead Internship Coordinator, Affiliate Faculty



Colleen Ellis, Administrative Operations Coordinator

Check out the Social Work Department website for a full listing of faculty, adjuncts, and staff bios.

EASTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Social Work