The review crew

**Reviewing grant proposals** for federal agencies has proven to be a boon to researchers at the USC School of Social Work.

A perfect example is Suzanne Wenzel (left), a professor and current chair of the school’s Research Council.

Since 2001, she has served as a reviewer for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on multiple occasions. She recently accepted an invitation to join a four-year review panel tasked with examining proposals related to the multiple personal, social, and community factors that influence HIV risk and preventive behaviors.

“I think it has helped me to craft stronger proposals and to give my colleagues and doctoral students better advice on writing their own,” she said. “The level of precision and scientific rigor that is expected by the reviewers and the institutes is really quite pronounced.”

The grant review process can be mystifying for many in academia. Application guidelines are long and complex, arguments and approaches have to be framed in a certain way, and funding priorities are constantly shifting.

Having an insider’s perspective on how federal agencies such as the NIH and National Science Foundation (NSF) assess grant applications is critical to putting together a successful proposal, said Charles Kaplan, associate dean of research at the USC School of Social Work.

“You can send proposals in but you can’t get them funded unless you are very aware of the dynamics of the review process,” he said. “You really have to have your finger on the pulse of what NIH and NSF are doing in terms of their review and to try to get on those committees. That’s the best way of learning. It’s a stepping-stone to excellence.”

The school has increasingly emphasized mentoring and internal review of grant proposals before they are submitted.
After tough upbringing, clinical professor finds way to give back

Omar López can point to a few instances in his past that set him on the right track.

That moment when his mother pointed to a man in an orange jumpsuit sweeping the streets of Mexico City and told him that he would have to stay in school or he would end up in a similar situation.

His father, a baker with a sixth-grade education, delivering a similar message as they rose at 3 a.m. to start preparing the dough and heating the ovens.

Having a few trusted mentors who encouraged him to keep attending classes and stay on the cross-country team rather than getting into trouble.

But it wasn't until he took a few sociology classes in college that López realized how fortunate he had been.

“I started noticing, man, I’m pretty lucky,” he said. “A lot of my friends with very similar backgrounds and abilities were either deported, dead, or in jail.”

Throughout his remarkable career as a social worker specializing in adoption services for Spanish-speaking families, as an international liaison handling complicated issues related to child welfare, and even as a clinical associate professor and assistant director of field education at the USC School of Social Work, López has said he felt blessed to have the opportunity to help others, particularly children and families in vulnerable populations.

“I’ve been very fortunate,” he said. “Being in a position to give back really drives me.”

As a self-described knucklehead growing up in a poor area of Mexico City, López said he proved to be too much of a handful for his hardworking single mother. By the time he finished sixth grade, she had enough and shipped him off to live with his father in the United States.

He landed in Elgin, a city in western Riverside County, at 12 years old with no immigration documents and a rowdy disposition.

“I was in an area that wasn't the greatest—gangs, prostitution, drugs,” he said. “Coming to this country as an immigrant, not speaking a word of English, was kind of rough, so I ended up hanging out with the wrong crowd.”

His father had good intentions but poor parenting skills, López said, letting him get away with misbehaving for several years. When his father remarried and tried to set some new boundaries, it didn’t sit well with López, who began spending his time in the streets or spending the night with friends so he didn’t have to follow the rules at home.

But not everything was bleak. As a freshman, he had joined the cross-country team to spend more time with a girlfriend on the squad. They eventually split up, but his coach refused to let him quit running.

“I ended up sticking with it,” López said. “That is a way I saved me. I minimized the number of hours I was on the street.”

He had managed to attend class often enough to maintain decent grades and even completed a few advanced courses. A school counselor encouraged him to apply to college and he was accepted to the University of Southern California in 2004.

By that time, he was a permanent resident; his father had been working diligently behind the scenes to ensure López was eligible for a green card, and later, citizenship.

After taking an elective course on the U.S. education system, López said he became aware of how few minority groups had fewer opportunities to succeed.

“The lightbulb started going off,” he said.

He enrolled in more sociology courses and, at the urging of one of his professors, quit his janitorial work-study job to take a position with the Chicano Federation, a nonprofit that provides social services and advocates for Latino issues.

As he neared the end of his undergraduate studies in sociology, López received a call from the USC School of Social Work.

“I was aware of the university, but I didn’t have much interest,” he said. “But when my advisor told me, I jumped at the opportunity.”

López was introduced to María Zuniga, a board member of the Chicano Federation and a long-time professor of social work at San Diego State University. After a five-minute conversation, she had convinced him to look into a stipend program that provided nearly $40,000 toward graduate education and other expenses as long as participants agreed to work in public child welfare services after graduation.

“You know the only thing they will pay me to go to school is to do what I want to do anyway and then they will give me a job after,” López said. “I sounded like a pretty good deal.”

He earned his master’s degree in social work in 2009. Thereafter, he had been hired by San Diego County as a social worker specializing in adoptions. He worked closely with adoptive families that primarily spoke Spanish through a program called Nuestros Niños.

“I developed more expertise in working on international cases, essentially dependents that were placed in Guatemala, Mexico, or other countries,” he said.

That experience landed him a gig as international liaison for San Diego County’s child welfare system.

When the county experienced a wave of national immigration reform in 2009, the university hired him to perform the same role.

López and his colleagues are still developing a specialized program to look into a stipend program that provided nearly $40,000 toward graduate education and other expenses as long as participants agreed to work in public child welfare services after graduation.

“When the county experienced budget cuts and eliminated his position in 2009, the university hired him to perform the same role,” López said. “A year later, the USC School of Social Work offered him a similar job at its San Diego Academic Center.

Throughout his time with the county, López became involved with various boards and organizations, including taking on leadership roles with the county employee union.

“I was an idealistic 23-year-old,” he said. “I was going to change the world.”

His experience, first as union steward and then vice president, and president, helped him understand how to present issues and build relationships in a productive manner.

And although he enjoyed his clinical work as a social worker, López helped students at his alma mater, San Diego State University, connect with field instructors and county agency.

When the county experienced mass shootings in 2019, the grant was designed to increase the size of the behavioral health services workforce.

López said a common theme among recent mass shootings has been that the perpetrators are often young men between the ages of 15 and 25 who were unable to access mental health and behavioral health services.

“As a country, we’re not doing a good job of helping these individuals or providing them with services that are necessary to prevent these outcomes,” he said.

The grant will provide more than $1 million in stipends to students interested in issues of substance abuse, mental health, and violence. López and his colleagues are still developing the selection process, but he said students who know about the program are already expressing interest.

“It’s going to be very competitive,” he said. “This is allowing me to work on it for more so at the macro level.”

But López is not one to sit back and congratulate himself for all he has accomplished. He is forward with other initiatives, including completing a doctorate program in higher education administration at USC and teaching leadership and field practicum courses.

He is also serving as an advisor to the Mexican government on issues such as business, politics, immigration, and police. He works with groups of approximately 100 individuals from North America. He travels there as another way to have an impact. He helps inspire others to work in social work to pursue a similar path.

“All of these experiences are great because I use them in my teaching,” he said. “I can give my students concrete examples of what some social workers can do in a bunch of different fields.”

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HALUX SOYDAN, PhD
Director of the Hamovitch Center

DEAN
Marillyn Flynn

DIRECTOR
Haluk Soydan

EDITOR
Eric Lindberg

Hamovitch PI is a research newsletter published by the Hamovitch Center for Social Justice Studies at the USC School of Social Work. Send questions, comments, and input requests to rd@usc.edu.

Front page: Federal officials recently selected Omar López as a clinical associate professor at the USC School of Social Work. López is charged with helping students find internships with social services agencies to gain real-world experience. He recently received a $5.6 million grant to expand student training opportunities on issues relevant to social workers, particularly the need for more behavioral health specialists.
A research team led by associate professor Shing Wu (center) and research assistant professor Hsin-Yi Hsiao (front left) test whether tablet computers can help older adults in Taiwan manage their health.

Dean inducted into social work hall of distinction

It’s safe to say Marilyn Flynn is in esteemed company.

The dean of the USC School of Social Work is among six individuals with distinguished and successful careers in social work who were inducted into the California Social Work Hall of Distinction during a recent ceremony that recognized their exceptional contributions to social justice and social welfare.

Joining Flynn in the new class of inductees are Marilyn Montenegro, PhD ’81, a social worker committed to resolving issues of societal inequality, and Helen Ramirez, MSW ’59, whose work in child welfare and adoption services have been a model for practice and outreach in minority communities.

“It’s so heartening to see so many people committed to preserving the history and dignity of the profession of social work in California,” said Rino Patti, DSW ’67, dean emeritus of the USC School of Social Work and professor emeritus.

In accepting the honor, Flynn emphasized the need to cultivate and cherish an appreciation for the history of the social work profession in California. Although much is known about economic and political development, she said less is understood about social workers who transformed the world.

“Some aboriginal village seniors with chronic disease struggled to deal with the disease on their own and didn’t receive the long-term care they needed,” Hsu said, describing results from a previous study. “In the end, they chose to commit suicide.”

Dean Flynn created a tradition that endures and inspires others for generations to come.

Marilyn Flynn

“I’m extremely proud to be part of a narrative that exemplifies and honors social work in the West. I hope we are establishing a tradition that endures and inspires others for generations to come.”

Marilyn Flynn

A $1.5 million donation from a couple with strong ties to USC will enable researchers at the USC School of Social Work to explore how technology can promote health among older adults in Taiwan.

Provided by USC Trustee Daniel Tsai and his wife, USC alumna Irene Chen, through their charitable foundation, the funding will support the efforts of associate professor Shing Wu and her research team to test whether tablet computers can be an effective medium to help prevent disease, decrease isolation, increase social engagement, and give them a tool to do better self-care,” said Wu, a researcher with the school’s Roybal Institute on Aging who will be working with family members to examine whether tablet computers can help older adults in Taiwan manage their health.

Gift will help older adults bridge the digital divide

“Some aboriginal village seniors with non-English proficiency are trying to deliver, and build social support for these patients,” Wu said. “This will create a more healthy aging community.”

The project will compare outcomes for older adults who receive tablet training and technological support via the Intergenerational Mobile Technology Opportunities Program, or IMTOP, to a comparison group that will receive standard health care.

Researchers are hopeful that providing access to online resources and tools will help address critical issues faced by older individuals, including low awareness of serious health conditions such as diabetes, the most prevalent chronic illness in Taiwan.

“Colorado is the world’s eighth largest economy; we are both the prophets and the canaries in the mine for the 21st century,” she said. “I believe we will be the source of social leadership on some of the greatest challenges confronting our society today.”

Paraphrasing C.S. Lewis, she added that it is never too late to set another goal or dream a new dream. “I’ve always believed this,” she said, “so just wait, there’s more to come.”

Flynn is joined in the Hall of Distinction by Montenegro, who has been a committed advocate for equality since her days as a graduate student at the UCLA School of Social Welfare and later as a doctoral student in urban studies at USC. Throughout her career, Montenegro has tirelessly pursued efforts to increase diversity in academia, to redress the injustices of a perniciously racist society, to address and protect prisoners from abuse and inhumane conditions.

Ramirez, another USC alumna, developed innovative programs and policies in child welfare and served as a vigorous advocate for minority children and families, establishing the first social work unit in the Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions focused on placing children with developmental disabilities with adoptive families and creating a support and training program for emancipated youths transitioning from foster care.

The Hall of Distinction also welcomed L. George Gitali, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, praised Flynn for her rigor, entrepreneurial spirit, generosity, international perspective, collaborative nature, and intense devotion to social justice.

“She’s always looking beyond the obvious into the future,” he said. “Marilyn has always been willing to share resources and time and energy and intellect to advance our profession to a new level.”

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Scholars to explore maltreatment in select neighborhoods

How do unique neighborhood characteristics influence rates of child maltreatment?

A new study led by researchers at the USC School of Social Work will explore that question, particularly how social dynamics in immigrant enclaves and collaboration among community service providers may protect against or increase the risk of child abuse and neglect.

Previous studies have largely focused on individual and family factors that might influence maltreatment, but researchers at the USC School of Social Work are widening that perspective to examine specific geographic areas in Southern California with child maltreatment rates that are higher or lower than expected.

Although the two-year project builds on a current effort by assistant professor Michael Hurlburt to explore variations in maltreatment at the neighborhood level in San Diego County, it will essentially allow doctoral candidates Megan Finno-Velasquez and Amy He to advance their personal research interests.

“This is allowing Amy and Megan to finish their dissertations and to develop additional skills and expertise that will strengthen their transitions into faculty positions,” Hurlburt said. “This grant is designed to develop outstanding scholars who will be the next generation of professional leaders in the field.”

Finno-Velasquez will focus on how cultural and social factors related to the immigrant experience may increase or decrease instances of child abuse or neglect, whereas He is interested in exploring the role of interactions and partnerships among child welfare service providers in preventing maltreatment.

Both students said the funding, approximately $200,000 from the federal Children’s Welfare Archives, will help them advance their dissertations and begin their careers in social work.

“Do they have difficulty understanding the laws here?”

For example, He recalled a recent conversation with a colleague who works as an emergency response supervisor regarding a specific Los Angeles neighborhood with a high concentration of low-income Guatemalan immigrants.

“Rates of maltreatment in that community are notoriously high, she said, and agencies are experiencing difficulty providing services due to language barriers and cultural differences.

“For some reason, the domestic violence in these families is really intense,” He said. “Housing is also an issue, because one person may rent out an apartment to three different families.”

Developing strategies to improve access and use of services in that type of situation is a good fit with He’s general research interests and her dissertation, which is focused on interagency collaboration and stakeholders that may lead to new studies.

“This funding, including the original support from this work will guide ongoing efforts to design community-level intervention strategies that can reduce local rates of maltreatment. The team is already building partnerships with agencies in San Diego, including a nonprofit organization in San Diego County that owns more than 30 affordable housing properties.

“Over time, we’re hoping that those collaborations will serve as ongoing venues for trying out ideas for prevention that come from the work we are doing,” Hurlburt said.

The researchers will also share their findings with community stakeholders during planned meetings and via the school’s Child Development and Children’s Services research cluster and Children’s Data Network.

“For me coming out of USC,” Finno-Velasquez agreed, noting that she plans to ask specific questions during planned meetings and via the school’s Child Development and Children’s Services research cluster and Children’s Data Network.

“This grant allows me to go out and collect data and talk to people about what is actually happening,” He said. “It’s a really great complement to my dissertation and in terms of my research agenda, it creates a much more rounded profile for me coming out of USC.”

Finno-Velasquez added that the funding will help her develop a more complete understanding of how both negative and positive social dynamics, such as strong family support networks, social isolation, and fear of mistrust of government, may affect child maltreatment rates in areas with high concentrations of Latino immigrants.

“This grant is designed to develop outstanding scholars who will be the next generation of professional leaders in the field.”

Michael Hurlburt
Should social work become more scientific?

Evidence-based Practice in Social Work: Development of a New Professional Culture

Marcia Soydan and Lawrence Palinkas

As a way of providing better quality services to the communities we serve, there have been a number of individuals who have embraced evidence-based practice for various reasons.

In a recently published book, Palinkas and Haluk Soydan, professor, associate dean of research, and director of the school’s Hamovitch Center for Science in the Human Services, outlined the issues and challenges of evidence-based practice in social work.

Ensuring that social services or treatments provided to individuals don’t do more harm than good is a critical underpinning of the profession and one that benefits from more rigorous research. However, concerns about adopting a dogmatic perspective toward evidence-based practice led to implementing interventions as they were intended and tested, and general discomfort with the perceived rigidity of evidence-based practice has presented a major barrier to its wide acceptance.

“Clinicians may feel that not everything in a particular practice is relevant to their clients’ needs or is consistent with their own practice philosophies,” Palinkas said. “In Evidence-based Practice in Social Work: Development of a New Professional Culture,” Soydan and Palinkas sought to dispel misconceptions about evidence-based practice, identify ways for social work practitioners to become more familiar with the concept, and highlight the nature of evidence supporting certain interventions, and offer strategies to integrate evidence-based practices with existing clinical approaches, practitioner expertise, and client preferences.

Designed with social work students and clinicians in mind, the book describes the relevance of evidence-based practice to social work, relevant controversies and criticisms, and issues related to cultural diversity and adaptation of evidence-based interventions.

“I find that this book has focused on the development of a new professional culture to be a unique contribution and one that sets the stage for further development,” said Edward Mullen, professor emeritus of social work at Columbia University. “Whatever EBP comes to look like in the years ahead it is the cultural shift that promises to make the deep and lasting difference within the profession.”

Based on his own experience working with clinicians in the field during research studies, Palinkas said researchers should be more responsive to the needs of practitioners and clients to encourage the use of scientifically proven approaches.

“People who are skeptical of the value of evidence-based practices often become converts,” he said. “They still look for ways to make it more flexible than perhaps many treatment or intervention developers would like, but I think that’s an inherent part of the process.”

Adaptation is particularly common when translating practices across borders, Palinkas said, an example of more critical low- and middle-income countries with limited resources begin importing interventions from other cultural contexts. Despite the need for adapting evidence-based practice, including the need to take time away from clinical practice to train staff members, these countries will need to adjust interventions to address their own needs and abilities.

The continual experimentation with these practices—reducing the number of sessions for cognitive behavioral therapy from 12 to four, for example—is an illustration of how translating many of these practices across national borders and with different cultures might provide opportunities for producing more effective and perhaps more cost-effective approaches to the work we do,” said Palinkas.

Palinkas said the book also fits well with a recent effort undertaken by leading scholars to develop a new professional culture that promises to make the deep and lasting difference within the professions.

Edward Mullen

“The innovative model has a positive impact on both generations,” she said. “For older people, tablets will be used as a medium for self-care and disease prevention. For young people, the experience of tutoring older adults to use tablets will empower them.”

Hsiao said she is hopeful the model can be translated to other older populations in other countries. “If this model is successful, we hope to disseminate it through other organizations,” she said. “The youth will learn about the very important value of respect for the elderly and empathy for the underprivileged community,” she said. “In addition, by mastering these modern technological devices, participants’ social isolation will decline and their social engagement will be enhanced.”

The IMTOP model has its origins in an unlikely encounter between Hsiao, a doctoral student at the USC School of Social Work, and Tsai and Chen, who were on campus to attend orientation with their daughter, who joined two of her siblings in attending USC.

Hsiao, a native of Taiwan, recognized the couple and struck up a conversation. When they learned she was studying social work, Hsiao said they extended an invitation to come to them with any future research proposals.

Seven years later, Hsiao emailed Chen and pitched an idea about a caregiving training program for older adults with disabilities that ultimately evolved into the IMTOP model.
Each of the school’s research clusters— which bring together faculty, student, and postdoctoral scholars with similar research interests to stimulate intellectual productivity— has at least one faculty member with extensive experience reviewing federal grant proposals. That knowledge appears to be paying off.

Three recent proposals earned perfect scores during the review process, a relatively rare occurrence in federal funding circles. However, Kaplan said he would like to see more leadership among faculty members with review experience in terms of mentoring younger or less experienced researchers.

“We definitely have lots of room for improvement,” he said.

The most effective way to gain knowledge of the review process is to be invited to join a study section at the federal Center for Scientific Review. Members of these study sections or peer review groups typically serve for four years and meet three times a year to review proposals that correspond with their area of expertise.

Due to her extensive research in the area, Wenzel has primarily assessed applications for funding that focus on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment and behavioral health issues. During a typical review period, she is assigned as the primary reviewer of a handful of proposals.

“Your role as a reviewer is to review the applications carefully, present your point of view to the study section, listen to the other reviewers, and as a group evaluate the applications in terms of their overall impact on the field and beyond,” she said. “It is important that you address whether the application is answering an important question within an area of science and how the aims, if successful, will move the field forward.”

Before meeting with other reviewers, however, Wenzel meticulously reads each proposal, including sections on the NIH and data analysis strategy, procedures for protecting participants, the budget, and biographical information for the research team. She then provides a review and assigns a preliminary score to proposals that warrant further discussion at the group level. After reviewing the review to the study section, other reviewers weigh in and vote on a final score.

Recommendations are then forwarded on to a federal advisory council, which helps the federal agency decide which proposals to fund. Adding to the complexity of the process is the varying set of guidelines for different types of proposals.

Some focus on the significance and innovation of the research, the rigor of the methods and analysis plan, and the scientific environment in which the project will occur. Others are focused on early career development and may emphasize training opportunities for less experienced researchers.

“If I had to describe my mindset when I approach review of any given application, it would be objectivity,” Wenzel said. “Fairness. Openmindedness. Impartiality must be a hallmark of review. Without that, the process is doomed.”

The commitment required to be a federal grant reviewer is staggering: John Brekke, the Frances G. Larson Professor of Social Work, has been involved as a scientific reviewer at the federal level since 1989, serving as a standing member of a mental health services and epidemiology review committee at the National Institute of Mental Health for six years and as an ad hoc reviewer on many occasions.

Although each round of review involves at least two weeks of intensive work prior to gathering with other committee members to discuss the proposals, Brekke said he never questioned whether he should dedicate his time to the process.

“It really is a notable time commitment, but it’s just something that people who are in the research community and take the research and scientific world seriously know is something we have to do,” he said. “It’s all about shaping a scientific agenda, and that’s a wonderful thing to be a part of.”

He also noted that the position is considered to be very prestigious. Only individuals who have exemplary records of scientific exploration and productivity are invited to serve as reviewers, Brekke said.

He is thankful for several senior mentors who offered guidance during the early years of his career, and he has since created a template for others to follow in terms of building a successful grant application.

“I think it’s absolutely perilous for someone to attempt an NIH proposal without mentoring from someone who has gone through the process,” Brekke said. “That can mean the difference between funding and no funding.”

By capitalizing on the strength and knowledge of experienced researchers, the USC School of Social Work is setting up its junior faculty members for success. It’s also helping senior researchers maintain their edge in an increasingly competitive funding environment and adapt to new funding streams.

“Brekke recently applied for and received a $1.2 million award from the newly established Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, a nonprofit organization created through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. He said advice and guidance from colleagues who had submitted successful proposals to the institute in the earlier rounds of funding was critical to his success.”

“I’ve had good success following a really disciplined approach,” he said. “You can tell the proposals that have done this and those that haven’t. It’s immediately obvious, just in reading the abstract, who has had some mentoring and who has not.”

Another strong believer in the power of mentoring and peer review of proposals prior to submission is Eric Rice, an assistant professor at the USC School of Social Work. As an early career researcher at UCLA, he wanted to pursue a specific NIH funding mechanism designed for career development known as a K award.

Because none of his close colleagues had experience with that award, his mentor referred him to a friend on a federal review committee, Concepción “Concha” Barrio, now an associate professor at the USC School of Social Work.

Barrio, who several years prior had said the experience has given him a better sense of how to craft his own proposals and is he sharing that knowledge with postdoctoral scholars and colleagues.

“Other early career researchers who are benefiting from the school’s focus on internal review and mentoring related to grant proposals is Mercedes Hernandez, a postdoctoral scholar who recently completed the school’s doctoral program.”

She worked closely with Barrio as a PhD student and received valuable feedback on an application for funding from the National Institute of Mental Health to support her dissertation. Barrio served for four years as a reviewer for the institute and has since been invited to participate in external reviews for various federal agencies.

“She was just amazing in helping me to navigate the whole application process, which can be a little overwhelming and daunting, especially if you are not familiar with it,” Hernandez said. “When I was trying to develop ideas for my dissertation, she read my drafts from the beginning, she directed me in terms of what I needed to include, and she directed me to the NIMH website and informed me of what is prioritized and how my work related to that.”

Barrio has extensive experience as a reviewer for the institute and other federal agencies.
The honor indicates that a researcher is part of a select cadre Level 1 status by the National Science Foundation of Mexico.

Building that understanding of the grant review process is critical for early career success, Barrio said, especially in the profession of social work. When she first served as an NIH standing committee member in 2006, she was one of only two reviewers at San Diego State University. Most of her fellow committee members were medical doctors, psychologists, and nurses, with a handful of economists and anthropologists. “I think what made me stand out is I’m a Latina with a lot of practice experience, a social worker, and my area of focus on serious mental illness and psychosis among Latinos and multicultural populations,” she said.

Barrio said her experience as a reviewer has improved her grant-writing skills and continues to afford her a sneak preview of federal funding priorities. Before each review session, she said officials provide an overview of the government’s focus for that particular period.

She also feels that being a reviewer has given her a boost of self-confidence, especially when she comes across grant proposals submitted by people whose work she studied and are recognized as top scholars in the field. However, Barrio noted that although gaining this knowledge has benefited her career, the ultimate goal of embracing the role of reviewer is to improve the quality of life and well-being of vulnerable individuals.

“We are invested in this process to improve the rigor of our research and ultimately benefit our community,” she said.

Hortensia Amaro, Dean’s Professor and associate vice provost of community research initiatives, has been selected as the recipient of the 2014 Elizabeth Hurlock Beckman Award. This award honors teachers who have inspired former students to make a significant contribution to society and is given to a faculty member who has motivated students to establish and sustain a concept, procedure, or movement of deep benefit to the community at large.

Helen Land, an associate professor, has received the Distinguished Alumni Award for Outstanding Contributions to Social Work Education from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work. The honor recognizes achievement in teaching, dissemination of knowledge, and scholarship with diverse populations, in addition to other contributions to the field of social work education.

Doctoral candidate Weiyu Mao has been elected to the student representative board position of the Association for Gerontology Education in Social Work. Mao specializes in social relationships and health-related outcomes in later life, family caregiving, cross-cultural research, and vulnerable populations and racial and ethnic minorities. In her role on the board, she hopes to support gerontological social work education and help colleagues and students interested in aging.