The University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice, formerly Penn Social Work, is noted for its commitment to social justice and to educating students that will take an active role in the struggle against oppression. The School has articulated a social philosophy that shapes the educational programs it offers, the research it undertakes, and the leadership it provides to the profession. This statement of social philosophy – Penn Approach (https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/who-we-are/#penn-approach) – is first and foremost an evolving philosophy. It reflects the faculty’s commitment to introduce students to a variety of perspectives related to social work practice, nonprofit leadership, social policy, research, racism, and oppression, and the nature of human behavior in the social environment.

The Penn Approach to the education of future social workers includes at least two major perspectives:

- a clear understanding and respect for the past and a realistic interpretation of current professional issues;
- a vision of the future that reflects a commitment to social change based on the values and philosophy of the School.

The School offers a curriculum that integrates the development of practice skills with research, the study of specific social problems and social policies, theories and methods of social change, knowledge about human relationships, and individual and societal responses to institutional racism and other “isms.”

The University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice is educating tomorrow’s leaders to confront societal problems in a time of diminishing resources, to provide leadership to non-profit organizations, to design and facilitate real-world solutions while fostering meaningful societal change. Students can also learn about the integration of innovative technology to enhance the delivery of social services, research on welfare to work initiatives, faith-based services, and other ground-breaking faculty research.

Learn more about SP2’s leadership: https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/dean-message/

Learn more about SP2’s history: https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/who-we-are/

Vision

The passionate pursuit of social innovation, impact, and justice.

Mission

The School of Social Policy & Practice contributes to the advancement of more effective, efficient, and humane human services through education, research, and civic engagement. In pursuit of this mission, our theory-based masters and doctoral programs in social work, social welfare, nonprofit leadership, and social policy encourage students to think and work across disciplinary lines and cultures as well as across national and international boundaries. The pursuit of social justice is at the heart of the School’s knowledge-building activities. Our innovative educational and research programs reinforce our vision of active student engagement in their own learning as well as that of social agencies and larger social collectivities organized at the local, national, and international levels.

Diversity & Inclusion

Throughout its history, the School of Social Policy & Practice (SP2) at the University of Pennsylvania has been committed to understanding and embracing diversity in its countless forms. With our Master of Social Work (MSW) program (https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/program/master-of-social-work/), the first program of its kind to organize its curriculum around the construct of institutional racism, two other expanding and ambitious masters programs (in Social Policy (https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/program/master-of-science-in-social-policy/) and Nonprofit Leadership (https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/program/master-of-science-in-nonprofit-leadership/)) that organically complement and extend our MSW offering, and two exciting doctoral programs (a Doctorate in Clinical Social Work (https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/program/doctorate-in-clinical-social-work/) and a PhD in Social Welfare (https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/program/phd-in-social-welfare/)) that produce some of the most sought-after thought leaders in our fields, SP2’s mission is to think critically, thoroughly, and holistically about the many factors that impact people’s everyday lives and life chances.

As SP2 has evolved, so too has the understanding of diversity that grounds and enlivens its work. Our historic commitment to racial and economic justice has in recent years intersected in vital ways with emerging commitments individuals and communities marginalized along other axes of oppression. Individuals and organizations across SP2 have mobilized to create curricular, interpersonal, and structural space for the consideration of LGBTQ+ needs and experiences and the elevation of LGBTQ+ voices both within and beyond the School. This understanding and this commitment is about striving to consciously honor the complex and multifaceted experiences of self and community that shape our lives together.

SP2 strives to be a space of principled inclusivity, valuing differences of opinion and attempting to foster an institutional environment where we all think openly, honestly, reflectively, and deeply about the questions and concerns that both unite and divide us. For our faculty, students, and staff, diversity is a multifaceted and intersectional concept that includes careful treatment of questions about how differences linked to race, sexuality, gender identity, religion, ideology, mental illness, ethnicity, class, age, and so much more systematically privilege some and marginalize others. The issues that we grapple with—from homelessness and racism to prisoner re-entry and poverty, from responsible philanthropy and economic mobility to aging and child welfare—are some of the biggest in the academy and in society, and many seem intractable. But we also recognize that we have the best chance of doing justice to these social issues by embodying a truly diverse and inclusive space from which we can attempt to re-imagine our social world.

Promoting social justice and working against forces of oppression have been central to SP2’s efforts since the founding of the MSW program over a century ago; they ground our work to this day, challenging us all—faculty and students, alumni, staff, and community—to grow together into new knowledge and to grapple with ever-evolving examples of injustice and inequity. Understanding, respecting, and celebrating diversity is essential to SP2’s educational mission and values, and we are committed to helping students learn how to have difficult conversations, listening without pre-judgement, and addressing social problems from diverse perspectives. It is a commitment that we take seriously and one that we hope to nurture in our students as they become empowered to work for a more just, equitable, and compassionate world.

For more information: https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/inclusion/

Learn more about SP2's history: https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/who-we-are/
Faculty & Research

The SP2 faculty upholds Penn’s commitment to engage locally and globally. Internationally regarded for producing cutting-edge research, our distinguished scholars, practitioners, and policy advisors bring a broad range of real-world expertise and interdisciplinary focus to the classroom setting. The research of the SP2 faculty is transforming policy and shaping best-practices on international, federal, and local levels. The faculty’s important research and activism stretch across the social sciences and the humanities in ways that link nuanced methodological inquiries and important research questions to attempts at real-world problem-solving.

SP2 faculty members are readily available to students. They are inspirational instructors and supportive mentors and advisors, helping students to approach problems in innovative and creative ways.

Faculty Areas of Eminence:

- Child welfare
- Criminal justice & mental illness
- Data analytics
- Domestic violence
- Faith-based social services
- Family violence
- Foster care
- Geographic information systems
- Gerontology
- Homelessness
- Mental health
- Nonprofits
- Philanthropy
- Prisoners’ reentry
- Social entrepreneurship
- Social impact of the arts
- Social work in health care
- Substance use
- Welfare policy
- Welfare to work

Learn more about the faculty: https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/sp2-directory/?_departments=standing-faculty

Learn about research: https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/research-page/