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2021 Presidential Core Values Award for Diversity: 'A Brief History of Oppression and Resistance' Course Team

May 19, 2021 | Jen Badie

School of Social Work prerequisite put a focus on the city of Baltimore and gained urgency in 2020 amid the national uproar and discourse over racial injustice.

To celebrate and promote the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) core values, the University hands out **Presidential Core Values Awards**, designed to recognize students, faculty, and staff who embody the seven values at the heart of UMB's mission: accountability, civility, collaboration, diversity, excellence, knowledge, and leadership.

Diversity Award Winner: "A Brief History of Oppression and Resistance" Course Team, School of Social Work



A University of Maryland School of Social Work (UMSSW) team's work to develop the course "A Brief History of Oppression and Resistance" became even more urgent last year as the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor sparked a national reckoning on racial injustice.

"The issues, history, and movements we had been grappling with were front and center and very heavy, and we knew it would be that way for our incoming students, and that all of our efforts were very necessary and pressing," said Ashlie Kauffman, MFA, MA, lead instructional designer, IDEA Team, UMSSW, who along with clinical instructors Victoria Stubbs, MSW, LICSW, LCSW-C, and Lane Victorson, MSW, LMSW, and adjunct faculty member Emma Kupferman, MSW, LICSW, LCSW-C, developed the prerequisite course for Master of Social Work students.

UMSSW had offered an elective of the same name focused on historical events in the United States, but the team decided to take another approach when asked to create the new course.

"We made the decision that in light of the needs of our students and the communities they serve, we would start from scratch and focus the prerequisite on Baltimore and its history, holding it as representative of other cities and communities that experience oppression and work to resist its impact," Kauffman said.

After a year of work, the result was a 15- to 20-hour online prerequisite, launched in July 2020, broken into four modules: Baltimore today; the history of oppression in Baltimore; a history of and current look at resistance to oppression in Baltimore; and an introduction to how frameworks for critical thinking and social work principles of empathy, social justice, and cultural humility can be employed in the classroom and social work practice.

A central aim of the course is to foster knowledge and reflection about the experiences of the diverse populations that social work students serve. The team's work included developing the concept and outcomes, outlining the modules, and writing course content and narration.

A survey of fall 2020 students shows the course is changing their knowledge, understanding, and comfort discussing oppression. For example, 87 percent felt their knowledge about the history of oppression in Baltimore changed a good amount or great deal, and 68 percent felt their comfort level discussing oppression in Baltimore changed a good amount or great deal.

"Instructors in other foundation courses report that their students are engaging with content around diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-oppression in a deeper way than in previous semesters," said Amanda Lehning, PhD, MSW, associate dean for academic affairs, UMSSW. "By focusing on Baltimore, it is creating a stronger connection to our community."

Despite the course's initial success, Kauffman said she and the team "believe it is an ongoing process and see this first launch as an invitation for others to join us in adding to the work and being critical of our perspectives. We are truly thrilled by the honor and the awareness it brings to the efforts of many at our school."

Honorable mention: Eseosa Fernandes, MD, MPH, School of Medicine; Diane Marie St. George, PhD, School of Medicine

(In photo: From left, Emma Kupferman, Victoria Stubbs, Lane Victorson, and Ashlie Kauffman)

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