

A New Vision for the B.S.W.

A Bachelor of Social Work is more than a prerequisite to a master's degree. Adelphi is highlighting the value of its bachelor's program to show students how a B.S.W. can make a difference in the world.

by Ela Schwartz

ADELPHI HAS A NEW FORCE driving its B.S.W. program. Urging students to join what he describes as “the world’s most noble profession,” Sergio Argueta, M.S.W., the new director of undergraduate social work, is re-energizing the program with his passion and commitment to social justice and the social work vocation.

Professor Argueta grew up in Hempstead, a community adjacent to Adelphi that’s plagued by poverty, drugs and gang violence. As a disillusioned high school student, Professor Argueta recalled seeing young people imprisoned, injured or killed as a result of these detrimental influences. “I have attended 32 wakes in 33 years of life,” he said.

While earning his M.S.W., Professor Argueta worked as a gang specialist for the Nassau County Youth Board. He became the executive director of S.T.R.O.N.G. Youth, Inc., an agency he founded.

S.T.R.O.N.G. (Struggling To Reunite Our New Generation) is one of the leading gang prevention and intervention agencies in the northeastern United States, a role that made him a sought-after expert on the issues of gangs and youth violence.

He is now drawing on these experiences to empower a new generation of social workers to bring about change. “The School of Social Work has a duty and a responsibility to engage and work with communities that need assistance,” Professor Argueta said, “and show the world what social workers do. Our goal is to create a society where social workers will run for office, bring their social conscience into the business world and help change communities for the better.”

In his new role piloting Adelphi’s B.S.W. program, Professor Argueta works closely with Diann Cameron Kelly, Ph.D., associate professor and chair, on implementing the School’s new vision for a B.S.W. program.

“We are committed to giving our students a different outlook and not being a traditional, two-dimensional B.S.W. program,” Dr. Kelly said. “Our students should be able to leave the program with a formidable skill set to do any job in social work, period. If they decide to join an M.S.W. program, that’s phenomenal. But we want our students to hit the ground running, not just when they graduate, but before.”

Under the program, students will develop their oral and written communication skills and learn how to mobilize and advocate for their constituents. In addition to faculty devising academic courses to teach these skills, the aim is to get students out of the classroom and into the social work trenches.

Dr. Kelly noted that Adelphi prides itself on attracting a diverse student population, many of whom, like Professor Argueta, know firsthand about problems their clients struggle with. “Our students have experiential knowledge of what undocumented immigration looks

like. Or they know anecdotally of child abuse and neglect,” she said. “We want to take that experience and supplement it with evidence-based practice to prepare them to go out there and change lives.”

To get students more involved, Professor Argueta created Social Work Action Gateway (SWAG), a club that is building bridges between campus and community, undergrads and faculty.

“There’s a wave of excitement on campus,” said junior Gina Dudley, secretary of SWAG. “Professor Argueta is a great leader, easy to talk to and very encouraging. He and the

faculty and staff listen to what we have to say...and we have a lot to say.”

While SWAG is a group on the Garden City campus, Gina said members are reaching out to Adelphi’s Manhattan and Hauppauge Centers. “Social work is global, so not connecting with the other centers seems un-social-work-like,” is how she aptly described it. Social work students throughout Adelphi have joined OrgSync, where they can interact via discussion boards, promote activities and view calendars for upcoming events they then arrange to attend in person. They can also be found on Facebook, promoting their

organization and the phenomenal experience of being an Adelphi University social work student.

Dr. Kelly is gratified to see the undergraduates mobilizing under Professor Argueta’s leadership. “Students are feeling more a part of the School of Social Work infrastructure. They’re talking to Adelphi students outside the department who are undecided, and saying, ‘If you’re interested in what we do, this is where you need to be.’ We’ve already seen undergraduate social work applications increase by more than 100 percent greater than last year,” she said.

A RUNDOWN ON SWAG’S ACTIVITIES THUS FAR:

- In the fall semester, SWAG members joined the Long Island chapter of Food Not Bombs to distribute food, clothing and books to Hempstead residents at the local train station.
- SWAG and the School of Social Work brought Jeff Reynolds, executive director of the Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, to speak to students about alcohol and drug abuse.
- After midterms were over, SWAG worked with administrators to host a Social Work Café, where students met with faculty over pastries and coffee and discussed how to improve the B.S.W. program and the School of Social Work. Gina Dudley, junior and secretary of SWAG, said when students told faculty they were having difficulty fitting in a required class, the School added additional sessions to the Spring 2012 semester within a week.
- Students submitted ideas on what courses they’d like to see offered, some of which were social change in the political arena, the science of social issues, communicating in the helping professions to affect social change, working with immigrants, refugees and migrants, as well as individuality and the social experience of violence.
- When Gina saw that continuing education lectures were offered to grads and postgrads, she approached Audrey Freshman, Ph.D., director of continuing education and professional development, and requested that bachelor’s candidates be able to attend as well. Her request was granted, and as a result dozens of undergraduate students are engaging in postgraduate work, learning marketable skills that will give them an advantage over students from other institutions.



SWAG members serve meals to Hempstead residents.



Kevin Taylor and Amanda Hiltz bearing goods to distribute to the Hempstead community.