

JANUARY 14, 2026 | HOSTED BY HOWARD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Grand Challenges for Social Work Festival of Ideas & Anniversary Dinner



From Evidence to Action, Mobilizing Community Change



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Festival of Ideas & Anniversary Dinner

Howard University | Blackburn University Center
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Grand Challenges
for Social Work



Welcome!

As the **Grand Challenges for Social Work**, enters a second decade, this gathering provides a forum for dialogue and exchange among those contributing to, and benefiting from, this work and those shaping its future directions. The Festival of Ideas and Anniversary Dinner provides space to reflect and to recognize the sustained efforts of individuals and institutions who have engaged with the Grand Challenges since inception and who continue to participate in the evolution of the Grand Challenges for Social Work.

The Festival of Ideas convenes participants whose work spans research, education, practice, policy, and community-based efforts. Throughout the day, panels and discussions will address topics that reflect ongoing areas of inquiry within the Grand Challenges, including social innovation, social work science, authentic community engagement, equity, and the translation of knowledge into policy and practice. The program brings together perspectives from across institutions, roles, and Grand Challenges networks, leadership, and working groups.

Participants are encouraged to engage in conversation, share insights from their own work, and connect with colleagues and partners across the field. The day reflects the Grand Challenges' ongoing role as a convening structure for ideas, relationships, collaboration, and social progress powered by science.

JANUARY 14, 2026

11:00 AM–5:00 PM

GCSW FESTIVAL OF IDEAS is designed to share and discuss ideas that shape society and social policy. Hosted by the Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW), our purpose is to:

- **EXCHANGE** ideas across GCSW networks & all festival participants,
- **ENGAGE** and dialogue on social work and society's most pressing issues,
- **INSPIRE** and articulate what's next for the GCSW &
- **GENERATE** ideas that will shape the future of the GCSW.

5:15 PM–6:15 PM

VOICES OF NEXT GENERATION SCHOLARS NETWORKING RECEPTION

The Networking Reception is a time to refresh and reflect on the day with your colleagues and a time to bridge new partnerships. The reception will be kicked off with next generation social work innovators - students and emerging scholars whose work represents the future of the GCSW and society.

6:30 PM–8:00 PM

GCSW ANNIVERSARY DINNER

JOIN US for a special evening commemorating the 10th anniversary of the GCSW—a decade of innovation, collaboration, and shared commitment to using science to drive social progress toward a more socially just, inclusive, and flourishing world.

This milestone dinner will bring our community together to celebrate the extraordinary leadership of our Leadership Advisory Council, Network Leads, and Cross-Cutting Working Groups who have shaped and sustained this transformative movement.

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Program Overview

Festival of Ideas & Anniversary Dinner

JANUARY 14, 2026

11:00–11:15 AM	Arrival & Registration LOCATION: Blackburn Center, 1st Floor
11:15–1:15 PM	Luncheon Program LOCATION: Gallery Lounge (SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN)
11:15–11:30 AM	Opening Remarks & GCSW Commemorative Video LOCATION: Gallery Lounge
11:30 –11:45 AM	Honoring GCSW Founders LOCATION: Gallery Lounge
11:45 –12:30 PM	SCoAR Signature Panel LOCATION: Gallery Lounge
12:30–1:15 PM	AASWSW Signature Panel LOCATION: Gallery Lounge
1:15–1:30 PM	BREAK
1:30–2:30 PM	CONCURRENT SESSION 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing Equity in Uncertain Times LOCATION: Gallery Lounge • Human Stories Spotlight: Voices from across GCSW Research, Practice, and Education LOCATION: Digital Auditorium • Building Common Ground through Social Work Science LOCATION: Blackburn Forum
2:30–2:45 PM	BREAK
2:45–3:45 PM	MAIN STAGE EVENT LOCATION: Digital Auditorium From Personal Struggle to Public Change: How Advocacy Takes Shape Across Law, Film, and Community
3:45–4:00 PM	BREAK
4:00–5:00 PM	CONCURRENT SESSION 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Grand Challenges Futures: Anticipating the Next Decade of Social Work LOCATION: Digital Auditorium • Community Engagement in the Grand Challenges: Confronting Institutional Barriers & Reimagining Partnership LOCATION: Blackburn Forum • Integrating Across the Grand Challenges: Strategies, Barriers, & New Commitments LOCATION: Gallery Lounge
5:00–5:15 PM	BREAK
5:15–6:15 PM	Voices of Next Generation Scholars Networking Reception LOCATION: Hilltop Lounge (SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON)
6:30–8:00 PM	GCSW 10 Year Anniversary Celebration Dinner LOCATION: Gallery Lounge



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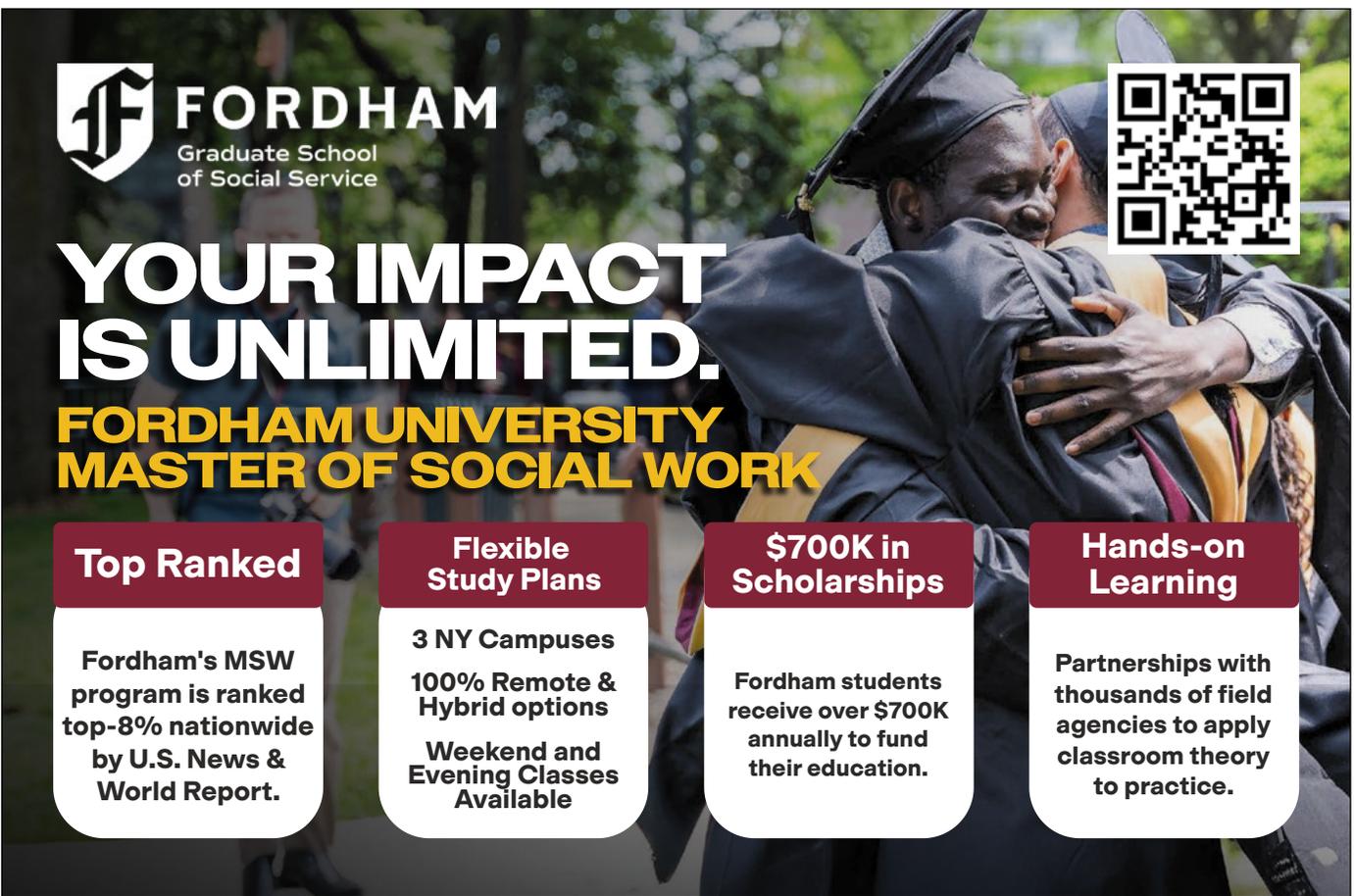


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Luncheon AASWSW & SCoAR Panels

From Evidence to Action, Mobilizing Community Change

11:45 –12:30 PM | SCoAR Signature Panel | LOCATION: Gallery Lounge

What Works—and What Doesn't — in Advancing Social Work Innovation



MODERATOR: Gautam Yadama

PANELISTS: Michael Lindsay, Deborah Gorman-Smith, Michael (Mike) Spencer



This panel, drawn from SCoAR members, brings together deans and academic leaders with diverse experiences in driving large-scale social innovation efforts within GCSW and schools of social work more broadly. Panelists will reflect on what has worked—and what hasn't—in efforts to move the field forward through ambitious, collaborative initiatives. Drawing on lessons from their institutional and national leadership roles, panelists will discuss strategies for mobilizing faculty, students, and partners around bold social change goals; building sustainable academic–community collaborations; and overcoming barriers to implementation and impact.

The conversation will provide candid insights into how social work education and research can better align to produce meaningful, measurable progress on pressing social issues. Ultimately, the panel invites reflection on how schools of social work can cultivate environments that support innovation, risk-taking, and evidence-informed leadership to strengthen the future of social work science and practice.

12:30–1:15 PM | AASWSW Signature Panel | LOCATION: Gallery Lounge

Re-imagining the Foundations of Social Work Science



MODERATOR: Laura Abrams

PANELISTS: Trina Shanks, Leopoldo (Leo) Cabassa, Richard (Rick) Barth



This panel of AASWSW Fellows will explore how social work scientists are redefining the field through innovative research, collaboration, and community engagement. Panelists will discuss how their work has been perceived within traditional paradigms and how evolving approaches are shaping new understandings of impact and relevance in social work science. Discussion will focus on diverse strategies for problem solving—such as cultivating deeper connections with communities, bridging methodological and disciplinary boundaries, fostering collaborative team environments, and using narrative and storytelling to communicate research and impact.

Panelists will also examine how social work science can more effectively measure outcomes and demonstrate meaningful change in complex social systems. The session will conclude with a forward-looking conversation on the next frontier for social work science: how to strengthen its scientific foundations, partnerships, and public influence in advancing social justice and human well-being.



Festival of Ideas Concurrent Session 1

From Evidence to Action, Mobilizing Community Change

1:30–2:30 PM | CONCURRENT SESSION 1 | LOCATION: Gallery Lounge

1: Advancing Equity in Uncertain Times



MODERATOR: Edwina (Eddie) Uehara

PANELISTS: Anthony Estreet, Renata Hedrington-Jones, Halaevalu (Valu) Vakalahi, Elizabeth Gillette, Charles E. Lewis

This panel of leaders from NASW, NABSW, CSWE, CRISP, and GCSW will explore how the profession can more effectively confront structural inequities and promote equity amid increasingly unstable, unpredictable, and dangerous times. Panelists will examine how social work’s core commitments—to justice, dignity, and community well-being—are being tested and transformed in the face of social, political, and environmental upheaval. The discussion will highlight innovative strategies for embedding equity and anti-racist principles into practice models,

policy design, and educational frameworks. Panelists will also consider new approaches to measuring progress toward equity—recognizing that conventional metrics often fail to capture the complexity of lived experiences and systemic change. Ultimately, this session invites participants to imagine a resilient and equity-centered future for the GCSW, one that strengthens the profession’s capacity to respond to crisis, foster solidarity, and drive transformative change across all levels of society.

1:30–2:30 PM | CONCURRENT SESSION 1 | LOCATION: Digital Auditorium

2: Human Stories Spotlight: Voices from across GCSW Research, Practice, and Education



MODERATOR: Shanondora Billiot

PANELISTS: Kristen Ravi, Amy Krings, Sandra Crewe, Taylor Reed-Jones, Durrell Washington

This session will feature GCSW network members in a series of brief, powerful stories from across the GCSW community, including undergraduate and graduate students, DSW and PhD scholars, faculty, deans, and community practitioners. Together, these narratives illuminate how engagement with the GCSW has shaped learning, teaching, research, and professional practice. Through personal reflections and lived experiences, participants will share how the Grand Challenges have influenced coursework, inspired new forms of community outreach, and

deepened understanding of social work’s role in advancing justice and well-being. The session will highlight the human dimensions of social work science; how ideas become action, how education drives impact, and how collective efforts continue to shape the future of the profession.

1:30–2:30 PM | CONCURRENT SESSION 1 | LOCATION: Blackburn Forum

3. Building Common Ground Through Social Work Science



MODERATOR: Martell Teasley

PANELISTS: Jonathan Singer, Tanya Sharpe, Ben Henwood, Sara Bachman, Teri Browne



This panel includes leaders from across the GCSW networks to explore how social work can help shape a more equitable and evidence-informed policy future. Panelists will consider how their networks might re-envision social work approaches and cross-sector collaborations to reflect the values of justice, inclusion, and collective well-being. The discussion will address how social work researchers and practitioners can find common ground across competing political ideologies to ensure that evidence-based knowledge reaches diverse audiences and informs public understanding.



Panelists will also share insights into the critical role community partners play in translating research into meaningful action. Finally, the conversation will focus on how social work scholars and advocates are engaging—or could further engage—with local, state, and federal policy platforms to influence systems change and strengthen the voice of social work in shaping the nation's social agenda.

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socialwork.du.edu/podcast

LISTEN:





Festival of Ideas Main Stage Event

From Evidence to Action, Mobilizing Community Change

2:45–3:45 PM | MAIN STAGE EVENT | LOCATION: Digital Auditorium

From Personal Struggle to Public Change: How Advocacy Takes Shape Across Law, Film, and Community



MODERATOR: Carrie Pettus

PANELISTS: Kerianne Flynn, Jon Goldfarb, Mary Ann Ponti



This mainstage event centers on *LILLY*, a deeply human and compelling film that chronicles the extraordinary journey of fair pay advocate Lilly Ledbetter. More than a courtroom drama, *LILLY* reveals the personal courage behind a landmark fight for pay equity and gender justice—one whose impact continues to shape national conversations about equality today. The session opens with curated film clips highlighting pivotal moments of discrimination, perseverance, and transformation.



A moderated conversation follows, bringing together voices whose work demonstrates how advocacy moves across systems and spaces. Panelists include Jon Goldfarb, the civil rights and labor attorney who represented Lilly Ledbetter in her historic gender pay discrimination case; Kerianne Flynn, a producer of *LILLY* and a filmmaker committed to stories that challenge entrenched systems and inspire action; and Mary Ann Ponti, Director of Outreach and Community Engagement at St. Anthony Shrine, whose work spans Boston's homeless shelter system, street outreach programs, and the Rita A. Dimento Women's Clinic for Homeless Women.



Together, the panel will explore how advocacy takes many forms; from the courtroom, to the screen, to the streets, and how personal narratives can catalyze institutional and cultural change.

Audience members will be invited to reflect on the film's themes and panel discussion in relation to social work's ongoing commitment to equity and justice. By bridging lived experience, creative storytelling, and systemic intervention, this session illustrates how persistence, collective action, and moral courage can inform and transform social work practice and policy today.



Festival of Ideas Concurrent Session 2

From Evidence to Action, Mobilizing Community Change

4:00–5:00 PM | CONCURRENT SESSION 2 | LOCATION: Digital Auditorium

1. The Grand Challenges Futures: Anticipating the Next Decade of Social Work



MODERATOR: Laura Nissen

PANELISTS: Kevin Durant, Ammi Hussein, Edwina (Eddie) Uehara, Nancy Smyth

This panel introduces the Social Work Grand Challenges Futures project, a special 10th anniversary initiative designed to equip social work leaders with the tools of futures thinking and anticipatory social work. Panelists will explore how foresight practices—rooted in imagination, equity, and transdisciplinary collaboration—can help the profession navigate uncertainty and shape just, inclusive futures.

Through conversation with the project’s lead architects and participants, this session will illuminate how futures-based methods are being used to prepare social work for the next decade of transformation. Topics will include building resilience and “future readiness” across Grand Challenge networks, applying foresight tools to policy and practice, and engaging communities in shared visioning for social change. Grounded in the principles of power analysis, inclusion, and hope, this discussion invites the social work community to think boldly about what comes next.



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4:00–5:00 PM | CONCURRENT SESSION 2 | LOCATION: Blackburn Forum

2. Community Engagement in the Grand Challenges: Confronting Institutional Barriers & Reimagining Partnership



MODERATOR: Cal Halvorsen

PANELISTS: Ray Boshara, Katie Calhoun, Julie Birkenmaier, Christina (Tina) Matz, Rocío Calvo, Carly Roszkowski

This panel brings together Grand Challenges Network Leads and their community partners for an honest and forward-looking conversation about the role of community engagement in social work research, education, and policy. Panelists will reflect on how the GCSW has sought to partner with communities—where those efforts have succeeded, where they have fallen short, and what must change to build more authentic, equitable collaboration. The discussion will examine how academic structures and research incentives can unintentionally hinder deep community involvement and co-creation.



Panelists will explore ways to overcome these barriers by rethinking institutional norms, funding mechanisms, authorship models, and measures of impact. Ultimately, this session challenges social work scholars and leaders to envision a future in which community engagement is not an add-on to research and teaching but a core value and practice that defines the profession—

ensuring that the Grand Challenges reflect, respect, and are shaped by the communities they aim to serve.

4:00–5:00 PM | CONCURRENT SESSION 2 | LOCATION: Gallery Lounge

3. Integrating Across the Grand Challenges: Strategies, Barriers, & New Commitments



MODERATOR: Lauri Goldkind

PANELISTS: Alison Wetmur, Dr. Andrea Fiero, Lisa de Saxe Zerden, Michael Dentato, Kelly Bareche

ASL INTERPRETER: Zibora Gilder, MSW

This panel will bring together leaders from the Cross-Cutting Working Groups to explore how the GCSW can strengthen integration across themes, disciplines, and practice domains. Panelists will share strategies for collaboration that bridge topic areas and institutional boundaries, highlighting both the opportunities and the persistent barriers that limit cross-network synergy. Drawing on lessons from other disciplines, the discussion will examine how social work can better translate



research and innovation into collective impact—particularly through partnerships that center practitioners and community knowledge.



Panelists will identify new commitments for working across silos, aligning research agendas, and co-developing solutions that advance equity and effectiveness. This session will conclude with concrete calls to action for building a more connected, interdisciplinary, and practice-

informed Grand Challenges movement—one capable of responding to the complexity of the social issues of our time with creativity, coherence, and courage.

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Reception & Dinner

From Evidence to Action, Mobilizing Community Change

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5:15–6:15 PM Networking Reception | LOCATION: Hilltop Lounge

(SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON)

Voices of Next Generation Scholars Networking Reception



**Michael (Mike) Spencer, Hannah Scheuer,
Pixie Popplewell, Bonnie Scranton**

The Networking Reception is a time to refresh and reflect on the day with your colleagues and a time to bridge new partnerships. The reception will be kicked off with next generation social work innovators - students and emerging scholars whose work represents the future of the GCSW and society. Through a series of brief, dynamic presentations, these future leaders will share high-potential projects that address pressing social issues with creativity, rigor, and a commitment to justice.



6:30–8:00 PM | GCSW 10 Year Anniversary | LOCATION: Gallery Lounge

Recognition and Celebration Dinner

JOIN US for a special evening commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Grand Challenges for Social Work—a decade of innovation, collaboration, and shared commitment to using science to drive social progress toward a more socially just, inclusive, and flourishing world.

This milestone dinner will bring our community together to celebrate the extraordinary leadership of our Leadership Advisory Council, Network Leads, and Cross-Cutting Working groups whose vision and dedication continue to propel this movement forward.



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Jenny L. Jones, PhD | David Rothwell, PhD | Margaret S. Sherraden, PhD

Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality

Quincy Bloxom, DSW | Vincent Fusaro, PhD | Leah Hamilton, PhD | Stephanie Hong, PhD, MSW | Laura Lein, PhD
Lenna Nepomnyaschy, PhD | Jennifer L. Romich, PhD | Trina R. Shanks, PhD

Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice

Rocío Calvo, PhD | Maggi Price, PhD | Martell Teasley, PhD

2026 GCSW Cross-Cutting Working Groups

Behavioral Health Across the Grand Challenges

Ron Manderscheid, PhD | Brianna Lombardi, PhD
Lisa de Saxe Zerden, PhD

Gender Issues Across the Grand Challenges

Jill Messing, PhD

Disabilities Across the Grand Challenges

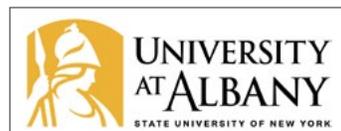
Alison (Ali) Wetmur, DSW, LCSW,
Vandana Chaudhry, PhD, MSW

Immigration Across the Grand Challenges

Kelly Barneche, LMSW | Katelin Paige East, LMSW

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