The University of Toronto’s Faculty of Social Work, long regarded as Canada’s leading social work faculty, has been given a huge opportunity to make an even bigger difference in the lives of the most vulnerable in society. A $15 million gift from social worker Lynn Factor and her husband, venture capitalist Sheldon Inwentash, will establish 50 graduate student scholarships, to be awarded annually, and create five endowed chairs. The gift, which springs from the couple’s deep commitment to children and the pursuit of social justice, is the largest gift ever made to a social work faculty in North America.

“This gift is visionary,” says Professor David Naylor, president of the University of Toronto. “It will enable scholarship and research that will inform future policy and social work practices. And it will help educate the next leaders of social work. We are extremely grateful to Lynn and Sheldon for their extraordinary gift and their commitment to improving how society cares and supports the most vulnerable among us.”

The five new chairs are:

• Social Work in Children’s Mental Health
• Development, Welfare and Protection of Children
• Social Work in Health Care and Mental Health
• Social Work in the Global Community
• Law and Social Work

Says Professor Cheryl Regehr, Dean of the newly-named Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, “We thank Lynn and Sheldon for their leadership and for providing U of T with the opportunity to make an immense contribution to the study and practice of social work.”

She stresses the importance of research and the incredible opportunity that is created with the addition of five endowed chairs. “Research ensures best practices and hence best outcomes for the clients and communities that social workers serve,” she says.

Profile on page 3
Through the Early Researcher Award program, the McGuinty government is helping promising, recently appointed Ontario researchers undertake cutting-edge research and build their research teams of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and research associates. This round of awards will provide $5,900,000 to support 39 researchers in the Greater Toronto Area. Researchers each receive a $110,000 award.

Dr. Peter A. Newman
Vaccines are our best long-term hope for ending the AIDS epidemic. Ongoing clinical trials to test experimental vaccines are essential. Dr. Peter A. Newman, an associate professor in the Faculty of Social Work and RBC Chair in Applied Social Work Research at the University of Toronto, is creating a set of best practices for community engagement in safe and ethical HIV vaccine trials in Ontario, North America, and the developing world. By facilitating the development of HIV vaccines, Dr. Newman's research will help to reduce the monumental human and economic costs of the AIDS epidemic.

Dr. Aron Shlonsky
Structuring and analyzing data, especially in large institutions such as the child welfare system, is often a daunting task. Dr. Aron Shlonsky, an associate professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto, is building a longitudinal child welfare data-base, a system that will track the service histories of children and families. This will help link data collected from across the province, and provide child welfare workers and government with crucial information on how to improve child and family policies and practices.

In Memoriam: Bill Stern
A Valuable and Loyal Alumnus of the Faculty of Social Work died on April 18th, 2007.

A former president of the Faculty of Social Work Alumni Association from 1961-1964, Bill was the coordinator of the Mentoring Program for the last four years. A long-term mentor himself, he was able to attract many students and many of his colleagues to take on the role of mentor. His success in running this program can be attributed to his commitment, his determination, and the tireless efforts he devoted to it. One of his colleagues wrote in a letter about Bill: “He was a wonderful person with a beautiful heart and a commitment to justice.”

We will all miss him.

Update and correction
Arts and Social Work Research Initiative (ASWRI) now has a website under the Centre for Applied Social Research, which includes the descriptions of the current research projects, upcoming events, resources and materials produced, including the research report and posters from the Coming Together Project whose pictures of homeless women were featured in the last issue.

In the last issue of REACH, the names of the community partner agencies were inadvertently omitted in the article titled “Arts and Social Work.” Regent Park Community Health Centre and Sisterting-A Woman’s Place have been the integral partners of the Coming Together Project. We sincerely regret the omission and apologize for the inconvenience this might have caused.

ASWRI is in the process of formalizing our ties with community partners and artist partners, as we see the collaborative efforts of faculty, students, agencies and artists as crucial to knowledge development.

THE RBC CHAIR IN APPLIED SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES: HIV Transmission in Canada: Concerns Regarding Drug Use and the Failure of Prevention
Dr. Ralph Weinberg
Dr. Weinberg is a member of the Centre for Health Law and Policy Research and the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative.

SEMINAR TOPICS INCLUDE
1. My Vaccines, Social Challenges: If We Build It, Will They Come?
Prof. Peter A. Newman
Peter A. Newman, RBC Chair in Applied Social Work Research at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

How Does Poverty Create Vulnerability to HIV Transmission in Women? Gendered Realities from Malawi
Dr. Richard White
Richard White, chair of the HIV Prevention Trials Network’s Women’s Initiative in Africa, and director of the AIDS Vaccine Program’s Gender Initiative.

Walk with Us: Aboriginal and HIV Prevention in Canada
Ph. D. Kevin Barlow
Kevin Barlow is a residential school survivor and an Enbridge Fellow at the Institute of Aboriginal and Northern Studies of Canada.

From Silence to Action: Black Women and HIV/AIDS in Edmonton
Dr. Neneka Mavesi-Gumede
Neneka Mavesi-Gumede is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Lethbridge and co-founder of the National Black Institute of Canada.

Organized by the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto

* The U of T Faculty of Social Work respects your privacy. We do not rent, sell or trade our mailing lists. Even if you do choose to receive Reach, you may notify us at any time to change your preference.

Interested in Reconnecting with the Faculty?
The Alumni Association is currently looking for new board members to get involved in areas such as Continuing Education, Advocacy and Faculty liaison. For more information, please contact us at alumni.fsw@utoronto.ca or 416-978-4437.
Couple share deep commitment to children and social justice

"F"or years, I have contemplated what I would like to give back in the event I became a success. The University of Toronto was always the top of my list but I felt that I wanted to give back not in the business field but rather in a field that gives back directly to society – like social welfare. I chose social work because Lynn, my wife and life partner, has taught me that there is no more noble profession and no more noble cause than social justice.”

Those words, spoken by Sheldon Inwentash about his wife Lynn Factor, brought tears to the eyes of many at last June’s gathering of faculty, staff and graduates where Inwentash and Factor announced their $15 million dollar gift to the now named Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. One woman in the audience said later that her eyes welled up because Inwentash’s words showed so much respect and who want to return home. She has stayed deeply involved in her career because she enjoys it and those in need,” he says.

Both Factor and Inwentash are passionate about making a difference in children’s lives, which is why two of the five chairs they have established within the faculty will focus on children. Those are the chair of Child and Family Advocacy and the chair of Child and Family Welfare.

Her husband clearly understands and appreciates the work. While he agrees that the field is often “overlooked and under-funded,” social work probably “reaches more aspects of society than many other professions. And it especially touches the vulnerable and those in need,” he says.

"I am proud to call myself a social worker. Social work addresses the most important issues in our community.”

Lynn Factor

Welfare Protection and Children's Mental Health. "While you can start anywhere in life to help, we felt we wanted to start with the young," said Inwentash.

The couple sees their efforts as a family affair, wanting to involve their own three children, who all attend school. "We decided we would fund some applicants as a family. So all five of us sat down and read through the same profiles of applicants who are all around our children's age. Many of these children had pretty disturbing backgrounds. "The exercise helped their children understand the difficult task of having to decide who and how to help. While Factor, so steeped in the issues of her field, is very aware of the need and potential that a large donation like theirs can make. Five new chairs and 50 scholarships have the potential to "attract the best professors, the best opportunities for research on what are the best service delivery models," Factor says.

And the couple plans to stay involved and build on their initial commitment. "It's very important to give back and we wanted to do it sooner rather than later while there is an opportunity to build on this donation over time and while Lynn is still very active in the field," Inwentash says. He adds that he hopes their generosity will be "a bit contagious," and that others in business will follow their example. "We hope this will be a leadership gift,” he says. In her remarks at the announcement of the gift, Lynn Factor linked the gift directly to what she has learned as a social worker in the field for the past 25 years. "I am proud to call myself a social worker. Social work addresses the most important issues in our community," she said. However, "the voice of social work is not heard as loudly as it should be,” she said. "We need our voices to be heard to attract the scholarship and the leading edge research to the field.”
The Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare (CECW) has five main roles – to ensure CECW projects are implemented effectively, particularly around training to deal with substance abuse, Blackstock says. The over-representation of Aboriginal children reported for child maltreatment informed a separate analysis of provincial “child in care” data in the Wende: We are Coming to the Light of Day (2005) report, which found that one in 200 non-Aboriginal children are in care in Canada, while 1 in 10 status Indian children are in care. Overall, there are more Aboriginal children in care in Canada currently than when residential schools were operating at full capacity by a factor of three, Blackstock says. “That’s the biggest challenge facing the child welfare system. I tell my colleagues, ‘If there’s a bigger issue, let me know!’” she says.

“I just want to say again how thankful we are to the CIS for this data,” Blackstock says. While non-Aboriginal peoples sometimes worry that collecting data based on race is somehow racist, Blackstock says that Aboriginal groups have long been asking for this data. "We need it to legitimize our concern about our kids leaving our communities and to better understand our own circumstances,” she says.

Before the first CIS was conducted in 1998, it was widely suspected that Aboriginal children were over-represented in the child welfare system. But no one could put numbers to the suspicions or explain why Aboriginal children were over-represented. With the 1998 CIS report came the deaument that Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child welfare system by a factor of two at every stage in the system, from filing reporting, investigating, substantiating and taking into care. But what also came out of the research, Blackstock says, is that “Aboriginal children enter care for far different reasons than non-Aboriginal children.” Aboriginal children are no more likely to be involved with child welfare in cases of sexual abuse, Blackstock says. "That's the biggest challenge facing the child welfare system. I tell my colleagues, ‘If there’s a bigger issue, let me know!’” she says.

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Reducing his time commitment to 25 per cent and handing over management responsibility to Michael Santì, recent PhD graduate in social work at UofT and systematic review specialist for the Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work. Looking back at what the CECW has accomplished, Broom points several to highlights. In the area of analyzing existing research, the CECW has funded and helped to support secondary data analysis of results from both 1998 and 2003 Canada’s Child Abuse Incidence Studies. This landmark study spearheaded by Professor Nico Troughton while he was a member of the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work, is now at Mc Gill and coordinated through UofT. It is conducted every five years. The multi-site study involving several Canadian universities, examines the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of the children and families investigated by the Canadian child welfare services. These studies are a representative sample of reported child abuse and neglect cases from all over Canada. By analyzing what kinds of abuse and neglect are reported, which cases are substantiated and what happens after, researchers can better understand who perpetrates abuse and neglect, under what conditions it occurs, and the characteristics of a maltreated child and a perpetrator. Such knowledge is essential for policy-makers, social workers in the field, and future researchers.

However, what has become abundantly clear throughout the social sciences is that there is a strong need to better connect policy, research and practice. That has been the focus of annual symposia that the CECW organizes. Disseminating information has grown in importance at the CECW. On its website, it posts plain language information sheets on the workings of each provincial child welfare system in the country and offers a bi-monthly newsletter on research results to subscribers at no cost at info@cecw-cep.ca.

And finally, in the spirit of always focusing on the facts and not perceptions, the CECW has spearheaded a “research culture” throughout the field of child welfare by actively engaging communities and agencies in research projects and making sure that research results are available in plain language summaries and analyses in the field. As the new manager of the CECW, Michael Santì hopes to continue building on the CECW’s success in fostering interdisciplinary and cross-national networks of people dedicated to making a difference for children and families in communities throughout Canada.”

The CECW has spearheaded a “research culture” throughout the field of child welfare and Neglect includes Aboriginal children and their families.

Supporting First Nations
The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect includes Aboriginal children and their families.

Research
Getting at the facts
The Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare mines the data and shares what’s new.

Ivan Brown
Michael Santì

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The Campbell Collaboration
Faculty of Social Work joins prestigious international group to review and disseminate research evidence

THE
Faculty of Social Work has been chosen as a Canadian partner in an international organization that is revolutionizing the way social science research is assessed and translated into practice.

“This formal alliance between the Faculty’s Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work and the world renowned Campbell Collaboration will advance our leadership role in closing the gap between research and practice,” says Professor Faye Mishna, director of the Research Institute. “The partnership status will allow our students and faculty members to fully develop the skills and resources needed to make social work research accessible and useful to the field,” she says.

The Campbell Collaboration aims to answer the perennial question of social science practitioners and policy-makers: What works? It is a non-profit organization whose mandate is to help those professionals make well-informed decisions about the effects of a wide variety of interventions. To achieve this, the global network of Campbell partners prepare, maintain and disseminate systematic reviews of social science interventions.

Practitioners who need to know the efficacy of a particular treatment or course of action often perform literature reviews. These traditional reviews of the research are usually limited in scope and may be subject to bias. Systematic review by the Campbell Collaboration, on the other hand, must adhere to a very rigorous scientific methodology. They are comprehensive, impartial appraisals of all the existing research on a given intervention.

“In Campbell systematic reviews, you don’t just go after published literature,” says Professor Aron Shlonsky, one of several faculty members with a Campbell systematic review underway and Coordinator of the Campbell Collaboration effort at the Faculty of Social Work. “You also go after the grey literature and find all the studies that have been done in a given topic area – whether or not they made it to the peer-reviewed, academic press. Then you evaluate these studies using rigorous criteria and use only the very best studies to answer your research question. Campbell’s methods allow for an honest appraisal of everything that’s out there and they are the gold standard for synthesizing evidence and supporting best practice.”

The Faculty has a systematic review specialist, Michael Saini, PhD, to provide assistance and advice on the review process. A PhD student, Charlene Cook, also assists with these reviews. Once a review is complete, the final step is to disseminate the findings to the widest possible audience. The Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work and the Campbell Collaboration are committed to creating free online databases of all completed reviews.

“Members of the Faculty of Social Work community will now have the opportunity to be involved in conducting Campbell systematic reviews,” says Mishna. “By doing so, they will be helping practitioners everywhere do a better job of choosing the right interventions for the right clients.”

The following are three examples of current Campbell systematic reviews at differing stages of completion being conducted through the Research Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work:

Risk of child maltreatment: A systematic review of the predictive validity of instruments

Lead reviewers: Professor Aron Shlonsky
Other reviewers: Michael Saini

One of the hardest tasks of a child welfare worker is to accurately identify children at risk of future harm. Historically, the decision to intervene in a family has been based on a worker’s professional experience and intuition. However, there is now evidence that statistically-driven, standardized risk assessment instruments are better at predicting maltreatment recurrence than unassisted practitioners.

There are many risk assessment instruments currently in use by child protection services, but the instruments vary considerably when it comes to their reliability (consistency when completed by different workers) and validity (ability to predict future harm).

Led by Professor Aron Shlonsky, this review will systematically compare the ability of these tools to accurately determine the likelihood of future child maltreatment. The review is particularly timely because Ontario’s Ministry of Children and Youth Services has implemented a new risk assessment tool that will be evaluated and updated over the next three years.

A systematic review of interventions to reduce distress in adult victims of sexual violence and rape

Lead reviewer: Dean Cheryl Regehr
Other reviewers: Professor Ramona Algagg and Michael Saini

The psychological effects of sexual assault and rape can be devastating. Research has shown that victims of rape are not only more prone to depression, anxiety and sexual dysfunction than the general population, but are also far more susceptible to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

While there are a number of psychological interventions available to reduce suffering and distress in victims of sexual assault and rape, there is no clear consensus amongst therapists and researchers on which one is most effective. Dean Cheryl Regehr and her review team will conduct an exhaustive search of studies on psychotherapies for adult victims – both male and female – of sexual assault and rape. They will evaluate a wide variety of interventions, ranging from cognitive behavioural therapy to hypnosis, and evaluate each one based on its ability to reduce levels of trauma, depression and anxiety.

Prevention and intervention of cyber abuse targeting children and adolescents: A systematic review to evaluate current approaches

Lead review: Professor Faye Mishna
Other reviewers: Professor Robert MacFadden, Michael Saini and Charlene Cook

Despite all the benefits that have come from computer-based communication over the last decade, the Internet also has a dark side. Young people are particularly susceptible to sexual predators, stalkers, and exploiters as well as peers who bully online. Research from around the world shows that cyber abuse of children and youth is growing at a rapid rate. As the problem has increased, so have strategies to keep young people safe online.

This review led by Professor Faye Mishna will ensure that the relatively new field of cyber abuse intervention is based on the strongest possible research evidence. It will examine all research regarding technological (e.g., filtering software), policing (e.g., undercover policing) and psycho-educational (e.g., awareness programs for youth and their parents) measures to prevent cyber abuse.
Gift benefits Chinese newcomers

Buddha’s Light International and FSW announce partnership to help newcomers make smooth transition to Canada

In the discussion off by describing the importance of the Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work, welcomed recently working with Chinese newcomers.

social workers to work with Chinese Canadians, and happily in a harmonious and prosperous society."

The partnership, which focuses on helping Chinese newcomers make a smooth transition into Canadian society, is important because “everyone is the same and shares one life. We must live together.

Chinese society, is important because “everyone is the same and shares one life. We must live together.

Chu said the partnership, which focuses on helping Chinese newcomers make a smooth transition into Canadian society, is important because “everyone is the same and shares one life. We must live together.

We talk to employers and have frank discussion about what organizations really mean when they say they want diversity but seem to reward sameness..."
Go, team! Whoo hoo!

FSW new intramural softball team gives its all on and off the field

They may not have won a game yet, but the Therapeutic Alliance, the faculty’s freshly minted intramural softball team, had a blast in their first season. Made up mostly of first-year Masters students, the team is already practicing for next year with undiminished enthusiasm, says team organizer Rachael Walisser. “We’re 0 and 8, but some games were close,” she says. And so enjoyable was the season that the team is thinking about playing intramural volleyball this winter.

Walisser started the team because she loves to play ball and had played at McGill University where she did her undergraduate studies and in her hometown of Victoria, British Columbia. “I really wanted to get into a league here,” she says. Faculty offices had bankrolled the team with $400 to cover the entry fee and team members bought their own uniforms, which were T-shirts with the vaguely positive but mystifying words “OK” “Well” bought in bulk from Honest Ed’s for 97 cents each. Walisser admits team members were somewhat perplexed by their de facto team slogan but the T-shirt price was right.

Intramural rules for co-ed teams require that there be at least three women and three men on each team. With the overwhelmingly female makeup of the faculty, finding enough guys meant bringing in a few “external friends” from other faculties. As well, a few non-student friends of team members helped out, says player Laura Shugar. Shugar, whose softball experience had been limited to playing catch as a kid, discovered she had top-notch cheerleading abilities along with ball-playing prowess. Nobody on the team left the field without a “Go, team! Whoo hoo!” or a “Good job!” “It makes everyone happy!” says Shugar. And, of course, the team did their best strategizing over drinks and nachos and had helped mount the play at their respective universities as undergraduates. Like The Vagina Monologues, the thought-provoking play entitled Meri Kahani: My Story dealt with violence against women in a series of vignettes, in the case of Meri Kahani: My Story, all the characters come from the South Asian community. There’s Shanti, a new immigrant and victim of spousal abuse, who struggles to get help from social services despite a language barrier; there’s Anne, a lesbian woman who wonders whether she should “just get married” to please her traditional parents and then, when she does, suffers serious consequences; there’s Amita, an ambitious young professional, working with her therapist to deal with the childhood trauma of witnessing her parents’ abusive relationship. “One of the unique elements of the play is that it can be done in entirety or individually depending on the needs of the audience,” says Poonja.

The two writers drew on their experiences with survivors of abuse within several communities to create their characters. Each character is a composite of several women but the idea is that “we are telling their stories and each woman we interviewed helped us to write about their issues,” says Inayet. “Abuse spans across all cultures, religions and races,” says Poonja, “but each culture has its specific nuances and we felt we needed to speak to our own.”

Creating a play can stop the cycle of abuse in several ways, Inayet says. Abuse victims may recognize themselves and learn how to access help that exists. Perpetrators may recognize themselves and reform their behaviour. “When you get people talking, you start to build a social movement so that change will take place,” she says.

The response to the play, which has been performed in several community settings, has been intense. After seeing the play, some audience members have emailed the writers to tell them about their own experiences of abuse. One woman wrote: “I’m a survivor of abuse. I’m going to bring my daughter to see the play because I want her to understand what I went through.” Other members of the audience have been moved to tears by the depictions of women’s struggles. And on occasion, members of the audience have got up and walked out, angered by the way the play portrays controversial issues within their community.

From their own families, Inayet and Poonja have received only praise and support. Inayet says her aunt told her how proud they were of her work and she has received emails from relatives in Pakistan who have read the reviews on line or watched a clip of a CBC interview she’d done that’s available on YouTube. “They’ve been really supportive,” she says. Besides family and friends, they have received community supports through partnerships with agencies such as the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO), Alliance for South Asia AIDS Prevention, Coalition of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and the South Asian Women’s Centre (SAWC.)

Inayet says that both she and Poonja feel a strong sense of responsibility to advocate on behalf of their community here in Canada. “Our parents brought us here to have a better life. If you’re privileged enough to get a Masters degree, you’d better make it worthwhile,” she says.

For more information on the play, visit www.merikahani.ca

A student play about family violence opens community discussion

When two Masters students were given a class assignment to create a therapeutic product for a course entitled “Working with Survivors of Trauma,” they faced their social work expertise with their theatre background to produce a moving play and a powerful tool for raising awareness about family violence. The course, offered by Dr. Bonnie Burstow through the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, allowed Mohseni Poonja and Umbereen Inayet to put a spotlight on domestic violence within their own South Asian community. The outcome was the thought-provoking play entitled Meri Kahani: My Story.

The play had its debut in May at the Hart House during South Asian Heritage Month and was performed in July at Masala Mehndi Masti, a major South Asian cultural festival in Toronto, and also during Gay Pride Week. It will be staged several times this fall at community organization annual general meetings. “The beauty of theatre is its ability to be mobile and bring stories to the community,” Poonja says.

Poonja and Inayet, who both graduated with their Masters of Social Work in June, are keenly passionate about using their education and skills to help their own ethnic community. They decided to write a play, says Inayet, because it allowed them to explore issues of abuse in a non-threatening way. “It’s a safe way to discuss issues without having to identify victims or perpetrators,” she says.

Both women are big fans of Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues and had helped mount the play at the play at their respective universities as undergraduates. Like The Vagina Monologues, Meri Kahani: My Story deals with violence against women in a series of vignettes, in the case of Meri Kahani: My Story, all the characters come from the South Asian community. There’s Shanti, a new immigrant and victim of spousal abuse, who struggles to get help from social services despite a language barrier; there’s Anne, a lesbian woman who wonders whether she should “just get married” to please her traditional parents and then, when she does, suffers serious consequences; there’s Amita, an ambitious young professional, working with her therapist to deal with the childhood trauma of witnessing her parents’ abusive relationship. “One of the unique elements of the play is that it can be done in entirety or individually depending on the needs of the audience,” says Poonja.

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Inayet says that both she and Poonja feel a strong sense of responsibility to advocate on behalf of their community here in Canada. “Our parents brought us here to have a better life. If you’re privileged enough to get a Masters degree, you’d better make it worthwhile,” she says.

For more information on the play, visit www.merikahani.ca

Photography: Michael Stuparyk / Toronto Star

Published by the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto

Students
The doctoral program shows the way of the future

Students work “at the very edges of new knowledge”

The 10 doctoral students that the Faculty of Social Work accepts each year carry a major load—and it’s not just the research and course work they undertake. Professor Sheila Neysmith, who is director of the doctoral program, reminds each new crop of doctoral students that they are the future. “Whatever it is that you become doing your PhD, that’s where social work is heading. You’re putting into place what social work will be in year 2030, 2040,” she says.

Neysmith, who has been PhD director since 2004, says PhDs build knowledge in the field and influence how social work will develop in two ways: as researchers, they teach future social workers, and as researchers they set the agenda for what research will be carried out for decades to come. Neysmith chairs a policy committee on PhD studies that considers “what should a PhD program look like? What are the most important questions? What kinds of connections at the international level are important to keep social work relevant?” In a PhD program such as the one at U of T, which is research intensive, PhD students are working on the most important questions of the day within a global context and then building on their knowledge and skills in many different forums. “Former PhD students from our faculty work everywhere in the world,” Neysmith says.

The program, which is one of the preeminent ones in North America and by all standards, the foremost doctoral program in Canada, has had guaranteed funding since 2000. Each PhD student is funded $13,000 plus tuition and fees for a total of just under $20,000 per year. Students who choose the program “are also choosing to come to U of T because it is a large and high-quality university that is very rich in cross-disciplinary opportunities,” Neysmith says. Currently 138 PhD students can take part in eight different collaborative programs with students from other faculties, she said.

Professor Adrienne Chambon, who has been involved in developing PhD programming at the University of Toronto and elsewhere for many years and who served as PhD director in 2005/2006 while Professor Neysmith was on sabbatical, emphasizes the importance of treating PhD students as colleagues and offering them opportunities to be visible within their fields. The year she served as director, a large annual conference of schools of social work was held at York University. She discussed with organizers the possibility that University of Toronto PhD students organize a session on doctoral studies courses, which was agreed to. Then she turned the project over to the students to plan and host. “Part of the scholarly task is to lead in the areas of policy, research and academics,” she says. “It is important that students take on this role from the beginning,” she says. Students were also encouraged to take more leadership in the PhD working groups.

Professor Chambon also initiated a review of PhD curriculum. Out of the first year of that review came the concept of “communities of scholarship.” Although doctoral studies can be very competitive which creates considerable stress for students, it is also important to guide the program with “a very generous spirit” and help students see how they are connected. One way this was accomplished was to encourage the relaunching of the PhD student organization that had been inactive. “By finding ways to profile students’ work to let everyone know who is working on what and by being sensitive and open to student financial issues, the faculty can help create that sense of community. ‘They are not just seen as people passing through. They are colleagues working at the very edges of new knowledge. We want to know them as individuals and get to know each other,'” she says.