

Social Work Newsletter

HERITAGE.EDU

Summer 2026 ♦



A Message From the Chair

As I reflect on this academic year, it brings a smile to my face and fills me with immense pride. It has truly been an incredible year for our Social Work Department. Watching our students grow academically, professionally, and personally has been both inspiring and rewarding. Each of you has faced challenges, celebrated accomplishments, and demonstrated resilience throughout your journey. Seeing the dedication, compassion, and commitment you bring to this profession is heartwarming.

You are preparing to enter a field that has the power to transform lives, strengthen communities, and advocate for those whose voices are often unheard. I have no doubt that each of you will make a meaningful impact as social workers, leaders, and agents of change.

This year has also been one of tremendous growth and achievement for our Master of Social Work program. This year has also been one of tremendous growth and achievement for our Master of Social Work program.

We are proud to share that our MSW program has **achieved full accreditation**, marking a significant milestone in our department's history. This accomplishment reflects the dedication and collaboration of our faculty, students, practicum partners, and community stakeholders. As we continue to expand our program offerings, we remain committed to excellence in social work education and preparing culturally responsive, skilled social workers who are equipped to serve their communities.

As we look ahead, I am excited about the future of our department. Together, we are building a strong foundation for the next generation of social workers who will serve with integrity, compassion, and professionalism. Thank you to our students, faculty, staff, Practicum Supervisors, and community partners for your dedication and partnership in making this year such a success. It is an honor to be part of your journey, and I look forward to celebrating the many accomplishments ahead.

Ruby A. Aguilar

In this newsletter you can expect:

Message from
the Chair

Important Dates

ADEI: Inclusivity

All Things
Practicum

Spotlights

Resources

Welcome

My name is Liz and I am a Heritage University Social Work alumna! Since graduating HU I completed my MSW at EWU, then went on to work in roles at local non-profits and in education. Most recently, I have been serving as a TRIO SSS advisor for undergraduate students in the Tri-Cities (since 2023), and am SUPER excited to transition into the role as Social Work faculty at HU this fall!!! I was born and raised in Tri-Cities so this community is special to me, and I cannot wait to be back at the TC Heritage campus!



Important Dates: Fall Semester 2026 (August – December)

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- Classes Begin (Graduate): Monday, August 17
 - Classes Begin (Undergraduate): Monday, August 24
 - Registration Closed – Last day to add a course: Friday, August 28
 - Labor Day (Offices closed): Monday, September 7
 - Drop Date (for 100% refund): Tuesday, September 8
 - Last Day to Withdraw from a course (for 50% refund): Monday, September 21
 - Annual All Faculty Assessment Day (classes cancelled 8 am to 5 pm): Friday, October 2
 - Midterm Exam Week (Undergraduate): Monday, October 12 – Friday, October 16
 - Midterm Grades Due: Wednesday, October 21
 - Spring Registration Opens: Monday, October 26
 - Veteran's Day (Offices closed): Wednesday, November 11
 - Thanksgiving (Offices closed): Thursday, November 26 – Friday, November 27
 - Classes End (Undergraduate): Friday, December 4
 - Classes End (Graduate): Sunday, December 6
 - Finals Week: Monday, December 7 – Friday, December 11
 - Final Grades Due: Wednesday, December 16
 - Winter Break (Offices closed): Monday, December 21 – Friday, January 1
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Heritage
University

INCLUSIVITY - ADEI

Across Washington State, conversations around Anti-racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) continue to evolve in meaningful ways. While each component of the acronym plays a critical role in building just systems within our communities, the "I" for Inclusion is where these efforts take root and become sustainable. Inclusion is not simply about who is present, but about who feels seen, valued, heard, and empowered to participate fully as their genuine selves (Shore et al., 2018).

At Heritage University, the Social Work Program mission statements at both the Bachelor and Master levels emphasize preparing culturally responsive practitioners committed to serving diverse and underserved communities, particularly in the Yakima Valley and surrounding regions. Inclusion is central to this mission, ensuring that students, clients, and communities are recognized as partners in practice, not passive recipients of services (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2022; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). This localized commitment reflects broader ADEI goals across Washington State, grounding them in community-based knowledge, relationships, and equitable participation (Washington State Office of Equity, n.d.).

Inclusion Begins Here!

Heritage University advances ADEI in our rural communities by centering the "I" in Inclusion, and it starts in our classrooms. The university's commitment to serving culturally diverse, historically underserved, and rural populations reflects its mission and values (Heritage University, n.d.). Located on ancestral lands, Heritage University acknowledges the history of the land and the Indigenous communities who have stewarded it. This acknowledgement is part of including voices from the past, honoring those present today, and preparing future generations to engage in a more equitable and inclusive society (Washington State Office of Equity, n.d.).

All Things Practicum

Cultivating Reflective Practitioners

Bridging the gap between class theory and practice is the heart of social work practicums. Yes, textbooks provide us frameworks like systems theory, attachment theory, or the strengths perspective, however it is in our agency placement where these concepts come to life and actually stick.

When a student uses theory in practice when navigating complex systems or uses theory to complete an intake the intersection of theory and practice becomes seamless.



Practicum is where knowledge and practice come together to look beyond symptoms and evaluate the broader forces impacting individuals, families, and communities.

This integration relies heavily on the process of reflective practice. **True growth occurs when we bring our challenges in practicum back to supervision and seminar.** Let us remember practicum is not only about completing hours, it is also about developing professionalism and identity.

As we navigate the next semesters remaining intentional about daily actions with clients, our social work values, and theoretical knowledge will be imperative.

A HUGE SHOUT-OUT TO OLGA ZUNIGA AND HUGO CAMARILLO OF EAST VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT!



We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Olga Zuniga and Hugo Camarillo for their incredible partnership and unwavering commitment to Heritage University and social work education. Their dedication goes far beyond providing practicum placements—they create a rich, supportive, and meaningful learning environment where our students can grow in confidence, develop their clinical skills, and gain invaluable real-world experience.

Thank you for investing your time, expertise, and mentorship in the next generation of social workers. Your partnership makes a lasting difference, not only in the lives of our students but also in the communities they will go on to serve. We are truly grateful to have East Valley and both of you as a valued practicum partners!

EXCITING NEWS! WE'RE GOING ELECTRONIC!

In the coming weeks, students and practicum supervisors will receive an email with instructions for accessing our new online practicum system.

This platform will streamline the practicum process by allowing students to complete and submit required documents electronically, while supervisors can review and approve forms, electronically sign documents, and verify student practicum hours—all in one place.

We are confident this transition will create a more efficient, organized, and user-friendly experience for everyone. Additional training and support resources will be shared as we prepare for implementation. Thank you for your continued partnership and support as we take this exciting step forward!



Being a student can be a financially difficult situation, especially if you have family to help take care of. Eagles Market is a free market on campus for students, staff, faculty and their families. Everyone is welcome to shop for shelf stable, refrigerated and frozen food items such as fresh produce, eggs, cheese, canned soups, tuna, pasta, rice, nuts and more! We receive food from our partner OIC.



Office of Ability Services

If you need academic accommodations due to a disability or other circumstance, please contact the Office of Ability Services (ADA). The Office will review your individual needs and determine appropriate accommodations. Heritage University is committed to providing equitable access to academic programs, services, events, and campus activities through collaboration between students, faculty, staff, and the Office of Ability Services.

There is a formal process for students seeking reasonable academic accommodations. The following are steps to complete if you are in need of accommodations:

- Download and fill out the application.
- Read guidelines and procedures to understand ADA limitation on ability support services and the processes involved for approval.
- Schedule an appointment for an intake and assessment with ADA Specialist Bianca Chavez. * Intakes and assessments can be completed over-the phone for regional site students or in person.
- Submit documentation such as an IEP, medical documentation stating a formal diagnosis. Records can be:

Faxed to: (509) 865-2150

Mail to:

Heritage University, Office of Ability
Services 3240 Fort Road, Toppenish, WA
98948

Or Email to:

Officeofdisabilityservices@heritage.edu



Touching Grass - Summer Self Care

By Jacob Campbell, Ph.D. LICSW

The Pixar movie, *Hoppers* (Chong, 2026), follows an animal-loving college student, Mabel, who transfers her mind into a robotic beaver, where she communicates with animals to save her grandma's forest glade from destruction. The film starts off with Mabel as a young, kind of wild elementary school girl. We are introduced to her as she attempts to liberate all the classroom pets in the school. She is caught by the teachers, who realize she is at it again. There is a chase, and Mabel bites a staff member, prompting a school disciplinary visit and mom leaving Mabel with her grandmother Tanaka for the day.

- > Tanaka [finds Mabel having run off, upset, and having climbed a tree in her expansive forested property]
 - > So, what'd they book you for this time? [Pause]
 - > The outlaw's life is pretty lonely, huh? [Pause]
- > All right, you leave me no choice. [Walks away, to a glade, sits on a large rock in front of a pond, and waits for Mabel to join]
- > Come on. [patting space next to her] When I was 12, I punched Suzie Perkins in the face. I used to get really mad, but not anymore. Wanna know my secret? You just have to be very still and watch and listen.
- > [Through the eyes of Mabel, we see her calm herself through seeing the nature, wildlife, and a sense of awe of the systems around her]
 - > Feel better? [Mabel Nods]
- > That's what nature does. It's hard to be mad when you feel like you're part of something big.
 - > Mabel: Grandma, can I come here every day?
- > Tanaka: Anytime you want. It could be our special place. You and me.

I love this scene, and the visual it provides of a scientifically backed phenomenon. Bratman et al. (2019) provide a consensus review including a broad interdisciplinary breadth of authors who describe concurrence that evidence supports associations between common types of nature experiences and an increased psychological well-being a reduction of risk factors and burden of some types of mental illness.

At the same time, opportunities for some types of nature experiences are decreasing in both quality and quantity for many people globally. This summer, I would encourage you to seek opportunities to have nature experiences, especially those that inspire feelings of awe and connection to a greater whole (Capaldi et al., 2015). For me, I love many outdoor activities.

Some of these are things I do locally and don't take significant extra effort (for example, afternoon bike rides or walks along the river), and some include more planning and going places (such as camping, backpacking, visits to the Oregon Coast, day hikes). I find it helpful to calendar out some activities you want to do over the summer, that you are endeavoring to accomplish. Make sure some of those activities include touching lots of grass.



BSW Spotlight: Congratulations to Robert Luna!



Robert Luna exemplifies the heart of the social work profession through his compassion, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to serving others. Whether in the classroom or at his practicum, Robert consistently demonstrates a genuine desire to learn, grow, and make a meaningful difference in the lives of those around him.

As a practicum student at Astria Toppenish Behavioral Health, Robert quickly became a valued member of the treatment team. His supervisor, Ana Morales, MHP, LICSW, praised his ability to build therapeutic relationships while maintaining professional boundaries and approaching every interaction with empathy, respect, and cultural humility. Robert eagerly sought opportunities to strengthen his clinical skills, welcomed feedback, and steadily developed confidence in his clinical decision-making. He effectively facilitated patient groups, collaborated with the interdisciplinary team on discharge planning, and advocated for

Robert Luna cont.

patients to ensure they had the resources and support needed for successful transitions of care.

Robert's impact extended beyond his clinical work. Patients frequently shared how much they appreciated his support and knowledge, with comments such as, "Your groups are informative. I really like them," and "I respect Robert a lot, he really helps." Staff also recognized his professionalism and authentic approach, noting that he "understands the balance of being professional and personal" and "demonstrates what social work should look like."

In the classroom, Robert is known as a dedicated learner and supportive classmate who embraces every opportunity to expand his knowledge. He approaches new experiences with enthusiasm, recognizing each one as an opportunity to become a stronger and more compassionate social worker. His respectful demeanor, willingness to assist others, and commitment to the profession make him a positive influence on those around him.

Robert plans to continue his educational journey by pursuing his Master of Social Work (MSW). We are proud to recognize his accomplishments and have no doubt he will continue making a lasting impact in the communities and individuals he serves.

Congratulations, Robert! We look forward to seeing all that you accomplish in your social work career.

MSW Advanced Generalist Spotlight: Congratulations to Janey Mendez!



Our featured MSW Advanced Generalist student stands out for her leadership and dedication to personal and professional growth. Janay approaches every opportunity with determination, maintain a positive attitude through challenges, and consistently demonstrate a strong commitment to serving others. Her ability to connect with people, think critically, advocate, and remain dependable has made her a valued member of both the classroom and the community she serves.

As she continues preparing for her MSW career in social work, we invited her to reflect on the journey, the experiences that have shaped them, and the impact they hope to make in the future.

Janay Mendez cont.

1) What inspired you to pursue social work, and what motivates you to continue on this path?

I've always been passionate about mental health and education, I wanted a career where I could make a meaningful difference in people's lives. What keeps me motivated is knowing the privilege it is to support and serve individuals and families. It's an honor to serve some of the most vulnerable people and to give back to my community.

2) What has been the most meaningful or impactful experience you've had during your time at Heritage University or in your practicum?

I've had many meaningful experiences throughout my time at Heritage University and in my practicum, but what has meant the most to me are the relationships I've built with my classmates, practicum supervisor, and the Heritage University Social Work Faculty. Their encouragement, mentorship, and support have made a lasting impact on me and reminded me that social work is rooted in collaboration. Together, we're all working towards the shared goal of strengthening and communities together.

3) What are your goals after graduation, and what difference do you hope to make in your community as a social worker?

I hope to expand access to culturally responsive mental health care, especially for underserved communities like my own. I want to reduce barriers to care and increase access to mental health services so people can receive the help they need. My goal is to make a lasting impact in providing quality and compassionate mental health care to my community.

MSW Generalist Spotlight: Congratulations to Jessica Cruz!

Jessica's compassion, curiosity, and dedication have made her an exceptional practicum student and an emerging social worker with a bright future. Throughout her first year in the MSW program, she embraced every opportunity to learn and developed lasting relationships with her peers and faculty. Her thoughtful approach and genuine desire to grow has allowed Jessica to develop confidence.



We reached out to her practicum supervisor at Catholic Charities, Terri

Brummet, LICSW to share some words. Here is what she said, “Jessica spent her practicum time with our agency learning clinical skills in a therapist role. She was able to quickly build rapport with the clinical team and her clients. Her time was spent observing other clinicians while finding her ownstyle. It was such a pleasure to watch Jessica grow in her confidence and skills during her experience with our agency. She was able to bring thoughtful and challenging questions and concerns to our supervision appointments. Jessica's inquisitive spirit initiated deep and meaningful conversations; that left me feeling as if I learned as much from her as she did from me. I have no doubt that she will continue to thrive in whatever Social Work role she chooses for her future because of her determination and empathetic heart. “

Resources

Heritage Boutique

Prepare for interviews, conferences, presentation, or work.

The Heritage Boutique offers free professional clothing, shoes, and accessories for all Heritage University students.

LOCATION: Violet Lumley Rau Building

Contact: Clare Wilmes at
Wilmes_C@heritage.edu for
more information.



Washington Caregiving Journey

The Washington Caregiving Journey is a free online community that helps family caregivers build skills, find support, and connect with experts and other caregivers. The platform offers information on topics such as caregiver burnout, injury prevention, chronic conditions and mental health, along with practical advice and encouragement from people with lived caregiving experience. The resource is available at no cost through local partnerships and is designed to support caregivers throughout their journey.

Join the [Washington Caregiving Journey caregiver community](#)



Social Work Resources

- [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- [National Association of Social Workers \(NASW\)](#)
- [Social Work Insurance](#)
- [Social Work Examination Preparation](#)

In-Person Training Opportunities

ESD105: Youth Mental Health First Aid

Come and learn to recognize warning signs, understand substance use, and connect with professional mental health resources in person on August 5, 2026 from 8:00am to 4:00pm

PLEASE REGISTER BY: JULY 31, 2026---<https://trst.in/pmw1sR>

YWCA

Invite a friend or coworker and join us in our next domestic violence in person learning session on July 22-23 from 9:00am-4:00pm.

For more information on dates, times, or to register, visit the [website](#).

On-Line Training Opportunities

WASIN Rapid Response Training: YIRN

Learn how to become part of the statewide network of volunteers: Hold immigration and law enforcement agencies accountable for their actions on August 3, 2026 from 6:00pm via Zoom-----[REGISTER HERE](#)

Harborview Behavior Health Institute: Cultural Humility in Behavior Health Care

Participants will enhance their ability to provide culturally responsive care by understanding and applying cultural humility principles.

[\(REGISTER HERE\)](#)

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THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



*ADDITIONAL CONCESSIONS AVAILABLE FOR
PURCHASE. PLEASE, NO OUTSIDE FOOD OR DRINKS.

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TO RSVP OR FOR
MORE INFORMATION.
WALK-INS WELCOME!



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WASHINGTON NATIONAL GUARD YAKIMA BACKPACK RESOURCE EVENT

2026



FREE BACKPACKS & SCHOOL SUPPLIES!

Plus Military Family Resources & Support Services



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August 1 & 2
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WHERE
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Yakima, WA 98903



WHAT YOU GET
Free Backpacks
School Supplies &
Family Resources



WHO CAN ATTEND?

★ **OPEN TO ALL SERVICE MEMBERS,
VETERANS & THEIR FAMILIES** ★

WHAT TO EXPECT

✓ Free Backpacks

✓ School Supplies

✓ Family Resources

✓ Community Support

DAY 1

SAT, AUG 1

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

DAY 2

SUN, AUG 2

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

★ **NO COST — First Come, First Served** ★



WASHINGTON NATIONAL GUARD



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

👤 Mike Berndt

📞 (509) 844-4059

✉️ michael.w.berndt.civ@army.mil

The poster features a vibrant, cartoonish illustration of a summer scene. At the top, a bright yellow sun is partially obscured by white, scalloped-edged clouds. A blue cross-shaped decoration hangs from a cloud on the right. Below the sky, a lush green field of grass is filled with various colorful flowers, including pink, yellow, and white blossoms, and several red ladybugs are scattered throughout. A thick, wavy green line separates the grassy field from the central text area. The background of the text area is a solid light orange color. At the bottom, a row of eight colorful icons represents different types of market stalls or food carts, including a hot dog stand, a lemonade stand, a flower stand, and a clothing rack. The entire poster is framed by a thin green border.

Summer Craft Faire

**SATURDAY,
AUGUST 8, 2026
8 A.M. TO 3 P.M.**

5315 Tieton Drive | Yakima WA 98908

