

# The Heller School

FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

## Heller Alumni Association Board Biographies 2015-2016



**Chrisann Newransky (President), MA SID'05**, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Adelphi University in New York. Her current research focuses on disparities in the utilization of health services. Chrisann is particularly interested in disease prevention through vaccination, and understanding the impact of political factors on health service utilization in the US. She has worked with several research programs to understand the financial and health impacts of microcredit programs in South India and Northern Ghana. Chrisann has been a board member for Empower Dalit Women of Nepal (EDWON), a human rights organization for “untouchable” women, and has served as president of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program Alumni Association in New England. Before coming to the Heller School, Chrisann spent eight years working overseas, in the Philippines and Japan. In the Philippines, she coordinated the volunteer programs of Habitat for Humanity International. In Japan, she worked as a coordinator for grassroots international relations projects and as a translator for the private sector. In addition to her Heller degree in Sustainable International Development, she has an M.S.W. and a PhD from Boston College. Chrisann lives her husband and daughter in Long Island.



**Sarah K. Emond (Vice President), MPP'09**, currently serves as the Chief Operating Officer at the Institute for Clinical and Economic Review (ICER), an independent non-profit dedicated to conducting and implementing comparative effectiveness research. As COO, Sarah uses her experience in the business and policy of healthcare to execute the strategic planning and operations of ICER. Previously, she was Principal at SKE Communications, a health policy consultancy, and was Manager of Corporate Communications at Oscient Pharmaceuticals. She also held positions at Feinstein Kean Healthcare and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. Sarah is a graduate of Smith College (biological sciences). A resident of Walpole, Sarah recently learned to ski and enjoys taking her dog for walks around her new neighborhood.



**Arnaa Alcon, PhD'00**, is the director and chair of the School of Social Work at Bridgewater State University, where her teaching is concentrated in the areas of aging, social policy, research, and financial literacy. Previously, Arnaa was the Associate Director of the National Center on Women and Aging of the Heller School. Having spent several years on the Boston staff of AARP, she has worked extensively with volunteers and community groups on policy, program evaluation and advocacy in the areas of health and family economic security. She holds a Master of Social Work degree and Certificate in Gerontology from Boston University, and is a faculty scholar in the fourth cohort of the National Institute on Aging and Hartford Foundation Institute on Aging and Social Work. Arnaa is a member of the Advisory Board of the Boston-based nonprofit Generations Incorporated and of the Board of Advocates of Jewish Family and Children's Services of Greater Boston.



**Kelly Axtell, MBA'05**, was a Property Manager for Project-based section 8/tax credit housing for elders and people with disabilities in Boston during her time at Heller. After graduating and concentrating in Elders and People with Disabilities, she went back into the assisted living industry and expanded her knowledge and experience through various management roles. These roles included Assisted Living Manager, Dementia Neighborhood Manager and Marketing Director. Kelly has been Assistant Director of Senior Services for the town of Lexington since August 2012. In addition, she is involved in the strategic planning for a (potential) new community center for the town as well as strengthening the senior services team of the human services department through improving customer service, implementing best practices and creating a policy/procedure manual. Kelly lives in Bedford, MA with her husband, Rich, and their two children, Kaylee (6) and Mason (3). In her spare time, Kelly enjoys creating jewelry and spending time with her family.

**Sunindiya Bhalla, MBA'11**, is the Community Impact Director at the United Way of Mass Bay and Merrimack Valley. Formerly, she was a Program Coordinator at the Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund, a quasi-state agency dedicated to strengthening families and preventing child abuse. She has dedicated her career to children, youth and families with a focus on early education and family support. She has worked at the agency for over six years, overseeing family centers funded throughout the state and working with other state agencies on initiatives related to early education, family support, and child abuse prevention. After completing her MBA, she has been leading her organization in strategic and business planning efforts. She holds a BA in Child Development and Community Health from Tufts University and an MPH in Health Services Management and Policy from Tufts School of Medicine. She is also a chair for the Tufts Alumni Admissions Program, an active member of the Association of Tufts Alumnae, co-founder of the Tufts Public Health Alumni Association, and a founding member of the Tufts Alumni Nonprofit Network. While in residence, she served as the student representative on the MBA Program Committee.



**Pem Brown, MA/MPP'11**, is a Senior Strategist at M+R where he works with progressive non-profits like the Union of Concerned Scientists, SEIU, and PETA to develop and implement innovative online fundraising and online advocacy campaigns. Pem joined M+R after working for NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts for five years, where he managed their fundraising and online communications programs. In addition, he has worked with a range of progressive candidates and issue advocacy organizations. Pem majored in French and European Studies at Amherst College, and received joint degrees that include the MPP in social policy and an MA in women's and gender studies.



**Robert Dunigan, PhD'04**, is a senior research associate at the Schneider Institutes for Health Policy at the Heller School. He has 15 years of experience in clinical social work, and particular expertise in the areas of treatment intervention and program development for individuals diagnosed with chronic mental illness and substance abuse problems. His research has focused on health disparities and drug and alcohol treatment and prevention aimed at improving the quality of life and health service needs of marginalized groups and individuals. While studying at the Heller School, Robert was a recipient of a pre-doctoral training grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.



**Lynn Garvin, PhD'14, MBA** is a Clinical Assistant Professor at Boston University's School of Public Health and an Investigator with VA Boston Healthcare System. Focusing on patient engagement, organizational behavior and health information technology (health IT), her research focuses on how health care providers and patients use health IT for improved outcomes and more effective, efficient care. Dr. Garvin's research with VA developed and validated measures of Veterans' digital patient engagement using the My HealthVet patient portal. This study offered evidenced-based support for the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) Stage 2 "Meaningful Use" rules for patient engagement using Blue Button personal health record and other provider-based online tools. Dr. Garvin most recently served as VP of Corporate Communications for EMD Millipore, a division of Merck KGaA, and held leadership positions at Boston Children's Hospital, IBM/Lotus Software and P&G/Gillette. In addition to her Heller degree, she has an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School, and a B.A. from Wellesley College.



**Yara Halasa, MS'06**, has worked in policy and economic analyses of health related projects for the last decade. Her career began as a dentist at the Ministry of Health in Jordan. In 2002 she obtained her first Master's from Bocconi University in Italy. She worked as a research associate with Partners for Health Reform Plus, where she focused on decentralization and health organization accreditation. In 2005, she obtained a Masters in International Health Management and Policy at The Heller School. She worked as a consultant for the League of Arab States, and the Regional Office of the Eastern Mediterranean of the World Health Organization. Since 2007, she has been working at The Schneider Institutes for Health Policy. Her focus and areas of expertise are: Costing and Cost-effectiveness research, Willingness to Pay, Burden of Disease, Health financing, Health equity and National Health Accounts. She is a co-founder of Leaders of Tomorrow, a youth NGO in Jordan.



**Isabella Jean, MA COEX'06**, is Adjunct Lecturer in the Program on Coexistence and Conflict at the Heller School. Her research focuses on International aid effectiveness and conflict-sensitivity, participatory program design, monitoring and evaluation methods, and peacebuilding. At CDA, she serves as Director of Evaluation and Learning, and leads field research efforts involving international peace and development practitioners in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Isabella Jean co-authored a book on cumulative impacts of international assistance, "Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid." She consulted with Coexistence International and conducted policy research on issues of conflict, coexistence, democracy and education in multi-ethnic societies. Earlier she conducted evaluation and training at a national non-profit focused on education policy, school reform and community organizing. As a Watson Fellow, she conducted field research on youth coexistence initiatives in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. In addition to her Heller degree, she holds a B.A. in International Relations & Anthropology from Bowdoin College.



**Eric Kingson, PhD'79**, is professor of social work at the Syracuse University School of Social Work's and recipient of Syracuse University's 2010 Martin Luther King, Jr. Unsung Hero Award. He is also a Senior Research Associate in the Maxwell School's Center for Public Policy. He served as policy advisor to two presidential commissions – the 1982-3 National Commission on Social Security Reform and the 1994 Bipartisan Commission on Entitlement and Tax Reform. His scholarship examines the politics and economics of population aging, Social Security policy, the baby boomers, and cross-generational obligations. His research also examines the distributional effects of changes in retirement age. His most recent book "In Their Own Voices" (Center for Spiritual Care, SUNY Upstate Medical University, May 2009) presents the experiences, strengths, lessons and advice of 14 children and youth, each of whom face life-threatening illness.



**Sandra Kretz, PhD'81**, has worked in the health policy and aging fields for over twenty-five years. Her interest in the Heller School began while she was Director of the Southwest Mississippi Area Agency on Aging, a focus she continued at Heller on an Administration on Aging Fellowship. She has subsequently served as the Director of the Office of Health Policy in Massachusetts, and worked as a Senior Analyst for the Office of the Inspector General at HHS. In the private sector she developed one of the first centers of excellence national networks for organ transplantation, and moved on to apply the same outcomes based concepts to chronic illnesses as Vice President for Programs and Outcomes at Quantum Health Services.



**Linda Sprague Martinez, PhD'09**, is an Assistant Professor of Macro Community Practice at the Boston University School of Social Work. Her work is focused on how assets can be recognized and leveraged by communities to improve living environments and health. She is specifically interested in examining culturally relevant strategies to tackle health inequities. Community and youth engaged research approaches are central to her work. Dr. Sprague Martinez has expertise in urban health; community, student and youth engaged research; photovoice; community assessment and mobilization; and qualitative research methods and analyses.



**Jane Martha (Oslin) Naseem, MA SID'07**, manages ArtCorps' capacity-building programs and directs its communications strategy. With a background in community-based programs and participatory research, she is passionate about engaging communities in social change, sustainability and building strong nonprofits. Prior to joining ArtCorps, Jane evaluated Oxfam America's gender equity and microfinance programs in Latin America and conducted research on health disparities at Tufts University. She served as a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa and also worked as an advocate for immigrant families in California. In addition to her Heller degree, she has a BA in English from the College of William and Mary.



**Mary Otiato, MBA'08**, is currently the Acting Chief of Staff at the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind and has worked in state government for the past six years. First, she served as a Program Development Manager at the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and currently as a Regional Director at the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB). Mary strongly believes that it's important to define one's sphere of influence and enlarge it to advance social justice. Mary's sphere of influence is state government. In her current position, she oversees Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Rehabilitation and Rehabilitation Teaching services for Commonwealth residents who are legally blind. It is one of the most rewarding positions in her life.



**Anna Perlmutter, MBA'12**, is a doctoral student in Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management. Her research is focused on concepts of inter-organizational collaboration, leveraged infrastructure, shared resources, and support systems to improve positive organizational change. Prior to beginning her doctoral studies, Anna was a Research and Development Specialist at the Relational Coordination Research Collaborative (RCRC) at the Heller School as well as a Research Associate with the Center for Youth and Communities (CYC) at the Heller School. Anna has been a nonprofit capacity builder for more than a decade, focused on management support, research, technology, and community engagement in the mission-driven sector. She is passionate about advancing the knowledge and practice of cross-sector coordination and collaboration to help leaders, funders, and policy-makers make informed decisions in supporting resilient work. Anna received her MBA in Nonprofit Management at the Heller School and a BA in Literature at New College of Florida.



**Amy Maizel Seeherman, PhD'78**, is Director of Grants and Research at Old Colony YMCA (OCY), a network of YMCAs in southeastern, MA. OCY is unique in that half of the organization's budget is in social services. Before coming to OCY, she was a Project and Grants Manager on the senior staff at the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS), where she managed a number of initiatives, including the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), an Annie E. Casey Foundation-funded project and the Performance-based Standards (PbS) project. Prior to her service at DHS, she served as the Project Director of the Asthma Center on Community Environment and Social Stress (ACCESS), based at the Center for Community Health Education, Research and Service (CCHERS) at Northeastern University. Prior to her service at Northeastern University, she worked at Abt Associates, Inc., where she was Deputy Project Director of a national evaluation of a juvenile justice block grant program and a study of young inmates in adult prisons. While at Abt, she also worked on a variety of research projects focusing on juvenile justice and domestic violence, as well as evaluations of different strategies to reduce substance abuse.



**Debra Rahmin Silberstein, PhD'09**, is an attorney in private practice with over 25 years of legal experience, specializing in estate planning for individuals and families, estate and trust administration, probate matters, tax related issues and elder law matters. Debra is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Syracuse University (1981) who received her J.D. from Hofstra University School of Law in 1984. Outside her office, Silberstein serves as a Trustee of Lawrence General Hospital and a member of the Advisory Council for Bipolar Research at the Massachusetts General Hospital and a director of TAVAH, an organization that provides support to senior citizens to stay in their homes. Silberstein serves as a consultant to the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy at the Heller School, and a member of the New England Regional Board for the Anti-Defamation League. She previously served on the Long-Term Financial Planning Subcommittee for Governor Deval Patrick's Education Readiness Project and is a past director of the Legal Access Project of the Women's Resource Center, which provided legal services to victims of domestic violence.



**Amy Smalarz '98, PhD'06**, has over 16 years' experience in the healthcare industry. She is the founder and CEO of Strategic Market Insight, consulting with clients in multiple areas including: outcomes research, US payer assessment and positioning, clinical outcomes assessment, patient and clinician decision making, instrument and measurement development and pay-for-performance metrics. Her expertise is in working directly with clients to think about, discuss and implement strategies that enable them to translate and communicate their product's value to key stakeholders such as payers, provider/clinician groups, patient advocacy group and caregivers. She is also an Associate Professor at Regis College in their Health Care Administration Program teaching courses in Health Economics and Statistics. Previous positions include Director of Health Care Analytics at Adelphi Values, Research Scientist at UBC and Director of Performance Measurement at the Division of Health Care Finance and Policy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In addition to her Heller degree, Amy also has a Masters in Health Care Administration from Simmons College and BA in Biology and Sociology from Brandeis University.



**Trilby Smith, MM'98**, was born and raised in Vancouver, Canada. She is a lifelong activist and upon graduation from the University of British Columbia, moved to New York to become the Executive Director of a Jewish youth movement. This gave her a taste of what it was like to run an organization, but she realized she needed some more concrete skills. When she found the Heller School she knew she had found the perfect marriage of ideals and practical knowledge. Following graduation, she moved back to New York City to join her soon-to-be husband, and began working as a research and evaluation consultant at Metis Associates. This turned out to be her calling, and is what Trilby has been doing for the past 14 years. Two states, two children, and one dog later, she and her husband returned to live in Vancouver in the fall of 2011.



**Casey Thomas, MA SID'11**, focused her studies on Coexistence and Conflict Management, as well as Youth Development. She completed her practicum with a small organization in Ibagué, Colombia, working on a youth employability program that uses sport as a tool for life skills development. While in residence at Heller, Casey organized numerous social events, served as captain for intramural teams, and coordinated the social events calendar during the Capstone Seminar. Following graduation, Casey accepted a job with the Baltimore City Public School (BCPS) system, coordinating a \$3.3 million Saturday Learning program targeting middle grades students. She continued her efforts at BCPS, working in the Office of Teacher Support & Development. Currently, she is the new Executive Director of Soccer Without Borders in Baltimore, MD. Casey is a passionate member of the Heller community and continues to build this sense of community. She believes that the Heller School offers a unique opportunity to build a global professional network, as well as a global network of lifelong friendships based on common passions and goals.



**Danielle Thompson, MPP'12**, is a health policy and government relations professional. Her mission is to improve health outcomes through the promotion of public policies that protect the rights of consumers, improve access to quality care, and emphasize wellness and prevention while also controlling costs. Her research on diversity and employee wellness issues was presented to Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Judy Ann Bigby and used to inform policy decisions. Danielle currently works at the USDA Food and Nutrition Service in Boston, MA. In June 2013, she completed a post-graduate fellowship in government relations at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, MA. Before Heller, she spent three years working on employee wellness policy at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). Danielle has completed seven political internships, including two in U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy's HELP Committee Office. Research from Danielle's MPP Capstone Project, "Strategies to Improve Access to Insurance Coverage of Acupuncture in Massachusetts," was extensively cited in an online journal article: HealthCare Medicine Institute, "Massachusetts Acupuncture Health Insurance Campaign," Jan 19, 2013. She serves on the Programming and Events Committee for Boston Young Healthcare Professionals and is Co-Chair of the Boston Chapter of the Hollins University Alumnae Association. Danielle also holds a BA in history from Hollins University.



**Denise Tyler, MA'06, PhD'07**, has been conducting research on long-term care facilities and their employees for several years. She is currently Assistant Professor of Health Services, Policy and Practice (Research) at the Brown University Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research. Her research is focused primarily on nursing workers in long-term care facilities, including ways to improve work experiences, training, and teamwork. She has completed studies on the ways in which nursing home organizational structure can be enhanced to increase teamwork among direct-care workers, the reasons for declining availability of nursing home based pre-employment training for nursing assistants, and participatory action research that addressed cultural competence among nursing staff. Her current research focuses on enhancing the supervisory skills of nurses in ways that empower nursing assistants to apply their own skills and knowledge.



**Crystal Vitagliano, MA SID'14**, is a Program Analyst for the eRulemaking Program at the US Environmental Protection Agency. eRulemaking is part of the ongoing open government and transparency initiative that allows agencies to accept public comments electronically on rulemaking materials. Rulemaking is a process by which over 170 government agencies issue regulations implementing statutes passed by Congress. She primarily supports these agencies and the content they publish on the public-facing site: Regulations.gov - where the public can comment on rules and proposed rules. Currently she is working on a project to support the government's 2019 initiative to switch from paper to electronic records. In addition to her Heller degree, Crystal also has a BA in English Literature from Xavier University. With experience in the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps and the private sector, Crystal's position with the EPA blends her passion for public service and the environment - with her experience in business operations and information technology.



**Cassandra Welchlin, MA SID'05**, is the Child Care Matters Director at Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative. She is a native Mississippian and change agent for low wealth communities of color. In addition to her Heller degree, she graduated from Jackson State University and is a licensed Social Worker. For the past seven years she has worked with organizations at the local, state, regional and national level to develop strategies and create opportunities to address the social, political, economic and ecological injustices in low wealth communities of color that grows out of racial inequity in public policy. Cassandra works to build local leadership and partnerships in order to organize their efforts and support their community's power for the purpose of eradicating racial inequity. Currently she is a policy/advocacy consultant managing the Child Care Matters Campaign for the Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative.





**Wu Zeng, MS'05, PhD'09**, is an Assistant Research Professor specializing in health financing, health economics, cost-effectiveness analysis, health system and program evaluation in both developed and developing countries. He is formerly the Assistant Director of the MS program in International Health Policy and Management. His recent research concerns global health financing for HIV/AIDS programs and the evaluation of performance of HIV/AIDS service delivery at the national level. Prior to coming to Brandeis, Wu was an instructor at Shanghai Second Medical University (now Shanghai Jiaotong University), teaching and conducting research in epidemiology of preventive medicine.

## At-Large Member Biographies 2015-2016



**Rebecca Loya, MA'10, PhD'12**, is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions at Brown University. Her recent research examines the role of sexual violence in creating economic disadvantage and the protective effects of financial assets and social capital. Rebecca's research interests include racial and gender income and wealth inequalities, asset-based poverty alleviation strategies, and work support policies for low-income families. Rebecca has taught courses on social welfare policy, inequality and poverty, and policy analysis. Prior to entering the academic world, Rebecca worked in the nonprofit and education fields in the areas of job training, violence prevention, and reproductive healthcare. She received her Ph.D. in Social Policy from Heller in 2012, where she focused on assets and inequality. Rebecca completed an M.A. in Psychology at Stanford University, where she also received her B.A. in Psychology with a minor in Feminist Studies.