

Dear School of Social Work Community,

We are pleased to announce university approval for a new student organization: the Union of Black Social Work Students. The idea of starting such a club was born from the desire to nurture the development of Black students in the school by providing an intentional space for dialogue, mentorship, and collective action. Dr. Huguley has agreed to serve as our faculty advisor.

To study at the University of Pittsburgh is a highly sought opportunity, as it connects students to exceptional faculty, learning environments, and resources that lead to meaningful and prosperous careers. Additionally, The School of Social Work itself has a reputation as one of the best in the nation. However, ratings often do not reflect the context of minority student experiences. Research indicates that Black students at universities with profiles similar to Pitt experience challenges that are unique to their socio-historical status in the United States. These challenges include perceptions of school climate as hostile, prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments, pedagogy that perpetuates racism and oppression, and feelings of isolation and disconnection. As such, organizations like ours provide students the opportunity to discuss their experiences openly and without fear of judgment, the chance to engage in problem-solving, and allow for communal healing.

This organization also helps to celebrate the individual achievements of members, enhance their development as social work professionals, and reflect upon what it means to be a Black Social Worker. Peer mentoring is a foundational aspect of this organization. This organization will be absent of hierarchy as we believe that member experiences and perspectives are equally powerful and important; a student's value as a member is not determined by their current academic level. Additionally, we hope to bring Black Social Workers currently working in the field to campus to prepare the next generation of practitioners and researchers.

Originally a biblical verse, former first lady Michelle Obama frequently intones her audience to practice the principle of "to whom much is given, much is expected." To be a student at Pitt is a blessing that will follow us for the rest of our lives. However, we are aware that the experiences of our Black sisters and brothers in Allegheny County more broadly—those with no attachment to the Ivory Tower—are dramatically different. Our desire to give back is more expansive than community service -- we are called to protect and promote Black Lives.

In the next several months you will hear more from us about our mission, membership application procedures, and plans for the inaugural Fall-Spring academic year. At any time, if you have any feedback please feel free to contact us at [ubsws.pitt@gmail.com](mailto:ubsws.pitt@gmail.com).

Thank you,

Cortney VanHook, President

Dashawna Fussell-Ware, Vice President

Laurenia Mangum, Business Manager

James Huguley, EdD, Faculty Advisor