

KUYPER

College News

A Publication for Alumni & Friends

Jennifer Colin, program director and an assistant professor of social work; Abby Brown, senior social work major; and Kelli Hoffman, an assistant professor and Kuyper's director of field education.

Going PLACES

SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS GAIN REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCE

The experiences Abby Brown had at The Other Way Ministries as part of her Kuyper Bachelor of Social Work major practicum (or internship) are exactly what her professors hope for when students come into the program.

"I love the 'lightbulb moments' where I can see students make the tangible connection between textbook information and real-life application," said Kelli Hoffman, an assistant professor and Kuyper's director of field education. "Students come in with much eager enthusiasm to help others, so watching them take that innate passion and equipping them with skills and tools to channel it into something effective is what gets me excited."

Jennifer Colin, the program director and an assistant professor of social work, agreed.

"The practicum is a chance for students to apply all of the knowledge and skills they have acquired in their coursework," she said. "The intersection of faith and learning is a consistent focus in the classroom, and social work provides opportunities for critical thinking as well as hands-on learning."

To that sentiment, Brown adds a double thumbs-up.

"The social work classes I have taken have been amazing," she said. "And what

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Not Worth It?

More and more students are saying — It's Not Worth It.

Really? College isn't worth it? That's hard for me to hear.

In a recent survey* of more than 20,000 high school students, 20% said just that.

And why do they say college isn't worth it? The study states that students are concerned about tuition costs and student debt.

At Kuyper, we are keenly aware of these challenges and wholeheartedly committed to supporting our students.

We offer competitively low tuition and housing and meal costs with no additional fees.

We freeze tuition for full-time students for all four years of college, which provides a predictable financial pathway to graduation for students and their families.

We award ample merit and need-based scholarships and other institutional aid, totaling more than \$600,000 this year.

As the only federally recognized work college in Michigan, we provide KuyperWorks positions where students

earn \$4,000-\$8,000 toward their tuition each year, funds which in part have helped to decrease our students' average direct loans by 22% in the past five years.

We are one of only two colleges in Michigan that offer all incoming freshmen a loan repayment assistance program at no cost to them or their families.

Where do YOU come in?

While 87% of our annual operating expenses directly support student access and success, our tuition revenue covers less than 60% of our annual operating expenses. We rely on YOU and donors like YOU to provide the rest through your generous giving.

In this season of giving — please give generously!

Help us meet our \$250,000 matching fund. And, help our students experience a Kuyper College education that has immeasurable worth.

Enjoy the stories in this issue that highlight how our students, alumni,



Help us meet our \$250,000 matching fund. And, help our students experience a Kuyper College education that has immeasurable worth.

faculty and staff exemplify our mission of living purposeful lives of work and service to God and neighbor.

Grateful to serve,

Dr. Patricia R. Harris
President

*EAB Global, Inc. (2023). Recruiting "Gen P" Insight Paper

Empower Our Students to Lead Lives of Faithful Service

At Kuyper, work is about more than just fulfilling one's own interests. It is about honoring God and caring for others.

This service-minded attitude runs counter to our culture, yet it can be found in the Kuyper community. From greeting guests at events to sweeping leaves with a smile, students approach all tasks as an opportunity to follow

Christ's example and give back. With your help, we can empower students as they begin to change the culture of work and embark on a life of service.

This holiday season, we invite you to support our students by making a gift to the Kuyper College Annual Fund. To make a gift, please visit [Kuyper.edu/giving](https://www.kuyper.edu/giving) or call the Advancement Office at **877.229.0940**.

West Michigan YWAM Partners with Kuyper

Keith Williams did not envision a career in missions.

“I didn’t exactly grow up in a Christian home,” he said recently, sitting in the Vos Chapel on a chilly fall morning. “We went to church, but it was nominal with no real discipleship or understanding of the Bible.”

Reflecting on a journey filled with many ups and downs, the 2020 Kuyper graduate and base director of Youth with a Mission West Michigan emphasized the grace and providence of God that brought him to where he is now.

The first step in this transformation began in high school, when his mother started taking him to a new church, though he admitted he was initially not enthusiastic about this.

“She really had to drag me there,” he recalled with a wry smile.

But then Williams encountered God for the first time in the pages of a Bible given to him by the church’s youth pastor, and his attitude changed.

“It was God speaking to me through His Word that converted me; that’s when I got saved,” he said.

Almost immediately, his newfound faith sparked a desire to share the message of salvation, and he enrolled in Discipleship Training School (DTS) through YWAM Montana after high school. Because DTS is a five-month, dual phase program that trains young people to share the Gospel all around the world, he then journeyed overseas to Turkey.

Williams returned more on fire for God than before and enrolled in Kuyper College to deepen his knowledge of God and His Word.

“I wanted to learn everything I could about God,” he said.

Though things seemed to be going well for Williams, a storm was on the



Keith Williams, a 2020 Kuyper graduate, is the base director of Youth with a Mission West Michigan.

horizon. He had gotten married shortly after returning from DTS, and when that marriage ended in divorce, he was plunged into a painful period of his life and withdrew from his studies.

“Those were dark years for me,” he recalled, soberly. “I walked away from God in some big ways.”

But God did not walk away from him, he added, describing two divine encounters unlike any he’d had before. Both times, he heard God speaking to him clearly. First, telling him to recommit his life to Jesus and second, calling him to become a missionary pastor.

He then returned to Kuyper to complete his education and, after graduation, to open a YWAM base in partnership with his alma mater. This means the YWAM base is housed on the Kuyper campus, with students living there during the lecture phase of DTS and, after completion, having the ability to transfer their credits into several Kuyper degree programs.

Williams is looking forward to the

Biblical Missions Training for Students

YWAM West Michigan began in 2020 with a dream of seeing young people disciplined, trained and commissioned to reach the nations. In their words: “We believe that young people are uniquely positioned to make a difference for the gospel because they have significant time, energy and the passion; they just need training and a roadmap to do it.”

The DTS program will see students on campus for the lecture phase, during which students learn from trusted speakers on foundational topics such as the nature and character of God, missions, evangelism and more. The lecture phase also is filled with worship, teachings, intercession, Bible study, one-on-ones and outreach preparation ahead of the next phase which is a two-month overseas outreach.

In the words of YWAM: “When you choose to do a DTS, you are joining the worldwide movement to make Jesus known in all nations of the world.”

first session of DTS, which begins in January 2024. Because sharing the Gospel has been part of Kuyper’s DNA since it began in 1939, he hopes that YWAM’s passion for evangelism will spread among the community on and off campus.

In fact, he believes that sharing the message of salvation is a Christian’s highest call. Speaking recently at chapel, he urged the Kuyper community to keep this goal in focus, though the world will try to distract us with lesser things.

“You can’t serve God and something else at the same time,” Williams said. “So, this is God’s question for you. Who are you going to serve?”

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makes them really shine is when we get a chance to apply what we have learned in settings outside of the Kuyper campus. When I started my internship, I could immediately see how what I had learned was going to help me in real life and help the people being served.”

Kimberly Bonnema said the same about her internship at Safe Haven Ministries.

“I think the most beneficial part of my internship experience at Kuyper is engaging with clients at Safe Haven Ministries and learning crisis intervention skills,” she said. “I also have learned a lot from and have enjoyed observing the support groups at SHM.”

Brown’s labors for The Other Way, a Christ-centered community development organization dedicated to supporting its neighbors on the west side of Grand Rapids, went so well, the organization hired her this past summer to work 20



Students make tangible connections between textbook information and real-life application at Kuyper.



The intersection of faith and learning is a consistent focus in the social work classroom.

hours per week. It didn’t hurt that her supervisor, Elizabeth Penning, is also a Kuyper social work graduate and knows the quality of the College’s students.

Skills to Engage

On the other hand, Brown is not the only Kuyper social work major sought after by her internship organization. Hoffman said that when Kuyper students complete their required 400-hour internships, the job offers from their internship location are frequent, and Kuyper social work graduates annually choose numerous fields in which to work.

“Because of the generalist perspective of the program, students graduate with the skills to engage with every population, which opens up so many doors,” she said.

Indeed, past Kuyper social work graduates are serving as foster care managers, as

probation officers in district courts, as grant writers and even in more non-traditional social work positions, such as school librarian. In all that they are doing, Kuyper graduates are benefiting from their social work skills and their Kuyper degree, Hoffman and Colin said.

Both professors also served in a variety of fields before coming to the College. Hoffman, a 2007 Kuyper graduate, came back to her alma mater full time in 2018 after previously serving as an adjunct. Prior to Kuyper, the bulk of her social work experience was at Cherry Health, working with people diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illness. Colin, a Taylor graduate, came to Kuyper three years later after serving as the principal of Creative Technologies Academy in Cedar Springs and has also been a K-12 school counselor and a therapist with Alpha Women’s Center in Grand Rapids.

Kuyper News and Events

Marriages

Casey (Cohoon) Kosten (2019) married Mike Kosten on October 17, 2023.

Nicole Romero-Johnson (2018) married Keegan Romero-Johnson on October 7, 2023.

Births

Krista (Vermeer) Sterling (2015) and Jacob Sterling welcomed Jude Benjamin Sterling to their family on August 9, 2023.

Professional Development

Joshua Carpenter (2019) passed his classical examination and was officially ordained on September 17, 2023. He accepted a call to serve as pastor of Volga CRC in Volga, South Dakota. In February 2024, Carpenter and his wife Kayla expect to welcome their first child.

Both professors love being in the classroom with their students and also seeing them placed in internships. Adding new partnerships and placement sites is a constant focus for the program and both help broaden Kuyper's engagement with various communities and open up more doors for students looking for employment down the road.

In tandem with their internships, the students also complete a one-credit seminar each semester where they have the opportunity to listen to and support their peers in their different settings.

"We have an incredibly diverse set of placements this year, and it is so good for the students to hear about the successes and struggles their classmates experience," Hoffman said. "It gives them the opportunity to not feel so alone in the process and also to continually broaden their perceptions of what one can do within the social work field."

Placement settings this academic year range from the City of Grand Rapids all the way to the state of Washington.

"Generally, we see students being placed in close proximity to campus, but due to the unique desires of our students this year, we are spread all over West Michigan and even out to Lansing, Indiana and Washington," Hoffman said. "What a wonderful way to spread the word nationwide about what Kuyper College students have to offer."



Social work major Kimberly Bonnema at her Safe Haven Ministries internship.

Accreditation is Important

Colin and Hoffman said that Kuyper's program aims to equip students with the knowledge, values and skills to be able to engage in generalist social work practice, grounded in the view that every person is created in God's image.

Kuyper social work graduates who achieve a certain grade point average (a mark set by each individual graduate school) can qualify for graduate school advanced standing. Colin said this means selected courses from the Kuyper undergraduate program will transfer into the master's program, saving students both time and money on their path to a Master of Social Work degree.

Accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education holds the program accountable for ensuring that Kuyper graduates possess the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

"It's important for our program to be accredited because we want our students to be prepared for the current field of social work," Colin said. "The accreditation

process requires adherence to specific competencies on which our coursework focuses in order to appropriately educate our students for work and service, and we are committed to crafting a valuable college experience for our students."

Brown, who grew up in the small Michigan town of Millington, southeast of Saginaw, can attest to the deep commitment of her professors and the College in preparing her for her chosen vocation. And, she added, that commitment was evident already when she was a high school student at Valley Lutheran, trying to decide where to go to college.

"Kuyper professors were the most responsive of any of the schools I was considering," she said. "Professor Hoffman responded over and over again to all of my questions on email. It was very affirming."

When she made her decision to come to Kuyper, she knew immediately that it was the right one.

"I love the campus location, I love the affordability of Kuyper, and I love the social work program," she said. "What I have experienced here has confirmed for me more and more every day that Kuyper has been the right place for me."

After she graduates at the end of the fall 2023 semester, Brown isn't sure what's next. But she knows she'll be ready for whatever comes her way.

"I feel very equipped for my social work career," she said. "And very thankful for Kuyper."

Campus Event

Homecoming | January 13, 2024

Kuyper invites alumni to join us for Homecoming! Enjoy men's and women's basketball games in the Boonstra Gymnasium, an alumni and staff basketball game, a welcome from President Patricia Harris, appetizers, live music and more.

See www.kuyper.edu/homecoming

Brent Lamberts (2006) accepted a position as the youth director at Graafschap CRC in August of 2023.

Debra Potter-Simmons (2000) accepted a position at Jarvis Christian University as executive administrative assistant in the Office of the President.

Andy Thompson (1995) was called to pastor the Vandalia Church of God, and he continues to work as a chaplain for Compassus Hospice Kalamazoo.

Jonathan Waterbury (2014) was ordained and became an elder on October 17, 2023.

Ken Capisciolto to Retire

Ken Capisciolto, vice president for advancement, is retiring at the end of December, bringing to a close an almost two-decade career at Kuyper.

He said he will look back on wonderful co-workers in not only the advancement division but also among the faculty and the staff as a highlight of his time at the College.



Ken Capisciolto

“No one does this alone,” he said. “I have had amazing colleagues, and being able to provide resources to help our faculty and

our staff—and to help create an environment in which our students can flourish—has been incredibly gratifying.”

Connections to students have been especially meaningful, he added.

“We see transformation occur here,” he said. “Seeing the growth in our students from the time they come in as freshmen until the time they leave as seniors is a wonderful part of my job.”

He also has enjoyed connecting with donors, he said.

“To be in my role is to have seen Christian stewardship at its finest,” he said. “I have worked with so many people who understand that they are stewards of that with which they have been entrusted. It’s been an honor.”

Kuyper President Patricia Harris served with Capisciolto as provost and for the past six years as president.

“I am deeply grateful for the years of dedicated service that Ken gave here, for his thoughtful leadership, his care for this community and his commitment to the mission of Kuyper College,” she said.

In My Words

GRACE IS THE WORD

I have been working in human resources most of my life. I always knew I wanted to work with people, but I didn’t know that doing so would also mean caring for people.

I was raised in the military, the Army to be exact. My mother was a nurse on military bases, and my dad was an officer. I thought I would follow



Annie Fields

Human Resources Director

in my mother’s footsteps and be a nurse but did not want to go to nursing school. I just wanted someone to tell me I was a nurse! Well, obviously that doesn’t happen. But I did go to college and to graduate school, earning an undergraduate degree in English and a master’s in social work.

I knew I did not want to teach (I don’t have the patience), and at the time being in social work was very political and involved protesting (which was interesting), but I lacked the passion the profession demands.

During an internship in my second year of graduate school, I was approached by a businessman asking me to join his company, and this became my first experience in the business world. After graduation, I joined the company and realized where I could do the most good for employees was in human resources. The rest, as they say, is history.

God has always been present in my life, from where I lived to how I have been led to accept and treat all people. God and my faith have played huge roles in the types of employment I have chosen for myself.

Transitioning from the for-profit to the not-for-profit world was part of that faith journey for me. After I got caught up in a corporate downsizing, I decided I wanted to work in a not-for-profit where my values and the values of my employer could more closely line up.

Here, the employees are so central to the core values of the organization, and that is such a wonderful thing, something that makes my work very satisfying. Because I am new to higher education, I have had to learn new aspects of human resources work, but the opportunity to serve in this role has been for me the best experience. Here, my values have found a home.

My work at Kuyper is not my first in the not-for-profit sector, but my job here leading human resources is my first in higher education. And what I have found is what I was looking for when I transitioned from the for-profit world. I love what I do and am so glad to be able to bring that passion to Kuyper.

“In My Words” is a feature of the Kuyper College News highlighting first-person stories by Kuyper College faculty and staff.

Serving the Disenfranchised

Allie Roehl admits that, at first glance, it might not appear she is relying on her college studies in her current line of work.

Roehl, who graduated from Kuyper College in 2020 with a degree in social work and again in 2022 with a Master of Ministry degree, chuckled as she said, “Those aren’t usually fields you think of as setting you up for a career in digital marketing.”



Allie and her fiancé Jerrick.

Speaking to members of the Kuyper community assembled in the Vos Chapel for Ora et Labora, a weekly time where speakers come to campus to talk about their work and how their faith impacts that work, she was quick to add that her studies have actually prepared her very well for what she is doing now.

After spending four years with PRC Grand Rapids, an organization that provides pregnancy services to women considering abortion, she now works for Life Advancement Group, which harnesses cutting-edge technology to reach and connect these individuals with crisis pregnancy centers.

“I think anyone who goes into social work or ministry already has a desire to serve those who are disenfranchised or can’t

speak for themselves. For me, children in the womb became the focus of my social work and ministry,” she said.

This mission has led to significant transformation in her life, Roehl added.

“When you have the influence of the Holy Spirit, it’s impossible for your compassion to not increase when you see people in their need. God has really humbled me to realize that I’m not that different than the people my organization serves,” she said.

This kind of humility in service is something Roehl feels blessed to have had modeled for her by others in her field.

“I’ve had such great examples of people joyfully serving, even when they get no recognition for it,” she said, smiling.

But humble servanthood isn’t something reserved for those who are in social work or ministry, she reminded her listeners. Over and over throughout Scripture, we see God’s heart for the vulnerable and direction to care for them, wherever we are.

“We’re called to seek the interests of others and not ourselves,” she said.

“God has really humbled me to realize that I’m not that different than the people my organization serves.”

A “Pawty” for Vegas

In a year at Kuyper focused on the theme “a life of service,” a party for a service dog in training seemed like the perfect way to celebrate on a pleasant fall afternoon on campus.

The “Pawty to Celebrate Vegas” brought together students, staff and faculty and, of course, the star of the show, Vegas, a one-year-old male black labrador retriever who has spent the last year with Kuyper’s Emily Perton, the College’s new director of student success.

“Vegas is the first pup we have raised,” Perton said. “My husband and I felt we would be a good family since we have two boys with Down syndrome, and so we thought the pup could get a lot of experience with people with disabilities.”

Vegas also spent a lot of time on the Kuyper campus, which was why Perton decided to host a goodbye party.

“Students would come to my office often to see if Vegas was here,” she said with a smile. “Everyone knew his name and greeted him with love. He had an official ID made by the IT department, and the students were thrilled to teach him how to check out a book at the library. When he is in class, he greets students as they enter, and the students’ faces light up when they see him.”

Perton and her family are now working with a 16-week-old male golden retriever named Tweed who has become the next regular visitor to Kuyper’s campus.



Emily Perton with her son Nico and Vegas at the goodbye “pawty.”

“Kuyper has been a wonderful place for the dogs,” Perton said. “Service dogs provide equitable access to the world, and raising Vegas and Tweed is one step toward someone having more access in the future.”

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

STUDENTS TO WATCH

Angelita Ledesma

I grew up in Grand Rapids and graduated in 2022 from Northview High School. My mom has been an accounting manager for 31 years, and my dad is an independent contractor who's been painting for over 50 years. My mom graduated from Davenport College with her bachelor's degree, while my dad went to Michigan State for a short time. I am the youngest of seven and have five brothers and one sister. Two brothers went to college, but I am the first to go to Kuyper.

My life growing up I would say was an adventure. We always did something new with my family. It was either taking trips to new places or to my out-of-town volleyball tournaments or just fun things to do in the area. We went to rodeos, movies, tractor pulls, camping and more. We were always on the go, which I enjoyed a lot.

I went to a different college last year and was going to major in forensic science. During my first semester there, I decided it wasn't for me, but I found that my true passion was in social work. I decided to transfer to Kuyper because of the amazing social work program and because it was close to home.

I have always had a job while being a student, even throughout high school. Last year I worked on campus, and now this year I do KuyperWorks. It's a great program. Not only do I work

while going to school, but I have also played volleyball since fifth grade, and I was on the volleyball team this year at Kuyper. It can be tough at times juggling work, school and volleyball. I manage it by having a to-do list each day and trying to save time for myself to rest.

I also am able to manage because the professors here are outgoing and understanding. They are always willing to help you. They work with you to help you be successful, and they get to know you personally. You won't be just a number in a classroom; you will be a name with a face at Kuyper. Social work professors Kelli Hoffman and Jennifer Colin have been especially amazing. Sometimes the things we talk about in class are hard, and they both do their best to make sure we feel comfortable.

So far, I have found Kuyper to be a small community where you receive a lot of one-on-one teaching and attention. You also develop and deepen your faith at Kuyper. Really, Kuyper is a place you can call home.



CLASS **2026**
HOME **Grand Rapids**
MAJOR **Social Work**