

# Sabbatical Leave Application

Submit electronically to  
Provost's Office

**Note: The PDF application form is the preferred form. This Word copy has been provided as a backup in case of technical issues. If using this form, please convert it to a PDF before submitting it to the Provost's Office.**

**\*\*\*The SaLe Committee will not consider incomplete applications\*\*\***

## Checklist

Please make sure you have included the following:

- Dates of Proposed Sabbatical
- Years of services/eligibility points
- Department chair and dean signatures
- Applicant signature

## Attachments

- Curriculum vitae—*Must not be longer than 8 pages.*
- Budget—*See application for details on when a budget should be included.*
- Letter(s) of support—*See application for details on when letters should be included.*

## Narrative

Please make sure all sections have been completed and that the proposal is written in language that is understandable to an educated layperson.

For any questions, please contact the co-chairs of the SaLe Committee:

Rachel McMullin [r McMullin@wcupa.edu](mailto:r McMullin@wcupa.edu) and Kate Stewart [kstewart@wcupa.edu](mailto:kstewart@wcupa.edu)



**West Chester University of Pennsylvania**  
**APPLICATION FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE**  
**Submit electronically to Provost Office**

First and Last Name: Alison Updyke Neff  
College: Education and Social Work  
Department: Graduate Social Work

**Sabbatical Request** (select one)

- 1 semester at full salary (requires 7 years of service as calculated below)  
 1 year at ½ salary (requires 7 years of service as calculated below)  
 1 year at full salary (requires 14 years of service as calculated below)

**Semester(s) that sabbatical will be taken:** Fall 2026

The semester(s) should take place the academic year following the application (i.e., applications submitted in fall 2025 are for fall 2026 and/or spring 2027)

**Eligibility**

The general rule of thumb is that you need 7 years of full-time service as a faculty member in the PASSHE system for each sabbatical (including at least 5 years continuous service at WCU), but you do not need to wait 7 years between sabbaticals. You cannot, however, apply any earlier than three (3) semesters following the semester in which a previous sabbatical has been taken. To help ensure that you have enough years of service to qualify for a sabbatical, please complete the following steps:

1. Semester and year that you began as a full-time faculty member in the PASSHE system: Fall 2018
2. Give yourself one (1) seniority point for each semester of service 16  
*Do include semesters that fall between the time of application and the start of the proposed sabbatical. For instance, if you are applying fall 2025 and the sabbatical would start fall 2026, include two points for fall 2025 and spring 2026. Three points would be added for a sabbatical starting spring 2027.*
3. Calculate points for any prior sabbaticals you have taken 0 (number of sabbaticals) X 14= 0  
*A full-year, full-pay sabbatical counts as 2 sabbaticals and equals 28 points.*
4. Then subtract that number from the total seniority points calculated in step 2 16
5. Divide the number in step 4 by two (2) to convert that number into years 8  
*This number must be at least 7 (years) to meet the minimum requirement for a 1 semester, full salary or 1 year, ½ salary sabbatical. It must be at least 14 (years) for a 1-year, full salary sabbatical.*

The faculty member is responsible for ensuring that Chairperson's and Dean's comments and signatures are obtained on time, and that the completed proposal (PDF) is emailed to the Provost's Office by the published deadline. Incomplete applications or applications received after the published deadlines will not be reviewed by the SaLe Committee.

**1. Project Abstract**  
(Maximum 150 words)

Please provide a short abstract summarizing your project and its outcomes.

Philadelphia's Alternative Felony Disposition (AFD) Program, a unique gun diversion initiative for first-time non-violent possessors of an illegal arm, represents a collaboration between WCU, the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), and the offices of the District Attorney (DA) and the Public Defender. This proposal seeks to examine AFD's effectiveness and lay the foundation for

the next steps of the intervention. Specifically, I will: 1) analyze collected survey and qualitative data on AFD, 2) collaborate with the DA's Office and other city AFD partners to refine AFD, 3) strengthen partnerships with service-providing agencies involved in AFD, and 4) prepare two juried conference presentations and two manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

## 2. Merit of Project

(Maximum 150 words)

Please describe how you think your project meets the standards of merit described in Section C of the WCU Sabbatical Policy.

This project significantly supports, develops, and strengthens my teaching process, professional competence, and ability to serve the academic community. Teaching about the AFD analysis will allow me to expand training about effective, non-carceral diversion practices, and highlight the way psychological, community-level, and macro/structural processes intersect in effective initiatives. I can continue and expand the practicum placements of WCU MSW students in the AFD initiative for training in the intervention. Professionally, the relationships I will build and strengthen with service-providing agencies, as well as the Offices of the District Attorney, the Public Defender, and the Philadelphia Courts, will enhance my standing as a social worker, policy consultant, research evaluator, and clinical trainer in the diversion and reentry field. Academically, publishing two papers and preparing a conference presentation will further my academic goals, and strengthen the academic/research partnerships with my co-authors at WCU and Penn who are collaborating on AFD.

## 3. Description of the Project and its Outcomes

(Maximum 1,500 words excluding references)

Please include:

- a. A discussion of the background and significance of your project(s).
- b. A detailed description of how the project(s) will be carried out (i.e., discussion of methodology, procedures, and/or activities) and the time commitment required to complete the work.
- c. A description of the outcomes of the project(s), including, but not limited to, any scholarly/creative outputs and any competencies developed via professional development.

**A. Background and Significance:** Most people with a first-time gun-possession charge are often ineligible for court diversion programs that seek to reduce recidivism and avoid incarceration <sup>1</sup>, despite being at lower risk of re-offending compared to those with previous gun-related arrests <sup>2</sup>. Interventions and diversion programs operated by District Attorney's Offices in the U.S. tend to target those charged with non-gun related offenses <sup>1,3</sup>, thus making nonviolent gun offenses the unaddressed "third rail" for diversion programs. This policy has resulted in clogged dockets for first time gun-offences, with Philadelphia documenting a waiting list of almost 300 people waiting for disposition for over two years <sup>4</sup>. The risk of being arrested for a gun offense is marked by significant social disparities. Research indicates that poor Black and

Latinx communities experience higher rates of gun violence<sup>5,6</sup>. Illegal gun possession in turn, is associated with exposure to such violence<sup>1,7-9</sup>, leading to young Black and Latinx men being at higher risk of arrest and incarceration. In Philadelphia, almost 82% of the those charged in Philadelphia are Black, with 11% identifying as Latinx<sup>10,11</sup>. A gun charge exacerbates social iniquities, posing a barrier to securing housing, employment, education, and/or health services<sup>12</sup>.

Scholars have called for an expansion of gun diversion programs and for building the evidence-base supporting the effectiveness of these interventions<sup>1-3,13</sup>. In particular, given the complexity of client needs and the intersecting psychosocial systems involved in shaping recidivism for those with a gun charge, scholars underline the appropriateness of social work-based interventions in this field of practice<sup>1</sup>. This proposal seeks to answer these calls by: 1) examining the effectiveness of Philadelphia's Alternative Felony Disposition Program (AFD), a collaborative intervention between Philadelphia District Attorney's (DA) Office and The Center for Carceral Communities (CCC) for people charged with a first-time gun possession offence, 2) laying the foundation for the next steps of the AFD program, and 3) disseminating results by preparing conference presentations and publications.

*The AFD Program:* AFD was a 6 month-long diversion program (initiated in 2022) for first-time gun offenses implemented by CCC, a community re-entry and diversion program I serve as the co-founding Clinical Director for, the Philadelphia DA's Office, the Public Defender's Office, and the First Judicial Court District. AFD completion led to charges being dropped, with diverted individuals participating in an evidence-based multilevel integrative intervention known as GAINS (Groups, Advocacy, Integrated Network of Services) at CCC. Utilizing a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy, support groups co-facilitated by formerly incarcerated peer leaders, and (free) smart phone-based intensive case management, GAINS<sup>14</sup> has been identified as a model diversion intervention by the National Academies of Sciences<sup>15</sup>. The AFD program at CCC represents a unique collaboration between WCU and the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), and key city offices, with its gun diversion focus making it one the few interventions of its kind in the U.S. Moreover, the DA's Office providing access to CCC to its gun offenses database represents one of the first times the City has shared these data with academic partners.

As a founding director of CCC and as its Clinical Director, I have been supervising the implementation of the AFD intervention and have access to the AFD data. This proposal seeks to analyze data collected by the AFD intervention, prepare the groundwork for results dissemination, and lay the foundation for the next steps of the intervention. Specifically, I will:

- 1) examine the effectiveness of the AFD intervention through an analysis of quantitative data that have been collected by CCC and Philadelphia's DA's Office, and qualitative data that have been collected by CCC researchers and me;
- 2) collaborate with the DA's Office and other city AFD partners to refine and strengthen the AFD intervention based on the results of my analyses;
- 3) build and strengthen partnerships with the agencies involved with AFD that comprise Philadelphia's diversion services landscape; and
- 4) use the analysis results to prepare conference presentations for the annual national social work research conference, and publishable manuscripts.

This is an opportune moment for this project. The City has recently given CCC data on AFD waitlisted clients, making it possible to conduct a comparison study on AFD's

effectiveness. Moreover, with the DA starting a new term in 2026, this is the perfect time to conduct this analysis and work with the DA to refine AFD.

**B. Implementation Plan:** As the co-founding Clinical Director of CCC I have been coordinating the AFD intervention. I am familiar with, and have access to the AFD client data that have been collected by CCC and the DA's Office, and have well-established relationships with AFD's city-wide partners. Moreover, IRB approval and a Memorandum of Understanding with the city of Philadelphia have been secured for the project. This sabbatical will provide me the time needed to analyze the collected data, and lay the foundation for taking the next steps of implementing the intervention. Specifically, I will take the project forward in the following ways.

*Quantitative Analysis* (Objective 1, months 1-3): I will utilize the SAS statistical program to prepare and analyze the client data collected in the AFD program housed at CCC (n=400). The AFD dataset is based on a survey of AFD participants interviewed at baseline, 3 months, and 6 months, as well matched non-AFD participants on the waitlist. The data comprise information on gun-related risk behaviors, arrests, demographic variables, and standardized measures of mental health, trauma, substance use, and adult attachment. Utilizing longitudinal multiple and logistical regression models, I will examine the AFD's effectiveness in reducing gun-related risk behaviors and recidivism, as well as the psychosocial factors affecting these outcomes.

*Qualitative Analysis* (Objective 1, months 1-3): Semi structured qualitative interviews (n=30) of randomly selected AFD participants and AFD service providers (n=10) have been conducted by me and CCC research partners, exploring their thoughts and attitudes about the intervention. For the sabbatical project, I will code and analyze these interviews utilizing the NVivo package.

*Refining AFD in collaboration with city partners* (Objective 2, months 2-4): Results of the analyses will shape discussions with AFD's city partners (the DA's and Public Defender's Offices, the Judges, and the Adult Probation and Parole Department). Given that our principal partner, the DA, starts a new term in 2026, this will be the perfect time for these feedback loops to reshape the program. As Clinical Director of CCC and coordinator of the AFD initiative there, I have long-standing relationships with these city partners and hold regular meetings with them currently. Drawing on my analytical results, we will use these meetings during my sabbatical term to tweak AFD, and explore long-term funding for the program.

*Building and Strengthening AFD Service Network* (Objective 3, months 2-4): AFD's network, that CCC partners with in service provision, currently includes the Community College of Philadelphia (for education), the Friends Rehabilitation Program (for housing), the Abolition Law Center (for legal advocacy), the Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project (for services to AFD's young adult clients), and the Philadelphia Reentry Coalition (for dissemination of news, developments, and recruitment). I will use the sabbatical term to strengthen these relationships through regular meetings that will help me to disseminate results about AFD's effectiveness. I will also use the sabbatical term to expand this network by identifying and recruiting more partners, specifically in the mental health and employment fields.

*Preparing conference presentations and manuscripts* (Objective 4, months 2-4): I will collaborate with research partners at CCC from WCU and Penn to develop two conference presentations for the Society for Social Work Research (SSWR), our discipline's annual

conference in 2027, and two manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed journals on the AFD program. I have an ongoing research relationship with the CCC research team and will build on it to prepare the presentations and two manuscripts.

**C. Project Outcomes:** The analyses will be utilized to prepare conference presentations and two manuscripts (qualitative and quantitative). The conference presentations will be submitted for the Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) conference in 2027, our discipline's primary annual conference. The first manuscript will draw on the qualitative analysis and be submitted to *Qualitative Health Research*. The second on the quantitative analysis will be submitted to *Social Services Review*, social work's leading journal for quantitative research. Dissemination of these results will enhance my academic development, and help establish the intervention as a model program for other cities facing similar challenges. Continuing my academic collaborations with CCC's research partners at WCU and Penn will strengthen these partnerships for future academic work.

The project will help my professional development in integrating me more closely with Philadelphia's diversion offices, and within the city's network of diversion and reentry service providers. It will strengthen my role as a social work and systems trainer in the GAINS and AFD intervention, laying the foundation for integration of this material in classes in the MSW curriculum. The project will also strengthen WCU's role as an academic and implementation partner in the city's efforts and will open up the possibility of student learning through practice placements in these programs.

#### References

1. Epperson MW, Cinque A, Lee H. Addressing the Complexity of Illegal Gun Possession for Participants in Gun Diversion Programs. *Advances in Social Work*. 2024;24(1):27-47.
2. Devitt Westley C, Kang B, Sheridan E, Specker J. Examining the recidivism of firearm offenders using state criminal history and mortality data. 2018.
3. Epperson MW, Garthe RC, Lee H, Hawken A. An examination of recidivism outcomes for a novel prosecutor-led gun diversion program. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. 2024;92:102196.
4. The Data Lab. 2022. <https://data.philadao.com>
5. Braga AA, Papachristos AV, Hureau DM. The concentration and stability of gun violence at micro places in Boston, 1980–2008. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*. 2010;26(1):33-53.
6. Larsen DA, Lane S, Jennings-Bey T, Haygood-El A, Brundage K, Rubinstein RA. Spatio-temporal patterns of gun violence in Syracuse, New York 2009-2015. *PLoS One*. 2017;12(3):e0173001.
7. Barragan M, Sherman N, Reiter K, Tita GE. “Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don’t” perceptions of guns, safety, and legitimacy among detained gun offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. 2016;43(1):140-155.
8. Beardslee J, Mulvey E, Schubert C, Allison P, Infante A, Pardini D. Gun-and non-gun–related violence exposure and risk for subsequent gun carrying among male juvenile offenders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. 2018;57(4):274-279.

9. Cook PJ, Goss KA. *The gun debate: What everyone needs to know*®: Oxford University Press; 2020.
10. Jacobs JB. *The eternal criminal record*: Harvard University Press; 2015.
11. Ewing M. A reckoning in Philadelphia. *The Atlantic*2016.
12. Dent M. The problem with probation in Philadelphia: "This thing is bigger than Meek Mill.". *Billypenn*. November 17, 2017, 2017.
13. Ostermann M, Hashimi S. Recidivism among people convicted of gun offenses: A call to better leverage reentry resources to decrease gun violence. *Justice Quarterly*. 2023;40(6):791-812.
14. Updyke A, Ghose T. "We're the CHATS old-heads": Engaging with evidence-based practice in a reentry agency. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 2023;51(3):945-961.
15. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *The Effects of Incarceration and Reentry on Community Health and Well-Being: Proceedings of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2020.

#### 4. Projected Work Plan

(Maximum 400 words)

Please include:

- a. A detailed timeline that shows when project activities will be completed, including relevant work to be completed before or after the sabbatical period. A table or list format is fine.
- b. A brief discussion of the likelihood of project completion.
- c. A discussion of contingency plans, if project completion is dependent on outside factors.

	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4
Secondary analysis of collected survey data				
Qualitative data analysis				
Meeting with City partners to refine AFD				
Meeting service providers to strengthen AFD network				
Preparing conference presentations for SSWR				
Preparing two peer-reviewed papers				

It is expected that all components of the project will be completed within the sabbatical period. The survey and qualitative data have already been collected, IRB clearance secured, and the relationships with City partners, service providers, and CCC research partners have been established through ongoing and regular meetings. External forces are not expected to shape this timeline. One challenge that may arise is the number of different elements that need to be completed. However, many of the elements are interlinked, with completion of one

simultaneously aiding the completion of the others. For example, results of the secondary and qualitative data analyses will serve as the basis for the ongoing and simultaneous refining of the AFD program in collaboration with AFD city partners and service providers, and will also lay the groundwork for the preparation of conference presentations at SSWR, the annual Social Work Research conference, in 2027. In turn, the conference presentations will lay the groundwork for the two manuscripts.

## 5. Letter(s) of support

Please include letter(s) of support if appropriate. Examples include:

- a. To document the value and nature of a collaboration or of a location, the availability of resources, or the feasibility of the project.
- b. To document access to a restricted space, such as an archive, library, or lab facilities needed to complete the project.

Are any letters attached?

- a. Yes X b. No

## 6. Budget

Please complete the sabbatical budget form if your proposed project depends on self or outside funding beyond the award of the sabbatical itself, including for any of the following:

- a. travel/lodging
- b. purchase of equipment/materials or other operating expenses
- c. paying student workers or consultants
- d. fees for conferences, presentations, workshops, etc.

Budget is:

- a. Attached      b. Not applicable to project X

Budget Elaboration (Provide any contextual information that would aid the committee in understanding your budget):

## 7. Project Benefits

(Maximum 500 words):

Please describe how your project will:

- a. Enhance your own teaching or professional responsibilities and/or scholarly/creative competencies.
- b. Benefit your students, the university, your discipline, and/or the broader community.

**Academic Development:** The project will result in conference presentations and publishable papers on a unique intervention in a field that is lacking scholarship. The dissemination of these

results will enhance my academic standing in the field of diversion and reentry research. Moreover, the analysis will buttress my role as an evaluator for City programs like AFD that utilize sensitive data that are not often shared with outside scholars, and will lay the foundation for similar future research collaborations. Finally, the project will energize my ongoing research partnerships with Penn and WCU research collaborators at CCC, thus positioning us well for future collaborative initiatives.

**Strengthening Teaching:** The project will allow me to expand my teaching repertoire by incorporating the results of the AFD initiative into class curricula. The clinical training on the multisystemic and multilevel GAINS intervention within AFD will help my social work students become more proficient in working with people in contact with the carceral system. Moreover, the analysis of the program that this project seeks to complete, will add to the field training of WCU social work students placed at CCC.

**Professional Development:** Refining the AFD program in collaboration with city partners like the Municipal Court Judges, the Offices of the District Attorney, the Public Defender, and the Probation and Parole Board will solidify my role as a social work trainer and policy formulator in the diversion and reentry fields.

**Benefit to the University:** The project enhances WCU's role, both as a partner in City diversion programs, and as with researchers from Penn. My students as well as my research partners at WCU will benefit from these relationships and continue to be salient in these city-wide networks of practice and scholarship.

**Disciplinary Contribution:** The AFD program answers the call for social work interventions with people who are charged with gun offenses. By examining its effectiveness and drawing on the analysis to strengthen the initiative, and disseminate the results, this project underlines the salience of social work in the field of anti-carceral diversion interventions.

## 8. Description of Meritorious Service

(Maximum 800 words)

Please see the description provided in Section D of the WCU Sabbatical Policy.

Note: If you have previously had a sabbatical, only include activities that have occurred since your last sabbatical.

### **Description of Meritorious Service**

Since joining the faculty at WCU, I have demonstrated sustained, high-impact service and leadership to the University. My work has focused on supporting interdisciplinary collaboration, developing innovative pedagogical practices to train and support students, strengthening professional practice, and advancing social justice. Below, I outline how my service aligns with the sabbatical policy's criteria for meritorious service: leadership, ongoing university and community engagement, contributions to the profession, and support for student success.

**Departmental and Institutional Leadership:** Since Spring 2022, I have served in critical leadership roles within the Department of Graduate Social Work. I was appointed Assistant Chair

and Graduate Coordinator for the PASSHE campus in Philadelphia (2022–2024) and currently serve as Assistant Chair for both the Philadelphia and main campuses. These roles involve providing high-level academic and operational support: departmental leadership (including a successful site visit and CSWE reaccreditation in 2023), navigating complex student concerns and issues, and supporting adjunct instructors.

I have also chaired multiple departmental committees, including the Practicum Committee (2020–2024), where I supported both faculty and Practicum Directors in complex decision-making around student practicum issues, especially during the transition back to in-person learning post-COVID. These efforts centered student safety, anti-oppressive practice, and program integrity during a time of uncertainty.

**Leadership of Funded and Interdisciplinary Initiatives:** Since Fall 2024, I have served as Principal Investigator (PI) and Program Director for the final year of a \$1.8 million HRSA Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) grant, which supported graduate students in Social Work, School Counseling, and Clinical Psychology. I led student retention (100% completion rate), coordinated an interdisciplinary faculty team, facilitated simulation-based training, and managed all federal reporting. I also submitted a highly rated competing continuation proposal (scored 97/100).

As part of this work, I organized the EPIC (Evidence-Based Practices in Integrated Care) training series, bringing together hundreds of students, faculty, and community professionals for four interdisciplinary events on cutting-edge, integrated care behavioral health initiatives. These training events reflect both leadership and deep commitment to workforce development and community engagement.

Additionally, since 2019, I have served on WCU's Interprofessional Education (IPE) Task Force, and as Co-Chair since 2023. I have led the design and implementation of five major simulation events (2021–2025), each reaching hundreds of students across a dozen disciplines. These events address complex topics such as the opioid epidemic, suicide risk, and intergenerational immigrant wellbeing. I also received IRB approval and have collected multi-year data to assess student learning outcomes. These efforts demonstrate sustained leadership in retraining and advancing interdisciplinary competencies on campus.

In Fall 2025, I was asked by my dean to serve as Research Liaison for the College of Education and Social Work given my experience as a PI for a federal grant. In this new university-level leadership role, I will connect faculty with internal/external funding opportunities, support interdisciplinary collaboration, and organize the faculty-student engagement event at Research Day. This work reflects both institutional leadership and a commitment to expanding research capacity across the college.

**Community-Based Leadership and Partnerships:** Since 2015, I have served as Clinical Director of The Center for Carceral Communities (CCC), a community-based organization offering free psychosocial services to post-incarcerated and probation/parole-involved individuals in Philadelphia. I facilitate weekly CBT-based therapy groups and advocate for the rights of people impacted by the incarceration system. This partnership also supports student success: since 2018, I

have mentored WCU graduate assistants and student interns at The Center, two of whom transitioned into paid roles and continue to contribute. This work is a clear example of building long-term, reciprocal university-community partnerships.

**Targeted Student Support and Equity Work:** I have co-led two grant-funded service initiatives focused on equity in student outcomes:

- In 2023, I co-developed and implemented a simulation-based OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) for MSW students to demonstrate crisis response and suicide assessment skills. This project received RGO funding (\$2,400), and is now a permanent part of our specialized practice curriculum, training 100 students per year. It expands experiential learning and supports students' readiness for advanced clinical work.
- In 2024, I co-led the LSW Exam Preparation Pilot, which received RGO funding (\$2,950). This project addresses racial disparities in licensure pass rates, offering an elective course and two free exam prep sessions for students and alumni. It continues in implementation and aligns with both the university's Moon Shot for Equity and CSWE's anti-racism standards.

**Additional Significant Service:** Other examples of sustained meritorious service include:

- Chair, Search Committee (MSW Field Director), 2020–2021
- Member, Tenure-Track Faculty Search Committee, 2019
- Member, Admissions Committee, 2020–2024, including 15–20 interviews annually with Advanced Standing candidates
- Lead Instructor (2019–2024) for the MSW Specialized Practice Sequence, during which I led major curriculum updates emphasizing simulation-based learning opportunities for students

These roles reflect long-term, high-engagement participation in essential departmental and university functions, with consistent attention to equity, inclusion, and program quality.

## Endorsements and Comments

### a. Chairperson

N.B. If the applicant is the Department Chair, this form must be signed by the Assistant Chair or, if there is no Assistant Chair, a senior tenured member of the Department.

Please indicate your recommendation regarding the funding of this application and comment below on the relevancy and potential benefits of the described project:

This project addresses a critical gap in diversion policy by evaluating one of the few programs in the country designed for first-time gun possession offenses. This work has the potential to reduce recidivism and unclog Philadelphia's courts, and to advance racial and social justice by mitigating the disproportionate impact of gun charges on Black and Latinx communities.

Chairperson signature: 


Date: 9/11/26

**b. Dean**

Please indicate your recommendation regarding the funding of this application and comment below on the relevancy and potential benefits of the described project:

I fully support this sabbatical proposal, as it presents a meaningful opportunity for professional growth that will directly enhance teaching, scholarship, and service. The proposed activities promise to provide a valuable service to the community and benefit our students in increased practicum opportunities. Additionally, the community engagement component aligns with our mission to foster impactful partnerships beyond campus. This sabbatical represents a valuable investment in both our students and broader institutional impact.

Dean signature:



Date:

9/13/25

**Signature of applicant**

I certify that the information I have presented is accurate and contains no omission of fact.

Faculty applicant signature:



Date: 09/11/2025

*N.B. The application will be submitted electronically in PDF form. Please follow the procedures for submission as outlined under [Sabbatical Leave](#) on the Provost's webpage.*



The Center for Carceral Communities

School of Social Policy & Practice  
Caster Building  
3701 Locust Walk  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6214  
Tel 215.898.5511 Fax 215.573.2099  
www.sp2.upenn.edu

September 10, 2025

I write in enthusiastic support for Dr. Alison Updyke Neff's sabbatical project that seeks to examine the effectiveness of the Alternative Felony Diversion (AFD) Program, a gun diversion initiative for people charged with a first-time, non-violent gun possession offense.

Dr. Updyke Neff and I co-founded the Center for Carceral Communities (CCC) in 2014 to work collaboratively with the city's diversion and reentry offices to provide evidence-based services for people involved in the carceral system. In 2022, CCC collaborated with the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, the First Judicial Court District, and the Probation and Parole Office to implement AFD. A memorandum of understanding with the City of Philadelphia and IRB clearance were secured to allow CCC to partner with the city offices to implement AFD and to collect research data. As Clinical Director at CCC, Dr. Updyke Neff coordinated AFD, and was the first point of contact with our partners in City government, as well as with service providing agencies. As such, she is deeply familiar with the AFD project, has long-standing relationships with city and service partners, and has access to the collected data.

Dr. Updyke Neff's project will allow CCC to collaborate with city-wide partners to fine-tune AFD, which has been hailed as a model gun diversion program. The results of her evaluation will build the evidence-base for interventions in the gun diversion field, filling a critical vacuum in scholarship on services for people involved in the justice system. Dr. Updyke Neff's project comes at a critical time: the City has recently provided CCC access to city data on a larger set of AFD-waitlisted clients, making it possible to conduct this comparison study. Moreover, with the District Attorney starting a new term in 2026, Dr. Updyke Neff's analysis is well-timed to allow for a refining of AFD next year. CCC, as well as our partners at AFD are excited by her project, and look forward to working with her on it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Toorjo Ghose".

Toorjo Ghose, MSW, PhD.  
Associate Professor  
Founder & Coordinator, MSW MFA Dual Degree Program

School of Social Policy & Practice  
University of Pennsylvania

Founding Director  
The Center for Carceral Communities  
4020 Market Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

## Alison Updyke Neff, DSW, LCSW

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WCUPA Philadelphia Campus: 701 Market St., Concourse Level Room 12, Philadelphia, PA 19106

### Education

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- DSW** August 2017, University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA  
School of Social Policy & Practice  
Dissertation Title: *Reconstructing The Center: The institutional logics of a structural intervention for a post-incarceration community*
- MSW** May 2007, Temple University  
Philadelphia, PA  
School of Social Administration  
Concentration: Clinical
- BA** December 2000, Indiana University  
Bloomington, IN  
College of Arts & Sciences  
Major: Political Science, Minor: Religious Studies

### Current Appointments

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May 2023-present: *Associate Professor*, Graduate Social Work, West Chester University of PA

Sept 2022-present: *Assistant Chair*, Graduate Social Work, West Chester University of PA

### Publications: Peer Reviewed Articles

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Smith, E. K., Hipple, E., Updyke, A. (2025). Simulation-based learning and relational suicide assessment skills: Bridging the dissonance between social work values and clinical practice. Manuscript under review; abstract accepted for special issue: Simulation & Clinical Social Work in *Studies in Clinical Social Work: Transforming Practice, Education and Research*.

Updyke A. & Ghose, T., (2023). "We're the CHATS old-heads": Engaging with evidence-based practice in a reentry agency." *Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(3), 945-961.

Bohrman, C., Updyke, A., Radis, B., Mohr, J., Ocean, M., Lopes, Y., & Bailly-Mompson, A. (2022). Criminal Records as Predictors of Harm: Questioning Social Work's Reliance on Records for Gatekeeping. *Advances in Social Work*, 22(2), 229-359.

Ghose, T., Shubert, V., Chaudhuri, S., Poitevien, V., & Updyke, A. (2021). Are financial incentives appropriate means of encouraging medication adherence among people living

## Reports

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National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. *The Effects of Incarceration and Reentry on Community Health and Well-Being: Proceedings of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25471>. (Publication based on presentation: Applying the Anticarceral Movement to Philadelphia. Presentation at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine conference at the University of Pennsylvania: The Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on Community Health and Well-Being.)

## Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations

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Updyke, A. & Ghose, T.J. (2026, January). "It's a Second Chance, but a First Life": Re-Engaging Those Reentering after More Than 20 Years of Incarceration. Accepted for oral presentation at Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Cicerelle, P. & Updyke Neff, A., & Akbar, G. (2025, April). Challenging Racial Disparities in Social Work Licensure: Addressing Bias and Advocating for Systemic Change. Pennsylvania chapter of the National Association of Multicultural Education (PA-NAME) Annual Conference, Kutztown, PA.

Updyke, A., Ghose, T., & Morgan, B. (2024, January). "They Using Us As Guinea Pigs Again": Resistance to Vaccination Among Criminal Justice-Involved Black Men. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Ghose, T., Updyke, A., & Akbar, G. (2024, January). The Mechanism of Risk for Black Men in a Felony Diversion Program: A Path Analysis. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Ghose, T. & Updyke, A. (2023, January). The Trojan Horse Resists: Gun Diversion As a Transformer of Institutional Isomorphism in the Reentry Services Field. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Phoenix, AZ.

Cicerelle, P., Updyke Neff, A., & Akbar, A. (2022, November). Justice in the Classroom: Upholding Social Work Ethics in a Time of Anti-CRT Legislation. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Conference, Anaheim, CA.

Akbar, G., Mendez-Diaz, N., & Updyke Neff, A. (2022, March, accepted but unable to present). Decolonizing child welfare: How anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice can reform child welfare policy and practice. International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect (ISPCAN) Congress, Quebec City, Canada.

Metz, S, Sankaran, G., Tennille, J., & Updyke Neff, A. (2022, February). Community-Based Interprofessional Education Pilot Evaluation. Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) Annual Conference, St. Louis, MO.

Updyke Neff, A., Metz, S, Sankaran, G., Tennille, J. (2022, February). Applying an Ecological, Systems Lens to the Opioid Epidemic: A Virtual Team-Based IPE Event. Emswiler

Interprofessional Symposium, Richmond, VA.

Updyke Neff, A., Ghose, T., Akbar, G., & Keim, N. (2022, January). Resisting Isomorphism in the Reentry Service Field: Organizational Hybridity, Identity, and Innovation. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Updyke Neff, A., Ghose, T., Akbar, G., & Keim, N. (2021, January). Zoom-Based Group Therapy with Inmates Released En-Masse Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, virtual.

Akbar, G., Updyke Neff, A., & Cicerelle, P. (2020, November). Radical Social Justice: Bridging Theory & Practice in Social Work Education Session: Decolonizing The Social Work Curriculum. Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting (APM), virtual.

Ghose, T., Neff, A. & Akbar, G. (2020, January). Matching Intent to Implementation: Evaluating the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program. Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Akbar, G., Cicerelle, P., & Neff, A. (2019, February). Radical Social Justice: Bridging Theory & Practice in Social Work Education. Presented at National Association of African American Studies National Conference, Dallas, TX.

## **Invited Presentations**

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Updyke Neff, A. (2024, December). Invited Panelist, "Pardon Me" Panel Discussion, following screening of documentary. NASW PA CEU event.

Akbar, G., Chiarelli-Helminiak, C., Cicerelle, P., Johnson, K., Updyke Neff, A. (2020, November). When the Community Teaches. Critical Theories in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (CT21) Conference, virtual.

Updyke Neff, A. (2020, March, invited and accepted, but canceled due to Covid). Invited Panelist – Gun Violence: Moving Beyond the Trauma. Alvernia University 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Social Work Community Conference, Elkins Park, PA.

Updyke Neff, A. (2018, June). Applying the Anticarceral Movement to Philadelphia. Presentation at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine conference at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

## **Workshops & Trainings**

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Bohrman, C. & Updyke Neff, A. (2020, October). Criminal Backgrounds and Gatekeeping for Social Work: Ethical Considerations and Just Alternatives. National Association of Social Workers, Pennsylvania Chapter (NASW-PA) Annual Conference, virtual.

*Clinical Trainer*, Housing Works / Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, New York, NY (2014-2019)

- Assisted in the adaptation of a CBT-based, solution-focused intervention model for use with a diverse group of homeless, LGBTQ, HIV-positive clients to improve adherence

- with antiretroviral medication regimens as part of New York state’s goal to end the AIDS epidemic by 2020.
- Conducted multiple on-site “Motivational Interviewing for Adherence” training sessions for case managers and group leaders across various HIV agencies in New York to facilitate their competence in implementing the model with high-risk clients in both individual and group settings.

## Grants

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- 2024-pres Principle Investigator. HRSA Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWEIT) Program for Professionals Grant, \$1,800,000.
- 2024-2025 Co-Principal Investigator. College of Education and Social Work Research Grant Opportunity (RGO) Project: LSW Exam Preparation Pilot for MSW Students, \$2,950.
- 2023-2024 Co-Principal Investigator. College of Education and Social Work Research Grant Opportunity (RGO) Project: Simulation-Based OSCE Pilot for Specialized Practice MSW Students for Evaluation of Suicide and Crisis Response Skills, \$2,400.
- 2022-2024 Co-Investigator. MacArthur Foundation Grant, Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC), Racial Equity Cohort, \$500,000.
- 2020-2022 Co-Investigator. Bloomberg Foundation’s Vital Strategies Fund. Smartphone intervention with sex workers, \$96,000.
- 2020-2022 Co-Investigator. Ford Foundation. Smartphone intervention with released prisoners, \$60,000.
- 2020-2022 Co-Investigator. Bloomberg Foundation’s Chan Zuckerberg Institute. Releasing prisoners in response to Covid, \$25,000.
- 2019-2020 Co-Investigator. Alternative Felony Disposition: Intervening with people charged with a gun violation. Vital Projects Fund, \$120,000.
- 2020-2025 Co-Investigator. The Center for Carceral Communities. Private Donor, Senvest Foundation Grant, \$250,000.
- 2018-2019 Co-Investigator. Evaluating mural-making as an intervention for formerly incarcerated people. Ford Foundation, \$30,000 (part of a \$200,000 grant).
- 2015-2020 Co-Investigator. The Center for Carceral Communities. Private Donor, Senvest Foundation Grant, \$250,000.

## Research Projects

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- 2019-pres Alternative felony disposition: Intervening with people charged with a gun violation.  
*Co-Investigator*  
Research Partners: University of Pennsylvania / Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office / The Center for Carceral Communities  
Funders: MacArthur Foundation & Vital Strategies Foundation

- Follow participants in a 3-year longitudinal matched controlled study on the effects of GAINS (the Center’s intervention) on outcomes for people with felony gun charges.
- 2019-pres Diverting those at high risk of incarceration: Intervening with people charged with PWID (Possession With Intent to Distribute).  
*Co-Investigator*  
Research Partners: University of Pennsylvania / Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office / The Center for Carceral Communities  
Funder: Calvin Bland Foundation
- Follow participants in a 3-year longitudinal matched controlled study on the effects of GAINS (the Center’s intervention) on outcomes for people with felony marijuana PWID charges.
- 2020-2022 Smartphone intervention with those at high risk of overdose and recently released from incarceration.  
*Co-Investigator*  
Research Partners: University of Pennsylvania / The Center for Carceral Communities / Project Safe  
Funder: Bloomberg Foundation’s Vital Strategies Fund
- Provided prepaid smartphones through Project Safe and SCI Phoenix (state prison system) to substance users recently released from incarceration.
- 2020-2022 Smartphone intervention with released prisoners at high risk of Covid-9 infection.  
*Co-Investigator*  
Research Partners: University of Pennsylvania / The Center for Carceral Communities  
Funders: Ford Foundation and Chan Zuckerberg Institute
- Provided prepaid smartphones through the Philadelphia Department of Prisons to those who are being released to ensure they are able to connect with reentry services, healthcare, and other critical supports.
  - Participated in management of budget – study is funded by Ford Foundation with a total funding of \$85,000.
- 2015-2020 Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) Project  
*Research Assistant*  
Research Partners: University of Pennsylvania / City of Philadelphia  
Funder: The City of Philadelphia Division of Housing and Community Development
- Coordinated the completion of 60 qualitative interviews with HOPWA-funded HIV service providing agencies and HIV-positive community members in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.
  - Assisted in the completion of results reports describing the housing needs of PLWHA in Philadelphia to inform the securing of HOPWA funds.
- 2017-2019 Examining Guild: An Art Intervention for People with Histories of Incarceration  
*Co-Investigator*  
Research Partners: Mural Arts / The Center for Carceral Communities  
Funder: Ford Foundation Grant: Art for Social Justice
- Collaborated with the Mural Arts Program’s Guild Program, an apprenticeship program that provides opportunities to young adults who are formerly incarcerated to develop job skills and reconnect with their community, to secure Ford Foundation funding for study.

- Coordinate mixed methods study to examine the impact of Mural Arts projects on neighborhood perceptions of people in reentry and to evaluate the effectiveness of the Guild Program in reducing recidivism.
- Conduct community-based participatory research (CBPR) initiative by training formerly incarcerated community members at The Center in qualitative methods and evaluation.

## Media Coverage

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Armstrong, J. (2024, March 07). Philly program keeps gun offenders out of prison. I'm all for it. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

<https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/larry-krasner-illegal-guns-alternative-felony-disposition-program-20240307.html>

Avalos, A. (2022, January 19). Philadelphia Awarded \$500,000 MacArthur Grant to Help Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Inequities in Justice System. *Philadelphia Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives for Criminal Justice and Public Safety Press Release*.

<https://www.phila.gov/2022-01-19-philadelphia-awarded-500000-macarthur-grant-to-help-eliminate-racial-and-ethnic-inequities-in-justice-system/>

Marin, M. (2020, May 29). This Philly group is giving people free smartphones when they get out of jail. *Billy Penn at WHY?*

<https://billypenn.com/2020/05/29/this-philly-group-is-giving-people-free-smartphones-when-they-get-out-of-jail/>

Brodsky, S. (2020, October 23). How a Technology Gap Punishes Former Prisoners: Even using a cell phone after being behind bars for decades can be impossible. *Lifewire Tech for Humans*.

<https://www.lifewire.com/technology-gap-punishes-former-prisoners-5083930>

Weisman, Z. (2020, July 20). SP2 professor leads reentry group providing free phones for formerly incarcerated people. *The Daily Pennsylvanian*.

<https://www.thedp.com/article/2020/07/penn-social-work-prison-coronavirus-reentry>

Ghose, T. (2020, March 23). To flatten the curve, Philadelphia should release all nonviolent prisoners now. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

<https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid-19-jail-philadelphia-release-20200323.html>

Phelps, M. (2019, October 24). The Probation Trap: Living in Fear. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

<https://www.inquirer.com/news/inq/probation-parole-pennsylvania-philadelphia-criminal-justice-system-violations-poverty-20191024.html>

## Teaching Experience

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West Chester University, Graduate Social Work Department (Fall 2018-present):

- Generalist Social Work Practice I & II
- Generalist Social Work Practicum I & II
- Specialized Social Work Practice I & II
- Specialized Social Work Practicum I & II
- Advanced Clinical Practice in Integrated Health

- Human Development Across the Life Span
- Radical Social Justice
- Child Welfare
- Specialized Social Work Practice with Families
- Methods of Social Work Research
- Human Behavior in the Social Environment: Groups, Organizations, Communities

University of Pennsylvania, School of Social Policy & Practice (Fall 2012-Spring 2018)

- Social Work Practice with Groups
- Social Work in the Affordable Care Act Era
- Building Community Capacity
- Foundations of Social Work Practice I & II (Teaching Assistant)

## **Committee & Administrative Service**

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West Chester University:

- Co-Chair, Interprofessional Education (IPE) Task Force (Fall 2023-present)
- Interprofessional Education (IPE) Task Force Member (Spring 2019-present)
  - Designed and co-facilitated, and evaluated virtual, community-based interprofessional education (IPE) simulation event for 300 students across 12 disciplines (2021-2025)
- College of Education and Social Work Research Liaison
- MSW and MPH students (Spring 2021 & 2022)
- Reviewer of HRSA BHWET stipend applications from MSW, MEd School Counseling, and PsyD (Summer 2021 & 2022)
- Interprofessional Education (IPE) Task Force Member (Spring 2019-present)
- Alternate APSCUF Representative (Fall 2019-present)
- Reproductive Justice Education Committee (Fall 2022-2024)

College of Education and Social Work:

- International Programs Committee (Fall 2021-present)
- CESW RGO Grant Recipient (2023 & 2024)
- Philadelphia Campus Commencement Committee (Spring 2022-2024)
- CELT Grant applicant (Spring 2022)

Graduate Social Work Department:

- Assistant Chair, Graduate Social Work, WCU & Philadelphia Campuses (Fall 2025-pres)
- Co-Chair Specialized OSCE (Fall 2023-present)
- Co-Chair LSW Exam Prep Project (Fall 2024-present)
- Graduate Coordinator / Assistant Chair, Philadelphia Campus (Fall 2022-Spring 2024)
- Chair of Practicum Committee (Fall 2020-Fall 2024)
- Facilitator for Radical Social Justice Podcast Series (Fall 2022)
- Chair of Search Committee for MSW Practicum Director (October 2020-April 2021)
- Co-Chair OSCE Committee (Fall 2020-Spring 2021)
- Admissions Committee (Fall 2020-present)
- Curriculum Committee (Fall 2020-present)
- Lead Instructor for Specialized Practice sequence (Fall 2019-present)

- Faculty Advisor, Phi Alpha Honor Society for Graduate Social Work (Fall 2018-2023)
- Search Committee for Tenure Track Faculty (August 2019-November 2019)
- SWG563 Revisions Committee (Fall 2019)
- Practicum Committee (Fall 2018-2020)
- Panelist, Campaign School, “Lessons Learned from the Campaign (April 2019)

Community:

- Peer Reviewer, *Advances in Social Work*, Spring 2025-present
- Clinical Director, The Center for Carceral Communities (2015-present)
- *Expert Witness*, Philadelphia City Council, Philadelphia, PA (February 2019)
  - Presented expert testimony to Philadelphia City Council regarding the importance of ending drug testing for marijuana by the department of Adult Probation and Parole

## Professional Positions

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2015-pres The Center for Carceral Communities Philadelphia, PA

*Clinical Director*

- Collaborate in all aspects of the development of a new agency providing free services and support to Philadelphia’s post-incarcerated and parole/probation-involved communities.
- Co-Investigate on multiple longitudinal studies.
- Facilitate weekly evidence-based CBT-based therapeutic groups addressing mental health, substance use, social issues, and structural barriers to support community engagement and reduce recidivism.
- Provide clinical supervision of social workers and MSW interns.

2012-2019 Hahnemann University Hospital Philadelphia, PA

*Emergency Room Social Worker (part-time) / Trauma, Maternal-Infant, ICU (per-diem)*

- Collaborate with patients, family members, and interdisciplinary medical teams to develop and facilitate safe, medically/psychosocially appropriate discharge plans patients, including many patients with complex medical, mental health, and social needs.

2009-2014 Public Health Management Corporation Philadelphia, PA

*Behavioral Health Assessor (part-time)*

- Conducted in-home behavioral health assessments for adults seeking to transition from public assistance tracks to employment or SSI.

2009-2012 Bethanna Philadelphia, PA

*Clinical Supervisor, Clinical Transition and Stabilization Services (CTSS) Program*

- Provided individual and group clinical supervision to Master’s-level Therapists and Bachelor’s-level Mental Health Workers, as well as MSW Interns.

2007-2009 Bethanna Philadelphia, PA

*Therapist, Clinical Transition and Stabilization Services (full-time)*

- Provided brief (3 to 6 months) individual and family therapy to children ages 5 through 21 and their foster and biological families in home and school settings.