

Virginia State University Outstanding Faculty Award, 2020-2021
Outstanding Service Star Award in Service

Gwendolyn Thornton PhD, LCSW

Associate Professor, Department of Social Work
College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Dr. Gwendolyn Thornton, (LCSW) is an Associate Professor of Social Work the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. She earned a master's degree in Social Work from Virginia Commonwealth University and a doctoral degree in Social Work from Norfolk State University. She joined the VSU faculty in 2008, first serving as Director of Field Education for Social Work and later becoming the Program Director in 2010. In 2013, after leading and achieving the accreditation of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program, Dr. Thornton would later be appointed as Chair of the newly established Social Work Department, a position she continues to hold. Many BSW students trained in the Social Work program and mentored by Dr. Thornton, faculty advisor to the VSU chapter of the Phi Alpha Honor Society, have gone on to receive graduate degrees, and like her, serve their communities and the academy at large. Building upon the success of the BSW program, Dr. Thornton worked to develop a Master of Social Work (MSW) program at VSU, recently approved by the VSU Board of Visitors, State Council of Higher Education of Virginia, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. A first for VSU, the MSW program will further aid our local communities and the nation overall.

Dr. Thornton's service to VSU, the social work profession, and community extends to other areas. She volunteered with the Remote Area Medical (RAM) Health Clinic in Wise County and Emporia, Virginia, a major non-profit provider of free pop-up clinics providing free health care to those in underserved areas. Her service there inspired her to bring this concept to VSU. In 2014, she led and co-founded the VSU Cares Free Dental Clinic, which provided free dental care for indigent individuals in the Petersburg Tri-Cities region. For three years this collaborative and interdisciplinary campus-wide endeavor not only served the adjacent community but gave VSU students opportunities to incorporate service learning projects into their academic disciplines. In addition, Dr. Thornton serves on the Advisory Board of the John Tyler Community College Department of Human Services and has served as an Assessment Consultant for Norfolk State University. She is an active member in numerous professional organizations, including the National Association of Black Social Workers and the Council on Social Work Education.

In collaboration with the VSU Dr. George Bennett Office of International Education, Dr. Thornton has committed herself to global scholarship and service by providing opportunities to take students, community leaders, faculty members and others to the continent of Africa. For the past three years she has provided consultation and training for administrators and staff at the Divine Kids Academy (DKA) in Jukwa, Ghana. She guided their development of a five-year strategic plan and budget and created a network of donors to raise funds for educational resources and equipment for DKA. She founded the Mimosa International Foundation of America, Inc. (MIFoA), a non-profit organization whose mission includes preparing competitive, culturally sensitive social work professionals and community leaders to cultivate social, economic, and environmental justice in an increasingly interconnected world. Dr. Thornton's life's passion and philosophy is to "be a servant and not to be served."