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BY SUSAN GROSSMAN  
PHOTOS BY ROBERT TAYLOR



# A Different Kind of Social Network

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The new Anne and Henry Zarrow Hall of Social Work  
is wired to educate students and  
practicing professionals across the state.



Perhaps it is the nature of the field—quietly going about the business of helping those most in need—that social workers might not think to ask for anything for themselves. As they orchestrate connections for clients through social service agencies, work to affect change via legislative channels and reach out to the disenfranchised, social workers tend to be a strong but behind-the-scenes bunch.

For decades, the University of Oklahoma has educated legions of the state's social workers in the large former Alpha Tau Omega fraternity house on the east side of campus. Rhyne Hall, named for former director of the School of Social Work J. J. Rhyne, has been home to the department within the College of Arts and Sciences since the 1950s. As the department and demand for social workers grew, dedicated faculty and staff made do with the ever-increasing limitations of a nearly century-old structure, even spilling out to occupy space in residences nearby.

With the start of the fall 2011 semester, however, faculty and staff are comfortably settled into their new home, Anne and Henry Zarrow Hall, located at the corner of Elm Avenue and Brooks Street. The building sits on the former location of the Jim Thorpe Multicultural Center, which has relocated to the renovated Commons Restaurant near the Thurman J. White Forum building.

Ground was broken for Zarrow Hall in February 2010 and finishing touches completed in August 2011. With its arched doorway, stately turrets and red brick exterior, Zarrow Hall fits seamlessly into OU's trademark Cherokee gothic architectural style.

And it instills a good deal of pride among its occupants.

"Moving into this new building elevates the view, particularly among the faculty, that they are valued," says Donald Baker, director of the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work. "When you come to the University of Oklahoma, you always had the distinct impression that this is a hard sciences and technology school where disciplines like engineering and meteorology are emphasized. The behavioral sciences, while important within any university, were not the emphasis necessarily. Social work fell into this area. Over time, this perception has changed, particularly with us moving into Zarrow Hall."

With the need growing, the thought of having a new building percolated among the school's faculty and staff. Still, the possibility never seemed plausible until a concerned group of influential alumni set the wheels in motion.

"A lot of what happens in social work happens at the policy and legislative level," Baker says. "The social work community has become very adept at working with legislators to bring about change that benefits the citizens of the state. Many members of our Board of Visitors are well-connected alumni who formed a building committee and used their connections, skills and knowledge to help the school get a new facility."

Michael Fogarty, alumnus and chief executive officer of the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, headed the five-member building committee. He arranged a meeting with OU President David Boren to explore ideas on how to proceed with addressing the ever-increasing shortcomings of Rhyne Hall.

"During the months between my communication and our meeting, you could tell that President Boren had given this topic a lot of thought," Fogarty says. "By the time all of us met with him, he was ready to go. We did some brainstorming, and he let us know what he needed help with, we let him know what we needed in a facility, and we talked about fundraising. Ultimately, I believe that we demonstrated that, as alumni, we were dedicated to making this happen and bringing this issue into focus."

Other members of the committee were Gail Lapidus, CEO and executive director of Family and Children's Services in Tulsa; Terrie Fritz, director of child health at the Oklahoma Health Care Authority; Terry O'Conner, executive director of Catholic Charities in Oklahoma City; Rietta Miller, an Oklahoma private practitioner and sister of U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman; and Sue Lunsford of Ponca City, who had a long career with Conoco-Phillips.

Ina Javellas, a two-time Oklahoma Social Worker of the Year and a pioneer in the field, was not on the committee but served as chair of the Board of Visitors at that time. In addition, alumna Jodi Boren Standard, a social worker with an active interest in military families, who also is a cousin of OU President David Boren, played a role.

As a result of the meeting in February 2007, the seemingly impossible was made possible in 2009 with a \$5 million gift from the Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation of Tulsa. In recognition of that lead gift, the OU Board of Regents renamed the school the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work. Additional money for the \$11 million facility came from state discretionary funds.

"I am deeply grateful to the Zarrow family for helping the University provide a new home for our School of Social Work," says Boren. "For decades the University of Oklahoma has played a leading role in training those who deal with the members of our society who most need our help. This new facility symbolized our commitment to the building of a stronger Oklahoma community.

"Anne and Henry Zarrow have helped to create and maintain more charitable organizations than any other husband-and-wife team in our history. Those organizations have primarily been staffed by graduates of the University of Oklahoma School of Social Work. Nothing could be more appropriate than to have the names of these two caring and generous civic leaders permanently attached to the name of our School of Social Work."

Social work has been a part of the University curriculum since 1917, when it was housed within the Department of Sociology



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and called the School of Social Service. In 1935 it was renamed the School of Social Work and became an individual instructional unit within the College of Arts and Sciences.

With more than 30,000 square feet of instructional and administrative space, the four-story Zarrow Hall features not only classrooms, but also clinical learning suites designed specifically for observational and group learning, a key component of social work education. The ground floor includes the J. J. Rhyne Community Room, which can accommodate more than 100 people for continuing professional education and hosting community outreach efforts.

“One area where we have struggled is providing continuing education in Oklahoma,” Baker explains. “We have thousands of working professionals, many of whom are alumni, who need continuing education units to maintain their licensure. The Community Room was built expressly for this purpose. Professional education is life-long and with knowledge and skills changing so rapidly, we wanted distance and continuing education to be a big part of our new building.”

Each classroom also is equipped with video and instructional technology that allows for distance education between OU’s Norman and Tulsa campuses.

Two clinical suites on the second floor provide visual access to an observation room, while a separate classroom provides space for skill-based instruction. Together, this space is a central component of social work education that allows students to observe each other conducting interviews, receive feedback on their techniques and break out to work in small groups.

“A lot of social work takes place in groups, and we wanted to have the space for our students to do that,” Baker says. “In this environment, they learn to develop and maintain cohesion while

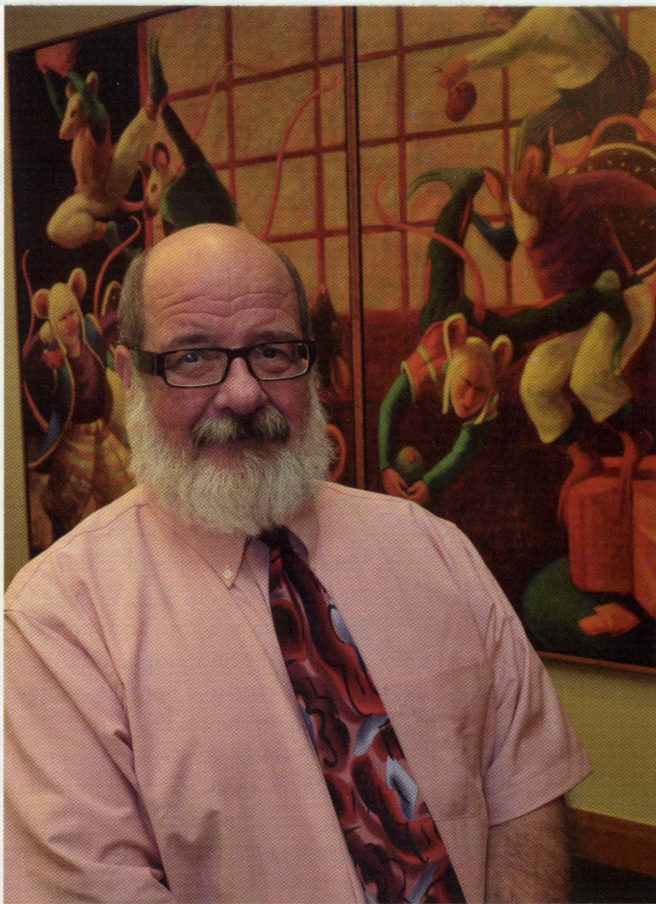
Assistant professor Christina Miller interacts with students in a classroom designed for traditional instruction as well as providing visual access to clinical work in the observation room behind her.



Before class, Christina Walker, left, and Jessica Schonlau take advantage of one of the new study areas on the first floor of Zarrow Hall.







Don Baker, director of the Zarrow School of Social Work, is justifiably proud of the new building and the opportunities for community engagement and continuing education it offers.



Umbrella tables, benches and fountains extend the amenities of the new facility into the great outdoors. From left, master's students Falon Morgan, Victoria Hagar and Melissa Smyth enjoy a parklike setting just outside the building.

focusing on a certain decision they might be trying to make. We did not have the room and space to do this effectively in Rhyne Hall.”

Also on the second floor are three suites that house the Child Welfare Professional Enhancement Program and the Knee Center for Strong Families. The third floor houses faculty and administrative offices, while the fourth provides much-needed storage.

Zarrow Hall was designed by Bruce Bockus of Bockus Payne Associates Architects in Oklahoma City and integrates the standards for the U.S. Green Building Council Leadership and Environmental Design (LEED). Dennis Glover, project architect for OU architectural and engineering services, says the pending LEED certification means that care was taken to be good stewards of the environment, particularly indoors.

“For example, lighting is set based on occupancy and in some areas the light is natural,” Glover explains. “Air conditioning and heating is programmed to shut down at 5 p.m. and restart at 7 a.m., running at higher and lower temperatures when the building is not heavily occupied.”

For Baker, there is simply no comparison between the school’s old home and its new one.

“Moving from Rhyne Hall to Zarrow Hall involves a lot of change for staff and faculty,” he says. “Rhyne Hall was in pretty bad shape. Here in Zarrow Hall, they are coming up with operational rules, for example, about decorating personal space.

“People care a lot about this building, particularly President Boren,” Baker adds. “Zarrow Hall is what the president and the University expect from a professional program.”

Adds Fogarty, “Zarrow Hall is not a place to practice social work, but a place for the education of social workers. It provides, and will continue to provide, the opportunity to train the current and next generation of social workers in a quality, positive environment. That is the magic. This building signals that social work is a priority at the largest university in the state of Oklahoma. It reflects the value the University places on the profession and will encourage young people to seek this education and this profession.”

*Susan Grossman is a Norman-based freelance writer.*