

Processing trauma from Rwandan genocide

July 12, 2012 3:30 AM Joseph Halm
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Nearly 20 years after the Rwandan genocide, social work is an emerging field in the country. Beata Mukamurenzi and Charles Kalinganire, two social work professors from the National University of Rwanda, shared their stories about the role of social work in a postgenocide society during a presentation at Tulane University.



Sara Maurer, left, a graduate student in the School of Social Work, talks with Beata Mukamurenzi, right, and Charles Kalinganire, two social work professors visiting Tulane from the National University of Rwanda. Maurer will be travelling to Rwanda in the fall. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The duo spoke on Tuesday (July 10) to more than 50 students and faculty as part of an [annual study tour](#) sponsored by the [School of Social Work](#) and the [Payson Center for International Development](#) at Tulane. The professors attend classes, work with field agencies and interact with Tulane faculty to learn about best practices.

Rwandans are still processing the trauma from the 1994 genocide, which killed more than one million people. The country created “Gacaca” courts to help judge the individuals responsible for the genocide.

“It would have taken more than 100 years to judge them in normal court,” Kalinganire said. “As of last month, [Gacaca courts] have been closed because they finished all the cases that have been presented. The main objective of Gacaca was not just to punish those who are guilty, but it was a form of unity and reconciliation.”

The National University offers a bachelor's-level social work degree, and the program is still growing, Kalinganire said.

As social workers continue to redefine their role in Rwanda, there will be plenty of work, Mukamurenzi added.

“We've found that there is a kind of collective trauma that is prevailing,” she said. “When we look at people 18 years after, we may think that because of those years that people are recovering, but what you observe is when people remember what happened, it is very hard for the survivors. They show acute trauma. It is a difficult problem.”

Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.