

**University of Washington Tacoma Social Work Graduate School Review
Report of Review Committee**

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**University of Washington Graduate School Review
Tacoma Social Work Program**

Report of Review Committee

Executive Summary

Recommendations

- 1. Continuation with review in 10 years**
- 2. Advanced Standing track be approved**
- 3. Begin the move toward independent accreditation**

The Tacoma Social Work program is unequivocally doing an excellent job of fulfilling its mission to educate future social work leaders, practitioners and educators, perform public service, and to conduct research, all of which is designed to improve social welfare.

The major strengths of the program include

- its ability to meet regional needs in terms of accessibility for South Sound students and its service to the community;
- the critical nature of its relationship to the Tacoma campus;
- the quality of academics and academic infrastructure.

Despite these strengths, we have serious concerns the program will not be able to continue to deliver high quality in the face of growing demands and lack of resources.

The major areas of concern include

- problematic joint accreditation with UW Seattle SW;
- over-demand on faculty and staff coupled with lack of resources; and
- questionable ability to meet current and impending growth demands.

Despite performing at an amazingly high level given the resources available, we believe Tacoma Social Work is “at the tipping point,” for this excellent program could either continue to grow and meet the needs of the region at a high level, or it could collapse. Each of the above areas of strength and challenge, along with suggestions for change, will be discussed in the following report.

Strengths

The Program is Meeting Regional Needs Well

The program has served the South Sound region well through training students to work in local organizations and agencies, placing interns, and providing community service by faculty and students. The reports from alumni and community people make it clear that the community is very appreciative of the training that the UWT social work program has delivered. As one graduate wrote, “The UWT Social Work Program has touched many lives in our community and helped to make Tacoma a better place for all to live and work.”

Many students and alumni are place-bound and make it clear that they would not have been able to complete their education in social work if the program was not available in Tacoma. Work and family obligations as well as the distance and traffic serve as effective barriers to Seattle-based education for most students. Many current students are already working in government or non-profit organizations in the area and the social work training and degrees add value to their work efforts. Community response to the program is very positive, and although we could not meet with the Advisory Board, we received many very positive emails from members and community employers of SW graduates. Typical was the following from a former board member who currently hires graduates:

“My impressions of this program are overwhelmingly positive. I have been very impressed with the caliber of students, the commitment and knowledge of faculty, and the depth and breadth preparation for professional social work practice. Social welfare agencies and their needy clients are exceptionally lucky to have the UWT School of Social Work providing a steady stream of well-qualified workers into the local workforce....The graduates of this program are welcome in the ranks of the Southwest Washington Social Work community....”

Community employers are very affirming of the program, and the graduates are meeting a pressing need for social services in the region. Placements for students and graduates seem to be timely and in appropriate agencies. There are some concerns that placements for student practicum could be reaching capacity given the staff time devoted to community outreach. However, this seems to be more an issue of lack of additional staffing than community need.

Students and faculty provide significant community service in the region. Faculty serve on the boards of local non-profit community agencies, provide advice (even in the context of student practicum placements), and use local organizations as the basis for their academic research. It is clear that the UWT social work program has developed in a manner that is consistent with the needs of students and the local community and fills a niche not well served by the UW Seattle program.

The Program is Integral to Future of the UW Tacoma Campus

The SW program is core to success of the campus as a whole, for it has a strong BASW and MSW program that attracts many students to the campus combined with strong campus service and leadership. The campus mission of teaching and research embedded in the community is being both actualized and strengthened by the SWT program. The program provides a place for continuing education for community members and alums, and faculty and staff have built strong connections throughout the campus and community. They contribute in many ways to institution-building, providing expertise to campus-wide committees and projects, and providing leadership throughout the campus.

The program is shaped to address the needs of a diverse working population, and manages to accommodate their needs very well, for they are very customer friendly and attract a large population of students to the campus. Another strength is that the faculty are very clinically competent, and there is a high level of practical experience on the faculty. This contributes to both campus and community relationships that are strong, for the faculty contribute their expertise to many South Sound community agencies and in so doing, “market” the campus as a whole to diverse communities.

A graduate and former advisory board member wrote:

“I want to express the importance of this program to our South Sound community...It would have been a hardship for me to attend the UW Seattle campus for graduate study...The UWT program allowed me an opportunity for a broader degree that has not only led me to years of meaningful and gainful employment, but allowed me to give back to my community...I now help to mentor UW Medical Students...The UWT program has touched many lives in our community and helped to make Tacoma a better place for all to live and work.”

Quality of Academics/Academic Infrastructure

Quality of Faculty

“Couldn’t have a better faculty” (MSW student)

We unanimously agree that the faculty are doing an excellent job of not only preparing future social workers but also functioning as important role models for students and staff. We were told many times that faculty epitomize the social work values and code of ethics they are teaching. Students and staff spoke of faculty availability and personal and professional mentoring, openness, going out of their way to make sure students succeed, responsiveness, ability to handle diverse learners & meet special needs. Students discussed how fair the faculty were, for expectations were clear, they followed the syllabus in a way that students knew what was expected of them and how to succeed. Adjunct faculty also functioned at a very high level, and we were impressed during our meetings by their commitment to students and the institution. Adjunct faculty discussed how they were well mentored, and as one wrote to us:

“One of the strengths of the Social Work Program is a strong mentoring system. I experienced this same support when I was the Practicum Instructor.”

The Review Team all agreed that faculty perform at a very high level in all areas.

Quality of Support Staff Excellent We were regaled with accolades regarding the staff of the school from students, alums, and adjuncts, and were very impressed when we met with the staff over the course of the two day review. The administration is to be commended not only for excellent hiring but their ability to make the staff feel valued and integral to the mission of the school. Students spoke in awe of the staff admissions personnel, and the following was a typical:

“Incredible admissions person, advisement person, (the) administrative staff is a big strength here.” “Advisor gives us a strong sense of community.”

Quality of Curriculum and Support Services Both the MSW/BASW are very strong and exceed student expectations. The curriculum is able to change to meet the needs of the population within the limits imposed by SW Seattle joint accreditation relationship. The curriculum very well integrated and the practicum experience excellent. External reviewers noted the curriculum is extremely strong and meets national standards for social work undergraduate and graduate education. One indication of this quality is that undergraduate students in a policy class were awarded an extremely competitive national policy award, sponsored by the national accrediting body, for two years in a row. This award was presented at the National Social Work Education Conference. We heard no complaints about the cohort model of delivering the curriculum, expecting to hear that it delayed completion when students got out of sequence. Instead, students appreciated the systematic structure, getting to know their group, and learning how to support each other. Students spoke of the ability of faculty to challenge them and encourage questioning as they develop a “social work perspective.” Retention rates of students exceed that of the Tacoma campus as a whole.

A graduate of the BASW program, currently obtaining an MSW from UW Seattle wrote to us:

“I was totally prepared for my grad school experience and am presently carrying a 3.9 GPA. I find I am knowledgeable and participate fully in each of my grad school classes...I will always be grateful for the ways in which UW Tacoma SW changed my life.”

It is obvious that the programs have exceeded students’ expectations, and clear that graduates find appropriate positions upon graduation.

The practicum experience was very positive for students, for they were very appreciative of the program’s ability to balance classroom and clinical learning in a very meaningful way. Practicum sites are diverse and help meet needs of South Sound. The practicum program is in need of additional support, as discussed below.

Information Technology is very current and accessible, and all students, faculty and staff noted that they were well supported in this area. Computers are readily available to students and faculty/staff, wireless, support services for technology excellent. In addition, campus resources such as the library, media center, copy center, etc. were deemed adequate for current needs by the people we met with.

Diversity Issues The program appears to be doing very well in handling issues of privilege and diversity, particularly in classroom discussions and required coursework. We were very impressed with the required diversity classes that are current with a strong curriculum aimed at students reflecting on their own socialization into oppressive practices and how to change that socialization. GOMAP is not a viable option for the program, for although they are allowed to participate they are not allowed any funds for support. More faculty of color are strongly needed, for too much pressure is put upon the single faculty of color currently. Without a cohort of diverse faculty, one faculty of color has to be all things for all people: mentoring students of color, representation on committees, responding to diversity needs, teaching curriculum on disparities, etc.

System of Governance is very effective. The Director has created a very efficient and effective governance structure. As one adjunct faculty wrote to us,

“I have the highest respect for the SW faculty, staff and students. Dr. Lazarri, Program Director, sets high ethical and performance standards....” The Management Review Team composed of faculty and staff advise the Director prior to issues being taken to faculty and staff. The team is highly regarded by faculty and staff, and faculty were appreciative that they were not required to attend meetings as a whole as often as prior to the team’s development. The director also created a Program Review Team to handle conflict that is not handled in the classroom, in effect, a way to be proactive when conflict occurs at the institution. The faculty see the management team as very responsive to their needs and helpful. Student representation a problem due to part time nature of the program. With students working and commuting, they are unable to spare time to participate in decision-making despite the administration’s desire for student representation on committees.

Community Advisory Board: Director, faculty, staff administrator, and community people and graduates serve on the board. The committee has an advocacy function, deals with internal hurdles at administrative level. Try to rotate BASW students through, but difficult – one student is on this currently. The board meets 2-3 times a year. The board is encouraged to come to presentations of candidates, listen to reports on programs, and participate in fundraising for external funds.

Summary

In summary, the program is meeting the needs of the region at a high level, is integral to the success of the Tacoma campus, and has an excellent, highly regarded MSW and BASW academic program. The following sections document our concerns regarding the ability of this program to continue to deliver a high quality product in light of the current and future challenges.

Challenges

Difficulties Due to Joint Accreditation with Seattle SW

Given the growth and development of the Tacoma program, in terms of both enrollment as well as the quality of faculty, the joint relationship with the Seattle program has begun to present issues and challenges. The Tacoma program through its development has clearly proven the need for increased access to social work education in the South Sound area. The Tacoma program has reached a critical mass, and we believe the analogy of the “tipping point” is appropriate in that if the program is to continue to grow and thrive, it needs to be permitted greater autonomy over its current and future operations.

We recommend that the University encourage the Tacoma program to seek separate CSWE accreditation. At present the program is of such a size and level of development that having to coordinate with the Seattle program is becoming a hindrance rather than a benefit. This viewpoint does not intend to imply that there are forces in Seattle that are against Tacoma, but to observe that the Tacoma program has reached a point of development that supports granting it autonomy. By allowing this autonomy, with the requisite resources, it will be able to better address important curricular and governance issues as they relate to program development and faculty development. The student demand is clearly present to sustain this program. In addition, the faculty that has been assembled in the relatively short time of the program’s existence indicates a rapidly maturing and strong social work endeavor.

The physical distance between the two campuses creates difficulties for full cooperation and coordination such that the real functional distance becomes even greater than it is. The time has come to recognize the solidity of the Tacoma program. By becoming separately accredited, the program will be able to fully define its growing mission and the current faculty will be able to fully engage themselves in both the teaching and research mission appropriate to the Tacoma program. It is likely that a free standing Tacoma program would become an even stronger partner with the Seattle program, rather than a junior partner as it may be at present.

In conclusion, for reasons of increased autonomy over both curriculum and faculty development, it seems appropriate that the time has come for the Tacoma program to be given its ‘freedom.’ That is, we return to our “tipping point” analogy: the Tacoma program will most likely thrive in the future as a separate program given the strong foundation it currently has established, but it may not do so if it continues to function as a branch of the Seattle SW program. In order for the program to gain independent accreditation, it needs to create the program infrastructure that Seattle SW is currently providing, and offer a full time MSW program. This much needed change requires staff and faculty with the time to create the infrastructure and to perform the additional

“institution building” the move necessitates. Currently, faculty and staff are working at full capacity and have few resources available to make this much needed move.

Demands on Faculty and Staff: Overenrolled, Under-Resourced

The program administrator, other faculty members and staff at UWT have accomplished much since the inception of the program. Enrollments are over projection, student applications are increasing, the program is respected in the community, and the program seems to be well-integrated into the overall academic mission of the Tacoma campus. Several concerns remain.

- Demands on faculty in teaching. The teaching load of six courses per academic year does not include the field liaison role, which is also a teaching activity. The faculty field liaison visits agency based field instructors and students in their agencies, provides ongoing consultation to the students and field instructors, and reviews evaluative materials. This role should be considered a teaching assignment and credited as such in the work load. It should be noted that the current load of six courses in most cases does not include duplicate sections of the same course. Faculty members have six different preps. Adding a full time MSW cohort would enable faculty to teach more than one section of a course, thus providing some relief in class preparation.
- Demands on faculty in service. Faculty and staff members in social work are credited by their students for being available for consultation, particularly important in a part-time program. Faculty and staff are also strong service contributors to the campus and the community. Community service has created and enhanced the strong community connections. It should be noted that faculty members pay their own expenses in community service.
- Demands on faculty in research. Faculty members have contributed to scholarship, even with the high demands for teaching and service. The ability of social work faculty members to continue providing excellent teaching and service while meeting requirements for scholarship is problematic.
- Lack of infrastructure support for research. Most faculty members have been recruited immediately following completion of their doctorates. They have extensive social work practice experience, but less research experience. Until recently, the only tenured social work faculty member was the program administrator. Neither the social work program nor the campus has the supports for mentoring new faculty in research or facilitating their search and application for external research funding. Some Assistant professors have had difficulty demonstrating sufficient research for tenure.
- Determination of qualification parameters for future faculty searches. Given the lack of research infrastructure , the social work program may need to limit future

faculty searches to those individuals with an established research record who can serve as leaders and mentors in scholarship. However, recruiting such individuals to the program with the current teaching load might prove difficult.

- **Practicum oversight and development.** The Tacoma program currently has one person to develop and coordinate 150 practica a year. Although student, field instructor, and alumni feedback is positive, the ongoing field practicum load warrants additional resources. As the most likely agencies are engaged, further development by necessity becomes more time consuming. A staff support person would be a good first step.
- **Staff load.** The program currently has 2.5 FTE staff members. Students, associate faculty, faculty members, and alumni all have praised the staff for their availability, positive attitude, commitment to the program, and overall support. Recruitment alone would seem to warrant additional staff time. Increasing staff would assist in continuing the current level of service, adding additional services, and improving morale.
- **Ongoing quality.** The site team has been impressed with the overall commitment and quality of the administrator, faculty, and staff of the social work program at Tacoma. However, the program needs additional resources in order to maintain this status.

Problems Meeting Current and Future Growth Needs

The Tacoma campus is moving toward a four year institutional status, meaning freshman will be admitted Fall 2006. Although the program is well positioned to offer courses to the general population of students (Intro to Social Welfare, Women and Corrections are already existing courses that could be opened to entering students), the change will increase the load on staff and faculty in terms of advising more students and increased enrollment in introductory classes in social work.

Anticipated growth in student demand for admissions requires an infrastructure of support that is already straining to meet current needs. The program is starting a part-time Advanced Standing program due to student demand, but is not hiring new faculty or staff to administer the program. (The Advanced Standing program counts the content of their accredited social welfare BA toward the first year of the MSW). Advanced Standing is the next logical progression for the program, and many of the students we talked to were anxiously awaiting this program. The numbers of military students attests to the need for this program due to frequent military transfers, for this program will assist students who are in Tacoma temporarily. These changes, coupled with the need to create the infrastructure required for independent accreditation, requires additional resources of faculty and staff.

What Can the University Do To Assist?

The Review Team agrees that it is imperative to make this program a high funding priority. The program is overenrolled and under-resourced and facing serious growth challenges, challenges that must be met or quality and regional needs will not be fulfilled. We view this program as critical to the future success of the campus, for it supports the campus mission, is very well delivered, and is vital to the larger mission and identity of the University.

Assessment of the entire Tacoma campus in terms of resource equity may enable some redistribution of existing resources. The SWT program has over 200 students and a large practicum component, and campus resource distribution should recognize those realities in terms of faculty and staff effort. At minimum, the program needs at 2 additional FTEs for faculty in the MSW program, and 1 fulltime staff person to meet current needs and future growth.

The program needs additional staff in the field office. The program has grown and this is a very labor intensive, community-based activity that is the heart of a successful applied professional program like social work. It is clear that given the growth and spread of the program, the field office is currently stretched very thin. It requires at least one more staff person, preferably an MSW professional.

The change to a fulltime MSW may help faculty in terms of preparation, for additional sections to courses will have to be added. With additional faculty this could potentially decrease faculty preparation time, because instead of teaching separate courses they would teach multiple sections of the same course. Faculty need time for creating the infrastructure of independent accreditation and to meet needs for research, publication, and mentoring of junior faculty. There have been problems with junior faculty and tenure, problems related in part to past insufficient SWT tenured faculty to serve as mentors, lack of research infrastructure, and high teaching and service demands. Separate accreditation may help this problem, for expectations for faculty research would be grounded in UWT realities. Faculty overload may also interfere with hiring of faculty, negatively impacting attempts to diversify the faculty. As discussed previously, without further resources, the program will not be able to seek and obtain independent accreditation, for faculty and staff will not be able to devote the time needed to create the separate infrastructure necessary while continuing to deliver such a high quality program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Tacoma Social Work program is obviously doing an excellent job of fulfilling its mission to educate future social work leaders, practitioners and educators, perform public service, and conduct research, all of which is designed to improve social welfare. Despite these strengths, we have concerns the program will not be able to continue to deliver high quality in the face of growing demands and lack of resources.