

**University of Washington Tacoma  
Social Work and Criminal Justice  
Program Review  
Final Report of the External Review Committee**

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## **Report of Review Committee Executive Summary**

### **Recommendations**

We recommend a 10 year term before the next review of the program (i.e., 2025-2026), with a progress report submitted at the 5-year interval (i.e. 2020-21) that addresses the recommendations outlined below.

The University of Washington Tacoma Social Work and Criminal Justice Program is a growing program that is responsive, self-reflexive, and looking to the future. It has a strong foundation in social justice that moves administrators, faculty, and staff toward a common goal. The Program has undertaken assessment in a meaningful, self-determining manner, using reviews and collecting data to gain greater clarity for its own strategic planning.

The major strengths of the program are:

- Uniqueness of concept
- Quality faculty
- Good learning outcomes and assessment procedures
- Good recruitment, retention, and completion rates
- Service to regional population of working students
- Community engagement by faculty and students
- Quality staff
- Faculty governance structure

The major challenges include:

- Campus context
  - Workload-expectations balance
  - Changes in scheduling practices
  - Campus diversity climate
- Program context
  - Need for common ground between the disciplines
  - Diversity practices
  - Leadership environment

Primary recommendations are:

- Hire a senior faculty in Criminal Justice
- Centralize the vision for a joint program in hiring, faculty governance, and curriculum development
- Continue support for the current SW&CJ Director

Each of the above areas of strength and challenges, along with recommendations, will be discussed in the following report.

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Social Work and Criminal Justice  
Program Review  
Final Report of the External Review Committee**

This document contains the findings from the external review for the Social Work and Criminal Justice Program (“SW&CJ”) at the University of Washington, Tacoma (“UWT”). The committee would like to thank the Program and its leadership for assembling a comprehensive self-study. In our view, the self-study and our visit present evidence for a growing program that is responsive, self-reflexive, and looking to the future. It has a strong foundation in social justice that binds administrators, faculty, and staff toward a common goal. The self-study also demonstrates that the Program has undertaken assessment in a meaningful, self-determining manner, using reviews and collecting data to gain greater clarity for its own strategic planning.

What follows is a brief description of the strengths of the program, which place SW&CJ in a unique position nationally. It is our hope that the following points help key stakeholders to move the program forward.

**I. Strengths of The Program**

*The Program is Conceptually Unique*

The SW&CJ Program represents a unique combination of faculty and students strongly bound through a common mission. As such, the program mission and goals are closely aligned with the purpose of UWT, which aims for “excellence, community, diversity, and innovation,” while serving a population of regional students. The SW&CJ Program is committed to “social and economic justice for poor and oppressed populations and enhancing the quality of life for all.” This commitment is important, as it serves as a principle binding force for faculty, students, and staff. The committee was impressed with the consistency and common dedication to social justice displayed across different agents in the program. It is obvious to the committee that the future of the program hinges on this commitment.

Structurally, the program combines two distinct fields: Social Work (SW) and Criminal Justice (CJ). Each field serves a different population of students with distinct professional trajectories. Yet, the program combines these fields in an attempt to produce an additive effect for both social workers and criminal justice practitioners. During our visit, undergraduate SW and CJ students indicated learning a great deal from each other, and requested more interaction between the two sides. In short, they suggested that there was an additive effect when these distinct students were placed in the same classroom. There is great potential here to train SW and CJ students about the related fields, giving each a perspective that very few programs in the country are matching. The committee understands that this unique configuration is key for the success of the program, and would encourage the faculty and administrators to concentrate their efforts in this area.

*The Program Has Quality Faculty*

The quality of program faculty is strong. There are a total of 25 full time faculty members in the SW&CJ program. Of these, eight are tenured social work professors and two more hold tenure track positions. Six faculty members hold tenure track positions with a criminal justice focus.

There are no tenured professors with a criminal justice background. This is a result of the quick growth on the criminal justice side, where the administration approved junior hires to staff the growing program. On the social work side, almost all faculty are senior in rank, with lots of experience in running a social work program. These faculty appear to be learning about the distinct needs in the criminal justice field. The division in rank between social work and criminal justice presents both strengths and challenges. While the challenges are provided in the next section of the document, our aim here is to point to the opportunities that this disparity brings, both to the faculty and the administration.

As such, the SW&CJ Program as a whole has senior faculty who have enough experience to help manage the growth of criminal justice, and able perhaps to mentor criminal justice faculty on how to engage their students in internships and field experience, for instance. The junior criminal justice faculty members have lots of energy and scholarly drive that will help build the reputation of the program nationally. The existing mentorship structure is commendable and several faculty across tenure and non-tenure tracks mentioned their mentors by name as a valuable resource in their professional development. A few have produced joint publications. Faculty scholarship is supported through funds for research and travel. These are important strengths. In addition, the lecturers and part-time faculty members have extensive professional experience, are committed to the social justice vision, and want to build a democratic and robust program. Students agreed with our assessment, telling us that they appreciated the quality of the faculty and their dedication to the students.

Overall, it is the committee's view that the program has strong faculty, each with qualities that add to the whole, rather than detract. While there are differences in the needs of the social work and criminal justice faculty members, there is also a common ground to build into the future.

#### *The Program Has Good Learning Outcomes and Assessment Procedures*

The program has adopted good practices regarding student learning outcomes and has established assessment procedures to evaluate outcomes. The BASW and MSW degrees require specific student assessment for their accreditation, and the program has been collecting student data for a long time. Learning goals and assessments for the BACJ were developed in 2014 and measurements are embedded throughout the curriculum. In the future, the BACJ program will be able to collect and provide trend data on student learning. For now, it appears that students are, for the most part, achieving the program learning goals.

In addition, there is evidence that the program is using assessment results to guide curricular changes in various degrees. For instance, the BASW is undergoing changes after student evaluation stated that the practicum seminar was not a good use of time. To deal with this issue, the faculty changed the curriculum of the seminar. In the MSW, faculty members are revising the practice curriculum after evidence suggested it needed change. In the BACJ, faculty members are focusing on collecting more data that will allow them to see trends in the program.

#### *The Program Has Good Recruitment, Retention, and Completion*

The data in the self-study indicates that the program is meeting its goals in attracting, retaining, and graduating students. This is true across all degrees offered. The MSW (3-year and AS) degree attracts approximately 150 students per year, and graduates around 50 students. The

BASW has grown over the last decade, attracting approximately 110 students and graduating 50. However, the main growth in the program is within the CJ degree, which grew quickly since 2011. Since then, the BACJ degree grew from 22 to 131 students, with graduation numbers growing from 22 to 84 at its peak. The growth of the CJ degree is impressive, and likely also a cause of some of the growing pains in the program that include the disproportionate number of CJ junior faculty and the changes in the governance structure.

#### *The SW&CJ Program Serves a Regional Population of Working Students*

The program is doing an excellent job serving a regional population that is place-bound and that would have difficulties if the only option is completing their education in Seattle. Consistent with the mission for social justice, the program serves as a conduit between the Tacoma region and professional jobs. This is true for both the social work students and those in criminal justice. It also holds for both undergraduate and graduate students in the program. Interviews with students indicated that the program attracts working students seeking to improve their lives while also serving others. This is a key feature of the program, one that serves as a strength directly linked to improving the economic status of the regional population.

#### *Faculty and Students Are Engaged with the Community*

It was clear from the interviews with community partners and students that the SW&CJ Program is engaging the community effectively, and providing ample opportunities for student training. Community members commended the problem-solving approach and the high level of technology support from their Program liaisons. This is, of course, more true in the SW area than with CJ, mainly because of the long tradition of community service in the former field. Community employers strongly affirmed the program, as did undergraduate students. There is a strong potential for growth on the CJ side, where students could be more engaged in community work, either via internships with different law enforcement agencies or through voluntary work in non-profit organizations. Given that the CJ side of the program is relatively new and has experienced quick growth, it makes sense that CJ students are less engaged with the community. However, the committee would encourage the CJ faculty to engage the community more strongly in the coming years. Yet, all this demonstrates a clear demand in the region for the MSW, BASW, and the BACJ degrees.

#### *The Program Has a Strong Staff*

We were regaled with accolades regarding the staff of the SW&CJ Program. The quality of the staff supporting the program is strong. The committee heard from multiple sources that staff was responsive, competent, and available to students and faculty alike. While there appeared to be some growth issues as a result of the increase in BACJ students, university administration supported the growth by hiring needed staff, allowing the faculty to focus on teaching while the staff helped to recruit, advise, and guide students through the program. MSW, BASW, and BACJ students all expressed deep gratitude toward the staff.

#### *The Program is Building a Faculty Governance Structure*

Faculty recently redesigned and approved a new governance structure. Making changes to the Bylaws, the faculty members established two Degree Committees, one focusing on the MSW/BASW and other governing the BACJ degree. The intent is to allow each of the faculty (SW and CJ) a space to discuss, debate, and make changes to the curricula, aiming to improve

both programs. Each committee then brings forth recommendations to the entire body of SW&CJ faculty members, where issues are debated and voted on. Structurally, this is a good system in that it seeks to share the governance responsibilities across faculty. However, the structure also has the potential for reducing communication across degrees, and perhaps isolating expertise by degree. This could be an issue in a program where the faculty members in SW are more senior in rank than the faculty in CJ, leaving one group with little history and the other likely less vested in innovation. Regardless, what should be commended is the dedication to keeping a strong democratic tradition of governance. Thus, the committee commends the Program Director and the faculty for seeking solutions to a complicated arrangement. This indicates a willingness to identify problems and respond to them structurally.

## II. Challenges and Recommendations

The committee noticed several challenges that the program could face in the coming years. These are described below under two sections. We will first focus on challenges within the context of the UWT campus level. Then we list challenges to the program itself.

### Campus Context

UWT has undergone significant leadership changes over the past few years, with some corresponding swings in focus as each new leader begins to shape specifics of strategic plans. The effects of this are perhaps more influential in a fast-growing, urban serving university where the Teaching-Research-Service balance is less well established for faculty members. Several university-located challenges impact the internal dynamics and functioning of the SW&CJ Program. Challenges as they relate to the campus context are outlined below:

*Workload-Promotion Expectations Balance:* There is general concern among faculty that heavy institution-building responsibilities continue even as tenure and promotion standards increase. This leads to significant stress, especially for junior faculty members, but also for associate level leaders and full professors who fear they will not have the time and support for their research careers.

*Changes in Scheduling Practices:* Recent changes in the campus Time Schedule and scheduling policies have made it increasingly difficult to deliver the SW and CJ degrees in a way that meets the needs of commuter students and faculty. Students, many of whom were non-traditional with job and family schedules to balance, spoke to us about their difficulties in traveling significant distances for a few hours of class time, and faculty spoke of the challenges of having teaching responsibilities structured in a fragmented way.

*Changes in Advising Structure:* The decision by campus leadership to move from unit-specific academic advising to centralized advising affected the quality of service to the students and the sense of community among advisers. Staff experienced high turnover over the years, leaving multiple and hefty tasks such as advising, recruiting, and outreach, to just one or two members. Currently, advising has been relegated back to the SW&CJ Program, staff numbers are healthy, and, as described in the previous section, staff members are building up their strengths as a team.

*Campus Diversity Climate:* Students and faculty discussed the strong need for the campus to continue to make gains in diversity hiring among faculty to respond to the students' articulated need for greater correspondence in demographics between students and faculty.

*Campus Environment for Non Tenure-track Faculty:* Connecting to the ongoing campus conversation on multi-year contracts for non-tenure track faculty, part-time lecturers in the Program expressed the need to maintain continuity in their teaching and to feel a deeper sense of connection with the campus at large.

## **Department Challenges**

*Need for Common Ground Between the Disciplines:* There are currently only a few faculty members whose vision and expertise positions them to lead the development of the SW&CJ Program through creative joint work across the disciplines. Meanwhile tensions between the two groups of faculty threaten to drive the sides apart rather than together. A recent division of the curriculum groups encourages independent rather than synergistic thinking about curriculum. Indeed both SW and CJ faculty have moved to reduce the number of cross-listed courses, potentially moving the two further apart, and certainly reducing the contact both faculty and students have with each other.

These tensions include the normal, expected tensions between colleagues who have been trained differently and who think about curriculum in different ways. That natural barrier to good interdisciplinary thinking is exacerbated by several factors.

First, the two disciplines have some negative stereotypes about each other's student population. It is perhaps interesting to note that students with whom we met spoke eloquently of their desire for more joint courses, and staff members, including those with advising responsibilities do not see significant differences between the two student groups.

Second, the differences in rank distribution across SW and CJ (all senior faculty members are in SW and all CJ faculty members are junior) leads the CJ faculty members to seek greater autonomy through the curriculum division. It is, however, not entirely reasonable to assume that a junior faculty group would have all the skills necessary to build a curriculum. Nor is it wise for them to be wholly responsible for leadership in this area, given the demands of the pre-tenure period. With the amount of time and energy required to invest in the development of the CJ curriculum, faculty in this discipline noted they had not yet had the time to build toward a larger sense of community with SW faculty. Indeed, the SW faculty members have some very useful skills and approaches to curriculum construction, including the judicious use of sequencing that could aid in the coherence and deliverability of the CJ program, and toward building community. It may be of interest to note that students raised this issue of sequencing in their discussion of potential improvements in the CJ program.

Third, the differences in disciplines and rank across the disciplines together produced a lack of clarity in criteria for tenure and promotion and the expectations for accomplishment within and across disciplines. Concerns were raised among CJ faculty that expectations for scholarship may differ between the disciplines, where for example, publishing in the top journals may be seen as a

value by some, and publishing in interdisciplinary journals although lower in rank, may be seen to be of more value to others. In all, need was expressed for a clearer review structure.

*Need for Further Conversation Across Disciplinary Lines:* The committee noticed that SW and CJ are disciplines with significant differences. While the disciplines are related in important ways and work with institutions that often overlap, the attitudes regarding these institutions is different enough within each discipline to warrant examination. That is, given these differences in disciplinary training, it would be easy for faculty to miscommunicate about concepts like social justice and law enforcement and service delivery. Thus, a deeper conversation and understanding across the disciplines would only strengthen the Program.

*Need for Stronger Alignment Between Diversity Vision and Practice:* As noted above, and as is common across campus communities, there is a need for stronger messaging and programming on campus related to campus commitment to a diverse and multicultural community. Across faculty groups, both junior and senior, concerns were raised regarding hiring and course scheduling discussions that seemed essentialist, that is, that embedded assumptions of skill and expertise based on gender, ethnicity, or orientation, for example, rather than academic experience or background. Instances of perceived micro and macro aggressions were described, as were concerns about entitlement. These are complex situations, and there are no easy solutions. However, it is imperative that the SW&CJ Program develop some common expectations of behavior, and that those whose behavior is outside these norms be held accountable regardless of departmental position

*Need for Attention to Faculty Governance Structure:* There is a need to revisit the faculty governance structure to ensure that communication between the SW and CJ is maximized. The structure was redesigned recently so that faculty members from SW and CJ could focus on the curricular development in the BSW and BACJ degree separately. While this is a reasonable step to take, it also has the potential to facilitate a movement of the degrees away from each other rather than producing a more integrated experience for both students and faculty members alike. Also, the current structure does not include representation from part-time faculty.

*Need for Further Structural Support for Faculty:* A critical need was expressed for grant management support at the campus and Program level.

**Recommendations:**

1. The University should pursue a senior faculty hire in the CJ program. Without additional leadership for the development of both the CJ curriculum, and the curriculum bridges between SW and CJ, the promise of this unique program is unlikely to be achieved. The ideal candidate would share the vision for joint programming that prompted the creation of the co-location of these two programs, and have an interest in developing the unique aspects of the social justice-focused CJ program, along with the ability to mentor and support a strong junior faculty contingent. We realize that a senior faculty hire requires significant resources, however without such senior leadership, it is unlikely that the unique promise of this program can be achieved.



2. Future hires in the department should be focused on bringing in new faculty members who can contribute to joint programming. That is, the program must hire “bridging thinkers” who can contribute to the vision for synergy between the disciplines. We realize that the SW program has curriculum content to deliver, so that enacting this recommendation requires a willingness to increase the use of adjuncts or non-tenure track faculty members in some areas. However, if the Program does wish to pursue the significant opportunities associated with the melding of these two disciplines, hiring must serve that goal, while also serving individual disciplinary needs.
3. Given that the Director, Dr. Diane Young, is one of the principle bridging faculty members in the Program, and will be on sabbatical in AY 2016-2017, planning faculty hires in SW might best be delayed until her return. Her leadership will be needed to achieve the desired results in the above recommendations.
4. Program governance structures should be formulated to require joint thinking and program development, as well as representation across ranks and tenure track and non tenure track status. Some reconsideration of the recent split in curriculum decision-making would be in order.
5. Points of curriculum connection should be established between the two programs, including joint required and elective courses, development of a stronger internship opportunity for the CJ program and subsequent joint internship placement sites, opportunities for CJ faculty to teach in the MSW program, and significant opportunities for both faculty and students to work together.
6. Faculty should consider building a community engagement component for the BACJ. This would give students in that major the opportunities to work in the field and gain a further perspective on the relationship between social justice and the criminal justice system. This could be done through an internship requirement or volunteer opportunities that could expand student’s scope of experience.
7. In response to community partnerships, the Program should refine its student-preparation structures so that students transition better to practicum environments with a clear understanding of professionalism and realistic expectations of outcomes.
8. Given the rapid growth the Program has witnessed, we recommend building in critical “reflection points” that address qualitative issues of development periodically, within annual faculty retreats or other such structured meetings.
9. We recommend a 10 year term for re-review of the program, with a progress report submitted at the 5-year interval.

### **III. Conclusion**

The Social Work and Criminal Justice Program at the University of Washington, Tacoma, has significant potential to become an exemplary national program that trains social work and

criminal justice students jointly on issues of social justice. As such, the program has good faculty, dedicated staff, and students eager to meet the challenge. Yet there are several barriers that could affect the course of the program. This report outlined these barriers and made suggestions on how to proceed so that the program can meet its mission to produce students who are committed to “social and economic justice for poor and oppressed populations and enhancing the quality of life for all.”