

Response to Program Review Committee Report

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TO: Dean and Vice Provost, The Graduate School
University of Washington

Review Committee

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FROM: **School of Social Work (SSW) Leadership**

Dr. Edwina Uehara, Ballmer Endowed Dean

Dr. Michael Spencer, Incoming Ballmer Endowed Dean 2023-24

Dr. Val Kalei Kanuha, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

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Dr. David Takeuchi, Associate Dean for Faculty Excellence

On behalf of the faculty, staff and administrators at the School of Social Work, we would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the review committee for their thoughtful and thorough feedback. We received numerous comments from our students and colleagues regarding the quality of the questions asked during sessions and the perceptiveness of the final report. We thank you for your many compliments and the strengths that you see in our program. Under the School's current leadership, the last ten years have brought tremendous growth, impactful accomplishments, and both national and global recognition as one of the best schools of social work in the world. At the same time, we always seek to improve and evolve as a school and profession, and therefore welcome the findings and recommendations of the committee. Overall, the report resonates well with our own perceptions about areas for future improvement that represent the many and diverse voices of our School and community stakeholders.

The SSW would also like to thank the leadership and staff of the Graduate School for the time they have dedicated to supporting this process. The following response addresses the key findings and conclusions of the committee and provides clarification on certain issues raised within their report.

Strategic Plan

Recommendation: Develop a new strategic plan. Throughout the meetings, people referred to ambiguity about the School's future direction, in part due to the anticipated change in leadership and the need for renewed strategic planning. The SSW is going through many changes currently (i.e., back to in-person learning, the search for a new Dean and transitions in other key academic program leadership roles. The

conclusion of these transitions provides an excellent platform for new visioning for future directions of the school.

Response to Opportunity/Challenge: As stated in our report, we have recently completed our previous strategic plan. It was the intent of Dean Uehara not to start a new strategic planning process near the end of her deanship, and therefore we have proceeded with a set of aspirational aims as we prepare for the transition of our long-standing Dean. The recent conclusion of the Dean search in early 2023 resulted in the hiring of Professor Michael Spencer as incoming Dean. Professor Spencer's transition prior to his effective start date in July 2023 provides an opportunity to initiate a new strategic planning process that will address many of the committee's recommendations. We are currently planning to incorporate strategic planning into our annual Autumn retreat, which will include faculty, staff, students, and members of the social work community. Professor Spencer will also be working closely with Dean Eddie Uehara between now and July to ensure a seamless transition between administrations and coordinated continuity of existing SSW initiatives.

We also acknowledge that the School has undergone many other leadership transitions recently that have affected continuity of policies and practices across the SSW. Some significant transitions in the last two years alone have included three Associate Deans for Academic Affairs (ADAA), and three MSW and PhD program leaders. In addition to changes in leadership roles, there was also turnover of key administrative staff in these offices and elsewhere at the school. We also acknowledge that many of these challenges coincided with the impact of COVID-19 pandemic that contributed to gaps in meeting the complex needs of our school community.

The timing of the program review during our school's transition, though not ideal, has had its advantages. We will utilize information gathered during this program review process as guidance for a deeper evaluation of our academic unit during the strategic planning process. This evaluation will include strategic stakeholder listening sessions among all populations of faculty, staff, students, and community members who support SSW, analysis of recent student and faculty feedback mechanisms such as student and alumni surveys, and more. We hope to have a draft plan in place by January 2024, to be finalized by spring and ready for implementation.

Academic Unit Infrastructure

Overall Finding: The SSW has a strong relational culture with caring environments producing a culture of safety. However, throughout the course of the review a consistent theme was a lack of infrastructure in processes (where to go for what?) and who is updating information. This lack of attention to processes and detail will, over time, lead to an environment that is not conducive to school faculty, staff, and students staying active and maintaining the high quality known at the UW. Given the deep care expressed during the review, the School will need to commit to ensuring basic information to students and staff is provided and accessible. Additionally, the SSW needs to develop new revenue streams to meet targeted reserves.

Response to Opportunity/Challenge: As stated in our previous responses, transitions and both vacancies and accelerated retirements over the past two years have made updating our infrastructure a challenge. However, we do plan to include efficient infrastructure development, not only for our academic mission, but for the entire school in our future strategic plan. We will also include communication as a major strategic issue we would like to address, including clear policies and procedures to support not only faculty, staff and student access to key sources and locales of relevant information, but enhancing information dissemination for prospective students, faculty, staff, and public stakeholders and constituents.

Positive changes have already begun to occur with the school with the growing stability of our current administrative appointments. We would like to highlight the work of our new PhD director and assistant director, who have been working to create an updated online manual for the PhD program. This quarter, we will be hiring a new MSW director and new Assistant Dean and Director of Field Education, which we hope will provide further stability. The SSW will enhance our very important marketing and communications unit. We have recently hired Rebecca Dixon as our new MARCOMM director, and we will work with Ms. Dixon both to restructure and to improve our communications with our internal and external constituents that will be in alignment with our strategic plan. Promising changes include hiring a dedicated web specialist as well as a digit media specialist who can work to provide up-to-date and ever-changing information about our programs in an accessible format that reflects current innovations in communication, social marketing, and technology.

Technology and Online Learning

Finding: As student needs and preferences crystallize, there may be an opportunity to leverage technology and new pedagogical approaches to reach a wider diversity of students and provide new ways of learning. Exploring these new opportunities might yield increased revenues that could fund student support and facilities improvements.

Response to Opportunity/Challenge: The SSW has been working over the past two years to assess diverse stakeholder needs and workflows in relation to the student experience at SSW. While UW Information Technology (UWIT) centrally is in the process of continuous quality improvements with students, SSW needs to devote dedicated attention now to technological changes that enhance our unique stakeholder experiences. SSW leadership unanimously agreed to replace a 12+ year-old custom-built in-house student information management system with multiple modern, scalable, mobile friendly, commercial solutions. The outcome of this update will track and maintain student records from initial contact to alumni relations. This project endeavors to streamline/automate workflows for SSW students and staff across Admissions, Student Services, BASW, MSW, and PhD programs, Advancement, Accreditation, Field Education, Child Welfare Training and Advancement Program, and numerous other academic opportunities with which students interface. This transformation is already underway with an anticipated completion and implementation of summer 2024.

Simultaneously, SSW has embarked on adopting a UW internal and custom software solution in partnership with the College of Education for fiscal and human resource operations. These updates will integrate a modern ticketing system with services offered by SSW fiscal and human resources staff. The software solutions will partner well with the UW's launch of Workday Finance that comes summer 2023. The system will provide a platform for training and a portal for policies and procedures for easy review for all who interact with it. Furthermore, we are reimagining our website and Intranet to better meet the needs of all SSW stakeholders over the next year with a significant investment in a consulting firm and hiring additional aforementioned positions in our MARCOMM unit.

The School of Social Work has also invested resources to explore and plan for the use of new pedagogical approaches to reach more first-generation, BIPOC, and rural students. A part-time, senior member of the faculty who also served as MSW Program Director has been contracted to conduct a study on the following:

1. Explore the feasibility of designing and implementing a pilot online program to replace the current hybrid, part-time, Extended Degree MSW program;
2. Create a more flexible part-time program employing a distance education option that would allow students to move through their degree requirements at their own pace; and,
3. Incorporate evidence-based pedagogy for professional social work education that best incorporates in-person, online, and hybrid instruction.

As a result of nine months of study, a preliminary plan for an online MSW program option has been developed and we are hopeful that the pilot will begin for a weekend student cohort entering in September 2025. We are currently working on the start-up costs of this option, including identifying dedicated faculty with training, mentorship and support to teach online, reformulating the MSW part-time curriculum to accommodate online instruction, identifying hardware and software needs for instructors and students, and updating recruitment and admissions criteria for best-fit students in an online option. The SSW is planning to contract with an Instructional Designer to incorporate evidence-based pedagogy and design into existing courses, with a focus on the online option. We are confident that this option will not only meet the needs of an untapped population of students from around the state who seek an MSW from UW but cannot afford or are unable to attend an in-person degree program in Seattle. We are also assured by other distance education programs of social work around the country that these efforts will yield additional revenue for the SSW through stabilized and increased enrollment. Most importantly, an online educational option fulfills the SSW and our profession's values and practices of equity, inclusion, and access to quality education that are rooted in social and racial justice for those most marginalized by the conventions of higher education.

Teaching Faculty

Finding: Attention to the faculty title transitions. The transition of some faculty from the lecturer track to the Teaching Professor track has created some confusion and threatens the trust of some voting faculty. As this transition continues, attention should be paid to equality in relation to title, compression, etc. As the UW brings on a new Vice Provost of the Office of Academic Personnel, the SSW might consider other academic titles for faculty whose role includes not only instruction but field supervision (e.g., Professor of Practice). SSW should also address faculty perceptions that the teaching mission is not as highly valued as its research mission.

Response to Opportunity/Challenge: Faculty and school leadership are closely tracking the considerations around faculty titles. Some of the confusion may be transitory as faculty members adjust to the new titles and their associated assessment and promotion processes (some of which were instituted during the pandemic, increasing confusion). Other concerns may require additional clarification or resources. For instance, median pay by rank for tenure-line faculty is higher than pay for research faculty and considerably higher than pay for teaching faculty. School leadership has to balance the national market forces that shape tenure-line compensation with our commitment to pay equity across tracks.

In terms of titles, the [Professor of Practice](#) title as defined by [UW Academic HR](#) would not be appropriate, as it is a non-voting title, is not eligible for promotion nor emeritus status, and is meant to be "used sparingly." SSW faculty in the Office of Field Education have been voting faculty members for over two decades. However, the Faculty Senate is currently contemplating a "Professor of Clinical Practice" title that may or may not align more closely with the role of field faculty. Again, these titles are currently under discussion among faculty bodies, but we will prioritize equity as our goal across the school's faculty ranks.

Faculty Mentorship

Finding: Create paths for explicit mentorship. The SSW has new tenure-line and teaching faculty, each needing mentorship for successful promotion and reappointment. In some cases, the SSW should consider supports that may go beyond the walls of the university. Consider research and writing for funding mentorship for faculty not associated with a center. Consider mentorship opportunities for the various faculty titles (tenure-line, teaching, fieldwork) which will build a stronger curriculum.

Response to Opportunity/Challenge: We agree with the committee that fostering formal mentorship plans for different types of faculty, particularly for teaching and junior faculty, will be helpful to individual members and the school's larger teaching, research, and service mission. As mentioned in our report and by the committee, the Dean and/or the Dean's representatives meet with faculty at the end of each academic year. We will use our spring faculty meeting to focus on the mentorship needs for the academic year 2023-2024, including assistance for pre-award development, building contracts, and addressing concerns regarding maintaining relationships with funders in post-award phases. A mentorship plan for the different faculty types will also be developed, including resources within SSW, UW, and external to UW if appropriate.

In Fall Quarter of 2023, we will informally meet with different faculty classifications to discuss their proposed career plans and assess if additional needs and resources to meet those needs can be identified. Note that the Fall Quarter meeting is a new faculty mentorship program we plan to initiate.

Doctoral Program

Finding: Doctoral program needs sustained leadership and coordination to ensure all students have access to the necessary opportunities to fulfill the needs of the next generation of researchers, teachers, and practitioners. The number of transitions in leadership experienced by students seems to be high and has affected students' understanding of the program and the opportunities available to them. Ensure leadership, in collaboration with faculty and students, is revising a handbook, mentoring guidelines, research opportunities, etc.

Response to Opportunity/Challenge: We appreciate the feedback provided. We strongly concur with the statement that the "doctoral program needs sustained leadership and coordination to ensure all students have access to the necessary opportunities to fulfill the needs of the next generation of researchers, teachers and practitioners." Our PhD Program has a long history of strong leadership and robust faculty engagement with doctoral students, and as a result, our graduates are leaders in the field of social work education and research nationally and internationally.

Unfortunately, for the past few years, several extraneous circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in several changes in leadership positions in the PhD office, that no doubt contributed to gaps in information and communication between the PhD office, the students and faculty. The SSW responded in 2022 by appointing a new PhD Program Director (Dr. Orellana) and PhD Program Assistant Director (Ms. Chu-Torres). Additionally, the SSW hired a former assistant director over the spring and summer of 2022 to work with the program on updating the program manual and program policies. The work of revising and updating policies has continued throughout the 2022-2023 academic year, with the support of a very active PhD Program Committee composed of several faculty, staff members, and students. Over the past year, PhD program leadership has been committed to implementing a PDF program handbook that is also accessible on the SSW website. This handbook will include revised/updated information with course offerings, policies, resources, funding opportunities, mentorship guidance, and other resources to support students' navigation of the program and develop opportunities to collaborate with faculty. Dr. Orellana and Ms. Chu-Torres are both committed to providing sustained and stable leadership to the program, and to work closely with the Dean's office in advance of any transitions in leadership and staffing. Our goal is to have a future director act as co-director for one to two quarters to ensure a smooth and productive transition.

MSW Program

Finding: The curricular content and infrastructure in the MSW program needs attention. Teaching associates (adjuncts) are a wonderful asset to the program by providing rigorous and practice informed

courses, but lack the infrastructure to produce a well-coordinated and cohesive curriculum across classes. Specifically, the school should consider redesigning SOC W 504 in collaboration with students of color.

Response to Opportunity/Challenge: Our existing curricular structure has been developed over many years to ensure consistency, provide mentorship to new teaching faculty and to foster a team-teaching approach. All required generalist courses have a “course lead” who is a full-time faculty member who convenes course section instructors on a regular basis when the courses are being offered. Similarly, our specialized curriculum is led by “specialization chairs” faculty who are experts in their field of practice and are appointed to oversee their specific courses and any assigned section instructors (full- or part-time faculty). The MSW program director and assistant director bring together the course leads twice a quarter to provide further guidance and offer support; we host a similar meeting with specialization chairs, while also meeting separately with each specialization team quarterly. Starting at the beginning of each quarter, the ADAA and program director offer a weekly new instructor support meeting, which includes Teaching Associates, to respond to pedagogical inquiries, answer curricular and course content questions, and provide consultation on any student-related issues. We are working to better define the roles and responsibilities for faculty who serve as course leads and specialization chairs. Additionally, we are planning to do more intensive and robust instructor orientations, onboarding, ongoing mentorship, and instructional support for new and established instructors. While we are currently providing all of the above support, we also believe strengthening these efforts will require additional compensation for our faculty members, which we are exploring with our administration.

As with other units in the university, the SSW begins planning for each academic year and each quarter months in advance of registration. All required courses (both core generalist courses and specialized courses) are offered on regular schedules and are never canceled. The vast majority of our elective courses (~20 in Winter and Spring, and 4-5 in Summer and Fall) are offered during regular quarters and scheduled every year. However, we have a number of biannual elective courses, along with “special topics” courses that are offered according to instructor interest/availability and student interest. On the rare occasion that classes are canceled after registration begins, it is due to assigned faculty unexpectedly receiving grants or course buy-outs, adding on unscheduled administrative duties, or other personal or professional schedule conflicts. If faculty are unable to teach we assign another qualified faculty or doctoral student as the instructor.

Additionally, field education is the “signature pedagogy” for social work and we take very seriously the learning students are doing in their placements. In the integrative seminar, full-time clinical specialization students meet in a small group of student peers with an expert practitioner/faculty to role play, case consult, and discuss clinical application of theories and frameworks. We will be incorporating the integrative seminar requirement for our part-time students next year, which together will represent 90% of our student body. We are working to design and offer the integrative seminar model for our two other specializations (Administration & Policy Practice and Community-Centered Integrative Practice), which are much smaller foci areas in terms of student cohorts. Both of these specializations are also in the process of reevaluating their curriculum to better meet the standards, academic, and pedagogical needs of students and practicum. Finally, we regularly employ practicum instructors to teach in the classroom as they are the embodiment of the theory and practice of professional social work. We will consult with these instructors to help design stronger curricular offerings and structures to bridge theory and practice.

SOC W 504 Social Work for Social Justice: Developing a Personal Professional Stance is required by the Council on Social Work Education as a foundation course in any accredited MSW program. We agree that SOC W 504 is in significant need of restructuring. Starting last fall 2022, Dr. Kalei Kanuha, MSW Program Director and Acting ADAA has been engaged in designing an entirely new structure for the 504 course to address long standing student concerns about the pedagogical methods, sequencing in the SSW graduate curriculum, and content relevance in relation to contemporary social justice issues. We are

beginning to review the feasibility of this new course structure and will convene a working group of MSW students to advise on the re-visioning and transformation of the course. The restructure will include BIPOC-only meet-and-greet and breakout sessions for incoming MSW students during summer orientation, separate caucus/affinity sections for BIPOC students during the course offerings in fall and winter, a focus on applied skill acquisition in the winter course, and optional, no-credit caucus/affinity groups in spring. Therefore, the course is proposed to extend for the entire first year of the MSW program starting from summer through spring versus its present requirement as a single, 3-credit course in fall. We are hopeful that this transformation of the course will better reflect our values and commitment to racial and social justice not only with SOC W 504, but across our entire graduate curriculum.

Resource Requirements

Finding: Classroom facilities were improved and if more scholarship support was available. Examining policies around paid family leave, considering having some sort of childcare space within the school and/or childcare subsidies.

Response to Opportunity/Challenge: We fully support the committee's findings regarding our facilities. To assist with the challenges of non-sequential physical and virtual classroom attendance students currently face, SSW has embarked on remodeling its Research Commons which is estimated to reopen in August 2023. This new space includes multiple areas for students to study with dedicated study nooks, computers, charging stations, and more. There will also be Zoom-ready spaces to meet for online courses while on-campus. Additionally, this space includes a "hybrid classroom" beyond the current AV standards of UW central. This space will support modern pedagogical approaches such as implementing a truly hybrid "flipped classroom". We intend to gather feedback from students and faculty learning in these cutting edge and experimental hybrid classroom spaces.

Despite these improvements to our Research Commons, the issue of space has been a growing concern that was featured in our self-study in the form of accessibility concerns for our community members with disabilities and/or access needs. Additionally, available classroom space to meet growing student enrollment, available office space for the increasing Research and Innovation Centers, and meeting critical childcare space needs for our doctoral students in particular. We believe that improving our learning infrastructure is vital to both our ability to meet student access needs, as well as delivering high quality education for in-person and hybrid classes. The SSW does not currently have the necessary fiscal resources individually to meet this recommendation and would require additional support from the UW capital projects office to formally explore needed renovation options. The committee's specific suggestions related to technological adaptability that aligns with our residential needs and practice aspirations, the number and size of classrooms, and the furnishings in our classrooms, offices, and collaborative spaces that could meet the access and childcare needs would be of great value as we move forward.

Additionally, the SSW agrees with the findings regarding challenges doctoral students with parenting roles face. We will explore childcare subsidies, as well as paid family leave and childcare space policies in partnership with other UW Academic Units as part of the strategic planning process to identify any available resources. Support from UW regarding these existing policies and/or any financial resources would be deeply appreciated.