



### Office of the Provost

## School of Social Work Site Visit Report

Prepared for Belinda McCarthy, Provost

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**Background:** President Nietzel's directive for an external review of the Social Work Program was announced in the following excerpt from a November 8, 2006 Missouri State University press release.

President Nietzel will commission a comprehensive, professionally directed evaluation of the Missouri State Social Work Program. He has asked Provost Belinda McCarthy to identify an outside group of social work education experts who will be charged with this review. "It is important for current and prospective students, for potential employers, and for the faculty and staff in the program to have confidence that the policies, procedures, leadership, and delivery of the program are up to par," said Nietzel. "The reviewers will have the complete cooperation of the university as they conduct their assessment. We will begin to recruit this external team immediately with the hope that they can visit us and conduct the review in the spring 2007 semester."

**Introduction:** The following areas were provided to the external reviewers as their "charge" for the review. To complete this review the site visitors met with faculty, professional staff, students, alumni, agency field instructors, employers, per-course faculty and community representatives.

### 1. ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

**Does the academic environment of the School of Social Work promote learning and stimulate an honest and open dialogue in which intellectual differences are shared and respected among students, faculty and staff?**

Many students and faculty stated a fear of voicing differing opinions from the instructor or colleague. This was particularly true regarding spiritual and religious matters however, students voiced fears about questioning faculty regarding assignments or expectations. In fact "bullying" was used by both students and faculty to characterize specific faculty. It appears that faculty have no history of intellectual discussion/debate. Rather, differing opinions are taken personally and often result in inappropriate discourse.

**Do the faculty and staff of the School of Social Work model and communicate the CSWE Code of Ethics for students in the program?**

There is an atmosphere where the Code of Ethics is used in order to coerce students into certain belief systems regarding social work practice and the social work profession. This represents a distorted use of the Social Work Code of Ethics in that the Code of Ethics articulates that social workers should respect the values and beliefs of

others.

### **What changes would enhance the academic environment of the School of Social Work?**

see comments below

## **2. POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

### **To what extent do the policies and procedures of the School of Social work, in particular the Standards and Essential Functions, support the effective functioning of the School and protect the rights of students, faculty and staff?**

The SEF policy in itself is not bad. However, the implementation is variably and inappropriately used which creates problems for the faculty, staff and students.

### **Are the policies and procedures of the School of Social Work (1) adequate and appropriate, (2) clear, (3) consistent with University policies and procedures, (4) understood by students, faculty and staff, and (5) appropriately and consistently implemented by students, faculty and staff?**

The SEF is an unnecessary extra layer. The University policies and procedures are quite adequate and should supersede any school policies. However, the policies and procedures must be implemented appropriately. It appears that the SEF has been used to bully and browbeat students.

Tenure and promotion criteria are too vague. There is no clear teaching, research and service markers for tenure or promotion. The vague criteria allows for subjectivity which seems to allow for personal feelings to influence the vote rather than objective criteria.

### **Are there policies and procedures that should be implemented or current policies or procedures that should be revised?**

The tenure and promotion policy/criteria should be revised to reflect clear expectations for tenure and promotion.

Policies and procedures appear to be adequate for the management and administration for the School. However, there is differential use of such policies and procedures and a climate exists where the lack of collegiality impairs the efficient and effective use of such policies and procedures. At times, policies and procedures are used as obstructionist mechanisms for moving forward decisively. It also appears that inaccurate information regarding accreditation standards are used to promote one's agenda.

## **3. SCHOOL ORGANIZATION & LEADERSHIP**

### **Does the organizational structure of the School (School Director, BSW Director, MSW Director, Joplin Coordinator, and committee structure) facilitate the School's ability to accomplish its goals?**

The organizational structure of the School of Social Work with a Director, BSW Director, MSW Director, Off-campus program coordinator and School committees are typical for a School of Social Work of this size. However, faculty's lack of respect for authority impedes the functioning of this organizational structure. It is not the structure, but rather faculty behavior which impedes progress.

The current committee structure is appropriate but somewhat misused. It appears that committees are used to interminably process and debate issues with little problem solving or resolve. We suggest fewer, shorter meetings with time limited discussion and movement toward decisions.

### **What changes would result in improved organization and leadership?**

Faculty respect for authority, faculty respect for each other, faculty appreciation of students and an understanding of the mission of the university and the school would go a long way to improve the functioning of the school. Also the use of the word "Director" in the title of so many of the administrative team is confusing and undermines the

authority of the Director. We would suggest the following: Director, MSW Program Coordinator, BSW Program Coordinator, and Field Placement Coordinator.

#### **What actions would improve the School's ability to recruit a permanent School Director?**

It is difficult to imagine any competent persons being willing to assume the position of Director while the environment of the School is so toxic. The current climate is one of hostility toward administration and colleagues. We suggest that Dr. Etta Madden continue for at least one more year as Acting Director of the School and given sufficient release time to fully concentrate on giving direction and stability to the School. Further we suggest that there be no recruiting for a new Director until several serious faculty issues are resolved (see below).

#### **4. DELIVERY OF THE PROGRAM**

##### **Faculty: Are the number and qualifications of the faculty appropriate to deliver the programs offered?**

Yes, the number of faculty and the qualifications of the faculty are adequate to deliver the programs, however, the School would benefit immensely from recruiting faculty who have had social work teaching experience at other institutions of higher learning, particularly Research I universities. It would also be helpful to have more faculty who are trained in CSWE accreditation standards and have an understanding of national and international trends. Further, the use of instructors/lecturers who have full-time teaching responsibilities is questionable. This has the potential of creating a two-tiered system of faculty and will most likely create even further divisions at the School. Overall, the faculty are incredibly underproductive particularly in the areas of research, scholarship and service. Given the small class size and small advising load that they carry (compared to other Schools of their size) the faculty should be much more productive. It seems that their time is spent in meetings and endless processing rather than productive activities which could move the School forward.

##### **Does the faculty understand their role in the educational process of preparing future social workers?**

Faculty do not adhere to the standard educational process of preparing future social workers. Accreditation requires that students all receive the same content and meet the same learning objectives. However, in the School (particularly the MSW Program) content varies considerably across differing sections of the same course and the foundation field placement in the MSW Program does not appear to allow all students to experience all of the required practice methods. The faculty and *[Personally identifying information deleted]* use great latitude in allowing differences to occur both in the classroom and in the MSW foundation field placement. On the other hand, however, some faculty feel pressured to make sure students in their classes get good grades. These problems will result in serious consequences for the next reaccreditation visit.

Per-course faculty are used in social work education to enhance and enrich the curriculum. For the most part required content should be taught by regular faculty with per-course faculty being used for expertise in elective areas or specific required content for which they have extensive knowledge and experience. Per-course faculty need to receive an orientation and be mentored by full-time faculty teaching in the same area. Currently there is no close monitoring of per-course faculty with respect to content taught and this appears to allow for content drift. This may result in serious consequences at the time of reaccreditation. Also, the program needs to be careful to ensure that approximately the same percentage of per-course faculty are used at the Springfield site and the Joplin site – thus assuring comparability of programs.

##### **Students: Are admissions standards in both the BSW and MSW programs appropriate to ensure access to educational opportunities and qualified program graduates?**

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that admission standards in both the MSW and BSW Programs are applied differentially with possible bias against students who are faith based. It also appears that MSW applicants who clearly do not meet admission standards are admitted to satisfy enrollment expectations.

##### **Resources: Are the resources (budget, support staff and space) adequate to support the programs offered by the School?**

Budget, support staff and space are adequate to support the programs. In fact space for faculty and students is quite nice. Space is somewhat limited if the university expects the school to engage in externally funded activities. Externally funded graduate assistants are already sharing limited space.

A few faculty engage in external funding activity. This activity however is almost entirely service oriented rather than research activity. There is very low indirect cost recovery. Given that, the amount required to buyout from a course appears to be exceedingly low and actually costs the school money. We would recommend consideration of increasing the cost of buyout to a percentage of salary per course (perhaps 10-15%) and encouraging faculty to engage in external funding leading to research/scholarship.

**Curriculum: Does the curriculum adequately prepare students for credentialing examinations and for current employment opportunities?**

Pass rates on the licensing exam are quite high for the LBSW exam. They are also high for the LCSW exam however a very low percentage of MSW students take the exam. This infers that graduates of the MSW program are employed by agencies not requiring licensure. Current employment opportunities for BSW and MSW graduates are appropriate to the number of students graduating and seeking positions in the southwest Missouri region. Many students appear to be hired by the agency in which they completed their field placement. Employers interviewed spoke highly of the program graduates.

**Delivery Methods: Does the School utilize appropriate delivery methods to facilitate access and maintain program quality?**

The full-time MSW program on the Springfield campus and the MSW program in Joplin are appropriate and facilitate access to social work education. However, the part-time MSW program appears to be rigid, not addressing the population of students for which it was intended. The School should offer as many courses on-line as possible to accommodate part-time students who are working full-time. Appropriate course content for on-line classes includes Human Behavior, Policy, Research and some electives. The current part-time program requirements are too excessive for persons working full-time. Students report that they receive very little support or understanding from faculty/advisors regarding this issue. In fact, there were numerous reports of students being told to simply "quit their jobs". The students are misled at the time of application to believe that they can complete the program while working fulltime. Halfway through the program, after having invested much time and expense, they are faced with either having to drop the program or quit their job. Better information and advising need to be put in place immediately to prevent this. Additionally, the part-time program must be changed to realistically accommodate part-time students.

**What changes would be needed to strengthen the Social Work Program?**

1. We suggest that faculty create a "true" part-time MSW program to accommodate students who are working full-time. This should include possible concurrent placements, summer placements, extended placements, and coursework which does not exceed 6 credit hours per semester. The Field Placement Coordinator should develop more field placements which allow for evening and weekend opportunities.
2. Faculty must adhere to course learning objectives and have assignments and expectations which are consistent across different sections of courses, including the practicum seminars.
3. The Field Learning Plan for the MSW Field Placement appears to be cumbersome and inappropriate for students doing placements. This causes great problems for students and field supervisors. *[Personally identifying information deleted]* is not helpful to students struggling with the Learning Plan. This causes great anxiety for the students.
4. Field placement experiences do not appear to be consistent across students particularly with students in MSW foundation placements that do not get the full range of methods. This is a violation of accreditation standards.
5. Students should be treated respectfully from the point of application through graduation. This does not mean a diminution of standards or faculty's lack of ability to assign low grades for work performance.

6. The Joplin Program is an excellent program with satisfied students. However, resources are spread too thin. We suggest the School determine the best focus for the Joplin Program rather than trying to maintain a broad focus of offerings (full-time, part-time, and advanced standing). They should perhaps consider a cohort model for each of these groups. The Joplin Program has an excellent Program Coordinator who is enthusiastic about the program and lauded by students for her assistance, teaching ability and professionalism.

## 5. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

### How is the School of Social Work viewed by various constituencies within the community?

The reviewers met with department heads of other academic units within the College. Clearly, the School is viewed as problematic within the college and university although some individual faculty are held in high regard.

The reviewers met with alumni, employers, community field instructors and per course faculty. Each group stated the need for a public School of Social Work in the area. However, perceptions of the program were varied. Many members of the community indicated the BSW and MSW programs were educationally adequate but felt that the community would be better served if the programs were enhanced to a higher quality. The School faculty is viewed as problematic, difficult, and absent from community activities with a few exceptions. For the most part, faculty are not seen as experts that the community can consistently rely on. Moreover, the reputation of the School has been diminished by the constant turnover of Directors of the School.

Alums are grateful that the School exists and many stated that they would not have been able to move to pursue their degree.

### What activities could be implemented to improve the School's image and community relations?

1. Students graduating from the program need to feel as if they were treated fairly and respectfully while a student in the program.
2. Having a strong Director who is engaged in the community and fosters positive relationships between community agencies and the school.
3. Developing a School Alumni Association
4. Reconstituting the Community Advisory Committee
5. Have select faculty offer their expertise (testimony to the legislature; consultation to agencies; etc)

## 6. FUTURE DIRECTION

### How can the School of Social Work best position itself for the future?

The School of Social Work has a long history of inner conflict and dysfunction. In fact, it was described by some outside of the School as "legendary". Faculty appear wedded to old history and grudges. Some faculty and students do not feel safe. This toxic environment permeates every aspect of the School. It should be noted however, that almost all faculty expressed that the current environment under Dr. Madden has greatly improved.

The external reviewers met with all faculty individually and academic/professional staff as well as a good representation of students. Both external reviewers have extensive experience in several institutions of higher learning and both have conducted numerous site visits for reaccreditation. Neither of the reviewers have ever witnessed such a negative, hostile and mean work environment. Persons in administrative roles are held in contempt by the faculty; faculty colleagues are disrespectful to one another, and some faculty are disrespectful and demeaning toward students. The consequence is a dysfunctional and hostile work and learning environment.

Faculty appeared to have little or no insight into the reasons for the reviewers' presence. In fact, many faculty clearly felt that this was just one more exercise with outside consultants/reviewers. Faculty stated that "nothing ever resulted from the past consultant/reviewer visits and that they did not expect any consequences to occur as a result of our visit". Faculty do not appear to have an understanding of the seriousness of the issues that occur in the

School nor do they have a feeling of commitment to improvement of the School.

There are several factions among the faculty and junior faculty are pressured and threatened to support one or another of the factions. Faculty spend way too much time meddling in each other's business and looking over each other's shoulders. There is an air of mistrust and expectation that one will be wronged or hurt by one's colleague. Faculty are mired in old history and perceived affronts. Even new junior faculty are quickly introduced to the negative culture of the school. Faculty voiced an inability or lack of desire to let go of past hurts and many had no self awareness of their contributions to the problems which exist in the school. In fact, they all seem to view themselves as victims. Upper administration was often blamed for the toxicity within the School. Faculty appear to have no institutional loyalty. Faculty members stated that "hiring a good director will solve our problems". This lack of insight indicates that problems will simply continue unless aggressively and directly dealt with.

The external reviewers suggest that there are limited options. These options are as follows:

1. Close down the School; disband the faculty and restart the School after a short period (start from scratch). This option ensures ridding of all toxic faculty but will require careful hiring for the restart. Also, the community response will be negative and the university may be viewed as non-responsive to community needs. Also, during the hiatus, another School of Social Work may move in to fill the void.
2. Eliminate those faculty who are identified as major contributors of the problem and find ways to remove them from the faculty. This may be accomplished through buyouts, not awarding tenure, eliminating annual raises, and refusing accommodations. At the very least, eliminate offices and have them work from home in order to keep them away from the School as much as possible. Also, they should be discouraged from committee work. No new faculty should be hired until the problem faculty are removed from the environment. We recommend that Etta Madden continue as acting program director for a minimum of one more year and that she be given significant release time to adequately administer the School of Social Work.
3. The School of Social Work should not be allowed to recruit for a new Director until negative faculty can be neutralized and a more positive environment created. Bringing in a new director at a time of hostility and instability will only ensure failure of the new Director. Faculty appear to pride themselves on their ability to manipulate situations which undermine administration.
4. Each faculty member must be held accountable for his or her contributions to the toxic environment. Benchmarks should be established with specific time frames to hold faculty accountable. These benchmarks should include productivity in teaching, research and service as well as collegial behavior to one another, school and university administration and respectful behavior toward students. Frequent meetings with students should occur to ensure that they are receiving a sound and respectful education.
5. The School should request from the Council on Social Work Education a postponement of reaffirmation of accreditation based on lack of permanent leadership.

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