

**2013-14 Academic Program Review  
FAU School of Social Work  
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**Prepared by**

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**Overview**

The two external reviewers and internal reviewer received and studied the School of Social Work's self-study report and then visited the School on February 19 and 20, 2014. The review team met with most members of the School of Social Work's faculty, leadership team, the Associate Provost Diane Alperin, Interim Dean of the Graduate College Debra Floyd, Dean of the College Of Design and Social Inquiry Rosalyn Carter, Dean of Undergraduate Studies Ed Pratt, and the School's Community Advisory Board. Based on the information provided and the meetings with key stakeholders, we submit this review that includes the following sections: 1.) Assessment of the program's three principal areas of research, curriculum and instruction, and service and community outreach; 2.) Assessment of the faculty's four primary goals; 3.) Answers to the School's questions at the end of the self-study; and 4.) Recommendations for an action plan to take the School to the next level of excellence.

**1. Assessment of the School of Social Work's strengths and weaknesses**

**A. Research**

**a. Faculty scholarship**

Members of this faculty are highly productive scholars averaging more than three publications per year, per faculty member which includes articles in refereed journals as well as other publications. Many of these publications appear in highly regarded journals in social work and cognate disciplines. In addition to the record of faculty publications, faculty members on an average make one presentation at a scholarly meeting annually. It should be noted that there is a very strong spirit of collaboration among social work faculty members and faculty members of other disciplines in the Nursing School and the School of Medicine as it relates to shared authorship. Several faculty members also publish with students as a means of preparing and ensuring the next generation of social work scholars.

**b. Research support from College and University**

There does not appear to be a substantial amount of financial support for research by either the College or the University. It was explained by the administrations of

the two that expanded funds to launch pilot projects and to seed new research ideas are available in limited amounts due to the budget demands of the State of Florida. In addition, there does not seem to exist at FAU a culture of attracting sizeable external research dollars through generation of research grants, since so much of a faculty member's work load requires teaching. Much to its credit, despite the lack of institutional support, the School of Social Work has worked to foster an environment of inquiry and scholarship and has enjoyed some success with receipt of external funding by some of faculty members. It is notable that the school was the lead vendor in a large multi- year Title IV-E child welfare training grant that sub contracted with most of the other schools of social work in the state and was highly valued for its organizational, fiduciary and conceptual leadership. Currently there is a strong likelihood of the project being reestablished and no doubt the school will be welcomed as a key partner. It should also be pointed out that social work faculty continue to conduct solid research projects with very limited resources in spite of high teaching, advising , and administrative demands on them. Faculty research and the profession are also enhanced through some very creative collaborative research efforts with social work agencies in the professional community. A research infrastructure that supports grant writing is needed to move the School to the next level of research productivity.

c. Graduate Student Assistants

This is an area that could have a very positive impact on faculty research if it could be expanded. From the reports to the reviewers there are only two graduate student assistantships made available to the School annually. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) does not permit masters degree students to teach in accredited programs; however, at FAU graduate students in the School of Social Work are deployed as research assistants. By increasing the number of these opportunities more students' graduate education can be funded, faculty members will have the help to conduct and sustain their research, and the students will complete their degree program with priceless research skills that will enhance their professional careers which they otherwise would not have acquired. In many schools success in attracting external funds for research is further incentivized by awarding additional graduate assistantships to those units. This may be a course of action FAU should consider.

## B. Curriculum and Instruction

### a. BSW curriculum

The BSW has evolved a very fine reputation over the many years of its existence, and its graduates are sought after by field work agencies used by the School and by other social and human service agencies and enterprises in the area. Current students and graduates of the program give high ratings to the quality of the education and the practice. The community views this program as filling a very meaningful niche in the realm of professional social work practice. The curriculum follows the accreditation mandates of CSWE and expands on those mandates with a taught and lived experience of diversity and respect for diversity in all of its facets relevant to social work. The reality of this is reflected in the high retention rates of students in the program and the 100% employment rate of graduates with the BSW degree.

### b. MSW curriculum

Like the BSW program, the MSW program follows the mandates of the CSWE in providing and maintaining an accredited School of Social Work. The program made a well-thought out decision to focus on clinical practice knowledge and sufficiency as the concentration of the advanced portion of its curriculum. In so doing it has developed a curriculum that is sensitive to the needs of this region of Florida especially as they relate to taking into account cultural and ethnic differences of persons who are served in the social, health and mental health agencies in the region. The curriculum is well conceived and its success is well documented through assessment measures of students, graduates and their performance in the agencies they serve. The excellent curriculum is being delivered with the expectation that the program will grow as what appears to be a University expectation that the faculty can and will do more with less. The student to faculty ratio is much higher than that expected by CSWE, and this is likely to create some problems for this excellent program when it comes up for the next reaffirmation of its accreditation by CSWE.

### c. Quality of Teaching

The quality of teaching is excellent as reported by students. The School is in the process of preparing for reaffirmation of its accreditation and is reviewing its

assessment tools to determine competencies of students upon completion of their courses of study. Members of the faculty have been creative in meeting the demands of producing practice-ready social workers in oversized class sections through the use of educational technology and innovative teaching strategies. Professors are well engaged with their students and focused on their success by creation of internal and external educational structures that will help them to succeed. We were also impressed by the School's retention efforts, especially the student success conferences, extracurricular activities, and the highly successful "Lobby Day" that takes students to Tallahassee to lobby on behalf of social work issues.

d. Faculty-student ratios

As mentioned above, the faculty- student ratios are well out of line with those put forth by CSWE. The program should not continue on this course if it is to maintain its tradition of academic excellence, and neither the BSW nor MSW should grow until an acceptable ratio is achieved.

C. Service and community engagement

Members of this faculty and the field work department are heavily engaged in service to the community and give countless hours to the professional development of their social work colleagues working in agencies. In addition, the faculty of the School is very much involved with faculty governance across the University. Social work faculty members make themselves available for developmental tasks in the College and across the University. The School has been instrumental in developing innovation in multi-disciplinary education of health care professionals with the Schools of Nursing and Medicine. While this may be seen as curriculum development, its value to improved health care delivery in the region in the future should not be overlooked.

**2. Faculty Goals for the future**

Goal 1: Obtain Reaffirmation (reaccreditation by Council on Social Work Education).

The faculty reported that it is well on its way in preparation of the documents for CSWE. As the documents are prepared it is suggested that the program consistently show the inter-relatedness of its mission to the University and the College. It should also draw attention to and capitalize on its very successful recruitment, and

retention of a diverse student body that is being prepared to serve the diverse communities of south Florida. Also, a plan to bring the student-faculty ratio in line to CSWE standards should be clearly articulated in the report.

### Goal 2: Doctoral Program (DSW)

The FAU School of Social Work is ahead of the curve in the establishment of the DSW program as an essential means of meeting the future mental health demands and service needs of Florida and the nation. This program will significantly advance the national reputation of the school and immediately increase the ability to attract high quality, prominent faculty and well qualified students. The program has been conceived in such a way that builds in clinical and translational research that can expand evidence informed practice and provide leadership for the development of an administration of excellent health and mental health programs. Students enrolled in the DSW program will be able to provide teaching assistance to the BSW and MSW programs, and they will help to grow the research capacity of the School as well. The need for more faculty, especially a very senior faculty member to head the program, is apparent. It was gratifying to learn from the Dean that the Provost is solidly behind this proposal and has pledged to provide the necessary resources to initiate the program on sound footing.

### Goal 3: Community Mental Health Clinic

The Community Mental Health Clinic is an excellent idea, not only for meeting extant mental health service needs as a principal service provider but as a site for clinical education of social work students (BSW,MSW, DSW), and mental health practitioners from related fields. It presents the School with the potential to draw sizeable research and training grants in the furtherance of needed services and provision of well-prepared service providers. Some of the needs for implementation that will need to be addressed include 1.) a dedicated space for the clinic with adequate access for clients; 2.) an administrative staff to manage the daily operation; 3.) A clinical director and clinical faculty. We believe the School's record with the inter-professional program is a sign that they can manage such a clinic and draw on faculty strength both in the School and from other colleges.

### Goal 4: Raise Community Visibility and Enhance Fundraising for the FAU School of Social Work

The School is doing a tremendous amount of work in this regard with limited resources. It would advantage the School if it could have its own development or institutional advancement person who could operate in a timely manner to identify and cultivate advancement opportunities. A well-developed business plan for development would allow for initiation of creative strategies that are of necessity labor intensive and time consuming. To reiterate, the School has already begun a vigorous advertising and promotional campaign with limited resources much to its credit. It definitely needs additional support from the University's central administration.

### 3. Questions posed to reviewers in the self-study

- a. Please review the faculty-student ratio, as well as faculty areas of research and expertise. What recommendations do you have for future hiring so that the School can continue on an upward trajectory in education, research, service, and community engagement?

This was dealt with in two places above, but the program should receive the number of faculty members that was discussed with Dean Carter who concurred with the visitors that the School should move with all due haste to fill the two faculty lines that were not filled last year, to fill the DSW position with a Sr. level person and fill the position vacated by the promotion of Dr Michelle Hawkins.

- b. What recommendations do you have to make us a more prominent school, within FAU as well as among the BSW/MSW programs across the United States?

The School should seek a new director who will continue the prominence Dr. Michelle Hawkins established for the School in her participation and leadership in NASW, NADD, CSWE and Florida association of social work educators. The University should seek to fill that position quickly.

There is now a successful inter-disciplinary collaborative model operating at FAU. This **model** could be expanded at FAU among other fields of practice (aging, child welfare, Veterans) where there is interest. This model could be written about and expanded to be called the FAU model of collaboration.

The School has a history of offering successful certificate programs. Perhaps those programs could be offered as advanced practice or knowledge certificates, as post-master's certificates for social workers and other disciplines with an interest in certification, e.g., nursing, law, education, financial literacy professionals.

The School should consider seeking cross-disciplinary education such as exists with Nursing and Medicine with other educational institutions, e.g., law. Possible areas of cross collaboration or education could be in aging and/or child welfare.

The DSW will immediately put FAU on both the regional and national map of the very few schools with doctoral programs.

- c. What concerns, if any, do you think the School needs to address in order to ensure successful CSWE reaffirmation (given that the self-study is to be submitted in December 2014)?

Resources will be an issue. Deficiencies that may be flagged include the high faculty workloads, the insufficiency of financial aid for students, the lack of in-house (SSW) start up dollars for faculty research support, and the unacceptable faculty-student ratio.

#### **4. Recommendations for an action plan**

- 1.) Convene a search committee and conduct a national search for a Director**
- 2.) Advertise and conduct two faculty searches to meet the high demand for BSW and MSW degrees and the future DSW.**
- 3.) Develop an administration plan and business plan for Clinic if none exists**
- 4.) Galvanize supporters for clinic, obtain a dedicated space for it, hire staff, and launch the clinic**
- 5.) Search for Director of DSW**
- 6.) Develop a marketing plan for DSW and implement the curriculum**
- 7.) Consolidate and market the FAU model of collaborative education**
- 8.) Reexamine and solidify plans for certificate programs going forward**
- 9.) Consolidate and get approval for SSW development plan from University**
- 10.) Make more investment in grant writing in order to bring in more resources to support graduate research assistants and faculty research.**

#### **4. Final observations**

The School of Social Work at FAU has a very energetic, respectful and cohesive faculty. Among faculty there is a value of forward movement and future orientation, program improvement and advancement. Complacency seems to be absent from the School. The faculty and administrative staff are hardworking, creative and selfless as it relates to putting personal ambitions ahead of the success of the School. School leadership is considerate, consultative and deliberative in making decisions. The leadership of the School is as inclusive as possible. The School is very committed to the social work profession, and each faculty member and educational administrator has appropriate social work credentials. Graduates report very high satisfaction with their degrees and the

department reports near 100% job placement of their graduates, a record that should be boasted about whenever possible. In conclusion, we believe the School is poised to move to ever more regional and national prominence through the implementation of the action plan recommended above.