

EP.09.24

PROPOSAL TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

TITLE: Undergraduate Social Work Major/Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Degree in the School of Social Work

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION:

The proposed undergraduate major in social work prepares graduates for generalist social work practice with vulnerable individuals, groups, families, and communities. The purpose of undergraduate social work education at the School of Social Work is to provide a comprehensive educational experience for students that is grounded in a liberal arts tradition and prepares graduates for excellence in three potential trajectories upon completion of the degree including: professional social work practice; entry into master's degree programs in social work with advanced standing status (entry with foundational competencies met and an overall shorter time-to-degree); and graduate or professional education in such fields as human resources, law, education, non-profit management, religious studies, health professions, and government/public service. The School will seek accreditation for the BSW program from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

The curriculum draws on the latest research and pedagogy in social work and related fields to educate students for practice with culturally diverse populations in a variety of settings. Students will gain skills and competencies to work with vulnerable peoples such as those with developmental disabilities, severe mental illness, substance abuse problems, children who experience abuse and neglect, at-risk older adults and their caregivers, and other underrepresented and impoverished groups.

Admittance into the professional program begins in the junior year. The program will require 50 core hours of professional course work in social work, including 10 hours for a two-semester agency-based field practicum (internship) in order to gain practical social work experience. Students will be placed by the School in social service organizations and matched with an experienced supervisor to guide them in their service delivery. Seniors will be in their internship 2-3 days per week during fall and spring semesters (approximately 510 clock hours). Internships will be completed in local social service agencies within a 30-45 mile radius of campus. All internships will be set up and supervised by the Field Education Office of the School of Social Work. During fall semester of the senior year students will participate in an integrative seminar concurrent with their internship. The curriculum culminates in a capstone professional practice seminar during the spring semester of the senior year. A minimum of 125 total hours is required for the degree.

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OFFICE OF THE SENATE

JUSTIFICATION:

Many of the best and brightest students on our campus are deeply interested in addressing critical societal problems, improving the lives of the most vulnerable citizens, and organizing groups and communities to create new solutions to human problems. An undergraduate social work program at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign would be an ideal vehicle to educate students who have as their goal addressing critical human needs.

Several recent studies have highlighted the need for professional social workers at both the BSW and MSW levels. The social work profession is projected, on average, to grow by 22% by 2016 (Department of Labor), significantly faster than average for all occupations and for other health professions. Projections for new positions at the BSW level are most significant in case management roles to work with older adults, people who have developmental disabilities, long-term mental illness and substance abuse, as well as with children and youth.

Within the State, severe county-wide shortages for mental health professionals, particularly in rural counties and downstate Illinois, suggest that employment in this area will continue to be needed (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/SAMHSA). This trend is consistent with national mental-health employment needs in rural areas. Projections indicate that need for mental health and substance abuse social workers will grow by as much as 30% through 2016. The National Behavioral Health Study has suggested critical shortages within mental health and substance abuse fields, and particularly in the areas of children, youth and their families. Additionally, a deficit within the area of geriatrics is acute. Finally, the field needs professionals who can work effectively with an increasingly diverse population and who are trained to respond with culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions.

Students who take Social Work 200, Introduction to Social Work, have expressed a strong interest in a social work major. A survey conducted last year at the "Majors and Minors Fair" also indicated a strong interest in a major along with expanding undergraduate courses in social work. In addition, students from Parkland and other community colleges involved in the TEAM program are likely candidates.

The School of Social Work on the Urbana campus is uniquely positioned to respond to the needs for highly educated BSW practitioners. With our strong ties to human service agencies throughout central Illinois, we will be able to place students in internships that will prepare them for employment in human services. Our faculty have close ties to state and local agencies for research and ongoing professional education. They also are familiar with the curriculum for BSW education as it is foundational to the MSW curriculum.

The Committee that planned the BSW program is composed of social work faculty, representatives of the social work practice community, a community college representative, representatives of, the Division of General Studies and other campus units. This Committee will continue as the BSW Curriculum Committee. It will be led by a BSW Program Director who will report to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs who reports to the Dean. Course proposals will be reviewed by this committee and then forwarded to the Social Work faculty for vote.

BUDGETARY AND STAFF IMPLICATIONS:

The initial years of the program will partially be supported by internal re-allocation of income associated with teaching SOCW 200, Introduction to Social Work. Over time, enrollment in the program will defray costs associated with its implementation. We project an initial cohort of 25 juniors. We project 50 juniors and 50 seniors within three years. We anticipate hiring a faculty member to serve as program director, a clinical faculty member to direct the field education program and provide instruction, and an academic advisor/student affairs specialist to serve the students and assist in recruitment. The positions of program director and field education director are required by accreditation standards. The courses will also be taught by current faculty who can teach in both BSW and MSW programs, so we anticipate efficiencies in teaching.

Because we already have a social work collection in the university library that supports teaching and research at the graduate level, we do not anticipate much impact on the collection. We will, however, generate the need for additional services as students seek support for their social work classes.

We anticipated the needs of undergraduate students as we planned our new facility. We have sufficient computers and support for smart classrooms in our new space.

As major course work will be provided by courses within the School, there will be minimal impact on other departments for required course work. Students will be advised to select general education courses that help them to expand their knowledge and understanding of people and their environments.

GUIDELINES FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:

The proposed social work major meets the goals of undergraduate education on our campus. In terms of basic abilities, the general education courses, required electives in related areas, and core social work courses will prepare students for critical thinking and innovation, to think quantitatively and qualitatively, and to develop a respect for evidence. We have designed the curriculum with recommended pre-requisites that will provide strong theoretical grounding, particularly in the social and behavioral sciences. This theoretical grounding is further developed in social work classes and amplified through social work research on interventions to address specific human needs.

As a School of Social Work, we are committed to providing a learning environment that models respect for diversity, an understanding of diverse cultures, and the strengths and problems that arise as people from diverse cultures interact. All of these areas are reinforced in both the classroom curriculum and in the internship. In addition, these expectations are mirrored in the accreditation standards which require students to be critical thinkers, use evidence to inform practice, and engage diversity and difference in practice.

As required by the campus, our professional preparation of undergraduate social workers will be directed not just to training for specific jobs, but will be directed to preparing students to critically assess human needs and the social policies and programmatic interventions that respond to those needs. Graduates will be prepared for leadership in their communities, whether

as professional social workers or as citizens who serve in such roles as members of boards of non-profits or serve in the political arena, whether on a local school board or higher elected office.

STATEMENT FOR PROGRAMS OF STUDY CATALOG:

The purpose of undergraduate social work education at the School of Social Work is to provide a comprehensive educational experience for students that is grounded in a liberal arts tradition and prepares graduates for excellence in the areas of social work practice, policy, social engagement and leadership.

The focus of undergraduate curriculum delivery is through a student-centered strengths-based educational model that fosters student learning by providing a challenging, yet supportive environment of high expectations that encourages the development of well-informed and engaged citizens through applied experiences. As required by the Council on Social Work Education, all undergraduate social work majors are placed with a supervisor in an agency-based field practicum (internship). During the senior year students will gain professional social work practice experience 2-3 days per week and will be enrolled in a concurrent integrative seminar course to supplement their field learning. The program will require 50 core hours of professional social work education in the major, including 10 hours for the two-semester internship. A minimum total of 125 hours is required for the degree.

Graduates will be prepared for entry into three potential trajectories upon degree completion including (but not limited to): professional social work practice; entry into master's degree programs in social work with advanced standing status; and career opportunities or graduate education in related areas such as communications, corrections, education, government, health care, human resources, law, non-profit management, religious studies, and public service.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Fall 2009

CLEARANCES:

Signatures:

Shyane S. Kov
Unit Representative:

9-29-08
Date

Shyane S. Kov
College Representative:

9-29-08
Date

Graduate College Representative:

Date

Provost Representative:

Date

Educational Policy Committee Representative:

Date