

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

Social Work (BSW, MSW and Ph.D.)

Date of Review: April 7 - 8, 2014

*In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the undergraduate and graduate Social Work programs delivered by the **School of Social Work**. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out the recommendations that have been selected for implementation. The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.*

Executive Summary of the Cyclical Program Review of the BSW, MSW and Ph.D. Programs in Social Work in the School of Social Work

In accordance with the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the School of Social Work submitted a self-study in March 2014 to the Associate Vice-President (Faculty) and Associate Vice-President and Dean of Graduate Studies to initiate the cyclical program review of its programs. The approved self-study presented program descriptions, learning outcomes, and analyses of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Appendices to the self-study contained all course outlines associated with the program and the CVs for each full-time member in the Department. Two arms-length reviewers, one from British Columbia and one from Calgary and one internal reviewer, selected from a set of proposed reviewers, examined the materials and completed a site visit on April 7 - 8, 2014. The visit included interviews with the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Associate Vice-President (Faculty); Associate Vice-President and Dean of Graduate Studies; and meetings with a group of current Ph.D. and MSW students, full-time faculty and support staff.

The Director of the School of Social Work and the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report (July/August 2014). Specific recommendations were discussed and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation and the committee determined that all the programs that were reviewed were of excellent quality. The QAC recommend that, subject to a satisfactory 18-month interim report, the programs should next be reviewed according to the regular cycle. The Final Assessment Report was prepared by the QAC in February 2015, to be submitted to Graduate Council and Senate.

In their report (May 2014), the Review Team provided feedback that describes how the BSW, MSW and Ph.D. programs in Social Work meet the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) evaluation

criteria and are consistent with the University's mission and academic priorities. The Review Team wrote that the School of Social Work at McMaster University is a well-run, innovative academic unit that offers high quality programs across all levels of education. Based upon a review of the School's self-study and site visit discussions, the review team was confident in saying it remains a leader in social work education on a national level.

The School of Social Work is closely aligned with McMaster University's mandate and direction. It is also a School that receives strong support by senior university administration, and its fit in the Faculty of Social Sciences appears to a good fit. It was the Reviewers' sense that the School of Social Work is a leader within the institution in terms of community engagement, student experience and community-based research. It demonstrates the potential to be a "flagship" school for McMaster University in these areas.

The reviewers' report noted that a recent accreditation review conducted by the Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE) concluded that the School's BSW and MSW programs are of the highest quality. The IQAP review team concurred with this conclusion. The social work PhD program at McMaster University was started in 2008 so it is still evolving. At this point, however, the PhD program appears to be solid. The curriculum focus is typical of social work PhD programs across Canada, and expectations for students are appropriate for a high quality PhD program.

The Reviewers further noted that the School enjoys the contributions of a strong faculty and staff complement. It has an experienced and competent Director and the current transition to a new Director is being managed very capably and smoothly. Other administrators in the Faculty, such as those who manage field placements, are also very experienced and skillful. There is a strong, collective commitment to the School demonstrated by faculty, staff, students and community constituents. Together these elements have created an academic unit that functions well internally, with a culture of inclusiveness and openness that would be envied by any school across the country. These elements have also helped establish the School as a highly respected organization in the community, and many external human service agencies in the region express a particular affiliation to McMaster University as a result.

There are of course current challenges faced by the School. The Reviewers' report noted that the School appears to be at a crossroad in terms of making decisions about its identity and future directions. The combined BA/BSW program is undoubtedly going to be impacted by the dwindling three-year BA reality in Ontario. The School could choose to focus on a four-year honours BSW program in response. There is also opportunity to create a two-year MSW program for post-BA students. This, however, would shift the unique nature of the School and create some challenges in managing diverse student populations. The review team also identified options for other Master's degrees that the School could lead within the institution.

The Review Team's general conclusion is that the School of Social Work is an academic unit marked by a remarkable culture of trust, collegiality, respect, excitement, critical consciousness, and ethical responsibility. These attributes have profoundly shaped the School. Moreover, what makes the School stand out with regard to these qualities is the embeddedness of these qualities across the School's constituencies; in teaching, administration, and scholarship; and in everyday social relations. In short, McMaster University should rightfully be very proud of the School of Social Work for its people, programs and position within the community.

The following program strengths and weaknesses were noted:

Strengths

- The School offers an outstanding program at the bachelor's level, with many unique features that are envied by the reviewers
- There is a strong sense of collegiality within the School
- The graduate programs are of excellent quality

Weaknesses

- At the time of the review, several issues were raised around the combined BA/BSW program. These are however being addressed, as this program is being phased out and a 4-year BSW program is being put in place
- Issues around the School's practicum database were raised; however these have been addressed by new funding that has been provided for new software
- There were several suggested enhancements to the MSW program, including potential for expansion by introducing (a) new program(s) that require further careful analysis and implementation
- Questions were raised around the adequacy of the faculty complement to provide necessary mentorship for PhD students and ongoing coordination of field placements. The faculty complement will require careful attention as several retirements are expected in the near future
- The reviewers noted that graduate student funding rates are not competitive with other similar institutions; this issue is to some extent beyond the School's control, but several initiatives are under way to address some of these concerns
- Increased diversity of the student body would be desirable; several initiatives have been implemented in this direction

The Director of the School of Social Work submitted a response to the Reviewers' Report (July 2014). The (Acting) Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences submitted his response to the Reviewers' Report and the Program's Response in September 2014. Specific recommendations were discussed, along with follow-up actions to aid in addressing the recommendations.

The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, in consultation with the Director of the School shall be responsible for monitoring the recommendation implementation plan. The details of the progress made will be presented in the 18-month Follow-up Report and filed in the Associate Vice-President, Faculty's Office and in the School of Graduate Studies.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the School's and Dean's Responses ***Recommendations for Undergraduate Programs***

1. Decisions around the implementation of a new practicum database need to be settled.

Response: The School noted that the limitations of the current "community connections" database system are well known at the School and well understood at the Faculty level. Program staff have identified a very promising system, designed specifically for managing field education programs and well tested and reviewed by field staff and faculty at the University of Calgary. A description and budget for initial and ongoing costs is currently being prepared and will be presented to the Acting Dean.

The Dean has advised that since the Review Team's visit, the School requested funding from the Faculty of Social Sciences for a new database system and the Faculty has been able to provide the funds to replace the practicum database.

Responsibility for Following Up: Director of the School

Timeline: Update at 18-month follow up report

2. Sustaining and diversifying quality of field placements and community connections

Response: The School noted that reviewers applauded the recently secured contractually-limited appointment (3 years, effective July 2014) with responsibility for developing and supporting placements in non-traditional settings. The reviewers recognized that, with current pressures on social services and concomitant demands on the time and attention of the social workers, quality field placements are more difficult to achieve and require increasingly creative arrangements and support. In light of changing conditions in the field, they recommended that this position be considered a permanent requirement, necessary to sustain the field education program in collaboration with the Faculty Field Coordinator. The School also noted that the reviewers urged careful planning around the anticipated retirement within the next few years of the current Field Education Coordinator.

The Dean highlighted that the field education component is key to the School's undergraduate programs and one of the long-recognized strengths of the School. To support quality field education, the School recently secured a new three year contractually limited appointment and the Faculty will work with the School to develop a coherent succession plan for the Director of Field Education position.

Responsibility for Following Up: Dean and Director of the School

Timeline: Update at 18 month follow up report.

3. Ensure that practice-focused classes are of sizes that permit the integration of skills and theory necessary for professional practice.

Response: The School noted that this recommendation will be taken up in the planned transition from the BA/BSW to the Honours BSW.

The Dean advised that the Faculty supports the School's efforts to review the structure of the undergraduate program and that an honours four-year BSW would be in keeping with the direction being explored by other academic units in the Faculty.

Responsibility for Following Up: Director, School of Social Work

Timeline: Update at 18-month follow up report

4. Increase the flexibility in the undergraduate program

Response: The School anticipates that the upcoming reorganization of the BA/BSW into an honours BSW will directly address the concerns surrounding workload and scheduling for students. The undergraduate education committee will also consider suggestions from the reviewers to introduce further flexibility.

The Dean noted that the reorganization to an honours BSW will allow for greater flexibility in the undergraduate program.

Responsibility for Following Up: Director of the School with the undergraduate education committee

Timeline: Update at 18-month report

5. Diversity Initiatives: Increase attention to diversity in the curriculum and increase the diversity of the student body

Response: The School highlights that alongside ongoing activities of School committees and caucuses, the recently awarded Forward with Integrity grant for Faculty Development will enhance instructors'

capacities for teaching and learning about Indigenous-Settler relations. The project will also support instructors to appropriately integrate Indigenous practices of healing, helping, community building and activism into the social work curriculum. This project will be implemented over the 2014-2015 academic year.

Faculty members and School staff have recently initiated discussions with Human Rights and Equity Services to develop a plan for further diversifying the Social Work study body. An early initiative will involve a review of the Social Work Admissions Test (SWAT) and testing process, with the aim of introducing principals of universal design. Easily managed changes will be introduced in 2015, and a more long-term plan for changes in admissions, program structure and student supports developed over the following years. This work will necessarily occur in concert with campus partners, particularly Student Accessibility Services.

The Dean noted that the School is also currently reviewing ways to diversify its student body through changes to its admissions process and to better integrate anti-oppressive content across the curriculum in its undergraduate and graduate programs.

Responsibility for Following Up: Director of the School

Timeline: Follow up at 18-month report

Recommendations for MSW Program

6. Improve research course sequencing and make logic of courses more visible

Response: The Director of the School advised that the instructors of the MSW research courses are meeting with the School's Director and Chair of Graduate Studies to review the issue highlighted by some MSW students about the merits of having two research focused courses, and to consider changes to better support all students in designing, implementing and writing up their thesis research. The reviewers noted that the conversation about the research courses is linked in part to admissions requirements (especially the requirement for work experience), a topic that will also be considered in the planned meeting.

Responsibility for Following Up: Director of the School

Timeline: Follow up at 18-month report

7. Opportunities for expansion at the Master's level (suggestions: A two-year MSW (either alongside or replacing the current post-degree BSW), an MA in Community-Engaged Research & Evaluation or an MA/MSW in Ethical Leadership)

Response: The school advised that a task group has been struck to move forward with planning at the MA level. They are currently developing curriculum models, and exploring costs, for a Master's in Ethical Human Service Leadership. At the same time the task group is exploring models of 2-year (and 2+ year) MSWs. The group is considering whether and how it might be possible to sustain the unique and valued character of the School's current graduate program while at the same time preparing students well for advanced social work practice.

The Dean noted that the introduction of a new Master's program in Ethical Human Service Leadership would help maintain the unique nature of the School and ensure that it does not directly compete with neighbouring schools of social work.

Responsibility for Following Up: Director of the School with task force

Timeline: Update at 18-month report

Recommendations for Ph.D. Program

8. Ensure senior faculty are replaced so that supervisory capacity and experience is not eroded.

Response: The School noted that with respect to supervisory supports, students drew reviewers'

attention to the School's relatively small faculty complement. The recent hire of an Assistant Professor will go some distance to easing this concern. At the same time reviewers again flagged upcoming retirements at the School, and indicated that at minimum the current faculty-student ratio needs to be maintained in order to support the quality of instruction and supervision at the PhD level.

9. Improve access to wider range of scholarship (scholars, ideas, literatures)

Response: The School advised that this topic will be taken up by the School's Graduate Studies in the fall.

Responsibility for Following Up: Director of the School

Timeline: Follow up at 18-month report

10. Student supports: Increase flexibility in program structure and make funding rates more competitive.

Response: The School acknowledged that students raised concerns with reviewers about the expectation to complete in four years, and the limits placed on paid work hours. The School noted that the expectation for completion in four years is especially ill suited to the School's doctoral students, who typically enter the program with substantial practice and/ or research experience, established professional careers and ongoing community engagements. While the School has strategies in place to support students through varied trajectories, policies set elsewhere in the University and beyond are not immediately amenable to intervention by the School. The School also mentioned that the reviewers commented favourably on the high levels of support provided to students on their fellowship applications, a practice the School intends to continue.

The Dean suggested that reducing the flexibility in the timing of comprehensive examinations may be one way to help move students through the program in a timely manner. The Dean noted that the Faculty will continue to work with the School of Graduate Studies to ensure that graduate student funding is adequate and competitive.

Responsibility for Following Up: Dean and Director of School

Timeline: Update at 18-month follow up report

11. Overarching Resource Considerations

Space: Reviewers noted that there is particular pressure for space that can accommodate private meetings and meetings with students. In anticipation of a new MA program, space concerns can become more acute.

Response: The School recognizes that there is no immediate solution to the space constraints, but anticipates that these will ease considerably once Wilson Hall is built. In the meantime, the School will continue to use existing space as creatively as possible.

The Dean further notes that in the longer term, McMaster is also considering expansion into a downtown campus, which could free some space on the main campus in the years ahead.

12. Faculty Resources: The reviewers urged strategic succession planning in anticipation of the retirements of three of the school's most senior and experienced faculty members. Specific recommendations included mid career replacements for the former Director and the Faculty Field Education Coordinator and an extension of the current CLA position for Field Development and Support.

Response:

The Dean noted that faculty resources are an ongoing concern for the School and the anticipated retirements of senior colleagues will make this issue all the more acute. The Faculty remains committed to ensuring a strong faculty complement in the School and the Dean is hopeful to be able to provide a mid-career replacement for one of these two positions. Longer term plans to convert the 3 year CLA

position into a teaching track appointment will be discussed with the School and will depend, in part, on the School's ability to expand enrollment. The effects of the university's new budget model are still unclear for the Faculty's ability to increase the size of the faculty cohort, but the Dean will be in a better position in the coming year to know whether it is possible to convert the CLA position.

Responsibility for Following Up: Dean and Director of School

Timeline: Update at 18-month Follow up

Quality Assurance Committee Recommendations

The Committee finds that the programs are of excellent quality, and that the review raises a number of important but not critical points that could be addressed to improve the programs. Subject to satisfactory progress in addressing these issues being demonstrated in the 18-month follow-up report, the Committee recommends that the program proceed to the next review at the normal time, i.e. at 8 years after the present review.