

Social Work Program Review

Reviewers: Brad Lundahl, Ph.D., Director Ph.D. Program in Social Work, University of Utah
Mequette Sorensen, MSW, CSW, Director of Social Work, Salt Lake Community College
Carla Trentelman, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Weber State University
Kristin Hadley, Ph.D., Department of Teacher Education, Weber State University

It was our pleasure to review the Weber State University's Social Work Program. Below we note our findings using the structure provided in the review material. In addition, we provide a narrative summary with recommendations. Our findings represent a common agreement of the four reviewers and were derived from reviewing the written materials supplied to us, interviews with faculty, staff, administration, students, and community partners.

Standard A: Mission Statement

Strengths

- The Mission Statement is clearly defined.
- The Mission Statement is clearly aligned with the mission of social work.

Weaknesses/Challenges

- The Mission Statement lacks clear evidence that objectives are monitored and measured, which could be easily rectified by inserting language that indicates where and how the objectives are evaluated.

Standard B: Curriculum

Strengths

- The curriculum aligns with the values of social work.
- The curriculum effectively prepares students to function in expected community roles as stated by field supervisors and students.
- The curriculum strongly prepares students for employment and/or graduate education.
- Courses are offered for students as needed.
- Both students and field supervisors report that the capstone project is highly valued as it integrates the curriculum and forms a bridge to professional responsibilities. However, students desired a better understanding earlier in their coursework of how the foundational courses fit into overall programming.

Weaknesses/Challenges

- The reviewers hold significant and consistent concerns regarding the lack of resources allocated to support the ongoing educational programming. Specifically, there are concerns that faculty are overworked, weakening their capacity for creative innovation.
 - As the program looks toward the new EPAS requirements, the review committee is concerned that the faculty members must have more time to innovate and develop curriculum to meet these requirements. This may be accomplished, in part, through filling the open faculty position(s).

Standard C: Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Strengths

- Student learning outcomes are clear.
- Evaluation of learning objectives in the practicum is well defined.
- Field supervisors report that student requirements are well defined. However, the self-study does not clearly present this observation, thereby missing an opportunity to show the excellence of the program.
- Reports from students, faculty, and field placement representatives suggest the program is of high quality.

Weaknesses/Challenges

- Reported measures do not give a clear picture of student learning.
- While the review team identified evidence of program quality from students, faculty, and field placement reports, the team is concerned that the program may not be getting credit for the good work they are doing. Increased resources (time, financial support, additional faculty) from the college are needed to create and systematically implement an effective assessment approach that directly measures student outcomes.

Standard D: Academic Advising

Strengths

- Students report effective advising, both prior to admission and during the program
 - Advising effectiveness was noted for program planning and assistance in career-related decision making.
 - Faculty acting in the advising role also serve as role models of effective social work practice.

Weaknesses/Challenges

- Academic advising adds one more additional expectation on an already overworked faculty. The review committee is curious why program-specific advisors are not available for students, especially when faculty are already so stretched in terms of time. Non-faculty, program-specific advising is available on other campuses as well as for some other programs at Weber State.

Standard E: Faculty

Strengths

- We emphatically believe the faculty are phenomenal, as evidenced by their enthusiasm, devotion to students, and commitment to student development through teaching, advising, and practicum placement. This was reiterated through comments from both students and field supervisors.
- The faculty provide opportunities for students to collaborate on research projects as well as obtain volunteer and leadership opportunities through the Social Work Club.
- Faculty collaborative spirit is evident. This was reported from the students, faculty, support staff, Dean, and community agency representatives.

Weaknesses/Challenges

- We emphatically believe the faculty are extraordinarily overworked. All faculty teach a substantial number of courses in overload. This must impact programming, professional development, energy for creative and innovative thought, opportunities for service, and thoughtful assessment of the overall effectiveness and delivery of the program.
 - We recommend that as a start the College immediately fill the vacant social work tenure-track faculty position.
 - Out of concern for individual faculty and the program, the committee urges the program to consider the long-term sustainability of the number of overload credit hours that individual faculty are teaching. While we commend the faculty on the success of the program, our concern is that continuing this workload may lead to faculty burnout, thereby placing the program at risk.
- Faculty need to meet more regularly in department/program meetings.

Standard F: Program Support

Strengths

- The department secretary and the college librarian provide excellent services and support.

Weaknesses/Challenges

- We are concerned with the dilution of the secretary's hours devoted to the Social Work Department.

Standard G: Relationship with External Communities

Strengths

- Community partners report that faculty show high desire and capacity to support community programming resulting in well prepared students and excellent partnerships. This represents a true advantage to the community and demonstrates the value of social work. The review committee strongly believes that Weber State benefits from this productive partnership.

- The above dynamic has led field supervisors to preferentially value Weber State Social Work students over students from neighboring institutions both in practicum placements and in employment.

Weaknesses/Challenges

- The practicum supervisors indicated that it would be useful to have opportunities to get together to network and collaborate with other community agencies – however, this may not be the role of WSU's Social Work Program.
 - This type of event has existed in the past but was discontinued due to lack of resources. The review committee also recognizes that this event may be outside the purview of the program responsibilities.
- Field supervisors indicate a need for continuing instruction on professional boundaries between clients and the students.

Standard H: Program Summary

In summary,

- The Weber State Social Work Program should be commended for
 - Faculty activity that promotes student enthusiasm and learning, and training which prepares them for practicum work, employment, and graduate school
 - Faculty who are collaborative and committed to high level education
- It is the opinion of the review team that the Weber State Social Work Program needs more resources to maintain its current programming and to innovate for future programming. Further, the current resource allocation appears to put the program at risk given the excessive work load of each faculty member. The lack of resources could easily interfere with many routine program activities such as meeting to plan, evaluate, and innovate.