

November 3, 2021

Dear Students of the Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work,

As you may know, the School recently announced plans to modernize our MSW program to ensure the education we offer best addresses the complex and evolving realities of the lives of those we serve, and that we offer it in a way that best supports our future social workers. I want to update you on the status of our proposed modernization, the deliberate and inclusive process by which we seek its approval, and what the program will look like if approved by all parties.

Our proposed, modernized program was first approved by the School's Curriculum Council, the committee responsible for decisions that shape the goals, structure, and content of our academic programs. The program was then approved by the School's governing body, the Faculty Council, which shares governance with the Dean.

After approval by these two councils, changes of this scale must also be approved by our full, 140-plus member faculty in order to move forward. Faculty voting on the proposed program is currently under way and results are expected in the coming weeks. These votes are all advisory to Dean Gehlert, who makes decisions based in part on the deliberations of the full faculty.

Should the proposed program be endorsed by the Dean, it will be submitted to the University for consideration by February 11, 2022. Should the program be approved at the University level, we will launch it in Fall 2022. This also is when we expect to admit the final cohort of students into our existing program.

The proposed program will still lead to a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, but there are notable differences between it and our existing MSW program.

The existing program offers three specializations: (1) Adult Mental Health & Wellness (AMHW); (2) Children, Youth and Families (CYF); and (3) Social Change and Innovation (SCI). The existing curriculum provides specialized training through coursework and a field placement in the area of specialization.

The proposed curriculum, on the other hand, will offer a single specialization—Integrative Social Work (ISW). While the existing curriculum offers specializations that revolve around practice methods and client populations, settings and systems, the curriculum for the proposed ISW program will offer specialized training solely around practice methods. The proposed curriculum is designed to provide training that will prepare students to practice *across* populations, settings and systems. This will better prepare our graduates for the complex world that they will be facing upon graduation.

Although training specific to client populations, settings and systems will not be included in the curriculum of the proposed ISW program, it will be addressed through augmented field training experiences. Because



of this, fewer required and elective courses will be necessary to complete the MSW degree, while still allowing for the best possible social work education. The proposed ISW program will meet and even exceed requirements necessary for accreditation through our accrediting body, the Council on Social Work Education. We expect the curricula and training in the proposed ISW program to be more rigorous than the curricula and training in the existing program. Fewer classes allows for greater attention in each course offered.

Students will be able to opt to take additional courses beyond the 42-unit basic model. We are working with key players in the field to design optional courses, such as courses in Addiction Science. These will support students with specific goals as they prepare for work in specialty areas.

Throughout the remainder of the year, we will continue to engage with various constituencies, particularly students, as we finalize conceptualization of the Integrative Social Work MSW and plan for its implementation. As we have always intended, we will collaborate closely with our School's Student Organization to determine how best to glean Suzanne Dworak-Peck student perspectives, voices and expertise in the ongoing decision-making, planning, and implementation of the proposed ISW program, subject to University approval.

Current students who will be continuing students in the Fall 2022 semester will have the option of completing the existing program or changing specializations to enroll in the proposed program. Although various approvals of the proposed program are pending, we will develop plans to help current students continuing into the Fall 2022 semester understand their program options. We expect to disseminate this information for students before the end of the Spring 2022 semester.

Students planning to complete their degree before Fall 2022 should continue to enroll in courses required to complete our existing program.

Over the next few months, we will share more material describing the proposed curriculum and how it compares with existing curricula. We will hold drop-in sessions for those interested in learning more and a Town Hall meeting with the Dean and administrators.

As a School community, our responsibility to our students, our profession, and the populations we serve is to strengthen our capacity to train and support future social workers. This proposed revision of our curriculum grew out of the very heart of our mission. We will continue to provide updates as the process unfolds.

In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns about the proposed program, please contact your academic advisor or Dr. June Wiley, MSW Program Chair, at june.wiley@usc.edu.

Sincerely,



Sarah Gehlert, MA, MSW, PhD
Dean and Ernest P. Larson Professor of Health, Ethnicity and Poverty