

## Visit Report University of Maryland Baltimore School of Social Work

Drs. Halaevalu Vakalahi and Susan Tebb were authorized by the Council on Social Work Education Commission on Accreditation to conduct the second follow-up site visit on behalf of the Commission to the University of Maryland School Of Social Work held virtually September 10 & 11, 2020. The visit was in regard to a complaint which was filed on September 15, 2017. Dean Richard P. Barth received a letter from the Commission on Accreditation on December 4, 2017 informing him of the complaint, regarding non-compliance of the master's social work program with the 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards 3.0.1, 3.0.2, 3.0.3, and 3.19. An initial visit was held September 2018 by Drs. Antoinette Farmer and Beverly Black. The Executive Committee of the COA determined following review of the visit report and response from the program that the program would provide an interim report in summer 2019 and a second visit would be made summer 2020 to assess the progress the program was making on the steps that they selected to begin to develop a culture change around Standard 3.0.1, 3.0.2, & 3.0.3.

***Accreditation Standard 3.0.1*** The program describes the specific and continuous efforts to provide a learning environment that models affirmation and respect for diversity and difference.

***Accreditation Standard 3.0.2*** The program explains how these efforts provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

***Accreditation Standard 3.0.3*** The program describes specific plans to continually improve the learning environment to affirm and support persons with diverse identities.

The Program's 2019 interim report provided a written update on the implementation of the following items, which they shared as the School's plan to address the noted Standards in AS 3.0 with Drs. Black and Farmer in Fall 2018:

- 1) instituting a required foundation level diversity course for students; (2) creating a special diversity and anti-oppression committee; (3) hiring a diversity officer; and, (4) providing additional training/development for faculty; (5) developing diversity and anti-oppression trainings for faculty, staff and students, improving teaching, and increasing self-awareness; (6) creating more inclusive physical and social spaces; (7) increasing opportunities for faculty, students and staff engagement; (8) searching for diverse faculty; (9) preparing field instructors and field liaisons; (10) updating marketing materials; (11) adopting a diversity statement; and (12) hosting diversity-related events

During this September 2020 visit both Drs. Vakalahi and Tebb met with program administrators, students, faculty, and staff from the Baltimore, Shady Grove and Baltimore County Campuses to discuss the implementation and effects of these efforts on the learning environment as noted in the letter that went to the then dean in October 2018. An updated written report entitled *CSWE Complaint Updated Progress August 2019-August 2020* written by Amanda Lehning, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs/MSW Program was shared with Drs. Vakalahi and Tebb prior to the September 10 & 11, 2020 virtual visit.

### **Meetings and Summaries:**

**Master's Program Committee**-Attended by the MPC Chair Dr. Joan Davitt and 7 members including the student representative. This committee has oversight of the new required foundation course 610, the noncredit online required foundation pre-requisite course 690 on the history of oppression (fall 2020 is first semester both courses are required) and the field foundation seminar implemented in fall 2019. The online 690 is available to faculty, staff, and field liaisons; a number of them have taken advantage of this opportunity. The University's President has requested a similar version to be made for all at the University. A field seminar for foundation students is also offered to address issues of DEI encountered in practicum. Likewise, there is also training of the faculty who offer these courses. One area requiring immediate attention is how to get all faculty to attend non-mandatory trainings. Offering the trainings on Saturdays have made it more available for a number of the adjunct faculty to attend.

Formal assessment of the courses and trainings will be conducted moving forward. Nevertheless, a student expressed that taking the courses has given her a good foundation for herself and her work as a social worker. Faculty noted that they are seeing more awareness of DEI issues in the student body, a shift in the curriculum content and culture in the SSW over the last two years, and that the SSW has come a long way owning its challenges with DEI and committing to do better. Faculty shared the plan to redo course evaluations in order to engage more constructive feedback around how and what the courses are doing in the content of DEI. Faculty indicated that they are beginning see the integration of DEI content in syllabi thus helping DEI conversations to happen in more courses and classrooms. The field office is offering field instructors training this academic year, 20-21.

Assessment tools are beginning to be refined, diversity/inclusion/equity experiences have begun to be implemented, content on social justice and pervasive efforts on diversity have begun to be integrated across the curriculum. Participants stated that cultural humility, anti-bias, anti-racism, and anti-oppression is embraced in the SSW.

### **Diversity and Anti-Oppression (DAO) /Diversity Implementation Group (DIG)**

**Committees**-Attended by Dr. Neijima Celestine-Donnor, the recently hired (August 2020) Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion with 9 members, a mix of staff, students and faculty. This committee began as a work group in 2009 and then in 2014 became an official School committee that focuses on internal School efforts in regard to DEI issues. Meetings are open to any member of the SSW community. At the beginning of each academic year the committee plans what the focus will be for the current year. In 2019-20 working to be more inclusive and representative it was decided that the co-chair should be a student. In 2019-2020 the committee worked on how to improve faculty and staff training on implicit bias, signage and procurement of gender neutral restrooms. Participants noted that the fundamentals have been developed through the curriculum and trainings and now it is time to see the change in the SSW's culture. Students were very involved in the hiring of the new Dean and the Assistant Dean for DEI. Participants indicated that the SSW is moving from a place of crises and reactivity to proactivity and no longer checking off a "to do list" but rather moving forward strategically achieving goals.

DAO/DIG are looking forward to a reorganization of the administration for a unified new leadership; refining their approaches to DEI in a more connected, organized, and coordinated way; continuous training of faculty and staff; developing ways to assess accountability as a priority by monitoring commitments, incidents, trends, responses to issues of DEI; refining definitions and commitments to actions using data to inform decisions; facilitating continuous deep dives into difficult conversations about institutional oppression; and sustainability of plans and efforts relative to DEI. The SSW is working towards declaring itself as an anti-oppression, anti-racism organization.

**Staff Meeting-**Attended by 11 staff consisting of Baltimore and Shady Grove campuses. The SSW staff created a new Staff Council this past academic year as a catalyst for inclusion. Prior, the staff felt that they had no process for their voices to be heard. Staff noted that they often felt ignored, especially in the area of communication. For a number of years they have asked to have staff names and pictures online as part of the school. Staff indicated that they would like to attend faculty meetings or have representatives to attend and they will invite administration to attend Staff Committee meetings. "Working from home" since March has highlighted communication issues to all, especially that not all in the School receive the same communications.

The executive committee of the Staff Council will be launching their efforts this semester. Staff shared that communication of diversity content, marketing materials, information, and artifacts is indeed supporting diversity and difference in their SSW environment. Currently, there is a more open line of communication, to have the hard conversations. The new leadership is initialing new opportunities for addressing diversity and difference. Staff name and photo are now on the website, visible.

**Faculty Meeting-** Attended by 13 people, adjuncts, clinical, tenure-track, BSW, MSW from the three campuses. The BSW faculty at UM Baltimore County began working on adapting/adding DEI curriculum content prior to the UMB MSW complaint. They do not have a required course but have worked hard to make sure this content is in all courses and trainings have been implemented for faculty, staff, field instructors/liaisons, and students. The BSW faculty is very diverse. The UMBC campus has a different administrative structure than UMB and the President of this campus made DEI content in curriculum and training a priority for all on the UMBC campus.

In discussion the visitors learned that Field has created videos required for Field Instructors and a separate video for students. Office of Student Affairs and Services (OSAS) is emphasizing supportive services and does not want to be seen as punitive, but rather a place where students belong and can thrive. The OSAS sees 40 to 45 students per month and is working with the Student Government Association (SGA). Also a Faculty Teaching Support Program was implemented fall 2019 to support instructor knowledge, capacity and skills in creating and maintaining *Brave Spaces*. A *Brave Space* is an environment that challenges both faculty, students and staff to have discussions on difficult and sensitive topics in the classrooms, trainings, conferences, webinars, peer coaching circles, and workshops. The trainings offered on DEI are open to all faculty and staff on the three campuses.

Moving forward, the plan is to make more deliberate hires of people of color in staff and faculty positions as they did fall of 2019. The new Dean and the Assistant Dean for Diversity are committed to hiring diverse faculty infusing the commitment to DEI into revised job descriptions, recruitment materials, equity training for hires, and in creating a pipeline of people of color prior to completing the PhD. Once hired the SSW noted they must work on retaining these faculty of color.

### **Student Meetings**

**Shady Grove MSW**-Attended by 4 students, 3 in advanced year and one in generalist year. Students indicated that being at a remote site was challenging in terms of attending meetings, events, and accessing forms, etc. In March when all students in the program were transitioned to online format, these issues rose to the forefront because all students were affected.

The one generalist year student who is taking the required anti-oppression course 610 noted that it is offering her the platform for discussion around DEI issues. She suggested that additional information about immigrants be added to the 690 history of oppression pre-requisite course. Those that are in the advanced year wish the course had been required for them because one stated she needed a place to have DEI discussions. Students expressed appreciation for the conversations around privilege and oppression in their practice courses and for those professors who intentionally challenged them on issues of DEI.

**University of Maryland Baltimore County Campus BSW students**- Attended by 4 students with diverse interests in macro and micro SW. Several are Title IVE students who stated that their training is excellent in offering them support and guidance on having DEI, racism, oppression, social justice conversations with colleagues and clients. They commend the BSW program's commitment to ensuring that their voices are heard and responses are made. They commented that their professors make classrooms respectful of everyone, their syllabi incorporate DEI, and they engage students in service. They did note that a course like the MSW course dedicated to the topic of DEI would be very beneficial for them. Their courses offered DEI content and a place for discussion on race, but more is needed on the other "isms" especially disability and LGBTIQ.

**Baltimore MSW (first group)**-Attended by 12 students mostly student leaders of various organizations in the SSW and campus. The group was a mix of both generalist and advanced year students. Several had been in the pilot courses for the development of both the 610 and 690 courses. They expressed appreciation for the 610 and 690 courses. Students noted that the first year of the Field Seminar was not as effective in dealing with DEI issues as they had hoped. The Seminar's success depended on which liaison was teaching it. The Seminar did not have a syllabus so they were not aware that DEI issues were part of the course until they talked with other students and field faculty. Due to the lack of a syllabus they felt they were not able to evaluate the Seminar as well as they would have liked.

Students also noted that communication between students and faculty/administration is not clear and often only one-way without much opportunity for students to communicate back to faculty/administration. There is a lack of mechanisms for feedback, avenues to let SSW know that things are not going well with students. Students expressed that the SSW has symbolically

addressed DEI issues but now they are anxious to see if what has been put into place will change the culture. They are very aware that they will not be around to see the results of the efforts that have been made and are being made, but that a culture shift is happening. They are also aware of the importance of lifelong learning after graduating from the MSW program.

Students shared that there is inconsistency among faculty in terms of the quality of addressing anti-racism, anti-oppression, anti-stigma. With some faculty students know they'll have an amazing experience on the topic of DEI and with other faculty discussions do not occur or are not very supportive or welcoming. Some faculty are braver and comfortable calling out discriminatory perspectives and behaviors while others are not comfortable daring to engage. One student expressed frustration with the responsibility as a student to call out the problem and believes that it is the SSW's responsibility to evaluate and find out the problems that students are facing.

Students asked for transparency on the SSW's history with DEI issues. They asked for accountability and better avenues for communication and responses to needs relative to anti-oppression, power, privilege, racism. They shared that this past summer, student leaders organized meetings with alumni to learn more about the history at the SSW and then took it upon themselves to create a timeline of the history of anti-racist efforts within the SSW. They asked for a timeline and a digestible summary of these efforts be readily available on the SSW website.

**Baltimore MSW (2<sup>nd</sup> group)**- Attended by 7 students about evenly divided generalist and advanced year. They shared that courses 610 and 690 talk about resistance, empowerment, social identity. They noted that they have seen more content on LGBTIQ issues in their classes. They felt that most faculty were attempting to do a good job to add DEI content into all the courses, addressing difficult issues from an anti-racism, anti-oppression perspective. They expressed that these topics are the basic foundation for being a good social worker.

Students noted that the SSW can do better in diversity areas across the board, for example, needing more helpful tools, dealing with power differences, and ensuring change. They indicated that mandatory trainings on these issues should be for all students and faculty, which might offer more a consistent experience across the program in relationship to DEI issues. It was suggested that there be a better course evaluation (faculty have said that they are working on redoing the course evaluations so that the evaluation addresses DEI content and how well the course integrates this content into the course subject). They noted that there needs to be shared responsibility for good communication between students and faculty/administration. Students shared that Field Seminar does not have a syllabus and that experiences with DEI depends on the liaison. They stressed the lack of accountability, transparency, and communication and the need for intentional hiring and investing in SW values and SSW mission not just in a class but throughout the SSW.

**Administration Meeting**-Dean Judy Postmus; Amanda Lehning Associate Dean for Academic Affairs/MSW Program; Shelly Wiechelt Chair and Associate Dean BSW Program; and Neijma Celestine-Donner Assistant Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. (There has been a significant change in the SSW's leadership in the last few months.)

Suggestions noted from the eight previous virtual meetings were shared:

Shared communication; better course evaluations; mandatory training for all faculty, staff and students; syllabus for field seminar in the generalist year.

- Continue to strengthen the diversity courses to offer to both BSW and MSW, create a field seminar syllabus and course evaluation.
- Continue to train faculty in order to address the inconsistency in their teaching of DEI.
- Continue to improve and foster accountability, transparency, and two-way communication.
- Continue to move towards the SSW's goal to declare the SSW as an anti-oppression, anti-racism organization.
- Facilitate Staff Council bridging staff and faculty communication and engaging in conversations about career ladder and promotion.
- Continue to strengthen organizational culture, policies and practices relative to DEI.
- Continue to work on ensuring access and a sense of belonging for satellite campus.
- Create better avenues for expression of concerns and ideas and monitoring responses and actions taken.
- Continue to monitor culture shift.
- Engage participants' sentiment that a major part of the SSW's sustainability plan is a unified leadership with the new Dean and the Assistant Dean for Diversity.