

CENTRAL FOCUS ON DIVERSITY

The Social Work Department agreed on the following “Statement on Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Diversity” in February, 1993:

Our goal is to make this Department a place where cultural competence can grow and where racism and oppression will wither. We are committed to appreciating variations in racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and in class, gender, age, physical and mental ability, religion, and sexual orientation. We see the differences among ourselves -- faculty, staff, and students -- as strengths and resources for us to tap. Welcoming diversity and understanding how we differ and what we share in common are first steps in our lifelong pursuit of ethnically sensitive and culturally competent social work education and practice. We are committed, also, to increasing the diversity of department resources by:

- Promoting affirmative action in hiring;
- Actively seeking training and renewal in ethnically sensitive practice for faculty, staff and field supervisors and students;
- Expanding and enriching our BSW and MSW curricula with readings, media and guest presentation which reflect the broad spectrum of human cultures;
- Advocating on behalf of oppressed groups in our communities;
- Serving on communities and task forces working to solve the problems of racism, hatred, and discrimination;
- Lobbying for legislation and policies intended to make our society more just; treating each other with respect and holding each other accountable to challenge racism; and
- Supporting each other in our efforts to become more ethnically sensitive and culturally competent.

Thus, we recognize that appreciation of differences as strengths and creative resources is a necessary, but not sufficient step in building a just community. Onto our willingness to learn about and to understand other cultures and other points of view, we consciously and vigorously add our determination to point out and to fight racism and other forms of oppression toward people. In our local region oppression has been especially evident in the disproportionate number of women and children who are poor, in the disproportionate number of children of color who are placed out of their homes, in the disproportionate number of older women of color who are without adequate housing or health care, in the disproportionate number of men of color in correctional facilities, in the recent rise in verbal harassment and violent attacks on women and gay and lesbian people, in the increase of anti-Semitic acts and cross-burnings, and in the still-limited number of staff and students of color serving in our social services agencies. To prepare faculty, staff and students to recognize oppression, discrimination, and both covert and overt racism on individual and institutional levels, we will include anti-racism content and skills in each course.

We are committed to address our own issues of racism through honest, direct dialogue with each other, through continuing scholarship, through reading, writing and participating in workshops, retreats, and cultural events and through listening to others -- students, practitioners, representatives from community and users of social work services whose ethnic or cultural backgrounds differ from our own. Further, we are concentrating on increasing awareness of assumed or presumed privilege based on membership in a group that historically has oppressed others in Minnesota.

The goal of these initiatives is to offer each faculty member, staff and student in our Program a supportive climate and substantial information upon which to build ethnically sensitive and culturally competent practice so that we each can grow as human beings and combat racism effectively together. Each student is required to develop skills in helping clients from diverse backgrounds. The Department has traditional ties to global studies and some faculty and students have experience and knowledge in international social work. This skill development will join efforts to achieve social justice world-wide.

(Retyped verbatim from MSW Handbook)