



**School of Social Work**  
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Dr. Timothy McCarragher  
The University of Akron  
School of Social Work  
College of Health Professions  
Akron, Ohio 44325-8001

Dear Dr. McCarragher,

I have been asked by the Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Cincinnati to review your proposal for an independent Master of Social Work at the University of Akron. As a social work professor with over 30 years of experience and someone who has completed several site visits for the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), in addition to providing training services since 1987 for the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program in Summit, Cuyahoga, and the surrounding counties in Northeast Ohio, I feel I am qualified to review your proposal for an independent MSW program. I have also had many of your MSW graduates in my trainings over the years and have been impressed with their professionalism, knowledge base, and commitment to the social work profession, the community, and particularly to child welfare. I am keenly aware of their respect for the University of Akron, and the role the School of Social Work has not only in local community but also throughout the entire region. I have also interfaced with several of your adjunct faculty and have the upmost respect for their commitment to social work and to the School of Social Work.

The joint MSW program between Cleveland State and the University of Akron began in January, 1995 with 24 students who were instructed in a distant learning format. At that time, the joint program served an important need for the metropolitan areas of Cleveland and Akron, not to mention the surrounding rural counties by providing the labor market with MSW students. The program has grown over the years with an enrollment of 350 students for fall semester, 2015. The joint program has outlived its original purpose and is now ready to operate as two distinct social work programs at both universities. This decision has been supported by the faculty, School, College, University Curriculum Committees, and the Board of Trustees at both Universities. It has become clear to both Universities that the joint program has grown to the point where it is impeding growth, particularly as the mission and priorities of both universities has evolved. As a result of this growth, the strategic mission of both universities has become too difficult to align, the program structure and format has evolved and changed over time to align with the goals of the faculty at both Universities.



I see this as a natural progressive growth movement as each University can now align their mission and goals to better serve the unique cultures and social problems of their own communities.

This year all of the MSW courses at the University of Akron are being taught in a traditional classroom on campus, or online. In reviewing the proposal, the University of Akron is not requesting a new program, but authorization and approval of an independent program. There are no changes being made in the curriculum at this time, nor are there any changes to admissions, field education, or curriculum. It has become clear to the faculty at the University of Akron that they want to make curriculum changes and cannot do so until the MSW program is approved first approved by the Ohio Board of Regents, and then by the CSWE. Progressive growth is being placed on hold until this program is approved by the above entities. The joint program was fully accredited by CSWE in 2011 until 2019. No changes can be made until either or both programs submit approval for an independent program. The School of Social Work at the University of Akron plans on submitting this report on December 1, 2015.

The School of Social Work at the University of Akron has all the standards set forth by the CSWE when it was accredited as a joint program in 2011. In reviewing the proposal it was evident that the School of Social Work is aware of the standards, criteria, and policies set forth by the CSWE's Commission on Accreditation for an independent program. In reviewing the faculty assigned to the MSW program, it is my understanding based on reviewing the report that there are 13 fulltime faculty assigned to teach in the program, thus meeting the faculty/student ratio of 1/12. It appears that 11 of the 13 faculty have MSW's and 6 of the 13 have a PhD. There are 2 professors, 2 associate professors, 1 assistant professor, 1 visiting professor, 1 field coordinator, 1 visiting assistant, 1 instructor, 2 senior instructors, and 2 contract professional (one of whom appears not assigned to the MSW program). In addition, there are 12 adjunct faculty with extensive social work practice experience who teach in the MSW program. One of the adjunct faculty has been teaching in the School of Social Work for 19 years, and another for 13 years making them as the most senior faculty in the school. The rich and vast array of direct practice experience of the part-time faculty is a great asset for the School of Social Work.

The faculty with PhD's include: 3 in social welfare, 1 in psychology, 1 in education, and 1 in human services. When combining the scholarly contributions of the PhD faculty to publications, presentations, grant writing, research, and teaching with the MSW full-time faculty, and the 13 part-time MSW faculties clinical experience, presentations, and community involvement, it is clear to me that the School of Social Work is adequately staffed to function as an independent MSW program.

In addition to the above stated reasons justifying granting the School of Social Work independent status, it is important to acknowledge that the rural Appalachian counties of Northeastern and Eastern Ohio will have greater access of a fully accredited MSW program closer to their community. The vast majority of mental health services in the United States are provided by MSW social workers, and the rural communities are often underserved and lack MSW social workers.

I am in full support for independent MSW program at the University of Akron. This is a positive opportunity as a result of growth and more manageable oversight of the MSW program for both Universities. The dissolution of the merger allows each School of Social Work to further define

their missions as it relates to the communities they serve. Cleveland State serves an urban metropolitan area with a city population of 389,521 (2014), of which 35.4% of the population is living below the poverty level. Akron has a population of 197, 859 (2014) with 27.5 % of the population living in poverty. There is approximately a 40 mile distance between the two cities. The independent status would open up social work education to the entire rural region of Eastern Ohio.

Sincerely,

*Gary L. Dick*

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