

Student Community Update Meeting

November 3, 2020

FIFSW's Student Community Update Meetings are part of number of opportunities for FIFSW students to connect with each other and faculty and staff. Other opportunities to connect now include virtual dinners with the Dean. (The first dinner with international students was held November 2). Dean Voisin also holds monthly office hours, which are open to all students on a first come, first served basis.

Other opportunities to communicate with FIFSW's administration are provided by staff and faculty. David Burnes, FIFSW's Associate Dean, Academic, meets monthly with student leaders from FIFSW's GSA. Lin Fang, FIFSW's PhD program director, also holds regular coffee chats with students. The Practicum Office holds matching information sessions and a forum, and obtains student input via Practicum Advisory Committee meetings. Faculty-field liaisons also meet with their students in practicum four times per practicum. Megan Davies, FIFSW's International Student Coordinator, holds monthly check-in meetings with representatives from the Centre for International Experience as well as monthly coffee/lunch chats and office hours. We encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities to share your feedback and ideas.

New FIFSW Staff

Hannah Jackson is FIFSW's new on-location [accessibility advisor](#). (Reshma Dhrodia has received a promotion.) To contact Hannah, please e-mail her at hannahw.jackson@utoronto.ca.

Cindy Chen is our Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator while Mel LeBlanc is on maternity leave. To contact Cindy, please e-mail her at cindyc.chen@utoronto.ca.

FIFSW is currently recruiting for a new position that will support students: Assistant Dean, MSW Program and EDI. This senior level staff position will oversee admissions, bursaries, and student outreach and services through an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens. Our goal is to create a unified support system for students in our Faculty.

Feedback on Community Update Meetings

FIFSW initiated Student Community Update Meetings in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic made remote learning a requirement. Since then we have noticed a decline in student participation. During this meeting, we solicited student feedback on the usefulness of these meetings and how they could be improved. (Further comments can be sent to the Office of the Associate Dean, Academic at associate.deanfifsw@utoronto.ca.)

Poll: Do you find the Student Community Update Meetings useful?

Student response:

Very helpful - 22%

Helpful - 67%

Not helpful - 11%

Discussion question: What would be helpful for us to address during these meetings?

Student responses:

- Changes and plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including changes to courses, practicum and post-graduation prospects
- Initiatives the faculty is involved in and initiatives that students can get involved with
- How to navigate placements remotely, availability of placements and how to make the most out of a remote placement
- Student deadline reminders (i.e. tuition deadline, practicum dates, dates to sign up for winter courses, etc.)
- Opportunities the faculty may be able to provide for clinical practice, in lieu of in-person placement opportunities
- How the ongoing political and social justice landscape affects our social work practice and field

Practicum

Will summer practicums still be offered in 2021?

Spring/Summer practicums have been available for students who need to defer due to personal emergencies and cannot complete their practicum in January, or for students who have failed their practicum. In the past, there were not enough Year 1 practicums in January, so we provided summer practicums for Year 1 students in this position. We will continue to recruit for field instructors during the spring/summer semester. There is an application form for students who wish to do a spring/summer practicum and requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

We are now recruiting for January practicums and our goal is to find a practicum for every single Year 1 student. Practicums that can start earlier than January are listed on our website.

Will working in online, remote practicums disadvantage students in the future when everything is back to normal?

When things resume in-person, online work will still take place. Many service providers have come to realize that online services are useful and often more accessible. It will become a part of the way of the future for certain types of social services, so being proficient in this environment will make you more competitive.

Student Services

Are there places at the university for students in need of a safe and quiet study space?

Study spaces are available on campus at [Hart House](#), [Robarts Library](#), and [Sidney Smith Commons](#). Please note that Hart House requires you to book your timeslot in advance to ensure proper distancing. The University also now requires all U of T community members to complete their [UCheck assessment](#) before coming to campus.

The [Community Safety Office](#) is available as a confidential resource for U of T community members experiencing harm within a relationship of any kind.

Please feel free to reach out to the [Associate Dean's Office via e-mail](#) with any additional questions.

Can you provide an update on grad photos and convocation?

Graduation photos are organized through FIFSW's Graduate Student Association (GSA). The GSA is currently in discussion with the photo company to determine alternatives for students who are not in the country. An e-mail about grad photos will be sent out to all graduating students shortly and made available on the GSA website. COVID-19 protocols will be in place.

Fall Convocation will be held virtually on **Saturday, November 21, 2020** at 12:00 PM EST. [More information about convocation can be found on U of T's website.](#)

Typically, we have three graduations per year. If students finish their requirements by the end of December, they can graduate in absentia in March. In this case their degree is approved and their diploma is mailed, but there is no ceremony. Students have the option of graduating in March or waiting until June for an in-person convocation. However, with COVID-19, there is no guarantee of an in-person ceremony in June. Our Registrar, Sharon Bewell, will email students about their options.

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) will give a presentation about how to register with the College via zoom. This is scheduled to take place on Monday, February 22, 2021 from 12:00 PM – 1:30 PM. Graduating students will receive more information by email closer to the presentation date.

Does the Faculty have statistics on the percentage of graduates that get hired after graduation?

This data is collected for PhD students, and over 90% of them are employed after graduation, with 70% of them employed in higher education.

For MSW students, in the past, we have done informal surveys during convocation. Unfortunately, the University does not collect this information, but it is an important question, and one that many students have. We know that our graduates are highly sought after because of the quality of our program. This is evident through the practicum opportunities that we offer, as some places only take FIFSW students.

We need to do a better job of tracking this data and will develop a plan to do so. [It is important that graduating students update their contact information](#) so that we have the means to stay in touch.

Will Year 1 students have the opportunity to hear from others before deciding on their Field of Study?

Every year we have a Field of Study Information session for Year 1 students. The deadline to pick a Field of Study is Friday, February 5, 2021. We will be holding an information session in January 2021.

Online Clinic

We are planning to launch an online counselling clinic in Winter 2021. This clinic will provide free counselling services to individuals within the GTA, with a specific focus on Black and low-income communities. Service will be provided by MSW students who will receive ongoing training and supervision.

Would the clinic provide practicum opportunities or is it an initiative that we can participate in in addition to our practicum?

The online clinic will provide practicum opportunities to our Year 1 students in January. Please note that all services offered will be online, through video therapy and chat services. The clinic will seek students who have previous experience working at distress centres or help lines, as well as students who have experience working with low-income and Black communities.

How can students get involved?

The clinic will continue to offer practicum opportunities past January. Volunteer opportunities will also be available. Please note that only supervised practicum students will be providing counselling services. The volunteer opportunities will be supporting the clinic in other ways, but please note that the number of volunteers we can accept will depend on having the resources in place to coordinate them. To volunteer, please contact Lin Fang at lin.fang@utoronto.ca.

How many spots will there be and approximately when do you think onboarding will start?

We estimate that we will be able to start by offering practicums for 5-7 students, but this could change. An official number will be released in the coming weeks. Onboarding will start once we have confirmed supervision. The earliest start date will be December of this year.

Courses

Do you have a sense of whether virtual learning will continue into the spring/summer semester? When can students expect the decision to be made on the status of Fall 2021 courses?

The short answer is that we do not know at this point in time. In March, we were hopeful to be back in-person this Fall, but now we know that we will not even be back for the Winter. We will continue to keep you updated in real-time. We are hopeful, but at this time, it is uncertain.

Is the Faculty getting feedback from professors and students regarding online learning, in order to improve teaching styles/approaches and assignments?

We have reached out through the MSW Studies Committee to solicit feedback. We understand that this is a different way of learning for many students. One of the main issues that has been brought to our attention is the need to improve the sense of connection, both among students and between students and their instructors. We have also received feedback on approaches to online teaching that work and have been identifying best practices to share with others.

Some instructors request feedback from their students via midterm evaluations, in addition to final course evaluations at the end of the semester. We hope you feel comfortable giving feedback to your instructors outside these formal mechanisms to share what is working and what might help make things better. We encourage you to do so. We want to be successful in meeting your needs.

With respect to modifying assignments: back in March, this was done in response to the sudden change in teaching/learning format. Now that classes have been online from the start of the semester, instructors would have designed their assignments with the remote learning environment in mind. That being said, if you have concerns, please bring it up to your instructor.

I remember reading a few months back about a Student Leadership Fellowship Program. Is this still happening? If so, when would applications/onboarding for this start?

We are excited to launch this program, which is being created to support and develop our already exceptional students for leadership roles within diverse sectors. While we have secured funding for this program, COVID-19 has delayed its launch and we are in the midst of figuring out when we will be able to move this forward.