

## A. Philosophy Statement

For the last six years I have been the Manager of Student Services in the Faculty of Social Work. In this role, I am responsible for providing ongoing visionary and strategic direction for the provincial Student Services team. Among various responsibilities, this entails developing and maintaining integrated and seamless business processes; enforcing institutionally approved standards and procedures related to admissions and program requirements; adhering to faculty and university policies and procedures; ensuring student success and retention through high quality academic services and support; and ongoing professional development.

While fulfilling my role and performing these duties my goal is to contribute to creating a welcoming, safe, inclusive and, above all, a supportive university community where each student's learning experience is enriched through a combination of outstanding teaching, research, and exemplary academic support.

Prior to assuming this position, I worked briefly as a student advisor and then, for more than a decade, as a distance education coordinator in the Faculty of Education (currently Werklund School of Education) at the University of Calgary. My advising and leadership philosophy has been shaped by experiences gained through my past and current roles and by the visionary leaders and dedicated advisors with whom I have worked. I credit these inspirational colleagues with instilling in me the importance of looking toward the future, creating high quality and inclusive programming choices, introducing innovative program delivery models, and leading with conviction and integrity. My goal is to emulate these leadership characteristics in my role as the Student Services manager.

### **Leading through Collaboration, Coordination, and Mentorship**

Arguably, there is no other team at the University of Calgary like Student Services in the Faculty of Social Work, where undergraduate and graduate advising and program administration are so closely intertwined. The most remarkable thing about the team I lead is its ability to connect and work as one unit despite the geographical distance between its members. Specifically, we have student advisors in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge who administer not just campus-based but also community-based and online undergraduate and graduate programs. A team that is so diverse in terms of demands and expectations, so capable and well versed to support various teaching modalities, doesn't need a manager, it needs a leader. I try to fulfill that role by engaging in a compelling vision, setting standards of excellence consistent with our faculty's and the university's mission to "enrich the quality and breadth of learning," and by creating a climate of accountability and learning that inspires all. I foster open and respectful communication, encourage collaboration through the sharing of knowledge and resources, and support ongoing professional growth and development of members of the student advising team and associated support staff. I believe that our strength lies within each of us, in our unity, our willingness to learn from each other, and our commitment to work toward a common goal. In the words of one advisor:

*"[Maria's] strong leadership and collaborative spirit has made it possible [for the team] to achieve many great things."*

*Student Advisor, Faculty of Social Work, Thank You card, 2017*

### **Advising with Intentionality and Compassion**

I believe that providing accurate, timely, and relevant information in a compassionate manner and empowering students to make well-informed decisions are the hallmarks of quality advising. These

core values shape how I interact with students and colleagues as a Student Services Manager and how I approach my tasks and projects.

Our students are highly capable individuals, each with unique backgrounds and needs. They chose the University of Calgary's Social Work program to prepare for a noble profession. This is a great honor that ought to be reciprocated through our commitment to providing high quality services that support their educational goals. I constantly challenge myself and my team to live up to these expectations.

Focusing on solutions rather than problems, being pro-active rather than reactive, staying positive, kind, and compassionate are the core principles I uphold. Instead of accepting easy and short-term fixes, I believe in long-term solutions even if this means investing extra time, effort, energy, and resources. Although in my role as manager most of my work takes place "behind the scenes," I take every opportunity to support and accommodate, when possible, student educational needs and preferences.

*"Ms. Soos-Gonczol exhibited responsiveness in personally supporting my learning. I prefer classroom as opposed to online courses so I approached Student Services about the possibility of taking two of my SOWK 500 level option courses at the FSW Lethbridge and Edmonton campuses. I was thrilled when Ms. Soos- Gonczol approved these courses and especially appreciated her willingness and diligence in dealing with the Registrar's office to secure my spot in two spring courses at our distance campuses. I am very appreciative of her exemplary support of my learning...."*

*Former Bachelor of Social Work Student, Thank you note,  
April 2016*

### **Looking Ahead: Envisioning Future Trends in Post-Secondary Education**

I love working at the University of Calgary and in the Faculty of Social Work because of the exciting opportunities available to actively participate in unique initiatives that are ground-breaking and that demonstrate our commitment to excellence in teaching, research, student experience, and community engagement. The launching of the special Master of Social Work program for staff of the provincial Department of Alberta Human Services, the recent expansion of the online BSW program, and the envisioning and redesign of the current MSW program are great examples of projects in which I have played an instrumental role. Presenting a variety of innovative solutions for challenging and complex situations, posing original scenarios and possibilities, using my university knowledge and past experiences, and being a strong voice for students and Student Services, are not just welcomed but encouraged and appreciated in our faculty, and have allowed me to make positive contributions to successful teaching and learning experiences at the university.

*"While Maria is not sitting in or standing in front of our classrooms, every student and teacher no matter the region or program (face-to-face or distance learning) have benefitted by Maria's unrelenting devotion to making our Faculty the best in terms of preparing stellar Social Workers. This is her North Star—she does not need to say it—we can all see it as exemplified by her professionalism and unlimited support. "*

*Current Graduate Program Director, Faculty of Social Work, Reference Letter,  
December 2017*