

**New Jersey State Legislature**  
**Senate Higher Education Committee**  
**Hearing on Online Degree Offerings By Institutions Of Higher Education**  
New Jersey State House Annex  
1st Floor, Committee Room 4  
Tuesday, February 25, 2020  
10:00 AM

Testimony of Matthea Marquart, Director of Administration, Online Campus,  
Columbia University School of Social Work

## **Introduction**

Good morning Committee Chair Cunningham, Vice-Chair Gopal, and Members of the Senate Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing on online degree offerings by institutions of higher education, and thank you for your leadership and attention to this topic.

I am Matthea Marquart, Director of Administration for the Online Campus at the Columbia University School of Social Work, or CSSW. CSSW has been a leader in social work education and research since 1898, and we launched our Online Campus<sup>1</sup> in 2015. So far we have graduated three cohorts of online students, and our fourth cohort will graduate this May.

I'm delighted to be sharing our Online Campus with you, and I will be focusing on three elements of how we run our program in-house:

- First, the quality of the education we provide for our online students,
- Second, the quality of the overall experience we provide for our online students, and

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<sup>1</sup> Columbia University School of Social Work. Online MSW.  
<https://socialwork.columbia.edu/academics/online-msw/>

- Third, the interconnectedness of our online and New York City-based residential campuses.

I've shared a handout titled "Fast Facts: CSSW Online Campus Quality," which provides an overview of key aspects of our online program.

## **Quality of education**

The first element I'll describe is the quality of the education we provide for our online students.

Columbia University's School of Social Work is the only top-three school of social work in the United States to offer a fully online Master of Science in Social Work degree, and our online program has a unique model.

Our courses include a weekly live virtual class session using a web conferencing platform, with homework in our learning management system. The courses are led by instructional teams made up of three highly qualified members:

- 1) The instructor who is a social work professional with years of social work experience coupled with years of teaching experience,
- 2) The associate who supports the instructor with the course's overall academic quality, and
- 3) The live support specialist who supports the instructor with the technical quality of the live class sessions<sup>2</sup>.

Each member of the team has a minimum of a Master's degree, and each has passed an intensive training program and participates in ongoing professional development with us.

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<sup>2</sup> Creswell Báez, J., Marquart, M., Garay, K., Chung, R., and Ryan, D. (2019, April 11). *Increasing faculty satisfaction and student access to online education via dedicated technical support specialists*. Poster presented at the Social Work Distance Education Conference, San Antonio, TX. Poster deposited in Columbia University's Academic Commons: <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-ft0c-g896>

Our intensive training program for prospective online instructors and associates is called the Institute on Pedagogy and Technology for Online Courses<sup>3</sup>, and it has been recognized with awards from the United States Distance Learning Association<sup>4</sup>, the International E-Learning Association<sup>5</sup>, and the University Professional Continuing Education Association<sup>6</sup>. It is a rigorous five-week online training that prepares social work professionals to become excellent online educators. We created this customized training internally at CSSW, and we have offered it six times over the past three years. Anyone who wants to be an instructor or associate for one of our online courses must pass this Institute with a score of 90% or higher. The educators who have passed the institute currently lead about 125 online courses each year<sup>7</sup>.

We also created and run a three-week Institute on Technical Skills for Online Event Production, which prepares social work professionals to manage the technology of our live online classes, to ensure that our classes are highly interactive, engaging, and inclusive. Anyone who wants to be a live support specialist for one of our online courses must pass this Institute with a score of 90% or higher.

Another hallmark of our online course quality is the thorough quality assurance that every course site undergoes each semester. Our instructors have the academic freedom to make updates to their course sites and assignments, and prior to every semester, a team of professionals combs through every page of every course site, to check the updates and make sure that the readings are available, the assignments are set up properly, and the overall course site is

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<sup>3</sup> Creswell Báez, J., Marquart, M., Chung, R., Ryan, D., and Garay, K. (2019, October). Developing and Supporting Faculty Training for Online Social Work Education: The Columbia University School of Social Work Online Pedagogy Institute. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 39(4-5), 505-518. Special Issue: Online and Distance Social Work Education: Current Practice and Future Trends. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2019.1653419>

<sup>4</sup> Oleinik, V. (2019, August 21). *The best teachers are also amazing learners*. United States Distance Learning Association. <https://usdla.org/blog/2019/08/21/the-best-teachers-are-also-amazing-learners/>

<sup>5</sup> International E-Learning Awards - Past Winners. 2018 Winners, Academic Division. [http://www.ielassoc.org/awards\\_program/past\\_winners\\_AD\\_2018.html](http://www.ielassoc.org/awards_program/past_winners_AD_2018.html)

<sup>6</sup> 2019 UPCEA Mid-Atlantic Award Recipients. <http://conferences.upcea.edu/mid-atlantic/awardrecipients.html>

<sup>7</sup> Chung, R., Marquart, M., Ryan, D., and Creswell Báez, J. (2020, February 18). *Preparing faculty to teach online via an award-winning, intensive online pedagogy institute*. Poster for the Columbia University Center for Teaching and Learning's Celebration of Teaching and Learning Symposium, New York, NY. Poster deposited in Columbia University's Academic Commons: <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-ab3x-6t08>

functioning smoothly. This sets the stage for a smooth student experience with every course site.

An important part of social work education is two years of internship experience in the field. CSSW's Field Department matches students with local agencies around the country, and provides a different field placement for each year. The Field Department is highly selective in creating field partnerships, and each placement must provide a strong educational experience for our students. In addition, a new component of our field education is a seven-week lab that prepares students for direct practice with clients by building their clinical skills<sup>8</sup>. Our online students do this lab virtually via live online lab sessions<sup>9</sup>.

Each component that goes into creating a high quality education for CSSW's online students -- from deciding on our model, to selectively hiring and training our instructional team members, to conducting quality assurance of our course sites, to setting up field placements -- is managed in-house. This gives us the flexibility to continuously innovate, and the authority to maintain high standards.

### **Quality of overall student experience**

The second element I'll describe is the quality of the overall experience we provide for our online students.

Before our online students begin their coursework, they participate in a tech orientation training led by live support specialists who are alumni who have taken online courses themselves. The students have many scheduling options for this tech orientation training, and they can attend as many times as they choose, in order to feel comfortable with the online course technology.

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<sup>8</sup> *New Lab Grounds First-Year MSW Students in Motivational Interviewing*. Columbia University School of Social Work.

<https://socialwork.columbia.edu/news/new-lab-grounds-first-year-msw-students-in-motivational-interviewing/>

<sup>9</sup> Piepmeier, M. and Marquart, M. (2020, February 18). *Converting an experiential clinical skills-based lab from an on-campus to a live online version: A pilot*. Poster for the Columbia University Center for Teaching and Learning's Celebration of Teaching and Learning Symposium, New York, NY. Poster deposited in Columbia University's Academic Commons: <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-dk56-n123>

Once their first semester begins, our online students are supported by a comprehensive advising model that encompasses both academic and field advising to support the success of online students who live across the United States<sup>10</sup>. Each advisor works with no more than 12 online students, so that they can provide individualized support. The Office of Advising provides extensive oversight of local advisors, from careful recruiting and hiring, through training, monitoring, staff meetings, and frequent contact and feedback.

Our online students are also supported by dedicated offices that provide one-on-one virtual consultations, webinars, and live-streamed events. These include our Writing Center<sup>11</sup>, our Office of Career Services and Leadership Management<sup>12</sup>, and our Social Work Library<sup>13</sup>.

Again, each component here -- from the technical orientations, to advising, to dedicated offices for professional skills development -- is managed in-house, which enables us to continuously innovate and to maintain high standards.

### **Interconnected online and residential campuses**

The third element I'll describe is the interconnectedness of our online and New York City-based residential campuses.

For our students, we strive to create an experience of being a part of one overall program.

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<sup>10</sup> Marquart, M., and Curtain, M. (2018, November 15). *Supporting Online Student Success Cross-Functionally: The Collaborative Work of the Office of Advising and the Online Campus at Columbia University's School of Social Work*. Session presented at the Online Learning Consortium Accelerate Conference, Orlando, FL. Slides deposited in Columbia University's Academic Commons: <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-h0dx-zv25>

<sup>11</sup> The Writing Center. Columbia University School of Social Work.

<https://socialwork.columbia.edu/student-experience/student-services/the-writing-center/>

<sup>12</sup> Career Services and Leadership Management. Columbia University School of Social Work.

<https://socialwork.columbia.edu/student-experience/student-services/career-services/>

<sup>13</sup> Social Work Library. Columbia University School of Social Work.

<https://socialwork.columbia.edu/student-experience/student-services/social-work-library/>

As one example, we have one overall semester structure for our online and residential campuses. Because there is no difference in semesters, our New York City-based residential students are able to take up to two online courses each semester, and our online students are able to take up to two residential courses each semester if they are near the physical campus; most of our residential students take at least one online course. This enables our online and residential students to take courses together and get to know each other. Students also have the option of transferring between campuses if they choose.

As another example, we have the same Admissions, Financial Aid, and Student Services teams working with students from both campuses. In addition, one Office of Development and Alumni Relations<sup>14</sup> connects with every alum and one Office of Professional Excellence<sup>15</sup> offers continuing education opportunities.

As a final example, last year we had an exciting opportunity for students to participate in a new elective course, which included traveling to another country to participate in international social work during spring break<sup>16</sup>. The instructor opened up the application for the course to both online and residential students, and taught the course in a physical classroom with three online students joining via web conferencing robots. All of the students met in person for the first time during the travel portion of the course. The instructor won an award from the Council on Social Work Education<sup>17</sup> for this course, and she is offering it again this year. Our online students were able to participate because our two campuses are so integrated.

Our online students are never required to come to Columbia's physical campus, but they are always welcome and they may come to our New York City campus for

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<sup>14</sup> Alumni. Columbia University School of Social Work. <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/alumni/>

<sup>15</sup> Continuing Education. Columbia University School of Social Work. <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/academics/continuing-education/>

<sup>16</sup> Showcase Event: Forced Migration to Jordan: A Humanitarian Response. <https://livestream.com/columbiassw/events/8662694>

<sup>17</sup> Partners in International Education (PIE) Awards. Council on Social Work Education. <https://www.cswe.org/About-CSWE/Governance/Commissions-and-Councils/Commission-on-Global-Social-Work-Education/Awards>

lectures, student caucus meetings, or other events. For those who cannot come to campus, we frequently live-stream our New York City campus events so that online students can join them. We also offer fully online events. During the 2018-19 academic year, we offered 40 events that students could join online. We also create events in which both online and in-person attendees can participate, such as our annual reception for graduating online students, and the awards ceremony for our Steven P. Schinke Teaching Awards and Student Innovation Fellowships<sup>18</sup>, which included remote attendees via webcam and offered a computer station where online and in-person attendees could chat via webcam and mic.

Once again, managing our online program in-house provides benefits for our students in that we do not need to separate resources and opportunities for online and residential students and can integrate the two campuses.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, by running our online program in-house, Columbia University's School of Social Work is able to provide students with a top-notch education, via the three elements I've shared:

- First, high quality teaching and learning experiences,
- Second, a high quality overall experience, and
- Third, the benefits of being part of one interconnected online and residential program.

Thank you again for the invitation to appear before you and for your leadership in the field of higher education. I welcome any questions you may have.

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<sup>18</sup> School Honors First Recipients of Steven Schinke Namesake Awards. Columbia University School of Social Work. <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/news/school-honors-first-recipients-of-steven-schinke-namesake-awards/>

# Fast Facts: CSSW Online Campus Quality

## 1 ONLY TOP-3 SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK WITH A FULLY ONLINE MSW PROGRAM

Of the 3 highest ranked schools of social work, only Columbia has a fully online MSW program.

## 3 SOCIAL WORKERS ON EACH INSTRUCTIONAL TEAM

The only online MSW program with three MSW-degree holding professionals on each instructional team: instructor, associate (TA), and live support specialist. Each of these professionals completes rigorous training prior to working on online courses.

## 1 ONLY ONLINE SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM WITH SOCIAL WORKERS AS DEDICATED TECH SUPPORT

The only online MSW program with live support specialists for each course, who attend each weekly class session to support students and instructors. They are CSSW alumni who took CSSW online courses as students.

## 1 ONE SCHOOL

Online students can take residential courses and vice versa because our online and residential programs are integrated, unlike programs that keep online and residential students separate.

## 12 MAX ONLINE STUDENTS PER ADVISOR

The Office of Advising supports students' graduate success. Our advising model incorporates academic and field advising. For the online program, advisors are assigned no more than 12 students. Academic and field advising is individualized -- advisors meet with students every semester individually and in seminars, and they visit each student's field agency. Advisors support students, field instructors, and academic instructors. They approach students' educations from a holistic perspective, considering academics, field education, and life issues that may impact students' graduate school performance.

## 2 FIELD PLACEMENTS

CSSW students complete two field placements for a breadth of experience: a foundation year field placement and an advanced year field placement.

## 2 OFFICES DEDICATED TO DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Online students have full access to CSSW's Writing Center and Office of Career and Leadership Development through individual online appointments and web-based events. These offices are dedicated exclusively to CSSW.

## 40 CAMPUS EVENTS OFFERED ONLINE

Online students can access on-campus activities online, with 40 live-streamed campus events & Facebook Live events offered in the academic year 2018-19.

## Many OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN CAMPUS LIFE

Online students have many opportunities to participate in CSSW student activities, including Community Day, Self-Care Day, student caucuses, and as editors/authors for the Columbia Social Work Review.