Title: RESOLUTION SUPPORTING FAIR LABOR PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICUMS

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Resolution Number: 04. 14-15

WHEREAS the University of Washington (UW) School of Social Work’s (SSW) practicum program provides administrative support, oversight, direction and negotiation with practicum agencies for approximately 500 graduate and undergraduate students assigned to approximately 300 agencies; and

WHEREAS the UW SSW exercises significant and primary control over the practicum tasks, practicum environment, practicum placement and practicum evaluation of practicum students; and

WHEREAS the UW SSW practicum students’ activities include actual operations of the practicum sites and are dissimilar to classroom-based learning; and

WHEREAS social workers provide essential services to vulnerable and at-risk populations, that are often undervalued, with the average Master of Social Work salary upon graduation in Washington state expected to be approximately $42,200. While many students incur educational debt, the debt burden to social worker students is higher than many programs, which could be reduced by compensated and protected practicums; and

WHEREAS the tasks performed by UW SSW practicum students benefit the practicum site; as reported by the SSWs 2014 Student Survey evaluating the Practicum experience, approximately 50% of social work students felt they did displace regular employees and 75% of students felt that their practicum agencies derived immediate advantages as a result of their uncompensated work done in the agency; and

WHEREAS the UW SSW has been unwilling to report back their findings on their evaluation of student practicums, making students obtain this information by filing a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request; and
WHEREAS paid internships yield employment offers upon graduation at over twice the rate of
unpaid internships with significantly higher salaries/earnings; and

WHEREAS UW Master of Social Work students engage in 140 additional hours of practicum
work above the Council on Social Work Education’s (CWSE) required 900 hours; and

WHEREAS some UW SSW practicum sites are already paying practicum
students minimum wage, because they consider practicum students to be employees and are
concerned that they would otherwise be liable for violating minimum wage laws; and

WHEREAS the UW SSW practicum sites maintain the right to bill and receive
payment for services performed by the practicum student, as maintained in the practicum
agencies/UW SSW contracts and practicum manual for students, which may violate item number
4 in the Department of Labor’s (DOL) Fair Labor Standards Act; and

WHEREAS the tuition cost to Washington resident students to complete the UW School of
Social Work practicum requirements is approximately $15,361 or $14.77/practicum hour for
Washington residents and $25,706 or $24.72/practicum hour for non-Washington residents.
Additionally, due to the burden of practicum hours, students also incur a loss of wages that might
otherwise be obtained in paid positions outside of school curriculum, as well as additional
financial resources associated with transportation, professional clothing, and required agency
materials; and

WHEREAS the UW SSW does not provide health and accident insurance for
practicum participants and requires students to sign a liability waiver prior to beginning work in
their practicum sites, deeming them financially responsible for any medical bills incurred as a
result of emergency or other medical treatments needed as a result of practicum students’ tasks at
the practicum site; and

WHEREAS the UW SSW practicum students are required to sign a risk liability waiver holding
the UW SSW and practicum sites harmless for bodily injury and death incurred at the practicum
site including the following: driving to and from the practicum site, or while in the course of
practicum activities; unpredictable or violent behavior of certain client populations served by the
practicum site; exposure to infectious diseases, including tuberculosis or other airborne
pathogens, and hepatitis, HIV or other blood borne pathogens; and

WHEREAS, the UW SSW deliberately misclassifies its practicum students as exempt from wage
requirements, workers’ compensations and employee benefits;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT
SENATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON:

THAT the GPSS calls upon the UW SSW to recognize that the work
performed by students at the practicum sites equates to uncompensated, unprotected and
unrecognized labor and is not compliant with the DOLs standards; and
THAT the GPSS calls upon the University of Washington to commission an annual audit of the 
practicum program’s adherence to the Department of Labor’s standards and a program evaluation 
assessing student safety in their practicum sites, the burden of financial responsibility placed 
upon students as a result of practicum participation, and student satisfaction with their learning 
experience by the start of the next practicum placements; and

THAT the GPSS calls upon the UW to ensure this audit is carried out by a body independent of 
the School of Social Work with at least one student representative and that the results of this 
audit are made public in a timely manner; and

THAT the GPSS calls upon the UW to recognize that the UW SSW operates as the primary 
entity responsible for exercising extensive control over the tasks, environment, contracts and 
responsibilities of the practicum students’ relationship with the practicum program; and

THAT the GPSS calls upon the UW SSW to procure sustainable practicum positions that are 
compensated and protected under Federal Labor Laws, that both ensure student safety and hourly 
wages associated with the work students provide in these agencies. Additionally we urge the 
SSW to clearly designate a paid staff member to address and be charged with procuring these 
paid practicum positions, as well as inform and support students and agencies in applying for 
work study benefits for work done in practicum agencies; and

THAT the GPSS calls upon the UW SSW to report the results of student surveys to the student 
body, and deliver a plan of action to address issues of DOL compliance and student safety; and

THAT the GPSS directs the President of the GPSS to monitor the university's progress towards 
making the above changes, advocate on behalf of the affected students in the SSW to the 
university administration, and work with the Social Workers Student Union to achieve this 
directive; and

THAT a copy of this resolution be forwarded to interim UW President Ana Mari Cauce, the 
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Emiko Tajima, the Dean of the SSW Edwina Uehara, the 
UW Board of Regents, UW Faculty Senate Chair Kate O’Neill, Editor-in- Chief of The Daily Joe 
Veyera, GPSS President Alice Popejoy, ASUW President Christina Xiao, 

Presented to GPSS for approval on Wednesday, March 11, 2015
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