Ad Hoc Trauma-Informed Teaching Committee
Spring 2016 Report

Committee Members:

Janice Carello, PhD candidate, Committee Chair
Kim Kaufmann, MSW student, SSW GSA President
Rob Brandon, MSW student
Angela Calabrese, MSW student
Diane Elze, Associate Professor, MSW Director
Mickey Sperlich, Assistant Professor

An ad hoc committee was formed in 2014 to address concerns raised by students regarding what some perceived as a lack of trauma-informed (TI) teaching in the School of Social Work (SSW). During the 2014-2015 academic year, the committee met with SSW Graduate Student Association (GSA) leadership members who informally investigated and presented findings about TI teaching.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the current ad hoc committee was formed to further address these concerns. More specifically, the committee was charged with developing a definition of/statement about TI teaching for inclusion in the MSW Handbook and also a statement for inclusion on course syllabi in order to help create a common understanding in the SSW of what TI teaching means and what it looks like in practice.

The current committee met four times during the Spring 2016 semester and also communicated on a Blackboard site created for this purpose. After reviewing and discussing relevant literature and relevant concerns, the committee drafted a definition on TI teaching that we recommend considering for inclusion in the MSW Handbook (see Appendix A). The current MSW Handbook contains a statement on the school's trauma-informed and human rights curriculum (TI-HR); therefore, we developed a statement that we thought could immediately follow that attempts to explain what a trauma-informed approach to delivering this curriculum means and what it does not mean. The statement also provides a definition of retraumatization, secondary traumatic stress, and vicarious traumatization. Preventing retraumatization is one of the main purposes of any trauma-informed approach, and secondary traumatic stress and vicarious traumatization are other risks of exposure to trauma in the curriculum. The statement was worded to fit in with the current values and policies already articulated in the handbook, such as self-care and the impairment policy.

We also drafted a statement about trauma exposure and self-care that we recommend considering for inclusion on course syllabi (See Appendix B). Some faculty are already familiar with trauma-informed principles and integrate them in their teaching; therefore, we added an optional statement for inclusion by those who are already using teaching policies and practices that are explicitly trauma-informed.

To help further the SSW in its commitment to TI teaching, the committee would also like to make the following recommendations:

1. Update the current trauma-informed principles recognized and utilized by the SSW so they are more aligned with recent TI policy and practice initiatives, particularly SAMHSA's: http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic
2. Formally adopt a set of TI principles that can be adapted to inform all practices and policies for all SSW members and affiliates (students, faculty, administrators, staff, volunteers).
3. Consider making SW 542 Trauma and Human Rights a foundation year course.
4. Provide training for faculty to help them develop TI teaching practices and policies.

The committee chair shared some TI teaching training materials that she developed and used successfully with SW faculty at another university, including a set of TI teaching and learning principles (see Appendix C) and a self-assessment guide that helps course and field educators operationalize trauma-informed teaching (see Appendix D). She indicated that she would be happy to develop and present a training for UBSSW faculty.

The committee also discussed methods for investigating trauma-informed teaching in the SSW further. Since the committee chair is in the process of completing a dissertation on trauma-informed teaching, the committee considered it prudent to review the results of that investigation before engaging in additional research.

After reviewing preliminary results of a survey on the implicit curriculum conducted by some of Mickey Sperlich's prior SW 542 students, the committee was also able to provide a few suggestions to Diane Elze regarding items that might be revised/added to the annual end-of-year climate survey completed by students.

Lastly, the committee would like to acknowledge Shelley Hitzel, MSW student, and Travis Hales, PhD student, who provided feedback at the initial meeting, and also Sarah Richards-Desai, PhD student, who shared scholarship and research findings related to the implicit curriculum and to human rights.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice Carello, Committee Chair

Appendix A: Curriculum Delivery Statement

Curriculum Delivery

Our commitment to social justice and human rights is also apparent in the approach we take to delivering our curriculum. As educators we
- Realize the likelihood that many students have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime and that some will experience trauma-related symptoms or disorders during training
- Recognize signs and symptoms of various forms of trauma (e.g. PTSD, complex trauma, vicarious trauma, collective identity trauma) and understanding distinct vulnerabilities of special populations (e.g. children, veterans, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ community members, religious and racial/ethnic minorities, people who have disabilities, people who live in poverty)
- Respect students by supporting their resilience and learning
- Respond empathically, using trauma-informed principles to inform teaching policies and practices
- Resist teaching policies and practices that are retraumatizing
  (Adapted from Carello & Butler, 2015; SAMHSA, 2014)

Further, we understand that experiencing trauma does not mean experiencing merely upset or distress, nor does it simply mean developing trauma-related symptoms or syndromes. To experience trauma is also to experience betrayal, boundary violation, objectification, vulnerability, powerlessness, abuse, neglect, and/or cruelty, often at the hands of a trusted authority figure whose behavior was ignored, denied, or sanctioned by the larger community—and exposures or relationship dynamics that recapitulate these experiences are potentially retraumatizing (Butler, Critelli, & Rinfrette, 2011). Retraumatization during clinical training, whether in coursework or in field, is a concern because of the risks to the health and wellbeing of students and also because its potential negative impact on learning (Duncan, 2000; Perry, 2006; Sitler, 2009).

We are committed to using trauma-informed principles to inform our curriculum delivery in order to cultivate educational environments that are congruent with social work values and that support successful educational and professional outcomes. Because we are committed to professional competence, employing a trauma-informed human rights approach in the context of curriculum delivery does not mean that students will be able to avoid exposure to traumatic content or to sensitive or difficult topics; that students will never experience stress or distress; or that the curriculum will lack rigor. Rather, the purpose of such an approach is to respect trauma, not to protect students from learning about it.

Indeed, some of the material encountered in coursework and field—and some of the ways in which it is presented—may be upsetting or temporarily overwhelming for some students. It is well-documented that indirect exposure to trauma narratives may put helping professionals (and trainees) at risk for developing trauma reactions, particularly those who have a personal trauma history or limited clinical experience (e.g. Bride, 2007; Cunningham, 1999, 2004; Figley, 2002; Jones, 2002; Knight, 2013; Neumann & Gamble, 1995; Shannon et al, 2014; Zosky, 2013). In addition to retraumatization, possible reactions also include *secondary traumatic stress* (also referred to as *compassion fatigue*), which refers to the trauma-related symptoms that one may develop as a result of empathizing with trauma survivors (Bride, 2007; Figley, 2002), and *vicarious trauma*, which refers to the cumulative impact of working with trauma survivors that is characterized by a disruption in the helping professional's identity, worldview, and beliefs (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

Self-awareness and self-care go a long way in recognizing and minimizing distress and bouncing back from it. We encourage students to do periodic self-checks on how the curriculum and curriculum delivery are affecting them. Students should also utilize the self-care resources, including the "Self-Care Starter Kit," that are available in the "Current Students" section of the SSW website (http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html). Getting support from friends, colleagues, family, and mental health professionals is also important, especially for students who have risk factors that might make them more likely to become distressed. Free services are available for students through the UB counseling center (http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/). Students should also speak with their instructors and field educators if they find they are having some difficulties with the curriculum or with curriculum delivery.

A trauma-informed approach to curriculum delivery also recognizes that some students may be unable to successfully complete course or program requirements at the time they would like to due to the aftermath of traumatic experiences. In such cases, we understand that temporary or chronic impairment means that something has happened to the student, not that something is wrong with the student, and that the student may need more recovery or support before being ready and able to successfully complete requirements and demonstrate professional competence. In such cases, we also work with the student to develop an individualized plan, if needed, to support the student's success (see Impairment Policy).

Appendix B: Syllabus Statement

Recommended statement for all syllabi:

Trauma Exposure and Self-Care
Some of the material presented in this course—and some of the ways in which it is presented—may be upsetting or temporarily overwhelming at times. It is well-documented that indirect exposure to trauma narratives may put helping professionals (and trainees) at risk for developing trauma reactions, particularly those who have a personal trauma history or limited clinical experience (e.g. Bride, 2007; Cunningham, 1999, 2004; Figley, 2002; Jones, 2002; Knight, 2013; Neumann & Gamble, 1995; Shannon et al, 2014; Zosky, 2013). *Secondary traumatic stress* (also referred to as *compassion fatigue*) refers to the trauma-related symptoms that one may develop as a result of empathizing with trauma survivors (Bride, 2007; Figley, 2002). *Vicarious traumatization*, though it is often used interchangeably with secondary traumatic stress, refers to the cumulative impact of working with trauma survivors that is characterized by a disruption in the helping professional's identity, worldview, and beliefs (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). *Retraumatization*, which refers to the triggering or reactivation of trauma-related symptoms that originated in earlier traumatic life events, is another risk of indirect trauma exposure during professional training (Carello & Butler, 2015).

Understanding potential negative responses to course content or delivery is important because experiencing trauma does not mean experiencing merely upset or distress, nor does it simply mean developing trauma-related symptoms or syndromes. To experience trauma is also to experience betrayal, boundary violation, objectification, vulnerability, powerlessness, abuse, neglect, and/or cruelty, often at the hands of a trusted authority figure whose behavior was ignored, denied, or sanctioned by the larger community—and exposures or relationship dynamics that recapitulate these experiences are also potentially retraumatizing (Butler, Critelli, & Rinfrette, 2011). Experiences of secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, or retraumatization are a concern because of the risks to the health and wellbeing of students and also because of the potential negative impact on learning (Duncan, 2000; Perry, 2006; Sitler, 2009).

Self-awareness and good self-care go a long way in recognizing and minimizing distress and bouncing back from it. Be sure to do periodic self-checks on how the material in the course—and the ways in which the material is delivered and discussed—are affecting you. Check out the self-care resources, including the "Self-Care Starter Kit," that are available in the "Current Students" section of the SSW website (http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html). Getting support from friends, colleagues, family, and mental health professionals is also important, especially if you have risk factors that might make you more likely to be upset by some material or you find yourself becoming distressed. Free services are available for students through the UB counseling center (http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/). And, of course, please also talk with your instructor if you find you are having some difficulties with any aspect of the course.

Optional statement for those who are already using policies and practices that are explicitly trauma-informed:

As the course instructor, I am committed to using trauma-informed principles to inform my course delivery in order to cultivate an educational environment that is congruent with social work values, that reduces the risk of retraumatization, and that supports your success in the course and in the profession.

Appendix C: Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning Principles for Social Work Educators

Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning Principles for Social Work Educators

A trauma-informed approach refers to of a set of principles that inform policies and procedures. The principles outlined below are designed to inform curriculum delivery in classroom (traditional and virtual) and field education settings.

1. **PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, AND ACADEMIC SAFETY**
   Students feel physically and emotionally safe in all traditional and virtual classrooms and in field settings, including feeling safe in individual and group interpersonal interactions, and feeling safe to make and learn from mistakes.

2. **TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TRANSPARENCY**
   Building and maintaining trust are essential elements of safety, and transparency is an essential element of building and maintaining trust. Students who have histories that include abuse and/or neglect by authority figures may have even more difficulty learning to feel safe when they lack trust in educators.

3. **SUPPORT AND CONNECTION**
   Support and connection are empathic responses integral to models of trauma recovery and integral to the development of safety and trust. Support from and connection with peers, instructors, the department, the institution, and national organizations and resources also helps foster empowerment.

4. **INCLUSIVENESS AND SHARED PURPOSE**
   Educators and students all have valuable roles to play to reach the common goals of student success and professional competence.

5. **COLLABORATION AND MUTUALITY**
   Educators and students can respect roles yet still share power and decision-making.

6. **EMPOWERMENT, VOICE, AND CHOICE**
   Students are viewed as creators of knowledge and experts of their own experiences and learning; as such, they are empowered to make choices and to develop confidence and competence.

7. **CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND GENDER ISSUES**
   Addressing issues of diversity and oppression is fundamental to social work practice in all settings.

8. **RESILIENCE, GROWTH, AND CHANGE**
   Educators recognize students' strengths and resilience and provide feedback to help them grow and change.

Developed by Janice Carello, MA, LMSW, PhD Candidate

(Adapted from Bath, 2008; Carello & Butler, 2015; Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013; Fallot & Harris, 2009; SAMHSA, 2014; St. Andrews, 2013).

Appendix D: Self-Assessment Guide

Creating Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning Environments:
A Self-Assessment Guide for Social Work Educators

Developed by Janice Carello, MA, LMSW, PhD Candidate

(Adapted primarily from Fallot & Harris, 2009, and also from Bath, 2008; Carello & Butler, 2015; Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013; SAMHSA, 2014; St. Andrews, 2013)

Principle 1: Physical, Emotional, Social, and Academic Safety

Key Questions: To what extent does the learning environment ensure the physical, emotional, social, and academic safety of students? How can the setting and/or policies and practices be modified to ensure this safety more effectively and consistently?

Sample Specific Questions:
- How would you describe the physical and/or digital learning environment? Is it comfortable and inviting?
- Are the first contacts with students welcoming, respectful, and engaging?
- What authority style do educators model: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, or uninvolved?
- Do educators communicate using assertive, nonviolent communications methods?
- Are educators attentive to signs of student discomfort or unease? Do they understand these signs in a trauma-informed way?
- How is conflict managed during group discussions, activities, and assignments? Do students receive guidance and/or feedback to help them improve skills and manage conflict?
- Are students provided low-stakes opportunities to make and learn from mistakes prior to being evaluated?
- What events or behaviors have occurred that indicate a lack of physical, emotional, social, or academic safety? What triggered these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?

Principle 2: Trustworthiness and Transparency

Key Questions: To what extent do the learning policies and practices maximize trustworthiness and transparency by making expectations clear, by ensuring consistency in practice, and by maintaining appropriate boundaries? How can policies and/or practices be modified to ensure that expectations and boundaries are established and maintained clearly and appropriately?

Sample Specific Questions:
- Does the syllabus or learning contract provide clear information about what will be done, by whom, by when, under what circumstances, at what cost, and for what purpose?
- Does each session conclude with information about what comes next?
- When, if at all, do boundaries veer from those of the respectful professional? Are there pulls toward more friendly and less professional contacts in this setting?
- How does the educator handle dilemmas between role clarity and accomplishing multiple tasks (e.g., navigating working on a research project with a student or serving as both advisor and course instructor)?
- How does the educator communicate expectations regarding the completion, submission, and evaluation of particular assignments or the demonstration of particular skills? Are the expectations reasonable? Is unnecessary student disappointment avoided?
- Is there any type of informed consent process? Do students have any opportunity to negotiate an alternative assignment if they believe a specific activity or assignment would not benefit them or would put them at risk?
- What events or behaviors have occurred that indicate a lack of trustworthiness or transparency? What triggered these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?

Principle 3: Support and Connection

Key Questions: To what extent are students linked with appropriate peer and professional resources to help them succeed academically, personally, and professionally? How can student access to support be improved or enhanced?

Sample Specific Questions:
- Do educators post and/or have on hand referral information for campus and community resources such as counseling, health, and tutoring services or providers?
- Is the educator available to provide support during office hours, before/after class, or through some other means?
- What events or behaviors have occurred that indicate a lack of student support or connection? What triggered these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?

Principle 4: Inclusiveness and Shared Purpose

Key Questions: To what extent do policies and/or practices emphasize inclusivity and shared purpose? How can policies and/or practices be modified to convey the sense that educators and students have valuable roles to play to reach the common goals of student success and professional competence?

Sample Specific Questions:
- Do students and educators (and/or field agency staff) perceive themselves as allies or as adversaries?
- Do students understand the role that they play, the importance of this role, and the impact they have in this role, especially in field settings?
- Are educator and/or field agency policies and practices congruent with social work values and ethics?
- Is student impairment handled in a way that conveys "What's happened to the student?" versus "What's wrong with the student?"
- What events or behaviors have occurred that indicate a lack of inclusiveness or shared purpose? What triggered these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?

Principle 5: Collaboration and Mutuality

Key Questions: To what extent do the learning activities and settings maximize collaboration and sharing of power between educators and students? How can policies and/or practices be modified to increase opportunities to share power and decision-making?

Sample Specific Questions:
- Do students have a significant role in planning and evaluating the course/field experience? How is this built in to the learning activities?
- Are student learning preferences and needs given substantial weight?
- Do learning experiences cultivate a model of doing "with" rather than "to" or "for" students?
- Do educators identify tasks on which both they and students can work together?
- What events or behaviors have occurred that indicate a lack of collaboration or mutuality? What triggered these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?

Principle 6: Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

Key Questions: To what extent do policies and practices maximize student experiences of choice and control and prioritize student empowerment and skill-building? Are students viewed as experts of their own experiences and learning, and as such are they empowered to make choices and develop skills?

Sample Specific Questions:
- How much choice does each student have over the content they engage with or how they engage with it?
- How much choice does each student have over the assignments/tasks they complete or how they complete them?
- To what extent are the student's priorities given weight in terms of learning objectives?
- Do students get a clear and appropriate message about their rights and responsibilities?
- Do educators communicate a conviction that the student is the ultimate expert on their own experience and learning?
- Do educators communicate that the learning environment is one over which the student has little control?
- Are there negative consequences for exercising particular choices? Are these necessary or arbitrary consequences?
- Does each contact aim at two endpoints whenever possible: (1) accomplishing the given task and (2) skill-building on the part of the student?
- What events or behaviors have occurred that indicate a lack of empowerment, voice, or choice? What triggered these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?

Principle 7: Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Key Questions: To what extent are policies and practices responsive to cultural, historical, and gender issues? How can policies and/or practices be modified to ensure that issues of diversity and oppression are effectively addressed?

Sample Specific Questions:
- In what ways are stereotypes and biases addressed in the learning environment? Which stereotypes and biases are addressed?
- In what ways are policies and practices responsive to and respectful of students' diverse experiences and identities?   To which experiences and identities are they responsive?
- What events or behaviors have occurred that indicate a lack of awareness of cultural, historical, or gender issues? What triggered these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?

Principle 8: Resilience, Growth, and Change

Key Questions: To what extent do policies and practices recognize student resilience, growth, and change? How can policies and/or practices be modified to maximize possibilities for resilience, growth, and change?

Sample Specific Questions:
- How are each student's strengths and resilience recognized?
- Do educators communicate a sense of realistic optimism about the capacity of students to reach their goals?
- Do learning and feedback emphasize student growth more than student deficits?
- How are students helped to understand and reflect upon their own and others' (micro, mezzo, macro-level) growth, and change processes?
- What events or behaviors have occurred that indicate a lack of emphasis on resilience, growth, or change? What triggered these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?