



**College of Social Work**

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH



**2025  
2030**

# **Strategic Plan**



---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Letter from the Dean</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Mission, Vision, and Values</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Strategic Plan Framework</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<i>01 Advance Research and Discovery</i> .....	9
<i>02 Grow Community Engagement</i> .....	11
<i>03 Continuously Cultivate Academic Innovation and Quality</i> .....	13
<i>04 Foster Student Success</i> .....	15
<i>05 Invest in Internal Operations and Resource Development</i> .....	17
<b>Implementation</b> .....	<b>19</b>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the members of our college community who participated in this process—our faculty, staff, students, and external partners. This plan is a result of the collective efforts of this community and their active participation throughout the process.

We would also like to thank our steering committee members for their dedication to this process. Their time, insights, and direction were integral in shaping the college's future.

**Sumiko Anderson**

Clinical Assistant Professor

**Liz Foxley Pearson**

Community Advisory Board member

**Lindsay Gezinski**

Associate Professor & Director, MSW Program

**Jeremiah Jagers**

Associate Professor & Director, PhD Program

**Danielle Littman**

Assistant Professor

**Misty McIntyre Goodsell**

Research Assistant Professor

**Kort Prince**

Research Associate Professor

**Erin Becker Worwood**

Associate Director, Administration & Finance

# LETTER FROM THE DEAN

---

**Dear college community, colleagues, and partners,**

At the beginning of this new chapter, I am proud to share the University of Utah College of Social Work's bold strategic plan. This is more than just a document—it is the culmination of the collaborative efforts, insights, and aspirations of our college community. It reaffirms our mission to educate, innovate, and empower, and reflects our shared commitment to advancing the principles of social justice, enhancing community well-being, and shaping the future of our profession.

The strategic planning process we undertook over the past several months invited our entire community—faculty, staff, students, alumni, and external partners—to actively contribute through an engaged participatory model. Through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and thoughtful dialogue, each voice enriched the process. Together, we have crafted a plan that defines our path forward, anchored by the values that guide the social work profession and driven by the possibilities of a rapidly changing world.

I am deeply inspired by the dedication of our college community and grateful to all who took part in this work. Whether from a student imagining the future of the

profession, a faculty member sharing expertise, or an alum reflecting on their journey, your ideas and passion have been the cornerstone of this effort, ensuring this plan truly reflects the voices and needs of our community.

With this plan, we are advancing our mission with renewed purpose and vision, charting a course that embraces collaboration, innovation, and excellence. As we move forward, this plan will serve as a roadmap to drive meaningful change and guide our future decision making. It challenges us to collaborate across disciplines, deepen our connections with the communities we serve, and position the College of Social Work as a leader in education, research, and service.

Thank you for your commitment to the College of Social Work and for your contributions to this vital effort. I am confident that together, we will continue to lead with compassion, integrity, and impact—strengthening communities and improving lives—locally and beyond.

Sincerely,

**PHILIP OSTEN, PHD, MSW**

**Dean, University of Utah College of Social Work**





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

**Over the past several months, the University of Utah College of Social Work has engaged in a strategic planning process designed to foster cohesion and develop a shared vision for the college and its community. Grounded in our mission, vision, and values, this plan underscores the core principles of the social work profession. Our mission defines our purpose and directs our actions toward promoting social justice and enhancing well-being. Our vision reflects our aspiration to lead in driving positive change.**

This strategic plan champions innovative research, fosters impactful community partnerships, drives transformative educational experiences, empowers student success, and outlines investments in our internal supports and structures.

By prioritizing these areas, we aim to address the challenges of today while shaping the future of social work. The supporting

actions and strategies outlined in this plan have been thoughtfully developed to further our mission and vision. This plan not only represents a collective vision for the college's future, but also marks a pivotal step forward—introducing innovative approaches to collaboration and partnership. As we embark on this next chapter, we are united in our dedication to working together in new and impactful ways.





# INTRODUCTION

**The University of Utah College of Social Work, established in 1937, has long been a leader in social work education and innovation in the Intermountain West.**

With a history rooted in advancing knowledge, fostering collaboration, and preparing skilled and compassionate practitioners, the college has continually evolved to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world. Today, we stand on the cusp of a new chapter—one filled with possibility and purpose.

Social work, at its core, is a profession grounded in hope, resilience, and the belief in the potential for positive change. These same values have shaped this strategic plan, which reflects our unwavering optimism for the future of the college and our discipline. The challenges and transformations of recent years have only reinforced the critical importance of social work in building stronger, healthier communities. Across our state and nation, the call for innovative practices, community partnerships, and well-prepared social work professionals has never been more urgent—and the College of Social Work at the University of Utah is ready to answer that call.

This plan represents a shared vision for the future of our college. It builds on our strengths while focusing on the foundational pillars that define our mission: advancing cutting-edge research, fostering meaningful community

partnerships, providing transformative educational experiences, and supporting the success of our students. By reinforcing our efforts in these areas, we not only respond to the needs of today; we also shape the future of social work, locally and nationally.

This ambitious undertaking would not have been possible without the contributions of our dedicated college community. We are deeply grateful to the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and external stakeholders who lent their voices, ideas, and expertise to this effort. Special thanks go to our steering committee and university leadership for their guidance in helping us articulate this bold vision for the college.

As we look ahead, we commit to investing in the resources, support systems, and collaborations needed to ensure our continued growth and impact. Together, we will advance research that transforms practice, forge partnerships that empower communities, and educate the next generation of social work leaders. With this plan as our guide, we are poised to lead with excellence, compassion, and integrity into a future brimming with opportunity.



# MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

## MISSION

The College of Social Work is dedicated to educating and training students, conducting transformational research, and engaging with communities to promote social justice and enhance well-being.

## VISION

To lead as a nationally recognized college of social work, preparing future social work leaders, conducting impactful research that improves lives, and driving change for communities.

## VALUES

**Service**

**Social Justice**

**Dignity and Worth  
of the Person**

**Importance of  
Human Relationships**

**Integrity**





# STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK

**This strategic plan outlines the path of the College of Social Work for the coming years.**

It is focused on five priority areas, each with overarching goals that outline success, actionable strategies and initiatives to drive implementation, and measurable success metrics to ensure accountability.

These priority areas anchor our strategic plan and will guide our path forward.

## **PRIORITY AREAS**

**Advance Research and Discovery**

**Grow Community Engagement**

**Continuously Cultivate Academic Innovation and Quality**

**Foster Student Success**

**Invest in Internal Operations and Resource Development**





# 01

## ADVANCE RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY

Our college is a leader in advancing the field of social work through rigorous, expansive, and innovative research that bridges theory and practice. We are steadfast in our commitment to research that not only furthers knowledge, but also enriches the lives of practitioners and the communities they serve. Guided by the principle of being robust in our expectations and generous in our definitions, we embrace many forms of scholarship—from traditional academic studies to community-embedded research—that drive innovation and impact.

Achieving excellence in research requires intentional investments. We are dedicated to building a culture that

supports faculty and students alike, providing the resources and mentorship necessary to lead within their respective specialties. By fostering collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches, we aim to address emerging challenges in social work and ensure that discoveries are translated into actionable practices.

Research is not peripheral to our mission; it is integral to how we prepare the next generation of social workers and contribute to transformative changes in the communities we serve. This dual focus—on creating knowledge and applying it—is the cornerstone of our approach, positioning our college as a catalyst for progress and innovation in the field.

# STRATEGIES

## EXPAND THE RESEARCH OUTPUT OF THE COLLEGE

- Increase pre-and post-award support to facilitate the pursuit of new research projects and support dissemination of findings
- Improve internal communications and resource navigation for existing research supports
- Formalize a research-focused mentorship program for tenure-track faculty
- Increase awareness of faculty and staff expertise to match skills and skill needs across the college

## FOSTER COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

- Identify and support opportunities for collaborations and the creation of research groups within the college
- Increase collaboration between college-based and research center faculty

## CREATE MEANINGFUL AND COMMUNITY-CENTERED IMPACT

- Formally recognize and promote community-engaged and participatory research
- Provide support for translation and dissemination of research findings to practitioners and community partners
- Develop tools and toolkits to enable and support faculty in establishing research partnerships

## BOLSTER RESEARCH OUTPUT THROUGH STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

- Increase the size and duration of doctoral student funding packages
- Intentionally connect students with faculty for mentorship and aligned research opportunities
- Identify funding sources to increase accessible opportunities for student participation in research

# METRICS

- Increased research expenditures
- Increased publications
  - » Increased publications in high-impact journals
- Positive growth in community-engaged research collaborations and projects
- Increased facilities and administration indirect costs
- Increased number of collaborative/multi-PI grant applications
- Increased average length of doctoral funding packages
- Development of innovative methods for dissemination of research to community partners





## 02

# GROW COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

At the heart of social work lies a commitment to service and human connection. These values guide our college's efforts to expand our presence within the community and strengthen our collaborative relationships with organizations dedicated to societal impact. Social work is a collective endeavor, and we recognize that our efforts are most effective when pursued in partnership with others.

We affirm our commitment to intentional and reciprocal partnerships, seeking to build on past successes and uncover new opportunities to engage with communities. These relationships are essential not only for advancing research and service, but also for equipping our students to

lead as advocates and practitioners who value connection and collaboration.

By prioritizing community engagement and involvement, we aim to amplify our impact. This includes celebrating and elevating the work led by our college community, supporting students and faculty in meaningful advocacy efforts for policies that affirm the inherent dignity and worth of individuals, and creating systems to document and share the outcomes of our partnerships. Together, we can achieve far more than we can as individuals, living out the core values of our discipline and our college.





# STRATEGIES

## FACILITATE AND REWARD COMMUNITY-ENGAGED WORK

- Equip faculty and staff with knowledge and tools to articulate partnership expectations for community-engaged and participatory research
- Modify Retention, Promotion, and Tenure Standards (RPT) to recognize community-engaged and participatory research
- Invest in a dedicated position to lead community-engagement efforts, facilitating partnerships and coordinating engagement
- Proactively identify potential external partners with aligned needs and focus areas

## EQUIP THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- Create an annual community impact and civic engagement event, highlighting the college's work and impact for current and potential external partners
- Provide students with resources and information to learn about historical and current advocacy and civic engagement efforts
- Leverage partnerships with community-based organizations to identify emerging needs within the community

## ENSURE COMMUNITY-ENGAGED WORK IS CLEARLY DEFINED AND DOCUMENTED

- Develop definitions of partnerships and types of community-engaged work
- Implement processes to capture, track, and report annual partnerships and community service by faculty and staff

# METRICS

- Positive growth in the number of active annual external partners
  - » Expanded array of partners (e.g., type, geography)
- Completion of updates to RPT
- Creation of community engagement position
- College investment in community-engaged partnership
- Positive growth in participation in the annual impact event
- Positive growth in percentages of philanthropic and grant funds dedicated to community-based work





## 03

# CONTINUOUSLY CULTIVATE ACADEMIC INNOVATION AND QUALITY

The field of social work is ever-evolving, shaped by the shifting needs of society and the expectations of students entering the profession. To remain at the forefront of education and practice, our college is committed to continually evaluating and enhancing our curriculum, aligning it with best practices and with the changing needs of our students, who increasingly benefit from new and hybrid modalities for learning. This includes ensuring that our programs meet the highest standards of rigor while embracing innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

We recognize the importance of aligning theoretical foundations with practical skill-building, preparing students to navigate the complexities of their future careers. By

embedding competency measures throughout our programs, we ensure that graduates are not only knowledgeable in the principles of social work, but also equipped to apply them effectively in different contexts.

As we adapt to new modalities and expand access to education, the quality of our offerings will remain unwavering. Whether in traditional classroom settings or through online platforms, our courses will reflect best practices, emerging trends, and the needs of the communities we serve. Through these efforts, we affirm our commitment to providing a transformative education that prepares our students to lead and innovate in the field of social work.

# STRATEGIES

## PROVIDE RIGOROUS AND RELEVANT ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES FOR ALL STUDENTS

- Enhance the scalability of online courses while maintaining high-quality learning experiences, utilizing graduate students for support
- Ensure updated online pedagogy is applied to and available for previous courses being translated online
- Embed integrative behavioral health, collaborative course management, and pragmatic preparation for practicums into the curriculum
- Develop and implement curriculum to support social work practice with Spanish-speaking communities and evaluate the feasibility of a formal certificate program
- Engage with external community partners, building standard and lasting communication pathways to identify industry needs to guide modernization of curriculum
- Explore expansion of grounded and online electives through cross listing with other colleges across campus
- Finalize program and focus area audits, implementing recommendations across all programs
- Develop a regular cadence for monitoring, maintaining, and updating course materials

## UTILIZE COMPETENCY MEASURES TO IMPROVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

- Create clear action plans based on competency data for students, developing benchmarks and integrating skill building into courses
- Better equip practicum field instructors with the tools and standards needed to effectively assess student performance

# METRICS

- Improvements in student competency rates
- Enrollment by BSW, MSW, and Doctoral programs
  - » Growth in online enrollment
  - » Increased enrollment of Spanish-speaking students to meet the needs of Utah
- Decreased time to degree
- Improved climate survey results
- Positive results on surveys of partner organizations







# 04

## FOSTER STUDENT SUCCESS

The academic strength of our college is one hallmark of its excellence, but true success is only achieved by prioritizing the holistic well-being and development of our students. Aligned with the University of Utah's Impact 2030 goals, we are committed to increasing enrollment, improving graduation rates, and ensuring that more students secure meaningful and gainful employment upon completing their degrees. These ambitions align closely with our mission to prepare skilled and compassionate practitioners who will serve our state's unique and evolving communities.

Achieving these outcomes requires a comprehensive approach to student success. We are committed to enhancing recruitment and retention efforts, ensuring that our programs reflect the needs of both our students and the communities

they will serve. We also recognize the importance of connections—to peers, mentors, and the broader college community—in fostering persistence and academic achievement. By investing in mentorship opportunities, student organizations, and other relationship-building programs, we aim to create an environment where students thrive both academically and personally.

Finally, experiential learning is a cornerstone of social work education. By tailoring practicum experiences to the unique goals and needs of our students, we will provide them with real-world opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge, equipping them for successful careers long before graduation. Through these efforts, we reaffirm our commitment to student success as central to our mission and impact.

# STRATEGIES

## GROW THE CSW STUDENT BODY

- Develop student recruitment partnerships with regional high schools and community colleges
- Intentionally recruit students from Spanish-speaking and native populations to appropriately meet the needs of the changing state demographics
- Develop information hub with scholarship and loan-forgiveness opportunities for students

## PROVIDE EXCELLENT STUDENT EXPERIENCES

- Develop a formal student and alumni mentorship program, supporting strong connections between current and past students to foster professional and personal growth
- Expand community-oriented student events and sustain support for student organizations
- Assess the feasibility of an embedded counseling program within the college, providing standardized patient and other simulation-based training opportunities for students



## PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES FOR ALL STUDENTS

- Increase the number of practicum partners to create more opportunities to match students with goal- and interest-aligned placements and experiences
- Facilitate practicum placements for out-of-state and online learners by building and maintaining relationships with out-of-state and in-state practicum partners
- Create and fund a scholarship program to provide stipends to students participating in unfunded practicum experiences

# METRICS

- Increased number of practicum partners and placements
  - » Growth in the variety of practicum partners (e.g., macro focus, rural areas)
- Positive growth in participation of student programming efforts
- Improved retention of underrepresented students
- Improved placement upon graduation
- Creation of formal student and alumni mentorship program
  - » Positive growth in student and alumni participation
- Increased percentage of students who receive a practicum stipend
- Positive response to identity as a social worker





# 05

## INVEST IN INTERNAL OPERATIONS AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The success of our research, partnerships, academic programs, and student-focused initiatives depends on the strength and sustainability of our internal operations. The faculty and staff who comprise the College of Social Work community are the foundation of everything we do. To achieve the ambitious goals laid out in this plan, we must prioritize investments in the people, processes, and resources that enable our work to flourish.

Central to this effort is equipping our people for success. By providing robust onboarding, clear career progression pathways, and opportunities for ongoing professional development, we empower faculty and staff to thrive in their roles and contribute meaningfully to the college's mission. Alongside this, we are committed to fostering leadership within the college, cultivating a pipeline of future administrators and leaders who will help guide us forward.

Achieving our goals also requires a focus on resource development. Expanding our philanthropic efforts, diversifying our donor pool, and strengthening relationships with alumni and partners will enable us to grow our capacity to support students, advance research, and deepen community engagement. As we expand these efforts, we will also prioritize telling our story—communicating the impact of our work and celebrating the achievements of our faculty, staff, and students.

Through strategic investments in people, processes, and resources, we are laying the groundwork for sustainable progress, ensuring that our college remains a leader in education, research, and service.



# STRATEGIES

## INVEST IN PEOPLE FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

- Build standard onboarding and processes for faculty, staff, and instructors, with regular touchpoints and training opportunities offered after initial onboarding
- Develop clear role and progression expectations for staff and career-line faculty
- Intentionally build a network of college administrators and leaders, investing in leadership development offerings
- Formalize mentorship programs to support career progression of faculty, staff, and leaders



## GROW PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING

- Expand and diversify the overall donor pool considering, private donors, foundations, and non-profits
- Expand the types and frequencies of donor and alumni events and opportunities to become involved with the college
- Develop a comprehensive donor map to share the impact of support

## SHARE THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK

- Provide the appropriate resources to implement a comprehensive public relations, communications, and marketing plan, utilizing a variety of channels to reach distinct audiences
- Invest in additional resources for marketing and communications, ensuring adequate personnel for external communications and the dissemination of faculty research

# METRICS

- Development of standardized onboarding procedures
  - » Positive feedback on new processes
- Increased number of donors
  - » Increase in first-time donors
- Increased philanthropic funds
- Positive growth in the number of CSW faculty and staff who participate in leadership development programs
- Positive growth in marketing and communications reach (e.g., media coverage, site traffic)

A man in a white shirt is pointing at a whiteboard. The whiteboard has some faint, illegible writing on it. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

# IMPLEMENTATION

**This plan charts a clear and distinctive path forward for the College of Social Work, rooted in our commitment to continuous improvement and meaningful impact.**

We are committed to maintaining strong alignment with the priorities identified through the University's current strategic planning process. Moving forward, we will focus on developing an implementation plan that outlines clear targets for all metrics and sets timelines for our work, ensuring accountability and progress tracking. Our aim is to continually reference this document as a college, ensuring timely progress and strategy-aligned decision making.



THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH  

---

**College of Social Work**