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INTRODUCTION

Our seventieth anniversary celebration is a fitting time to take stock of our history as a social work training institution and to look to our future. The Department of Social Work at Wits has a long and proud history spanning 70 years in which many of our staff and graduates played a critical role in the development of social services in South Africa and in the struggle for freedom and democracy in our country. Eminent graduates of the Wits Department of Social Work who helped to craft the story of social work in South Africa and enhanced the dignity and stature of the profession include, among others, Ruth First, Ellen Kuzwayo, Leila Patel, Anne Letsebe and Brian McKendrick. Their lives and work are inextricably interwoven with the history of the Department of Social Work at Wits. Part I of this monograph provides a summary of this unique history, based primarily on the work of Hare and Hoffmann (1987), while Part II focuses on the Department’s vision for the future and some of the challenges confronting the discipline in the years that lie ahead.

PART I: The History of the Department of Social Work at Wits

According to Hare and Hoffmann (1987) in 1937 the University of the Witwatersrand became the fifth South African university to initiate degree and diploma courses for social workers. The stimulus for these programmes was the report of the Carnegie Commission of Enquiry into the Poor White problem in South Africa published in 1932. Among the recommendations articulated in the report, was a need for the training of social workers and the need for a department at one of the South African universities where skilled social workers could be trained.

In 1933, Professor R. F. A. Hoernle, professor of philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, presented a memorandum to Principal Raikes on the need for the development of the scientific study of social problems and the university training of students to deal practically with these problems from a scientific perspective. Subsequently
in 1936 John Linton Gray was appointed to the Chair of Social Studies at Wits and in 1937 the first cohort of students were admitted to the course. The chronological history of Social Work at Wits is described under the headings adopted by Hare and Hoffmann (1987).

Phase One: Beginnings

1947-1948: First Decade under Professor John L. Gray

In 1937, the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Social Studies was initiated and extended over four years of study. A two-year part-time diploma in Social Studies was also introduced during the same year. In October of 1937, the State Department of Social Welfare was established in response to another recommendation of the Carnegie Commission and as a result of the Volkskongres held in Kimberley in 1934.

In 1938, the Minister of Social Welfare, Mr. JH Hofmeyer, announced that the Department would subsidise 75% of the salaries of trained social workers employed by voluntary agencies.

The professional Social Studies course at Wits encompassed both theoretical subjects as well as practical work in the field.

John Gray, the first departmental head, has been described as “a theorist and philosopher and he was the moving spirit behind the establishment of the University of the Witwatersrand’s Community Health Centre in Fordsburg.
which commenced operations in June 1943” (Hoffmann & Hare, 1987:12). Facilities were provided for the training of students from the University Departments of Medicine and Social Studies. Simple social welfare services were offered to the poverty-stricken people of Fordsburg by Social Studies students. This centre was later renamed the John Gray Community Health Centre. However, due to urban decay and the industrialisation of the Fordsburg area, the Centre ceased operations at the end of 1952 and its assets were transferred to Entokozweni, the family welfare centre in Alexandra Township north of Johannesburg.

An important graduate of the social work programme in 1946 was Ruth First who subsequently became one of the important freedom fighters during the Apartheid era.

With Professor Gray’s untimely death in a drowning incident at sea in 1947, Phase One of the development of social work education at the University of the Witwatersrand came to an end (Hare & Hoffmann, 1987).

**Phase Two: Towards Autonomy**

**1947-1948: Caretaking by Dr. H. Sonnabend**

From 1947 to 1948, Dr. H. Sonnabend served as Acting Head of the Department of Social Studies at Wits. The most important development during this period was the introduction in 1948 of a new diploma course in Community Organisation which was designed to train staff for the community centres which the national War Memorial Health Foundation proposed to establish.

**1949-1967: Almost Two Decades under Professor O. J. M. Wagner**

In 1949, Professor O. J. M. Wagner assumed the position of Professor of Social Studies at Wits and was responsible for bringing about important changes in the curriculum. The
following year social work became a major subject to be studied over the full four years of the course. The Diploma in Social Work was abolished in 1950. In 1954 Psychology I was introduced into the first year of study and Social Economics became one of a number of elective courses in the second year. A clinical psychologist was employed who conducted groupwork with students aimed at enhancing insight into interpersonal relations and group dynamics.

In 1956, the name of the Department was changed from the Department of Social Studies to the Department of Sociology and Social Work and the degree was named a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work.

An important factor that influenced these changes was the establishment in 1955 of a Professional Division within the State Department of Social Welfare in 1955. Students were required to major in Social Work (Theory and Practice and Field Instruction), Sociology and Psychology. Additional prescribed courses included English I or Afrikaans I in the first year. Second-year electives included, among others, Social Anthropology, Philosophy, Legal Studies and Elements of Statistics. In 1957, a new elective named Psychiatry and Mental Hygiene was introduced for fourth-year social work students and their medical counterparts. The thrust of social work education remained generic and efforts were made to resist specialisation in the undergraduate degree.

Professor O. J. M. Wagner
Two significant innovations in 1959 were firstly, the introduction of a dissertation in the fourth year of study spearheaded by Dr. Thelma Seawright; and secondly, the requirement that students subscribe to an Oath of Confidentiality before they could be admitted to the second year of study. These regulations further enhanced the academic and professional calibre of the degree.

Although the practical social work programme had for long been an integral part of the course, linking the theoretical knowledge and practical components, it was only in 1961 that regulations were laid for the University to officially regard field work as an essential part of the course.

Field work supervision received increasing recognition following a Conference in 1958 on Supervision in Social Work. From October 1966, annual end-of-year meetings of supervisors and agency executives from field instruction centres were formally established with the aim of integrating theory and practice and facilitating communication between agency, student and University.
This phase in the history of social work drew to a close with the separation of the disciplines of sociology and social work in 1967. Professor Wagner relinquished his former role and became head of the re-titled Department of Sociology.

**Phase Three: Independence as a School of Social Work**

**1968-1973: The School of Social Work with Professor Felix Brummer as Director of Studies**

Hare and Hoffmann (1987) state that from December 1967, the Division of Social Work became the School of Social Work, and by the beginning of 1968, Dr. Felix Brummer had assumed the position of Director of Studies of the School. This new phase marked the beginning of Social Work’s operation as an independent entity.

During the following year the Department of Social Welfare and Pensions acknowledged the superior status of the Wits four-year degree (as opposed to the three-year degrees offered by many of the other social work training institutions) by granting Wits graduates who entered its service in a professional capacity two increments on the basic salary scale on appointment.

Other important changes adopted in 1969 involved firstly, reducing the number of major subjects in the third year by giving students a choice between Psychology III and Sociology III, and secondly, making provision for the quantitative evaluation of field instruction through the assigning of marks which came into effect in 1970.
A significant event during this period was the University conferment in April 1969 on Lillie Marguerite MacKenzie of an honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy in recognition of her pioneering role in the field of child and family welfare. She became the first social worker to be honoured in this way by Wits.

From the time of the inception of the School, undergraduate students were encouraged to participate in its activities and regular meetings were held between class representatives and staff members.

In 1969 Mr. Brian McKendrick from the School of Social Work was appointed to the position of Director of the Witsco Riverlea Project, an initiative of the students of Wits and funded by the University Rag. He was given the task of enhancing the co-ordination of the theoretical and practical aspects of education, with particular reference to group work (Hare & Hoffmann, 1987).

In the meantime the number of students in first year had increased from 39 in 1968 to 60 in 1969, leading to motivations for further staffing appointments for the following year. In 1969, Senate agreed to the creation of an ad hominem Chair of Social Work and the appointment of Dr. F. Brummer to fill this post. His inaugural address titled, The Changing Face of Social Welfare, was delivered on 5 May 1971. In view of the need to limit the intake of students to Psychology and Sociology which were compulsory subjects for social work, as from 1970, the intake of first-year social work students was capped at 60 although the number was subsequently increased to 65 in 1972. The reduction of intake numbers to 50 in 1982 led to the introduction of selection procedures for applicants.

In 1969, the School was offered accommodation in the new Gate House building and in 1970 reluctantly separated physically from its allied disciplines of psychology.
and sociology, where it had previously shared premises in the Social Sciences Building. “Symbolically, however the move furthered its identity as an independent university department” (Hare & Hoffmann, 1987:58).

During the ensuing years, syllabus changes were minimal except for the incorporation of a series of lectures on social welfare law into the first-year syllabus. Under the leadership of Mrs. Ceciel Muller, the School began offering continuing education programmes to the welfare community from the beginning of the 1970s.

Another highlight in reaching out to the community was the hosting by the School of a national conference for student social workers, organised by the Student Social Work Association (SSWA) of the School.

As early as 1970, the School experienced difficulties in negotiating with academics from the United Kingdom to accept invitations to visit the School because of the country’s racial policies. Around 1975 the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) began to apply pressure on its South African counterparts to resist the country’s political policies. For this reason, Dr. Herman Stein, President of IASSW visited South Africa on a fact-finding mission in 1973. On meeting with the staff of the School, he was able “to obtain evidence of the School’s consistent stand against racism” (Hare & Hoffmann, 1987:62).

From 1966 onwards, the field instruction component of the social work curriculum received increasing attention. Close links were forged with Witsco, the campus-based welfare organisation, which was able to offer students diverse field instruction opportunities. In recognition of the crucial role of supervision as the teaching modality of field instruction, and in order to ensure a high standard of field instruction, a seminar course of five monthly sessions of one-an-a-half hours each was introduced in 1969 for supervisors of students. Shortly thereafter, in
1970, assessment procedures were introduced for the field instruction programme.

A significant event that cast the spotlight on the field instruction component in social work education was the Conference on Social Work Student Training, organised by the Social Welfare Commission in Pretoria in 1971.

Phase three of social work education at Wits ended with the granting of its first Chair in January 1974, however the Chair was not filled. Professor Brummer retired at the end of 1973. As the most senior member of staff at the time, Mrs. Ceciel Muller, was granted sabbatical leave, and a governing committee was appointed to administer the business of the School during her absence.

1974: Caretaking by a Governing Committee

In 1974, a governing committee was appointed to run social work education at Wits as a temporary arrangement until a professor was appointed to the Chair. Eminent anthropologist, Professor W. D. Hammond-Tooke headed the committee consisting of Professors A. Hurst (psychiatrist), J. W. Mann (psychologist) and Dr. H. Lever (sociologist). Professor Brummer who had retired in 1973 was appointed as professional advisor to the School.

Among the new developments was the introduction of a selection interview for persons applying for admission to the course. Up to 1974 only eight masters and one PhD student had graduated from the Wits School of Social Work, so efforts were made to attract more candidates. In 1974 a proposal was submitted in respect of the Postgraduate Diploma in Advanced Social Work Practice. The course was designed to target supervisors and senior personnel in social work agencies with the purpose of enhancing the standard of student field instruction in social work. Continuing education programmes continued to be offered under the leadership of Mrs. C. Muller.
The issue of membership of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSA) continued to be addressed and staff decided to take concrete steps in response to Professor Herman Stein’s exhortation that “individual schools of social work could do more to lessen discrimination within the discipline of social work in this country” (Hare & Hoffmann, 1987:80).

Professor Brummer and Mrs. Hare prepared a motion for submission to the Joint Universities Council (JUC) in Kimberley in 1973. The statement emphasised the need for the JUC to reaffirm its adherence to the fundamental values in social work education relating to human rights and human dignity. It also highlighted the need for proportional representation on the JUC Executive Committee of universities open to certain population groups only or all population groups. It was felt that attendance at international congresses of IASSW should be open to all teachers of social work in South Africa. In addition, it was recommended that overtures be made to the Minister of Education to consider the admission of social work graduates for postgraduate study at white universities situated in the areas where they work.

Phase Four: Forging an Identity
1975-1982: A near Decade under Professor Ceciel Muller

A central feature of the School during this period was the establishment in 1976 of a community-welfare research programme, funded by Anglo-American De Beers Chairman’s Fund, which subsequently became the Centre for Social Development in 1977. This Centre provided social work services via the Field Instruction programme to schools in the so-called coloured community which were extended to black schools in 1981.

This project subsequently developed into a project known as Project Early Start, which was a home-linked programme for pupils experiencing difficulties in coping with school
requirements. Hare and Hoffmann maintain (1987:92) that until its physical separation from the School in 1983, the histories of the two organisations were almost inextricably intertwined. During the same year, the School moved again to new premises, this time to Senate House.

Concerted efforts were also made to incorporate an African perspective into the curriculum in order to make education and training more relevant to the South African context.

Following a long battle by the Head of the School to persuade the government to allow black students to register for the proposed diploma for Advanced Social Work Practice introduced in 1977, ministerial permission was granted for the first Indian students to be admitted to Wits to study for the undergraduate social work degree. In 1982, 15 African students were admitted.

After protracted deliberations with the Faculty of Arts, the social work courses in each year of study were split into theory and field instruction components.
The Higher Diploma in Advanced Social Work Practice was an outflow of the continuing education programme and served to meet the demand for practitioners trained to fulfill roles at advanced practice level, and in policy development, administration, social planning, supervision, research and teaching. It ran from 1977 to 1981. This new academic development and the community research programme under the Centre for Social Development were both funded externally, which enabled the appointment of additional staff. Appointees were representative of all population groups in South Africa. In 1979, monthly seminars were introduced for Masters and Doctoral candidates.

It is of interest that the beginning of Phase Four saw the staff establishment of the School numbering five. This number more than doubled to 12 during the years 1978-1980, decreasing to eight in 1981 and to six in 1982-1983.

In 1979 the four-year undergraduate course was changed to a three-year bachelor degree followed by honours or diploma study in five specialisations, including Child and Family Welfare, Industrial Social Work, Medical Social Work, School Social Work and Social Welfare Management which were introduced from 1983. However, the Council for Social and Associated Workers subsequently recommended that as from 1 January 1986, only a four-year training in the subject Social Work be stipulated for registration as a social worker.

During this period, three important Bills were passed through parliament, namely, the National Welfare Act 100 of 1978, the Social and Associated Workers Act 110 of 1978, and the Fund-raising Act 107 of 1979.

Further important developments during this period were the allocation of a transport budget by the university administration to cover student field instruction expenses incurred in this programme, and the introduction of Skills
Training and sensitivity or Self Awareness training in 1980 and 1981, respectively.

From January 1983, the Centre for Social Development separated from the School of Social Work and Professor Ceciel Muller became the full-time director of the Centre.

1983: Caretaking by Professor WD Hammond-Tooke
During this period, Professor WDS Hammond-Tooke from the discipline of social anthropology, was asked to step into the role of taking primary responsibility for the School of Social Work.

A significant development during this period was the introduction of new requirements for registration of social workers. No sooner had the 3-year BA Social Work been introduced at Wits, than the Council for Social and Associated Workers, the statutory body responsible for social work education and practice in this country, stipulated that as from 1986, only holders of degrees with four years of social work study would be accepted for registration with the Council.

Another innovation was the introduction of tutorials within the School to assist educationally disadvantaged students, supplemented with University-level Academic Support Programmes. Other courses that were incorporated within the curriculum included the sequence on Health, Illness and Disability and Law and Social Work.

In 1987, three new medals were instituted: (1) The Ellen Kuzwayo Medal for the most outstanding diplomate in the Higher Diploma in Advanced Social Work Practice, awarded in recognition of Mrs. Kuzwayo's distinguished contribution to human welfare; (2) The John Gray Medal for the most outstanding BA (Social Work) Honours graduand, in memory of Professor J. L. Gray, who established social work training at Wits; and (3) The M.
C. O’Dowd Medal for excellence in School Social Work Practice, to commemorate Mr. O’Dowd’s contribution to the development of postgraduate professional education in social work at Wits.

Towards the end of 1983 Dr. McKendrick was appointed to the position of Acting Headship of the School and became the Head in January 1984.

Phase Five: Consolidating an Identity
1984-2001: Almost two decades under Professor Brian McKendrick

In response to the decreasing number of competent and experienced practitioners available to supervise the field instruction of undergraduate students, a course sequence on social work supervision was introduced.

A notable event was the election of Dr. McKendrick to represent the Joint Universities Committee on the International Association of Schools of Social Work for a period of three years.

Professor BW McKendrick

The specialisation in Industrial Social Work was introduced in 1986. During the same period, the David Murray Medal was established for excellence in the Child and Family Welfare postgraduate specialisation. A concerted effort was made to incorporate appropriate indigenous material into the teaching programme at both undergraduate and
postgraduate levels in order to make the course content more relevant to the South African context.

However, the highlight of this period was the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Wits School of Social Work in 1987. The theme of the conference was The contribution of social work in a changing South Africa. It was fitting that Wits chose this year to award an honorary doctorate to a social worker for the second time in its history. On this occasion a Doctor of Laws was awarded to Mrs. Ellen Kuzwayo, a social worker and a writer, for her dynamic community leadership, and her championship of the rights of Black people.

Front row left to right: Dr. Betty Livingstone, Professor Sandra Drower, Professor Brian McKendrick, Dr. Ellen Kuzwayo, Professor Wilma Hoffmann and Dr. Anne Letsebe

During its Jubilee year, the School of Social Work received a substantial amount of money referred to as the Muller/O'Dowd Gift for Campus-Community Social Work Contact. The interest accruing from this fund could be used for expenses incurred when hosting personnel from community-based welfare organisations who participated in the teaching programmes of the School.
Two issues related to field instruction began to emerge during the late eighties and continue to raise concerns. The first concern hinged on the availability of experienced supervisors employed by field instruction centres and the second concern related to the difficulty that disadvantaged students experienced in financing the transport costs associated with field instruction placements. The first issue was addressed by using field practice teachers who contracted with the School to supervise students. The second issue was approached by transferring funds from student fees to finance field instruction transport.

The number of applications received for undergraduate social work rose steadily over the years with 700 applications being received in 1987.

South Africa became a non-racial democracy in 1994. A former staff member from the Wits School of Social Work, Dr. Anne Letsebe was appointed to an important position in the office of the State President, while another staff member, Dr. Leila Patel was appointed as Director General in the Department of Social Development. She was subsequently responsible for formulating the White Paper for Social Welfare with its emphasis on the developmental paradigm.

The developmental social welfare approach is rooted in a rights-based perspective enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act of 1996, and views people not as passive recipients of services but as empowered participants in the broader economy. This paradigm became a core element of the social work training programme at Wits. A few years thereafter, Dr. Patel was appointed to the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor of Wits.

2001-2007: Critical Years for Social Work at Wits

In 2001, the discipline of social work was incorporated within the School of Human and Community Development together with the allied disciplines of Psychology and Speech
Pathology and Audiology. Professor Brian McKendrick was appointed as first Head of School. At the outset it was emphasised that while striving to become a cohesive multidisciplinary School, the autonomy and integrity of the individual disciplines would be respected, and there would be equal representation of all three disciplines on all decision-making bodies.

Professor McKendrick retired in June 2001 and was succeeded by Professor Thokozile Mayekiso as Head of the School of Human and Community Development. Professor Sandra Drower was appointed as Head of Social Work from mid 2001 until 2004. A significant initiative during her period of office was the staff and student exchange between Wits and Erfurt University in Germany which led to the publication of various book chapters by members of the Wits staff. Associate Professor Leah Gilbert assumed a caretaking role for a brief period until the end of 2004. Thereafter Dr. Tebogo Mabe assumed the Headship of Social Work from 2005 until October of 2006.

During this period the Department moved to the former Social Sciences Building which had been renamed the Umthombo Building.

The reason for many of the management changes was related to a disciplinary inquiry initiated against a member of staff in the Department of Social Work. Due to poor management of this crisis both internally within the School and externally by the University, the Department suffered severe dislocation. Several staff members resigned and vacant posts were frozen. The remaining staff members were compelled to assume very heavy workloads which had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and research output. At the same time, the throughput of students plummeted dramatically and the university considered possible closure of the Department.

A University Review Committee was appointed and
the panel recommended closure of Social Work at Wits and transfer of the Department to the University of Johannesburg. The School of Human and Community Development strongly resisted this recommendation and under the able leadership of the Acting Head of School, Professor Norman Duncan, presented a report detailing the reasons why the review could be regarded as invalid. Senate subsequently recommended the appointment of an independent review committee.

In the meantime, Associate Professor Eleanor Ross was appointed as Acting Head of Social Work in October 2006 and was elected to the position of head in December 2006. Professor Duncan’s Headship of the School of Human and Community Development was confirmed in December 2006. The review committee that was subsequently appointed comprised Professor Vivian Bozalek, Head of Social Work at University of the Western Cape, Professor Manganyi, retired professor of psychology and former deputy vice chancellor of the University of Pretoria, and Professor Philip Bonner, professor of History at Wits. They visited the Department in March 2007, interviewed all staff members and scrutinised various documents. On the basis of this review they recommended the continuation of social work at Wits.

PART II-our vision for the future and the challenges confronting the wits social work department

Our seventieth anniversary celebrations mark a significant and momentous occasion in the history of the Social Work Department at Wits. At this juncture we can look back on a long and proud history, built on the legacy that we inherited from our predecessors. However, we also need to acknowledge that the last five years have probably been the most formidable and critical years in the history of our Department. During this period we were confronted with the paradox of the University considering closure of a social work department during an unprecedented skills crisis which had resulted in the Minister of Social Development
designating social work as a scarce skills profession. The staff members in social work have experienced a long, drawn-out and extremely stressful review process in which we had the sword of Damocles hanging over our heads.

However, we worked as a strong, cohesive and resilient team, and despite the hurdles and obstacles in our path, we achieved a positive second review. Moreover, we have emerged from this experience with a newfound pride, vigour, determination and commitment to achieve our vision of reclaiming our former position as a centre of excellence in social work education on the continent of Africa and moving towards a culture of excellence.

Despite the intense external pressures to alleviate the skills crisis by increasing the number of social work graduates, we wish to focus on producing high quality graduates who can add value to their communities and are able to respond to the unique and complex social, economic and political challenges of the South African and African context, including poverty, unemployment, inequality, exclusion, corruption, crime, violence, HIV/AIDS and other fault lines. We wish to produce competent, reflective practitioners who will participate as responsible and culturally sensitive citizens in the life of local, national and global communities. We are aware of the fact that we need to equip students with a range of relevant and appropriate knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to make a meaningful and sustained contribution to any field of social service in which they may be employed. They need to not only be equipped with the direct skills and competencies to work with individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities but also the indirect skills of research, supervision, management, administration and policy development and implementation. Furthermore, they have to be aware of the need for continuing professional development following graduation.

We are also committed to instilling within our students the values and ethics of equity, democracy and social justice
enshrined in our Constitution, as well as service to others that will ensure that they work in an accountable manner following graduation. Their knowledge and skills need to be informed by a strong value base and they need to be able to use themselves as tools in building professional relationships with clients. Emphasis is placed on the fact that although social workers are responsible for assisting all people to meet their basic human needs, we have a particular responsibility to serve the vulnerable members of society, including children, women, disabled persons and the elderly and to intervene on the side of those who still carry the scars of historical, political and socio-economic injustice. In our training, we need to constantly emphasise social work’s values of caring and people-centredness, our commitment to being agents of social change and our willingness to take a moral stand against all forms of social injustice.

We also need to constantly re-appraise our selection procedures for the admission of students. Whereas previously we lowered our admission criteria in line with our moral obligation to meet democratic redress and transformation policies and imperatives, we have been confronted with the unintended consequences of such policies. For example, in the past many under-prepared students used social work as the only access route to university without having any real commitment to the profession, and the Department faced possible closure on account of very poor throughput rates and the revolving door syndrome where students repeatedly failed courses and remained in the system for extended periods. We are also aware of the fact that we need to adopt more creative teaching approaches and align our curriculum more closely with the Standards Generating Benchmarks (SGB) of the South African Council for Social Service Professions; the Integrated Development Strategy adopted by the Department of Social Development; and the Millennium Development Goals which represent an international commitment to promoting social and economic development, fighting poverty and combating hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and
discrimination against women (Development Effectiveness Report, 2005). To this end, we need to place greater emphasis on equipping students with the skills needed to assist communities to develop income-generating and poverty alleviation projects as a way of achieving sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, we need to ensure that our students are equipped with the technological skills to embrace the Digital Age.

A further challenge is to forge multidisciplinary partnerships with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governmental bodies, international organisations, women’s groups, trade unions and industry. Although we already have strong links with the South African Council for Social Service Professions, the Department of Social Development and a wide range of NGOs that we regard as invaluable partners in the training of our students, we still need to further expand our collaborative partnerships. In terms of research, we recently collaborated with the School of Public Health at Harvard University and the Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics on a pilot research project involving persons living with HIV/AIDS attending the Themba Lethu Clinic at the Helen Joseph Hospital.

For the past decade we have talked about keeping abreast of global developments in the field, while making the curriculum more relevant to the local context by being responsive to the needs of organisations working at grassroots level with local communities and infusing our teaching with emerging indigenous approaches and theories relevant to our diverse, multicultural and textured society. In the words of Steve Biko, we need to focus on forms of engagement that “inevitably exhibit African values and be truly African in style” (cited in Taylor, 2007:28). However, despite the fact that we have, for a long period, been aware of these imperatives, we need to approach this task with renewed vigour and commitment. In addition, we are committed to a strengths-based, ecological and developmental approach, located within a human rights perspective. We also re-affirm our commitment to a
teaching curriculum that resonates with the importance of such fundamental social institutions as the family, the school, and the workplace.

It has become imperative that we re-visit our teaching and learning strategies so that they become more creative and that we build in quality assurance and quality improvement mechanisms at all levels. There is a wealth of cross-disciplinary teaching and learning experience and expertise within the School of Human and Community Development as well as the Faculty of Humanities that we need to tap into.

We also need to work in close partnerships with service users in practice and education and be responsive to the needs and problems articulated by communities and practitioners when developing social work curricula, thereby promoting the concept of service user participation and inclusion (Lymbery & Postle, 2007:7).

In view of the fact that Wits is a research-driven University, we have aligned ourselves with the Wits 2010 strategy of producing high quality researchers and research output.

Our recently developed research thrust focuses on human rights and social justice and staff within the Department of Social Work have within the past few months had five articles located within this thrust accepted for publication in ISI accredited journals. As testimony of our commitment to research, we have increased our number of publications quite substantially from 3 in 2006 to 20 for 2007/2008. In line with these developments, we have changed the focus of our fourth-year research projects from a long essay to a research report and are making a concerted effort to build research capacity in our students and develop research-minded practitioners who view research as an integral part of their practice and have an ethical obligation to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.
through research. Implicit in this approach is the belief that research engenders within students the values of inquiry, critical thinking, creativity and open-mindedness, which are fundamental to building a strong democratic ethos in society.

A healthy development that needs to be encouraged is the fact that students are becoming increasingly aware of their rights and are prepared to challenge existing policies. We also need to encourage greater exchange and interaction between students of different universities.

For example a group of 50 social work students from the University of Zululand visited Wits in September 2007 and engaged in robust and animated debate with our students on a range of social issues that are likely to directly affect their practice following graduation.
Although the Department of Social Development has considerably eased the burden of university fees, residence costs and textbook expenses, the costs of travelling to and from their field instruction sites remain a problem for many students.
As a social work department, we go forward into the future with pride and determination, and with the belief encapsulated in the words of Postle and Lymbery (2007:263), that social work is “a profession to be proud of”. It is my personal conviction that even though there is a dire need for more social service professionals to meet the needs of our country and to assist social workers, we should resist the trend of allowing professional social work tasks to be undertaken by persons who lack social work education and qualifications, and can potentially harm clients and communities. We also need to resist the pressure to focus on quantity at the expense of quality in the education of future social workers.
REFERENCES


