



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

1010 W. Nevada Drive, MC-082
Urbana, IL 61801-3813

November 8, 2020

Professor Xinlei Wang
Agricultural and Biological Engineering
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Dear Xinlei,

We are writing to very strongly support your application to the Student Sustainability Committee for the needed repairs on the 2011 US DOE Solar Decathlon House. We cannot underscore enough how valuable this house is to teaching and learning at the School of Social Work at UIUC. The house allows important space for us to implement live simulations for our social work students.

Last Fall, over 100 students in four different social work courses participated in live simulation at the Solar Decathlon house. We staged the house, hired actors from the Station Theater and involved our PhD students in designing relevant case scenarios. Prepared with only basic knowledge about the simulations, students in each class arrived at the staged Solar Decathlon house, assessed family functioning and formulated realistic intervention goals.

The themes of the simulations focused on core social work competencies in relation to diversity, equity, and inclusion. They included: (1) a divorced older man with diabetes and chronic back pain; (2) a couple with domestic violence problems; (3) a woman whose relative has been living in the United States as an undocumented immigrant; and (4) a gay couple who adopted an adolescent from the foster care system. Other simulations focused on counseling skills for couples.

Mentored by lead instructors, Ph.D. students developed the cases scenarios, acted in supporting roles, and led discussion groups. To engage whole classrooms, we live-streamed the simulations to other instructors and students at our School.

Participating students have shared the transformative and innovative nature of this learning experience. When asked what they learned from the live simulation, comments from student participants included:

“Overall, I feel as if I gained practical experience to be able to assist me in my career as a social worker. I feel more confident in my ability to be able to interact with clients in their home and have

learned important things to look for when completing assessments.”

“The experience was amazing and very helpful. The best way to learn is practice. The practice with feedback shaped the way I will respond in real life situations for the better.”

“I got to really learn hands on what it feels like to do a home visit. I got to learn how I felt being at the door knocking on a door to not know what to expect. It was a great learning experience and awesome to get feedback and observe how my classmates would go about it...I was able to use skills I have learned throughout all my courses in a “real” situation. Getting feedback after my scene helped me decide what I will change in future home visits and interactions with clients.”

Since this time, we have received a Provost’s Initiative Teaching Assessment Grant to continue our simulations and to make them a core part of teaching and learning in all three of our programs (BSW, MSW, and PhD). An article has been written up about the simulations in SMILE POLITELY, featuring the central role of the Solar Decathlon House. Next week, many of our participating PhD students are presenting posters or giving talks on the simulations at the Solar Decathlon House at the Counsel on Social Work Education, one of our two major conferences.

We sincerely hope this effort to obtain needed funds is successful as the house plays a sustaining role in our program for learning.

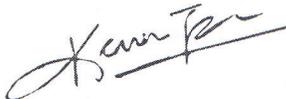
Sincerely,



Teresa Ostler, Ph.D.
Professor and MSW Director



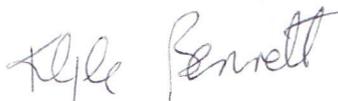
Min Zhan, Ph.D.
Professor and Associate Dean



Kevin Tan, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor



Chi-Fang Wu, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and PhD Director



Kyle Bennett, Ph.D.
Adjunct Teacher



Nicole Cantoni (Ph.D. student)
Adjunct Teacher