On Jul 19, 2016, at 8:00 PM, Dennis Miehls <dmiehls@smith.edu> wrote:

Marianne, Peggy, and Idene,

Marianne, I tried to get a meeting with you today but was told by Molly that you were unavailable.

I grow increasingly concerned about your current management of student concerns in our School. I see that tensions are escalating and I keep wondering why you, as the administrative team, are allowing the student body to essentially take authority over the decision-making of the School - I can only imagine that you are permitting the students such a wide berth as it fits with your overall goals for the School - which are quite unclear to me.

I understand that many students of color are expressing concerns and outrage at how they perceive they have been treated at the School and in the field agencies. Do any of you understand that student narratives may be exaggerated at this point and that the lack of direction from you is only fueling these concerns? I am dismayed that you are agreeing with the sentiments of many students that suggest that our supervisors and faculty field advisors are blatantly racist and antagonistic towards students of color.

I also understand that we live in a racist country and that some students may have experienced some interactions with supervisors and others as racist. It is likely a true story. But, it is not likely the only narrative that we should be privileging. I also understand that the recent racialized events in this country are truly upsetting for all of us, especially for individuals who identify as a person of color.

I cannot abide that you continue to portray the field office, and especially Carolyn duBois, as the victimizer in the exchanges that the students feel they have been subjected to in their experiences. The narratives that the students are creating (and that no one seems to be challenging) are in many instances not reflective of actual events. The students do not seem to appreciate that the changes in the consultation process and also the review process were instituted by the Deans' office, not the field office. Students need to know that these changes were not initiated by the field department and this speaks to the core of the issue, in my opinion.

The core of the problem is that the admissions process of our School has been tainted for a number of years - we have admitted students who did not have a reasonable chance of success in our program. This is very problematic and it is an issue that seems to be somehow displaced onto the field department. Why is that? Why do you, as administrators, continue to offer differential outcomes to students of color, in spite of overwhelming data that demonstrates that many of our students, including white-identified students, cannot offer clients a social work intervention that is based upon competence, skills, and ethics. I am very troubled that we are increasingly, as a School, pay little attention to the gate-keeping function of our profession. We are supposed to be training students to be clinicians who are serving the needs of their clients - in contrast to serving their own needs.

I am appalled at how you are treating Carolyn duBois at this point. She is not the villain here - I am sure you will dismiss my comments as Carolyn and I are friends. Yes, we are colleagues and friends and yes, I suggest that she is being mistreated in this current climate in our School.

When we will go back to instituting our policies and procedures across the board? I am very afraid that your decisions as an administrative group are going to create further tensions in our student body - you seem to be contributing to a white/student of color divide on our campus. Differential procedures, based upon race, is only going to further alienate our students from their purpose here at the School - that is, to be trained to serve oppressed populations in a range of clinical settings.

I ask that you, as administrators, begin to take your blinders off and to see that you are creating chaos in our environment, all while under the guise of saying that "the field" is the source of the problems. Perhaps, you should look a little bit more inward.

I imagine that you will "roll your eyes" when you read this email - as I have experienced in meetings - this sort of disrespect and devaluing of colleagues needs to stop so that we can somehow salvage the mission of our School - to train excellent clinicians, grounded in theory and an anti-racism mission.

With respect and (some) outrage,
Dennis Miehls, Ph.D., LICSW
Professor and Chair of the Human Behavior in the Social Environment Sequence
Editor, Smith College Studies in Social Work
Smith College School for Social Work
Lilly Hall
Northampton, MA. 01063
Phone: 413-585-4198
Fax: 413-585-7990