

Growing up in the rural Midwest, I witnessed extreme inequities in access to mental healthcare and quality education; this has been an enormous motivator for my future in the social work field. In this setting, I have both observed and experienced the direct impact of a lack of resources. These experiences of my formative years in rural Missouri, as well as my subsequent world travels, enlightened me on the experiences of poverty locally and globally. From these experiences, I strongly believe that as long as the systems in this country continue to function the way they were created to, we will not live in a society centered on justice. I recognize that I have lived an extremely privileged life and have been given opportunities that have allowed me to visit many parts of the world. These experiences, along with a deep passion for people, led me to this profession and one important belief: humans are inherently good. The only way to better our society is to believe that every person is doing the best they can in their unique circumstances. All people deserve to be given the resources and support that will allow them to thrive however they choose. Working to ensure this is what the social work profession is based on is vital.

The School of Social Work has connected me to some of the most passionate, driven, and truly kind people. The professors have always been not only accessible but have gone above and beyond for me countless times. They have worked to ensure that I have the experience as an undergraduate and graduate student that I need to be a capable and strong social worker. The experiences that I have had throughout my time in the SSW have shaped me as a human being and as a social worker. I have been able to practice my skills in a variety of settings such as forensic social work, individualized counseling, and now in school-based social work. My beliefs have been challenged, the way I see the world has been altered, and the meaning of ethics has been in constant question. These experiences have allowed me to grasp an understanding of the education system, the criminal justice system, and how overall access to resources in this country impact vulnerable populations, and most notably Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). I have learned that there is no justice in a racist system.

The importance of dismantling oppressive systems is something that I have educated myself on throughout my time in the program. I have learned that there are times that I need to use my voice and advocate for others. Being a fierce advocate is a value that continues to grow within me. There are also times when your voice is not the most important or impactful one in the room. Those moments require you to empower and uplift others, or simply take a step back. Social workers exist because of failed systems. Social work is a profession that was created because of white supremacy. As social workers, we must criticize the profession, and hold colleagues accountable as to what their intentions are within the profession.

The experiences I have had have allowed me to see where my clients were failed by those who had some duty to them. Consistently, that was every step of the way. Social work is branded a “helping profession,” but my view on this has changed over time. I’m not here to “help” people. Far less people will need to be “helped,” if they are able to access basic resources. Maslow’s

hierarchy of needs shows that people are unable to experience growth if their physiological needs, safety needs, and feelings of love and belonging go unmet. This model, along with my experiences, has shown that people need community, and people need to feel stability. Without these things, people cannot and will not be able to do the work to live their lives the way they want to. The SSW has given me the tools to look at others from a strengths-based perspective. I have learned how to hold space for others, and how to provide support for my clients. My ability to have meaningful and impactful conversations and connections continues to grow.

My short-term goals will be to continue to connect with different populations, and to gain a deeper understanding of the systemic changes that need to take place to achieve a society centered on justice. This will likely look like gaining my licensure so that I will be able to work in a wide variety of settings. My long-term goals are to advocate for systemic change and get involved in more activist work. The social work profession and the impact it has on society needs to continue to be criticized so that accountability can persist.

I am hoping throughout the rest of my final practicum, and as I enter my career, I can gain a deeper understanding of human beings and the way we function in this world. I want to be able to utilize clinical interventions that can allow people to have a greater understanding of themselves, and what they need to thrive in the way they choose to. I want to understand how I can use my privilege to lead people to continue to work toward an inclusive society that results in justice for all.