

2026 CSWE Election: Candidate Statement

Kathy Ruiz, LCSW, CCAT

Undergraduate Faculty Representative – CSWE National Nominating Committee

I am honored to be considered as an Undergraduate Faculty Representative for the National Nominating Committee for CSWE. I am currently an Assistant Professor and Director of Social Work Field Education at Southern Utah University. SUU is a rural institution, and the only on-the-ground social work program serving the Southwest Utah region. I am deeply committed to undergraduate social work education, as well as ensuring that the unique needs and challenges of rural programs and communities are meaningfully represented within CSWE's governance and functioning.

My work is grounded in practicum education in the field. I currently teach across the BSW curriculum, including Introduction to Social Work, Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Case Management, and Practicum Seminars. This allows me to work closely with undergraduate students from the start of their journey to their final time in the field. I oversee and guide students through forming professional identity, navigating practical ethical decision-making in the field, and readiness for generalist practice. Many of our students are first generation college students and intend to remain in our community or other rural communities across the state of Utah.

As Director of Social Work Field Education for both our BSW and developing MSW program, I develop and sustain partnerships with local agencies serving rural and remote populations. My professional background in clinical mental health, medical social work, trauma-informed care, and experiential interventions informs my lenses for practice. I have spent the entirety of my social work and clinical career serving the Southwest Utah region and am well-versed in the unique opportunities and constraints faced by rural social work programs and social work professionals. Limited resources, workforce shortages, and isolation require insightful approaches for field instruction, supervision, assessment, and general student support, and these challenges need to be reflected in CSWE decision making and policy.

I am also actively engaged in service and the shared governance structure in our institution. At SUU I founded our chapter of the Phi Alpha Honor Society, I serve on the department curriculum committee and the BSW program admission committee and was a key player in writing our MSW Benchmark 1 documents. I am also currently serving on hiring committees for three new social work faculty positions. These experiences align with my commitment to transparent and values-based leadership, and seeking individuals who represent diversity, which I believe includes small, rural, and new programs.

I approach committee service with a spirit of collaboration, integrity, and attention to representation. I believe I would bring a field practice centered and rural perspective to the NNC, and advocate for leadership that understands the realities of undergraduate education beyond urban and resource-rich settings. I aim to nominate leaders who value rural innovation, student-centered field education, and collaborative governance. I am

motivated by a belief that the strength of social work education depends on inclusive leadership that reflects the range of programs and communities that schools serve.