

Reflections on the History of the Society for Social Work and Research, 2008–2018

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ABSTRACT Founded in 1994, the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) is social work's scientific society, widely recognized as the world's foremost venue for scientific exchange, advancement, and connection of social work researchers at all career levels. In 2008, in an effort to preserve the organization's history, SSWR's first 7 presidents collaborated on an account of the society's first 14 years (1994–2008). This article brings the assessment of SSWR's history to the present day by sharing the perspectives of SSWR's next 5 presidents (2008–2018). During their terms, SSWR experienced dramatic expansion of membership and annual conference offerings, introducing new avenues for broad participation among its membership and conference contributors. Increasingly, SSWR has assumed a smart, collaborative role in promoting social work science in the profession's maturing ecology of social work knowledge development.

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The Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) was founded in 1994 as an independent membership organization to provide a meeting ground and support for individual social workers who engage in research. SSWR is now social work's scientific society, widely recognized as the foremost venue in the world for scientific exchange, advancement, and connection of social work researchers at all career levels.

In an effort to preserve the history of the organization, in 2008 SSWR's first seven presidents collaborated to publish an account of SSWR's first 14 years (1994–2008; J. B. Williams et al., 2008). The 2008 article is an important historical contribution and a lively recounting of the founding and early years of SSWR's growth and evolution.

In 2016, as SSWR celebrated the 20th anniversary of its annual conference, the moment seemed right for additional reflection on the organization's history and future as a scientific society. In the present article, the five subsequent presidents of SSWR review the organization's recent history. We focus on key challenges, opportunities, and advances experienced by the organization from 2008 through 2018 and reflect on the future of SSWR as the organization moves into its third decade.

The Origins and History of SSWR: Major Milestones, 1994–2008

In the 2008 article, SSWR founder Janet Williams wrote that she conceived of SSWR in response to the highly influential report "Building Social Work Knowledge for Effective Services and Policies: A Plan for Research Development," issued in 1991 by a National Institute of Mental Health task force on social work research comprised of prominent social work researchers and leaders of the day. Williams wrote that she was responding to the report's assertion that "throughout the profession there is insufficient organizational support for research development" (Task Force on Social Work Research, 1991).

The Task Force on Social Work Research report was a clarion call. It made a number of far-reaching recommendations to strengthen social work's research capacity, many of which were successfully followed by social work schools, programs, and national organizations. But for all the depth and breadth of its recommendations, the task force report made no mention of one element that Williams believed the profession needed: its own scientific society in the form of an independent, voluntary association of social workers who are engaged in and dedicated to advancing social work research. The Society for Social Work and Research met that need.

Fortunately, Williams' vision for SSWR was shared by other scholars and leaders in our field, and in 1994 the Society for Social Work and Research was founded as an independent membership organization "dedicated to the support of social workers in research activities," with Williams as its first president (J. B. Williams et al., 2008, p. 209). SSWR's goals, Williams wrote, were

. . . to foster a support and linkage network among social workers in research, to encourage more social workers to become engaged in research activities, to provide formal recognition of significant contributions to research by social workers, to advocate for increased research funding and research training, to promote advances in the knowledge base of the social work profession, and to encourage the betterment of human welfare through research and research applications. (J. B. Williams et al., 2008, p. 209)

By 2008, SSWR had enjoyed extraordinary growth and success in meeting its original goals. Beginning with Williams, the organization was graced with strong board leadership that acted swiftly to establish and expand the society. From its inception, SSWR was energized and guided by an active membership base and supported by organizations within and beyond social work. SSWR's first conference

was launched, for example, by a small, dedicated cadre of member volunteers with assistance from the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research and financial support from the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Throughout the terms of its first seven presidents, SSWR maintained a steadfast commitment to advancing and showcasing high-quality social work research and strengthening its annual conference as a central space for the dissemination and exchange of research-based knowledge for social work. A small, dedicated staff and a hardworking, hands-on board of directors ensured the organization's success throughout its lifetime.

SSWR's first seven presidents amassed an array of impressive organizational achievements. By 2008, for example, the SSWR Board of Directors had

- organized and institutionalized a successful annual conference, which grew from approximately 300 attendees in 1998 to 1,250 by 2008, with notable contributions from Presidents Tony Tripodi and Allen Rubin (J. B. Williams et al., 2008);
- built the human, financial, and legal infrastructure necessary to support a growing scientific conference and expanding portfolio of initiatives, guided by Presidents Paula Allen Meares and Deborah Padgett (J. B. Williams et al., 2008);
- engaged in long-term strategic planning under the leadership of Presidents Padgett and Anne E. (Ricky) Fortune (J. B. Williams et al., 2008);
- developed a diverse and growing membership, including doctoral students, faculty, and social work deans and directors, championed by Presidents Nancy Hooyman and Tripodi (J. B. Williams et al., 2008); and
- established a portfolio of annual awards (the Distinguished Achievement Award) and inaugurated its first named annual lecture (the Aaron Rosen Lecture).

While stressing advancements, the authors of the 2008 article also identified a number of challenges facing the organization, some of which persist to the present day. Previous presidents described the challenge of sustaining adequate infrastructure on an exceptionally lean annual budget, reaching and appropriately serving the needs of diverse faculty members and doctoral students who may not immediately view SSWR as a scientific *home*, and grappling with the disruptive effects of unexpected events, such as the 2000 NAACP boycott of events in South Carolina. Yet by the conclusion of her term in office in 2008, President Fortune wrote, SSWR had sufficiently matured as an organization such that it could turn to the consideration of priorities beyond its annual conference. The authors concluded,

Although SSWR has come far, there is still need for more. Individual junior faculty and doctoral students who are not located in a major school of social work need mentoring and support for carving out a career in research. The need for intervention research should continue to be emphasized. And finally, our field, as well as all the other health fields, needs to improve the translation of our research findings into knowledge that is put into practice by practitioners. Let us keep our eyes on the prize: the betterment of human welfare through research and research applications. (J. B. Williams et al., 2008, p. 219)

Presidential Reflections: 2008–2018

Sarah Gehlert, 2008–2010

My 5-year tenure on the SSWR Board of Directors included terms as vice president-elect and vice president/conference chair (2003–2005); and president-elect, president, and past president (2008–2011). The experience in vice president and president-elect roles helped to prepare me to be the SSWR president and has been invaluable in my teaching, scholarship, and present service with the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW).

My term as SSWR president began in the eighth and final year of George W. Bush's presidency (2001–2009), which set the external context for my tenure. Deborah Padgett of New York University, whose term preceded mine (2005–2007), initiated a strategic planning process for the organization, including a careful discussion of SSWR's role with regard to other social work professional organizations. This planning process set the internal context for my term as president.

Many events during the Bush presidency challenged the nation. The presidency began amid questions about the integrity of the 2000 election process, followed within months by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The war in Iraq began on March 19, 2003, in part based on a series of (later repudiated) reports of the existence of weapons of mass destruction. Hurricane Katrina hit on August 29, 2005, killing 1,300 people and displacing hundreds of thousands more. Iraq policy and scandals involving Republican Congress members led to the return of both houses to Democratic hands for the first time since 1994. Finally, President Bush's tenure ended with the financial crisis of 2008.

The residuals of the Bush years presented major challenges to SSWR. Although natural tragedies and man-made scandals were affecting the mood of the nation, President Bush's military and economic policies had a profound effect on social programs. In the area of child welfare, for example, Allard (2007) outlined several policy shifts that either occurred during the Bush presidency or started before 2001 and became manifest after Bush took office.

Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration as the nation's first African American president came with the hope that some of the conservative social and fiscal agendas of

the Bush years would be reversed to allow greater opportunities for all Americans. Yet, although Obama's election raised hope for new programs and policies, it became clear that change would be an uphill battle. Previous bailouts of the banking, auto, and other industries were projected to produce a decade-long, \$10-trillion deficit. Despite passage of an economic stimulus package (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), the unemployment rate rose beyond 10% by October 2009 from a low of 4.5% in 2006. This challenged social work research to identify the connections between these policies and the social outcomes that accrued from them and to devise and implement interventions at multiple levels to address social outcomes. This proved to be an enormous challenge for SSWR as the professional organization that sets the standard for and support of social work research.

The aforementioned events caused profound introspection within the social work profession that challenged SSWR's identity and place in the sphere of social work professional organizations. SSWR leaders participated in discussions to consider new organizational alliances and configurations that might strengthen the profession to address the worsening economy and plight of disenfranchised and economically impoverished individuals, families, and communities. SSWR was faced with how it could leverage its greatest asset: its ability to conduct research and use evidence to improve health and well-being. A historic meeting of 10 social work organizations and associations—entitled “Social Work: Future of the Profession”—was held at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, WI, on June 18, 2007, with representatives from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), SSWR, the Association of Social Work Boards, the National Association of Deans and Directors of School of Social Work (NADD), the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE), the Action Network for Social Work Education and Research, the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD), the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR), and the St. Louis Group for Excellence in Social Work Research and Education (SLG) in attendance. I represented SSWR as its president. Julia Watkins (2008), executive director of CSWE at the time, argued that the lack of a unified voice for the profession hampered its influence on social policy and political decision-making. Facilitated by an outside professional, the meeting aimed to explore how to develop such a unified voice. A number of ideas were proposed at the 2-day conference, ranging from a way of structuring or positioning the organizations to allow for the development of a collective voice and vision, to dissolving the separate entities and reforming them as a single organization. One idea for the latter was to develop subgroups within the organization that specialized in education, practice, and research. These subgroups were to be configured logically based on the aims of the individual organizations. SSWR clearly fell into the category of research. The resulting Wingspread Unification Resolution was supported by all in atten-

dance (Hull, 2008). However, although goals were identified, no specific actions were delineated.

The challenge of unification generated SSWR's first-ever open forum, which occurred at its 12th annual conference, entitled "Research That Matters," in 2008 in Washington, DC. Whereas in past years ideas and issues had been discussed in the annual business meeting, this was the first instance of SSWR leadership setting aside time during the annual meeting to discuss an important issue with SSWR membership. An open forum in town-hall format was held on January 18, 2008, to solicit feedback on the Wingspread Unification Resolution (which had been made available to members ahead of time on the SSWR website). During this forum—although it became clear that no one supported SSWR merging with other organizations—some members urged the SSWR Board of Directors to work more closely with organizations like NASW and CSWE to ensure that research is informed by practice. The SSWR board then deliberated in its open meeting at the conference and formulated its position to remain intact but to join and participate fully in a newly formed Social Work Roundtable that would meet annually to develop and maintain a unified voice and vision for the profession. The nine-organization Social Work Roundtable continues to meet annually in Washington, DC. The use of an open forum during the SSWR annual conference was an important new mechanism for ensuring communication between rank-and-file members and the SSWR Board of Directors. In this case, directors heard the call from SSWR members to ensure that research was informed by practice, which led to enhanced communication with sister organizations.

The economic climate of the country affected schools of social work, constraining them in terms of contributions to professional organizations—a change that challenged SSWR. The Board of Directors of IASWR, which was created in 1993 to enhance the profession's research infrastructure, voted to close the organization for financial reasons as of September 30, 2009. The IASWR board chair contacted me to see how its functions might be assumed by SSWR and other organizations that had collaborated to form IASWR and from which it received funding (i.e., NASW, CSWE, BPD, NADD, and GADE). This became the topic of a number of board meetings. SSWR was challenged to see if it could assume some of the roles previously held by IASWR, which would involve the outlay of financial resources and add to the duties of SSWR's volunteer Board of Directors. After deliberating, the SSWR board decided the organization could assume two of IASWR's five key functions. The first of these was planning preconference sessions with federal funders held at the annual SSWR conference; this would involve new alliances with the funders who had participated at past meetings and new duties for SSWR conference organizers.

A more involved key function was to serve as the face of social work research in Washington, DC. All agreed that social research had generally received less attention

tion than biomedical research and that it was essential to communicate the benefits of social work research among major funders, such as to directors at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and to administrators of other federal agencies, such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The SSWR Board of Directors also began to deliberate on how it might expand the presence of social work research in the nation's capital. In 2010, the board hired Llewellen J. Cornelius from the University of Maryland to serve as its representative in Washington, DC, and began to meet with him regularly. Further discussion involved how to expand to foundation funders, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation and William T. Grant Foundation, although no solution was found that would balance need with SSWR's limited resources. One advancement was that more direct communication between the SSWR Board of Directors, members, and funders produced new levels of knowledge about the research process and resulted in more social workers on NIH scientific grant review panels.

Throughout the process of introspection that I have described, an additional challenge became clear. The events of the Bush presidency and beginning of the Obama presidency made clear the need to disseminate the results of social work research as quickly as possible after peer review. After careful deliberation and planning, the SSWR Board of Directors decided to launch an open-access journal: the *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* (JSSWR). This action was taken following recommendations resulting from a 2-year study of publication practices in social work led by Jeffrey M. Jenson of the University of Denver and Anne E. (Ricky) Fortune of the State University of New York at Albany (Jenson et al., 2008). The report detailed problems inherent in social work journals, including the slow turnaround of peer reviews, poor-quality manuscript reviews, and delays between acceptance and publication of articles. The board's decision to begin a new journal represented the first time that SSWR had taken direct action to speed the process of translation by shortening the time between research production and dissemination and to provide an avenue for open access to research results to the social work community at large. The editorship of the journal was assumed by Mark Fraser from the University of North Carolina, which collaborated with SSWR to produce the journal's four annual issues. The establishment of the online journal, the quality of output, and the ability to review and publish scholarly work in a timely manner represented another major accomplishment of the 2008–2010 SSWR presidential term.

Rowena Fong, 2010–2012

Although my presidency started in 2009 as president-elect and ended in 2013 as past president, my initial SSWR experience was from 2002–2008, when I served as a board member under Presidents Meares, Padgett, and Fortune. During this

period, I established the Doctoral Fellows Award and the Deborah K. Padgett Early Career Achievement Award.

The two years of my presidency differed sharply in tone and direction from each other. My first year, 2010–2011, was characterized by its collaborative tone and clear direction following the demise of IASWR. The summer institutes and research methodology courses for capacity building formerly offered by IASWR were retained, as was the effort to promote social work research to federal funders who needed a better understanding of research undertaken by the profession. To foster these and similar activities, I created the National Research Capacity Building Initiative (NRCBI) to nurture research capacity building and promote the science of social work.

Research capacity building for doctoral students and social work faculty continued beyond the annual conference previously promoted by IASWR through research method courses during SSWR-sponsored summer institutes. James Herbert Williams organized the first summer institute in 2010 at the University of Denver, and Lambert Maguire organized the second in 2011 at the University of Pittsburgh.

The *science of social work* concept turned the profession and my presidency in a new direction in 2011. The 2011 SSWR conference theme was “Emerging Horizons for Social Work Research.” John Brekke of the University of Southern California presented the Aaron Rosen lecture in 2011, and his provocative talk, “It’s Not About Fish and Bicycles—We Need a Science of Social Work,” made clear the need for the social work profession to claim and promote its scientific identity (Brekke, 2011). His lecture complemented the presidential plenary speech—“The Youngest Science: Social Work Research as Product and Process in a Competitive Scientific Market”—by King Davis of the University of Texas at Austin. Davis (2011) observed that the product of social work science was as important as the process of social work science. Together, these lectures ignited dialogue about the science behind social work and the profession’s relationship to that science.

The dialog addressed many philosophical and pragmatic questions (i.e., What is scientific about social work? Are social workers researchers but not scientists? How familiar do social work practitioners need to be with research methods and findings? Are the only “real” social work scientists those with federally funded NIH grants? Are social workers just consumers of research done by other social scientists, such as psychologists or sociologists?). Other questions arose about the place of science and research in the training of social work practitioners at the doctoral level—the preparation of doctoral students to excel in the increasingly competitive research funding environment and tightening job market.

Debates also assayed the preparation of doctoral students to become stewards of the profession, as the Carnegie Foundation had proposed in its report on the future of doctoral education (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008). Another

issue concerned social work's adequacy to promote a social work scientific identity in doctoral education. These questions instigated philosophical and analytical contemplation of the emerging horizons of social work, the role of science in the profession, and social work's aspired education outcomes.

The science of social work. After the 2011 SSWR conference, several schools of social work collaborated to sponsor meetings at IslandWood, a conference venue in Seattle, WA. Invited participants discussed the concept, values, curriculum, and training of doctoral students, the impact of that training on social work practice, and the influence on educational policy and accreditation standards, all in the context of this new science of social work initiative. It was at the 2012 meeting that the concept of the science of social work gained traction and became associated with AASWSW's Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative (Uehara et al., 2014).

National Research Capacity Building Initiative. The science of social work spurred research capacity-building discussions in sister organizations. The speeches by Brekke and Davis at the 2011 SSWR conference raised awareness of the science that social workers were already conducting and of the reality that social work science is not only *applied* or borrowed from other fields, such as psychology, sociology, or nursing. The characterization of social work as science and social workers as scientists fostered many conversations at other professional meetings, including GADE and NADD. Discussions at GADE annual meetings weighed the differences between doctor of social work (DSW) and PhD degrees and what the research priorities or requirements of the two programs should be. Some GADE members held that social workers were applied scientists, believing they were researchers who applied the findings of research from other disciplines; others believed social work researchers were not scientists unless they had NIH funding (Fong, 2012).

Conversations at BPD conferences challenged the realism of expectations for social work professors in undergraduate programs to conduct research and claim a scientific identity while maintaining heavy teaching loads. Some observed that undergraduates were, in fact, more consumers than producers of research and therefore did not need to adopt the identity of social work scientists.

These conversations extended to SSWR's 2012 conference, when the NRCBI Roundtable was established and brought representatives of sister organizations together to discuss the science of social work and strategic planning for the future of SSWR. NRCBI activities were initially undertaken by a task force whose mandate was to build research capacity for doctoral students and faculty through networking that led to mentoring, targeting faculty in midcareer positions and faculty teaching at the undergraduate level. The NRCBI task force also aimed to effect internal and external changes to SSWR itself to strengthen research capacity-building programs and activities offered at SSWR's annual conferences. Externally, SSWR sponsored an additional workshop on obtaining foundation funding to supplement prior

workshops by federal funders. The NRCBI task force eventually became a standing committee in 2017, described in the SSWR bylaws as the Research Capacity Development Committee.

To strengthen the pipeline of undergraduate student researchers, research method workshops that had been offered collaboratively at BPD on behalf of SSWR in earlier presidential terms were solidified with commitments for additional financial support. SSWR agreed to assist with transportation and travel costs for researchers presenting at BPD's annual conference. These annual presentations were arranged in collaboration with BPD's research subcommittee to meet the needs of BPD faculty already engaged in (or wanting to engage in) research.

To encourage doctoral students to become more familiar with GADE, SSWR invited the GADE president to participate in SSWR's doctoral student panel in 2012. In turn, GADE sponsored a doctoral student breakfast meeting at CSWE's annual convention. SSWR continues to build collaborative relationships with sister social work organizations to strengthen social work's pipeline through the education of graduate and undergraduate students and enhance their identities as future social work practitioners, researchers, scientists, educators, and policymakers.

For faculty development and research capacity building for midcareer scholars, I established a collaboration between SSWR and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Connections Program, which sponsored a highlighted special panel presentation—"Using Research and Mentoring to Promote Early and Mid-Career Diverse Scholars"—followed by a networking reception. SSWR supported midcareer scholars through an invited symposium entitled "Research and Career Development to Make a Difference: Stories from Mid-Career Scholars."

Building collaborations within and among social work organizations was a focal point of SSWR research capacity building. To illustrate, I invited representatives of CSWE, NASW, NADD, AASWSW, SLG, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Connections Program as guests to the annual SSWR conference in 2011 and acknowledged them during the opening plenary session. This was another emerging effort to foster unity and solidify collaborations across the profession.

Jeanne C. Marsh, 2012–2014

It was a great honor to serve as SSWR president from 2012–2014. Having attended SSWR's inaugural meeting in 1995, presented papers at numerous subsequent meetings, and served on the board as member-at-large from 2003–2006, I was delighted to have the opportunity to continue to build and advance social work's premier scientific society. In my work with the SSWR Board of Directors, I have been impressed with members and the management and accounting infrastructure developed for SSWR in partnership with STAT Association Management's Jennifer Lewis and DeeJay Garringo. Finally, I was encouraged by what I sensed to be a growing desire for cooperation and mutual support among social work sister organiza-

tions, particularly with CSWE and its president and CEO, Darla Coffey, and with NASW and its CEO, Angelo McClain.

I was fortunate to follow the strong leadership of President Rowena Fong. In my year as president-elect, we updated the strategic plan put in place by the SSWR Board of Directors during President Padgett's tenure (2004–2006). The process involved gaining input from members at public meetings during the January 2012 Annual Conference as well as additional meetings with leaders of key social work organizations, including AASWSW, BPD, CSWE, GADE, NADD, NASW, and the SLG. The SSWR board approved the final plan in April 2012. Seven strategic goals for 2012–2017 emerged from this process:

1. Encourage the design, implementation, and dissemination of rigorous research that enhances knowledge about critical social work practice and social policy problems and advances social work welfare practices and programs.
2. Foster a transdisciplinary interprofessional support network of investigators conducting research on social work practice and social policy in the United States and abroad.
3. Provide learning opportunities to improve the conduct of social work-relevant research and its application.
4. Promote practices and policies grounded in an evidence base.
5. Support increased funding for research and training programs for social work researchers.
6. Provide formal recognition of significant contributions to social work-relevant research.
7. Seek active partnerships with other social work and research-related organizations to accomplish all of the above.

Several initiatives emerged from this planning process during the next 2 years, including (a) the establishment of the SSWR Fellows Program; (b) the move of *JSSWR* from an online open-access journal to a print journal published by the University of Chicago Press; and (c) development of policies and practices for socially responsible conference planning.

SSWR Fellows Program. As noted in the previous section, a strong contribution of SSWR as a scientific society has been the development of awards recognizing excellence in social work research at all levels. As a strategy for recognizing and rewarding active participation of early career, midcareer, and senior scientists, the 2012–2014 SSWR Board of Directors launched the SSWR Fellows Program. *SSWR Fellow* is an honorific title bestowed on SSWR members for their individual accomplishments, leadership, and contributions to SSWR as a scientific society. The SSWR board established eligibility for the Fellow designation with a point system under

which individuals are awarded points for participation in the society, including years of membership, abstracts submitted, papers presented, years served as an abstract reviewer, years served as a special interest group convener, years served as conference abstract cluster cochair, years of service in elected office, years served as an award reviewer, award recognition, and years served as a *JSSWR* reviewer. Because our partners in STAT Association Management had kept excellent records in the SSWR membership database, it was possible to determine the members deserving induction into the first class of SSWR Fellows. At the January 2014 SSWR meeting, 45 members (3% of the membership) were inducted as the first class of SSWR Fellows. From 2014–2018, 205 members were inducted as SSWR Fellows: 45 in 2014, 27 in 2015, 53 in 2016, 55 in 2017, and 19 in 2018. Overall, the fellowship program has become an effective strategy for promoting and rewarding participation and leadership and has become a sought-after and respected honor.

University of Chicago Press begins publishing JSSWR. In his 2012 annual report to the SSWR Committee on Publications, *JSSWR* Editor-in-Chief Mark Fraser, who with Managing Editor Diane Wyatt had established SSWR's online journal and led it through its first 3 years of publication, announced the need for a new publication model. The overwhelming success of the journal—measured by number and quality of articles published as well as rigor and timeliness of reviews—meant that a different publication strategy was required. Fraser wrote in the annual report,

*Our collective efforts have produced dramatic new opportunities for the journal and SSWR. In its current form and current level of support, *JSSWR* is not sustainable. Anticipating further growth (which we want), the demands of copyediting alone outstrip available resources. To strengthen the journal's fiscal base and resources to support copyediting, layout, plus routine journal management, a new model is needed. (Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research, 2012, p. 9)*

Based on this assessment, SSWR Committee on Publications Chair Jeffrey M. Jenson of the University of Denver solicited proposals to host *JSSWR* from several publishers. Jenson and the Committee on Publications based their search for a new publisher on impact, reputation, and overall fit for social work research and scholarship. Following an extensive review of five publication proposals, Jenson and Committee on Publications colleagues recommended selection of a subscription-based option from the University of Chicago Press. This option included a clause that allowed the *JSSWR* editor to identify two articles per issue to be published in an open-access format. As described in a Committee on Publications report (Jenson, Barth, Yaffe, Oyserman, Auslander, & Bender, 2013) to the SSWR Board, the proposal from University of Chicago Press had four distinct advantages over other proposals: It (a) offered greater flexibility and more sophisticated publication, production, website, and marketing features than other publishers; (b) required no increase

in current levels of financial support for JSSWR; (c) offered a cost-sharing arrangement intended to reduce SSWR's financial support for JSSWR over time; and (d) provided a publication option that offered the support and stability of a subscription-based model while preserving the option to publish selected manuscripts in an open-access format. The partnership with University of Chicago Press has proved productive. In 2017, JSSWR increased its number of submissions from 2016 by 52.9%, produced a rigorous acceptance rate of 21.2%, earned its first Impact Factor score, and was ranked by the 2017 Journal Citation Reports as 31st among 42 social work journals. JSSWR's ranking improved to No. 21 in 2018. In addition, the University of Chicago Press reports synergies created by serving as publisher of two premier social work journals, JSSWR and *Social Service Review*.

Socially responsible conference planning. Early in my tenure as president, I was contacted by representatives of the labor union UniteHere about an ongoing dispute (not a strike) between UniteHere and the Grand Hyatt San Antonio hotel, where SSWR had a contract—signed by a previous SSWR Board—to hold the SSWR January 2014 conference. The challenge of responding to a problematic hotel contract provided a valuable opportunity for SSWR Board of Directors development. The board engaged in a deliberative process prioritizing (a) active communication with SSWR members about ongoing developments and decisions, and (b) careful feasibility and cost analyses of available alternatives. First, given SSWR's status as a membership organization, the board was committed to frequent and transparent communication with members. Communication to the entire SSWR membership from the SSWR Board of Directors included regular e-mail updates as well as website updates about conference planning. Further, every member or nonmember who communicated with the board received an individualized response. By October 15, 2013, there had been 201 such communications: 21% from SSWR members, 79% from nonmembers, 11% from presenters, and 89% from nonpresenters. Second, the board worked with SSWR legal counsel to (a) clarify the legal and fiscal obligations incurred by the hotel contract, and (b) to review the legal and fiduciary duties of any nonprofit board. SSWR Treasurer Bowen McBeath provided a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the fiscal and organizational impact of various options that provided invaluable support for board decision-making.

The challenge of responding to a problematic hotel contract in a socially responsible way required an intense level of involvement from the Board of Directors and a deep commitment to their roles and fiduciary responsibilities as nonprofit board members. Board members rose to the challenge and provided outstanding leadership to SSWR and its membership. In addition to the opportunities this challenge provided for board development, it also provided opportunities to work with and learn from other social work organizations on shared concerns. To capture these learnings, President-Elect Eddie Uehara appointed a task force, including herself,

to establish board guidelines and policies related to socially responsible conference planning (Korr et al., 2015).

Edwina (Eddie) Uehara, 2014–2016

In contrast to many other presidents, I was neither an inaugural member nor previous board member prior to being selected as SSWR president-elect in 2013. In many respects, my election represented a leap of faith on the part of SSWR's membership—and in every respect, SSWR's notable accomplishments during 2014–2016 were a tribute to the virtuosity of SSWR's Board of Directors and staff in working with an enthusiastic but novice SSWR board president.

My presidential candidate's platform statement spoke to my aspirations for social work and for SSWR as social work's preeminent scientific society at a particularly promising moment in our professional and scientific development. As Rowena Fong noted earlier, by 2011 the field was engaged in a serious dialog about the science behind social work and the profession's relationship to that science. This discussion was taking place within a wider cross-disciplinary context emphasizing the importance of use-inspired transdisciplinary and translational science—a direction that seemed to play to social work's historic inherent strengths. At the same time, SSWR's 2012 revised strategic plan envisioned an emphatically bolder role for the organization in preparing future social work scientists, advancing social work's scientific agenda, and collaborating in strategic ways with other national organizations committed to advancing social work research.

My aspirations for SSWR and the future of the profession were also fueled by my term as president of SLG, which was comprised of deans and directors of research-intensive social work programs. In this role, I sensed among my peers a similar enthusiasm for closer cross-organizational collaboration and commitment to advancing the use-inspired science of social work—and most of all, by my involvement in the Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative in the year prior to running for SSWR president.

In August 2012 I joined Marilyn Flynn from the University of Southern California and a small group of social work deans, faculty members, and leaders of national organizations in hosting a roundtable convened to grapple with social work's role in shaping the 21st century. As Rowena Fong noted, the first day of the roundtable was dedicated to a discussion and elaboration of the science of social work framework. The second day, led by faculty and deans from the University of Washington, moved the discussion to a proposal for producing a set of grand challenges for social work (Uehara et al., 2014). The grand challenge roundtable leaders defined grand challenges for social work as "ambitious yet achievable goals for society that mobilize the profession, capture the public's imagination, and require innovation and breakthroughs in science and practice to achieve" (Kalil, 2012; Uehara et al., 2013, p. 3). Citing recent exemplars in other disciplines and fields, roundtable lead-

ers suggested that grand challenges had the potential to harness social work research around pressing societal challenges, address barriers between and among researchers and practitioners, serve as a calling card for interdisciplinary collaboration, and galvanize interest in the field (Uehara et al., 2014).

A proposition to support our field to develop a set of grand challenges for social work generated enthusiasm across roundtable participants (Uehara et al., 2014). By the close of that day, Richard P. Barth, then president of the AASWSW, suggested that that organization could provide leadership—along with schools, scholars, expert practitioners, and other social work leaders and organizations—in developing the grand challenges initiative for social work (Uehara et al., 2014). Shortly after the roundtable, the AASWSW board established a Grand Challenges Executive Committee to advance the initiative.

Inspired by these events, my SSWR presidential candidate platform spoke to the potential role of SSWR in shaping the future of social work and society:

SSWR has the ability—and the responsibility—to grapple with social work's role in shaping society's future. Many of the "grand challenges" that confront us in this century . . . are at the center of social work's long-held scientific and professional concerns. Social work has played a powerful role in lifting the country out of distress during pivotal points in history. . . . If the future is to be promising for all, social work must once again bring its knowledge base and know-how to bear on the seemingly intractable problems of our times. (E. Uehara, unpublished, November, 2012)

As I transitioned to the presidency in February 2014, the SSWR board under President Marsh's expert leadership had just successfully worked through complex issues presented by the San Antonio conference venue and was committed to developing new principles for socially responsible conference site selection. We were inspired by Vice President Jim Lubben's proposal to dramatically expand opportunities for member participation in the annual SSWR conference, particularly for early career scholars and social work scholars underserved and underrepresented in SSWR's membership. The Board of Directors saw a pivotal role for SSWR in the leadership and public launching of the Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative, an effort in which SSWR members were already heavily involved. We looked forward to marking a major SSWR milestone in 2016: the 20th anniversary of SSWR's annual conference. The board entered its annual spring planning retreat in 2014 with energy and a sense of promise. The priorities we set that April successfully integrated my presidential candidate platform with existing organizational momentum and laid the groundwork for major SSWR achievements. Following are highlights from selected board and society achievements.

Expanding opportunities for SSWR membership participation. At the 2014 spring retreat, the SSWR Board of Directors voted to increase the number of presentations at SSWR annual conferences in order to expand opportunities for member participa-

tion. In 2015, SSWR's conference schedule made room for 400 poster presentations (an increase of 100% over the 2014 conference) and 242 paper sessions (an increase of 22% over the 2014 conference). The board's decisions appeared to have had swift impact, and in 2016 SSWR's membership and conference participation rates were the highest in the organization's history (SSWR Board, 2016).

Recognizing policy research and policy advocacy as signature to social work, the board also institutionalized its commitment to policy research and advocacy by establishing the annual SSWR Policy Award, creating a permanent space for an annual social work policy panel in the conference program and creating a standing SSWR committee on policy, formally adopted by membership in 2017. Also in 2017, the board intensified its support for early career scientists (doctoral students and junior faculty) in several ways, including creating a doctoral student task force to ensure that doctoral students' needs, interests, and priorities are accurately reflected in SSWR doctoral student programming; expanding opportunities for doctoral student and junior faculty mentorship; establishing the virtual SSWR Doctoral Student Resource Center; and creating a standing committee on early career scholars, formally adopted by SSWR membership in 2017.

Establishing policies for socially responsible conference planning. At our spring 2014 meeting, the SSWR board formally approved the creation of the Socially Responsible Conference Planning Task Force. Chaired by Past Vice President Wynne Korr, the task force brought together the conference planning expertise of SSWR and CSWE to develop guidelines for conference site selection that recognized social work values and SSWR's commitment to maintaining conference affordability. These principles, adopted by the Board of Directors in 2016, now guide SSWR's selection of conference sites.

Launching the Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative and celebrating SSWR's 20th conference anniversary. In 2015 the board endorsed the theme of "The Grand Challenges for Social Work" for the 2016 conference—SSWR's 20th anniversary. Under the skillful guidance of Vice President Yolanda Padilla, SSWR conference planning for 2016 was highly collaborative, integrating AASWSW staff into the planning of the opening plenary, special symposia on grand challenges, and other conference components. The presidential plenary talk—"Race: America's Grand Challenge" by Larry Davis—was the highest attended in SSWR's history. The opening plenary session featured my reflections on SSWR as social work's scientific society (E. Uehara, unpublished, January 14, 2016), followed by a well-publicized public roll-out of the Grand Challenges for Social Work, incorporating commentary from the presidents of the AASWSW, SSWR, CSWE, and NASW.

Extending SSWR's "smart collaborations." Aligned with SSWR's revised strategic plan, I made several efforts to extend SSWR's strategic collaborations with sister organizations. These included a hosting a one-day retreat in August 2015 for the pres-

idents, past presidents, and presidents-elect of SSWR, SLG, and GADE. The retreat's goal was to identify shared aims and future strategies for "smart collaborations" to collectively build on existing strengths and synergy in meeting common goals. Our statement was eventually published as an invited article in *Social Work Research* (Lein, Uehara, Lightfoot, Lawlor, & Williams, 2017). This shared statement has guided strategic planning and collaborative efforts of all three groups in subsequent years.

James Herbert Williams, 2016–2018

With the end of my term as past president on February 1, 2019, I have spent a decade as a member of the SSWR Board of Directors. I started my service as a member-at-large (2002–2005), followed by service as vice president-elect (2007–2008); vice president and past vice president (2008–2010); and president-elect, president, and past president (2015–2019). As vice president, I chaired the 13th Annual Conference, which marked the return of the SSWR conference to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

In addition to leadership in SSWR, I have attended every SSWR conference dating back to the inaugural meeting. As president, I followed the leadership of Eddie Uehara, and during my year as president-elect, SSWR played a key role in promoting the Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative. During my tenure as president, three other initiatives emerged: (a) smart collaborations with organizations; (b) increased engagement with governmental relationships and expanded advocacy partnerships; and (c) SSWR 2018–2022, a strategic plan for a sustainable future.

Smart collaborations with organizations. My term immediately followed the recognition of SSWR's 20th anniversary. This highlighted the laudable launch of the AASWSW Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative as Eddie Uehara described earlier. This is one example of the smart collaborations SSWR has established with other social work organizations. Collaboration with AASWSW to officially announce the Grand Challenges for Social Work at the 2016 conference represented a call to action and served as a focal point for social work and related disciplines to address several of the challenges. This partnership with AASWSW is representative of the energy developing across the profession. In support, the SSWR board adopted five grand challenges as conference themes. The annual conference is also a hub for grand challenges networks to exchange ideas and plan future activities.

SSWR support, sponsorship, and adoption of the Grand Challenges for Social Work has been beneficial for the society. The partnership with AASWSW has increased the engagement of senior scholars with SSWR, which directly supports organizational goals to engage members across the scholarly career lifespan. The SSWR–AASWSW partnership is just one example of the concerted effort to engage in smart collaborative initiatives with sister social work organizations, social science organizations, and foundations to better position social work research nation-

ally and internationally. The relationship between SSWR and GADE was expanded to develop more capacity for training and mentoring of doctoral students.

SSWR also partnered with BPD; the Congressional Research Institute on Social Work and Policy; AASWSW; Influencing Social Policy; NADD; NASW; the Network for Social Work Management; the Race, Ethnicity and Poverty Network; CSWE; and the Fund for Social Policy Education and Practice to form the Coalition for Policy Education and Practice in Social Work, which gives policy advocacy and policy practice greater prominence in social work education and professional development (CSWE, 2018).

During my presidency, SSWR became a member of the National Workforce Initiative Steering Committee, which partners with the George Washington University Health Workforce Institute to produce the National Social Work Workforce Study. SSWR also became an active affiliate member of the Consortium of Social Science Associations in 2015, and as president I served as member-at-large on the consortium's board. In addition to SSWR, CSWE and NASW are the only social work organizations that are consortium affiliate members. Finally, SSWR signed a memorandum of understanding with the New York Community Trust to administer the Fahs-Beck Fund for Research and Experimentation to support research that address major social, psychological, behavioral, and public health problems affecting children, adults, couples, families, and communities. The Fahs-Beck Fund has a long history of supporting social work doctoral education and faculty research through its two grant programs. This collaboration provides a more national platform for social work scholarship. These partnerships and relationships were established with the intentions to expand the sphere of influence of social work research and to engage in thoughtful deliberations on how to more prominently position the profession nationally and internationally.

During my tenure as SSWR president, the United States witnessed a significant change in national leadership. Hillary Rodham Clinton was the Democratic Party's nominee for U.S. president in the 2016 election, and being the first woman to receive the presidential nomination from a major political party was a historic event. Her nomination followed the election and reelection of the nation's first African American president and suggested that the country was moving in a progressive direction. However, the election of Donald J. Trump in 2016 signaled a move in a more conservative direction. This outcome was unexpected given that the media and polls forecasted a different conclusion (J. H. Williams, 2017). The nature of pre-election discourse was unrivaled by previous elections in U.S. history, and the tone of rhetoric and discourse during the campaign created a great deal of concern across the profession. The changing political climate presented new challenges for SSWR.

After the closure of IASWR in 2009, it was imperative that SSWR be intentional about supporting the expansion of social and behavioral research and communicate

the benefits of social work research to national funders. Because SSWR does not have a strong staff or physical presence in Washington, DC, it developed sequential partnerships with the University of Maryland and Washington University in St. Louis to use faculty researchers to establish a presence in the capital. These efforts were met with only moderate success. Therefore, in 2017 SSWR entered into a partnership with CSWE and Lewis-Burke Associates to increase its efforts to promote social work research. In addition to the partnership with CSWE and Lewis-Burke Associates, governmental relations among CSWE, NASW, and SSWR have become more intentional and focused, although it is still too early in these partnerships to judge any outcomes.

As mentioned earlier, SSWR has experienced tremendous growth in both membership and conference attendance, which has yielded opportunities for social work research to network with other disciplines and community stakeholders, expand doctoral education, increase research funding for social work scholars, and highlight areas of organizational improvements. SSWR has long emphasized the importance of doctoral education and mentoring. The Research Capacity Development Committee—developed under Eddie Uehara's leadership to expand research and professional training, mentoring, and financial services to social work doctoral students—continues to collaborate with GADE to develop and conduct research training and professional development activities for social work doctoral students. SSWR also provides resources to support doctoral students' conference attendance. In addition to several years of having a doctoral student on the SSWR Board of Directors, the board and members approved expanding the board to include an early career board member.

Finally, SSWR's overall membership growth has also underscored the need to increase diversity and inclusion among the membership. SSWR members are primarily faculty in schools of social work or other professional schools, research staff in public and private agencies, and master's or doctoral students. Because the SSWR membership base is not racially or ethnically diverse, a current challenge for the society is to better mirror the diversity represented among social work practitioners and policy-makers nationwide.

Synthesis and Conclusion

From Janet Williams onward, SSWR's presidents have had rich and varied insights into the organization's major contributions to the field. At the same time, all have placed central importance on preserving and strengthening SSWR's function as a venue for knowledge development and exchange for social work's *rapidly developing substantive and methodological knowledge base*. Students of modern scientific societies point out that all societies perform this knowledge-development and exchange function, and they offer a pair of noteworthy observations about this phenomenon. The first is the sheer robustness of this function over time and across fields. From their early beginnings to the present day, scientific societies in Europe and the

U.S. were created to provide a forum for “learned” individuals to share knowledge and discuss discoveries (Hopkins, 2011; McCarthy & Rands, 2013).

The second observation concerns the importance that this function appears to play in the development and advancement of a field’s science and the identity of scientists. To understand this point, we must take a small step back and view scientific societies as a part of a larger ecology of knowledge organizations. The university is of course central to this landscape, fundamentally important to the pursuit and extension of knowledge. But the university does not and cannot achieve this task alone. It is strengthened and extended by other knowledge organizations—most notably, the scientific society.

Scholars have suggested it is the juxtaposition of the university and the scientific society that creates an ideal crucible for scientific growth and the formation of scientific identity within a field or profession (Oleson & Voss, 1979). The university provides the essential infrastructure for scientific training and support and the space within which researchers find interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research partners. However, it is principally through involvement in their profession’s scientific societies that working scientists find the opportunity to test and refine their ideas, influence and be influenced by others in their own discipline, to hear and contribute to leading-edge knowledge development in their fields, and to participate in the jostling scientific exchanges through which a field’s science base and scientists are forged. President Gehlert observed that the SSWR annual conference is

. . . where many subfields of social work (child welfare, health, community development, organizational dynamics, e.g.) come together to focus on research. Without this opportunity, we might have remained in our substantive silos and not benefited from exposure to one another’s ideas and methods. (S. Gehlert, personal communication, 2016)

Thus, scientific societies like SSWR are “the missing link” in the ecology of knowledge organizations, occupying a critical interstitial space in a profession’s knowledge landscape, drawing together members of a discipline from their broadly focused academic institutions (Hopkins, 2011).

Extrapolating from these general observations to social work’s own history provides insight into our past and prospects for the future. In the intervening decades since SSWR was established, social work has experienced the concurrent and rapid expansion of university-based infrastructure essential for the education and support of social work doctoral students and researchers and the dramatic growth of SSWR and its annual conference as our central venue for the exchange of cutting-edge research and knowledge in our field. Scholars of scientific societies would suggest that the expansive growth in university-based social work research capacity and SSWR is synergistic and that the synergy energizes what we have described as

the profession's rapidly developing substantive and methodological knowledge base.

To serve as the venue for knowledge development and exchange remains SSWR's central, indelible function. However, as suggested by the presidential reflections shared in this article, SSWR also plays a pivotal role in strengthening the ecology of knowledge organizations in which it exists. In the past several years, for example, SSWR's annual conference served to introduce the field to two national projects: the science of social work movement and the Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative. Reaching beyond specific social work research topics and questions, these initiatives attempt to grapple with metaorganizational questions—how to conceptualize, frame, and advance social work research and researchers (science of social work); and how to harness social work science, innovation, and cross-institutional collaboration to achieve demonstrable societal impact (a grand challenge). The concept of “smart collaboration” described by Presidents Uehara and J. H. Williams refers to efforts to (re)conceptualize SSWR's relationships to other organizations in an effort to more strategically use resources in ways that optimize the overall efficacy of knowledge-development organizations. Beyond the “scarcity of resources” reason, this strategy is “smart” in multiple ways. As the literature on scientific societies suggests, certain strategic goals (such as scientific identity development within a field) are best achieved in tandem and in synergy with other organizations. Moreover, as organizations grow and mature, a more sophisticated division of labor among organizations might be possible. For example, while SSWR's board has long been committed to mentoring and supporting junior faculty who are not located in research-intensive academic settings, it may be AASWSW, whose members are selected for established records of achievement and expertise, to whom this function more naturally falls.

Unmet goals and challenges still lie ahead for SSWR. For example, as J. H. Williams suggested, SSWR's current membership still fails to reflect the demographics of our social work colleagues, and the need to increase diversity and inclusion among the membership must remain a priority concern. At the same time, as Marsh has noted, we past presidents hold optimism for the future:

The main source of SSWR's effectiveness as a scientific society is that it has—throughout its 20 years—stayed the course of being social work's premier venue for knowledge development and exchange. This brief history has listed the array of challenges we have dealt with over the years—and dealt with successfully. . . . I am optimistic that SSWR has a bright future. My optimism derives from the intellectual and scientific capacity of the SSWR membership and its dedication to the development of social work science and the growing interest and capacity of all social work organizations to join together to advance social work research, education and practice. I look forward to doing what I can to contribute.
(J. Marsh, unpublished, 2018)

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