January 8, 2016

Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
Deans’ Office Response
School of Social Work Self-Study Report

Dear Members of Senate APR Committee:

This letter constitutes part of the Academic Program Review of the School of Social Work (SSW) and represents the overview of how this department contributes to the mission and strategic plan of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. The deans’ office recognizes and applauds the School of Social Work for the outstanding work they have done in conducting the self-study to assess their progress over the last five years. The Academic Program Review committee, chaired by Jan Ligon, clearly worked very hard to be thorough in its review of existing programs. Although the School of Social Work was not part of the Andrew Young School for its previous Academic Program Review, we can still recognize the important steps forward that have been made.

First, the deans’ office wants to emphasize that the School of Social Work has been a wonderful addition to the academic disciplines in the Andrew Young School and, as a personal note, I have very much enjoyed working with them over the past five years. The unique focus of their MSW program on community partnerships make them an important part of the public service, community engagement orientation of the AYS.

The self-study accurately reflects the close adherence of the department’s objectives to the goals of both the AYS and GSU strategic plans. A couple of examples to illustrate would include the Center for Collaborative Social Work and its outward focus on community capacity building. I agree with the department’s goals to build this Center in terms of research and outreach. Second, the SSW’s degree programs require substantial experiential learning. The internships, or field work, undertaken by all students are very well managed and students are generally very well satisfied with their experiences. Faculty in the School of Social Work are active in funded research and have recently become much more interdisciplinary in their grant work.

The self-study reports the numbers and trends for students completing both the BSW and the MSW degrees. Our School of Social Work leads the state in numbers of degrees produced. Survey results indicate the generally high level of satisfaction that students feel at the end of their courses of study. Retention and completion rates are quite high. The self-study notes, and we have long been interested in, the shortage of qualified social workers in the state and how we might position the SSW to produce an even larger share of the graduates. An opportunity that we should continue to
explore is how we can use the hybrid and on-line formats to extend our reach. The SSW faculty already lead the Andrew Young School in their numbers of on-line offerings.

The disruptive innovations outlined in the self-study are in line with goals we have for the AYS as a whole. The most extensive change is the goal of developing an innovative Ph.D. program. The SSW is currently the highest ranked social work program that does not have a doctoral program. A doctoral program would help to continue growth and progress and to continue hiring top faculty. Further, the grant-active social work faculty have the capacity to support the program. Finally, we believe that there are possibilities of leveraging doctoral courses in social policy that might reduce the cost of developing a new program. Thus, even though there are difficulties at the system level of launching new doctoral programs, we believe these efforts are worthy of support. Another innovation is the increased focus on family and child welfare training and development. Child policy has long been an area of interest to AYS faculty. The potential for successful collaboration is very high.

The outstanding teachers and scholars in the SSW, along with their enthusiastic and engaged students, are a critical component of the Andrew Young School’s success. The increased participation of the faculty in interdisciplinary research is highly valued at both college and university levels. The deans’ office looks forward to the further advances possible for this talented and creative faculty. There are areas that require additional attention, certainly, but there is much potential for this department to advance in innovative and strategic ways.