Jess Lucero and the New Department of Social Work

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An ever-growing department

By: Kelsie Holman, CHaSS Communications Journalist

The Utah State University Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology is splitting into two separate departments. Jess Lucero, associate professor in the College of Humanities and Social Science’s social work program, is taking the position of department head of the Department of Social Work.

Lucero has been at USU since 2012 and teaches community-engaged courses in research methods and community practice. Since 2016, she has served as director of USU’s Logan MSW program and is actively involved in the community serving as a founding board member for the Cache Refugee and Immigrant Connection, longtime member of the Local Homeless Coordinating Council, and planning commissioner for Logan City.

Over the last five years, the social work department has almost doubled in size, and becoming their own department will help them better leverage their capacity in focused ways. The department has faculty who are deeply embedded in their communities at nine campuses across the state, and Lucero hopes that becoming their own department will support their continued growth and success as they work to produce the next generation of social workers who will meet critical human service and mental health needs in their local communities.

“I am excited for us to be an autonomous department because it allows us to benefit from a leadership structure that is tailored to our unique needs and strengths,” said Lucero.

Splitting into two departments provides the social work department with resources to expand its interdisciplinary collaborations. With support from the legislature, the department is building connections within the criminal justice system for students interested in cross-training opportunities in an emerging area of practice.

In addition, the new department will be partnering with the Department of World Languages to increase Spanish language training for human service professionals, responding to an urgent need for more bilingual and bicultural social workers in the field. The department will also be focusing on leading more community-engaged research and growing the impact of the Mind-Body Bridging institute, led by former SSWA department head, Derrik Tollefson.

“Operating as our own department, there’s a better sense of community and in an autonomous department, it is more natural to foster that sense of community within students,” said Lucero. “Becoming our own department puts us in charge of our future, and with the immense strengths our students and faculty bring to the table, that future is bright.”

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