

ADVOCATES' FORUM — TEN YEARS OF ADVOCACY FOR THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

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Advocates' Forum represents the School of Social Service Administration's first publication initiated, written, and managed entirely by students. Celebrating its 10 year anniversary with this year's publication, *Advocates' Forum* was first published in December of 1994 and edited by founder Valerie Leon (A.M. 1995). As Ms. Leon noted in that issue's "Letter from the Editor," this publication was "the product of six months of planning and discussion begun by a small group of second year SSA students." The founder's goal was to "provide a forum for students and alumni to share ideas and information relevant to the field." Valerie recently reflected on her inspirations for starting *Advocates' Forum*:

While I was at SSA, I was amazed at all of the intelligent, passionate people I was meeting. I had a part-time job working in the Office of External Affairs for a man named Gary Grant. Jeanne Marsh was the dean then. Gary and I used to talk about the variety of students I was meeting, the different worldviews and areas of interest. Yet we were all so busy with our coursework and fieldwork that we barely had the opportunity to discuss the issues that were most important to us. In 1994, I told him I would like to start a publication that would provide an opportunity for debate and discussion. I could see that all SSA students were not on the same page. Some were liberal, some conservative.... So, I conceived of the idea of a newsletter (not yet the journal that it has become) and we set to work. First I advertised for interested students and put together a board. These people served as a sort of sounding board for me and also made submissions to the publication. In effect, we generated the material for the *Advocates' Forum*. Gary [Grant] and I brainstormed for a while and came up

with the title, which I still love! We selected the articles based on word of mouth. If I heard someone in class talking about their field placement and it sounded interesting, I would ask them for an interview. (Interview with Valerie Leon-Criminger, 2005)

In regard to the evolution of *Advocates' Forum* since its inception, Valerie commented:

I'm not sure how the focus has changed over the years, but my impression is that it has become much more academic. In some ways, I am impressed. But I'm not sure the *Advocates' Forum* is serving the same function that I intended. I like the intellectual exchange of ideas and it certainly fits with the overall flavor of the university. But I think it is important for the school to have a forum for students to grapple honestly with the difficult issues we face as social workers. (Interview with Valerie Leon-Criminger, 2005)

Valerie's thoughts echo the spirit with which she started the publication.

Since the journal's inception, 18 issues have been published. The first 6 years saw three issues per year, each devoted to a specific social problem, such as early intervention, welfare reform, adolescents, and identity. In more recent years, the journal has been published once a year and more broadly "explores clinical implications, social issues, administration, and public policies linked to the social work profession" (from *Advocates' Forum* Mission Statement).

In *Advocates' Forum*'s second year of publication, coeditors Eric Lock (A.M. 1996) and Ann Maxwell (A.M. 1996) published three issues, each publication focusing on a specific theme. Eric Lock edited the December 1995, March 1996, and May 1996 issues. Reflecting on why he got involved, he said that his reasons aligned well with the journal's founding mission. He said he was inspired by Valerie Leon's "motivating impulse" to create a "sounding board" that would "stimulate more dialogue about the profession." In addition to the founding efforts of Valerie, the first editorial board, and the journal's first faculty advisor, Eric credits Gary Grant (former SSA Associate Dean of External Affairs) with helping to sustain *Advocates' Forum*'s momentum and making it the well-received journal it is today. Eric believed the journal was more than a forum to discuss social issues of relevance to social work students and professionals; he saw it also as a tool that "helps like-minded people to find each other" (Interview with Eric Lock, 2005).

Advocates' Forum continues to provide a channel through which students can make scholarly contributions to the social work profession. Starting in the

2004 issue, the journal became a forum in which Ph.D. candidates can publish their dissertation abstracts. The 2004 issue was also the first to institute a peer-review process, further adding to the journal's integrity and professionalism. Paulette Yousefzadeh, coeditor of the 2003-2004 volume, reflected on this development in a recent interview:

I became involved with *Advocates' Forum* because I happen to enjoy the review and editing process that goes along with writing. I was impressed with the direction that the journal was taking at the time that I joined, which was towards a more academic and research emphasis. As an aspiring social work researcher, this evolution, not surprisingly, appealed to me.

At the time that I was on the editorial board, our goal, I would say, was to select papers that would reflect the diversity of the social work profession in terms of populations that are (or need to be) served, intervention types and methods, and so on. We aimed to include papers that serve as examples of clear and logical argumentation based on the evidence from research (Interview with Paulette Yousefzadeh, 2005).

Thanks to dedicated students and a supportive administration, we can look forward to a future of significant and thoughtful contributions to the social work profession. These efforts produce scholarship that captures the spirit of *Advocates' Forum*—an invaluable resource to its readership. ■