

NASW-TX Remarks for the Dean

"Thrive here. Thrive forever."

Good afternoon and welcome again to the 48th Annual NASW Texas State Conference, and welcome to North Texas. I appreciate the invitation to speak with you today.

I'm Kirk Foster, dean of the UTA School of Social Work. We're honored to be the Premiere Sponsor for this year's conference.

I've been the dean at UTA for 10 months after coming from East Carolina University where I was the director of the School of Social Work.

These past 10 months have been adventure-filled as I have learned more about Texas, social work practice here, and the unique challenges our communities face. I'm excited to be here in this state representing the University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work. I am even more excited to be in this space with you who toil day in and day out to advance justice and equity so that all people have a seat at the table.

I have to brag on our UTA faculty and staff. They are a phenomenal community that supports our students so they can thrive today and thrive tomorrow. Last academic year, our students, across 3 degree programs, provided 544,320 hours of service to the community for an economic impact of just over \$17.3M. Our faculty's research productivity ranks in the 94<sup>th</sup> percentile among Schools of Social Work nationwide. And our staff continue to innovate with a student-first mission, placing student success at the heart of what we do.

I also appreciate that the UTA SSW needs to be a better partner with our practice community. We will soon lean heavily into lifelong learning with a new center that will provide career readiness preparation for our students, licensure support, CEUs for the practice community, and short courses to earn micro-credentials that expand our capacities. We hope this will instill a desire and drive into our students that grows a love for lifelong learning and fills an important role within the community, just as does this conference.

One definition of leadership is “the ability to guide, influence, or inspire others to achieve a common goal.” I want what we do at UTA to influence and inspire our social work community to seek out new knowledge continuously – that lifelong learning becomes a part of our DNA.

My vision for the UTA School of Social Work and a concept that’s part of what drives conferences such as this is, “Thrive Here. Thrive Forever.”

This has been the foundation of our reimagining of parts of our programs. We want to ensure that students thrive in our courses, cultivate a strong passion for social justice and advocacy. We want our School to be a place where you too can connect and thrive in new ways.

From our PhD program to our MSW, BSW and Bachelor of Science in Substance Use Treatment program, we want our students and alumni to grow thrive, and make significant impacts in our community, our state and country.

We’re extremely proud of our in-person and online programs. We know they are making an impact across the nation.

During this conference we will have the opportunity to discuss and examine a number of issues facing our communities and in social work practice. Let’s examine them from the perspective of how we can help individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities thrive. Let’s be critical of our practice and care for each other so that we can all thrive in the communities and areas we work in.

I wish you all the best during this conference and look forward to you joining the reception sponsored by the UTA School of Social Work following the documentary film screening, “Raise Your Voice.”

The film screening begins at 6:30 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom G1& G2, and the reception follows immediately after at 8 p.m. all on the top floor of the Irving Convention Center.