The School of Social Work’s history is shaped by public service, academic innovation and a rigorous scientific approach to deciphering demanding social problems for successive generations.

In 1918 the University establishes a social casework course in the Department of Sociology with Red Cross funding. The class trains caseworkers to provide home services to families of returning servicemen. It’s the first formal social work training in Washington state. Over the next 15 years, the program expands, becoming a division of the Department of Sociology and offering a full range of social work courses. Several instructors go on to become leading social work educators, including Arlien Johnson (University of Washington, University of Southern California), Marion Hathway (University of Pittsburgh, Bryn Mawr) and Mildred Mudgett (University of Minnesota).

It’s 1934: the height of the Great Depression. The state unemployment rate hits 26 percent. Responding to the critical need for public agency social workers and administrators, the University establishes a graduate School of Social Work with funding from the Washington State Emergency Relief Association. Arlien Johnson returns to the University to direct the program. In 1935, the School becomes an independent graduate program. By 1938, over half the county welfare administrators are former School students.

In 1939, Ernest Witte is named the School director. Witte expands the curriculum, adopts a two-year master’s program and offers fieldwork experiences in community planning, juvenile justice, child welfare and public administration.

The 1900s

The 1930s

Shantytown for the homeless, known as Hooverville, Seattle (1937)
the 1940s

America goes to war in 1941, and the School is hit hard as faculty and students are mobilized for the war effort. The Red Cross designates the University as a key training center, and the School's emphasis shifts to war-related services and medical social work — away from its roots in public welfare. School graduates from the war years go on to establish leading hospital social work departments in the Seattle area. An important influence is Acting Director Grace Beals Ferguson.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt meets with Japanese Americans in Tacoma (1941)

“Social change is inevitable, but human needs are the same from one generation to another.” ARLIEN JOHNSON

the 1950s

In 1951, Victor Howery is named director and charged with refocusing the School, rebuilding connections with local welfare agencies and national organizations, and laying the foundations for a stronger research base. Enrollment grows, a Spokane branch program opens and the School becomes a regional leader in social work education. In 1955, the School moves into Social Work Hall — its first dedicated building — and in 1958 is designated an independent professional school, making Howery its first dean. Plans to develop a doctoral program are underway, and several faculty members with doctoral degrees are recruited, including Henry Maier, Florence Stier and Cal Takagi. The undergraduate program is established in 1959.

Henry Maier

the 1960s

In 1960, the School celebrates its 25th anniversary, and, by the mid 1960s, is the country’s eighth largest social work school. The Spokane program, a precursor to the social work program at Eastern Washington University, graduates 125 master’s-level social workers.

Charles Brink assumes leadership in 1963 and continues a period of expansion and increased national prominence. The Center for Social Welfare Research is established, and the School becomes the first in the United States to offer a specialization in aging. Faculty diversity and doctoral credentials multiply.

The Organization of Student Social Workers makes its debut. School responses to rapid social change include a specialization in community organization, the development of a teaching center in Seattle's historically African-American Central District and the hiring of faculty of color, including Jim Leigh, Jim Anderson and Lee Allen.
the 1970s

Student unrest rocks the University after the U.S. bombings in Cambodia in 1971. Activist social work students and faculty offer an alternative curriculum as well as coursework in black studies.

The School's commitment to social change solidifies. Faculty member Tony Ishisaka takes a leadership role in multi-ethnic practice. Women faculty members lead the nation in developing feminist social work practice.

In 1971, J. Scott Briar is named dean and moves the School in a new academic direction. Empirical research takes a higher academic profile, and new recruits help build a strong core of research-trained faculty including Jim Whittaker.

The School develops a national reputation for its research, writing and teaching on evidence-based social work practice.

The doctoral program is added in 1975. The School's research capacity is strengthened with programs such as the Social Development Research Group (SDRG), focusing on prevention science that fosters understanding and supports interventions that promote positive behaviors among young people.

The bachelor's in social welfare program is fully accredited in 1974. Federal training grants support curriculum innovations in social work administration, women's mental health, ethnic minority mental health, child welfare and aging.

By the close of the decade, the School has 50 faculty members, some 300 master's degree students, more than 175 undergraduates and 24 doctoral students.

Students demonstrating for child care at University of Washington, Seattle (1970)

The 1980s

As the decade opens, the School's national standing is firmly in place, and a period of expansion and innovation is underway. The School's reputation attracts funding for pioneering programs such as the Northwest Regional Child Welfare Training Center (later the Northwest Institute for Children and Families), which partners with state social services to promote excellence in child welfare services.

More women of color join the faculty, solidifying the School's commitment to racial and ethnic diversity. A three-year evening master's program is added, and the School opens a new building in the University District. By 1984, more than 3,000 social work students have graduated since the program began in 1934.

Nancy Hooyman assumes the School's top post in 1987, the first woman dean.

The School's research expansion continues. New research centers include the Innovative Programs Research Group (IPRG), focused on research in health and mental health interventions.

J. Scott Briar

Jim Whittaker

Nancy Hooyman
The School's emphasis on diversifying its faculty, student body and curriculum continues, including a focus on hiring LGBT faculty. Researchers at IPRG and the Collaborative Health And Prevention Group (CHAP) conduct groundbreaking HIV/AIDS-related research. A new computer lab and director of social work computing are added to the school’s research and teaching infrastructure.

In 1996, the School establishes the Intergroup Dialogue, Education and Action Center (IDEA) to engage students in transformative dialogues on race, justice and alliance building. A one-year master’s program is added in 1997, and the following year distance learning opportunities are expanded to the Olympic Peninsula and Tacoma, where the School opens a branch master’s program directed by Marcie Lazzari.

The School’s research capacity and productivity continue to grow: between 1987 and 1992, grant funding increases 250 percent.

### The 1990s

#### Diversification and Expansion

The School's emphasis on diversifying its faculty, student body and curriculum continues, including a focus on hiring LGBT faculty. Researchers at IPRG and the Collaborative Health And Prevention Group (CHAP) conduct groundbreaking HIV/AIDS-related research. A new computer lab and director of social work computing are added to the school’s research and teaching infrastructure.

In 1996, the School establishes the Intergroup Dialogue, Education and Action Center (IDEA) to engage students in transformative dialogues on race, justice and alliance building. A one-year master’s program is added in 1997, and the following year distance learning opportunities are expanded to the Olympic Peninsula and Tacoma, where the School opens a branch master’s program directed by Marcie Lazzari.

The School’s research capacity and productivity continue to grow: between 1987 and 1992, grant funding increases 250 percent.

### The 2000s

#### Public Service and Smart Partnerships

The School continues to be a regional, national and international leader in social work education, practice and research.

In 2002, **Dorothy Van Soest** is named dean, and the Institutes of Excellence are created, supporting innovative connections among teaching, research and practice.

In 2005, the newly established West Coast Poverty Center (WCPC) serves as a hub for research, education and policy analysis focused on understanding and reducing the causes and consequences of poverty.

The Indigenous Wellness Research Institute (IWRI) opens its doors in 2006 to support the rights and improve the health of indigenous people by coordinating research, building resources and sharing knowledge.

In 2006, **Edwina Uehara** is the first person of color to be named dean. While remaining committed to preventive science and research, Uehara reaches out to build collaborative relationships inside and outside the University.

In 2007, Partners for Our Children (POC) is launched. This innovative public-private partnership with the School of Social Work focuses on improving the lives of vulnerable families through research and collaboration that enhance child welfare policy and practices.

In 2008, the School more than doubles its fundraising target with more than $20 million in contributions and gifts, expanding student scholarships and endowed professorships.

In 2011, Dean Uehara becomes the inaugural holder of the Ballmer Endowed Deanship in Social Work, the nation’s first such endowment in social work at a public university.

In 2012, the School spearheads the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, a partnership uniting the resources of the state’s child welfare agency and the state’s social work schools to provide comprehensive child welfare training and education tied to research that measures results.

In the same year, **U.S. News and World Report** ranks the School third among 206 advanced social work programs in the country.

New building opens on UW Seattle campus (1980)
Redefining what’s possible.