

**Brad Fraser 00:01**

Hello and welcome to the Social Work beginnings podcast. Social Work Beginnings is a student hosted podcast engaging with instructors, agencies and members of the Social Work community in Canada. As we strive to learn to become effective social workers at the beginning of our careers, we seek to amplify the ongoing work to advance social justice in Canada within social work. This podcast was born out of a desire to equitably increase the accessibility of opportunity to learn outside the classroom about our diverse field. Our guest today is Doug Durst, that recently retired from being a professor at the University of Regina in the Faculty of Social Work. We sat down to discuss his time and his thoughts to the future. Thanks for joining us today.

**Doug Durst 00:51**

My pleasure.

**Brad Fraser 00:53**

Tell us a little bit about yourself about your time here at the University of Regina.

**Doug Durst 00:56**

Well, I'm an old prof here. I've been here for 30 years now. And it's quite as quite surprising that the time has gone so quickly. And, you know, I consider moving on and maybe going to another university and that sort of thing. In fact, when I came here, a colleague was here for 10 years, I oh my gosh, I'd never laughs 10 years because I moved over every five years. So it was quite surprise. Pastures aren't always greener on the other side.

**Brad Fraser 01:25**

Wow! So you said for 30 years University of Regina, take us back. What did it look like that that first couple of days?

**Doug Durst 01:32**

Oh, it was quite surprising. I arrived with my family, my daughter and a dog my wife and we arrived here. Actually, we started teaching in January. And so we arrived between Christmas and New Year's Yeah, my my poor dog came up and it was minus 35. Really cold kind of like shock, you know, it was gone. And then it is walked into the classroom, almost sort of like the next day and teaching social policy and taught social policy at Memorial University, St. John's Newfoundland. So, so yeah, I was, you know, a little a little behind in terms of getting the course outline together. But caught up fairly quickly, is pretty exciting. That was a good time. I got into social work kind of on the back end the way what most students don't realize is that anybody my age or older, would have like a two year master's degree, we have a bachelor degree in another discipline. And that that was the way social work education developed. Actually, you had a two year master's. And it was a creation of the BSW as occurred in the 1970s. And trying to make social work education more accessible to people. And so anybody that a social worker really meant had a master's degree in fact at the time. So I have a Bachelor in recreation, and I took kids out on paddling trips, emotionally disturbed kids, worked with kids with disabilities, and so social work was in that natural fit for me. And so, yeah, and then the whole creation of BSWs ism that that the BSW here was created in the early 1970s. And, and so then I went

on, and I went up north, in the Northwest Territories for almost 10 years working with Indigenous people working in Indigenous communities and really loved the work, mainly developing Indigenous social workers. The whole idea of as a white person, I mean, I can go on into communities, doing my social work stuff, where we work with, we call them community social service workers, and we developed education and encouraged them to get social work degrees. And yeah, that's where it started from. And then I got into well, I, I found these these people coming up north with PhDs doing research and they're doing terrible research and all kinds of assumptions and biases. And so I thought, well, if these guys can do a PhD and what the hell maybe I can too so I went on to go to Toronto and, and I thought I'd go north to do more further research. But I got into academia, and went out to Memorial University. I was there for six years. I made a shift to here. Yeah, I don't, looking back. I've had a good time and a good career. Did some research, got some grants and love teaching, love the students and love engaging. Yeah. So.

**Brad Fraser 04:14**

So from paddling trips to spending time up north to your dog running outside and being like, What the heck is this climate? Not only did you have a movement between physical spaces, but it sounds like you found yourself moving amongst just different areas of your interests as well how to vocationally target that.

**Doug Durst 04:38**

Well, that's true. You know, I've been living in Yellowknife for a while and also living in Iqaluit and also in Inuvik, so they're very different cultures, very different kinds of moods and also very different cultures among universities. Memorial University, sort of the culture there is very different than than here. And so I had to learn a little bit about harvesting, combines and swathing and stuff like that

**Brad Fraser 05:00**

Yes.

**Doug Durst 05:01**

And it's been good, you know. And I was impressed with Regina, the one thing about Regina was kind of a new to me because I actually went to high school in the east end of Toronto area, Scarborough. And so I was I was amazed about how engaging people were. And I think they still are here in Regina. You meet somebody on the street corner and be a woman, and she'll make a comment, you know, this, this rain is gonna be good for farmers or, you know, it was a nice warm day, you know, and they have some eye contact and some exchange even even with complete strangers. And I kind of thought that was kind of neat of a place. And I hope this Regina doesn't lose that, that kind of exchange so.

**Brad Fraser 05:40**

That big, small town that Regina, essentially, is that you found that that was almost something you saw in the culture in the university as well.

**Doug Durst 05:48**

Yeah, I think so. I really did. And all you know, there's some lots of other issues in the community. But I found that so that, yeah, and then I got established, and we moved on, my daughter was young. And

when she's young, she makes lots of friends. So it was easy to move. But then after that she developed more permanent kinds of relationships. So that, you know, moving a 16-year old is much more difficult than moving an eight year old. So that kind of kept us here. It was less attractive to move, because she got really settled as she went on. So yeah, it's been good. It's interesting. I mean, you you're asking earlier a little bit about kind of in that thought I'd share a little bit about the history of social work program because it was created in the 70s. And as this University developed out of branched out of U of S, so University of Saskatchewan was a college, Regina campus College, and then it became its own university. And so they hired they hired a guy from Saskatchewan, who that had a master's degree and studied the PhD at the London School of Economics in London. And so if anyone knows of London School of Economics, it's very left wing very left as a hotbed of socialism and, and that, and so he came here, and that's what he brought with him. And even so, as I said, he was a Saskatchewan person who grew up here. And, and so he hired a number of people that shared that left wing. So University of Regina in the early 70s, was very left wing, very socialist. And so he created a social work program. And it was kind of neat, in a way, because it was kind of wide open, and you can take whatever you wanted. And once you got enough credits, you got to be steady, and are no so I came here and I said, Hey, guys, and he thought about maybe sequencing classes, or maybe having some prerequisites, you know, because if you're not learning on this topic, don't you need a base over here and that sort of thing? Well, I was seen as the ultra conservative, right wing, you know, kind of, and they really resisted that. And so and then then the thing shifted, these guys started to retire and younger people started coming in. And people that were more geared to the professional association, the professional association developed and grew and pulled together and became more and more kind of influential, you had to have be registered to call yourself a social worker. And that's a good trend. And so the shift then switched. But then we started going the other way. And, quite honestly, for the listeners, social work students, I think that we've gone a little bit too far in the sense that we don't have enough flexibility in the program. There are too many courses that are required, and students don't get a chance to take electives. So just the other day, I was asking students, what classes do you think you could do without that we can have more flexibility to the program. And I think that that's perhaps happening, I think that it'll shift and wealth will find some balance. However, a very, very good thing is that we're fully accredited with the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators and the Canadian associate, pardon me, the Canadian Association of Social Work, so forth. And that accreditation is really important. And in the last review, we the accreditation process, where we present our program to the association, and they review it in-depth, in-depth review. And we've been given full-accreditation without problems. We didn't have any major significant issues, and that's a good thing. So we want to keep that accreditation, but I'd like to see us kind of open up a little bit more and not be so retentive.

**Brad Fraser** 09:27

Well, I think that's part of why the students actually had an interest in a podcast because there's so many things when you're doing those core required classes, you end up missing out on particular topics or areas of interest. And so what does it look like outside of the classroom to try and have some of those conversations and you talked earlier about, you know, you, you moved and then the next day you're teaching social policy. How has that evolved when you have in the classroom that course over the last 30 years, so it hasn't changed much?

**Doug Durst** 09:58

Well, that's an interesting question, social policy can be taught kind of two ways I actually and some of my colleagues teach a piece of social policy has looking at specific social policy looking at the policy around child welfare, looking around the policy of immigration and looking around the policy around say disabilities, persons with disabilities. I intended the teach it and trying to give not specific policies, because they change all the time. I mean, they change everyday, I try to teach and kind of give the students a foundation of social policy so they can analyze social policy as it changes, and how they can influence social policy. So that's kind of kind of the way the way I kind of taught it. And I've enjoyed teaching, and I also teach research. And those are two undergraduate classes that are probably the least favored students. And I see it as a challenge to teach those classes. And that's why I put a fair bit of energy into it, to try to make it meaningful and all of it so social, are the students come in, and like in the research class, they're all terrified, you know, they're just like, ooh, research, ahh, you know, it's gonna be a lot of math or, you know and then try to kind of make them relevant to what it is. What do they need to know, as a professional social worker, what kind of, because they're going to read research, then when you don't want them to be intimidated by it. And also, they're going to all of our students, graduates will eventually be in some form of evaluation, client satisfaction, assessments. So in any, you need a foundation and basic knowledge and research. So those are the two courses in the undergraduate program that I've taught that I really enjoyed teaching. I'm going to miss it.

**Brad Fraser** 11:40

Yeah, I bet.

**Doug Durst** 11:42

I'm going to miss it. This is my last term.

**Brad Fraser** 11:44

So this is the last term you've taught here for well over 30 years now. And you've talked about that energy that you were bringing, for example, to research

**Doug Durst** 11:52

Well, I try.

**Brad Fraser** 11:55

Is there something that you would say to students that aren't going to have the opportunity to learn from you and the upcoming semesters that but are looking at that research core requirement? What would you tell them?

**Doug Durst** 12:06

Oh, well, I don't know. depends who's going to teach it and how they want to teach it and that sort of thing. You know, I've tried to be engaging and try to make it relevant, you know, make that connection. So, you know, I'm not sure who all we've got new faculty coming in, and we've got new, new the whole university has changed. I used to walk around campus, and I pretty well knew everybody around, but now a lot of new blood. And I see that's good. That's all I see is positive. So the students will do fine.

**Brad Fraser** 12:36

Yeah, no, I agree. I think it's amazing to see when you discuss this kind of pendulum swinging changes as different people come and that as different people are involved, they bring with them their values.

**Doug Durst** 12:47

Right

**Brad Fraser** 12:47

And that means that the program itself changes,

**Doug Durst** 12:50

of course,

**Brad Fraser** 12:51

is there things that you've seen over your own research, you talked earlier about getting some grants and doing some research yourself? Is there anything that you look back on as?

**Doug Durst** 13:00

Well, you were asking earlier to before we started a little bit about research within indigenous communities, and that's really changed over the years, and it's a very, very sensitive topic. And Indigenous communities have been exploited, in fact, have been exploited through research. And, you know, I mean, quite honestly, I mean, I've been fortunate enough to work with Indigenous communities. But, you know, secretly, I mean, I've benefited, you know, I mean, my career has been advanced from that work and that sort of thing. So, so it's kind of a, you know, it's a, it's a sensitive topic. And I think, I think in the future, research with, there's a lot of protocols and procedures now, so that students can just sort of run out, go into communities, conduct research, there's a lot of protocols and sensitivities to that. And I think that really any, speaking, you know, any non-Indigenous person really needs to work with the Indigenous community to do the research in partnership with them. And also, Indigenous students have to be sensitive too, to conducting research, because doing research in their own way, in their own communities, it's sensitive and delicate. So that's a good thing. And I see that as a positive.

**Brad Fraser** 14:19

Yeah, you know, I think some of the questions from students around that interest in indigenous research for many that comes from their own cultural backgrounds, and I think they've probably seen what you described as this kind of tension and oppressive history. And so when we look ahead to some of those new policies and some of those new procedures to try and make this better, for lack of a better way to put it, what do you look forward to what what you see if you were to look into the future?

**Doug Durst** 14:48

Well, some of my own work is has been in the area of looking at moving away from if you're talking about Indigenous communities, is moving away from sort of the social problem aspect and looking at positive aspects and healthy communities. And I actually ended just yesterday, I gave a presentation on the class about, "What is a healthy community?" and not just an Indigenous community, but healthy other communities as well, what factors are there, and what's present in a healthy community and build on that. And that's, and then also, I guess, when, when I think you're talking about the future, I think,

really what's happening, and maybe again, this was maybe my bias, okay, so, not everyone would share this perspective. But I see a rising middle class an Indigenous community, and this rising middle class is what is a really, I see it as a positive outcome, a positive development. And our First Nations in Quebec, for example, that are very, very sophisticated. And we have, you know, professional services, like an in Meadow Lake, the tribal councils coming together with, again, very professional services. And, again, it's, you've got this middle-class that's starting to emerge. And that's, I see that as a positive development, countering some of the negative aspects and, and they can, in fact, you know, resist colonial racism. And, you know, I use this example, and again, this, you may accuse me of my own middle class values, okay, so, but the largest house on my street is, is owned by an Indigenous man who worked in Northwest Territories for a long time, and is a lovely home, and his kids are there and they go to school, and they work and, and again, that's that middle class, you know, that they've got it together. They know what they're doing. It's a very healthy, it looks like to me from outside looks like a very healthy family. And I see that as a positive development. So growing, growing group and others, this group of professional people both live on reserve and off reserve, not just in one area. So yeah. And would you say maybe then, over the last 30 years that made that story wasn't told or focused on as much when you talk about moving towards those healthier communities. And that positivist approach? I don't think it's even talked about now, very much, you know, positive examples, although I think maybe there's more more discussion on that positive entrepreneurs, and artists, artists and crafts and filmmakers and Indigenous communities, it's it's quite remarkable. They're flourishing. That's a healthy thing. Yeah. Well, social work, education that that's, you know, we're, you know, First Nations University has their social work program, and it's been around that's another interesting question. First Nations Social Work program. You know, I think that's really, First Nations University of Canada, their social work program has consistently provided almost a third of their graduates every year, and often I've kind of complained that they should get a third of the budget. If you walk down the halls and First Nations University and look at the graduating classes, again, consistently in like a third of the students are first and are first nation social work, social work students. And I think that I would like to see it better funded, better supportive, because that's where a lot of First Nations students are in education and social work. You know, that's a positive thing.

**Brad Fraser** 18:32

Absolutely.

**Doug Durst** 18:33

It's kind of secret, or no one talks about?

**Brad Fraser** 18:36

So when you talk about funding, have you seen changes over the last 30 years in terms of funding and social work? And what that looks like?

**Doug Durst** 18:46

No, we're always the quiet one in the background here at this university, you know, we're located here. It's interesting that we're a faculty that that's an interesting thing, rather than than our department, for example, with the small levels, I guess we're the smallest faculty. That's an interesting trend. And there's been some interest in combining some of these faculties to forming a larger, in fact that when I

moved from Newfoundland, this perhaps, I don't know how interesting this is. But when I moved from Newfoundland, I was in the Faculty of Professional Studies. So the Faculty of Professional Studies included social work, education, engineering, and it was huge. The faculty, the faculty, I was in at Memorial was larger than this entire university.

**Brad Fraser 19:29**

Oh, wow.

**Doug Durst 19:30**

Kind of different, a little bit different structure. But we're a little independent group. I think we've done quite well.

**Brad Fraser 19:37**

Well, and where we're sitting today physically, it's kind of interesting, because, you know, on the fourth floor of this building, engineering and social work actually share a space, right. But in terms of how they're actually divided, it's something completely different.

**Doug Durst 19:50**

Yeah. What's unique in Saskatchewan, again, maybe the students wouldn't think about this. But as social workers, the only program, program in, the social work program at the U of R is the only one in the province. Whereas if you went to Ontario, there's many social work programs. And I can't even think I'm not even sure how many of them there'd be. Maybe 12 or 14 social work programs spread around the province. So they're competing with each other and competing for practicums. On this, I think a lot of students don't realize too, that the program in Saskatoon is a U of R program.

**Brad Fraser 20:25**

Yes, it is, yeah.

**Doug Durst 20:26**

It's a U of R campus and the students get a U of R degree, they take their their electives and their prerequisites with U of S. But there is a full year U of R degree. So that's kind of realize that and then, of course, when you're asking about changes too I think that this is COVID pandemic has changed the way we're going to deliver classes in the future. I mean, there's going to be blended classes and hybrid classes, all that's going to change that that's that's going thing. And students with independent learning can do their degree in Yorkton, for example. Yeah, that's the I don't know what that means. I'm not one to ask because I'm, I'm a dinosaur from another.

**Brad Fraser 21:10**

Well, I often wonder if that's going to help bridge the divide that we've seen between urban and rural social work and the need for social workers to work in different communities, if the education can more easily reach people where they are, perhaps, allowing them to stay in their communities longer for part of their degree, or maybe even all of it someday, that may help them.

**Doug Durst 21:32**

That may, it may, and also, I think it'll make, not just the rural but also, you know, students that have families and commitments and other responsibilities that don't have the flexibility of coming into the city to study or coming into the classroom. You know, one of my classes I was talking about online students in the students from I'll say Melville, because of confidentiality, but you know, central Melville was great I can I can do here, I can be here, I can take your class, Doug, and break time, I can put a load of laundry and can check on the kids. And, you know, and I thought about that, and I thought, well, under normal circumstances, you know, he would have to drive in from Melville, and have to park his car, he has to pay for parking, he has to pay for gas, he picks up a coffee and a doughnut, and how much is the coffee and donut now? I mean, it's like six bucks or something like that. And so it picks up the coffee and doughnut and comes to class. And so if you think of the \$6 for a coffee and doughnut, and you've got 12 classes over the term, 13. So let's, you know, six times 12, seven, he's planning to spend \$70 to \$75 on coffee and donuts alone, you know, that's, you know, if you're a young family that that's, that's a bit of a pinch, and then he has to drive back and spend an hour an hour and a half or whatever it is. You know, so that makes accessibility and affordability attractive for a lot of students. So, yeah.

**Brad Fraser 23:07**

Well, I think for many of us students, that for many of us that actually started the program, during the pandemic, it's been a very interesting start to beyond zoom, and then to come on campus for some things. Because for many of us, we haven't known any different. So I think that example, you just gave up these increased costs, this increased time this, this stretching that happens within families, or whatever your commitments are, what excites me about technology, and for example, this podcast is the opportunity that, perhaps while he's putting a load of laundry, and he can listen to this podcast, and I think that's the hope we have within, at least as students for this podcast is that we can have this conversation and dialogue with you, but so many people are never going to be able to sit down and have a chat with you. Right, because of physical space. So what can we do to look further and use technology to do that. When you talked earlier about healthier communities, and when you look at Regina, has Regina changed much in the last 30 years from your perspective?

**Doug Durst 24:11**

Oh, yeah, I think that it's expanded population, but it's expanded remarkably, in diversity, you know, and all elements of the city and all, you know, diversity, and campus, is really, I remember, there was almost nothing for international students. I got involved with international students, and we were holding some events, and just about all the international international students were from China. You know, well, now the diversity, particularly from India and the Middle East and other parts of central South America. It's just remarkable change. And I think that's really healthy. You know, there are many more services for international students and then that's spilled out into the community. You know, and you travel around in different areas and my wife and I have done quite a bit of work with refugees supporting refugees and that sort of thing. And so the diversity among the population and neighborhoods where they live around the Golden Mile, for example, drive around the Golden Mile. And you just see that that's definitely yeah, many more newcomers are migrants, I think that's a healthy perspective for the community.

**Brad Fraser 25:20**

For sure if you talked about this diversity that you're seeing reflected on campus, would you say that social policy and research is perhaps adapted at the same speed of the diverse populations that are joining us here in Saskatchewan?

**Doug Durst 25:39**

The the province, I'm not sure about the social policy in the province in terms of responding to the diversity, I think that the government that we have now is pretty much focused on rural or rural white population. That's where they're trying to get their base. So social policy has not been that. I think that the population shift, Manitoba and speaking about social policy Manitoba, years ago, decades ago, really developed a provincial nominee program and wanted diversity. And so Saskatchewan's been way behind them, compared to other provinces, and it's sort of waking up in the last five or so years, for Provincial Nominee, but they are still incredibly slow. And of course, they blame the Feds. But that would be that would be my thinking on that. I think, in my classrooms among students, I've seen population, much more diverse population.

**Brad Fraser 26:44**

And would you say then that as the students go into social work, perhaps that there is that critical hope that they can start to influence that policy to be more progressive.

**Doug Durst 26:56**

The, the Regina Open Door has been one of the kind of the main kind of service delivery, it delivers to newcomers. And they've done a remarkable job and expanded a lot. Again, as was provincial. So the provincial government has kind of is sort of funding support for diversity through agencies like Regina Open Door rather than themselves. Maybe I don't I'm not sure about. It's another kind of question.

**Brad Fraser 27:26**

You know, Doug, is there something that you would say to students in terms of, you know, why social work? Because for many students, they're in the program already. But for some of them, they're checking out social work, they're in pre social work there. They haven't decided yet, if they're going to apply for their BSW, what would you say to those students that are considering social work?

**Doug Durst 27:47**

Well, I, the neat thing about social work is that is a huge kind of diversity within what we call social work, you know, and I think it's a case of finding your place and not being you know, when we get the applications, we review the applications to come into the program, and there's sort of like they, what they want to sort of work with children, that sort of thing is often kind of, but there's many other areas of social work that you can go into, that are branches out of social work, that you find your way if you don't like working, and I used my wife as an example. And see, she worked in long term care as a social worker, and she had a nursing background and she loved it. And, and people would say to her, so well, you know, you're dealing with death, you're dealing with dying, you're dealing with loss, you know, people are getting older and and she just she just had the personality to handle that she could never understand how people could work with young people and work at Rancho Ehrlo, you know, and so she did, that kind of tension was not what she likes. So, there's, if you don't like one area, there's some either and I often encourage students, I say, there's two things out there, there's one thing that try

something different in your practicum. Try something that is new to you, if you've never worked with elderly or people with disabilities were that populations to see whether you like it, and you'll find a place that social work. It's just more of a case of finding your place and your space and what you like to do. I think that's the other thing I encourage students to do. And unfortunately, by the time we get to my classes, they've already near the end of their program, so it's restrictive, but for those first year students take take a course in music or take a course if they're interested in music or or joining, we have an excellent choir here and we have a new choir director and she has a community, kind of University Choir. And I know some of his students, you know, they sang their church when you know so do that and take advantage of those things. And some of these you can get credit for. You can take a course in curling and you get 1/3 of a credit. Do it, use it. Yeah. And then I remember when I was a student and I took a course in astronomy, astronomy for non science students. And you know, I used it when I'm on a canoe trip with kids, I could look at stars and say, you know, how densify some of the constellations and, and so, you know, you'd be surprised. If you've got strength and music, you can use that, you know, in your social work practice. And so, yeah,

**Brad Fraser 30:21**

That sense of self, I think that social workers are able to bring, thinking, speaking to maybe the uniqueness that each social worker ultimately is we have this core value and ethic that we agree to as professionals, but yet within that, is these, immensely diverse and unique people?

**Doug Durst 30:38**

Sure. And there's a place for it. Yeah. And, you know, it's a great profession. And I also encourage guys too because when, you know, there's good opportunities for men and social work, and sometimes I think it's sort of a woman's professional one, with great opportunities as well. So, you know, we need we need men to work with boys and things like that. There's lots of work to do. And yeah, so get out there, get into the program. And as I say, kick ass and do your stuff. Make change, and make change happen.

**Brad Fraser 31:11**

Awesome. Was there anything else you'd like to leave us with, Doug?

**Doug Durst 31:14**

But no, I think that's just about it. And thanks for the the honor of making this podcast and I hope people find it interesting,

**Brad Fraser 31:21**

Oh, I'm sure we will. Thanks. Right on. This podcast has been brought to you by the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina, the U of R is currently accepting applicants until January 15 2023 for their Bachelor of Social Work Program for the 2023 academic year. Go to [www.uregina.ca/socialwork](http://www.uregina.ca/socialwork). Forward slash social work to apply today. The views, information and opinions expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent the views of our sponsors.