

MSW Program Assessment

This assessment covered the following semesters: Summer 2011, Fall 2011, and Spring 2012.

The assessment plan consisted of three primary sources of data including student evaluations of specific courses, evaluation of student learning via course-level assignments, and electronic surveys of various constituent groups. A summary of the data collected from each source is described and discussed in the following sections. Detailed final reports for each data source as well as interpretive tables are available upon request from the Department of Social Work by emailing lbrewer@astate.edu or calling 870-972-3169.

Student Evaluations of Specific Courses

Near the end of each semester, all students are given the opportunity to evaluate courses using electronic surveys administered through the College of Nursing and Health Professions utilizing EvaluationKIT software. Results of these evaluations are available to faculty following the submission of final grades for the semester.

All Summer 2011 courses were rated above four on a five-point scale (N=6). In Fall 2011, course ratings ranged from 2.23 to 4.52, with a 3.97 *mean of means* (N=18). This represents a modest improvement compared to Fall 2010 when the *mean of means* was 3.8. However, there is still ample room for improvement. Specifically, the rating for SW 5053: SW Policies and Services (2.23) required further analysis. Corrective actions already implemented include assigning the course to a full-time faculty member for Fall 2012, rather than an adjunct, and converting it to a web-assisted course to accommodate face-to-face instruction. In addition, the rating of SW 6063: SW Policy Analysis at 3.55 is a concern that will need to be addressed by the Curriculum Committee.

The *mean of means* for Spring 2012 course ratings is 4.31, with a range of 3.94 to 4.8, all courses exceeded the acceptable rating of 3.75 or higher on a 5-point scale (N=18). It should be noted, however, that response rates on course evaluations are generally low (below 50% in most cases). Therefore, these

findings must be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, faculty should explore means of increasing response rates to improve the validity of this data source.

Evaluation of Student Learning

MSW Curriculum objectives are implemented and assessed through the courses that constitute the Foundation and Concentration Curriculums. Therefore, evaluation of student learning through course-level assignments represents an important element of the MSW Program assessment. Selected assignments designed to assess specific curriculum objectives are benchmarked for expected student outcomes. Course instructors submit grade sheets for these assignments at the end of each semester, which are evaluated to determine whether the benchmark has been met.

The reliability of this assessment element is compromised by missing data since grade sheets for several courses were not submitted. In addition, the benchmarked assignments were selected from the model syllabi, which were subsequently modified by either changing or eliminating the benchmarked assignments in some cases. Mandating that instructors adhere to the model syllabi could jeopardize academic freedom as well as discourage creative and innovative instruction. Furthermore, concern has been expressed that this type of evaluation may indirectly contribute to grade inflation since a desire to meet or exceed the benchmark may unintentionally influence the grading process. Therefore, it is recommended that the assessment team review procedures for collecting this data and reinforce the need for consistent compliance.

Surveys of Constituent Groups

The following electronic surveys were distributed to various constituent groups during April, May, and June 2012 via Qualtrics software: Foundation Curriculum Evaluation (N=12); MSW Graduating Students Exit Survey (N=42); MSW Alumni Survey (N=42); and Employer Survey (N=169).

The Foundation Curriculum Evaluation survey yielded nine responses from the twelve surveys distributed to students completing the 27-credit hour foundation curriculum during this assessment

cycle (75% response rate). Significant improvement was noted in all items with the exception of #5 “Understand and interpret the history of the social work profession, describe and analyze social welfare policy research, and formulate social policies that advance social and economic justice”, which reflects issues previously identified with the policy sequence, and #10 “Use communications skills differentially across client populations, colleagues, and communities”. However, due to the small number of respondents, these results must be interpreted with caution.

The MSW Graduating Students Exit Survey yielded 37 responses from the 42 surveys distributed (88% response rate). Of the first 29 items, which assess students’ perception of the MSW curriculum, all items were rated at or above expected outcomes (85% of students are satisfied or very satisfied) with the exception of items #6, 7, 8, and 15. These items are discussed below.

On Item #6 “Appropriately balanced theory and practice skills”, only 53% of respondents indicated they were either *satisfied* or *very satisfied*. The mean rating was 3.34 on a 5-point scale for this item. In addition, student responses to item #21, “What do you wish you had learned while in the MSW program?” strongly indicate a desire for more theory and even suggest a specific course tying theory to diagnoses and intervention.

Seventy-nine percent of respondents rated item #7, “Appropriately balanced knowledge at all levels of rural-based practice (micro, mezzo, macro), as *satisfied* or *very satisfied*. The mean rating for this item was 3.95. In addition, 84% of respondents rated item #8, “Included adequate content on women, people of color, and/or gay and lesbian persons” as *satisfied* or *very satisfied*, with a mean rating of 4.03. Finally, 76% of respondents rated item #15 “Identify and implement appropriate interventions”, as *helpful* or *very helpful*, with a mean rating of 3.86. This rating, combined with student responses to item #21, suggests a need to strengthen the clinical practice classes. Furthermore, students’ perceptions of inadequate content addressing the linkage between theory and practice skills (item #6) must be addressed.

In addition, responses to item #22 “Additional comments or suggestions you wish to offer about your MSW education at ASU” suggest room for improvement. There was one comment addressing the importance of faculty modeling professional ethics in relation to students. Subsequently, department policies and procedures were reviewed to assure congruence with social work values and ethics. In addition, faculty are looking for other ways to strengthen the integration of ethics within the curriculum and program. Other concerns identified by graduating students include the lack of prompt feedback on assignments (one stated that large assignments were not even graded); lack of investment in the program by some faculty, and the lack of teaching skills by some faculty as well as a lack of consistency in “classroom and departmental structure and policy”. These issues will be addressed during faculty meetings.

The MSW Program Alumni Survey (2011 graduates) yielded 17 responses from the 42 surveys distributed (40% response rate). Since 60% of potential respondents did not participate in the survey, findings must be interpreted with caution. Of those responding, 88% had earned both BSW and MSW degrees at ASU. All 17 respondents had taken a social work licensing exam. Of those who took the LMSW exam, 81% (N=13) report passing the exam on their first attempt; 19% (N=3) report passing the exam on their second attempt.

One hundred percent of the respondents indicated that they have been employed since completing their degrees: 82% (N=14) are currently employed in mental health agencies; the remaining are employed in medical, school, or family-focused social work. Ninety-four percent report a gross salary of \$40,000 or more per year. Eighty-three percent report maintaining membership in NASW. Seventy-six percent of respondents “agreed” with the statement: “In general, I believe that the MSW Program at ASU provided excellent preparation for my first social work position”; 6% neither agreed nor disagreed; and 18% disagreed.

The Employers' Survey was distributed to the field placement contact list since the majority of placement sites also employ graduates of the ASU social work programs. We received 37 responses from the 169 surveys distributed for a return rate of 22% although three email prompts were sent to obtain additional responses. The first twenty-five items of this survey required respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with the performance of current employees who are graduates of either the BSW or MSW programs on a scale from "Very Satisfied" (1); "Satisfied" (2); Neutral (3); Dissatisfied (4); Very Dissatisfied (5). Therefore, a lower rating is most desirable. To broadly summarize the data obtained from this survey, approximately 85% (N=31) of respondents were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with employees' job performance on most items. On the other hand, 15% (N=6) of respondents were less than satisfied. All items receiving less than satisfactory ratings will receive further analysis and corrective actions will be implemented. The final report for this survey, as well as other data sources, is available upon request from the Department of Social Work.

Conclusions and Response

The following conclusions and responses are derived from the findings presented in previous sections.

- All respondents to the Alumni Survey indicated that they have been employed in social work since obtaining their degree.
- Of the 16 alumni who reported taking the LMSW exam, 81% report passing on their first attempt, while 19% report passing on their second attempt.
- 85% of respondents to the Employers survey indicated that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the job performance of alumni of the social work programs.
- We need to reduce reliance on adjunct instructors and ensure that those who are utilized receive appropriate orientation to their assignments and support throughout the semester, possibly by assigning a faculty mentor/coach. This process was initiated in Fall 2012 when the percentage of courses taught by adjunct instructors was reduced from 53% in Spring 2012 to 33% in Fall 2012. Strategic utilization of adjunct instructors with specialized skills should be a priority in the future.
- The Curriculum Committee needs to review and recommend revisions to the syllabi for the policy sequence (SW 5053 and SW 6063) as well as the undergraduate policy course (SW 4313)
- The Assessment Team needs to review data collection procedures associated with the Evaluation of Student Learning and reinforce the need for compliance.

- We need to enhance the clinical practice courses to strengthen the linkage between theory and evidence-based clinical interventions, perhaps via a sub-group of the Curriculum Committee.
- Items from the Employers Survey that received low ratings need further evaluation, perhaps via the Field Advisory Committee and/or the Community Advisory Council.

BACHELOR OF SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM

Accreditation:

Arkansas State University is accredited by the regional accrediting agency the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC). IN addition, twenty-two academic programs are accredited by their own specialized accrediting agencies. Both the MSW and BSW Programs are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. The Bachelor of Social Work Program (B.S.W.) has been accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) continuously since 1978. The BSW program was re-accredited in June 2010 and will be undergoing re-accreditation process in 2018.

Undergraduate Education:

Arkansas State University and the BSW Program take pride in the curriculum and in the expertise of faculty in instruction and research. Teaching is valued highly, as is the creation of a supportive learning environment that promotes active student and faculty engagement. Since 2011, when ASU first began participating in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Survey all of the benchmarks below have increased (<http://www.astate.edu/dotAsset/788c9afe-a324-4e58-9faa-6926f18e13fe.pdf/>):

- Academic Challenge
- Student-faculty engagement and interaction
- Supportive campus environment
- Learning in a supportive campus environment
- Reports of an enriching educational experiences

The Bachelor of Social Work Program:

Since 2002, Arkansas State University has awarded 532 undergraduate baccalaureate degrees (<http://www.astate.edu/a/irp/effectiveness/>). **Student satisfaction** with social work courses and the quality of teaching is high. Most recent data show that on average, students rate their satisfaction levels with BSW course at 4.1 on a scale of 5. Satisfaction with teaching is also high, with students rating their BSW instructors at 4.2 on a scale of 5.

Many of our students go on to accelerated graduate studies (Advanced Standing) to complete the MSW degree, here at ASU or at other CSWE accredited social work programs. Others find employment as case managers, crisis intervention counselors and child protective service workers in the North East Jonesboro area.

Program assessment data show that our students are prepared for employment as social workers. According to 2012 Program Assessment Data, **Field Instructors** rated **93%** of their undergraduate and foundation students as being excellently or more than adequately prepared:

- With relationship building skills
- With knowledge agency functions and referral processes;
- To recognize values and conflicts;
- And to complete assessments and document case involvement.

Once they are employed, ASU students make valuable contributions to the agency and our community.

In 2012, sixty-eight percent of employees who hired BSW graduates were either satisfied or very satisfied with their employees. Qualitative comments from our **Employer Survey** of employers who have hired graduates include:

- *“ASU continues to provide the community with outstanding social workers.”*

- *“In addition to the ASU graduates employed, the students who complete internships have been of the highest quality.”*
- *“They (ASU social work students and graduates) have been a great asset to the program and in serving our families. “*

Additional Assessment Activities:

In response to other earlier assessment data, gatekeeping standards and procedures were reviewed in the program. Standards for (non-academic) professional conduct in the program were established as well as the processes for reviewing student conduct issues. The BSW Program Handbook is being revised to incorporate these standards. Finally, the BSW Curriculum Committee reviewed all courses in the BSW curriculum and determined which teaching modalities (traditional face to face; web-assisted; and on-line) were appropriate for each course. All courses are now scheduled accordingly.

Goals for 2012-2013 include completing the process for electronic collection and analysis of all BSW program assessment data. Faculty have already begun this process and will complete it Summer, 2013.

The field instructor’s orientation will also be revised to include orientation to the electronic data process.