Advances in Social Work

SPECIAL ISSUE IN STUDENT ASSESSMENT

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Subscription Rates: *Advances in Social Work* is published twice each year (Fall and Spring) by Indiana University School of Social Work. Annual subscription is US $30, $40 for international subscriptions. Individual issues cost $15 each. The price includes postage by surface mail.

Order Information: Payment may be made by check or money order in U.S. funds to "Indiana University School of Social Work."

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ISSN 1527-8565

Advances in Social Work

Vol. 5, No. 1 . . . . . .Spring 2004

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Special Issue Editorial

Robert Vernon

Welcome to our special edition focusing on assessment. We have the pleasure of presenting eight articles that address assessment in social work education from a variety of perspectives. These contributions were chosen in keeping with the philosophy of this journal: The examination of issues and ideas that will influence how our profession will address the countless assessment questions we continually discover.

Assessment is interwoven throughout the fabric of social work education. We continually take stock of what we are doing and how well we are accomplishing our intended goals. It permeates our academic lives whether we notice it or not. Assessment presents itself when we emerge from class. Are we smiling or frowning because of what occurred? Assessment happens when we select textbooks. Are we happy with our choices or do we have the urge to write our own? Assessment is salient again when we craft syllabi. We can only cram so much into 15 weeks—something has to go—yet, we know from professional wisdom that we easily could use more time. It comes into play when the faculty meets to take stock of what the curriculum is accomplishing. Is graduation joyful because we are confident in what we have created? Or do we cross our fingers from reservations and misgivings? And, assessment presents itself when we engage in the self-study process for accreditation. Most of us feel torn between pride and anxiety when that site visit team arrives to assess our work.

As a person who has brought two social work programs through the complete precandidacy-initial accreditation process, served on numerous site visits, and is currently serving on the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Commission on Accreditation, I can attest that the complexities and challenges of assessment are enormous. There is no single path. There is no unique way to create a sound social work curriculum. There is no one way to deliver it. The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) from CSWE (2003) provide benchmarks. These standards establish content and assessment specifications, but how we choose to incorporate them is most challenging. EPAS's Accreditation Standard 8.0 is especially salient: We must have an assessment plan and procedures in place for evaluating every program objective within the curriculum, including specific measures, procedures, and methods. Standard 8.1 is just as crucial: We must implement the plan and continually use the results to affirm and improve the program. Perhaps assessment is best understood as an art, the willful choice to pursue evaluative knowledge from countless sources of potential information towards fulfilling this obligation. We select some approaches and sources but neglect others. The eight articles presented in this edition provide ideas about how this process may be undertaken and how these choices may be made.

One of my more interesting tasks has been choosing the presentation order for this issue. While some readers will only want to read occasional contributions, others

may want to enjoy this issue from cover to cover. This has made sense-making out of the diversity in the contributions a challenge. The following underlying order has been crafted:

The Big Picture…

The first contribution by Dr. Charles Zastrow and Dr. Tim Reutebuch provides insight into the Gestalt of program design. The authors map out a fairly comprehensive vision of how to approach assessment within the program design and accreditation process. Just as the Baer-Federico report (1978) guided us in the '80s, this article illustrates a model approach to developing an accreditable program and specifically delineates where assessment fits in. Using their own school as a case, the authors provide detailed information—including instruments—that readers who are in the beginning stages of creating a social work program may find invaluable. For the more established programs, the article provides an excellent perspective on what one program accomplishes through assessment and how colleagues go about this process.

Gatekeeping…

How many of us have had to "council out" inappropriate students who discover well into their studies that they should have focused their pursuits elsewhere? The second contribution from Larry Reynolds looks at quality control in the admissions process, hopefully towards preventing this problem. Again, presenting instrumentation, Professor Reynolds examines a much-neglected area: The course work students take prior to acceptance into the program. We have a gap in our literature: How do we craft a methodology that helps us assess potential students before we let them in? This article provides steps toward using preparatory coursework as a benchmark for potential student success. It illustrates how we may begin to establish benchmarks in this important area.

Even when we have established criteria and benchmarks for admissions, do these really work? The third article by Professors Thomas, McClearey, and Henry asks this difficult question. They provide an interesting history and overview of this area. They then examine the effectiveness of admission criteria on graduate student performance in the classroom and field. Just how effectively does the Graduate Record Exam serve as a predictor for classroom performance? What about the student grade point averages? And those glowing reference letters? Quality control over whom we admit into our programs has an eventual effect on the lives our graduates touch. Both articles in this section provide insights into the gatekeeping process.

Classroom Assessment…

Once admitted, Dr. Paul Adams shows a way to listen to the heartbeat of the classroom. All of us strive for dynamic, learner-friendly classrooms that focus on critical thinking. Our day-to-day, class-by-class events shape this. How do we assess these efforts? Professor Adams describes fine-grained assessment activities: Classroom assessment techniques, such as polling students about the "muddiest point" that they did not understand. This approach provides ongoing assessment feedback. Combined with other approaches from the literature, this case presentation on micro-assessment promotes the art of discerning just what worked well and what did not.

Just how confident can we be in our assessment measures? Drs. Cathy Pike, Robert Bennett, and Valerie Chang's efforts in instrument validation provide a methodological example. They compare two instruments that assess how well students interview—a core skill for social work practice. In their comparative examination of a classical instrument and a new one, the authors demonstrate how construct validity, reliability, and a clear factor structure can help establish confidence in assessment efforts and measures.

Online Course Assessment…

Our profession has only recently come to grips with web-based teaching, where the instructor may never even physically meet the students. How can one assess these online courses? Articles six and seven take this up through two evaluative reports. Dr. Zvi Gellis takes data from a clinical research methods course and explores various facets of online instruction from the learner's perspective. This qualitative study illustrates one approach to assessing the dimensions of online learning. A collaborative learning and teaching framework is presented for those social work educators interested in implementing web-based courses and assessing how well they accomplish their objectives.

Drs. Philip Ouellette and Valerie Chang take web-based learning a step further in their preliminary assessment of how well a traditionally taught classroom-based practice course on interviewing skills compares with a completely web-based course, where the students never meet each other or the instructor face to face. This is a "third rail" issue: Can you really teach practice in a total web environment? Students' background characteristics and their perceptions of their learning experience and skill acquisition are compared and reported as preliminary findings. The initial results are provocative and we look forward to learning more from their findings.

Portfolio as an Assessment Approach…

Dr. Mona Schatz looks at the larger summative perspective: Assessment through portfolios. In her study of a graduate-level portfolio approach, she investigates whether this technique promotes critical thinking, class and field learning integration, reflective thinking, professional socialization, and practice competence. She also investigates efficiencies: Does an adequate portfolio really necessitate endless hours of work on the part of the student?

Further Investigation

Finally, as editor, I am most grateful to my colleague Mary Stanley, Associate Dean for the University Library and Liaison to the School of Social Work. Together, we have amassed a large bibliography on social work assessment for the reader's continued research. We cast a fairly wide net and, while we have probably missed a few favorite articles, we have attempted to provide a sound beginning research bibliography for social work education assessment.

As editor for this edition, I have had the task of soliciting contributions, overseeing the jury process, and editing the chosen contributions for publication. I am deeply indebted to those colleagues who chose to submit their work. I regret that we are not able to share them all. I am also indebted to the colleagues who painstakingly reviewed the submissions. Many reviewers clearly spent hours carefully examining

and assessing the contributors' thoughts and work. Finally, I deeply appreciate the support I have enjoyed from my associates on the journal's editorial board.

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Sequencing Tasks in Developing an Accredited Social Work Program and Assessing Program Outcomes

Charles Zastrow
Tim Reutebuch

Abstract: *Two of the major challenges for developing an accredited social work program are to sequence the tasks in developing an educational program and to develop accurate and useful assessment instruments. A model for sequencing the tasks is presented, and a field placement evaluation instrument is highlighted in assessing the extent to which students are attaining the program objectives. Programs need to utilize multiple measures of program outcomes.*

Keywords: Accreditation, assessment, program development

The accreditation standards of EPAS (Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards) (Council on Social work Education, 2003) outline what baccalaureate and master's programs in social work must address in order for a program to develop or reaffirm an accredited social work program. However, EPAS does not present a model for successfully accomplishing the tasks necessary to design an accredited program. Administrative officials and faculty at colleges and universities in the United States who are seeking to develop an accredited social work educational program are often uncertain as to the specific steps that need to be taken. This article has two focuses. First, it summarizes an approach, or model, of the sequencing of tasks for developing an educational program. In the summary, it is advantageous to sequence the tasks in the following order: statement of program mission; statement of program goals; statement of program objectives; integrating program objectives with course objectives and into course syllabi; designing an assessment plan and developing assessment instruments; implementing the assessment plan; and using the results of assessment to improve the educational program.

The second focus of the article is to illustrate how a carefully constructed field placement instrument, completed by the agency supervisors in field placement, has immense usefulness in assessing the extent to which students are attaining the program objectives.

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SEQUENCING OF TASKS IN DEVELOPING AN ACCREDITED PROGRAM

For accomplishing complex projects, Hepworth and Larson (1993, p. 398-401) have noted it is essential to first partialize the tasks into "sub-tasks" in order to reduce them to manageable parts. These parts consist of discrete actions that need to be undertaken. After partializing tasks into sub-tasks, the next step is to order the sub-tasks so that they flow from one to another in a natural sequence.

The senior author of this article has visited/consulted with over 50 programs who were in the process of developing a social work program, or were in the process of seeking reaffirmation of accreditation. The senior author has also served two terms on the Commission on Accreditation. With this background experience, a model (or approach) has been formulated as to the sequencing of tasks in developing an accredited social work program.

The faculty at a college or university who are seeking to develop an accredited social work program (in this model) should first state its program mission. The mission should be consistent with the campus' mission and should reflect the intent for such mission statements as specified in Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) (Council on Social Work Education, 2003). To illustrate a program mission, our program has adopted the following mission statement:

> "The Baccalaureate Social Work Program (BSW) at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater seeks to prepare social work students so as to ensue that they obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for beginning generalist social work practice as competent, effective professionals in urban and rural areas. The program has an emphasis on the strengths of client systems. Recognizing that people are an integral part of their environment, the program utilizes an ecological model of human behavior. Another emphasis of the program is on preparing social work professionals who are committed to services to the poor and oppressed, and who are oppressed, and who are committed to promoting social and economic justice for populations-at-risk. The social work program also has a commitment to developing social work knowledge and providing leadership in the development of social work systems."

In our Self-Study documents, we further elaborate on how this program mission statement is consistent with the campus' mission.

Next, program goals need to be stated, which should be derived from the program mission, and also reflect the intent of EPAS. To illustrate, our program has stated its goals as follows:

1. To prepare students for beginning generalist practice who facilitate the functioning of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities by helping them to accomplish tasks, and obtain and use resources.
2. To prepare students for beginning generalist practice who engage in prevention activities that promote well-being.
3. To prepare students for beginning generalist practice who participate in the planning, formulation, and implementation of social policies, services,

resources and programs needed to meet basic human needs and support the development of human capacities.

4. To prepare students for beginning generalist practice who participate in the pursuit of policies, services, resources, and programs through organizational or administrative advocacy and social or political action; to empower groups at risk; and to promote social and economic justice.
5. To prepare students for beginning generalist practice without discrimination, with respect, and with knowledge and skills related to clients' age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.
6. To prepare students for beginning generalist practice who participate in the development and testing of professional social work knowledge and skills.
7. To prepare students to recognize the global context of social work practice.
8. To emphasize preparation for providing direct services to diverse populations (with particular attention to populations-at-risk in Southeastern Wisconsin), to alleviate poverty and oppression, and to promote social and economic justice for all its citizens.
9. To provide students with content about social contexts of social work practice, the changing nature of those contexts, the behavior found in organizations, and the dynamics of change.
10. To provide curricula and teaching practices at the forefront of the new and changing knowledge base of social work and related disciplines.
11. To provide curricula that build on a liberal arts perspective to promote breadth of knowledge, critical thinking, and communication skills.

UW-Whitewater Social Work Self-Study Documents, 2001

In our Self-Study documents, we also elaborate on how these goal statements are consistent with the program mission.

Then, the faculty should state the program objectives, which should relate to the program goals, and also reflect the intent for program objectives as specified in EPAS. The statement of program objectives is very important, as the development of the social work curriculum and assessment plan are largely determined by the statement of these program objectives.

An example of the statement of program objectives follows.

1. Apply critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice.
2. Practice within the values and ethics of the social work profession and with an understanding of and respect for the positive value of diversity.
3. Demonstrate the professional use of self.
4. Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and the strategies of change that advance social and economic justice.

5. Understand the history of the social work profession and its current structures and issues.
6. Apply the knowledge and skills of generalist social work to practice with systems of all sizes.
7. Apply knowledge of bio-psycho-social variables that affect individual development and behavior, and use theoretical frameworks to understand the interactions among individuals and between individuals and social systems (i.e., families, groups, organizations, and communities).
8. Analyze the impact of social policies on client systems, workers, and agencies.
9. Evaluate research studies and apply findings to practice, and, under supervision, to evaluate their own practice interventions and those of other relevant systems.
10. Use communication skills differentially with a variety of client populations, colleagues, and members of the community.
11. Use supervision appropriate to generalist practice.
12. Function within the structure of organizations and service delivery systems, and under supervision, seek necessary organizational change. (UW-Whitewater Social Work Self-Study Documents submitted to the Council on Social Work Education)

Such a statement of program objectives appears to be consistent with the guidelines for such objectives in the Curriculum Policy Statement for Baccalaureate Degree Programs in Social Work Education (Council on Social Work Education, 1994). Such a statement of program objectives also appears to be consistent with the guidelines for such objectives in EPAS (Council on Social Work Education, 2003).

The next step is for faculty to specify the required courses in social work in which material related to these objectives will be taught and assessed. A time-consuming part of this process is to write the syllabi for the required courses. In writing the syllabi, it is important to incorporate (in appropriate courses) the program objectives. Specified content in the syllabi needs to be "relevant to the mission, goals, and objectives of the program and to the purposes, values, and ethics of the social work profession" (Council on Social Work Education (2003, p. 34). The syllabi for the required courses also need to address the following foundation curriculum content, which is described in EPAS: values and ethics; diversity; populations-at-risk and social and economic justice; human behavior and the social environment; social welfare policy and services; social work practice; research; and field education (Council on Social Work Education, 2003, p. 34-36).

It is desirable for each required social work course syllabus to specify: lecture content, classroom activities, reading material, and assessment measures (such as tests, role-plays, classroom exercises, and student presentations) to assess the extent to which students are attaining the course objectives (which incorporate the program objectives).

The next step is for the faculty to develop its assessment plan, which utilizes a variety of measurement instruments and procedures. Examples of multiple assessment measures include: periodic alumni surveys, student course evaluations, focus group meetings with selective students (such as minority, nontraditional students) to identify shortcomings in the educational program, passage rates on the certification exam for graduates of the program, and evaluation by agency supervisors on the extent to which interns are attaining program objectives. (A later section in this article will highlight a field placement instrument for assessing the extent to which students in a social work program are attaining the program objectives.)

The next two steps in developing the social work educational program are: (a) implementing the assessment plan, and (b) using the results of the assessment to improve the educational program. These components will also be discussed later in this article.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSING PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) require that accredited baccalaureate and master's programs in social work education in the United States have "an assessment plan and procedures for evaluating the outcome of each program objective" (Council on Social Work Education, 2003, p. 41). EPAS further states, "The plan specifies the measurement procedures and methods used to evaluate the outcome of each program objective (Council on Social Work Education, 2003, p. 41).

The Organization that oversees accreditation entities in the United States is the Council for Higher Education and Accreditation (CHEA). When accreditation entities apply for accreditation recognition by CHEA, these entities must show their accreditation standards and procedures are consistent with CHEA's principles. Principle 1 of CHEA's Statement on Good Practices and Shared Responsibility in the Creation and Application of Specialized Accreditation Standards states:

> (Educational Outcomes) Standards should be designed to produce desired or needed educational outcomes for a profession and should refer to resources only to the extent required for graduates to emerge from programs intellectually prepared for their professional lives. (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2001, p. 1)

This principle emphasizes the importance for all accredited higher education programs to assess the extent to which graduates are attaining program objectives. There are a variety of ways (previously mentioned) in which programs can assess the extent to which students are attaining the program objectives. One of these approaches is developing a field placement instrument in which field instructors assess the extent to which students are attaining program objectives. This approach has a number of strengths. An evaluation instrument can be constructed (relatively easily) that focuses on identifying the extent to which students are attaining program objectives. Since evaluation of intern performance has to be conducted for grading purposes, using the same evaluations to assess program outcomes does not require much additional work. Finally, this approach has the additional advantage of having external observers (field supervisors) evaluate the

interns. (External observers are apt to be more objective than evaluation plans that utilize students or faculty to assess the extent to which students are attaining the program objectives.)

Using a Field Placement Instrument to Assess Program Outcomes

The Field Placement Instrument used by our program to assess program objectives is presented in the Appendix at the end of this article. The agency supervisors fill out this evaluation at midterm and at the end of placement. In this social work baccalaureate program, practically all of the students enroll in block field placements—they are at an agency for one term (either fall, spring, or summer) for 480 hours—either four or five days a week. The faculty designed this instrument with the goal of using the results to provide information on the extent to which students are attaining the 12 program objectives that were previously identified in this article. In developing this instrument, it should be noted that the program faculty concluded that since the 12 program objectives are so broadly stated, the faculty needed to identify a number of more specific items for each program objective, which interns are evaluated upon by agency supervisors.

The program has an annual departmental meeting to review the results of the various outcome measures that are used. At this meeting the identified shortcomings of the program are discussed by the faculty, and curriculum changes are then usually made to address these shortcomings. This process (including the assessment results and the resulting changes in curriculum) are then communicated to the campus administrative officials in an annual report. The faculty also communicate this information to the members of the program's Advisory Board.

The Results from the Field Placement Instrument

In the past two years, 167 students have had field placement and graduated from the program. The results of the field placement evaluations were tabulated for all the interns who graduated in 2001 and 2002. A variety of mean scores were tabulated. Through deliberation, the faculty decided that mean scores of higher than 2.00 were a matter of concern. Mean scores of 2.00 or lower were considered acceptable by the faculty as they included the two following ratings: "(1) The intern has excelled in this area" and "(2) The intern is functioning above expectations for interns in this area." The following are the results.

The mean scores were tabulated on the midterm evaluations and separately on the final evaluations to get an average mean score of all the items under each program objective. For example, under Objective #1 (Applies critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice) the average mean score received on the following items (grouped together) was tabulated:

1.1 Has good assessment skills

1.2 Has good problem-solving skills

1.3 Has good data gathering skills

1.4 Analyzes complex material well

1.5 Has good critical thinking capacities

The average mean scores for each program objective for both the midterm evaluations, and the final evaluations, were less than 2. This result indicated, overall, that agency supervisors believe that the interns in the program are doing quite well in attaining the program objectives. Furthermore, it was found the average mean scores for each program objective for the final evaluations were more highly rated (that is closer to 1.0) than for the midterm evaluations. This rating suggests the agency supervisors perceive interns, on the average, are attaining the program objectives to a higher extent at the end of field placement than at the middle of field placement.

The mean scores for each item on the final evaluations were then tabulated. All of the mean scores for each item were found to be less than 2.0. This suggests the agency supervisors believe that, on the average, the graduating students in the program have sufficiently attained the knowledge, values, and skills expected of beginning level, generalist social workers.

As far as program development is concerned, probably the most useful results were obtained when the mean scores for each item on the midterm evaluations were tabulated. The following items received mean scores higher than 2.0—indicating they were a matter of concern to agency supervisors.

Item Number:

(Readers will note the wording of these items has been slightly changed for clarity purposes)

1.1 Assessment skills

1.2 Problem solving skills

5.3 Knowledge of community resources

5.4 Resourcefulness in identifying and using resources not commonly known

5.5 Understanding of existing social welfare programs

6.4 Effectiveness in macro change efforts in the community

7.1 Knowledge of biological variables in assessing clients

7.2 Knowledge of psychological variables in assessing clients

7.3 Knowledge of sociological variables in assessing clients

7.6 Integrating information from appropriate assessment tools

7.7 Knowledge of intervention theories and techniques

9.3 Capacity to evaluate his or her own practice interventions

9.4 Capacity to evaluate the services provided by the field placement agency

10.1 Being assertive

10.7 Written work

10.9 Contributing his or her thoughts in group meetings

Using the Assessment Results to Improve the Educational Program

It appeared to the faculty that agency supervisors were indicating by these midterm evaluation results that these are the areas that interns (on average) have some deficiencies in the first few weeks of placement.

The faculty met at its annual assessment meeting and reviewed the results. For a few of the items, such as "Knowledge of community resources" and "Resourcefulness in identifying and using resources not commonly known," it was thought that a contributing factor to such items being identified was that a number of interns selected a field placement in a geographic area in which they were not familiar. Nevertheless, it was thought that faculty supervisors should give guidance to interns in these areas in field seminar meetings and in the faculty supervisor's weekly review of intern logs.

After considerable discussion, it was agreed that faculty who teach social work majors in any course should (in the future) refer those students having difficulties in the following areas: writing skills, being assertive, speaking in classes, assessment skills, problem solving skills, knowledge of intervention theories and techniques, and evaluation skills, to the Department's Standards and Support Committee.

The Standards and Support Committee was formed several years ago to work with students identified as having issues involving academic or professional performance. The main thrust is to develop an individualized plan to assist each referred student in improving the identified academic or professional performance areas. For example, a student who is nonassertive and says little in class is apt to be urged to enroll in the department's one-credit assertiveness course. A student who has deficiencies in writing skills is apt to be urged to take an additional writing course and go to the university's writing laboratory for assistance in writing all of his/her papers. As a last resort, if a student does not show improvement in an essential social work competence area, the Standards and Support Committee has the authority (with appropriate due process and grievance procedures) to terminate a student's future enrollment in the social work program.

The program will continue to use the field placement evaluation instrument, along with other assessment instruments and procedures, to assess the extent to which students are attaining the identified program objectives.

SUMMARY

This article has two main focuses, which are interrelated. First, it presents an approach (or model) of the sequencing of tasks for developing an accredited social work educational program. The suggested sequencing of tasks includes: specifying a mission statement; specifying program goals; specifying program objectives; integrating program objectives with course objectives and into course syllabi; designing an assessment plan and developing assessment instruments, implementing the assessment plan; and using the assessment results to improve the educational program. It is anticipated that this model, or approach, will be particularly useful to those programs that are in Candidacy and those programs that are in the process of preparing their self-study documents for reaffirmation of accreditation.

The second focus of this article demonstrates that a carefully constructed field placement instrument, completed by agency supervisors in field placement, has considerable usefulness in assessing the extent to which students (right before graduation) are attaining the program objectives. (It should be noted that social work programs need to use multiple measures of the extent to which students are attaining program objectives.) Finally, social work programs need to use multiple measures of the extent to which students are attaining program objectives.

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Appendix

Rating Scale for Evaluation of Field Placement Performance

Midterm ❑ Final ❑

Name of Intern _____ Date _____

Instructions for Rating Interns on the 12 Objectives in the First Part of the Evaluation:

The standard by which an intern is to be compared is that of a new beginning-level social worker. The 12 objectives specified in this evaluation form are those established by our national accrediting organization (the Council on Social Work Education). Under each objective statement are several items that we ask that you rate according to the following criteria.

(1) The intern has excelled in this area.
(2) The intern is functioning above expectations for interns in this area.
(3) The intern has met the expectations for interns in this area.
(4) The intern has not as yet met the expectations in this area, but there is hope that the intern will meet the expectations in the near future.
(5) The intern has not met the expectations in this area, and there is not much hope that the intern will meet the expectations in this area in the near future.
(na) Not applicable, as the intern has not had the opportunity to demonstrate competence in this area.

Comments may be made under any objective, if desired. Please be sure to indicate those areas in which you think the intern is particularly strong and those areas that need improvement.

This evaluation is intended to give the intern feedback about her or his performance. The agency supervisor's rating of these items will not directly be used to calculate the grade that is given to the intern. The faculty supervisor has the responsibility of assigning the grade for the course. The grade that is assigned will be based on: **the faculty supervisor's overall evaluation of the student's performance in placement in conjunction with the agency supervisor's evaluation (65%); intern logs (10%); seminar participation (5%); two papers (10% each—20% total).**

If you prefer to use another evaluation system **in addition** to this form to evaluate a student's performance, please discuss this with the faculty supervisor.

Objective #1: Applies critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice.

1.1	Has good assessment skills	1 2 3 4 5 na
1.2	Has good problem-solving skills	1 2 3 4 5 na
1.3	Has good data gathering skills	1 2 3 4 5 na
1.4	Analyzes complex material well	1 2 3 4 5 na
1.5	Has good critical thinking capacities	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Rating Scale for Evaluation of Field Placement Performance (cont.)

Objective #2: Practices within the values and ethics of the social work profession and with an understanding of and respect for the positive value of diversity.

2.1	Has a commitment to promoting the well-being of clients	1 2 3 4 5 na
2.2	Respects the right of clients to self-determination	1 2 3 4 5 na
2.3	Is perceptive and attentive to cultural diversity	1 2 3 4 5 na
2.4	Follows agency's guidelines on confidentiality	1 2 3 4 5 na
2.5	Has the capacity to communicate well with a variety of diverse groups	1 2 3 4 5 na
2.6	Treats all clients with dignity, courtesy, and fairness	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Objective #3: Demonstrates the professional use of self.

3.1	Presents self as a professional social worker	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.2	Has a high level of self awareness	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.3	Dress and appearance are consistent with agency standards	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.4	Is self-confident	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.5	Maintains poise and control in stressful situations	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.6	Conveys an interest in helping others	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.7	Has good interviewing skills	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.8	Formulates realistic contracts with clients (including goals and planned intervention) and follows through, as appropriate to the agency setting	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.9	Has ability to utilize group dynamics therapeutically	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.10	Has ability to observe a group and make accurate assessments	1 2 3 4 5 na
3.11	Has ability to co-facilitate or facilitate a group effectively	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Rating Scale for Evaluation of Field Placement Performance (cont.)

Objective #4: Understands the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and the strategies of change that advance social and economic justice.

4.1	Treats diverse clients with dignity and respect	1 2 3 4 5 na
4.2	Has considerable awareness of the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination	1 2 3 4 5 na
4.3	Is committed to advancing social and economic justice for individuals and groups who are subjected to discrimination	1 2 3 4 5 na
4.4	Uses pertinent information to assess clients, including attending to cultural/ethnic influences, gender roles, diversity of lifestyle, and access to resources	1 2 3 4 5 na
4.5	Has an understanding of the impacts of various environmental conditions on individuals, groups, families, and communities (such as poverty and discrimination)	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Objective #5: Understands the history of the social work profession and its current structures and issues.

5.1	Is knowledgeable about the agency's mission—its history, goals, and functions in the community	1 2 3 4 5 na
5.2	Is knowledgeable about current social problems	1 2 3 4 5 na
5.3	Is knowledgeable about community resources	1 2 3 4 5 na
5.4	Demonstrates resourcefulness in identifying and using resources not commonly known	1 2 3 4 5 na
5.5	Has a good understanding of existing social welfare programs	1 2 3 4 5 na

Objective #6: Applies the knowledge and skills of generalist social work to practice with systems of all sizes.

Comments:

6.1	Is effective in providing services to individuals	1 2 3 4 5 na
6.2	Is effective in providing services to groups	1 2 3 4 5 na
6.3	Is effective in providing services to families	1 2 3 4 5 na
6.4	Is effective in macro change efforts in the community (macro change efforts include efforts to develop new services and to improve existing services)	1 2 3 4 5 na
6.5	Has the skills and tact to effectively work toward organizational changes in agencies	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Rating Scale for Evaluation of Field Placement Performance (cont.)

Objective #7: Applies knowledge of bio-psycho-social variables that affect individual development and behavior, and uses theoretical frameworks to understand the interactions among individuals and social systems (i.e., families, groups, organizations, and communities).

7.1	Effectively uses knowledge of biological variables in assessing clients	1 2 3 4 5 na
7.2	Effectively uses knowledge of psychological variables in assessing clients	1 2 3 4 5 na
7.3	Effectively uses knowledge of sociological variables in assessing clients	1 2 3 4 5 na
7.4	Is knowledgeable about social system theory	1 2 3 4 5 na
7.5	Is effective in using the agency's assessment system	1 2 3 4 5 na
7.6	Uses and integrates information from appropriate assessment tools	1 2 3 4 5 na
7.7	Has a good knowledge of intervention theories and techniques	1 2 3 4 5 na
7.8	Demonstrates ability to establish intervention plans, and through in implementing the plans	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Objective #8: Analyzes the impact of social policies on client systems, workers, and agencies.

8.1	Is knowledgeable of the field placement agency and its organizational structure	1 2 3 4 5 na
8.2	Is knowledgeable of the relationship between the field placement agency and the larger human service delivery system in the community	1 2 3 4 5 na
8.3	Has the ability to see gaps in the service delivery system and has the ability to suggest appropriate plans for change	1 2 3 4 5 na
8.4	Understands the community and makes use of that understanding in working with clients	1 2 3 4 5 na
8.5	Has an understanding of how social policy issues impact clients and the field placement agency	1 2 3 4 5 na
8.6	Understands the limitations of the field placement agency in regard to financial and material resources and in regard to agency policy, and is able to work effectively within these constraints	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Rating Scale for Evaluation of Field Placement Performance (cont.)

Objective #9: Evaluates research studies and applies findings to practice, and, under supervision, evaluates his or her own practice interventions and those of other relevant systems.

9.1	Has demonstrated an appreciation of the importance of research	1 2 3 4 5 na
9.2	Is interested in reading the results of research studies that are relevant to improving services at this field placement agency	1 2 3 4 5 na
9.3	Has the capacity to evaluate his or her own practice interventions	1 2 3 4 5 na
9.4	Has the capacity to evaluate the services provided by this field placement agency	1 2 3 4 5 na
9.5	Has demonstrated competence in research at this field placement	1 2 3 4 5 na
9.6	Has demonstrated competence in adhering to the documentation and records requirements of the agency	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Objective #10: Uses communication skills differentially with a variety of client populations, colleagues, and members of the community.

10.1	Is assertive	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.2	Written work communicates ideas clearly	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.3	Has written work completed on time	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.4	Has written work completed in an efficient and accurate manner	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.5	Is able to pull out the most important material/information to incorporate in his/her written work	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.6	Is familiar with and clearly understands the style of writing utilized within the agency (i.e., knows the language, anachronisms, abbreviations, etc.) and makes appropriate use of these in assessments and other written work	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.7	Written work reflects a clear understanding of the social worker's role within the agency and service delivery system	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.8	Has good public speaking skills	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.9	Willingly contributes his or her thoughts and opinions in group meetings	1 2 3 4 5 na
10.10	Appropriately adjusts his or her choice of work in communicating with different populations (e.g., communicates well with such diverse populations as children, adolescents, and other professionals)	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Rating Scale for Evaluation of Field Placement Performance (cont.)

Objective #11: Uses supervision appropriate to generalist practice.

11.1	Is prepared for supervisory conferences	1 2 3 4 5 na
11.2	Has a positive attitude toward supervision	1 2 3 4 5 na
11.3	Is receptive to suggestions	1 2 3 4 5 na
11.4	Is open to new ideas and differing points of view	1 2 3 4 5 na
11.5	Seeks supervision when needed, and asks appropriate questions	1 2 3 4 5 na
11.6	Appropriately informs supervisor of problematic situations	1 2 3 4 5 na
11.7	Follows through effectively on work responsibilities assigned by supervisor(s)	1 2 3 4 5 na
11.8	Handles differences of opinion with supervisor(s) with tact and diplomacy	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Objective #12: Functions well within the structure of organizations and service delivery systems, and under supervision, seeks necessary organizational change.

12.1	Good attendance and punctuality	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.2	Promptness in completing work assignments	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.3	Good at prioritizing the work that needs to be done	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.4	Dependable	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.5	Is a team player	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.6	Is a self-starter	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.7	Has good professional relationships with clients	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.8	Has a commitment to continue to seek out opportunities for professional growth	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.9	Is aware of personal limitations	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.10	Has good time management skills	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.11	Abides by agency's policies and standards	1 2 3 4 5 na
12.12	Is professional in making suggestions for changes	1 2 3 4 5 na

Comments:

Rating Scale for Evaluation of Field Placement Performance (cont.)

Overall Evaluation at MIDTERM:

Please check one of the following at the midterm evaluation. At the final evaluation do NOT complete this section.

This intern is excelling in field placement by performing above expectations for interns.

This intern is meeting the expectations of a field placement intern.

This intern is functioning somewhat below the expectations of a field placement intern. There is a question whether this intern will be ready for beginning level social work practice by the end of placement.

This intern is functioning below the expectations of a field placement intern. There is considerable concern that this intern will not be ready for beginning level social work practice by the end of placement. This intern should perhaps be encouraged to pursue another major.

Comments/elaboration:

FINAL OVERALL EVALUATION:

Please check one of the following at the final evaluation. At the midterm evaluation do NOT complete this section.

This intern has excelled in field placement by performing above expectations for interns. If an appropriate position were open at this agency for a beginning level social worker, this intern would be considered among the top candidates for this position.

This intern has met the expectations of the field placement. This intern is ready for beginning level social work practice.

This intern is not yet ready for beginning level social work practice.

This intern is not yet ready for beginning level social work practice and has demonstrated serious problems in performance, and perhaps should be encouraged to pursue another major.

Comments/elaboration:

Signature of Agency Field Instructor _____

Agency _____ Date _____

The following section should be completed by the intern:

My agency supervisor and faculty supervisor have discussed this evaluation with me, and I have received a copy. My agreement or disagreement follows:

Intern's Signature _____Date _____

I agree with the evaluation
I do not agree with evaluation

If the intern disagrees with the evaluation she/he should state that disagreement in writing and submit a copy to both the agency supervisor and the faculty supervisor. The dis agreement should be specific and should also relate to the items in the evaluation.

Gatekeeping Prior to Point of Entry

Larry R. Reynolds

Abstract: *Social work educators have an obligation to the profession to admit into its ranks those applicants judged to have the requisite knowledge, skills, and values for effective practice. Even though considerable disagreement exists as to what those specifics encompass, there is a general sense that students should be monitored throughout the curriculum and that, by making admission decisions for students, the profession and ultimately the clients are better served. This study presents longitudinal data on an instrument utilized by a small BSW program across five pre-professional courses, yielding scores at mid-term and at the end of the semester that address students' compatibilities with the demands of the profession. Data are used in a feedback loop for assessing students compatibility with the profession prior to the initial point of entry into the major. Strengths and limitations of the study are addressed.*

Keywords: BSW gatekeeping, student assessment, evaluation, longitudinal data

Professional academic programs across the nation articulate standards for admission into their courses of study, and these standards are readily found in such programs as nursing, education, and social work. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) requires in Accreditation Standard 5.0 that "the program has admissions criteria and procedures that reflect the programs' goals and objectives," (Council on Social Work Education, 2002, p. 39). Once these criteria and procedures have been established, it is incumbent upon the program to utilize those articulated standards in their decision-making processes for selecting students whom they perceive as meeting the standards and possessing the requisite qualities to successfully complete the course of study and move into the profession. This decision-making process, commonly known as "gatekeeping," is of concern for social work admissions committees and for students who endeavor to enter the profession. The concerns of admissions committees cover such realities as institutional pressures to maintain student enrollments and, thereby, ensuring a critical mass that guarantees the survivability of a program to determining which students actually meet the admissions criteria (McClelland, et al., 1991). Students applying for admission into the major are also concerned with whether they can meet the standards and what it may mean to them if they are denied admission into the major.

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Social work faculty are frequently confronted with multiple and conflicting goals that create dilemmas and raise questions as to whether the admission decisions they make meet the intentions, goals, and objectives of the program. Social work programs also face the potential of creating lawsuits as a function of admission decisions. This is partly due to the difficulty the profession has in arriving at a consensus regarding the operationalization of the criteria for admission into the major (Younes, 1998; Morrow, 2000). It is difficult to define the qualities and characteristics that are requisite to the profession, and this subject generates much debate and controversy within the social work profession (Miller & Koerin, 1998; GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002). Nevertheless, it is imperative for programs to avoid utilizing arbitrary and capricious standards for admissions and to develop admission policies capable of differentiating between suitable and unsuitable applicants for the profession (Cole, 1991; Moore & Urwin, 1991; Cole & Lewis, 1993; Gibbs, 1994a; Miller & Koerin, 1998). The core values of the profession, as identified in the preamble of the NASW Code of Ethics (1996), include "service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, [and] competence," (p. 1). "A review of the Code of Ethics informs us of the importance of professional judgment as we make admission decisions in social work education" (Scott & Zeiger, 2000, p. 410). This, in combination with CSWE accreditation standards and the program's admissions policies, sets a backdrop for decision-making related to admitting or denying students access to the professional program.

Students applying for admission to social work programs also experience considerable consternation. They invest time, energy, financial resources, and become invested in the application process and they are concerned about what it will mean if they are or are not accepted into a professional program. Once students are admitted into a social work program, they are likely to continue experiencing concerns as to whether they will be allowed to progress through the curriculum, enter a field internship, graduate, and successfully negotiate social work certification or licensing examinations.

As students progress through the curriculum, becoming more involved with student social work organization activities and understanding the values and ethics of the profession, they become more cognizant of the demands inherent in the profession. This added knowledge allows students to engage in the process of self-reflection regarding their compatibility with the profession. Through this process of self-reflection, it is not out of the ordinary for some students to determine that they are a mismatch for the profession. Likewise, as social work faculty learn more about a specific student and become more adroit at perceiving the student's strengths and liabilities, they may also determine the student possesses a significant level of incompatibility with the demands of the profession. Consequently, social work faculty may initiate a student's termination from the professional program. Either action typically creates some concern about litigation potential and social justice and raises value conflicts in faculty and students. Thus, social work programs throughout the nation are continually attempting to refine the process of identifying suitable students for the profession (Miller & Koerin, 1998; Pelech, et al., 1999).

It is this desire to attempt to refine the process of identifying suitable students for the profession that has led to the focus of this study. Specifically, a small BSW program developed an instrument that assesses students enrolled in pre-professional level courses on selected requisite behaviors for studying and practicing social work. Faculty observations of these behaviors tap into some of the qualities and characteristics perceived as being critical to successful social work practice. It is suggested that the data from this instrument provides yet another vehicle for social work students and program faculty to better assess a student's compatibility with the demands of the profession. It is argued that, through the use of this data prior to the actual point of entry into the student's major, the program and the profession are better served and informed about gatekeeping and admission decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social work educators continue to debate the criteria for admission into the profession that allows for the safeguarding of the profession and ultimately the clientele who are the recipients of social services (Dunlap, et at., 1998; Magen, et al. (2000); GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002; Kane, et al., 2002). One source that provides some guidance concerning the criteria for admission into the profession is the NASW Code of Ethics (1996). This document identifies ethical principles and standards to which social workers are held accountable. The Code of Ethics specifically points out that practitioners are to be competent to deliver services, attend to the well-being of those receiving social work services, and that educators are to evaluate students "in a manner that is fair and respectful," (NASW Code of Ethics, 1996).

CSWE is another source that provides guidance for admission into the profession. The CSWE 1994 *Handbook of Accreditation Standards*, 4th edition, stated in Evaluative Standard 5 Student Development, 5.0 that "The program must clearly articulate and implement criteria and processes of student admission" (p. 87). Section 5.8 of this handbook requires that programs have "procedures for terminating a student's enrollment … for reasons of academic and nonacademic performance" (p. 89). In 2002, CSWE published the 5th edition of the *Handbook of Accreditation Standards*, which contains the new Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). It also specifies in Accreditation Standard 5, Student Professional Development, 5.6, that "The program informs students of its criteria for evaluating their academic and professional performance" (p. 40), and in 5.7, "The program has policies and procedures for terminating a student's enrollment in the social work program for reasons of academic and professional performance" (p. 40). Note the modification of language in the above statements concerning programs having policies for terminating students from the program. The 1994 standards called for students to be terminated for academic and nonacademic performance, while the 2002 standards call for termination for reasons identified as related to academic and professional performance. It will be recalled that Moore and Urwin (1991) advocated that "professional behavior is an academic requirement," (p. 11), and essentially suggested that in professional programs all behaviors are seen as academic and commingled into the educational process.

The gatekeeping function in baccalaureate social work programs is an issue that has received considerable attention from numerous authors (Moore & Urwin, 1991; Gibbs, 1994; Gibbs, 1994a; Younes, 1998; Moore, et al., 1998; Morrow, 2000). Recommendations for monitoring student readiness throughout the entire curriculum have been suggested (Moore & Urwin, 1991), and these same authors have identified five areas of specific interest to the gatekeepers: (1) Grades, (2) Indications of students taking responsibility, (3) Effective communication skills, (4) Student's attention to social work values, and (5) Student's skills in handling feedback. Gibbs (1994b) noted in her study that there were not well researched screening criteria for assessing baccalaureate students' professional qualities. She notes that developing policies and procedures on these professional qualities was a difficult and contentious issue. Gibbs (1994a) stated "…educators have yet to devise policies that clearly and unimpeachably outline the qualities and characteristics that are requisite to effective professional practice" (p. 15). Hull, et al. (1994) also argues for the development of relevant outcome measures for social work education.

Younes (1998) suggests social work educators face considerable dilemmas in their role as gatekeepers. Programs need to balance student enrollment and survival of a program with questions regarding whether some students should be allowed to enter the profession. This research concurs that there is considerable difficulty in defining the characteristics that a candidate for the profession needs to possess to be qualified for the profession.

Moore, et al., (1998) uses case studies to describe problematic situations in gatekeeping and calls for innovative ways to identify social work students who may not be qualified to proceed in the profession. This study also articulated how corrective actions were taken with students, thereby supporting the gatekeeping function. Morrow (2000) points out that small baccalaureate programs face critical admission decisions, as they have the opportunity to know their students in more depth, but they also face the conflict of limited resources and institutional pressures to retain students. She noted three opportunities for programs to engage in gatekeeping and identified them as: (1) admission to the major, (2) admission to the field, and (3) sanctioning graduation lists. Bogo, et al. (2002) notes that even though students have graduated from accredited social work programs, that "educators do not appear confident that graduates are competent to practice" (p. 386). They further note that "if social work educators are unable to differentiate reliably between those students who possess the skills to practice and those who do not, we are failing in our critical role as gatekeepers for the profession" (p. 386).

In an effort to clarify the requisite characteristics that are compatible with entrance into the profession, Koerin and Miller (1995) conducted a study of MSW programs by assessing the reasons for terminating students for what were then classified as "nonacademic" reasons. They determined that violations of ethical standards, mental health or substance abuse problems, inadequate performance in the field, illegal behaviors, and disruptive classroom behaviors were reasons provided by graduate programs for terminating students from social work programs. These authors did not provide any information relative to the initial onset

of these problematic behaviors; however, it would be unlikely that these behaviors would only manifested themselves during the graduate school experience. Dunlap, et al., (1998) examined the relationship between MSW program admission requirements and the subsequent relative academic success of the graduate student. Their findings suggested that the undergraduate grade point average (GPA) and Graduate Record Examination scores were positively related to academic performance. Miller and Koerin (1998) suggested that, at the MSW level, determining who is suitable to enter the profession requires continual monitoring throughout the educational process. They accurately recognize the interaction that exists among personal characteristics, life experiences, and "emphasis on the professional use of self" (p. 451). All of these authors note that social work educators, through continual gatekeeping activities, have an obligation to help students identify their compatibility with the demands of the profession.

Social work educators are cognizant that litigation may arise when decisions are made to deny students' entrance into the profession. Cole, (1991) and Cole and Lewis (1993) have provided educators with guidelines recommending due process for students and citing case law in which the courts have generally recognized and sustained faculty's professional judgment when functioning as a gatekeeper. The courts have also agreed that there is not a constitutional right to education, but that education is in fact a privilege.

Rhodes, et al., (1999) identifies the failure to enforce established gatekeeping standards as one of the elements that threatens social work education and the profession itself. They argue that, even though student enrollment has increased, there is little indication that a comparable number of students have been screened out of programs. Karger and Stoesz (2003) suggest that the growth in undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs has had an adverse effect on the profession, and that this growth has contributed to a reduction in the status of social work, kept salaries low, and has generally flooded the marketplace with an excess of social workers. They recommend that CSWE curtail its endorsement of new social work programs in an effort to enhance the quality of education and its graduates.

There continues to be much activity within the profession geared toward identifying instruments that can assist in the selection process of those students who seek access to the profession. GlenMaye and Oakes (2002) investigated the use of an instrument designed to objectively score an applicant's personal statement and relate this objective score to the student's effectiveness in the field experience. They found that reliability of the instrument was low, confirming the difficult task of assessing the suitability of applicants to social work programs. McClelland, et al., (1991) also found that social work faculty were highly idiosyncratic in their evaluations of BSW applicants and tended to streamline the gatekeeping criteria. Pelech, et al., (1999) studied several pre-admission variables and their relationship to problems students later had in the field experience. Interestingly, their results were contrary to what some social work educators and admission committees might have predicted. Their study revealed that students who tended to have more problems in the field were older, male, had more experience in social service delivery, were male, and were seen as less mature than students who did not demonstrate problems in the field experience.

One element that is consistent in the literature is that on-going, continuous feedback to students concerning their performances in a variety of areas supports the idea that better judgments can be arrived at relative to student compatibility with the demands of the profession. The literature review also suggests admission decisions can be very challenging and that social work educators are generally looking for more effective means of gatekeeping and determining the quality of the applicants who request admission into the profession.

A gap remains in the gatekeeping literature with respect to establishing a methodology prior to the point of entry into the major for systematically providing undergraduate social work students with feedback on their behaviors that are viewed as critical to the demands of the profession. To address this gap, what follows is a description of a feedback mechanism utilized by a small BSW program with pre-professional level social work students. Feedback is provided to students at mid-term and again at the completion of the semester across five pre-professional level social work courses. These data form a benchmark by which students and faculty are better able to gauge the extent to which a student possesses behaviors deemed requisite to the profession. This longitudinal data provides useful feedback to students prior to their point of entry into the major, assisting the student and the decision-makers with an identification of a student's compatibility with the profession. These data are used initially in an advising role with students providing them formative feedback on some of their behaviors that have been identified as being essential to the practice of social work. These data are reviewed again at the time of the formal application to the major and, become part of the overall data set that is considered in rendering a summative decision relative to admission into the major.

METHOD

A small BSW program in the Midwest examined its gatekeeping procedures and reflected upon the experiences it had with students who had been admitted to the major and to the field experience. The formal gatekeeping process in this program is typical of BSW programs nationwide and begins during the second semester of the sophomore year when students submit a formal application for admission to the major. The second phase of the gatekeeping process commences during the second semester of the junior year when students submit a formal application for admission to degree candidacy and field internship. Students accepted into the field are then formally evaluated on at least two occasions each semester. The final gatekeeping mechanism is approving the students for graduation.

The program consulted with its community advisory group as advocated by Dalton and Wright (1999). This advisory committee is composed of social work practitioners at the BSW and MSW levels, social services organization administrators, a county government official who chairs the county social services committee, a county judge who presides over family and juvenile court, a community member who has received social work services, an undergraduate social work student, and social work faculty. This group suggested it would be desirable to develop a method whereby social work faculty gathered more systematic data on

self-declared freshman and sophomore social work majors covering specific characteristics deemed requisite to the profession. The advisory committee then reviewed the professional literature and the program's objectives in relationship to the 12 foundation program objectives as articulated by EPAS. The advisory committee recommended that an instrument be developed that incorporated the general intent of the program objectives as articulated by EPAS, as well as including items the committee deemed essential for practitioners. Consequently, a 12-item instrument was developed (see Evaluation of Student's Performance in Appendix I), which provided systematic data on student behaviors seen as requisite to the profession. The advisory committee, social work faculty, and social work students judged six of the 11 items on this instrument to have face validity with the objectives articulated by EPAS 3.0 Foundation Program Objectives (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 10). The five remaining items were judged to be required by agencies, and were also seen as critical in the academy, since they are typically contained in social work syllabi (items 5, 6, 7, 9, and 11). Several of the latter items frequently impose a sanction on students for non-compliance, thus adding weight to their relevance.

Administration of this instrument yielded data on these essential behaviors which could then be used in a feedback loop with the students and program faculty to facilitate assessment of the students' compatibility with the requisites of the social work profession. Following training for administering the evaluation tool, social work faculty rated students in the classroom on these perceived critical elements of professional social work practice. A maximum score of 77 was possible and feedback was provided to students at two points in time—at mid-term and upon completion of the pre-professional course. Data represented a longitudinal perspective of each student's compatibility with social work prior to being formally admitted into the professional foundation curriculum.

The five courses where the rating instrument was used were taught at the freshman and sophomore levels and were designated by the program as pre-professional courses and included community service, introductory social work, interpersonal skills, history of social welfare, and elementary statistics. Full-time social work educators or adjunct social work faculty who were practitioners in the community taught these courses. Students were typically enrolled in at least one of the courses per semester throughout their freshman and sophomore years. It was anticipated at the initiation of this study that not all students who enrolled in the social work program would have completed all five pre-professional courses contained within the program's curriculum. In fact, the students were at various stages of completing their pre-professional courses, as some had been waived out of a course, while others were transfer students who had completed equivalent coursework at another institution, and yet others had only recently changed their self-declared major to social work. In an effort to obtain an adequate sample for analysis, the program examined all of the data it had obtained on students over the five pre-professional courses. This examination yielded a maximum of 32 students who had completed at least three of the five courses, including introductory social work, history of social welfare, and elementary statistics. This provided six pairs of data points, two per course (a mid-term rating and a rating at the end

of the course), and included ratings from both full-time and adjunct faculty. Data analysis was conducted with Statistix 8 software (2003) utilizing descriptive statistics, repeated measures ANOVA, simple linear regression, and correlation analysis.

RESULTS

The sample (n=32) consisted of 90.6% females (n=29) and 9.4% males (n=3), with 59.4% (n=19) being characterized as traditional students and 40.6% (n=13) being characterized as non-traditional students. The ethnicity of the sample was 91% Caucasian (n=29) and 9% minority (n=3), including African-American, Hmong, and Latino students. The sample's age ranged from 20 to 49 years and, as can be gleaned from Table 1, below, 56.3% were single, 18.8% were single-parents, and 25% were married with at least one child.

Table 1: *Frequency Distribution of Parental Status*

Type of Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	18	56.3
Single Parent	6	18.8
Married	8	25.0
Total	32	100.0*

**rounding error*

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of age by gender, parental status, and type of student.

Table 2: *Age of Student*

Descriptor	M	SD
Male	32.0	12.767
Female	26.172	7.7509
Traditional	21.684	1.5653
Non-Traditional	34.077	8.5192
Single	23.222	5.9956
Single Parent	26.333	4.2269
Married	34.875	9.6130

In comparing the ages of males and females in this sample, the females were about six years younger than the males; traditional students were around 12 years younger than non-traditional students; the single student was around three years younger than the single parent and about 12 years younger than the married student.

The grade point averages by gender as determined at the close of the introductory course (GPA 1), upon completion of the history of social welfare course (GPA 2), and at the end of the elementary statistics course (GPA 3), respectively, are shown in Table 3. Male GPAs for all courses were higher than the GPAs for females,

but due to the small number of males in the sample (n=3), no statistical analysis on the differences between gender and GPA was undertaken. The non-traditional students' GPAs for all courses were higher than the traditional students: GPA1 = 3.5141 vs. 2.7445, GPA2 = 3.4953 vs. 2.7927, and GPA3 = 3.4371 vs. 2.8593 (n=13 for non-traditional and n=19 for traditional students).

Table 3: *Grade Point Average*

Descriptor	Course	M	SD
Male	Intro GPA1	3.6136	.5373
	History GPA2	3.6322	.5237
	Statistics GPA3	3.6322	.5237
Female	Intro GPA1	2.9996	.6426
	History GPA2	3.0209	.5172
	Statistics GPA3	3.0383	.5018

As might be predicted, the GPAs for married students and single parent students were higher than the single students (see Table 4).

Table 4: *Grade Point Average*

	GPA1	GPA2	GPA3
Married	3.3134	3.3377	3.2419
Single Parent	3.3989	3.2608	3.3319
Single	2.8293	2.9020	2.9490

The program was also interested in examining inter-rater reliability among the three faculty members who rated the students' behaviors. Two faculty were full-time social work instructors and one was an adjunct faculty. Spearman correlations were computed using the final ratings from each class. The correlation between the final score from the introductory course and the history course was r=.57; for the introductory course and the statistics course, it was r=.72, and for the history course and statistics course, it was r=.70. These correlations are all statistically significant at p<.01.

Table 5 reports the means and standard deviations for the mid-term and final scores across the three courses. A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed a significant change in the ratings across the three courses F (5,155) = 2.70, p<.05). There were also statistically significant differences in scores between traditional and non-traditional students F (31, 155) = 4.95, p<.01).

To locate where the differences existed between the mid-term and final scores, Tukey post-hoc analysis was conducted. Two significant differences were found: (1) between the final score in course 1 and the mid-term score in course 2 (the introductory and history course), and (2) between the final score in course 3 and the mid-term score in course 2 (statistics and history course). Tukey post-hoc was also conducted on differences between scores, and the differences were found in scores below 63. The effect size for differences among the courses was small at only 4%, but much larger, 48%, for differences between scores.

Table 5: *Scores for Mid-term and Final Across Three Courses*

Course	M	SD
Mid-term Course 1	68.000	8.4051
Final Course 1	69.656	7.6690
Mid-term Course 2	64.781	11.975
Final Course 2	68.031	5.9972
Mid-term Course 3	67.969	5.9323
Final Course 3	69.406	6.4150

To locate where the differences existed between the mid-term and final scores, Tukey post-hoc analysis was conducted. Two significant differences were found: (1) between the final score in course 1 and the mid-term score in course 2 (the introductory and history course), and (2) between the final score in course 3 and the mid-term score in course 2 (statistics and history course). Tukey post-hoc was also conducted on differences between scores, and the differences were found in scores below 63. The effect size for differences among the courses was small at only 4%, but much larger, 48%, for differences between scores.

Linear regression was used in an effort to predict a theoretical cutoff point for the final scores and the program's requisite GPA of 2.5 to be eligible to apply for admission to the major. The regression model for the introductory course yielded a predicted value of 67.573 on the rating scale, whereas, the history course yielded a predicted value of 64.145 and for the statistics course, the predicted value was 65.332.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the program's admission decisions fall into three categories: (1) admitted, (2) provisionally admitted, and (3) denied admission. The program examined the mean scores from the three pre-professional courses for students who had applied for admission to the major in relationship to the actual admission decisions made on these students. Findings indicated that students were admitted outright to the major when their ratings were 65 or higher. Provisional admission decisions were made on students with scores of 64 or 63 points and, in this limited sample, the means scores of 62 or less resulted in a denial of admission into the social work major.

IMPLICATIONS

Gatekeeping in social work programs is a vital function intended to identify those students who possess the requisite knowledge, skills, and values consistent with the demands of the profession, and who are adroit at providing competent services to clients. Social work educators must continue to identify methods that can strengthen the gatekeeping function. NASW and CSWE both articulate requirements for educators to engage in gatekeeping as part of their professional obligation to protect clients and the profession. The professional literature suggests that there is little agreement among social work educators as to what those specific characteristics are. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that, as social work students progress through the curriculum, they can benefit from continuous monitoring and feedback concerning their "fit" within the profession. This is based on

the idea that feedback strengthens students' awareness of the requisite professional behaviors and assists them in judging their compatibility with the profession.

It is incumbent upon social work educators to assist students as early as possible in their educational experience to identify whether they possess the qualities that are compatible with the delivery of effective social work services, and then to aid students in the strengthening of those behaviors. The earlier this identification can be made, the better for the student, client, and ultimately, the profession. The longitudinal data from this small, non-representative sample lends support to the idea that pre-professional students used feedback from the instrument to assess their compatibility with the demands of the profession.

The expert panel assembled by the program consisted of its advisory committee, social work students, and social work faculty. The achieved consensus gives face validity to the identified behaviors that are consistent with the demands of the profession. The instrument is consistent with the intent of the NASW Code of Ethics, the 12 foundation program objectives detailed by EPAS, and the program's goal of graduating competent entry level practitioners. The reader is cautioned that the instrument described in this paper was designed only to assist the program and the student with identifying pre-professional behaviors viewed as conducive to the practice of entry level social work. It is beyond the scope of this paper to articulate the mechanisms by which the program monitors those students admitted into the major as they progress through the foundation curriculum and the field internship. Nevertheless, an instrument such as the one described in this paper becomes a mechanism for providing feedback to students prior to their admission into the major and ultimately benefits the student and the program's admissions decisions. Faculty and students utilize the data from this instrument in academic advising conferences regarding course selections and career goals (Moore, et al., 2003). In addition, as part of the application process for admission into the major, the program requires students to document how they make use of this data in their socialization to the profession and in their professional development plans.

Even though there is some utility promised by the instrument described here, it is obvious that there are several limitations to this study. The instrument has been utilized with only a small number of students, thus, no generalizations can be claimed. The program is still learning ways to incorporate this feedback into its gatekeeping obligations and, certainly, validation studies need to be conducted on the instrument. As professional educators, we must continue to strengthen the profession by searching for methods that help identify which students are suitable to enter the social work profession.

CONCLUSIONS

The obligation of "guarding the gate" to the profession is a critical one. There continues to be a dearth of agreement among social work educators concerning what constitutes the qualities and characteristics that are requisite to the profession. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon social work educators to explore ways to identify and test these requisite behaviors. Once the behaviors are identified, educa-

tors must then use that information to help strengthen students' compatibilitities with the demands of the profession and to select individuals for admission into the profession who possess and develop those qualities. Social work educators have stressed that the life of the profession is tied to whom we select to enter our profession and provide services to clients. This is an awesome responsibility, and a modest attempt to contribute to the conceptualization and thinking about the gatekeeping process of admission decisions in a small BSW program has been presented here. Clearly, there is a need for ongoing research to articulate the requisite professional behaviors needed to be effective in delivering social work services and interventions. It is also critical to conduct studies to validate measurement tools purported to evaluate the preparedness of the students who seek admission into this profession. Finally, research should explore the "best practices" of pedagogy that develop and/or strengthen these requisite behaviors in our students.

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Note:

A version of this paper was presented at the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors 21st Annual Conference Reno, NV, October 29-November 2, 2003.

Appendix

Evaluation of Student's Performance

INSTRUCTIONS:

Write the student's name in the blank below and check whether your evaluation is for the mid-term or the final evaluation of the student for the course. Using the scale from **1 to 7, with 1 as low and 7 as high, write the number** in front of the statement that corresponds to your evaluation of the student in each of the areas below.

Name of student _____ Mid-term _____ Final _____

1. ____ Demonstrates the use of appropriate grammar.

2. ____ Discusses relevant issues in a manner consistent with social work values.

3. ____ Demonstrates openness to diverse perspectives.

4. ____ Demonstrates the ability to work effectively with others.

5. ____ Demonstrates the ability to work effectively alone.

6. ____ Turns in assignments on time.

7. ____ Comes to class prepared.

8. ____ Demonstrates critical thinking.

9. ____ Demonstrates the ability to accept constructive criticism.

10. ____ Demonstrates respect for others.

11. ____ Demonstrates enthusiasm for learning.

____ TOTAL SCORE

12. Your recommendation concerning this student's choice of social work as a career.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Name of course instructor _____ Date _____

Effectiveness of Admission Criteria on Student Performance in Classroom and Field Instruction

M. Thomas
Roseanna McCleary
Patricia Henry

Abstract: *This study examines the effectiveness of admission criteria on graduate student performance in classroom and field instruction in a new MSW program. Graduate applicants' undergraduate GPA, GRE, and total weighted admission score consisting of four items were gathered. These were correlated with their classroom and field instruction performance. Findings reveal that GRE, undergraduate GPA, and total weighted admission scores are significantly correlated with their classroom performance. End of first year cumulative GPA and human service experience were identified as significant predictors of field performance. Implications of these findings for social work educators and graduate school programs are discussed.*

Keywords: Admission criteria, classroom performance, field instruction performance

Social work educators and administrators shoulder the paramount responsibility of selecting the most suitable candidates for graduate social work programs and providing students with the best education and training. In this process, they play a vital role as gatekeepers of the profession, thereby, assuring the public and the professional community of the highest standard in professional practice. Admittedly, recruiting appropriate graduate applicants who demonstrate an aptitude and commitment to professional values is élan vital for social work programs. However, this remains an area that has not been adequately researched (GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002; Miller & Koerin, 1998).

Social work educators struggle to design effective admission criteria. Although there is no consensus regarding admission criteria in graduate schools across the nation, a combination of factors are utilized by most schools in the admissions decision-making process. Undergraduate grade point average (GPA), scores from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), work experience, personal statements, reference letters, and academic potential are some of the factors considered by social work schools when admitting students into programs. Some scholars have

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argued that the selection criteria used to recruit social work students is often invalid given the kind of tasks they are called upon to perform later in their practice. These critics point out that the admission procedures in early social work programs are modeled after the selection process of math, psychology, sociology, medicine, law, and nursing (Wodarski, 1979). Furthermore, the use of the GPA and GRE as predictors of academic success has also been questioned by some researchers (Donahue & Thyer, 1992; Duehn & Mayadas, 1977; Sampson & Boyer, 2001) on the grounds that their relationship to professional performance has not been empirically established. Critics also argue that personal statements, interviews, and reference letters that lack standardization and predictive powers often reflect what students think social work schools are looking for. These criteria seldom predict the skill level and competency required for professional social work practice. Against this backdrop, Duehn and Mayadas (1977) have proposed a competency-based program with specific entrance and exit requirements for social work programs.

Social work literature on the effectiveness of admission criteria on student performance in classroom and field instruction or the predictive power of these criteria on the graduate students' success in later practice has not historically attracted adequate research interest. However, there has been some effort in the 1970s and 1990s as evidenced by the review of literature. Some of these studies have focused their attention on the suitability and reliability of using certain admission criteria and its impact on student performance (Constable, 1977; Donahue & Thyer, 1992; GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002; Miller & Koerin, 1998). The link between pre-admission data, classroom, and field instruction (Pelech, Stalker, Regehr & Jacobs, 1999), problems with using undergraduate performance alone as admission criteria (Moxley, Moxely & Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2000), and the need for establishing suitability criteria (Cole, 1991) have also been examined.

A review of literature revealed that there have been some efforts particularly in the 1970s and 1990s in understanding the influence of the admissions process on graduate students' success later in their practice. While some studies have focused on predictive factors that lead to success in the classroom, others have focused on the relationship between those factors and field performance. Very few studies exist that examined the relationship between the admissions process and classroom and field performance particularly of foundation year graduate students. This study highlights the significance of this area and contributes to the existing knowledge in the area of admission criteria and foundation year graduate student performance. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of admissions criteria on student performance in classroom instruction and field practicum in a relatively new graduate program in a public university in California. This research focused on the following three research questions:

1. Do students who are rated high in admission criteria items such as undergraduate GPA and GRE and overall weighted average, also score high in their first year MSW courses and field practicum?
2. Do students who perform better in classroom instruction also perform better in field instruction?

3. Are these outcomes the same for different cohorts such as full-time, part-time, first year and second year MSW students?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

GlenMaye and Oakes (2002) describe the program admissions process in Departments and Schools of Social Work as "... one of the least studied components of social work education" (p. 67). Yet, Dunlap, Henley, and Fraser (1998) state, "admissions decisions are among the most important decisions made in schools of social work" (p. 455). A review of existing literature reveals an inconsistent and fragmented relationship between admissions criteria and student performance in social work programs. Findings among studies done over the past 30 years are mixed, even when the same or similar variables and methods are used (Pelech, Stalker, Regehr, & Jacobs, 1999). The following are examples that illustrate the current state of the admissions process in social work education.

Pfouts and Henley (1977) describe a multivariate predictive index of student field performance that can be used as an admission tool in graduate social work programs. These researchers attempted to construct an index that would enhance the ability of the admissions process to select candidates who would perform well as practitioners. The results of a factor analysis identified four factors, which were then used as independent variables in a stepwise regression analysis. These factors were: the student's potential for graduate school, experience in post-college paid employment, the student's gender, and the quality of undergraduate school. These background variables used as predictors together explained 38.6% of the variation in the field performance. Of these, student potential for graduate school contributed the most to the prediction of student field performance followed by paid work experience.

In a similar study, Dunlap (1979) reviewed predictors of student performance using the following criteria: undergraduate grade point average (GPA), graduate record examination (GRE) score, length of prior social work or related experiences, and whether or not the student had an undergraduate degree in social welfare. A student interview and letters of reference were also quantified and used as predictor variables. The student's graduate school GPA and a quantitative faculty rating on his/her "professional potential" were used as the dependent variables. Using multiple discriminant analysis, Dunlap found that the best predictor of student performance was the faculty interview, with undergraduate GPA being a moderate predictor, and GRE score and letters of reference serving as weak predictors.

The Dunlap's study had been called into question by Glisson and Hudson (1981) primarily on statistical and methodological grounds. These critics have argued that there is a serious statistical flaw in trying to predict academic performance and professional potential of social work students with faculty interviews and undergraduate grade point averages. Despite these limitations, this study has been applauded by these critics as a groundbreaking endeavor in understanding the effectiveness of admissions criteria in predicting the potential of student applicants.

Using yet another dependent variable to define student performance, Dunlap, Henley and Fraser (1998) looked at the relationship between admissions criteria (previous social work experience, undergraduate GPA, and GRE score) and MSW students' scores on a pre-graduation comprehensive examination. The authors ran a blockwise multiple regression of exam scores using the background variables of age, gender, and race as covariates. Total GRE score and undergraduate GPA emerged as useful predictors of good performance on the comprehensive examination. This conflicts with Dunlap's (1979) finding of GRE score being a weak predictor, yet supports the finding of undergraduate GPA as a moderate predictor.

Donahue and Thyer (1992) focused on the GRE as part of the admissions process for MSW students. Predictive validity of the GRE has been studied in a variety of graduate programs (e.g., House & Johnson, 2002) with positive results. However, studies that focus on this topic using minority graduate students' academic performance report negative results (Milner, McNeil & King, 1984; Sampson & Boyer, 2001). Donahue and Thyer (1992) challenged the validity of a portion of the GRE—the reading comprehension sections. Narratives for a set of multiple-choice questions were blanked out and students were asked to guess an answer from the five choices. It was expected that students would be correct 20% of the time due to chance. Results showed an average correct response rate of 36%, significantly higher than what was expected. The authors then calculated a correlation between these scores and the verbal component of the students' actual GRE score and found a statistically significant correlation. This poses questions regarding the strength of the GRE's content validity and supports Dunlap's (1979) and Milner, McNeil and King's (1984) findings.

Pelech, Stalker, Regehr and Jacobs (1999) took a different approach to identifying predictors in the admissions process. Faculty members teaching in an MSW program were asked to identify a group of students who experienced problems in four areas (placement breakdown, extended practicum, poor academic performance, and problems with interpersonal relationships) and admissions data for these students were examined. Multiple regression analysis was done using this group of students and a group of randomly chosen students from those who were not identified. This study supported the finding that undergraduate GPA predicts subsequent academic achievement in an MSW program. An additional finding revealed a negative relationship between age and prior social service experience and academic performance. The authors noted that students who had extensive social work experience might return to school with a false sense of competence.

The faculty members involved in the admission decision-making process are as important as the applicants' background information. Dailey (1979) examined the validity of admission predictions, including the role of faculty members as admission decision makers. The study compared the faculty's admission decision to student outcome measures of classroom performance and field performance separately. Interestingly enough, classroom faculties were able to predict both classroom performance and field performance at statistically significant levels. On the other hand, field instructors were only able to predict classroom performance and not field performance.

Miller and Koerin (1998) and Moxley, Najor-Durack and Dumbrigue (2000) emphasized the importance of using nonacademic criteria in the admissions process. In an exploratory study that looked at the use of nonacademic admissions criteria, Miller and Koerin (1998) mailed surveys to accredited MSW programs. Qualitative questions were included in the survey to explore respondents' views on what constituted appropriate indicators of applicant suitability for a social work program. They concluded that while the majority of study respondents did use nonacademic admissions criteria in their programs, they reported similar problems in screening that had already been identified in previous articles that focused on admissions criteria and gate-keeping. Improvement in assessment of student suitability and a model for this process was suggested.

Moxley, Najor-Durack and Dumbrigue (2000) focused on nontraditional students and the need to develop alternative strategies to account for differences among this group. Using adult learning theory, the authors support the need to devise strategies for nontraditional students who may not have the level of academic credentials to meet admissions criteria to an MSW program. These strategies involved institutional commitment and planning, support for applicants during the admissions process, and helping them with the transition from applicant to student.

METHODS

Data for this study were collected from several sources. These sources included a survey questionnaire for graduate students admitted to the program in 2000 and 2001, pre-admission student information from admission files, quarterly field instruction evaluation files maintained by the field education coordinator, end of first year GPAs of full-time and part-time students, and the current cumulative graduate GPA of all students, including advanced standing students from the admissions and records office of the university.

The study was conducted among graduate MSW students in a California public university. The program began admitting students in 2000 and was recently accredited by the CSWE. Currently, there are 87 full time and part time students in the program. Graduate students (N=68) admitted to the program in Fall 2000 and 2001 were asked to voluntarily complete a survey questionnaire that consisted of demographic information. The pre-admission information gathered included such admission criteria as the undergraduate GPA (UGPA), GRE score, and total weighted admission score of four items as rated by two faculty members. These items included: Intellectual and academic potential (UGPA, GRE, and conceptual ability, problem-solving ability, writing skills, creativity, and academic skills as demonstrated through personal statement), relevant human service experience (length, demonstrated success and quality of the work experience), leadership potential (social work values, communication skills, initiative, and interpersonal skills), and quality of reference letters (the appropriateness and nature of endorsement). Two faculty members rated each application on the above four items. These items were rated on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "unacceptable applicant" and 10 being "outstanding applicant." Thus, each applicant can get a maximum of 40 points from each rater, totaling 80 maximum points.

Although the points for all items were the same, the relative weight for these items in the overall score were different. Based on experience, knowledge, and information from the social work literature, faculty raters assigned weights for each of the four criteria. Intellectual and academic potential were rated 50%, human service experience and leadership 20% each, and quality of reference letters was rated 10%. The item-scores on each student by two faculty raters were then transferred to a percentage scale based on the above relative weight. Thus, the score obtained is the "total weighted admission score." The scoring instrument has neither been pre-tested nor has it been tested for reliability and validity.

The cumulative GPA of full time students admitted in 2000 and 2001, the current cumulative GPA of third year part time students, and second year part time students were also collected. To assure the accuracy of comparisons between cohorts and within each cohort, the end of first year GPA was also calculated. This does not include five advanced standing students and, hence, the sample size for this variable was reduced to 63. The research team decided to use both the end of first year cumulative GPA and current cumulative GPA, as it represents a student grade reflecting their performance in the classroom.

The evaluation of field instruction was carried out every quarter, and the content of the evaluation forms were different for foundation field practicum and concentration practicum. The field instructor and the faculty field liaison conduct the evaluation jointly. Because of this collaborative evaluation process, the possibility of increasing subjectivity in the evaluation needs to be recognized and, therefore, findings should be interpreted with caution. For the foundation field practicum, the evaluation contains the following major areas: (a) Illustration of development of professional self, (b) Social work values and ethics, (c) Micro-level assessment skills, (d) Micro-level intervention skills, (e) Communication skills, (f) Macro-level assessment and intervention skills. Each of these areas has several items as subcategories. The illustration of the development of professional self was one of the categories that was defined as: (a) demonstration of professional self demeanor, (b) demonstration of independence and initiative, (c) self-evaluation of performance, (d) effective use of supervision, and (e) commitment to life-long learning. Each of these subcategory items is structured on a progressive skill assessment grading rubric ranging from 1 to 5, much like a Likert scale where one indicates the lowest performance in that area and five the highest performance in the area. Table 1 illustrates an example of the grading rubric. Students need to earn a minimum of 75 points out of a possible 90 points to pass the foundation field practicum.

In the second year, students chose an area of concentration that included children and family services and health and mental health. For concentration field practicum, the students are evaluated quarterly in the following areas: relationship skills, communication skills, assessment skills, collaboration skills, intervention skills, social work values and ethics, and development of professional self. Each of these areas has several items as subcategories or indicators that define the area of skill and competence. For example, intervention skill has been operationalized as: (a) effectively contracts with client regarding their stated goals; (b) assists reluctant client in the change process; (c) demonstrates flexibility and will-

Table 1: *Sample Rating Scale From Quarterly Foundation Field Instruction Evaluation*

Professional Self-development	**Progressive Rating Scale Rubrics**				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1.Demonstration of professional demeanor	Appears bored, passive, fails to maintain poise, unable to plan work. Easily overwhelmed.	Occasionally appears interested, assertive and calm only under routine conditions.	Appears interested and motivated. Calm and poised with exceptions to high stress situations.	Usually completes the assignments with poise and control. Very motivated.	Consistently responsible, and poised even under extreme conditions. Highly motivated.

ingness to utilize different roles, methods, and techniques; (d) demonstrates ability to proceed from engagement, assessment, problem identification, goal setting, and intervention to termination and evaluation; (e) demonstrates ability to monitor ongoing intervention process, accepting feedback from clients, significant others, and other professionals; (f) demonstrates case management skills, accepting realities of agency constraints, and serving as client advocate; and (g) intervenes in crisis and professionally helps client to stabilize and links them with resources. Each of these subcategories is structured on a scale ranging from NA (Not Applicable) and a Likert scale ranging from 1-5. Table 2 provides an example of this. Students can earn a maximum of 190 points, and they need 152 points (80%) to pass the field practicum. The actual points they earned were converted into percentages to facilitate comparisons. A sample rating scale in shown in Table 2.

The percentage points students gained during foundation and concentration practicum years are considered representative of their performance in field instruction. Since there were items in the Likert-type scale not rated by field evaluators due to the not-applicable nature of those areas in their learning opportunity, the entire field practicum performance points were recalculated based on items actually rated jointly by the evaluators. Accordingly, percentages were calculated based on items actually rated. This procedure was adopted in order to assure the accuracy of the field instruction outcome. Furthermore, there were three academic quarters of field practicum in the foundation year and similarly three academic quarters in the concentration year. Since some data were missing in the fall quarter, which happens to be the beginning field practicum quarter for full time students, the winter and spring quarterly evaluation were selected for analysis. Additionally, mean field instruction scores for winter and spring quarters were calculated for foundation-year students and concentration-year students. Thus, both foundation and concentration year percentage point scores were gathered.

Study Participants

A description of the demographic profile of the students is important to better understand their commitment and performance in the social work program.

Table 2: *Sample Rating Scale From Quarterly Concentration Field Instruction Evaluation*

Intervention Skills	Rating Scale	
1. Effectively contracts with clients regarding their stated goals	NA	No opportunity to judge
	1	Fails to meet expectations
	2	Meets expectations some of the time
	3	Consistently meets expectations
	4	Exceeds expectations some of the time
	5	Consistently exceeds expectations
2. Demonstrates ability to monitor ongoing intervention process, accepting feedback from clients and other professionals.	NA	No opportunity to judge
	1	Fails to meet expectations
	2	Meets expectations some of the time
	3	Consistently meets expectations
	4	Exceeds expectations some of the time
	5	Consistently exceeds expectations

Insights into their demographic profiles may help us understand who they are and how they perform in the classroom and field instruction. The study participants' age ranged from 23 to 64 years and the mean age was 39.5 years. More than four-fifths (84%) of the students were females and the rest were males (16%). Regarding their ethnicity, the data further indicated that 57% of the students were White, 18% African Americans, 22% Hispanic/Latinos and the remaining were Pacific Islanders and others. Furthermore, the study participants came from various types of family backgrounds: 41% were married, 38% were single, 16% were divorced and the remaining 5% were separated or had other types of family structure. More than half (52%) were working in full time jobs, 19% in part time jobs, and 31% did not work and had full time commitments to the program. The majority (54%) worked in public/governmental agencies.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS® Version 10. Descriptive data analysis and inferential data analysis were performed in order to answer the research questions under study. The study examined the demographic characteristics of the students in order to gain insight into students' broader social context. For this, descriptive analyses of selected variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, employment and family background, were performed. The study also tested for possible correlations between admission criteria (GRE, UGPA, total weighted admission score), student performance in the classroom (using current cumulative GPA and end of first year GPA) and field instruction performance (using two-quarter field instruction mean percentage scores). It was assumed that the graduate cumulative GPA and the field instruction score would be good indicators of student per-

formance in the program. In order to ascertain the relationship between admission criteria and students' performance in the classroom and the field, Pearson's correlation test was used. Further analysis was performed to examine the difference in outcome for part time students and full time students as well as for students admitted in 2000 and 2001. In order to compare group differences, t-Tests were used. A step-wise linear regression analysis was used to identify the predictors of student performance in field instruction.

FINDINGS

Admission Criteria and Classroom Performance

The total weighted admission score was an important criterion taken into consideration in admitting students to the program. Two faculty members rated each applicant on four items. The total admission score, which was representative of admission criteria, consisted of intellectual and academic potential, relevant human service experience, and leadership potential and quality of reference letters. The mean score of these items were calculated based on both the raters' evaluation and a two-tailed Pearson's correlation test was run. Among these four items, only intellectual and academic potential significantly correlated with end of first year cumulative GPA (see Table 3).

The study further found that the GRE score correlated with total weighted admission score and the relationship was statistically significant (r=.353; p<.003). Similarly, higher undergraduate GPA was significantly associated with the total weighted admission score (r=.404; p<.001). It is important to note here that GRE and undergraduate GPA were factors considered under "academic potential" which was one of the four items in calculating the total weighted admission score. The correlation between GRE and undergraduate GPA was statistically significant but relatively weak (r=.293).

The current cumulative graduate GPA includes GPA of students graduated in 2002, current full time and part time second year, current part time third year and advanced standing students who were at various stages of study in their MSW program. Due to this variation, correlation of this variable with other variables needs to be considered with caution when making comparisons within and between groups. Hence, the end of first year cumulative GPA for full time and equivalent cumulative GPA for part time students was calculated. This was based on one-year full time equivalent of courses taken by part time students. The data showed that end of first year cumulative GPA significantly correlated with GRE (r=.266; p<.03) and UGPA (r=.411; p<.001).

Admission Criteria and Field Instruction Performance

The mean field instruction performance score for all graduate students was 88.44 with a standard deviation of 9.50. The admission criteria and field instruction performance were also tested for possible correlation using Pearson's two-tailed test.

The admission criteria items (academic potential, work experience, leadership and references) and the field instruction performance were tested for possible relationships using a Pearson's correlation. As can be seen from Table 3, both

human service experience (p<.002) and quality of references (p<.002) were significantly correlated with field instruction performance.

Table 3: *Bivariate Correlation of Admission Criteria Items with End of First Year Cumulative GPA and Field Instruction Performance (n=68)*

Variables	End of First Year Cumulative GPA	Field Instruction Performance
Intellectual/Academic potential	.573***	.209
Human service experience	.122	.377***
Leadership potential	.005	.189
Quality of reference letters	.222	.376***

***p<.001

The data show that the total admission score significantly correlated with student performance in field instruction (r=.333; p<.008). Similarly, we found a relatively strong and significant correlation between the current cumulative graduate GPA and student performance in field instruction (r=.542; p<.0001). Similarly, the end of first year GPA had a significant correlation with first year field instruction performance (r=.573; p<.0001). However, undergraduate GPA was not significantly related with field performance. The GRE yielded a weak correlation with field performance (r=.224) that was not significant at .05 level. It should be noted here that the GRE and undergraduate GPA were factors in calculating the total weighted admission score. Although individually these were not correlated with field instruction performance, the total weighted admission score was associated with student performance in the field.

Several factors considered in the admission process and the end of first year cumulative GPA were positively correlated with the field instruction performance. Linear regression analysis using a stepwise method was used to identify the predictors of field instruction performance. Undergraduate GPA, GRE, academic potential, leadership potential, human service experience, quality of reference letters, and end of first year cumulative GPA were used as independent variables. The first year field instruction performance score was treated as the dependent variable. Only the end of first year cumulative GPA (β=.502***) and human service experience (β=.329**) emerged as significant predictors. These variables combined accounted for 47% of the variance in field instruction performance (Adjusted R^2=.407).

Group Comparisons

The differences in admission criteria mean scores (such as GRE, UGPA, and total weighted admission score) of full time and part time students admitted in 2000 and 2001 were compared as shown in Table 4. It is important to note that mean GRE score dropped for full time students in 2000 from 1433.85 to 1226.19 for full time students in 2001. Similar drops in mean scores for full time students admitted in 2001 were observed in total admission scores, field instruction scores, and current cumulative graduate GPA.

In order to test whether full time students differ significantly from part time students on any of the above items, a comparative analysis of group mean differences of GRE scores, UGPA scores, total weighted admission score, and current cumulative GPA was performed. The results did not yield any significant group differences. Similarly, *t*-tests were run on these items for students admitted in 2000 and 2001. Table 5 summarizes the results. The data show that these two cohorts differ significantly on current cumulative graduate GPA (t=2.59; p=<.01).

Table 4: *Mean Comparison of GRE, UGPA, Total Admission Score and Field Instruction Score (*n=*68)*

	Admission Year 2000		Admission Year 2001	
Areas	**Full Time**	**Part Time**	**Full Time**	**Part Time**
GRE mean score	1433.85	1233.24	1226.19	1246.50
UGPA mean score	3.24	3.19	3.24	2.95
Total weighted admission score	87.30	86.58	84.78	89.33
Field instruction Score	91.15	89.94	85.05	89.33
Current cumulative graduate GPA	3.71	3.69	3.58	3.40

Table 5: *Admission Criteria and Performance Differences Between Students Admitted in 2000 and 2001 (*n=*68)*

Items	2000 Admission Mean	2001 Admission Mean	Mean Difference	*t*-Test Significance	*t*-Test Values
GRE	1316.71	1222.65	94.06	.171	1.38
Total weighted admission score	86.87	86.27	.60	.76	.29
Undergraduate	3.22 GPA	3.1	.10	.33	.96
Current cumulative Graduate GPA	3.7	3.4	.23	.01**	2.59
Field instruction performance score	90.47	86.61	3.86	.10	1.65

**p<*.01;* ***p<*.001*

FINDINGS

Do students who were rated high in admissions criteria items also score high in their first year MSW courses? With regard to this first research question the study found that out of the four items that constituted the total weighted admission score, only academic potential significantly correlated with the end of first year GPA. The other three items did not translate into classroom performance of graduate students. Although these results cannot be generalized due to the small sample size, these findings suggest that social work programs and admission procedures may want to pay more attention to intellectual and academic potential.

The study further found a significant relationship between GRE, UGPA, total weighted admission score, and end of first year GPA. Clearly, students' performance in the GRE and their undergraduate success translates into academic performance in the first year graduate program. As evidenced by the correlation statistics, the undergraduate GPA showed the strongest relationship with graduate students' performance in the classroom. This is also consistent with the findings of Dunlap, Henley and Fraser (1998), where GRE and UGPA were predictors of graduate performance. With regard to the correlation between undergraduate GPA and end of first year graduate GPA, our study also confirms similar findings by Pelech, Stalker, Regehr and Jacobs (1999). Admittedly, these findings may offer some support for including GRE scores and undergraduate grades as part of admission criteria. In spite of the scholarly criticisms leveled against using GRE and UGPA as predictors of academic success, evidently, there is merit in using them as part of an effective admissions process. While the support for GRE is clear based on this study, the applicants' success in undergraduate programs may have accounted for their success in the GRE.

The second question asked: Do students who perform better in classroom instruction also perform better in field instruction? Of the four admission criteria, only relevant human service experience and quality of reference letters had a significant, positive relationship with the field performance of graduate students. Academic potential did not translate into their field performance. However, the total weighted admission score (combination of four admission items scores) significantly correlated with field instruction performance. This is indicative of the need to give more weight to applicants' relevant work experience and the testimony of referees in the admission criteria. This raises an important issue concerning the integration of classroom performance with field performance as the profession not only requires social workers to demonstrate skills in empathy, warmth, and establishing relationship with clients, but also necessitates social workers as having an adequate knowledge base as a springboard from which these skills can develop. It is important to exercise caution, once again, regarding the small sample size of the study in generalizing these findings. These findings show that both the end of first year cumulative GPA and current cumulative GPAs had a significant and positive relationship with the field instruction performance of students. This suggests that students are able to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom to their field situations. Along similar lines, Dailey (1979) found a significant correlation between classroom performance and field performance, indicating some commonalities that are essential for success in both these areas. It is these common factors that should form the basis of any sound admission process in social work. Another noteworthy point that does not correspond to common expectations is the absence of a significant relationship between undergraduate GPA and field instruction performance.

Are classroom and field instruction outcomes the same for different cohorts, such as full-time, part-time, first year, and second year MSW students? With respect to this third research question, a significant difference was observed only between cohorts admitted in 2000 and 2001 in terms of current cumulative GPA. It is important to exercise caution in interpreting the results, as there was a larg-

er pool of students in 2001 compared to 2000. Moreover, some students who could not cope with the increasing demands of the program dropped out in the first year. This may have left behind a more resilient group of students during 2000, as compared to 2001. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between full time and part time students in terms of their GRE scores, UGPA scores, total weighted admission score, and current cumulative GPA.

Results from the regression analysis identified two significant predictors of field instruction performance of graduate students, namely, end of first year cumulative GPA and relevant human service experience. This underscores the significance of considering work experience as an important component in the criteria for admitting students into graduate programs. This finding is consistent with Pfouts and Hanley's study (1977) that identified paid work experience as a significant predictor of field performance.

Demographic data revealed that the mean age of the population studied was 39.5 years. This is reflective of the growing number of non-traditional students seeking MSW degrees and suggests that social work programs need to modify their admission criteria and/or provide additional help for the non-traditional applicants. This was also consistent with the findings of Moxley, Najor-Durack, and Dumbrigue (2000). With respect to ethnicity, the majority of students were Caucasian, although close to a fifth were African-American, and a little more than a fifth were Hispanic. Consistent with the current distributive pattern in other programs, most of the students in this program were women.

Although the findings of this study add to the existing literature, there are several limitations in this study that need to be considered. It should be noted that it is primarily a baseline study using a small sample size in a relatively new graduate program in social work. Hence, it only provides an empirical base for future theoretical formulations by identifying a matrix of important pre-admission variables associated with graduate student performance in classroom performance and field performance. The relationship between demographic variables and student performance was not explored, as it was not within the scope of this paper. However, it is important to note that demographics may also influence successful student learning outcomes. Furthermore, in rating student applications, faculty raters have relied on their experience, knowledge, and information from the social work literature in weighting the problem solving ability, leadership potential, and quality of the references. These factors serve as external threats to the generalizability of the study's findings to other sub-populations.

In conclusion, the study reiterates the significance of adopting appropriate admission criteria in selecting suitable students for graduate social work programs. Although these findings cannot be generalized for all programs mainly due to the small sample size, these results identify indicators and predictors that are related to the success of graduate student performance in classroom and field instruction. Similar studies using large sample size need to be replicated in other settings in order to validate and support these findings. This is an important area of research that would contribute to the establishment of effective admission criteria for graduate social work education. The findings in this short study prompted the Admission Committee to revise its methodology by adapting the old crite-

rion and reassigning the numerical weight within each of the variable categories, e.g., GPA, GRE, and work experience. Undoubtedly, the gate-keeping function of the profession begins with a reliable and valid admissions process, which, in turn, will contribute to the highest standards for the graduates later in their professional practice.

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Note:

An early version of this paper was presented at the 49th Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, February 27–March 2, 2003, Atlanta, Georgia.

Assessment as Learning: The Role of Minor Assignments in Teaching and Learning

Paul Adams

Abstract: *This article focuses on assessment at the level of the course and classroom, rather than the program or institution. The assumption that building a culture of assessment in a social work program, or its host university—assessment, understood as a "rich conversation about student learning informed by data" (Marchese, 2004)—requires that both faculty and students are engaged by assessment as an activity that directly benefits their own teaching and learning while these are in progress. Classroom assessment based on the frequent use of minor assignments—ungraded tasks set by instructors for students to perform in the classroom—offers this direct and immediate linkage of assessment to learning. The uses and advantages of minor assignments are described, and the dynamic interplay between minor assignments and assessment is illustrated with an example from the teaching of Social Security in a social welfare policy class.*

Keywords: Assignments, assessment, instruction technique

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Assessment has assumed growing importance in higher education, partly because of the pressure to show that increasingly expensive college education produces the results it claims in terms of student learning. The assessment movement in higher education has drawn attention to the gap that may exist between coverage—the material taught in a course—and what students learn (Huba & Freed, 2000). At the level of the individual classroom, this emphasis on accountability for outcomes has highlighted the need for summative assessment of student learning in terms of the course's objectives. This in turn requires well-designed assignments with clear grading criteria that test student attainment of the intended outcomes (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998).

The assessment movement and the demand for accountability also draw attention to the need for formative assessment to provide both students and instructor with ongoing feedback that enables them to adapt and improve their learning and teaching from week to week. Accrediting bodies, such as the Council on Social Work Education's Commission on Accreditation, require processes of ongoing program assessment and improvement as a permanent feature of programs, rather

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than as a surge of energy in the year before a site visit. Similarly, classroom assessment can be designed to provide frequent feedback to inform and improve teaching and learning as students' progress throughout a term, rather than as a burst of activity at the end. Assessment-centered teaching, which is also necessarily learner-centered (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, Donovan, & Pellegrino, 2000), thus emphasizes formative and summative feedback and focuses on what students learn as distinct from what the instructor "teaches." This latter distinction, drawing attention to the ways in which prior knowledge and preconceptions constrain as well as enable new learning, has been a central theme in the cognitive science of learning and expertise development in recent years and in the assessment movement in higher education (reference omitted; Bransford, et al., 2000; Daley, 1999; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Steadman, 1998).

Whatever their value or potential for program assessment, assignments are, in the first place, part of the process of evaluating student learning in an individual course. Assignments are the student tasks that teach and test those things the instructor most wants students to learn. That, at least, is the assumption students make when they direct their energies to learning what they need to know in order to do their assignments well. Assignments provide the raw material for assessment. Classroom assessment is not only concerned with evaluation of outcomes. It is also part of the process of student learning. This aspect of assessment has been called assessment-as-learning, the involvement of students in the metacognitive processes of assessing their own learning as it progresses (Gingerich & Kaye, 1997; Alverno College Faculty, 1994). As social work programs take assessment more seriously, two different but complementary tendencies are evident: the first is toward evaluation of student learning in terms of its ultimate utility for improving client outcomes in the field (Gambrill, 2001a, 2001b, 2002); the second is toward incorporating classroom assessment, peer- and self-assessment into the normal, everyday instruction of professional social work education that is organized around assuring that students develop and can articulate their mastery of the abilities they need for professional practice (Gingerich & Kaye, 1997; Adams, 2004; Fanney, 2003).

These developments point to the key importance of assignments, both major and minor, in course design and teaching strategy. An assignment is defined here as any student task set by the instructor that both teaches students and tests their learning. Shifting the emphasis from what the instructor must cover in a course to what a student should be able to do by completion of the course points to the need to move up the development of assignments in the design of a course (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998). From this assessment-centered and learner-centered perspective (Bransford, et al., 2000), it is preferable to design a course around the major assignments that teach and test the knowledge, values, and skills that the faculty (collectively and individually) most want students to learn. These are properly specified in a course rationale and in the course objectives for student learning that the faculty has approved while building a horizontally and vertically integrated curriculum. After the rationale and course objectives or student learning outcomes are in place, developing the major assignments becomes the first task of the instructor, rather than the last. These assignments, based on the objectives, link

the desired learning outcomes to the course's structured opportunities to learn and assess them. Walvoord and Anderson (1998) provide a step-by-step guide to constructing an assignment-centered course outline that begins with the major assignments and selects them for the likelihood of their eliciting from students the kind of learning the instructor wants to measure.

Designing a course around the major assignments has at least two results. First, assignments are unlikely to be clustered at the end of the term, a practice that creates an undue burden on teachers and students, alike. If assignments and assessment are understood to be part of student learning rather than serve only as a means to evaluate it after the fact, they are likely to be shorter and less formal. A single policy analysis assignment, for example, that is due at the end of term can be broken up into several steps. Indeed, policy analysis frameworks lend themselves to this approach, because they are typically divided into steps or clusters of questions to be addressed sequentially (e.g., Bardach, 2000; Dunn, 2004; Gilbert & Terrell, 2002; Karger & Stoesz, 2002). The instructor and peers can give feedback on each part—without grading the work, while the student is still learning and revising—and the student can rewrite as she improves her skills. Such short, well-sequenced assignments build students' skills as well as assessing them. They also provide opportunities for self- and peer-assessment that can build metacognitive skills—learning how to learn—as well as helping the instructor provide more helpful feedback while the student develops an improved final product (Kusnic & Finley, 1993).

Second, minor or small-scale assignments also assume a new importance. As the course progresses, these assignments teach and assess what students need to learn to do in order to complete the major assignments successfully and, thereby, show students that they have achieved the learning outcomes of the course, which, in a well-designed curriculum, support mastery of the abilities students' need for professional social work practice.

WHAT ARE MINOR ASSIGNMENTS?

Major assignments, as we have seen, can be divided into smaller, more frequently assessed parts in order to allow for several iterations on the path to a final product. Minor assignments are on a smaller scale still. They are the small classroom tasks—usually ungraded and often anonymous—that provide feedback to both students and instructor on how they can improve their learning and teaching in progress. They support completion of the major, graded assignments by building the knowledge, values, and skills that those major assignments test, but they are not themselves part of or early drafts of those assignments. Minor assignments provide the instructor with data for assessing student learning, but they are not necessarily intended for measuring the performance of individual students.

The briefest and perhaps most useful minor assignments are Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs). These are "small-scale assessment techniques that provide information to teachers and students about what is going on in the classroom" (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 168). They were collected, developed, refined by Angelo and Cross (1993) as part of a larger Classroom Research Project involving several thousand college teachers in a wide range of disciplines and

professional fields. The purpose of CATs is "to improve learning *in progress* by providing teachers with the kind of feedback they need to inform their day-to-day instructional decisions, and by providing students with information that can help them learn more effectively" (Angelo, 1994, p. 5). The student tasks required by CATs are assignments on the smallest scale, usually taking only a few minutes during or at the end of a class session.

Brief as they are, CATs teach as well as assess. For each of the 50 CATs described and illustrated by Angelo and Cross (1993), the authors list the related teaching goals that the technique supports. For example, the simplest of CATs, the Muddiest Point, asks students in the last few minutes of class to describe on a half-sheet of paper or card the least clear point in the preceding class period or unit—lecture, discussion, video, or assignment. Its purpose is to guide teaching decisions about what to emphasize, clarify, or spend additional time on. Students learn quickly to identify and articulate what they do not understand (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Like many CATs, this technique requires and develops skills in metacognition, enabling students to become more conscious of and to take control of their own learning. As Angelo and Cross (1993) describe, the technique also supports several teaching goals in their Teaching Goals Inventory, an extensively field-tested and refined instrument for self-assessment of instructional goals for college teachers. The goals related to the muddiest point technique are:

- Improve skill at paying attention.
- Develop ability to concentrate.
- Improve listening skills.
- Develop appropriate study skills, strategies, and habits.
- Learn concepts and theories in this subject

Angelo and Cross, p. 154

Some techniques, such as Classroom Opinion Polls (an informal but anonymous poll of student opinion) and Everyday Ethical Dilemmas (which asks students to respond to a scenario involving a realistic ethical dilemma that they might encounter in practice), both foster and assess students' awareness of their own attitudes and values. Both can be administered as pre- and post-assessment devices to ascertain what changes occur as a result of classroom activities and assignments. (For a fuller discussion of CATs, their theoretical and empirical basis, and their application to social work education, see Adams, 2004; for a meta-analysis of the empirical research literature on CATs, see Becker, in press.)

Other minor assignments—such as role plays and simulations, or in-class small group tasks—typically take longer and are more clearly designed to teach than assess. They too, however, provide the instructor with feedback about student learning that can be used to improve both teaching and learning in the course, while it is in progress. All these classroom activities are given the name minor assignments to emphasize that they all: (1) are tasks assigned by the instructor, (2) facilitate learning needed for successful completion of the major assignments, and (3) enable both the instructor and students to assess student learning on a frequent and regular basis, allowing for improvements in teaching and learning

while the course is still in progress. Drawing on learning theory and empirical studies on the structure of knowledge, novice and expert learning, problem solving, development of learning in children, self-assessment, and the role of culture in learning, these activities provide for a learning environment that is focused on the course objectives while promoting metacognitive skills for lifelong learning (Adams, 2004; Boitel, 2002; Bransford, et al., 2000).

THE MUDDINESS OF ASSIGNMENTS

The Muddiest Point typically focuses on a particular lecture (Mosteller, 1989) or specific component of a class (discussion, video, etc.) and is intended to elicit feedback about the content of that component. In an analysis of muddiest points collected weekly from several classes over the course of an academic year, the author found that asking the general question, "What was the muddiest point in this class session?" did, after some coaching to go beyond such unhelpful answers as "everything" or "nothing," produce responses that illuminated the substantive elements in each class session that remained unclear. For example, the muddiest point for several students in a policy class session was the concept of regressive taxes, or more specifically, what was regressive about a sales tax when everyone paid the same amount of tax on a given purchase and the rate was the same on all taxable goods and services. But students also took the opportunity to ask questions about the major assignments. What was muddy to these students was what they were expected to know or be able to do. This was a variant of the much-despised question, "Will it be on the test?" or "What do I have to remember?" and initially elicited the irritation instructors, who love their subject traditionally feel, when confronted with this question.

Eventually, however, the attempt to persuade students not to use the Muddiest Point device to ask such questions was abandoned. This feedback posed a legitimate question—what do you expect us to know? It pointed to the overwhelming volume of unfamiliar material a student is expected to master in a foundation policy course that includes the history of social work and social services, current policies, service delivery structures, policy analysis, policy practice and advocacy, and financial, organizational, administrative, and planning processes pertaining to service delivery (Council on Social Work Education, 2002). It also indicated the inadequacy of such answers from the instructor as "all of it" or "the main points."

ADVANTAGES OF MINOR ASSIGNMENTS

An important advantage of minor assignments as assessment is the flexibility they allow in adapting teaching and learning strategies in response to the feedback they provide. Major assignments are typically written into the syllabus that students receive at the beginning of the term and, thereby, assume a contractual quality that leaves limited room to maneuver. Minor assignments, on the other hand, allow instructors to change their teaching strategy and combine assignments and assessment techniques so as to take advantage of opportunities created by feedback from prior assignments or address the problems of teaching and learning that come to light in the course of the term. The adoption or adaptation of new minor assignments and their combination in unanticipated ways makes for lively, responsive teaching.

The Muddiest Point, for example, can be the organizing element of an ongoing weekly dialog. The instructor can respond to the class by e-mail or on a class electronic discussion board to clarify points about the content or the assignment that were unclear. The distinction between policy and program in a major policy analysis assignment, for example, or between obsession and compulsion, or race and ethnicity, may need repeated clarification and exemplification before all students are clear about it.

The first part of each class can also be used to clarify muddy points and provide linkage between the previous and current class. Other CATs or minor assignments can be used to stimulate recall and critical thinking about the content of the previous class. The technique called RSQC2 (Recall, Summarize, Question, Connect, and Comment) offers a five-step protocol for guiding students through a process of quickly recalling, summarizing, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing content from the previous class session (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Students write down quickly what they recall from the previous week, summarize the important points into a single sentence, jot down a question that remains for them about the previous class, connect the main points of that class with the objectives of the course as a whole, and finally make an evaluative comment about the previous class session. This process enables instructors to compare their own sense of what they are teaching with what students are remembering and understanding. It gives students a framework for organizing and integrating their new learning, pushing them to manage their efforts well and develop good study habits and skills.

The questions students raise in doing the RSQC2, the Muddiest Point, or the Minute Paper—which asks students to jot down on an index card: a) the most important point of a lecture or reading, and b) what important question remains unanswered—do not necessarily need to be answered by the instructor. If the class is divided into small groups to compare their unanswered questions, only those questions the group cannot answer internally need the instructor's clarification. Thus, students have the opportunity to compare among themselves what they thought was most important and answer each other's questions, while the instructor focuses on what he or she alone can teach.

Tebo-Messina and Van Aller (1998) illustrate in a case study how classroom research can be joined with program assessment and some CATs, like the Muddiest Point, lend themselves to research across sections, courses, and programs that can improve teaching by identifying the most common misconceptions and misunderstandings in a particular curricular area. Nevertheless, such minor assignments and assessment tools have the practical advantage of adoptability by one or a few faculty members with or without wider utilization or support at the departmental level or above. Instructors have found them intrinsically rewarding in a variety of educational settings (Catlin & Kalina, 1993; Cross, 1998; Light, 1990; Steadman, 1998). They offer immediate rewards to teachers and their students in terms of feedback that can lead to immediate improvements in teaching and learning, while supporting a culture of assessment as an indispensable aspect of professional faculty responsibility for student learning rather than as a tool of managerial surveillance and control of individual faculty members (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

READING AND CHUNKING

Required reading constitutes perhaps the most problematic kind of assignment. It is in itself only a partial assignment—a task the student carries out that teaches what the instructor wants students to learn. But the testing of that learning requires an additional assignment or examination. Frustrated instructors sometimes view the purpose of multiple choice or similar tests as "making students do the reading." That, however, is not typically a student-learning outcome, but a means to achieve other objectives. The *direct* link between major assignments and course objectives is thus broken or attenuated. For their part, students may be frustrated with a large textbook replete with thousands of discrete facts that they are expected to recall for a test. They naturally want to know what of this mass of unfamiliar material they are expected to remember.

It would be a mistake, however, to substitute the mastery of analytic skills for the learning of factual content. Students *need* to master a substantial body of factual knowledge in order to develop analytic skills. As the recent National Research Council's review of the research on *How People Learn* (Bransford, et al., 2000) argues, "The ability to plan a task, to notice patterns, to generate reasonable arguments and explanations, and to draw analogies to other problems are all more intertwined with factual knowledge than was once believed" (p. 16). But students unfamiliar with a field such as social policy or human behavior and the social environment lack the organizing frameworks, concepts, and prior knowledge that would enable them to learn large amounts of material in these areas as an expert would (Bransford, et al., 2000).

At least two contrasting approaches are available to instructors in face of this challenge. One is to try to enforce prodigious feats of memorization on students through appropriate tests. The other is to help students acquire learning with understanding by focusing on the "big ideas"—key concepts, organizing themes—that will enable them to see patterns and relationships in what at first appears to be a mass of disconnected facts. As research on differences between the learning of novices and that of experts indicates, the ability to "chunk" information in this way, to cluster it into meaningful patterns—and not superior memories—is what distinguishes expert from novice learners (reference omitted; Bransford, 1979; Bransford, et al., 2000; Chi, Feltovich & Glaser, 1981; Miller, 1956).

From the second perspective, assignments that support required reading then need to teach and test learning with understanding. Assessments that measure propositional knowledge alone and emphasize accurate memorization may inadvertently direct student effort to decontextualized remembering rather than understanding. This, in itself, makes remembering harder, even if the reading explains key concepts and "big ideas" that would enable students (if they were able to apply them) to organize new learning into interrelated conceptual chunks and retrieve it without undue effort.

Sometimes, students see the solution in terms of more work on the part of the instructor to "predigest" the reading—providing a summary of key points in advance, for instance, summarizing them again at the beginning of class, and organizing the class itself as a lecture that goes over the substance of the reading.

This approach does little to build student skills in conceptualizing and synthesizing, and it is perhaps reasonable to suspect that this method does less to "make the students read" than it does to render reading superfluous!

CATs are particularly useful in addressing this problem. They can be used to foster—and enable instructors to assess—student progress in integrating and synthesizing new information, articulating key concepts, and using them to organize new knowledge. RSQC2, for example, can be used at the beginning of a class to encourage students to identify the key points of an assigned reading, to pose a question that the reading left unanswered for them, and to connect it to the objectives of the class. The summarizing part of this technique can be used on its own, as a One-Sentence Summary. Students are given the task of answering the questions, "Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?" and then synthesizing "those answers into a single informative, grammatical, and long summary sentence" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 183). This minor assignment builds student skill in chunking, as it provides the instructor with feedback about the range of student understanding of a required reading in a class.

USING THE FEEDBACK FROM MINOR ASSIGNMENTS: AN EXAMPLE

Although minor assignments are not normally graded and do not identify individual students for particular instructional intervention, they do provide valuable feedback for instructors regarding student learning. Reporting that feedback to the class affords an opportunity both for the class to reflect on student learning, difficulties, assumptions, values, and opinions, and for the instructor to account for his or her own use of the feedback to improve instruction. Minor assignments, as argued, allow for a kind of responsiveness and flexibility that preset major assignments may not. The feedback minor assignments provide makes it possible to develop new minor assignments, add or refocus lecture material, or arrange for a guest speaker or video not previously planned. A brief account of the author's teaching of social security over three class sessions in an undergraduate social policy course offers one example of how this can work. The process described here has been replicated with minor variations and similar results in five sections of an MSW policy course over three years.

Social Security exemplifies all the key challenges of relevance, content, and prior knowledge facing teachers of social policy to social work students (Adams, 2004). It does not seem relevant or applicable to the direct practice with individuals and families, which is most students' main focus of interest. As a Federal program, social security does not lend itself readily to a policy-practice curriculum focused on legislative lobbying at the state level. The program is complex, with many provisions and technical terms that are unfamiliar to most students. On the other hand, students bring to the topic prior knowledge and preconceptions that may be partial, inaccurate, and serve as a barrier to new learning (Adams, 2004; Bransford, et al., 2000; Behr, Harel, Post & Lesh, 1992; Confrey, 1990; Mestre, 1994; Minstrell, 1989; Silver, Shapiro & Deutsch, 1993; White & Frederickson, 1998). The instructor has to address all these challenges in order to be effective.

In order to assess students' response to the assigned reading on social security, a Reading Rating Sheet (Angelo & Cross, 1993) was used. Students were asked to

respond to three multiple-choice questions about how well they had read the assignment, how useful it was in helping them understand the topic, and how clear and understandable the reading was. A fourth question asked whether the student would recommend the reading to a friend (and why or why not), and the final question inquired, "What did you learn from it that you want to make sure to remember?" This assessment technique invited students to reflect metacognitively on what use they had made of the reading, while giving the instructor feedback on student responses to it. One striking response to the anonymous rating sheet was from a student who would not recommend it to a friend, because "All my friends watch videos."

Before giving a lecture on social security, the instructor administered a modified form of Directed Paraphrasing (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Students were asked to define social security in one or two sentences, addressing themselves to clients, their families, or professionals in other fields. As a prompt, the first sentence was started for them: "Social security is…." The instructor added to this exercise the instruction to "describe two or three facts about social security or beliefs you have about it that you believe others should know or share."

Students compared and discussed their responses in small groups and reported their most frequent responses and recurring themes. By far, the most common response was that the program "would not be around" for them. This was important feedback, though unsurprising in light of reports that young people are more likely to believe in UFOs than in the prospect of ever receiving social security benefits (DiNitto, 2003). It revealed that, despite reading a text that challenged both these assumptions, most students saw social security as a program solely for elderly people and did not believe it would survive into their own old age. But this view—the prior knowledge and preconceptions students brought to the subject—not only survived contact with the reading, it also reinforced students' sense that this content was irrelevant to their personal lives and (since few intended to work with aging persons) to their future professional practice as well.

The instructor was able to use this feedback to shape the lecture and classroom activities that followed, not in order to disprove students' assumptions about the future of social security, but to call into question the arguments and evidence on which they were basing them, to make them available to students for their own critical examination.

In lecture, the case of Germany was discussed, where the country's social insurance program, unlike other financial institutions, survived depressions, hyperinflation, two world wars, and several regime changes.

A brief op-ed piece from *The New York Times* called "Survivor Security" (Altman, 2001) was distributed and discussed in small groups. The author describes in it how social security helped the families of the victims of September 11, providing benefits to surviving children, which would continue every month until their late teens. The article not only emphasized the non-retirement aspects of social security in this dramatic way, it also argued that with minor adjustments, the retirement of baby boomers was readily affordable and that social security could be put on a sound financial footing for the foreseeable future—again, reinforcing arguments that were supported in detail in the assigned reading.

Students next completed a 10-question quiz, taken from the Social Security Administration's (1998) set of teaching materials for high school students. The quiz, like the lecture, focused on the basic principles—the "big ideas"—underlying the program. Rather than provide the answers, the instructor directed students to the Social Security Administration's website (www.ssa.gov), where the quiz and answers were available online in the Youthlink section. At the next class session, students reported their surprise and humility in finding that they did not do better at a test designed for high school students on material they had just covered. This assignment, though ungraded and anonymous, both created an information gap that students were motivated to fill and reinforced their learning of the basic principles of the social security program.

With this information and a new openness to learning about the program, students were asked in small groups to design a video for high school students. They were asked to discuss both the presentation of the material—use of music, dramatization, narrators, and so forth—and the key points about the program that they wanted to make to young people. This minor assignment was suggested and legitimated by the unenthusiastic student's comment that his or her friends all watched videos (and did not read more than they had to). Each group reported its design for a video and the points were summarized on the board for the class as a whole. Finally, the class watched the Social Security Administration's own video for high school students, Reel Security (1998b), then compared their own designs and key points with those of the Federal government.

Although some of these students were more familiar with a teaching format emphasizing lectures, readings, and multiple choice tests to enforce and assess memorization of both, they responded well to this more active and adaptive approach. Despite their initial lack of enthusiasm for the topic, at the end of term they rated it—equally with their working visit to the state legislature—as the most interesting part of the course and the one from which they learned most. Their final essay examination confirmed their impression and showed that the students had learned to reexamine the ideas they had formed from popular sources about the most important program in the American social welfare system and were able to explain and apply their new knowledge. They had actively and self-reflectively engaged in the learning process and had become both conscious and critical of the assumptions and beliefs they brought to the subject.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Classroom Assessment Techniques and other classroom activities that we have referred to here as minor assignments are widely used and there is evidence of both student and instructor satisfaction with them and increased class participation (Adams, 2004; Angelo, 1991; Catlin & Kalina, 1993; Steadman, 1994, 1998). Less clear, however, is their relation to improved student learning outcomes. Becker (in press) conducted a meta-analysis and critique of quantitative studies employing inferential statistics to assess CATs and other active-learning strategies. He found many methodological problems with existing studies and proposed criteria for future research. He concluded for the present that active-learning strategies do not demonstrably improve learning outcomes but that there is evidence to support

the hypothesis that periodic use of CATs like the (best researched) 1-Minute Paper does increase student learning. Further and more rigorous research is needed before much can be said with confidence about the relation of CATs (or still more, minor assignments in general) to student learning outcomes.

The disadvantage of CATs most widely cited by faculty is the time required to design, administer, analyze, and report back to students on the findings (e.g., Steadman, 1994, 1998). Catlin and Kalina's (1993) study, using both questionnaire and interview, found a discrepancy between faculty and student perceptions of improved student metacognition. Their finding suggests the importance of taking the time to repeat particular CATs and to explain their potential for transfer to other learning contexts in order to improve study and learning habits. In short, we may conclude that although CATs, the least time-consuming of minor assignments, take only a few minutes at the beginning or end of class to administer, they require a substantial investment of instructor time in and out of class to be used well.

Foundation courses in social work education, however, necessarily cover a great deal of content and time that is at a premium. The regular use of minor assignments in the ways suggested here probably cannot be achieved as an add-on but require changes in teaching strategies and use of classroom time. Assumptions about content need to be re-examined. For example, how much content has to be covered in class as opposed to in readings and research for major assignments? Is superficial coverage of extensive content in class a waste of time if students do not retain or apply it (Bransford, et al., 2000)? In addition, CATs and other techniques may, themselves, be used to address the challenge of content as Adams (2004) illustrates for the case of social welfare policy teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

As the Social Security example described above suggests, frequent and flexible use of minor assignments, whether Classroom Assessment Techniques, such as Directed Paraphrasing or improvised group tasks like designing a video on social security, provides information about student learning that can be used to improve instruction as the course progresses. It can make for a dynamic, interactive, and learner-friendly classroom environment that encourages active learning, metacognition, and critical thinking.

Taking major assignments seriously, as Walvoord and Anderson (1998) argue, involves organizing courses around them, so that the assignments teach and test what the faculty most want students to learn. This, in turn, places a new importance on those minor assignments and formative assessments that enable students and instructors to foster and assess new learning. Minor assignments identify the often unrecognized assumptions and preconceptions that hamper learning, enabling the instructor to expose them to evidence and analysis while there is still time. Minor directed assignments identify the often unrecognized assumptions and preconceptions that hamper learning, enabling the instructor to expose them to evidence and analysis while there is still time. Instructors can use them to check their own idea of what they are teaching against what students are learning. This enables instructors to improve their teaching as it progresses during a course

and provides students with opportunities to improve their thinking and learning (Vye, et al., 1998). Minor assignments build and assess the knowledge, values, and skills students need to complete the major assignments successfully, that is, to master the abilities the course sets out to teach.

Minor assignments, used as assessment and teaching techniques, do not require buy-in by whole faculties or even administrations. Individual faculty members can adopt them for their own teaching and later, excited by their experience, discuss, collaborate, share, and analyze data across sections, courses, or programs. CATs and related approaches to assessing student learning in the classroom may thereby contribute to building a culture of assessment rooted in the professional and personal interest of faculty in effective teaching and student learning rather than in reluctant response to accountability pressures from above or without. They may, in the process, serve higher-level assessment goals designed to respond to those pressures whether or not they are used directly in program or institutional assessment.

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Student Assessment of an Online Clinical Social Work Research Course: Using a Collaborative Learning Model

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Abstract: *This article reports on a clinical research methods course taught online to a total of 90 off-campus MSW students in the fall of 1999, 2000, and 2001. The course was taught in a mid-size public university in a CSWE-accredited School of Social Work. The purpose of the course was to teach single subject design research skills for the evaluation of clinical social work practice. The student experience of the online course was assessed using qualitative interviews that add a deeper, textured understanding of the various facets of online instruction from the learner's perspective. Important dimensions for social work instruction in online courseware were delineated. A collaborative learning and teaching framework is presented for those social work educators interested in implementing web-based courses.*

Keywords: Single subject design, clinical, online, collaborative learning

The world of web-based instruction enables universities to implement distance education to reach a diverse population and to provide an open learning environment 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Currently, there are approximately 17,000 web-based courses and 5% of all post-secondary students are presently online in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). In 2000, estimates were that 2.2 million individuals would be enrolled in online courses by 2002 (International Data Corporation, 2000).

The Internet (IT) has also permeated the educational and organizational environments of social work faculty, students, and professionals (Gifford, 1998). Computers and other information technologies have become standard fixtures within the profession. One reason for this proliferation is that Social Work is a knowledge-intensive profession where information is essential in decision-making and clinical practice. Information must be relevant, appropriate, and pertinent for practitioners. Social work graduate students require knowledge about the effects of IT on their clients (i.e., confidentiality and privacy), the profession, and society. Moreover, understanding the range of current uses, identifying emerging trends, and developing competency to optimize the use of IT for professional purposes is essential.

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This article reports on a clinical research methods course taught online to off-campus MSW students in the fall of 1999, 2000, and 2001. The course was taught in a mid-sized public university in a CSWE-accredited School of Social Work. The purpose of the course was to teach single subject design research skills for the evaluation of clinical social work practice. The online course is evaluated using qualitative methods. An online collaborative learning and teaching framework is described for those social work educators interested in implementing web-based courseware. This exploratory research contributes to the field of social work education in several ways. First, knowledge gained from the study of student perceptions of self-mastery and technology may be particularly valuable to social work educators. Second, an understanding of individual online learning experiences can provide social work educational programs with insight into preparing future social workers to use technology in evaluating practice. Finally, recognition of the utility of a collaborative learning framework within online education is significant for course development and sustainability (Riel, 1998).

COLLABORATIVE LEARNER-CENTERED FRAMEWORK

A primary goal of our online academic program is to ensure that it is reflective of collaborative learning. Our conceptual framework for effective pedagogy is based on the National Research Council's Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (NRC) publication on how individuals learn (Bransford, et al., 2000). The NRC report provides a model for effective learning environments in which a system of four interconnected elements exists and mutually supports each other. These components are focuses that identify environments as learner centered, knowledge centered, assessment centered, and community centered. This paper focuses on the collaborative learner-centered component as an effective learning environment that accounts for learner strengths, interests, and preconceptions and assists students to gain insight into themselves as learners.

The NRC guidelines provide an excellent framework from which to consider the design of online learning environments. There are three reasons why this framework presupposes that teaching social work practice and research skills online encompasses a method of instruction towards a collaborative learner-centered model and away from a traditional didactic model (Duffy, Dueber & Hawley, 1998; Bonk & Cunningham, 1998). First, this model views students as engaged in critical inquiry and problem solving within the context of a collaborative environment (Duffy et al., 1998; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). Second, the ability of students to project themselves socially into a community of discussion and inquiry is deemed critical in the absence of the physical presence of the course instructor. Finally, the model asserts that the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes online may influence meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes for students. The benefits of online education for teaching and learning have included increased equity and collaboration among students (Johnson & Johnson, 1996), promotion of critical thinking (Gokhale, 1995), high satisfaction with student-faculty interaction (Shea, Swan, Frederickson & Pickett, 2002), and high class participation rates (Frederickson, Pickett, Shea & Pelz, 2000). Given that one of our objectives in social work educa-

tion is to help students explore their potential as thinkers and conveyors of ideas, online instruction offers considerable possibilities.

Proponents of collaborative learning claim that the active exchange of ideas within small work groups promotes critical inquiry, with shared goals and values that inform decisions and actions (Gokhale, 1995; Walther, 1996). This approach is viewed as consistent with information processing theories that place more emphasis on the student's role for constructing and reconstructing his or her own knowledge by trying to make sense of new information (Brufee, 1999; Chong, 1998). Gellis (2000) has noted that knowledge is not something that is presented to students in this process, but something that emerges from active dialogue and interaction among those who seek to understand, apply, and integrate concepts and techniques.

Developing Internet courses entails using a different lens since collaborative online activities require social work instructors to make changes in their role from content provider to flexible facilitator with the purpose of teaching in a learner-centered style. In order to facilitate student learning, Cahoon (1998) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1992) recommend using six methods of instruction for the online environment:

1. Coaching—focuses on issues and problems arising while students are in the process of attempting online tasks.
2. Modeling—focuses on cognitive modeling, which demonstrates to students the online thought process involved.
3. Reflection—particularly reflection that compares the student's processes with each other's and with those of the teachers.
4. Exploration—focuses on students, not only in solving online problems independently, but seeks them out independently.
5. Articulation—prompting students to demonstrate or verbalize their own knowledge and cognitive process in a specific online topic.
6. Scaffolding—This is external online support from the teacher that helps students achieve early success but can be withdrawn as students are able to function independently.

The author has found that developing and implementing collaborative online activities takes substantial preparation and planning at various levels including: Choosing content-based activities, weekly tasks and assignments, decisions on how student groups will be organized, and decisions about rules and expectations for online participation. The clinical research course discussed in this paper was developed in approximately four months for an online environment. Student work group and discussion group size appears to be an important factor for effective collaborative learning. Online work group size ranged from four to six participants for the entire semester. Empirical studies note that the optimum size for decision-making groups is five in order not to dilute the experience nor change the group dynamics (Brna, 1998; Bruffee, 1999; Felder, 1996).

Creating the appropriate conditions for an online student learning environment presents many other challenges for the social work instructor during the

planning stages of online curriculum development. Experience suggests that pedagogical decisions need to be considered in the following areas:

- Orientation of students in the use of Internet technology.
- Management of the interaction of the student community.
- Preparing students to participate in quality online discussions.
- Assessment of the online group interaction and individuals within the group.
- Sustaining student commitment to continuing in the discussion forum.
- Management of any online problems.
- How the online group will be monitored by the instructor.
- How to convey to students a sense of mastery in an online discussion.

An example of integrating a learning-centered model in an online social work course is delineated in the next section.

TEACHING SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH ONLINE INITIATIVE

Supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the State University of New York's SUNY Learning Network (SLN) is an online distance learning delivery system using an Asynchronous Learning Network (ALN) approach to teaching and learning that is student- centered and eliminates the constraints of time and location that higher education normally places on students. Key characteristics of the SLN asynchronous software system includes the capability for secure student login via a standard Java-enabled browser, centralized database-centered syllabus with links to internal or external web pages, on-line, time-monitored quizzes with randomized dynamically-generated testing, discussion groups, and integrated e-mail. The SLN software system also provides instructor development tools to ease transitions from other media.

Typically, an SLN online course is delivered weekly over a semester and the instructor directs the course for about three hours during the week. Using Lotus Notes as the software platform, an online clinical research course was taught as part of the required MSW direct practice sequence. Identical syllabi and assignments were also utilized in other course sections where students are taught in a traditional classroom setting. No comparable data were collected for this investigation. This MSW-level course is fundamental for social work practitioners in empirically evaluating their clinical practice. Clinical social workers must be able to understand and use various research methods in order to conduct ethical, efficacious, and accountable practice interventions. Therefore, it is important that professional social workers have the advanced knowledge and skills needed to retrieve and critically analyze existing intervention research and the ingredients to carry out such clinical practice evaluations.

Sample and Procedures

Ninety MSW students were enrolled in three sections of a required social work graduate course titled "Evaluation of Clinical Social Work Practice," at a mid-size

research university in the Northeast. To obtain the data for this study, a qualitative instrument was administered on the Internet as part of the culminating activities during the 14th week of the course. Students were asked to write their answers to open-ended questions online in a short interview format, then assign a rating on a scale from 1 (much less than expected) to 5 (much greater than expected) on seven questions about the online course activities. This combined method of assessment resulted in a numerical indicator of learning with a richer understanding provided by the qualitative data.

A total sample of 81 (90%) social work students (31 males, 50 females) volunteered with informed consent to participate in the study. To reduce possible response bias, instructions to participants stated that the students' qualitative responses would only be viewed by the course instructor after the submission of grades. Participants were informed that the survey was anonymous and confidential and that the instructor would not be able to identify any particular student. To increase response rates in the project, no personal or student identifiers were requested. Participants were asked to send their answers to an administrative assistant at a secure website, at which point all identifiers were deleted. Instructions to respondents stated that the qualitative information would be used by the course instructor to evaluate and improve the online course experience for future students; the students did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to, they could withdraw from completing the qualitative instrument at anytime without penalty, and participating or not in the project would have no effect on their course grade.

Online Course

Each of the three online course sections had identical formats and materials including syllabi, online lectures, shared references and websites, quizzes, lecture notes, discussion questions, discussion groups, a class bulletin board, and virtual office hours. All of these course features were integrated online to provide students with the opportunity to relate lecture material with hands-on computer experience. The specific objective of the online lecture section was to develop student comprehension of topics, such as single system designs, target problem assessment, measurement packages, behavioral observation, logs and journals, data analysis and interpretation, and computer software applications for clinical social work practice. In addition, other portions of the course involved working with microcomputer applications including word processing, database, graphics, and electronic mail.

Qualitative Results

The online short interview method was used to explore the perceptions of students on technology-related activities, online learning, knowledge, and overall course experience. The short interviews were conducted primarily to lend rich, qualitative texture to this exploratory study. These interviews were designed to invite the student participants to give voice to their cognitive experiences and their plans with respect to technology in social work practice. It was hoped that the short interview method would capture student experiences as they occurred in a variety of online activities. In the section that follows, participant comments

were selected from these short interviews, representing the range of responses and experiences that generally reflect variation along the two dimensions of affect and cognition. The interview questions are delineated in the order they were asked online.

Table 1 presents the characteristics and prior experience of the sample with previous computer courses. All students were registered as full-time in their second year of an MSW program. The mean age for the sample was 29.4 years (sd = 6.29), with an age range of 22-51 years. About half of the respondents indicated that they had a computer course in their undergraduate program. The most common course reported is word processing, followed by Internet navigation and searching. The most common type of computer used in undergraduate courses was an IBM compatible computer (92.5%). Macintosh computers accounted for approximately (7.5%). More than two-thirds of the students (69.2%) reported having a cable modem connection, with a 56K modem being the next most common connection (28.4%). The students had access to computers in three different ways: (1) they had their own computer at home (97.5%), by far the most common situation; (2) they had access to computers provided by the university in public user rooms (1.2%); and (3) they had access to a computer in their remote area at a small community college or local library (1.2%).

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Table 2 presents the results of the student participants on the rating scale. Overall, none of the participants rated any of the items as either "worse" (2) or "much worse" (1) than expected, suggesting that they were satisfied with various facets of the online course. The first question asked of students was to rate how much the online course prompted them to become more aware of learning to use technology in their social work practice. They reported learning much about applications and issues surrounding technology in social work practice, with a mean score of 4.62 out of a maximum of 5.00 on the self-rating scale. More than three-quarters of the students reported the online course to be much better than expected, and it expanded their thinking about integrating information technology into their work with clients. Less than 5% perceived it to be about what they expected. The general theme of technology integration by the students in this course can be summed up in this student's comments:

> "*The use of technology in social work practice includes many things: assessment tools, clinical data collection, evaluation tools, and other software programs. I hadn't thought about all the potential uses.*" (Student #79)

Experience and Attitudes of Learning to Use Technology in Social Work

The second question asked students about their level of awareness of their own experiences and attitudes as they relate to learning to use technology in social work. The mean score was 4.66 out of a maximum of 5.00 on the rating scale. More than 90% of the students perceived their awareness level to be better or much better than expected at the end of the course. In the short interviews, students reported contrasting opinions about their level of awareness. Students generally reported increased awareness and improved attitudes towards tech-

Table 1: *Sample Characteristics (*N=*81)*

	N	Percent
Gender		
Male	23	28.4
Female	58	71.6
Total	81	100.0
Taken Computer Class as Undergraduate		
Yes	41	50.6
No	40	49.4
Total	81	100.0
Type of Computer Worked On		
IBM or Compatible	75	92.5
Macintosh	26	7.5
Other	0	0.0
Total	81	100.0
Type of Internet Service Connection		
56K Modem	23	28.4
Cable	56	69.2
DSL	2	2.4
Total	81	100.0
Student Access to Computers		
Have own computer	79	97.5
University Public User Rooms	1	1.2
Local library or college	1	1.2
Total	81	100.0

nology in social work. However, there was a minority of students who felt anxious during the course due to a lack of confidence in using technology.

> "*As a social work student,…I learned that I am not the only one who is anxious about working with computers. I have a computer at home and I need more practice to increase my comfort zone.*" (Student #62)

> "*Completing this online course has taught me a lot about myself. I realized that I have mastered many new information technology skills and that excited me.*" (Student #2)

The majority of students indicated positive attitudes towards technology at course completion.

> "*I learned that I am on the high end of attitudes and aptitudes [regarding technology], which surprised me somewhat. I like working with computers, but sometimes I feel overwhelmed.*" (Student #51)

Table 2: *Student Ratings of the Online Social Work Course by Frequency and Percent (N=81)*

Rating Scale Items	Much Better Than Expected 5	Better Than Expected 4	About What I Expected 3	Worse Than Expected 2	Much Worse Than Expected 1	Mean Score
1. Rate whether the online course prompted you to become more aware of learning to use technology in social work practice	64 (79.01%)	13 (16.04%)	4 (4.93%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.62
2. Rate the level of awareness of your ownexperiences and attitudes toward technology	59 (72.83%)	17 20.98%)	5 (6.17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.66
3. Rate whether the online course promoted collaborative discussions	74 (91.35%)	5 (6.17%)	2 (2.46%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.90
4. Rate how the online course compared with your expectations at the beginning of the semester	67 (82.71%)	7 (8.64%)	7 (8.64%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.74
5. Rate the features of the online course template	27 (33.33%)	33 (40.74%)	21 (25.92%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.07
6. Rate the technical support/assistance you received for the course	43 (53.08%)	30 (37.03%)	8 (9.87%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.43
7. Rate your ability to access the online instructor as compared to a traditional course	77 (95.06%)	3 (3.70%)	1 (1.23%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.93

Online Collaborative Discussions

The third question asked students if they perceived the online course to promote greater collaborative discussions among members of their online course group as compared to their traditional classroom experiences on a scale ranging from "much better" (5) to "much worse" (1) than expected. The mean score on this question was 4.90 out of a maximum score of 5.00. The majority of students (more than 90%) reported positive experiences on promoting collaborative group discussions.

> "*I loved the intensive interactions among [online] group members, stimulated by the weekly discussion questions. I don't remember ever having such intensity in a regular classroom. These [clinical evaluation] questions and online discussions really helped me to understand the topics of the course.*" (Student #44)

> "*I have only positive things to say about our group. I personally found the interactions almost "addictive," in that I was anxious to get on and find out what my group members had said… [about the discussion question or field internship question]... I was also fortunate to be in such a stimulating, thoughtful, and thought-provoking group. These were not the experiences I have had in a traditional classroom.*" (Student #70)

Only four participants in the sample expressed their preference for live communication in a traditional classroom, instead of the asynchronous online group discussion format. Upon examination of this subgroup's qualitative comments, the online course experience was perceived to be more time-consuming than other traditional courses they had completed. Perhaps, this perception was due to a course requirement of logging onto the SLN website for a minimum of three times during the week for the purpose of collaboration and communication on weekly discussion assignments, in contrast to a traditional three-hour weekly course session.

Online Social Work Course Expectations

The fourth question asked was, "How did this online course compare with your expectations at the beginning of the semester?" Students had a mean score of 4.74 out of a maximum of 5.00. More than three-quarters of the students rated this item as "much better than expected." Course participants were prompted to describe times during the online course when they were interacting online with regards to their expectations of the course. A majority of students stated that the online course was flexible, and enjoyed working at one's own pace at home. The course also provided access to clinical measures in social work practice, useful for clinical evaluation.

> "*The course offered so much flexibility…I was able to use the CD that came with our text to choose several reliable and validated screening instruments to use with clients in my field placement…Our [online] discussion group decided what was the most convenient time to meet online. Also, it offered direct online participation regularly, which I did not have in other courses.*" (Student #31)

> "*It forced me to become familiar with the technological aspects within the [social work] field, something that I may have avoided had I not taken this course…In addition, I learned so much about how to use computer-guided assessment and clinical information systems for my field internship…*" (Student #29)

Some students described how completing the short interview seemed to trigger an awareness of their feelings of anxiety, which otherwise remained in the background of their online experiences.

> "*I always feel like I am going to break the computer if I type in the wrong command, though I feel less and less like that now. I've learned to be more patient and to discuss these issues with other online group members. I realize that other people are struggling with the same things through this course. That is comforting. I don't panic as much, because I realize that happens to even the experts.*" (Student #78)

Online Course Template

The fifth question asked to students was to rate the features of the online course template (for example, chat, discussion group, course documents, announcements, course evaluation, virtual lectures, shared references, private course folders) on a scale from "much worse to much better than expected." Students rated the features of the online course with a mean score of 4.07 out of a maximum score of 5.00 on this question, somewhat lower than the other rating scale items. One-third of the participants rated the course template as "much better than expected." Forty percent of responses were in the "better than expected" category, while a quarter were in the "about what I expected" category. This question was significant, since it focuses on sustaining the student's interest and developing a webpage environment for continued curiosity and interest in the course material. The examination of qualitative responses found that students were generally pleased with the discussion groups and, in particular, the amount of sustained interaction. Other course template features frequently mentioned as helpful included the shared class references section and the private course folders for student-instructor interaction.

> "*The discussion [bulletin] board was helpful with information, but I really enjoyed chatting with members in my group and sharing ideas on various topics that we were learning for clinical practice.*" (Student #48)

> "*The chat room, announcements, course documents, and the discussion groups were all helpful. The shared resources were very helpful external links. I was finding myself checking these resources more than I realized.*" (Student #12)

Technical Support/Assistance

The sixth question asked students to rate the technical support/assistance they received during the course. Technical support was provided by university personnel who were available five days per week, 12 hours each day, to assist with computer or Internet problems experienced by registered SLN students. The mean score on this item was 4.43, with the majority of responses in the "better" and "much better than expected" range. Interview responses were positive for perceived technical support and assistance during the online course.

> "*I had problems logging on and the tech support came through for me. My anxiety level decreased immediately.*" (Student #48)

> "*The course docs, announcements, and online helpdesk were very useful, especially when I ran into a problem.*" (Student #16)

Online Access to the Course Instructor

The seventh and final question asked students to rate their ability in accessing the online instructor as compared to a traditional course from much better than expected to much worse than expected. The majority of students rated this item very high, with a mean score of 4.93 out of a maximum 5.00.

> "*I have never had so much interaction with a course instructor as I have had in this online course. It is much appreciated. All courses should be this way.*" (Student #22)

> "*The instructor responded very quickly to questions and concerns. Papers and assignments were graded on the same or next day and were on the web for viewing. I couldn't believe how quick the turnaround time was. This has never happened in any other courses I have taken.*" (Student #73)

Student responses to the short interview questions provide some evidence of a diversity of positive cognitive experiences triggered by technology-related experiences. The richness of these responses was heightened by the articulate manner in which students were able to describe their thoughts and affect. The timing of these interviews at the end of the course was successful in eliciting an inclusive set of cognitive experiences as well as triggering student experiences in other traditional courses. Taken at face value, the diverse range of student experiences reported here may have been influenced by levels of technological competency, attitudes toward technology, and the amount of time spent with computers during the semester.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions of their experiences in an online required graduate-level social work course. The findings will be used to identify key dimensions for designing and improving collaborative learning activities in online social work courseware.

Based on the qualitative interview findings, several components of teaching online should be emphasized. Students can interact with each other, with the instructor, and access online resources at any time without the constraint of a classroom or office hours. The instructor acts as facilitator rather than a lecturer. In addition, the instructor can provide immediate support, guidance, and feedback on assignments and discussion questions. The online course can facilitate a democratic and collaborative learning environment and may place students in control of their learning, offering them a choice of content, online time, feedback, and a wide range of media for expressing ideas. Instructors can also update course materials, review assignments rapidly, interact with individual students and through group discussions with ease at anytime. In the course presented, students were able to log on anytime, access all resources, review virtual lectures, complete assignments, take quizzes, and receive results instantly. Online courses permit students to meet their own needs in a self-paced, self-monitoring environment.

Within this online experience, video and audio media and text interactions are used frequently; this is provided through asynchronous communication, thus

maintaining visual anonymity. Students are reliant on each other for completion of tasks, therefore, increasing group influence. Online interaction is required of all group members for a sustained period (14 weeks), and task activities are balanced with online non-course related social interaction in a bulletin board lounge. One of the main course objectives is to develop an online collaborative learning community with increased student participation. Collaborative learning among students and instructor emphasizes active participation and sustained interaction. It creates a medium for conversation, discussions, and an exchange of ideas.

The processes of this online course group experience is concisely described by Felder (1996), who suggests that students in online groups can be organized to collaborate on projects and discussion forums under circumstances that include the following elements:

- **Online group processing.** Online group members set group goals, periodically assess what they are doing well as a group, and identify changes they will make to function more effectively online over the semester.
- **Individual accountability.** All members of the group are held accountable for doing their share of the work and form a mastery of all of the material to be learned.
- **Positive interdependence.** Online group members are obliged to rely on one another to achieve the goal. If any group members fail to do his or her part, everyone suffers the consequences.
- **Appropriate use of collaborative skills.** Students are encouraged and helped to develop and practice trust building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management skills.
- **Communication and interaction.** Although some of the group work may be parceled out and done individually, some must be done interactively in person and online, with group members providing one another with feedback, challenging one another's conclusions and reasoning, and perhaps most importantly, informing and encouraging one another online.

Favorable online collaboration and communication combines elements of the learner's and instructor's capabilities, needs, and goals with academic content, pedagogy, and the application of technology. Online communication offers the potential for collaboration, increased participation in the learning process, reflection, peer tutoring, and monitoring of student learning as it takes place in real time. However, for the collaborative approach to succeed, online instructors need to be concerned about developing teamwork skills and structured exercises that promote critical thinking. These online experiences have one factor in common. They are based on the premise that comprehension and problem solving require activities that engage students in constructing knowledge (Norman, 1999). Student engagement in the online process is likely to include more time spent on task, more self-directed learning, increased participation in group discussions

and special projects, and less absenteeism (Shea, Frederickson, Pickett & Pelz, 2001).

Teaching an online course can be a rewarding experience for instructors, because it is designed to provide the student with an authentic learning environment by addressing real world problems and issues relevant to social work practice. The SUNY Structured Learning Network (SLN) online experience described here features a virtual community, virtual classroom, virtual office hours, and a virtual real world studio for life-long learning. It is imperative that social work educational programs begin to develop a collaborative learner-centered online environment that will help students feel a sense of mastery while learning to integrate technology into social work practice.

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The Acquisition of Social Work Interviewing Skills in a Web-based and Classroom Instructional Environment: Preliminary Findings

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Abstract: *Little is known regarding the learning of social work practice skills in a Web-based online environment, most especially, social work interviewing skills. This article presents a review of the research methodology used to initiate a study to explore the similarities and differences of two groups of students who were taught interviewing skills in a classroom-based teaching environment with those taught in a Web-based instructional environment during the same 15-week period. Students' background characteristics and their perceptions of their learning experience and skill acquisition are reported as preliminary findings.*

Keywords: Telelearning, WEB-based instruction, social work interviewing, Social Work practice

The infusion of technology into social work courses has progressed exponentially in the past few years. Some have indicated "no significant difference" between the efficacies of learning outcomes with courses taught in an online learning environment versus those taught in a face-to-face classroom-based learning setting (Macy, Rooney, Hollister & Freddolino, 2001). Little is known, however, regarding the learning of social work practice and interviewing skills in a Web-based online instructional environment.

To date, most of what has been done to teach social work practice skills with the use of technology has been conducted through the use of Web-enhanced instructional format, which combines the classroom with some Web-based instruction (Ouellette, 1999). Doubt as to whether interviewing skills can realistically be learned in an online environment still prevails in the field of social work education (Burton & Seabury, 1999). Research specifically addressing the extent to which social work students learn actual interviewing and practice skills from an online course is needed.

This paper presents the preliminary findings of a recent study initiated to explore the similarities and differences in the acquisition of basic interviewing skills between two groups of students enrolled in an undergraduate meth-

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ods course in social work. One group was taught interviewing skills in a traditional three hours per week classroom-based teaching environment. The other group was taught interviewing skills strictly in a Web-based instructional environment with no face-to-face contact with the instructor. Instruction for both groups took place during the same 15-week period. A description of the research project and preliminary findings regarding student perceptions of their learning experience follows. In addition, examples of pedagogical strategies used in each of the instructional settings to teach basic interviewing skills will be outlined.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Learning social work practice skills in an online instructional environment has already been suggested as a possibility if one adheres to adult learning principles (Friedman, 2002) and effective active learning paradigms which are conducive to a technology-supported instructional environment (environment (Brooks, 1997; Ewell & Jones, 1996; Ouellette & Sells, 2003). Attempts have been made to teach an advanced practice course by combining the use of several technological mediums, such as teleconferencing and Web-instruction (Ouellette & Sells, 2001), the results of which have shown much promise. In addition, some have suggested that the task of teaching and learning social work practice in an online environment can greatly be facilitated if careful attention is paid to proper preparation and by following a step-by-step approach to course design of a technology-supported learning environment (Ouellette & Sells, 2003; Brooks, 1997).

One criticism often heard from social work educators with respect to the use of technology as an instructional medium is that this environment is not particularly conducive to the training of social work practitioners (Kreuger, 1997). As a result, many have been reluctant to offer their programs in a distance education format and have been suspicious of the use of technology in education and practice (Burton & Seabury, 1999; Butterfield, 1998; Marson, 1997). This argument is largely articulated based on the unsubstantiated notion that only a face-to-face, classroom-based social environment provides meaningful interaction between students and instructor. From this perspective, the teacher becomes the major communicator of new information and influence for the students.

On the other hand, a technology-based learning environment shifts a considerable amount of power, authority, and control from the instructor to the students (Jaffee, 1998). It is more compatible with progressive educational approaches that are characterized by a climate of mutual collaboration between student and teacher in developing learning activities and goals (Trigg & Cordova, 1987).

The Birth of TeleLearning

Since the early 1990s educational experts coming from disciplines other than social work have been examining the impact of teaching and learning in WEB-based instructional environments (Harasim, 1999). As a result of the pioneering work of many technology-sensitive educators, a new concept has emerged, that of telelearning. Telelearning is understood to mean the use, at school or at home, of multimedia computers networked to other computers for learning purposes (TL*NCE, 1995). This means that learners, using computers networked together,

communicate from one site to the other using a variety of information sources. Networked computers permit students to expand their acquisition of new information beyond a single instructor.

Another term that describes the use of computer networks for teaching and learning is "Network Learning" (Kearsley, 1993). It has been suggested that learning networks, based on asynchronous communication using computer technology, offer additional opportunities for active participation between learners (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles & Turoff, 1995). The difference between traditional forms of asynchronous communication used in the conventional classroom, such as an integrative paper, a quiz, or exam, and asynchronous communication in an electronic medium, such as the use of e-mail and a discussion board, lies mainly in the following. The speed with which feedback can be provided is accelerated, the nature of the setting used to communicate ideas can be in one's home or work setting, and the ability to easily and quickly disseminate ideas to peers or a large number of people is greatly enhanced by the electronic medium. It is for this reason that asynchronicity in an electronic medium has been suggested as having the potential to elevate the quality of student interaction and participation (Doherty, 1998).

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Irrespective of the training context or instructional medium being used, the transfer of learned skills from the training setting to actual practice continues to be a challenge for social work educators. With respect to learning interviewing skills, there are many factors that contribute to a student's skill acquisition. For example, these may include the quality of the instruction, teaching methods that are utilized, opportunities for skills practice, opportunities to practice observation skills, and opportunities to self-evaluate performance and provide constructive feedback to others.

To further enhance our understanding of how interviewing skills are acquired, irrespective of the teaching medium, a study was initiated with two groups of undergraduate students enrolled in two different sections of a social work practice course in generalist social work. Both instructors adhered to similar teaching and learning principles. One section of the course was taught in a classroom-based instructional environment, while the other was taught in a Web-based instructional environment. This study explored the similarities and differences between two groups of students who were taught interviewing skills in different instructional contexts.

Design: The study employed a quasi-experimental design (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Students registered in the BSW program were provided with the opportunity to enroll for a required core practice course in one of two sections having the same number of students. The primary instructional method for one section was the use of a classroom-based instructional format. The group met once each week for a three-hour class session during the 15-week semester. The other section followed a Web-based instructional format with no face-to-face meetings between the instructor and the students. The online students received a different unit of study each week, with learning objectives and learning activities to be

completed on a weekly basis. Both courses followed the same semester and were implemented during the same timeframe.

Once the semester was completed, all students who participated in the study were asked to attend a face-to-face session at the university to conduct a 10-minute interview segment with a simulated client who was coached and trained by the two investigators. The interview was videotaped for further analysis by independent evaluators.

Selection Process: Once the course was initiated, students from each class were invited to voluntarily participate in a study to examine the acquisition of practice skills. A total of 60 students were invited to participate in the study. A consent form outlining the purpose of the study, what was to be expected, and what steps were taken to ensure confidentiality, was provided. A demographic survey questionnaire was provided, which was completed by those students who chose to participate. In response to our invitation, a total of 30 students agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. Table 1 outlines the number of students from each class section who participated in the study.

Table 1: *Study Participants by Section*

Section	Total Number	Percentage
Classroom setting	14	46.6%
Online setting	16	53.3%
Totals	30	

Demographic Characteristics: Table 2 presents the gender, age, and ethnic characteristics of the 30 student beneficiaries. As can be seen, the majority of students (93.3%) were female. More than half (53.3%) were between the ages of 20 and 29, with 30% being between the ages of 30 and 39. Only 16.6% were older than 40, with 60% being Caucasian and 33.3% African American. In addition, 3.3% were Hispanic and 3.3% were from other cultural backgrounds. It is interesting to note that both groups had similar characteristics.

Table 3 presents the number of students with no online course experience and those with prior experience in taking online courses. Of the students in the study, 66.6% had never taken an online course, 10% indicated they had one previous online training experience, and only 24% reported having had two or more online course experiences, all of which were part of the online group.

Table 4 presents the number of students who indicated they had previous experience with using interviewing skills either through their existing employment situation or volunteer work. Of the students involved in the study, 83.3% reported having had no prior experience with the use of interviewing skills.

Using a *t*-test and Chi-Square measure, Table 5 compares the statistical differences between the background characteristics of students in both groups. It is interesting to note that except for the online group's age and their prior experience with online courses, both groups are very similar.

Table 2: *Study Participants by Gender, Age, and Ethnicity*

Gender	**Total**	**Percentage Number**	**Online**	**Classroom**
Male	2	6.67%	2 (12.5%)	None
Female	28	93.3%	14(87.5%)	14 (100%)
Totals	30		16	14
Age Range	**Number**	**Percentage**	**Online**	**Classroom**
20-29	16	53.3%	7 (43.75%)	9 (64.29%)
30-39	9	30%	5 (31.25%)	4 (28.57%)
40+	5	16.67%	4 (25%)	1 (7.14%)
Totals	30		16	14
Ethnicity	**Number**	**Percentage**	**Online**	**Classroom**
African American	10	33.33%	6 (37.5%)	4 (28.5%)
Hispanic	1	3.33%	1 (6.25%)	0
Caucasian	18	60%	9 (56.25%)	9(64.2%)
Other	1	3.33%	0	1 (7.1%)
Totals	30		16	14

Table 3: *Number of Online Courses Taken*

#	**Total Number**	**Percentage**	**Online**	**Classroom**
None	**20**	**66.67%**	**9 (56.25%)**	**11 (78.5%)**
1	**3**	**10%**	**0**	**3 (21.4%)**
2	**4**	**13.3%**	**4 (25%)**	**0**
3	**1**	**3.33%**	**1 (6.25%)**	**0**
4	**2**	**6.67%**	**2 (12.5%)**	**0**
Totals	**30**		**16**	**14**

Table 4: *Prior Experience with Interviewing Skills*

Prior Experience	Total Number	Percentage	Online	Classroom
Yes	5	16.67%	2 (12.5%)	3 (21.4%)
No	25	83.3%	14 (87.5%)	11 (78.5%)
	30		16	14

Table 5: *Comparison of Background Characteristics*

Background Characteristics	Online Group (*N*=16)	Classroom Group (*N*=13)	*t*	*P*
Age	32.69	25.46	2.037	.052
Credit hours	12.69	13.85	-1.3382	.192
Paid work hours per week	21.81	21.85	-.005	.996
S231 importance	8.38	8.85	-1.416	.168
Grade expected	7.25	7.38	-.227	.822
Overall GPA	3.15	3.11	.303	.764
Last semester GPA	3.37	3.41	-.276	.785
			Chi Square	p
Percent of Ethnicity	43.8%	38.5%	.083	.774
Percent of prior experience with online courses	43.8%	0%	7.49	.006

Instructional Methods

Classroom Setting: For the classroom-based instructional setting, the following methods were used to learn and practice basic interviewing skills. The classroom course used a competency-based model, with skills defined and operationalized using clear, behavioral, observable, specific terms and an evaluation system for assessing levels of competency (Clark & Horejsi, 1979). The students learned basic interviewing skills by focusing on one skill group at a time, adding new skills in each class (Chang & Scott, 1999). In this class, students learned basic interpersonal skills; communicating involvement; observing, active listening, and exploring skills; reflecting, questioning; and seeking clarification. The learning sequence involved reading, writing, discussing, practicing, and evaluating. After reading about the appropriate use of a group of skills, the students had opportunities to use the skills by writing responses to client statements. Discussion of skill usage was promoted by showing videotaped examples of student interviews. Using transcripts of the interview, students discussed individual transactions, use of specific skills,

and the overall process of the interview. Students then practiced simulated interviews with other students in the role of client.

Receiving immediate evaluation was an important part of the learning process. Each interview was followed by an evaluation. The person in the role of client gave feedback to the person in the role of social worker. The person in the role of social worker identified his/her strengths and weaknesses. A third person in the role of peer supervisor completed a detailed evaluation form. Likert-type scales measure overall skill categories and dichotomous categories assess specific behaviors. As each group of new skills was learned, the students also learned how to evaluate the appropriate use of these skills. This immediate feedback provided students a chance to identify strengths and begin working to correct problem areas. Safety was created, because all students were facing similar learning challenges, feedback was constructive, and encouragement was freely given. At the end of the semester, each student completed a final 10-minute videotaped interview with another student from the class as the client. The student wrote a transcript of the interview and evaluated it. The instructor met with each student to review both his/her videotape and evaluation of the videotape.

Web-based Setting: In the Web-based instructional environment, several pedagogical strategies were used to learn and practice interviewing skills. These were: (i) interactive notes, (ii) self-test, (iii) collaborative-learning activities, (iv) video demonstrations, (v) skills practice exercises, (vi) self-assessment reports, (vii) peer reviews, and (viii) instructor feedback. The first was the use of a series of "interactive notes," where students were to develop conceptual skills about the interviewing process. These notes complimented traditional reading materials. Interviewing skills were divided into five different stages of the interview process. For the purpose of this study, examination of skill development focused primarily on specific interviewing skills associated with the beginning stages of the interview, that is, the Social or Engagement and the Problem Identification Stage. Embedded learning activities made the notes interactive. As a student explored the interactive notes on different micro-skills of a particular stage of the interview, learning assignments were integrated to permit the student to reflect on the content. These assignments required the student to stop his/her exploration of the notes, complete a brief learning task that required some critical thought, and upload the assignment to a specific electronic drop box. A series of learning tasks of this kind were embedded throughout the interactive notes. This strategy provided the instructor with some initial feedback regarding how the student was progressing in the development of basic conceptual skills about a particular interviewing strategy.

The second pedagogical strategy was the extensive use of "self-tests." A self-test is a short multiple choice or short answer online quiz that reviews the content of the required readings and interactive notes. Self-tests provide opportunities for immediate feedback regarding the student's level of understanding or the meaning of specific interviewing strategies. To enhance the development of conceptual skills, students were then required to engage in a

collaborative learning exercise. This was facilitated by the use of an electronic bulletin board of a small group discussion forum using asynchronous communication. This provided an opportunity for the students to articulate the meaning of certain interviewing strategies to one another and acquire additional input from peers and the instructor on how certain strategies can be implemented in an interview.

The next step in the learning process involved the development of actual executive skills through practice. To set the stage for practice, a series of small streaming video interview segments were provided online that were easily downloadable through regular connection lines. A discovery learning strategy was used to guide students towards implementing a particular interviewing skill. The initial video segment illustrated the beginning moments of the interview between a social worker and a fictitious client. Only the sound track of the fictitious client was heard, but the social worker in the interview could be seen. After a particular segment was completed, the students were to provide examples of the kinds of questions and/or statements that could be used to solicit the client responses they were hearing. These suggestions were provided in an observation form and forwarded to the instructor. This technique provided students with an opportunity to examine the multiple ways a message can be articulated while acquiring similar responses from clients. In the second part of the exercise, the student reviewed the same interview segment, but this time with what was actually said by the interviewer. Questions and answers were compared, with the surprising results that student questions and guesses were at times far superior to what was actually said in the training video. After reviewing several segments of the video using this process, the students were then asked to practice the skills associated with a particular stage of the interview. To do this, each student selected a friend, classmate, or relative at home to role-play and practice a particular skill during the initial stages of the interview. These practice sessions were videotaped either at home or by accessing videotaping facilities at the university. The students were to practice and videotape each interview segment several times before advancing to the next step. The final step involved using a self-assessment strategy and peer reviews. By using an observation tool provided online, each student selected his/her last practice segment and self-evaluated the performance. A peer was asked to assist by reviewing the same segment and providing his/her own comments and reflections. These practice tapes, along with self-evaluation reports and peer reviews, were submitted to the instructor for additional feedback. This process was repeated for each stage of the interview process.

Once the video-tape practice sessions were completed, each student was then required to conduct an entire 30-to-45 minute interview which demonstrated their skill acquisition at each stage of the interview process. This tape was submitted to a peer for a peer review, which was completed using a behavioral checklist and observation sheet designed for this purpose. The results of the peer review were submitted to the instructor.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Three sets of data were collected for this study. The first set of data was based on information regarding the demographic nature of the study participants. A second set was collected to gather information on student perspectives of their learning experience and determine the degree to which they perceived their level of skill acquisition. A third set of data were collected to acquire information on the acquisition of actual interviewing skills.

Instruments: Two instructors, respectively, administered all evaluative instruments used for this study. Specifically, three instruments were used to collect information from student beneficiaries.

(1) Demographic Survey: At the time of student recruitment, a pre-interview demographic survey questionnaire was used to gather the demographic characteristics of students who chose to voluntarily participate in the study. This questionnaire provided information on age, ethnicity, gender, prior experience using interviewing skills, and prior experience with taking online courses.

(2) End-of-semester survey questionnaire: Once the course was completed, students in the study were requested to complete an end-of-semester questionnaire to gather subjective information on the students' perception of the clarity and effectiveness of the learning exercises used to teach interviewing skills, irrespective of the instructional medium used. Likert-type scales measures were used to acquire data on the following characteristics: (i) organization of learning exercises, (ii) the extent to which interest levels were sparked by the learning exercises, (iii) clarity of instructions, (iv) student perception regarding implementing interviewing skills, (v) student perception of their learning experience, and (vi) student's level of confidence with the use of interviewing skills. In addition, the students were provided an opportunity to add subjective data for each of the characteristics.

(3) Videotaped Interviews: After the course was completed and grades were turned in, the students were invited to conduct a 10-minute interview with a simulated client. This interview was conducted and videotaped at the university. The simulated client was trained and role-played by graduate-level students and one undergraduate senior-level social work student. All three students used for the client simulation were coached and trained to role-play the same simulated client role-play scenario. The students used for the simulated client were neither part of either the classroom or online group being studied, nor were they known to the study participants.

ANALYSIS

For the purpose of the article, qualitative and quantitative data analysis was conducted on information collected from the demographic survey and the end-of-semester survey questionnaire. A *t*-test and Chi-Square was used to determine the extent that the two groups were similar or different with respect their background characteristics. A *t*-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between student responses regarding their perceptions of the clarity and effectiveness of the learning exercises used and their perception of their level of skill acquisition. Qualitative data collected from the two survey questionnaires

were coded and examined using NIVO software to assess student attributes and emerging themes from their comments. The qualitative data were reviewed independently by the two co-investigators.

Data from the videotaped interviews are currently being evaluated by independent evaluators, the results of which will be reported at a later date.

Preliminary Findings

The following tables summarize findings from data collected from the two survey questionnaires. Tables 6 and 7 present information on how students in

Table 6: *Clarity and Effectiveness of Learning Exercises*

Online Respondents Reporting *N*=16	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Disagree (2)**	**Undecided (3)**	**Agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**
Exercises well-organized	0	0	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.25%)	(56.25%)
Exercises sparked my interest	0	3(18.75%)	0	5 (31.25%)	8 (50%)
Enjoyed participating	0	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)	7 (43.75%)	7(43.75%)
Instructions were clear	0	0	1(6.25%)	7(43.75%)	8 (50%)
Can implement interviewing skills	1(6.25%)	1(6.25%)	2 (12.5%)	7(43.75%)	5(31.25%)
Learned a lot from activities	0	2(12.5%)	0	10(62.5%)	4(25%)
Achieved a high level of confidence with interviewing skills	2(12.5%)	1(6.25%)	2(12.5%)	8(50%)	3(18.75%)

Table 7: *Clarity and Effectiveness of Learning Exercises*

Online Respondents Reporting *N*=13	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Disagree (2)**	**Undecided (3)**	**Agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**
Exercises well-organized			1 (7.69%)	3 (23.08%)	9(69.23%)
Exercises sparked my interest			1(7.69%)	4(30.77%)	8(61.54%)
Enjoyed participating				8(61.54%)	5(38.46%)
Instructions were clear		1(7.69%)	1(7.69%)	7(53.85%)	4(30.77%)
Can implement interviewing skills			1(7.69%)	8(61.54%)	4(30.77%)
Learned a lot from activities				6(46.15%)	7(53.85%)
Achieved a high level of confidence with interviewing skills			1(7.69%)	11(84.62%)	1(7.69%)

the online and classroom group assessed the clarity and effectiveness of the learning exercises that were used. From the data we can conclude that a majority of the students in both groups agreed or strongly agreed with all the characteristics used to assess clarity and effectiveness of the learning exercises.

Table 8 compares the group means and statistical significance of the student responses regarding the clarity and effectiveness of the learning exercises used in each course. On all variables regarding clarity and effectiveness of learning exercises, both groups showed no significant differences in their responses.

Table 8: *Mean Differences of Clarity and Effectiveness of Learning Exercises*

Variables	**Online Group (*n*=16)**	**Classroom Group (*n*=13)**	***t***	***p***
learning exercised well organized	4.44	4.6216	-.686	.498
learning exercised sparked my interest	4.13	4.54	-1.151	.260
I enjoyed participating in learning exercises	4.25	4.38	-.499	.622
Instructions were clear	4.44	4.08	1.302	.204
I can implement beginning skills	3.88	4.23	-1.009	.322
My interviewing confidence is high	3.56	4.00	-1.195	.242
Interviewing skills confidence is high	3.56	3.85	-1.069	.294

Students' Qualitative Responses

What follows is a description of the typical responses students provided when asked to add additional comments for each characteristic used to define the clarity and effectiveness of learning exercises.

With respect to organization of the learning exercises, the following is an example of student responses:

> *"The order of the interview skills was good—beginning with small skills and building upon them."*

The following exemplifies how the students felt the learning exercises sparked their interests:

> *"I feel that the learning exercises were interesting, because they contained so much information such as: empowering the client to allow him/her to use resources that he/she already possess, asking open questions, and not focusing on what's wrong—putting emphasis on what's already working and helping the client to develop skills to strength the resources that already exist."*

Many students expressed feeling uncomfortable when initially experimenting with practicing interviewing skills. The following is a typical response from students in both groups.

> *"Doing the taped interviews without previous personal experience was really uncomfortable, I was very unsure of myself."*

Students in both groups indicated that the learning exercises used were useful in preparing students for conducting interviews.

> *"These learning exercises were very helpful in letting me know which questions to ask and how to ask them."*

Table 9 presents combined data from both groups with respect to student perception of the clarity and effectiveness of the learning exercises used for learning interviewing skills. Once again, the majority of all students agreed or strongly agreed with the quality of the learning exercises used.

Table 9: *Clarity and Effectiveness of Learning Exercises*

Online Respondents Reporting *N*=13	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Disagree (2)**	**Undecided (3)**	**Agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**
Exercises well-organized	0	0	3 (10.34%)	8 (27.59%)	18 (62.07%)
Exercises sparked my interest	0	3(10.34%)	1 (3.45%)	9 (31.03%)	16 (55.17%)
Enjoyed participating	0	1 (3.45%)	1 (3.45%)	15 (51.72%)	12(41.38%)
Instructions were clear	0	1(3.45%)	2(6.9%)	14(48.28%)	12 (41.38%)
Can implement interviewing skills	1(3.45%)	1(3.45%)	3 (10.34%)	15(51.72%)	9(31.03%)
Learned a lot from activities	0	2(6.9%)	0	16(55.17%)	11(37.93%)
Achieved a high level of confidence with interviewing skills	2(6.9%)	1(3.45%)	3(10.34%)	19(65.52%)	4(13.79%)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Integrating technology into higher education has turned universities' attention to distance education. Although distance education has come a long way in providing quality educational programs to populations that would not otherwise attend universities, some have cautioned years ago that it should not be the driving force behind the development of computer-facilitated instruction (Boot & Hodgson,

1987). The main goal for developing technology-supported instructional mediums should not be limited to reaching out to students in isolated areas. Rather, the primary goal for developing technology-supported instructional environments should, first and foremost, be to provide students with a rich, stimulating learning experience. It builds upon the diverse expertise and resources that the medium makes possible and provides students with the opportunity to develop their own individual interests as they discover new meanings and understandings made possible by this unique learning context.

This study addresses the issue of learning efficacy in an online environment, most especially with respect to learning basic interviewing skills considered so essential to the development of effective social work practitioners. *Preliminary findings do not indicate major differences between student perceptions of the quality of their learning experience and/or their level of confidence, as beginning social work practitioners, irrespective of the learning medium used to learn interview skills.*

With further analysis of the data collected for this study, we will be able to determine to what extent learning interviewing skills in the classroom or in a technology-supported learning environment actually transfers to actual practice. As Ehrmann (1995) has suggested, future research and discussion must focus on learning methods specific to the instructional environment and not on the technology itself. The goal of this study is to move our pedagogical discussion towards a greater understanding and appreciation of the conditions that appear to facilitate the creation of a context for good learning, regardless of where or when an educational experience is delivered. By ensuring that we focus on sound principles of good teaching and learning when developing medium-specific learning tasks, our journey in developing quality technology-supported learning systems will greatly be facilitated. Irrespective of the teaching medium we choose, above all else, what remains important is that we continue to strive towards a better understanding of the learning processes that guarantee social work students receive a quality educational experience.

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Evaluation of Two Interviewing Skills Measures: An Instrument Validation Study

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Abstract: *This article reports an initial validation of an instrument that measures basic interviewing skills and compares its psychometric results with another instrument that has been used more frequently to measure similar skills. Four field supervisors rated 30 students' videotaped interviews (*N*=120) using two instruments, the validation, and a comparison instrument. The current validation instrument had high internal consistency reliability, a clear factor structure, and performed well in construct validity evaluations. These preliminary results supported the instrument's internal consistency reliability, content, factorial, and construct validity. The validation instrument had higher internal consistency reliability, lower error measurement, and a more interpretable factor structure than the comparison instrument.*

Keywords: Assessment; interviewing skills; instrument development; direct measures; measurement

Before beginning to work with clients, all social work students need to master basic practice skills. These basic skills are generic prerequisites to additional skills required in specialized fields of practice and for particular theoretical approaches. These basic skills are widely recognized as beginning, exploring, and contracting with clients (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 1997).

Students are expected to learn basic skills in practice courses, later developing more complex competencies during field practice. In a study completed by Dore, Epstein and Herrerias (1992), eight field-training objectives were identified. Their first objective was the "development of specific skills for micro practice, including skills in engagement, problem exploration, exploration of feelings, goal setting, contracting, and termination, as well as knowledge of and ability to apply various treatment modalities" (Dore, et al., p. 357). Also noted by these authors was the paucity of student learning measures.

Learning basic skills and engaging in self-assessment contribute to becoming self-reflective social workers with the skills to continuously improve prac-

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tice (Bloom, Fischer & Orme, 1995). Although students should be responsible for assessing their progress (Shepard & Wahle, 1981), they also need ongoing feedback from their classroom and field instructors (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987). Beginning students are particularly dependent upon supervisors for direction, feedback, and evaluation (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987).

Unfortunately, students report that they receive minimal feedback (Barth & Gambrill, 1984) and that they need critical analyses of their use of social work skills (Urbanowski, 1988). Relevant, practical, and psychometrically sound evaluation tools that can be used across practice settings to provide feedback to students about their interviewing skills are needed (Vourlekis, Bembry, Hall & Rosenblum, 1996).

With the increased pressure for accountability in practice and education (Bernotavicz, 1994), social work educators need outcome measures that accurately assess competency in the use of basic and more complex practice skills (Matarazzo & Patterson, 1986; O'Hare & Collins, 1997; Ragg & Mertlich, 1999). However, sound, psychometrically tested measurement tools for evaluating basic practice skills are not readily available (O'Hare & Collins, 1997; Vourlekis, Bembry, Hall & Rosenblum, 1992). Without solid evaluation tools, it is difficult to effectively and consistently evaluate beginning practice skills. Evaluation instruments that have good levels of reliability and validity can enhance the learning experience for students. Specifically, evaluation instruments should assess accurately students' skill development and identify skills that students need to develop further.

Only three instruments related to basic practice skills were identified in the social work literature: a measurement tool used in evaluating students' field process recordings (Vourlekis, et al., 1996), a social work practice skills instrument (O'Hare & Collins, 1998), and a somewhat dated interview skills assessment instrument (Katz, 1979). Vourlekis, et al. (1996) reported research on the usefulness of a checklist in evaluating interviewing skills in field. The instrument contains 26 items and is scored from "1=beginning level" to "5=advanced level." Vourlekis, et al. (1996) found high internal consistency reliability and good validity results for the instrument. However, this instrument was developed for use in evaluating apparent interviewing skills through the use of process recordings and is limited to students' self-report and the verbal content reported in a process recording. The checklist, although useful, is an indirect measure, rather than a direct measure of interviewing skills.

O'Hare and Collins (1997) reported the most recent instrument development project related to practice skills measurement. Their instrument addressed the frequency with which practitioners use 23 skills that are therapeutic, supportive, case management, and evaluation. The items are measured from 1 to 5, and the anchors range from "never/almost never" to "very often." This is a self-report instrument that better relates to the frequency with which MSW students and MSW practitioners (O'Hare & Collins, 1998) use a variety of skills in their practices, rather than measuring competencies in the use of these skills. In psychometric analyses, the instrument yielded

acceptable to strong internal consistency reliability coefficients (.78 to .92), with the four-factor solution remaining stable across two studies (O'Hare & Collins, 1997; 1998). Although this instrument is easy to use and can be completed quickly, the measurement goals, i.e., identifying the frequency of use of skills, differ from the instrument tested in this study.

The Katz (1979) instrument is more dated than the two instruments described above and has a complicated scoring mechanism. However, this instrument is similar to the current validation instrument and has been used more frequently in research on students' levels of interviewing skills, as reported in the Katz (1979) writing. The Katz instrument contains 23 items and was designed to include identifiable skills taught in beginning social work practice methods courses. The first 11 items on this instrument are descriptions of interviewer characteristics. The items are "attentive to clients," "eye contact," "relaxed," "self-conscious," "fidgety," "distracted," "genuine," "respect for client," "sensitive to client's feelings," "mutuality" and "warmth" (Katz, 1979). These items are rated using a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from "0=almost never present" to "3=almost always present."

Items 12 through 22 are associated with discrete interviewing skills. These skills are "verbal following," "exploratory responses," "understanding responses," "primary-level empathy," "summarizing responses," "self-disclosure," "advice," "confrontation," "advanced-level empathy," "immediacy," and "concreteness." For these items, the rater uses a three-point scale for appropriateness of use. The scale ratings are "0=not appropriate and not used," "1=over-use or under-use," "2=appropriate use." That score is then multiplied by a weight from a four-point scale of effectiveness with high effectiveness rated as a "4" and low effectiveness rated as a "1."

The final item, 23, requires an overall judgment about the student's competence as an interviewer when compared with other students. This item is rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale of "1=poor" to "7=excellent."

In preliminary studies conducted across three cohorts, inter-rater reliability ranged from poor to good, .48 to .82 (Katz, 1979). Katz' (1979) validation studies exhibited two major flaws in analyses. First was the use of 22 items in three very small samples (N=15 or fewer for the first two samples, and N=26 in the third sample) to predict overall performance, a global item contained in the instrument. These sample sizes were too small to provide stable multiple regression results (Pedhazur, 1973). Second, the Katz (1979) studies used an excessive number of dependent samples t-tests that were computed to examine changes from pretest to posttest. An astounding 23 analyses were conducted for each of the items of the scale (Katz, 1979). Cohen and Cohen (1983), using tables that take sample size into account, reported the estimated Type I error rate for 20 separate tests as being about 90%.

The objectives of this research were to: (1) psychometrically test an instrument designed by Chang and Scott (1999) but for which no psychometric testing had been completed, and (2) compare the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument's psychometric characteristics to those of the Katz (1979) instrument,

which has been more frequently used in research on basic interviewing skills. The Katz (1979) instrument was designed to offer instructors a tool for evaluating skills taught in the classroom and practiced in a laboratory setting. Although the Katz (1979) instrument does not contain some currently recognized practice skills, the instrument is a core set of interviewing skills items that are similar to those in the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument. Permission was obtained to include the Katz (personal communication) instrument in this research in order to compare the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument results to the more frequently used Katz (1979) instrument.

METHODS

Description of the Validation Instrument

The Chang and Scott (1999) instrument focuses on social workers' behaviors related to interviewing and is constructed with the goals of having faculty, field instructors, and students use it to evaluate students' interviewing skills. The instrument is designed to measure a variety of interviewing skills: communicating involvement, observing, active listening, beginning process, reflective questioning, exploration, seeking clarification, initial contracting, and interpersonal skills. See the appendix for additional details about the skills and behaviors or descriptors that comprise the broader level skills included in this instrument.

Within the first nine skills are lists of behaviors that are inherent to broader-level interviewing skills. For example, communicating involvement includes the following discrete behaviors: attentive body posture, facial expressions, and eye contact. The purpose in listing behaviors was to focus raters on the specific grouping of behaviors that comprise each overall skill. Each of these behaviors or descriptors is rated dichotomously (present or not present). The process of reviewing the dichotomously scored skills can assist raters in more accurately appraising the broader category. Similarly, students' can further their understanding of specific behaviors that will improve their interviewing competencies. For purposes of this study, these discrete behaviors, which comprise a broader skill, were not included in psychometric analyses. Each broader-level skill is rated on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = ineffective and/or inappropriate to 5 = highly effective and appropriate).

An additional four items (10–13) focus on the interpersonal qualities of warmth, respect, empathy, and genuineness. Each of these final four qualities is more abstract than many of the practice skills, involves less universally recognized behaviors, and requires raters to make a somewhat subjective judgment. Because of this, no attempt was made to include specific lists of behaviors for these four items.

The final item (14) is focused on rating the general effectiveness of students' responses to clients. Scoring the instrument is accomplished by summing up the first 13 ratings. This item was included for purposes of using it in evaluating the instrument.

Sample and Informed Consent Procedures

Study participants were graduate social work students recruited from two sections of a first-year MSW theory and practice methods course. The course

objectives, textbooks, workbook, and required final videotape were the same in each section. An "Informed Consent" form, provided to students, described the following: The intent of the study, the students' extent of involvement, any risks and benefits associated with the study, information about the voluntary nature of the study, students' right to refuse to participate, and their right to withdraw their consent to participate in the study at any time during their involvement in the study. Thirty of 44 students (response rate = 68.2%) across the two course sections voluntarily participated in the study.

Demographic information was gathered at the time the students agreed to be involved in the study. The sample consisted of 26 females and four males. There were 27 Caucasian students, two African-American students, and one Hispanic student. The students ranged in age from 22 to 53 years old, with a mean age of 28 and a median age of 25 years.

Design and Procedures

Students in each class were videotaped conducting a 15-minute interview with an individual trained to simulate a single client. The authors hired two senior-level BSW students and two-second year MSW students to simulate the client. These students were included in the development of a client profile and practiced the client roles with coaching from the authors.

Four social workers with at least 10 years of post-MSW practice experience were recruited and trained to rate the videotapes. Their years of social work experience ranged from 10 to 23 years, with a mean of 14 years. All the raters were female and had from one to six years of field instructor experience. Three of the raters were Caucasian and one African American.

In a four-hour training session, the raters were instructed in the use of the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument, as well as the Katz (1979) comparison instrument. During the training, the raters watched two videotaped interviews not included in the study and evaluated them using both the validation instrument and the Katz (1979) instrument. Raters' evaluations were compared and discussed by the trainers and raters.

Each rater received copies of the 30 student videotapes and evaluation instruments. The raters were instructed to evaluate each tape using both the revised Chang and Scott (1999) and the Katz (1979) instruments (N=120) and complete and return the ratings within two months.

Psychometric Examinations

Several statistical analyses examined the psychometric properties of this instrument in relation to the Katz (1979) instrument. Internal consistency reliability evaluations were conducted through computations of Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Information about inter-rater reliability was obtained through Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey's HSD follow-up tests. When the important assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated by one data set, Kruskal-Wallis tests (the non-parametric analogue to ANOVA) were used.

Principal Components factor analyses using Promax rotations examined the content, construct, and factorial validity of the instrument. These factor

analyses were interpreted through the use of the percentage of variance accounted for by factors, eigenvalues, visual inspection of the Scree plot, and theoretical considerations.

A final analysis to examine evidence of construct validity was conducted by computing a Pearson's correlation for the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument scores with the Katz (1979) instrument scores. The purpose of this examination was to test the hypothesis that the two instruments would have a positive, moderate correlation, suggesting that the two instruments are measuring related, but different, constructs.

No attempt was made to use individual items to predict overall ratings (item 14) of the students' responses to clients, because the sample was too small to permit the large number of predictors (13) that would be needed for computing a multiple regression analysis. However, a Pearson's Product-Moment correlation was computed for the Chang and Scott (1999) summed scores (items 1-13) and the global rating item (item 14) to assess their correlation and the amount of variance in the global rating scores that can be accounted for by the 13 items taken together. Item 14 asks the rater to provide an overall effectiveness of students' responses to clients. It is scored 1-5, from "1=Ineffective" to "5=Highly effective."

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Initial Examinations

Descriptive statistics were generated for both the Katz (1979) and the current version of the Chang and Scott (1999) scale. The Katz (1979) scale scores ranged from 45 to 127 (Mean = 78.62, Mdn = 80.00, Std. Dev. = 17.68). The Chang and Scott (1999) instrument's scores ranged from 31 to 76 (Mean = 58.18, Mdn = 58.0, Std. Dev. = 8.68). A rater scored one videotaped interview on the validation instrument as 31, which was more than two standard deviations below the mean. Because outliers like this score can unduly influence small samples, this case was deleted from the database (N=119). The data were examined for additional positive outliers, but none were identified within the analyses as highly atypical.

There were some differences between the two instruments on the issue of missing data. The Katz (1979) scale had no missing data. However, the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument had enough missing data to bring its sample size to 86 (rather than 119) in reliability analyses where listwise deletion is used. Frequencies were generated for individual items to assess systematically the extent to which data were missing. Most of the items in the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument had minimal missing data (ranging from 0-6). Two items (8 and 9), respectively, had 19 and 14 missing data-points. Item 8 referred to seeking clarification. The dichotomous statements used to focus raters were as follows: exploring the meaning of clients' words, conclusions, contradictory statements, and eliciting detail about statements. Item 9 involved the contracting process and, likewise, seemed well defined through the use of its dichotomous focusing statements. Those items where one might expect missing data because of their level of abstraction (e.g., interpersonal qualities of warmth, respect, empathy, and

genuineness) had no missing data. No explanations were apparent in these examinations, which explained the missing data. The sample sizes for internal consistency reliability analyses, by definition, deleted cases where data were missing (listwise deletion). However, factor analyses accommodated the missing data through the use of a pairwise deletion.

Evaluations of Reliability

Internal Consistency

Cronbach's coefficient alphas were computed for both the Katz (1979) and the current version of the Chang and Scott (1999) scales. Analyses were computed with and without the global rating item of each scale. The Katz (1979) scale achieved an acceptable internal consistency reliability score for research purposes, .77 (N=119) for all items and a .74 when the global rating item was removed from analysis.

The Chang and Scott (1999) scale achieved an excellent level of reliability of .91 (N=86) for all items and a closely matching .90 when the global item was removed from analysis. The Chang and Scott (1999) instrument had substantially lower standard errors of measurement than the Katz (1979), indicating that the Chang and Scott instrument (1999) exhibits more precise measurement of basic interviewing skills than the Katz (1979) instrument. Table 1 contains further information about the internal consistency reliability examinations.

Figure 1: *Internal Consistency Reliability Results*

Instrument Evaluated	**Std. Dev.**	**Alpha**	**SEM**
Katz (1979)–all items	15.17	.77	7.35
Katz (1979)–global item omitted	14.28	.74	7.13
Chang & Scott (1999)–all items	7.39	.91	2.04
Chang & Scott (1999) –global item omitted	6.74	.90	2.16
Using Factor Analysis Results			
Katz (1979)			
Factor 1	10.82	.81	4.70
Factor 2	7.88	.54	5.32
Chang & Scott (1999)			
Factor 1	6.48	.91	1.91
Factor 2	1.35	.61	.84

Note: Results are rounded to two places.

Inter-rater Reliability

Inter-rater reliability was assessed for both instruments via Analyses of Variance (ANOVA), where rater was the independent variable and scale score comprised the dependent variable. The Levene's test for the Katz (1979) data resulted in a significant F-score (F=11.034, p.<.001), indicating that the homogeneity of variance

assumption of the ANOVA had been violated. Consequently, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis was computed for these data. It yielded a non-significant Chi-Square of 5.67 (p.=.129), indicating no significant differences by rater on mean rank (ranging from a low of 47.48 for rater 3 to 65.85 for rater 1).

The data for the revised Chang and Scott instrument (1999) did not violate the homogeneity of variance assumption by the Levene's F-test (F=.813, p.=.489). The overall ANOVA indicated significant differences in mean ratings among the raters (F=9.137, p.<.001). The Tukey's HSD follow-up test indicated that rater 3 had a significantly lower mean rating (52.37) than the remaining three raters (ranging from 58.40 to 61.57).

Frequencies were generated for all raters in order to further understand the differences among raters' distributions. Hand computations of t-tests for kurtosis and skewness for all raters were not significant (df=29, tskewness ranged from .115 for rater 4 to -.806 for rater 2, and tkurtosis ranged from -.278 for rater 2 to –1.358 for rater 4). However, an examination of the frequency distributions indicated that fully half of rater 3's ratings were below a score of 50, compared to the frequencies of 1, 3, and 3 scores that were below 50 for raters 1, 2, and 4, respectively. Median ratings were 51 for rater 3 and 61, 62, and 56 for raters 1, 2, and 4, respectively.

Based upon the above obvious inconsistency of the third rater's ratings, the Kruskal-Wallis and ANOVA were recomputed. In this computation, rater 3's ratings were removed to identify the extent to which this person's ratings were unduly influencing the overall inter-rater reliability. Rater 3's data were retained for all other analyses, however. The Katz (1979) data again violated the homogeneity of variance assumption (Levene's F=16.050, p.<.001), and the subsequently computed Kruskal-Wallis Chi-Square was not significant (.148, p.=.929).

The Chang and Scott instrument (1999) data again did not violate the homogeneity of variance assumption (Levene's F=1.206, p.=.304). The ANOVA for these data yielded a non-significant F of 1.058 (p.=.352, Eta-Square = .02). Only about 2% of the variance in ratings can be attributed to rater differences when rater 3's data was removed from the analyses.

The mean ranks and means across both data sets were similar for raters 1, 2, and 4. The Katz instrument (1979) mean ranks ranged from 43.53 to 45.88, and the Chang and Scott instrument (1999) means ranged from 58.83 to 61.57, indicating good evidence of inter-rater consistency across these three raters in scoring both instruments. Rater 3's inconsistent ratings call somewhat into question the inter-rater reliability for the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument. However, the results, after removing Rater 3's data, are more suggestive of rater, rather than instrument, inconsistency. This finding is based on both the insignificant results and the fact that when Rater 3's data were removed from the sample, only 2% of variance among the remaining raters can be attributed to rater differences. However, Rater 3's data were included for all other analyses, including evaluations of internal consistency reliability, factor analyses, and all other validity examinations. This decision prevents the loss of data but also provides more conservative psychometric estimates.

EXAMINATIONS OF FACTORIAL, CONTENT, AND CONSTRUCT VALIDITY

Factor Analysis

Principal components factor analyses were computed to examine the factor structure of both the revised Chang and Scott (1999) and Katz (1979) instruments. The Kaiser-Meyer measure of sampling adequacy for the Katz (1979) items yielded a score of .868 and a Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Chi-Square of 1,450.92 (p.<.001). These two tests, respectively, examine the extent to which the items in the analysis are sufficiently correlated and differ significantly from an identity matrix. Both tests indicated that the items were well suited for examinations using factor analyses. Likewise, these two tests of assumptions were met with the Chang and Scott (1999) items, yielding a Kaiser-Meyer coefficient of .923 and a Bartlett's Chi-Square of 710.59 (p.<.001).

The initial factor analysis of the Katz (1979) instrument yielded a 4-factor solution, with the factors accounting for the following percentage of variance, respectively: 36.84, 11.29, 6.49, and 5.62. An examination of the Scree plot indicated that the last two factors were likely comprised of error variance. The first two factors were correlated at .484, and factors 3 and 4 had low to trivial correlations with all factors. The correlations of the last two factors with the other factors ranged from -.000006 for factors 3 and 4 to .377 for factors 3 and 2. Factor 4 was negatively correlated with all other factors, with its highest correlation being a -.329 with the first factor.

A second factor analysis was conducted with the Katz (1979) items, where a 2-factor solution was specified. In this analysis, 36.84% of the variance was attributed to factor 1 and 11.29% to factor 2, for a total of 48.13% of variance accounted for by the two factors. All but six items loaded most heavily on the first factor. Those items loading most heavily on factor 2 were items 17-22. These items were designed to measure self-disclosure, the provision of advice, use of confrontation, "advanced-level" empathy (as opposed to "primary-level" empathy), discussion of current therapeutic relationships, and concreteness. Factors 1 and 2 had a very low correlation (r=.225), indicating that these factors measure different latent constructs and should be scored separately.

The initial factor analysis of the revised Chang and Scott (1999) instrument indicated the presence of two factors with 50.88% of the variance accounted for by the first factor and 8.71% for the second factor. Only three items loaded most highly on factor 2 (items 5-7). These items related to assessing client problems in relation to: (1) the nature of the problem, its history, severity, and precipitating factors; (2) the problem's effects on the person's feelings and functioning, and the client's personal strengths; and, (3) situational stresses, supports, and strengths. These three items are highly correlated and more focused than items stated at a general level, e.g., general interpersonal, process, and exploring skills. However, they are central components of basic interviewing skills in social work. Further, the two factors were moderately correlated at .54, a level that Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) considered sufficiently high to combine factors.

A second factor analysis was conducted specifying a one-factor solution. The total percentage of variance explained by this solution was 50.80%. In this analy-

sis, items 5, 6, and 7 loaded positively on the single factor, with a range from .372 (item 6) to .606 (item 5).

Internal Consistency Reliability of Identified Factors

Based on the findings of the above factor analyses, changes to both the Katz (1979) and the Chang and Scott (1999) instruments' internal consistency reliability were re-examined. Two evaluations of the internal consistency reliability were conducted for each factor of each instrument using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. First, internal consistency reliability analyses were computed on the Katz (1979) instrument for the two factors identified through factor analyses. The internal consistency reliability and the standard error of measurement (SEM) of Factor 1 were improved through deletion of items 17-22 (alpha=.81, SEM=4.70), but the internal consistency reliability still remained lower and the SEM higher than had been found for the Chang and Scott instrument (1999) in earlier analyses. In addition, the internal consistency reliability coefficient for Factor 2 was unacceptably low (alpha=.54), and the SEM unacceptably high (SEM=5.32) for a scale having only six items and a narrow possible range of scores. The items identified as comprising factor 2 are not internally consistent and exhibit a high level of measurement error.

Internal consistency reliability analyses were computed on the revised Chang and Scott (1999) instrument for the two factors initially identified by the factor analysis. The first factor's internal consistency and SEM remained essentially unchanged (alpha=.91, SEM=1.915). The second factor, comprised of only three items, had an unacceptably low level of internal consistency reliability (alpha=.61) for evaluating individual interviewing skills, but its SEM (SEM=.844) also was very low in relation to the possible range of scores (possible range = 3-15). Scales containing only three items tend to suffer from low levels of internal consistency reliability and poorly represent the breadth of constructs (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). For these reasons, the three items were retained with the other items to comprise a single scale. Further, when these three items were removed from the scale, their omission did not change an already very strong level of internal consistency reliability, and the items' inclusion with the other items yielded only a very trivial amount of increase in error measurement. From a theoretical framework, the inclusion of the three items is sound, because those skills measured by the three items are central aspects of conducting effective interviews.

Further Evaluation of Construct Validity

The final analyses evaluated the construct validity of the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument (see Table 2). A Pearson's Product-Moment correlation was computed for the Chang and Scott (1999) revised instrument scores and the older, more frequently used Katz (1979) instrument scores. Based on the similarity of some of the items in both scales, a positive moderate correlation coefficient had been hypothesized. The Pearson's correlation resulted in a positive and moderate correlation between the two instruments (r=.585, p.<.001). This result supported the hypothesis that the two instruments would measure somewhat different but similar constructs.

Figure 2: *Final Factor Analyses Results*

Validation Instrument		Katz (1979) Instrument		
Items	One-Factor	Items	Factor 1 (Structure Matrix)	Factor 2
13.	.87	10.	.80	.22
12.	.85	23.	.80	.54
14.	.84	9.	.76	.15
10.	.81	6.	-.76	-.09
11.	.80	11.	.75	.12
1.	.80	5.	-.73	-.08
4.	.77	2.	.72	-.23
8.	.75	3.	.70	.23
3.	.72	13.	.70	.46
5.	.61	8.	.68	-.17
2.	.60	7.	.67	.06
9.	.53	1.	.67	-.27
7.	.44	12.	.68	.39
6.	.37	14.	.66	.49
		15.	.6	.43
		4.	-.59	-.28
		16.	.54	.48
		21.	.17	.54
		18.	.09	.54
		17.	-.04	.50
		20.	.03	.50
		22.	.14	.41
		19.	.08	.38

Note: Items are rounded to two places.

The Pearson's Product-Moment correlation between the summed Chang and Scott (1999) instrument scores (items 1-13) and the global rating item (item 14) resulted in a positive, moderate, and significant relationship (r=.676, p.<.001, N=119). About 46% of the variance in the global item can be accounted for by scores on the first 13 items. This solid relationship between the global item that measures overall effectiveness of student responses to clients with the individual items taken together provides preliminary evidence of construct validity.

DISCUSSION AND APPLICATIONS TO SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES

Like much research that is based in field or natural settings, i.e., classrooms, this research has several limitations. First, the research used a single sample of social work students from one school and across sections of only one course. Further research is needed to examine the instrument's psychometric properties with more diverse groups of social work students and at varying academic levels and courses.

Second, the Katz (1979) instrument was not ideal as a comparison instrument, because it is dated and was examined using problematic validation techniques. Therefore, any interpretations based solely on this instrument require caution. However, there were strengths which using the Katz (1979) instrument provided the research. The Katz (1979) measurement purpose matched the purpose of this research, and the Katz (1979) instrument shared a common set of core interviewing skills with the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument. In addition, by examining the internal consistency reliability and factorial validity of the Katz (1979) instrument, preliminary information not only was obtained regarding the Katz (1979) instrument's psychometric properties, but it allowed a comparison between the Katz (1979) instrument and one (Chang & Scott, 1999) that had not previously been psychometrically evaluated. These analyses were positive steps toward mediating the limitations of using an instrument with unknown psychometric qualities.

A third limitation of the study was substantial missing data for two items of the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument compared to no missing data in the Katz (1979) instrument. These were the two items that measured seeking clarification and contracting process skills. It is unclear whether the missing data are due to some aspect of formatting or a lack of clarity in the items. However, the Cronbach's alpha analysis indicated that both items had moderate to strong corrected item-total correlations (.70 and .46, respectively), indicating that they were internally consistent, i.e., contributed to accurate measurement.

A fourth limitation became evident in examinations of inter-rater reliability, specifically those of rater 3, whose scores were substantially different from the other raters. With this research, it was not possible to identify whether the differences in this rater's scores were due to the rater's incomplete training, the researchers allowing too much time for raters to complete the rating tasks, the rater's procrastination in completing the ratings, or unreliability in the instrument. Further research should be conducted on inter-rater reliability. However, other findings from this study suggest that instrument unreliability is not likely the cause of rater 3's inconsistent ratings. Specifically, the strong results on virtually every psychometric evaluation argue against instrument unreliability as the explanation for rater 3's inconsistency in rating.

A fifth limitation is that this research used simulated clients and, because of that, it is impossible to know how valid and reliable this instrument would be when applied to interviews with actual clients. Further research is needed to examine the usefulness of the instrument with actual clients.

Despite the preliminary nature of findings from this study, the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument performed very well in evaluations of its internal consistency reliability, inter-rater reliability (when rater 3's scores were omitted for this analysis), and content, factorial, and construct validity. Both the evaluations of internal consistency reliability, where all 14 items were used, and the evaluation with the global item omitted, yielded high enough alpha coefficients for the instrument to be used in evaluating individual students' basic interviewing skills. Furthermore, the instrument had higher internal consistency reliability coefficients when its items were used as hypothesized, rather than those computed on the basis of the

factor analysis results. The factor analyses provided evidence of good content, factorial, and construct validity. The correlation analysis also provided preliminary evidence of construct validity, resulting in a positive, moderate correlation with another instrument that has been used to measure interviewing skills.

In contrast, the Katz (1979) instrument fared less well on virtually all analyses than the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument. The Katz (1979) instrument had substantially lower alpha coefficients and higher measurement error on both analyses, where all of its items were analyzed, and then with the global item measuring interviewing skills omitted. An examination of this instrument's factorial structure found two factors, rather than the implied one-factor, solution. Further analyses of internal consistency based on the factor analyses supported a two-factor solution for the instrument, substantially increasing the level of the alpha coefficient for the majority of items when the items comprising the second factor were omitted from the reliability analysis. The Katz (1979) instrument and the Chang and Scott (1999) instruments had a moderate positive correlation, providing very preliminary evidence from the Katz (1979) instrument of convergent construct validity for the Chang and Scott (1999) instrument.

A larger validation study that includes a representative sample of students from a diverse sample of schools could provide additional information about the instrument's usefulness as a tool in evaluating interviewing skills. Increased structure and data collection controls may improve the instrument's inter-rater reliability. In addition, further research is needed to examine the extent to which basic interviewing skills are transferred from class exercises to work with clients in field placements.

From a teaching viewpoint, an instrument that exhibits good evidence of reliability and validity and which can be used in both the classroom and the field may be helpful in coordinating learning across the areas. A further advantage would be the ability to promote discussions across the two learning environments regarding learning needs and challenges. Perhaps such consistency would promote the better transfer of learning from the classroom to field settings and, ultimately, to effective social work practice. This research sought to achieve a preliminary step toward facilitating coordination in learning across the classroom and the field by psychometrically evaluating two instruments that evaluate students' basic interviewing skills.

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Appendix

Definitions of Skills in the Chang and Scott (1999) Instrument

1. Communicating involvement includes attentive body posture, facial expressions, and eye contact.
2. Beginning process skills consist of the ability to communicate beginning information such as describing the initial purpose of the meeting, explaining the process, discussing ethical and agency policies and introducing yourself and your role.
3. Questioning skills involve balanced use of open-ended and close-ended questions.
4. Exploring problem/challenge contains such areas as gaining information about previous attempts to solve the problem, history of the problem, and severity of the problem.
5. Exploring person includes seeking information about feelings about having the problem, effects of the problem on functioning, and personal strengths.
6. Exploring the situation consists of gaining information about effect of the problem on others, available social support, other demands and stresses in the situation/environment, and strengths in the situation/environment.
7. Reflecting skills range from the ability to summarize the client's feelings and basic content to the ability to encapsulate themes related to behavior, thoughts, feelings, and interactions with others.
8. Seeking clarification skills entails using questions to explore areas such as the meaning of words, the basis of conclusions, statements that appear contradictory, and details about sequences of interaction.
9. Contracting process skills range from the ability to reach agreement about problems to establishing clearly defined goals and creating a contract.
10. Expressing warmth involves verbal and nonverbal expressions of concern and compassion.
11. Expressing respect is defined as communicating regard for such things as the client's feelings, thoughts, potential, strengths, and resources.
12. Expressing empathy is defined as communicating understanding and acceptance of the client's felt experience.
13. Expressing genuineness includes being sincere, fully present, and able to able share reactions with the client.
14. Effectiveness of responses involves using interventions that invite the client into further exploration.

Using Portfolios: Integrating Learning and Promoting for Social Work Students

Mona C.S. Schatz

Abstract: *Portfolios are a valuable educational tool to aid in the integrative experience for graduate social work students. Forty-one graduate students were asked to evaluate their portfolio experience. A Pearson correlation shows that graduate students find the experience of developing a portfolio to be reflective of their second year MSW program (*r=*.511;* p<*.01), reflective of their competence as a social worker (*r=*.587;* p<*.01), and reflective of their personal uniqueness (*r=*.526;* p<*.01). All students demonstrated generalist social work practice through the inclusion of materials reflecting practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, agencies, and communities. Students also report that the portfolio was a valuable tool to foster integration of class and field learning (*N=*24 or 58.5%). Findings reveal that two-thirds of the students, 68.3%, applied a "medium level of effort" in the development of their portfolios, yet were able to create a final product that adequately reflected their uniqueness, their integration of learning, and their competence as a second year student.*

Keywords: Portfolio, reflection, integration, social work education

Integration of learning implies that there is a process wherein students take discreet ideas, thoughts, and knowledge and move to a level of synthesis, incorporating different types of information and thought processes to create their own personal perspective. Lowy, Bloksberg and Walberg (1971) describe the need to integrate learning as more than a process of aggregating components. They posit that this process of integration is meant to suggest "organic unity, creative synthesis, psychological *Gestalt*" [author's italics] (p. 13).

Achieving integration for social work students is vital (Lowy, Bloksberg & Walberg, 1971) and must merge the basic foundation concepts and skills in the educational curricula, and later integrate specialized and advanced knowledge and practice. Problems in reaching adequate integration exist. For example, the prevailing theoretical and practice base of generalist social work is so broad that some students are unable to grasp its extensiveness without student-centered educational approaches that aid in the integrative process.

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Furthermore, the experiential learning component in social work, the field placement, varies widely for students. Thus, in some cases, social work programs do not succeed in providing adequate exposure and practice competence related to central curricular areas.

A portfolio is a collection of materials assembled in a manner that demonstrates either a prescribed outcome, such as a financial portfolio, or a self-initiated professional outcome, such as an artist uses to bring his or her "best" work to a potential employer. Portfolios have been used in some schools of social work at graduate and undergraduate levels. The value of the portfolio among undergraduate social work students was examined several years ago by Simon and Schatz (1999). In this study, field supervisors identified six benefits for students, highlighting its value for self-directed learning. Benefits included: (1) its practicality as a self-directed learning approach; (2) a more focused approach for student learning; (3) greater ability for students to gain an understanding of social work in the social agency; (4) a way of getting students more organized "in what is often a somewhat chaotic experience;" (5) being able to combine school and field learning through a collection of materials; and, (6) encouragement of student's own creativity, thus promoting the uniqueness of each learner. (p. 104)

No published articles were found that addressed the use of portfolios at the graduate level. In addition, no articles appear in publications that examine either the reflective processes inherent in portfolio develop or the integrative process that is achieved from the use of a portfolio approach.

The key question that motivated this study was whether portfolio projects can serve as a valid assessment tool for the graduate learning experience. Does this tool foster a strong process for student integration of the field and classroom educational experiences? A second question sought more understanding about the role of self-reflection in this learning approach. It asked what role self-reflection plays as students formulate their portfolios. Before moving into the study design, a brief overview about portfolios is provided.

Background on Portfolios

The use of portfolios is extensive. Discussions span fields as diverse as occupational therapy (Kramer & Stern, 1994), health information management (Barron & Sartori, 1994), higher education—graduate level (Condon, 1994; Palmer, Holahan & Johnstone, 1996), field-based experiential higher education (Lewis & Williams, 1994), social work (Risler, 1999; Simon & Schatz, 1998), and doctoral candidacy (Heiges, 1994). Portfolios also are used to prepare new teachers (Weiser, 1994), foster literacy (Irwin-DeVitis, 1996; Standerford, 1996), teach pre-service English teachers (Yagelski, 1994), English methods (Yancey, 1994; Condon, 1994), creative writing (Fischer, 1994), and developmental writing (Rich, 1994).

Generally, what students are asked to include in portfolio projects is unique. The portfolio development related to this specific study asked second year graduate social work students to examine their experiences in the field experience and select examples of practice that illustrated their generalist and

advanced generalist practice competencies. These competencies were broadly presented at the beginning of the academic year, thus allowing students wide latitude in organizing their notebooks. Portfolios that ask students to collect their class papers and class projects serve more as a "mini-filing" experience and may actually limit some of the real educational benefits that portfolios can offer related to self-discovery, creativity, and self-expression.

Strengths frequently associated with portfolio use include the self-directed nature of the assignment, the shared responsibility for assessing the learning experience, and the ongoing developmental nature of the product (ERIC Trends and Issues Alerts, 1993). Portfolios allow students to better portray their learning experience within its unique context (e.g., Yancey, 1994). They help students' capture personal meaning (Barnett & Lee, 1994) from the learning process. White (1994) states that the portfolio brings teaching, learning, and assessment together as mutually supportive activities in the educational milieu (p. 27). Toward confirming that premise, proponents also suggest that portfolios offer the world of [educational] assessment a view of student learning that is active, engaged, and dynamic, as opposed to the overwhelmingly passive concept that still dominates the educational assessment movement (White, 1994, p. 27). Yet, many of these proponents (e.g., Paulson & Paulson, 1990; White, 1999; Elbow, 1994) are clear that educators must produce evidence beyond personal testimony that this educational assessment tool is effective, credible, beneficial, and capable of achieving its intended purpose(s) as an assessment tool for the learner(s).

Portfolios in the University Milieu

During the last two decades, universities have been scrutinizing the quality of education, seeking to better define and articulate learning outcomes. Schon (1987) states that educators worry about the gap between a school's perception of professional knowledge and the actual competencies required of practitioners in the field (p. 10). Ashelman and Lenhoff (1994) suggest that maintaining portfolios for graduate and undergraduate students serve three primary departmental goals. First, they allow departments an assessment strategy congruent with the department's need; second, instruction and assessment are based on a constructivist approach; and third, the assessment, when using the portfolio, involves the faculty in a similar process of self-reflection and individual change—a collegial process (p. 66)

Use of Portfolios in Social Work

Portfolios have been used in social work education programs for several decades at least. At national conferences and workshops over the last 10 or 20 years, social work educators have presented their perspectives and experiences using portfolios. Risler (1999) suggested that the portfolio invites divergent thinking. This provides valuable illustrations of collaboration in the learning process which occurs between students and instructors during field experiences. For social work education, Chambers and Spano (1982; also see Knox, 1986) believe that integration implies a synthesis, but that synthesis only occurs if the student is made aware of how the elements of the learning are interrelated. They further inform us that the learning process must be

"reflective, rather than a reflex" (p. 229). They do not mention educational tools which would advance this reflection, however. A portfolio can accomplish this integration while also allowing students the opportunity for self-direction and self-reflection.

Evaluation, Assessment, and Grading of Portfolios

In the educational field, student portfolios have been assessed by Knight and Gallaro (1994) to benefit: (1) curriculum, (2) student learning in the classroom, and (3) improving student satisfaction in the learning experience. Standerford (1996) suggests that this is the ultimate goal of educational assessment. Others (e.g., Ashelman & Lenhoff, 1994) suggest that the process of engaging students in self-assessment and reflection for the purpose of making judgments about their own work is highly individual and personal, requiring high order thinking of critical awareness and non-defensiveness of one's evaluative strategies (p. 75).

The 1990s provided valuable discussions among among educational specialists, particularly related to the evaluation, assessment, and grading of portfolios (see Paulson & Paulson, 1990; Yancey, 1994; Weiser, 1994). Other issues that have been discussed when assessing portfolios include the wide variability of material included in portfolios (Ashelman & Lenhoff, 1994) and the validity of the portfolio to measure what it is intended to measure (Yancey, 1994).

An evaluation study of portfolios by undergraduate social work students found positive support among students and field instructors. Simon and Schatz (1998) used an evaluative survey instrument to assess how well students perceived their portfolio process as an integrative of the field and classroom learning. In a second study using a survey instrument, Schatz and Simon (1999) found that both field instructors (N=14) and students (N=39) believed that the portfolio supported the integrative aspects of learning needed for students in an undergraduate generalist program. Students and field instructors saw the portfolio project as extremely valuable, indicating that the portfolio brought more depth to learning in the field placement experience. This study did not examine how students made decisions related to their final portfolio presentation.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

This study explored graduate social work students' decisions regarding how they organized their portfolios and the role self-reflection played in this learning strategy. Questions developed to guide this study included the following:

1. Does the portfolio process used for second year graduate social work students promote reflective thinking?
2. Do students achieve an integration of class learning and field experience through the use of a portfolio process?
3. Do students see this tool as helpful for both academic and professional endeavors?

4. Do students view their portfolio process as promoting their competence?
5. Do portfolios adequately illustrate generalist and advanced practice?

RESEARCH DESIGN

A research approach that was both qualitative and quantitative was constructed to respond to the research questions. A student survey instrument gathered qualitative and quantitative responses about the portfolio development experience (see Appendix A). The questionnaire instrument served as a tool for the evaluation of the student's actual portfolio notebook, which was handed in at the end of a year-long seminar and field placement experience. The instructor made the decision to use the portfolio with second year concentration students, in part, because she was the instructor of the seminar class, and in part, because this instructor views the portfolio as an effective self-assessment instrument that can be used throughout one's social work career.

A second research tool (Appendix B) was used by a team of three researchers: Two were graduate research assistants and the third was the author. The team provided more objectivity and consistency when examining the quality of portfolios, because the author also served as the instructor for the student participants. The evaluation of portfolios done by the team was conducted after the grading period so that there would be no inherent conflict or bias in the team's evaluation of portfolios.

Design of Two Instruments: The Survey and Portfolio Review Instrument

Students were asked to complete a written survey instrument that inquired into the creation of their portfolio. This survey was completed at the end of the concentration year graduate experience. To answer the research questions, the survey looked as several focuses. First, some questions explored what types of items students included in their portfolio (Questions 1, 5, 6, and 7) and informed research questions 3, 4, and 5. These items, in aggregate, represented a generalist social work orientation (Schatz, Jenkins & Sheafor, 1990). Second, some questions asked about attitudes related to the portfolio process and the student's reflection about that process (Questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, and 12) and informed research questions 1, 2, and 4. For example, some questions sought to capture student decisions about what they chose to include in their portfolio and what they excluded, if any (Questions 6b, 7b). Third, some questions examined areas such as the student's level of effort (Questions 10), their view of the strengths of this assignment (Question 9), if they had shared their portfolio with others (Question 8), and if they would continue to use this tool in the future (Question 13). Question 12 asked students about grading and evaluating portfolios. These questions informed research questions 1, 2, and 3. The survey also asked students their age, gender, and social work field setting.

The second tool (see Appendix B) was designed in order to use a team score that judged the quality of the portfolio and whether it demonstrated aspects such as: a) the portfolio's ability to be seen as a highly professional tool, b) the quality of the organization, c) the level of effort, d) the demonstration of social work com-

petency, e) the demonstration of integration of class and field experience, f) demonstration of advanced generalist practice orientation, and g) reflective quality used by the student in organizing their portfolio. The three research team members did a "trial run" with a portfolio from an undergraduate student in order to discuss the rating process towards providing consistency on what each item in the review instrument sought to evaluate.

Student Sample

Student participation was voluntary. Forty-one of the 42 students in the sample completed the written survey (97.6% of the population). Sixteen of the 42 students, (38.1% of the population) agreed to allow the research team to review their portfolio. This lower participation rate was due to timing: this portfolio assignment was due at the end of the graduate coursework and students just wanted to leave and take their work with them. Reviewing these portfolios by the team required an extra week for review purposes.

Respondent demographic information shows that the mean age of graduate social work student respondents was 32.69 (standard deviation=7.85); 75.6% (N=31) were women and 24.4% were men (N=10).

The field placement setting of students varied. Thirteen students worked in family and children's programs, 11 students were in mental health programs, 7 were in community and education programs, 6 were in medical settings, and 4 were in corrections.

RESULTS

The portfolios were unique. Illustrative of the reflection process in portfolio development, the students were able to indicate which items in their portfolio illustrated their "best practice," which item(s) were excluded from their portfolio, whether they were ambivalent about having included certain items in their portfolio, and what decisions influenced them in these decisions.

The first research question asked: "Does the portfolio process used for concentration graduate social work students promote reflective thinking?" The process of reflecting on one's competence and uniqueness: When asked if the portfolio served as a reflective tool, students indicated their level of agreement using a four-point Likert scale. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to explore the relationship of these variables. A strong positive relationship was found among these three (r=.526; r=.511, and r=.587; 39 df; p<.001). Table 1 shows these correlations, indicating a reliable relationship between the variables.

Demonstrating their competence: Demonstrating their competence: Each student was able to provide specific examples of his or her: a) emerging practice competence and b) "best" practice(s). Thus, students presented their portfolio in an integrated way and expressed their own sense of competence. A wide range of examples of practice was evident due to the many types of field placement agencies that students were involved in.

From a pre-constructed list of nine (9) items, respondents were asked to indicate whether any of these nine items were included in their portfolio. Students were also asked if they included items such as class activities and assignments.

Table 1: *Pearson Correlation Demonstrating Reliability of Student Responses on Perception of Competence and Uniqueness (n=41)**

Survey Statements	Reflects Personal Uniqueness	Reflects Social Work Competence	Reflects 2nd Year Field Experience
Reflects personal uniqueness			
Pearson correlation	1.000	.587**	.526**
Significance**	.	.000	.000
Reflects social work competence			
Pearson correlation	.587**	1.000	.511**
Significance**	.000	.	.001
Reflects 2nd year field experience			
Pearson correlation	.526**	.511**	1.000
Significance**	.000	.001	.

**Degrees of freedom=39;*
***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 2 shows the types of items included by students.

Demonstrating their competence: Demonstrating their competence: Each student was able to provide specific examples of his or her: a) emerging practice competence and b) "best" practice(s). Thus, students presented their portfolio in an integrated way and expressed their own sense of competence. A wide range of examples of practice was evident due to the many types of field placement agencies that students were involved in.

From a pre-constructed list of nine (9) items, respondents were asked to indicate whether any of these nine items were included in their portfolio[1]. Students were also asked if they included items such as class activities and assignments. Table 2 shows the types of items included by students.

Respondents listed items in their portfolio that represented experiences beyond the field and classroom if they believed these items represented their social work competence. Twenty-four respondents (58.5%) included non-academic/field items. The lower section of Table 3 lists the most frequent items included which were of this nature, such as copies of grant submissions, certificates, certification awards, licenses, and personnel evaluations.

To explore the constructivist process of the portfolio notebook, students were asked to identify two examples from their portfolio that demonstrated their social work competence. A second question asked them to indicate one item in their portfolio that represented their "best" practice. Table 2 illustrates that "practice materials" were listed as most representative of their competence (38.73%) and best work (38.89%), credentials (21.92%) and field materials (15.07%) gained second in position, professional materials (10.96%) created by the student, and class work materials (8.22%) followed. Furthermore, it appears that students value their work with clients and their recognition for this work.

Table 2: *Portfolio Items That Reflect Educational Experience and Items That Reflect Practice Competence From Other Professional Experiences*

Items That Reflected Their Work in Field Placement	**Number**	**Percentage**
Work with individuals	33	80.5%
Work with clients in groups	24	58.5%
Work with families	18	43.9%
Community work	35	85.4%
Training and seminars	39	95.1%
Funding activities	11	26.8%
Administrative activities	30	73.2
Public relations/media activities	12	29.3%
Class assignments and activities	35	85.4%
Items from Other Professional Experiences		
Other training	3	*
Certifications and licenses	3	*
College transcripts	1	*
Grants	2	*
Public relations/media materials	3	*
Personnel evaluations	2	*

**Individual items not tabulated, however, 24 respondents (58.5%) did include some type of non-field items.*

Respondents identified certain materials which they had ambivalence about including in their portfolios. For example, some respondents were unsure or uncomfortable including "class work" (25.93%), certain "field materials," particularly if the materials might divulge someone's identity (18.52%), and "credentials" (14.81%). "Non-client specific practice materials" and "materials developed by the students" were items students' were less ambivalent about (7.41%).

Respondents were asked if they excluded items from their completed portfolios. Twenty-five respondents (61.0%) indicated that they excluded items when finalizing their portfolio. Most frequently, students excluded items that were "not reflective of me or my best practice" (29.63%) or were "left out because of confidentiality." For a small number of students, "space constraints" (14.81%) and items from their "distant work experiences" (14.81%) were reasons for exclusion.

The Process of Reflecting on One's Competence and Uniqueness

When asked if the portfolio reflected the respondent's sense of competence as a second year MSW student and as a social worker, as well as their personal uniqueness, students indicated their level of agreement using a four-point Likert scale. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to explore the relationship of these variables. A strong positive relationship was found among these three correlations (r=.526; r=.511, and r=.587; 39 df; p<.001). Table 3 shows these correlations, indicating a reliable relationship between the variables.

Table 3: *Portfolio Items Respondents Identified as Demonstrating Social Work Competence (*N=*41)*

Portfolio Item	Portfolio Items That Represent Social Work Competence		Portfolio Items That Represent "Best" Social Work Practice	
	*N**	% of Total Responses	*N***	% of Total Responses
Practice materials: assessments/ interventions	29	39.73%	14	38.89%
Credentials, e.g., resume, certifications, license	16	21.92%	2	5.56%
Field materials, e.g., learning plans, evaluations	11	15.07%	5	13.89%
Professional materials developed by student	8	10.96%	6	16.67%
Class work materials, e.g., organizational scans, research projects	6	8.22%	4	11.11%
Other e.g., thank you's, letter of recommendation, syllabi	6	8.22%	6	16.67%
Total	73	100.00%	36	100.00%

**Respondents were asked to provide two examples of portfolio items that represented their social work competence. Some respondents provided more than two responses while others did not respond at all.*

***Respondents were asked to provide one "best" item that represented their social work competency. Some respondents provided more than one response while some did not provide any response.*

Respondents identified certain materials with which they had ambivalence including in their portfolios. For example, some respondents were unsure or uncomfortable including "classwork" (25.93%), certain "field materials," particularly if the materials might divulge someone's identify (18.52%), and "credentials" (14.81%). "Non-client specific practice materials" and "materials developed by the students" were items students were less ambivalent about (7.41%).

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The second research question asked: "Do students achieve an integration of class learning and field experience through the use of a portfolio process?" Respondents were asked to evaluate whether "The portfolio had been a valuable

way to integrate class and field learning." Twenty-four students, or 58.5%, indicated their "agreement" or "strong agreement" with this statement; only 9.8% of students "strongly disagree" (Mean=2.44; SD=.78).

Reviewers determined whether, in their assessment, the portfolios demonstrated the integration of class and field experience. Using an 8-point Likert scale, the mean score from this review was 4.56 (standard deviation=2.42) slightly higher than mid-point. This is similar to the mean of respondents (Mean=2.44, standard deviation=.78).

"Do students see this tool as helpful for both academic and professional endeavors?" To assess this third question, whether the portfolio served as an educational or professional tool during the past year, students were asked whether they shared their portfolios with others, such as faculty, supervisors, co-workers, family, and fellow students. Thirty-eight (38) students responded (92.7%) affirmatively to this question. Thirty-five respondents, or 85.4%, shared portfolios with other students. Faculty were shown portfolios by 18 students or 43.9% of the respondents. Thirteen or 31.7% of the students shared their portfolios with their families.

Question four asked: "Do students view their process of portfolio development as promoting competence?" The students were asked about the best way to evaluate their portfolio. Results show that only one student believed that the instructor should solely assess the portfolio. Most frequently, respondents thought that the assessment process should be mutual, the student meeting with the instructor to discuss the development process and the final submission (14 or 41.18%). Twelve (12) students, or 35.29%, suggested that self-grading the portfolio was the best way to accomplish the evaluative process.

Finally, "Do portfolios adequately illustrate generalist and advanced practice?" Because the graduate educational experience rests in a specialized area of study, the research sought to examine whether students' portfolios illustrated the generalist and advanced generalist social work specialization. Table 4 shows a strong validation for the generalist social work approach. As shown, students have included materials that illustrate the multiple level practice experience (micro-practice, mezzo practice, and macro practice) in field and the multi-method practice process.

The advanced level assessment was only possible to ascertain when reviewers looked at the nature and extent of the practice materials included. As an example, reviewers were looking for the complexity of practice presented by students. The reviewers used an 8-point Likert scale, "1" representing "very high" and "8" indicating "very low." Reviewers might judge, for example, an advanced generalist representation in the portfolio, whether examples of treatment plans were included, or grant projects or other activities requiring application of competencies generally viewed as "graduate level." The mean score of reviewers for this demonstration of advanced generalist social work practice was 3.5 (standard deviation=2.68), representing a "high" score in this area.

Examination of Students' Level of Effort in Portfolio Development

Though no one research question specifically asked about the level of effort, the idea that different student levels of effort might influence the quality of the work

Table 4: *Items Included in Portfolio That Represent Multiple Systems Level Practice and Multi-method Practice (*N=*41)*

Portfolio Items	Yes, Included		Not Included		Not Sure	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Micro practice:						
Work with individuals	33	80.5%	7	17.0%	1	2.4%
Mezzo practice:						
Work with groups	24	58.5%	14	34.1%	3	7.3%
Work families	18	43.9%	21	51.2%	2	4.9%
Macro practice:						
Community work	35	85.4%	4	9.8%	2	4.9%
Training and seminars	39	95.1%	1	2.4%	1	2.4%
Administrative activities	30	73.2%	6	14.6%	5	12.2%
Funding development	11	26.8%	26	63.4%	4	9.8%
Class activities/ assignments	12	29.3%	28	68.3%	1	2.4%

was surmised. When the concentration year began, students were given the portfolio assignment that this research examined. It was suggested at that time that students use their portfolios as an on-going tool where they could collect items that would be indicative of their field and class learning experiences. Since the survey was given at year's end, the students were asked to select from a three-point scale of "high," "medium," and "low" to indicate their level of effort in developing the portfolio. To better guide the response process, these three response choices had a short descriptive narrative as follows: "High–worked on [the portfolio] regularly during the year;" "Medium–worked on intermittently throughout the year;" and "Low–worked on just the last few weeks of each semester." Table 5 shows that two-thirds of the respondent students (68.3% or 24) put a medium level of effort into development of the portfolio. Nine students or 22% put in a low level of effort; less than 10% (8 students or 9.8%) of the sample population placed high effort into this project.

Significance was found with the level of effort and correlations with (1) the portfolio's value as a tool for class and field integration (r=.394; p<.005 (one-tailed)), (2) the ability of the portfolio to reflection the second year MSW experience (r=.302; p<.028), and (3) the use of the portfolio as a tool that reflects the student's uniqueness as a social worker (r=.383; p<.007(one-tailed)). No significance was found when correlated with the variable that assessed whether the portfolio reflected the student's competence as a social worker (r=.228; p<.076).

The review team that examined each portfolio also assessed the level of effort. This review of portfolios revealed that the level of effort for the sample as compared with the population as a whole is significant (Mean=3.5; Sig. .000, p<.001). Having used an 8-point Likert scale, the mean of 3.5, between "high" and "medium" on the rating descriptors is quite similar to the respondents themselves, whose mean is 2.12, a middle-rating on a 4-point Likert scale.

Table 5: *Level of Effort in Portfolio Development (*N=*41)*

Responses Choices	***N****	**1%**
High	8	9.8%
Medium	24	68.3%
Low	9	22.0%
Total	41	100.0%

**Mean=2.12; sd=.56*

DISCUSSION

The study found significant support for the idea that development of a portfolio can serve as a tool that reflects social work competence for graduate students who are nearing the end of their academic experience. Their ability to identify items that represent their competency is evident. The respondents could also identify what items in their portfolio reflected their best work. The items that students included in their portfolios illustrate their multi-level practice with individuals, agencies, and communities, and their class assignments and related school activities. Training and seminar information accumulated during the advanced concentration year were included in student portfolios and were viewed as important. This may be the case, because these external learning opportunities actually enhanced the person's learning, e.g., field experiences, and probably provided more advanced knowledge and skill development.

Students' work with clients was included in all portfolios. For some, issues of confidentiality brought ambivalence for them regarding whether to include this kind of information in the portfolio. These results indicate that students were ambivalent about how or whether they should put client work into their portfolio, demonstrating their ability to reflect on value and ethical issues related to practice and professionalization.

It is interesting to learn that a medium amount of effort was adequate to build quality individual portfolios. Among some opponents of portfolios there has been expressed concern that they are too time consuming (Simon & Schatz, 1998) and, therefore, not a valuable learning tool. From this respondent group, it may be more realistic to suggest that a medium level of effort is sufficient for students to create a professional/educational tool that demonstrates social work competence. It is worthy of mention that the assessments made by students regarding their level of effort was based on a set of definitions presented in the survey tool. It is possible that the descriptors served to create a mid-range response, since students were comfortable stating that their work was actually intermittent throughout the year, versus, regularly worked on, which qualified for the "high" descriptor. This honesty gave the researcher the ability to conclude that the construction of the portfolio, as intended, does not have to be overwhelmingly time-consuming.

The time needed by the instructor to examine the portfolios is often a concern. For this author and for those who have joined in adopting portfolios as assessment tools, the time and effort is worth the outcome. Students are so pleased to

have a tangible product that illustrates the many tasks and responsibilities they undertake in their education and field experience. Faculty should not shy away from this teaching tool because of time requirements.

The respondents demonstrated their generalist orientation and advanced generalist practice. The team assessed that more than 80% of the students included materials that reflected advanced practice throughout the continuum of intervention levels—individuals, groups, families, organizations, and communities. This demonstration also reflects the specialized, advanced social work curriculum at this university program.

A number of factors have become apparent through the analysis of data that suggest that there are considerations made about the construction of the portfolio and, in turn, influence what is included and not included in the portfolio. When students were asked what two items in the portfolio represent their social work competence, all students had a response. Yet, no two responses were alike. Second, when asked if they had included items in their portfolio that they were ambivalent about, 27 responded in the affirmative. Third, the students were then asked if there were items they had excluded when submitting their portfolio at year's end. Twenty-seven individuals had excluded items. While the items that respondents were ambivalent about or what they excluded is important, what may be more valuable is the awareness that these three questions, considered altogether, capture a process of personal decision-making and reflection that responds to one of the research questions initially posed.

A series of five statements were used to uncover whether the portfolio served reflective purposes that included educational integration, social work competence, and personal uniqueness. It was found that the perception of the portfolio's value as an integrative tool was highly associated with its perceived value in determining social work competence. These correlations show the magnitude and direction of the linear correlations between each set of variables (Craft, 1990). The r scores show positive correlation with strong significance. This is not surprising since portfolio work reflects many things for students.

Because the students were able to articulate what they did and did not include in their portfolio, the research uncovers a process of decision-making used by students and a process of reflection about their construction of their portfolio. It might be possible to imply from portions of this analysis that students amass a large quantity of materials that may be worthy of inclusion in their portfolio. Then, closer to the time when the portfolio is to be submitted for review, the student makes a series of determinations about the final set of materials that will actually be used as representations of practice and educational performance. The reflective process promotes aspects of the person's professional endeavors and their educational experience. Materials that are either too old or questionable on ethic grounds may be excluded, as well as other considerations such as the sheer size and magnitude of the volume.

IMPLICATIONS

With stronger demands to evaluate educational outcomes in academic programs throughout the nation, this study offers an educational strategy that could serve

as an outcome assessment tool. Schools of social work or individual social work faculty who consider using a portfolio project may aptly demonstrate what students are learning and how they take their learning and create integration for themselves. To achieve a process of integration, the educator could consider how class work and fieldwork combine to support that process for students. With further exploration, we could learn how a portfolio could become more useful for students.

Another implication of this study found that students were able to achieve the portfolio experience by merely using a medium amount of work level. This finding may be helpful to students who are given the portfolio assignment in the future, because it allows them to realize that they can accomplish it without the assignment being overly time-consuming.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The survey population comes from the same graduate program as the research team. There are biases when subjects know the researcher. Measures were taken to redirect some potential bias, however, the bias could not be eliminated entirely. The respondents represent 97.6% of the population under study. Therefore, the results confidently reflect the population under study. It is, however, not plausible to generalize these findings to other schools of social work that use portfolios. For example, the school of social work used in the study has one specialization in a generalist perspective, where other schools of social work may have several specializations and, therefore, the survey may not be as useful. Consequently, the results may not meet the needs of other schools of social work that have multiple specializations.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Limited research has been able to capture student learning and reflective aspects related to integration in social work educational curricula. This study only initiates a possible method, e.g., portfolios, to consider in this area. Though this study found some insights into a process of reflection related to building a portfolio, examining more closely how reflection services the educational experience should build from this initial effort.

This study was intended to explore how students reflect and cognitively process construction of the portfolio. Five research questions were posed at the start of this study and have since been successfully answered. This study found the portfolio to be reflective of the students thinking around their competence in the second year of graduate school. It found that students are able, through the use of portfolios, to express their integration of class, professional uniqueness, and field learning. Respondents confirmed the generalist perspective and students working in multisystem areas of practice. Students also believe that assessment of the portfolio is best done in a collaborative process with the instructor. Most important, the findings promote the idea that schools of social work can benefit from adopting a portfolio approach.

Endnote

[1] These items represented major areas of social work practice in the field placement experience such as work with individuals, groups, families, and communities, as well as items that represented work with or involvement in training, seminars, administrative activities, and public relations/media activities.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Instructions: Please take a few minutes and complete this questionnaire. The more specific your responses the more helpful you will be in aiding this study. Your are welcome to use the back of the survey to continue your written comments. Return to: Social Work Dept./Schatz' mailbox/CSU.

1. Please check below if you have items in your portfolio that represent your work with or involvement in:

	Yes	**No**	**Not Sure**
Individual clients worked with	____	____	____
Clients in groups worked with	____	____	____
Family clients worked with	____	____	____
Communities' members/organizations	____	____	____
Training and seminars	____	____	____
Administrative activities	____	____	____
Funding development activities	____	____	____
Public relations/media activities	____	____	____
Class activities/assignments	____	____	____

2. Having completed your portfolio please respond to the following statements:

	SA	A	D	SD
a) The portfolio has been a valuable way to class learning and the field agency placement.	1	2	3	4
b) The portfolio reflects my competence as a social worker.	1	2	3	4
c) The portfolio reflects my second year field experience.	1	2	3	4
d) The portfolio helped me identify areas for field.	1	2	3	4
e) The portfolio reflects my uniqueness as a social worker.	1	2	3	4

3. Describe two items in your portfolio that reflect your practice competence?

   a) _____

   b) _____

4. Describe one item you included in your portfolio that reflects your best social work practice.
5. Describe any item(s) that you were ambivalent about including in your portfolio?
6. Did you include items beyond field placement that were related to past or present work situations?

   a) Yes ___ No ___

   b) Why did you include these items?

Appendix A

Survey Instrument (cont.)

7. Were there items you excluded from this portfolio submission?

   a) Yes ___ No ___

   b) What thoughts or considerations led you to exclude these items from your portfolio?

8. Please check below if you shared your portfolio (at whatever stage of completion) at any time during the year with:

	Yes	No
a. your supervisor	____	____
b. co-workers	____	____
c. other students	____	____
d. family members	____	____
e. friends	____	____
f. university faculty	____	____

9. What are the strengths of using a portfolio assignment for the second year field experience, if any?

10. What level of effort did you put into the development of this portfolio?

High	**Medium**	**Low**
(Worked on regularly throughout the year)	(Worked on throughout the year)	(Worked on just the last few weeks of each semester)

11. What two conclusions would you make about yourself as a social worker by reflecting on what you included in your portfolio?

12. What do you believe is the best way to evaluate the portfolio? For example, should the instructor meet individually with each student? Have students self-grade their notebook? Other approaches?

13. Will you continue to use and update your portfolio?

    Yes __ No __ Not sure __

Comments?

_____

Age:___

Gender: Female __ Male __

Social work setting: Mental Health ___ Medical ___ Family/children ___
Community/Education ___ Hospice ___ Corrections/Probation ___

Have you ever done a portfolio before? Yes ___ No ___ Not Sure ___

Appendix B

Instrument: Review of the Portfolio

Reviewer: _____

Date of the Review: _____ Student Code ____

1. Items in the portfolio reflect work in any of the following situations.

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Individual clients you have worked with	____	____	____
Clients in groups you have worked with	____	____	____
Family clients you have worked with	____	____	____
Communities members/organizations	____	____	____
Training and seminars	____	____	____
Administrative activities	____	____	____
Funding development activities	____	____	____
Public relations/media activities	____	____	____
Class activities/assignments	____	____	____

2. Are there items in the portfolio that represent efforts outside of the field experience?
   Yes __ No __
   List items: _____

3. Portfolio presentation is professional.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	Can't judge
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low

4. There is a quality of organization to the portfolio.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	Can't judge
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low

5. There is an apparent level of effort by the student.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	Can't judge
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low

6. Portfolio demonstrates social work competency.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	Can't judge
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low

7. Portfolio demonstrates integration of class and field experience.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	Can't judge
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low

8. Portfolio demonstrates advanced generalist practice orientation.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	Can't judge
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low

9. Portfolio resonates a reflective quality by student.

1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	Can't judge
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low

10. General comments

Assessment in Social Work Education: A Bibliography

Robert Vernon
Mary Stanley

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