George Mason University

Department of Social Work

Report: Assessment of Student Competencies/Learning Outcomes, January 2013

The MSW and BSW programs at George Mason University were fully reaffirmed for accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education Commission on Accreditation (COA) in February 2010, for the full eight years, ending February 2018.

http://www.cswe.org/default.aspx?id=17491

This reaffirmation was based on 2003 CSWE accreditation standards. Our next self-study will be based on 2008 accreditation standards. Following is a description of 2009 assessment activities, findings, plans, and curriculum changes made, based on these findings. Questions and additional information may be directed to the Department of Social Work.

GMU Social Work Program Assessment 2009

The faculty in the Department of Social Work implement the evaluation plan. The plan focuses on assessing the extent to which BSW and MSW students meet the learning outcomes (competencies) for their respective programs. Results of the various evaluation strategies are used for ongoing improvement of the quality of the BSW and MSW programs. In 2009, as part of our preparation for our Council on Social Work Education reaffirmation site visit we reviewed the evaluation data and decisions over the past five years. This report provides highlights from this report and describes recent curriculum changes and assessment plans.

The Department of Social Work used seven assessment tools in our last CSWE accreditation to monitor student outcomes, as based on accreditation standards. These tools facilitated a systematic, coherent Assessment Plan that provided faculty with ongoing feedback, permitting and informing continuous improvement. The following data sources were in place for the BSW and MSW programs:

- Student Self-Assessment (BSW & MSW)
- Knowledge Assessment (BSW & MSW)
- Field Practicum Assessments: 7 assessments specific to field education
- Social Justice Assessment (BSW only)
- Thesis Project Assessment (MSW only)
- Exit Interviews (BSW & MSW)
- Alumni surveys (BSW & MSW)
Questions on each assessment were matched to a program objective. Several assessments were administered at different junctures during the program to provide feedback on student progress during the program. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected that identified strengths and areas needing improvement. This extensive plan led to program changes in mission, goals, objectives, and curriculum.

The results reported in our 2009 Self Study documents include:

BSW Strengths:
- Values and Ethics
- Understanding organizations and the function of organizational systems
- Students felt confident in working with diverse populations

BSW Challenges:
- Group Work skills
- Junior Field Experience
- Macro Practice
- Research

Response by BSW program to challenges:
- Group work class was revised so that it was devoted to working with families and groups; other content was moved to a new course
- Junior Field Experience was revised to become a Service Learning Model
- A new methods course, *Integrative Methods in Social Action and Social Change*, was developed for senior year that addressed macro content
- Research was infused into more of the junior courses; students begin reading scholarly research articles in *Introduction to Social Work Course*

MSW Strengths
- Values and Ethics
- Respectful working relationships with diverse populations
- Written/oral technological skills

MSW Challenges
- Research- qualitative research
- Diagnosis of clients
- Historical legislation and Policy analysis
Response to MSW program challenges

- Added more qualitative content to the research course; more research was infused throughout the curriculum
- Added more content on diagnosis in MSW foundation year;
- Created clinical concentration; ultimately added a Psychopathology course
- Strengthened policy analysis in foundation policy courses: SOCW 651 and SOCW 652

Recent Changes to Strengthen MSW Curriculum

Building on these responses, the MSW curriculum was strengthened in several other ways. These developments provided students opportunities to develop diagnostic and other clinical skills, as well as their policy analysis skills. Within the clinical and social change concentrations, students can now strengthen their clinical and policy analysis skills and apply them to certain areas, target populations, and/or social problem. Beginning in 2011-2012, students in the clinical concentration make take any of the following advanced practice courses:

- Family Therapy
- Clinical Practice with Older Adults
- Trauma and Recovery
- Military Social Work
- Substance Abuse Interventions
- Forensic Social Work

These are offered in addition to the following required courses: Psychopathology, Advanced Clinical Practice, Community Centered Clinical Practice and Clinical Practicum.

The following policy courses have been developed for students in our Social Change concentration. These were also launched during the 2011-2012 academic year. Students in the clinical concentration are required to take a policy class of their choice in their second year of study. The new policy courses include:

- Aging Programs and Policies
- Social Policy for Children and Youth
- Immigration Policy

Students in the Social Change concentration must take the following courses that had been part of the curriculum prior to the restructuring: Social Work and the Law, and Organizational Leadership for Social Workers.

All students are offered a free elective in their last semester of study. The free elective serves several functions. Together with offering students a chance to deepen their
knowledge of certain social work topics, they also afforded the opportunity to elect to take a special topics course offered periodically such as, Group Work, Art Therapy, and Integrated Behavioral Health Policy. Students may also opt to write a masters thesis.

In addition to meeting CSWE accreditation standards, faculty members reviewed MSW curriculum content to assure its compliance with the recently passed “Regulation Governing the Practice of Social Work in the Commonwealth of Virginia, 18 VAC 140-20-10”, mandating specific curriculum content as part of eligibility requirements to sit for the clinical social work licensure exam. In response to these regulatory requirements specifying specific curricular content, the

In an effort to make the program more accessible, we have developed a number of online course offerings. These include:

- Communication and Technology for Social Work Practice
- Aging Programs and Policies
- Psychopathology
- Field Seminar (Foundation Year)
- Field Seminar (Clinical Concentration)
- Advanced Research in Social Work
- Clinical Practice with Older Adults

Recent Changes to Strengthen the BSW Curriculum

The BSW Program was also strengthened. As a result of the last CSWE self-study and site visit, the BSW program made a few significant changes to its curriculum and overall program. The results of the 2009 self-study indicated much strength throughout the BSW program and a few challenges. Highlights of the strengths included providing students with substantial curriculum content around values and ethics, students exhibiting a remarkable understanding of organizations and the function of organizational systems, and students’ confidence in working with diverse populations. The challenges for the students included limited development and application of group work skills, the need for more macro practice content, increased exposure to and application of research concepts, and the program developing an alternative way to administer the junior field experience.

To address the issue of limited development and application of group work skills, the GMU BSW faculty made changes to the group work content and experiential components. Over the years, it has been a challenge to find consistent group work experiences for BSW students within the community. Because of this, the 40 hours of required group field experience within community agencies for BSW juniors was removed from the curriculum and a new 3-credit course (SOCW 362 – Group and Family Interventions) was added so that a consistent group work understanding was provided
to all students. Various types of group simulations occur within this course as a result of
the group work and family theory, research, and practice content that students obtain in
SOCW 358, Methods of Social Work Intervention II, during the same semester. A
description of the course is below:

**SOCW 362 - Group and Family Interventions** (3 credits). Provides students the
opportunity to integrate theory, research, and practice in the area of group work and
family interventions. Classroom simulation of group skills and how to work with families
will occur. Collaboration with community agencies working with groups and families is
required.

The need for more macro practice content was met through the development of a third
practice course that the BSW seniors take during their last semester in the program.
The course is called **SOCW 417, Integrative Methods in Social Action and Social Change**.
This course uses generalist social work practice concepts with large systems and
provides students with a hands-on opportunity to apply concepts and principles of
intervention with large systems. Students work with organizations and communities on
a local, national, or global level to promote social action and social change. The course
also focuses on evaluating interventions addressing the social justice needs of diverse,
at-risk, and oppressed populations.

George Mason University has a relatively new initiative in place called **Students as
Scholars Program**. This initiative promotes the inclusion of research content and
research opportunities throughout the undergraduate experience. Because the BSW
faculty recognized the need for more research content, faculty have taken advantage of
the opportunities that the university is offering to strengthen research content and
scholarship options for BSW students. For example, the SOCW 417 course, mentioned
above, is now a university-designated research and scholarship (RS) course and two
BSW students to date have been chosen, through a competitive university process, to
be **Students as Scholars** fellows. The fellowship experience provides funding for the
students to work with a faculty member on a research project that the student is
interested in. Class exercises and assignments have also been strengthened in other
BSW courses, such as the Introduction to Social Work course and the Practice Methods
courses, to increase knowledge and skills relative to research.

The last change that has been made to strengthen the BSW program is the streamlining
of the BSW junior field experience. Due to the current economic state leading to limited
resources, the fall junior course where students spend 60 hours in the field (SOCW 301)
is now only open to social work majors; our community partners are only working with
students who have committed to the social work profession. Since bringing the group
experience back into the classroom (SOCW 362), the juniors are now completing 60
hours of a field experience instead of 100 hours of field. The junior field experience has
now been integrated within our larger field department (which is responsible for senior BSW students and first and second year MSW students), allowing for a more efficient administrative process.  

In an effort to continue to reach out beyond the GMU campus community as well as to give the current GMU students diversity in their pedagogical options, the BSW program offers at least one section of the following foundation courses online. All of these courses have been implemented for at least two academic years and have been met with success relative to enrollment and overall student satisfaction:

- SOCW 200 – Introduction to Social Work
- SOCW 323 – Human Behavior and the Life Course
- SOCW 340 – Human Behavior within Macro Systems
- SOCW 351 – Social Policy and Social Justice
- SOCW 370 – Social Policy Analysis and Advocacy

Sections of other courses and social work elective content, such as aging issues and human rights, continue to be developed online as well.

**Summary of Assessment Plan for Measuring Practice Behaviors**

Each practice behavior will be measured in the field, and through an assessment of student performance on a class assignment specifically linked to that behavior. For each identified assignment, all students (100%) will be required to achieve an 80% or better before completing the course. Students who do not initially meet the 80% benchmark of achievement on the assignment will be required to revise the assignment until a score of 80% or better is achieved. Additional assessment measures and benchmarks will be identified and developed in spring 2013.