

Final Report
Survey of Social Work Graduates
2003-2007 Cohorts

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Periodically, the Department of Social Work at the University of Michigan-Flint conducts a mailed survey of students who had graduated approximately 2 years before. The survey is intended to achieve three outcomes. First, the survey is designed to assist the faculty in evaluating the impact of specific aspects of the curriculum on employment and graduate school experiences of graduates. Second, participation in all aspects of the research project is offered as an enrichment experience for current students interested in furthering their research experience. Third, the project is completed in accordance program evaluation plans established with the national organization Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and University of Michigan-Flint Academic Assessment Committee (AAC, 2005).

This project began in January 2008, when students who had completed the Methods of Social Work Research and Evaluation (SWR 270) were invited to join a research project to survey graduates about their experiences since graduation. One student agreed to support the survey construction aspect of the survey process, and served as a research assistant to the project.

Literature Review

The first step of the project was to outline the direction of the current survey. The research assistant began with a review of the literature on graduate surveys, aligned draft questions to the Social Work Student Outcome Assessment plan and interviewed each faculty about content areas of significant interest. The last phase of the literature review process focused on the feedback loop data from the 2007 Student Outcome Assessment Retreat, and identified three topics for the open-ended questions: Comportment, personal growth from the university experiences and overall recommendations to improve the Social Work program.

Methodology

Design

Ex-post facto research design was chosen for the project. The independent variable, the past event, was identified as graduation from the social work program at University of Michigan – Flint between January 2003 and May 2007. The dependent variables as currently observed were identified as: employment experiences, graduate school experiences, and reflective perception of the social work curriculum.

A mailed survey was chosen as the method of data collection, measuring the dependent variable as self reports in a standardized mail survey techniques (Dillman, 1978)

Population

The entire cohort of students was included as a census study, rather than sample a smaller subset. Factors considered in this decision included the relatively small population, the strength of the research team as a large number of researchers, the political and economic benefits of including all students and the limits of statistical inferences to describe the real picture of graduates. The list of all Social Work graduates during this time period was obtained from the Office of the Registrar that identified the population as 189 students. A list of current addresses for these students were obtained from the Office of Alumni Relations.

Instrumentation-

The instrument was developed to improve on the work of previous surveys, and included repeat questions and added content emphasized in the literature review. Results of this process led to the identification of three major foci of the survey: employment experiences, graduate school experiences, and curriculum effectiveness. The literature review from the Student Outcome Assessment (2000) and Curriculum Policy Statement (1992) provided evidence to further emphasize generalist practice subdivide the instrument into the specific areas of field

placement, liberal arts, CSWE accreditation, practice skills, critical thinking skills, diversity and values and ethics. Two open ended questions about the transition to employment were removed. Additions to the survey included an explicit question to measure the program goals in 2004, and are delineated in question 25. Similarly, the fields of practice were expanded (Question 8) to reflect market specificity, roles performed in practice were added (Question 14) and Diversity measures were added (Question 25).

The final instrument contained 29 questions that were a combination of open ended, Likert Type attitude rating scales, nominal (yes/no) and ordinal ranking questions. The final instrument was approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee of the University of Michigan-Flint on January 24, 2008.

Procedures

The initial mailing was made on May 10, 2008. Each envelope included the survey instrument, a personalized cover letter, a stamped self-addressed return envelope. A second mailing, including an updated letter, return envelope and instrument was sent to all those graduates who had not returned the survey by June 12, 2008. At the final analysis stage, 18 students were identified as unreachable and 54 students completed the written survey, resulting in a final response rate of 31%.

Data Analysis **EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES**

Employment

The Social Work curriculum at the University of Michigan – Flint is a professional education program. Therefore, one of the curriculum outcome goals for the social work program is to prepare students for bachelor level employment as a generalist practitioner. One measure of the effectiveness of the curriculum to achieve this goal is based on the experiences of graduates as bachelor level employees within the social welfare system. This research project sought information about the graduates' employment experiences: Employability and Satisfaction.

Employability

Employability refers to the opportunities available to graduates' as a result of the degree status. Employability was measured as a series of variables: Employment status, Field of practice, Full time/part time employment, Employment Obligation, Job Title, Salary, and Benefits.

Employment Status

A critical measure of employability is the determination if graduates are employed and the explanation of why graduates were not employed. Graduates were asked about their current employment status. The mode was "yes" (88.9%, n=48) indicating that students are employed two years after graduation. Graduates who were not employed, cited two reasons - continuing their education or caring for children as the reason for not being employed.

Field of Practice

Field of practice refers to the work assignment as measured by the employment setting, type of clients served, and/or social issue addresses. The goal of the undergraduate curriculum is to prepare graduates as generalist practitioners and therefore eligibility for employment in a variety of fields of practice based on the individual interests and aptitudes of the graduate. Fields of practice was measured as a categorical variable in which graduates marked the field of

practice best representing their employment focus. Of those students who indicated they were currently employed (n=48), the modal response was “yes, a social work position” (95.8%, n=46) indicating that the majority are working in social work fields of practice. Graduates also indicated employment in a range of fields of practice (Table 1).

Table 1: Employment by Field of Practice

<u>Percentage Employed</u>	<u>Field of Practice</u>
8.7%	Gerontology
4.3%	Housing
19.6%	Child Welfare
2.2 %	Health, Fitness and Nutrition
2.2%	Hospital, Health Care, Rehabilitation
17.4%	Mental Health
8.7%	Developmental Disabilities
4.3%	Criminal Justice/Juvenile Justice
0.0%	Work Place/Employment
8.7 %	Substance Abuse
0.0%	Hospice
6.5%	School Social Work
17.4%	Other (home care, University, Salvation Army)

Employment Stability

Employment stability refers to the opportunities for full time employment and graduates’ experiences of sustained employment. The nature of graduates’ employment experiences is also quite varied. Half (45.8%) of the students who are employed report working hourly positions and the other half (54.2%) report working salaried positions. The majority of working graduates report working full time (mean number of hours worked = 38.2, s.d.= 8.95) although there is great variability in their part time and full time opportunities.

Students appear to be successful in maintaining their employment status over time. When asked “*How many months have you been employed since graduation?*” more than a 1/3 of all graduates were continuously employed since graduation (38%). Taking into account graduate school attendance which removed graduates from the workforce for at least 1 year, 75% of graduates were employed and within 3 months of graduation and remained continuously employed.

Job Title

Job title is important in social work as it reflects the perception of the employment community regarding the professional orientation necessary for the preparation of graduates. Job title was measured as an open-ended question “*What is your job title?*” Graduates reported great variability in their job title, however, three clusters emerged from their responses. The first group of responses reflected the majority of classifications of title around the primary task the graduate performed: Most graduates identified their job title as the primary task they performed “Case Manager” (n=14), “Administrator/Coordinator” (n=10), and “Therapist/Counselor” (n=8). The second group of responses reflected the status of the position relative to other positions in the agency: “Intake Worker” (n=3), Specialist (n=3), and Direct Care Worker (n=1). The third group reflected position titles relative to field of practice: School Social Worker (n=4). Probation Officer (n=1) and RN (n=1).

Salary

Since all the students worked prior to graduation, they desired to enhance their earning potential rather than simply establishing a minimum standard of living. A fundamental goal of students was to seek employment after graduation such that the salary would compensate for the economic sacrifice of college tuition and professional nature of their preparation.

In order to determine a legitimate estimation of the earning potential, graduates were asked to mark their salary within a range of \$4000.00 as an ordinal level of measurement. Graduates reported a modal salary of \$31-35,000. Table 2 outlines the dramatic variability that exists between graduates in salary earned (range from 15,000 to \$50,000).

Table 2: Annual Income as Full Time Equivalent

<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Annual Salary</u>
0.0 %	less than 15,000
2.2%	15,000 - 19,000
6.5%	19,001 - 23,000
13.0%	23,001 - 27,000
10.9%	27,001 - 31,000
26.1%	31,001 - 35,000
21.7%	35,001- 39,000
4.3%	39, 001- 43,000
6.5%	43,001 - 47,000
4.3%	47,001 - 50,000
4.3%	50,001 +

Benefits

Benefit packages that accompany salary, have become an integral aspect to quality of life measures within professional employment standards. Benefits were measured as a quantitative item designed as list of typical benefits offered and the response option as a dichotomous variable (yes no). Graduates indicated all the benefits they received. Table 3 indicates the percent of graduates who indicated they received each particular benefit. The five most frequently mentioned benefits were: vacation time (93.5%), Health Care, Dental/ Eye care (87.0%), Sick Leave (80.4%), full time work (78.3%), and In-service training (76.1%). Each graduate also indicated the number of benefits available. On average, graduates had six categories of benefits available (mode = 6; range = 9), only 2 graduates reported only 1 benefit, while 4 graduates reported 10 benefits. Every field of practice had at least one employee with at least 7 categories of benefits.

Table 3: Available Benefits

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Benefit</u>
78.3%	Full time work
65.2%	Flex Time
93.5%	Vacation Time
80.4%	Sick Leave
87.0%	Health Care/Dental Care / Eye Care

13.0%	Child/Dependent Care Subsidy or Services
69.6%	Retirement Benefits
21.7%	School Tuition
76.1%	In-service/Training
8.7%	Professional Membership
47.8%	Advancement Opportunities
13.0%	Other, (Annuity, Other insurances, summer off)

Interpretation of Employment Status

The employment status of graduates appears to be quite favorable. The vast majority of graduates are employed, earn salaries and receive benefits that afford them a minimum quality of life. Their employment positions are predominantly within social work. Once employed, graduates reported great stability in their retention of employment status.

The University of Michigan-Flint curriculum goal of generalist practice appears to be successful in the evidence of the variety of fields of practice where graduates report being employed.

Two areas of concern emerge. First, the great variability of compensation (salary and benefits) provides evidence that some graduates do not experience appropriate employment opportunities. Low wages, few benefits, part time employment, and lengthy job searches characterize some graduates' post degree employment experiences.

Second, the great variability in the professional nature of graduates' positions suggests discrepancies in the professional orientation of the employing agencies. The fact that a majority of employing agencies use job titles associated with practice methods rather than professional affiliation, may reflect a challenge to the public perception of social work as a profession.

Employment Satisfaction

Employment satisfaction refers to the graduates' perceptions of the value of their employment opportunities. Employment satisfaction was measured as a series of variables in the survey categorized by three organizing constructs: Employment decisions, the graduates' preparation for employment, and the graduates' job experiences.

Employment Decision Making

Preparation as a generalist practitioner provides a wide array of possible employment settings, and allows the graduate to be selective about the setting they pursue. In an effort to determine how graduates create limits to manage all the possibilities, quantitative questions were included in the survey.

Decision making was measured quantitatively as a list of typical factors impacting employment decisions. Graduates were offered response options as a dichotomous variable (yes no) in which graduates indicated all the factors they considered. When asked "*Which of the following factors did you consider when exploring employment options since graduation?*" the top five criteria for choosing an employment setting were: Salary (78.3%), Location (78.3%), Job Responsibilities (76.1%), Hours of employment (65.2%) and Field of Practice (67.4%) Graduates reported a complex priority setting strategy unique to their circumstances (Table 4).

Table 4: Factors Influencing Employment Decisions

<u>Percent</u> <u>Graduates</u>	<u>Factor</u>
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78.3%	Location close to home
65.2%	Hours of employment
45.7%	Flexibility with family obligations
78.3%	Salary
58.7%	Benefits
47.8%	Agency reputation in the community
45.7%	Perception of agency values
67.4%	Field of practice related to personal interest
76.1%	Job responsibilities related to social work
19.6%	Profession of supervisor
39.1%	Opportunity for advancement
19.6%	Perceived stress of the job
4.5%	Other (flexibility with MSW study, offering full time work)

Job Search Advice

Graduates were asked to reflect on their job search experience to identify what strategies were helpful to their success. When asked “What advice would you offer to current students about employment after graduation?” There were five themes that emerged as graduates provided encouragement to new students. The most frequent recommendation was related to personal interest and fit with agency (n=11), to which graduates attributed both personal satisfaction and community gains: One graduate wrote “Ensure that agency mission/values align with your own within the profession. This allow you to work efficiently and enjoy the environment you are in, avoiding unnecessary stress and burn out.” And another graduate wrote “I would advise students to choose a job that you not only have interest in but something you are passionate about. Social Workers are in a position to make a difference in the lives of our fellow community members and this responsibility privilege should not be taken lightly.”

The second most frequently mentioned theme was “Networking,” (n=7) as graduates reported great value in relationships to identify job opportunities and insights into particular agencies. As one graduate wrote “Networking is extremely vital in any social work position, making a good reputation and name for yourself is vital also. I found in my area of social work doing voluntary tasks and offering my services for free for a limited time impressed those who interviewed me. Interviews are difficult, know all areas when you concentrate on ethics the questions may be all about administration and the role of administration.”

The third most frequently mentioned theme was “starting early,” (n=7) as graduates pointed out the value of accessing opportunities for employment while still a student. On graduate reported: “Don’t wait till graduation to start looking for a job, start sending our resumes two months in advance. Also apply for a variety of positions.” And another stated “Be prepared to take a “starter” job while continually looking for your ideal position.”

The fourth most frequently mentioned theme was “continue to learn” (n= 4) as graduates encourage students to anticipated graduate school and licensure expectations. One graduate wrote “If at all possible continue to learn and get your LLBSW there is a lot of recognition for it with possibilities for the right job or advancements.” And another stated “These days it is of upmost importance to continue your education with a masters degree.”

The fifth most frequently mentioned theme was labeled “Generalist Practice” (n=3) which reflected graduates awareness of the value of using the degree to serve different populations as they changed interest areas and employing agencies. As one graduate reported “Keep an open mind. I only wanted to work with children when I started out but I am working with adults with mental illness and guess what, not only do I LOVE IT, I’m GOOD at it.(sic)”

Preparation for Employment

The social work curriculum is guided by the intention to prepare generalist practitioners (Curriculum Policy Statement, 1992). Little information has been documented however, about how this curriculum is translated by employing agencies as specific and necessary skills for completing the job and the relative emphasis of specific responsibilities. Although each field of practice is unique and each employment setting has context specific expectations, there is the assumption within generalist practice that there are universal tasks and skills that all students should learn in order to be successfully employed.

In an attempt to identify which tasks and skills students would find useful, the graduates were asked to rate how frequently they used each of the key tasks and skills identified as generalist practice elements. Median scores below 4 were considered significant job responsibilities, and 20 elements of generalist practice were identified as universal employment responsibilities (Table 5).

The high variability (range = 4) of all the generalist practice elements was an important indicator of the relative significance of the other elements of generalist practice. Although they are not universal elements of the daily work of the majority of graduates, some graduates reported completing these tasks frequently.

Table 5: Use of Generalist Practice Skills in Employment Settings

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Median</u>
DSM IV	4	5	4
Planned Change Process	1	4	1
Report Writing			
Initial plans of intervention	1	4	1
Measurable outcomes	1	4	1
Evaluate your own practice	1,4	4	3
Case notes - record keeping	1	4	1
Agency reports	1	4	2
Conference-journal articles	5	4	4
Client progress reports	1	4	1
Presentations			
Presenting at conferences	4,5	4	4
Presenting to the public	4,5	4	4
Presenting to agency staff and officials	4	3	4
Presenting to client groups	4	4	4
Work Settings			
Independent work, or working alone	1	3	1
Working with a partner	1	4	2
Working with a team	1	3	2
Working on a committee	4	4	4
Roles			
Case management	1	4	1
Advocacy	1	4	1
Behavior Changer	1	4	1
Caregiver	5	5	4
Community Planning	4	4	4
Consultant	1	4	2
Data Manager	2	4	3
Evaluator	1	4	2
Mediator	1, 2	4	2
Mobilizer	1	5	2
Teacher	1	4	1

Key: Mode of 1=Daily, 2=Weekly, 3=Monthly, 4=Infrequently, 5=Never

In an effort to identify the graduates' perception of their preparation for employment, graduates were asked "Please rate your perceptions of how well the social work curriculum at University of Michigan-Flint prepared you for employment." Graduates indicated that the University of Michigan-Flint social work curriculum was quite adequate in preparing them for employment. Graduates indicated that their perception "strongly agreed" (mode= 1) or "agreed" (mode =2) with each of specific aspects of the curriculum identified as preparation for employment (Table 6).

There were also curricular areas that could be strengthened to employability of students. High variability (range=3) indicated some discrepancy in the rating of a curriculum objective. Items of particular concern indicated some "dissatisfaction" (range =3) with their preparation for the outcome objective. Although variability was an important quality indicator, a very small number of graduates indicated "dissatisfaction". Based on the number of graduates who reported "dissatisfaction" (scores 4 or 5), Table 6 provides evidence for attention to preparation for: knowledge needed for employment.

Table 6: Perception of Preparation for Employment

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 4 or 5 scores</u>
My supervisor perceives me as well prepared.	1	4	6
My employer perceives UMF as a good program.	1	4	4
My education prepared me well for the transition to employment.	1	4	7
I received adequate instruction on the appropriate roles of a social worker.	1	4	6
I obtained useful skills for employment.	1	4	7
My education allowed me to gain the knowledge I need for employment.	1	4	9
I received guidance to adjust my attitude about people.	1	4	6
I receive support to develop a professional attitude about social work.	1	3	6
I was adequately prepared to work with people in other professions.	1	4	6
Group projects prepared me to work as a team member in interventions.	1	4	7

Key: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

Employment Readiness

The social work program maintains an explicit goal to prepare students for professional employment. In an effort to identify areas where the curriculum can be improved, the survey contained an open ended question for graduates about what could be improved. Five themes emerged from answers to the question: *Please describe here, any aspects of your job that you were not adequately prepared to handle and that we could improve in the Social Work Program at University of Michigan – Flint*

The most frequently mentioned need was "none" (n=7). One graduate reported "I can't think of any, and I have yet to run across a situation that we did not study upon." And another reported "I had my doubts, but I quickly learned I was fully prepared."

The second most frequently mentioned need was "dealing with agency bureaucracies" (n= 6), within which graduates mentioned not being prepared for the rules and processes of paperwork, problem solving and advancement. One graduate reported " Paperwork and handling administration and bureaucracy better." Another reported "There is no chance for advancement.

The training that I received from the university was great, but I was not prepared for a position that did not allow for advancement.”

The third most frequently mentioned area was “stress and coping” (n=4). One graduate reported “The stress and demand of the job. Time management skills would be extremely helpful.” And another reported: “Although I felt extremely prepared professionally, I did not realize the amount of stress that is involved when working with people at risk with high needs.”

The fourth most frequently mentioned need was “ Co-worker Relationships,” (n=4), which reflected comments from graduates about difficult relationships within agencies. One graduate wrote “I think it would be beneficial to have a class of how to deal with “difficult” colleagues. It seems social work is applied for everyone at the agency including staff. It’s a tough job.” And another reported “My first year I made some enemies unfortunately for me because I spoke out on students being treated unfairly and being set up for failure.”

The fifth category is labeled “Individual Items” and is the compilation of specific ideas that were mentioned by only one graduate. This category includes “Cultural Diversity, i.e., beliefs, values attitudes,” “more life experience,” “hands on experiences,” private and public agency differences,” “maintaining professional values and avoiding professional drift,” “group work,” “case notes and documentation,” “counseling therapy,” and “transition to professional life.”

Interpretation:

Interpretation of graduates’ responses to employment satisfaction indicated that graduates are typically satisfied with the employment experiences they have. The University of Michigan-Flint curriculum goal of generalist practice appears to be successful as evidenced in the variables of employment satisfaction.

- Graduates reported that they have a relatively short transition from school to employment.
- Graduates reported that they are able to find employment that matches the factors they identified as important to their decision-making.
- Graduates report being well prepared for employment.
- Graduates offered suggestions to the new graduates that are consistent with appropriate job search strategies for other professions.
- Graduates reported great variability in the use of the skills taught them, which is consistent with expectations for generalist practice.
- Graduates reported that they were well received within the employment arena.

One area of concern emerged. A significant discrepancy was reported between the variables measuring recruitment and retention of a job and subsequent employment satisfaction. The decision- making factors for choosing an employment agency appear to be necessary but insufficient considerations for the graduates’ employment satisfaction.

- Curriculum content needs to include skills that address the issues that sustained social work practice as well as immediate employability concerns in order to socialize graduates to a long-term commitment.
- One opportunity to increase satisfaction with their employment experiences is to prepare them better for the political and external factors that impact client outcomes.

Graduate School Experiences

Knowledge building for social work practice is a continuous process. Professionals within social work must stay connected to the emerging research on appropriate theory and practice. Since the Social Work curriculum at the University of Michigan – Flint is a professional education program, it is imperative that students be prepared to continue their education beyond the bachelors degree. The effectiveness of the curriculum to achieve this goal was measured by graduates’ experiences in continuing education opportunities and master degree studies.

Continuing Education Experiences

The profession of social work maintains a value orientation toward continuing education. Graduates’ participation in continuing education was measured in two areas: Continuing education and graduate school attendance.

Continuing Education Options

Results of the survey indicated that graduates participated in a wide variety of continuing education activities beyond the bachelor degree. Table 7 details the range and depth of activities graduates used to further their education. At least two thirds of the graduates reported using four strategies for continuing their education including: Professional workshops/conferences (79.6%), Use of library/computer (75.9%), Agency training (77.8%), and Interview/consult other professionals (66.7%). Reading professional journals was also significant to more than half of all reporting graduates (59.3%).

All graduates reported using at least one strategy to remain current in the wisdom of the profession. More than half of graduates reported using 5 or more opportunities to continue their education (62%), with a significant percent using at least 8 (bi-modal 6, 8).

Table 7: Continuing Education Activities

<u>Percent Graduates Participating</u>	<u>Activity</u>
77.8 %	Agency training or in-service
48.1%	Membership in NASW
29.6%	Other professional organization membership
79.6%	Professional workshops/conferences
59.3%	Read professional journals
44.4%	Established a mentor/mentee relationship
75.9%	Use of library/computer
66.7%	Interview/consult other professionals
27.8%	Attend college courses
7.4%	Other (supervise interns, on township planning commission)

Graduate School Status

Graduates were asked about their plans for and experiences with continuing their education in graduate school. Results indicated that within 3 years of graduating with a bachelor's degree, almost half of the graduates had initiated (n=11, 22%) or finished their masters degree [n = 12, 24%]. An additional 40% (n=20) of the graduates were considering graduate school up to 3 years after graduation but had not yet chosen a program.

The graduates who continued their study at the masters level cited three major reasons for continuing to study. The first reason related to the individual's ability to advance within the profession (n=11). The second reason related to the individual's desire to continue to learn (n= 5). The third reason related to the individual's desire to specialize in a field of practice: (school social work n=3, psycho-therapy n=1).

Interpretation:

Results indicated that the objectives for continuing education and graduate school attendance are met and exceeded. Opportunities for continuing education experiences appear to be readily available and frequently used by graduates. Five different sources of continuing education experiences were used by at least 75% of graduates. Similarly, graduates were successful attending graduate school. Almost half of the graduates had attended graduate school and pursued advanced study in social work.

Interpretation of this data led to the conclusion that there was no need to change the continuing education or graduate school preparation content of the curriculum.

Graduate School Experiences

The terminal degree for direct practice within profession of social work is a master's degree in social work. One measure of the effectiveness of the curriculum to achieve this goal is based on the experiences of graduates in the graduate school process. Three areas of graduates' experiences were measured: graduates' motivation, obstacles experienced and the graduates' perception of their preparation for graduate studies.

Graduate School Motivation

Graduate school represents a significant commitment of personal resources and the sacrifices of alternative activities. In light of this significance, the decision to attend graduate school is often an involved process of priority setting and logistic arrangements.

Graduates were asked an open-ended question to explore how students arrived at a decision to attend graduate school. Graduates' responses to the question: *What motivated you to go to graduate school?* can be organized around three priorities. The graduates who continued their study at the masters level cited three major reasons for continuing to study. The first reason related to the individual's ability to advance within the profession (n=11). The second reason related to the individual's desire to continue to learn (n= 5). The third reason related to the individual's desire to specialize in a field of practice: (school social work n=3, psycho-therapy n=1).

Obstacles to Graduate School

The decision to attend graduate school requires that graduates resolve the barriers to continued studies. The unique geographic and demographic variables of the student population in the University of Michigan – Flint social work program creates the possibility that obstacles faced by non-traditional students may differ from obstacles typically identified. In an attempt to identify any unique concerns, obstacles were measured as a quantitative item designed as list of typical obstacles identified by students, and the response option as a dichotomous variable (yes no). Graduates were asked to indicate all the obstacles they experienced continuing their education.

Five factors were identified by graduates as obstacles to a masters degree. These factors emerged as a frequency rating and included: Financial Aid/Tuition (50.0%), Family Obligations (35.0%), Travel (25.0%), Employment Conflicts (25.0%) and Programs Not Available (20.0%). Table 8 includes other less frequently mentioned items.

Table 8: Obstacles to Graduate Studies

<u>Percent Graduates Participating</u>	<u>Obstacle</u>
10.3 %	Lack of interest in school
61.5%	Financial aid/ Tuition too high
7.7%	Programs not available
56.4%	Travel, commute
46.2%	Employment conflicts
53.8 %	Family obligations
8.0%	Unaware of opportunities
5.1%	Unable to be accepted by program
10.3 %	I like what I am currently doing
17.9 %	other (health issues, health care costs, diversity of graduate faculty, wanted more direct experience)

Preparation for Graduate School

In an effort to identify the graduates’ perception of their preparation for employment, graduates were asked “*Please rate your perceptions of how well the social work curriculum at University of Michigan-Flint prepared you for graduate studies.*” Graduates indicated that the University of Michigan-Flint social work curriculum prepared them for graduate school. Graduates indicated that their perception “strongly agreed” (mode= 1) with each of specific aspects of the curriculum identified as preparation for graduate studies (Table 10). One area of further curriculum review was identified as “Faculty of graduate school perceive UMF as a good program,” by the significant variability in scores (range =4).

Table 9: Perception of Preparation for Graduate Studies

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>
I was well prepared for graduate school.	1	2
Faculty of the graduate school perceive UMF as a good program.	1	4
I was well prepared for the transition to graduate school.	1	2
I knew a lot of social work theory before starting graduate school.	1	3
I had the necessary library skills to be successful in graduate school.	1	1
I was better at professional writing than my graduate school peers.	1	3
I knew enough about research to be successful in graduate school.	1	3
The practice skills I learned at UMF prepared me for my graduate school field placement.	1	3

Key: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly disagree

Interpretation:

Results indicated that the objectives for graduate school experiences are met but not exceeded.

- Graduates were motivated to attend graduate school by factors that were directly influenced by advanced study (i.e., advancement, knowledge and credentialing).
- Graduates indicated that they face obstacles to graduate school that were consistent with the expectations of graduate school, not the result of bachelor curriculum limitations.
- Graduates reported that the University of Michigan-Flint curriculum offered adequate preparation for graduate studies.

Curriculum Evaluation

The mission of the social work program states that the intention of the curriculum is to prepare graduates for employment and/or graduate study as a generalist practitioner. The survey included questions regarding: 1. The comprehensive curriculum and Generalist Practice and 2. Focused study of six curriculum areas (field placement, liberal arts, practice skills, critical thinking skills, diversity and values and ethics).

Comprehensive Curriculum

In an attempt to measure graduates’ perception of the strengths and weaknesses of the UM-Flint curriculum, graduates were asked questions about the four program goals and respective outcome objectives and preparation as a “generalist practitioner.”

Goals and Outcome Objectives

The social work curriculum is detailed by 13 student outcome objectives. The outcome objectives were further clarified to sixteen statements. These sixteen statements were rated by graduates according to their perceptions of their preparation for each of the program objectives. Overall, graduates reported great satisfaction with their preparation under the UM-Flint curriculum (Table 10). Each of the four goals and subset of 16 outcome objectives were rated

“satisfied” (mode=4) or “greatly satisfied”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about the specific curriculum content.

There were curricular areas identified that could be strengthened. High variability (range=3) indicated some discrepancy in the rating of a curriculum objective. Items of particular concern indicate some “dissatisfaction” (range =4) with their preparation for the outcome objective. Although variability is an important quality indicator, a very small number of graduates indicated dissatisfaction. Based on the number of graduates who reported dissatisfaction (scores 1 or 2), evidence exists for attention to preparation in one curricular area “Evaluate and apply current research findings to one’s personal practice and the practice of other relevant professional systems.” (Table 10).

Generalist Practice

Generalist practice is defined within the social work program as the primary method of intervention in Bachelor level of practice (BSW). Five questions were used to measure graduates’ perceptions of their readiness to practice as a generalist BSW. Preparation as a generalist practitioner requires that each graduate be prepared to implement each of these five elements. Results of graduates’ rating of their perception of the preparation for each of the five elements are detailed in Table 11.

Overall, graduates reported agreement with statements that indicated they were prepared for generalist practice. Each of the five statements about generalist practice were rated with “agree” (mode=4) or “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about the specific curriculum content.

There are generalist practice areas that could be strengthened. High variability (range=3,4) indicated some discrepancy in the rating of a generalist practice element. Items of particular concern indicated “disagreement” (range =3+) with positive statements about their preparation in generalist practice elements. However, a very small number of graduates reported disagreement. Based on the number of graduates who reported disagreement (scores 1 or 2), the focus on curriculum enhancement should be on “implementing the 8 step Planned Change Effort” (Table 11).

Table 10: Satisfaction with Preparation by Program Goal and Objective

	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
Program Goal 1			
Effectively utilize critical thinking in practice settings.	5	4	1
Embody the values and ethics of the social work profession.	5	4	1
Exhibit a consistent sense of professionalism in interactions with others.	5	4	1
Demonstrate an appreciation of the tradition and history of the social work profession and exhibit a working knowledge of important emerging professional trends.	5	3	1
Adapt the knowledge and skills of generalist social work to practice settings of varying sizes and approaches.	5	4	1
Utilize knowledge of bio-psycho-social characteristics as they apply to individual behavior as a means to understand interactions among and between individual and the various social structures they encounter.	5	4	1
Demonstrate the ability to respond to appropriate supervision in the practice setting.	4,5	4	1
Program Goal 2			
Demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the positive value of diversity.	5	4	1
Understand the origins and workings of oppression and discrimination and demonstrate the ability to implement change in order to advance social and economic justice.	5	4	1
Communicate appropriately and effectively with the variety of audiences regularly encountered in social work practice.	5	3	1
Exhibit the ability to differentially assess and apply appropriate intervention skills necessary to serve diverse populations.	5	4	1
Program Goal 3			
Exhibit the ability to operate successfully within a complex organization and to successfully utilize appropriate change strategies as necessary.	5	4	1
Demonstrate insight into the impact of social policies upon client systems, workers and agencies.	5	3	1
Engage in collaborative efforts to promote social justice.	5	4	1
Program Goal 4			
Evaluate and apply current research findings to one's personal practice and the practice of other relevant professional systems.	4	4	5
Demonstrate quality within one's personal practice and continuous growth in the knowledge and skills of the profession.	5	4	2

Key: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Table 11: Perception of Generalist Practice Preparation

<u>Item</u>	<u>Number</u>		
	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>1 or 2 scores</u>
I was prepared to work with different types of people.	5	4	2
I was ready to work with individuals, families, groups and communities.	5	2	1
I know how to implement the 8 step Planned Change Effort.	4	3	2
I learned how to intervene based on the client and issue.	5	4	1
I learned the principles of generalist practice.	5	4	1

Key: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Interpretation:

Interpretation of this data leads to the conclusion that the goals for the comprehensive curriculum were met.

- Graduates reported that they were adequately prepared for each of the 4 goals.
- Graduates reported one specific curriculum objective, “*Evaluate and apply current research findings to one’s personal practice and the practice of other relevant professional systems*” could be strengthened:
- Graduates reported adequate preparation for generalist practice.

Field Placement

The accredited curriculum in social work has a foundation experience titled Field Placement that requires students to have direct experience as a social work intern within a human service agency. This experience is conceptualized as an experiential learning providing an opportunity to apply the academic curriculum to the direct interaction with clients. Field placement is a critical aspect of the curriculum and should be assessed from the graduates’ perspective.

Perception of Field placement was measured using seven likert scale items to measure graduates’ perspectives on components of the field placement experience. Overall, graduates reported agreement with statements that indicate they were prepared by their field placement. Six of the seven statements about field placement were rated with “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about the specific curriculum content (Table 12).

There are also field placement elements that could be strengthened. High variability (range=4) indicated some discrepancy in the rating of a field placement element. Although variability was an important quality indicator, a very small number of graduates indicated that they disagreed with a positive statement about field placement. Based on the number of graduates who reported disagreement (scores 1 or 2), evidence suggests that further attention is warranted in area of: *I would recommend my field placement to other students.* (Table 12).

There is one statement “*My field placement was similar to the work I do now.*” which was rated as “disagree” (mode=1). On this item, there was also extreme variability (range=5) and a significant number of graduates (n=21) reported “disagreement” with this statement (Table 12). This statement refers to the similarity between their current employment setting and the particular agency in which they completed the field placements assignment. Since the goal of the undergraduate education is generalist practice, this rating was interpreted as a positive

response. Disagreement supports the goal to prepare graduates to adapt what they learn in their field placement to a variety of employment settings.

Table 12: Perception of Field Placement

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
My field placement supervisor was helpful to me.	5	4	8
My field placement helped me grow professionally.	5	4	5
Experiences in field placement prepared me for life.	5	4	7
I would recommend my field placement to other students.	5	4	11
Field placement prepared me for the transition to work.	5	4	7
I had a positive relationship with my field placement supervisor.	5	4	7
My field placement was similar to the work I do now.	1	4	21

Key: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Interpretation:

Interpretation of these findings leads to the conclusion that the goals of field placement experiences were met.

- Graduates reported the perception that field placement was a positive experience for integrating academic work with real life experiences.
- Graduates reported favorable outcomes for the generalist practice goals of the curriculum based on the nature of the experiences they have in field placement and the relationship of field placement and post- graduation employment.

Liberal Arts

Liberal Arts is the foundation curriculum of the social work degree, as outlined by the Council on Social Work Education. At the time the graduates of this survey were students at the University of Michigan-Flint, the general education program was defined by the liberal arts, and regulated by the College of Arts and Sciences and adopted by the Social Work program. This liberal arts curriculum includes two courses in English writing, 3 courses in humanities, 3 courses in the social sciences, 2 courses with labs in the natural sciences, 1 course in the fine arts, three courses in an “area option” (e.g., values inquiry) and two courses in a foreign language.

Graduates’ perceptions of the liberal arts curriculum provided information about the overall quality of the curriculum. Overall, graduates reported agreement with statements that indicate they were prepared by the liberal arts curriculum (Table 13). Each of the eight statements about liberal arts were rated “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about a specific liberal arts concept.

There are liberal arts areas that could be strengthened. High variability (range=4) indicated some discrepancy in the rating of each liberal art component. Although variability is an important quality indicator, a very small number of graduates indicated disagreement (scores of 1,2). Based on the number of graduates who reported “disagreement,” attention should be made to how the curriculum advances the concept of “The courses I completed outside of social work were important to my learning.”

Table 13: Perception of Liberal Arts Curriculum

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
The courses I completed outside of social work were important to my learning.	5	4	6
I learned how to analyze information at UMF.	5	4	2
I was prepared for citizenship at UMF.	5	4	3
I learned to participate in public life at UMF.	5	4	3
My education transformed my thinking.	5	4	2
I was empowered by my education.	5	4	1
My education changed my life.	5	4	1
My education made me a “well rounded” person.	5	4	1

Key: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Interpretation:

The purpose of liberal arts to diversify the content of student learning, enrich student thinking processes and transform student affective perspective appears to have been met for a majority of graduates. The existence of a few but strongly oppositional perspectives may indicate a need for more flexibility in the alternatives available for the liberal arts component of the undergraduate degree.

Interpretation of this data led to the conclusion that there was no need to change the liberal arts curriculum for the majority of the students. Alternatives to the foreign language may be appropriate for a focused and select few students.

Practice Skills

Professional education seeks to prepare graduates who are qualified to integrate cognitive, affective and behavioral domains of learning. The profession of social work uses the term “practice skill” to refer to the pattern of instruction which begins with attention to the behavioral domains (i.e., how to intervene) and evolves toward integration of all the domains into “practice.” Students are evaluated by prospective employers and/or graduate school admissions programs based on how well they “practice” as an integration of all the learning domains. Since practice skills are integral to post-graduation success, graduates were asked to rate the practice skill instruction they received at University of Michigan – Flint. Overall, graduates reported agreement with statements that indicated they were prepared with practice skills (Table 14). Each of the six statements about practice skills were rated with “agree” (mode=4) or “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about the practice skill curriculum.

There are also practice skill areas that could be strengthened. High variability (range=4) indicated some discrepancy in the rating of a curriculum objective. Although variability was an important quality indicator, a very small number of graduates reported disagreement (scores 1 or 2). Practice Skill Curriculum areas that could be improved are: “adequate opportunities to practice interviewing skills” and “role plays” (Table 14).

Table 14: Perception of Practice Skills Curriculum

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
I learned how to communicate with many people.	5	4	1
I learned to write well.	5	4	2
I had adequate opportunities to practice interviewing skills.	4	4	9
I learned how to assess client needs.	5	4	3
I was taught to involve clients in problem solving.	5	4	1
The role-plays prepared me for professional practice.	5	4	7

Key: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Interpretation:

Interpretation of this data leads to the conclusion that there was a need to improve student learning by offering opportunities to complete role-plays and practice interviewing skills within the existing curriculum.

Although graduates reported being well prepared for the variety of tasks and topics included in their practice, there are a significant number of special topics or context specific areas not covered in the curriculum. The transferability and magnitude of the influence of these topics across the cohort is not known. Similarly, the life long learning skills used by graduates to resolve the discrepancy between what they learned and what they have to do on the job has not been clarified.

Critical Thinking

Social work is both an art and a science. The professional practice of social work requires the integration of knowledge, values and purpose with practice technique. Critical thinking skills are necessary for the integration process and represents the graduate’s ability to connect what they have learned academically and experientially within the curriculum to new and challenging situations they experience as graduates. In an attempt to determine graduates’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the curriculum in facilitating this integration, critical thinking skills were measured using likert scale items.

Overall, graduates reported agreement with statements that indicated they were prepared for critical thinking (Table 15). Each of the five statements about critical thinking were rated “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about critical thinking content. All items indicated a high variability (range=4) , however, the number of graduates who reported disagreement with the positive statements was too small to be considered significant (Table 16).

Table 16: Perception of Critical Thinking Curriculum

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
I learned how to apply theories to real situations.	5	4	1
I am able to recognize when a client is different from theory.	5	4	2
I am able to make appropriate judgments from conflicting observations.	5	4	2
I was taught to gather information efficiently.	5	4	1
I use critical thinking to maintain objectivity.	5	4	1

Key: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Interpretation

Interpretation of this data led to the conclusion that there was no need to change the curriculum to enhance critical thinking skills in graduates.

Diversity

Diversity is a component of the “purposes” of social work as defined by Bartlett’s definition of social work as a profession. The University of Michigan-Flint has adopted position statements that indicate support for a curriculum that emphasizes the positive value of diversity and the commitment to the alleviation of poverty and oppression. This position statement is represented by diversity content that is infused throughout the curriculum. Likert scale items were used to measure the graduates’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the infusion of the diversity content.

Overall, graduates reported agreement with statements that indicated they were prepared in diversity content (Table 16). The six statements about diversity were rated “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about the specific diversity content. High variability (range=4) indicated some discrepancy in the rating of diversity experiences, however, this variability was extremely weak as only one graduate rated “disagreement” on the items (Table 16).

Table 16: Perception of Diversity Curriculum

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
I am able to recognize populations at risk for oppression.	5	4	1
I was encouraged to appreciate diversity.	5	4	1
Inter-racial communication skills were taught well.	4	4	2
I recognize different coping strategies used by clients who are members of minority groups.	4	4	1
I understand how experiences of oppression can limit a client’s ability to trust me.	5	4	1
I was prepared to communicate with diverse groups.	5	4	1

Key: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Interpretation

Results indicate that the objectives for Diversity Curriculum were met. Interpretation of this data led to the conclusion that there is no need to change the curriculum to enhance understanding of diversity in graduates.

Values and Ethics

Values and Ethics are connected as one of the four elements of the definition of social work as a profession. The University of Michigan-Flint has adopted the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics and an adaptation of Beistick’s definition of social work values. This content is infused throughout the curriculum. Likert scale items were used to measure the graduates’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the infusion of the values and ethics curriculum.

Overall, graduates reported agreement with statements that indicated they were prepared in curriculum areas of values and ethics (Table 17). Six of the seven statements about values and ethics were rated with “agree” (mode=4) or “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about the specific curriculum content. Each of these six statements demonstrated low variability (range=3) indicating that no graduates strongly disagreed with the statements (Table 17). Similarly, very few graduates (i.e., 1 or 2) reported “disagree” to the positive statements.

One statement was rated “strongly disagree” (mode=1). “*The value of confidentiality was over-emphasized when compared to real life.*” was worded as a negative statement about the curriculum. Disagreement in this situation suggests approval for the curriculum content on values and ethics (Table 17). This statement had a relatively large variability (range = 4), however only one individual indicated support for the statement (Table 17).

Table 17: Perception of Values and Ethics Curriculum

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
I learned about social work values in several classes.	5	3	2
The program helped me learn how to apply social work values to real life.	5	3	1
I was encouraged to maintain social work values despite value conflicts.	5	3	1
I understand the importance of the NASW Code of Ethics.	5	3	1
The value of confidentiality was over-emphasized when compared to real life.	1	3	54
The value of self-determination is appropriately emphasized for the real world.	5	3	1
The value of human dignity and worth as taught at UMF is critical to good social work practice.	4	3	1

Key: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Interpretation

Results indicated that the objectives for the Values and Ethics Curriculum were met. Interpretation of this data led to the conclusion that there was no need to change the values and ethics content of the curriculum.

Discussion

The statistical and qualitative results of this research project described above were presented to the social work faculty for a series of discussions about the significance of the findings. Discussions were guided by efforts to identify curriculum strengths and challenges, with an ultimate goal of establishing an agenda for program improvement. The discussions were organized by the original three foci of the project: employment experiences, graduate school experiences, and curriculum effectiveness. Highlights of these discussions are detailed below.

Employment: Four conclusions were made regarding the graduates' employment experiences.

- Faculty were very impressed by the employment opportunities graduates' experience. Graduates are hired quickly. They remain employed over a long period of time. They are compensated with a salary range and benefits that allow them a quality of life. They are employed in a wide variety of agencies and work with a diverse population of clients. It appears that the social work program and specifically the curriculum is successful in preparing students for professional employment.
- The term "professional drift" was used to describe the phenomena that was evidenced by the discrepancy between professional affiliation and job title. Faculty discussion indicated an need to enhance curriculum content on Professional Self. Three strategies were identified as goals for achieving this outcome: 1. Emphasis on social work professional orientation as distinguished from other professional actions in the junior year course work (SWK 250, 310, 311, 320, and 325). 2. Encouraging membership in professional organizations, particularly NASW early in the academic study and particularly focused in the transition course to the senior year, SWK 399, 420, 430 and 3. Requiring identification of the professional self as a social worker at the senior level (e.g., Class exercise SWK 430).
- Faculty discussed graduates' report of dissatisfaction with their employment experiences. The areas of dissatisfaction highlighted were graduates aversion to politics and challenges to client outcomes. It was recognized that these dissatisfactions were not the result of curriculum weakness or omissions of content. Instead these topics were interpreted as opportunities to better prepare graduates for these experiences through infusion of content throughout the curriculum on bureaucratic and interpersonal politics as well as content on multi-system impact on client outcomes. This content can be included in the presentation of systems theory (SWK 320 & 311), research(SWK 250 & 400), policy and policy making (SWK 310) micro and macro human behavior (SWK 320, 325), practice classes (SWK 311, 420, 421, 430, 431) and case studies throughout the curriculum.

- Faculty discussion identified the discrepancy between the educational focus on preparing students for “generalist” practice and the employment patterns seeking “specialist” practice. Faculty identified the need to focus on both students and the employment setting regarding the issues associated with this discrepancy. Focusing on students, the curriculum can be designed to emphasize the inclusive nature of the generalist practice so that graduates can articulate the range of capabilities they have to employers. This may be accomplished by having graduates practice interview questions of this nature prior to graduation (e.g., What is your theoretical orientation?). This goal may also be achieved by having senior level students compare their philosophy with the field placement agency’s orientation to clients. Similarly, the curriculum can focus more clearly on distinguishing theories of practice (i.e., behavior theory) from theories of understanding (i.e., systems theory) so that graduates can articulate more clearly their understanding of the relationship between gathering information, interpreting the information and planning interventions in a way that employers will appreciate their skills. This may be improved in the junior year curriculum when theories are presented and the planned change process is introduced and practiced in case studies.

Graduate School: Three conclusions were made regarding the respondents’ graduate school experiences.

- The program outcome goal of preparing graduates for life long learning appears to be achieved based on the behaviors of graduates. Graduates appear to participate in several continuing education opportunities and their employment settings appear to substantiate the importance of continuing education.
- Graduates perceive themselves as well prepared for graduate school in academic and professional socialization. The difficulties they experience in graduate school (i.e., finances, obligations and travel) are beyond the scope of the undergraduate curriculum. Faculty discussion about students’ graduate school experiences revealed significant concern for the quality of education our students are receiving and how they are socialized to professional action. Faculty determined that further discussion was necessary to clarify a program position statement regarding the program role in furthering the graduate’s experiences which included responses to four issues: What should be the on-going commitment of the program to graduates and their professional performance? What needs for graduate study and professional development are not met in the current graduate school opportunities? What is the range of responsibilities we may have toward masters degree programs? What strategies are available to the program to mediate the discrepancies between students’ needs and available resources?
- Faculty discussion recognized the importance of research and library skills and noted the intended infusion of this content throughout the curriculum. Faculty observed that several significant changes to this content have already been created in the two years since this cohort graduated including: requiring research based term papers in each social work class and separation of the evaluation of practice paper from the research methods course (sophomore level) to the senior level integrative seminar. Future strategies to

enrich these skills are discussed in the curriculum changes suggested in the subsequent section of this report.

Curriculum Content: Each of the ten curriculum areas included in the survey were discussed by the faculty. Separate summaries of the conclusions are detailed here.

- Faculty discussed the results of the generalist practice questions at great length. Two themes emerged from these discussions.
 - The common understanding of the distinctions between generalist and specialist education as paralleled with undergraduate and graduate studies was made. Subsequently, commitment to generalist practice was reaffirmed. “We acknowledge the competing ideologies between specialization bias of employment and state licensing exams and the generalist practice bias of NASW and CSWE accreditation standards. We are committed to: providing a curriculum that emphasizes generalist practice, facilitating the political process which negotiates the competing ideologies, ameliorating the damages students experience being caught in the competition.” As Michigan moves toward state licensure, the faculty is considering offering an elective course on assessment and diagnosis in behavioral/mental health (e.g., DSM IV) to bridge this gap.
 - Results of curriculum questions regarding generalist practice support the conclusion that curriculum objectives for this content have been met. Philosophical problems with the terminology of *Planned Change Effort* as distinguished from *Problem Solving Method* were discussed, and tabled for discussion within the relevant professional organizations. Discussion identified strategies to strengthening the curriculum by emphasizing the terminology and direct application of the term “Planned Change Effort” within lectures and assignments at both the junior and senior level. Individual faculty agreed to add this content to the course syllabi and writing assignments for SWK 200, 320, 325, 310, 311, 400, 420, and 421 to begin by fall 2001.
- Program strengths identified by students were echoed in the faculty discussions. The faculty recognized the positive contributions of their colleagues, desirable class sizes of 25 students, and course content related to students’ professional goals. The faculty remained committed to maintaining these program strengths through their individual and collective effort.
- Results of questions regarding areas of growth indicate that two curriculum areas need to be addressed, including: Research and social justice. Faculty discussed these issues at great length and the decisions for addressing these issues are:
 - Two changes to these content areas have already been changed since the respondents graduated. The goal of the changes was to strengthen the curriculum content by broadening and deepening the coverage of the topics. First, the social work department has established a research based, term paper as a required assignment for each social work course. Second, the required evaluation of

practice assignment has been moved from the sophomore level research methods course to the senior level integrative seminar course.

- Two additional changes to these content areas have been proposed by the faculty. First, faculty proposed transferring the evaluation of practice research assignment to the field placement seminar (SWK 430 431). This move would allow the project to be conducted over a full year, facilitate a more rigorous discussion of research conclusions in terms of social change within an agency, and formalize the relationship between field placement and academic assignments. Second, the faculty established a goal of infusing social and economic justice content throughout the curriculum. During the summer 2001 the faculty developed definitions of the key terms associated with diversity, including justice terms for dissemination throughout the curriculum. Subsequent effort will be made to detail specific strategies to incorporate this content in specific courses. Two suggestions made to begin this discussion were: 1. Requiring a legislative experience within the policy course (SWK 310), and 2. Developing detailed discussion of public life/social and economic justice in junior level courses.
- Results of questions regarding field placement support the conclusion that curriculum objectives for this content have been met. Discussion emphasized achievement of generalist practice content and facilitating the transition from theory to practice. Faculty discussion highlighted the opportunity to enhance the field placement experience by drawing field placement supervisors closer to the program. Faculty initiated a process to develop an annual field placement supervisor' orientation to highlight student and program expectations for this experience.
- Results of questions regarding liberal arts support the conclusion that curriculum objectives for this content have been met. Discussion emphasized achievement of personal, public and professional growth facilitated by the liberal arts foundation. Faculty discussed two strategies to enhance the liberal arts foundation. First, the faculty suggested periodic reviews of the content and course assignments of prerequisite courses taught outside the department to assure representation and balance of the key concepts as foundation to professional studies. Second, two changes were suggested to made that enrich the content in social work courses related to public life experiences: adding a required legislative activity to the SWK 310 course, and adding a community connection experience to the junior year. Faculty discussion determined that these processes would favor clarifying and deepening curriculum content without altering the positive achievement of the related curriculum objectives. Commitment from the faculty was made to maintain this objective as a strength of the curriculum.
- Results of questions regarding the title of the degree (BA vrs BS or BSW) support the conclusion that the majority of students are served by the BA degree. Further conclusion highlighted two additional areas of concern.
 - Discussion of the minority voice (i.e., outliers in the skew, and dissenting opinions) revealed the option to change the nature of the degree to a B.S. in a

manner that met the needs of these students without affecting the opportunities for the majority (i.e., the BS requirement for 4 additional credits for graduation was off set by the opportunity to choose 2 area options). The BS offered more flexibility without violating either the liberal arts foundation or professional development of students. The faculty concluded that transitioning to a BS was an appropriate initiative for the program pending re-accreditation and institutional change processes.

- Faculty discussed the attributed meaning of the degree to the professional orientation of the graduates. Faculty identified two strategies to assist students in the transition from student to professional. First, providing a diploma that includes “in Social Work” in the context of the words would enable students to profess their professional orientation by “official documentation.” Similarly, graduates could be served by a social event (i.e., social work graduation) that marks their transition from a student to a beginning professional. Faculty agreed to initiate these options beginning in Fall 2001.
- Results of the Accreditation questions supported the conclusion that this program goal is valuable to students. The faculty remained committed to maintaining accreditation status through their individual and collective efforts in the academic and political processes required of accreditation.
- Results of the practice skills questions supported the conclusion that curriculum objectives for this content have been met. Faculty recognized the fact that interviewing skills and role playing content were identified by respondents as areas of potential improvement. These areas have been addressed by adding role-play and interviewing skills to existing courses in the two years since these respondents graduated. Additionally, faculty proposed including more of this content in additional courses that bridge the gap between the sophomore and junior year of courses. Commitment from the faculty was made to maintain this objective as a strength of the curriculum and infuse the content wherever possible.
- Results of questions regarding critical thinking support the conclusion that curriculum objectives for this content have been met. Commitment from the faculty was made to maintain this objective as a strength of the curriculum.
- Results of the diversity questions support the conclusion that curriculum objectives for this content have been met. Faculty discussion included review of the changes in the diversity curriculum that have been made since these respondents graduated. In response to CSWE re-accreditation guidelines this content has been specifically defined and infused throughout the junior and senior level courses. Faculty discussion concluded that these changes added specificity and depth to the diversity content, and therefore would not negatively alter the perception of the content by graduates. Commitment from the faculty was made to maintain this objective as a “strength” of the curriculum.

- Results of the values and ethics questions support the conclusion that curriculum objectives for this content have been met. Faculty discussion of prospective changes in this content would favor clarifying and deepening curriculum content without altering the positive achievement of the related curriculum objectives. Commitment from the faculty was made to maintain this objective as a strength of the curriculum

Conclusions

The future begins by emphasizing the commitment to maintain the strengths of program. The faculty has made an emphatic affirmation to continuing to provide an undergraduate education that matches or exceeds these students' experiences in employability, graduate school, and curriculum quality. Changes in the curriculum will be guided by these standards and focus on improvements.

As a result of the tone and tenure of the discussions on areas of improvement, issues were identified and classified as immediate or priority initiatives. Within each classification, plans were made by the faculty to change aspects of the curriculum to enhance the program's ability to achieve the student outcome objectives.

Immediate Changes

Immediate changes in the curriculum were identified and subsequently developed for implementation by Fall 2001. These changes included:

- Content on topics of: professional self, agency politics, client outcome assessment and generalist practice, social and economic justice were added to junior level courses and increased in emphasis in the senior level courses.
- Instructional methodology changes of increased role-plays, application of library and research skills, and participation in public arena.
- Content for the Orientation of Field Placement Supervisors was expanded to include generalist practice content, evaluation of practice, and emphasize roles involved in supervision.
- Developing a legislative experience for the junior level policy course.

Priority Initiatives

Priority initiatives were identified and organized by complexity of steps to achieve the goal. Each initiative is set to begin in Fall 2001, however, the completion of each task varies and completion of all tasks extends well beyond 2002. These initiatives include:

- Develop content for the Fall Adjunct Faculty Meeting to include new diversity definition and research content.
- Develop plan to reorganize the evaluation of practice assignment.
- Develop the program's position statement on graduate education.
- Develop a Bachelor of Science degree option, with related changes in area options, research and graduation requirements.
- Develop further course offerings on special topics of graduates and undergraduates needs for connection to the community, including a bridging course and continuing education seminars.

- Develop professional identification with transition ceremony to the profession, and changes in wording of diploma.
- Develop a periodic process to review courses taught outside the major that provide foundation knowledge for the professional curriculum.

References

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- Dillman, D. (1978). Mail and telephone surveys: The total design method. NY: John Wiley and Sons.
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Appendix A: Expressed Appreciation for Student Researchers

Great gratitude is expressed to Cheryl Graham (class of 09), who served as the student assistant to the survey design.

A heartfelt thank you to _____, who painstakingly typed the narratives of each respondent.

And of course, thank you to each graduate who donated significant time and care to completed the survey. Please know we appreciate all we have learned from your story and recommendations. We will show our respect for your effort as we improve the curriculum.

Appendix B

Survey of Graduates 2003-2007

**Survey of
Social Work Graduates
2003-2007**

University of Michigan - Flint
Department of Social Work

As you may remember from your studies at UM-Flint, the Social Work Department is committed to preparing students to participate in the professional social work community. From time to time, we find it very beneficial to learn about the post-graduation experiences of our students so that we are sure curriculum offers students what they really need. So it is your turn to help us improve the curriculum based on the needs of our community. We are asking you to help us answer two questions which are the heart of this survey.

1) We want to know what happened to you in areas of professional social work after graduation. In this survey, we ask questions in three areas (employment, continued study and professional development) to find out what opportunities are available to you after you complete your bachelors degree.

2) We want to know how you use certain aspects of the curriculum in your professional work. In this survey, we ask you to rate the importance of specific elements of the curriculum to your skills as a professional social worker, and we ask you to offer suggestions to strengthen the program.

This project is being conducted with the joint cooperation of the faculty and current students of the social work program. The goal of this cooperation is to gather information which is of interest to both parties and to build an understanding of the research process for the students. Therefore, we welcome any questions or concerns you may have about this project at 810-762-3390.

Signatures of researchers:

Employment

1. Are you currently employed?
 Yes. Please continue with question 2.
 No. Please continue with question 18 after answering:
What is the reason you are not currently employed?

2. Is your employment related to your social work degree?
 Yes. Which field of practice best describes your employment setting?
 - Gerontology
 - Housing, Homelessness
 - Child Welfare
 - Health, Fitness, Nutrition
 - Hospital, Health Care, Rehabilitation
 - Mental Health
 - Developmental Disabilities
 - Criminal Justice/Juvenile Justice
 - Work Place/Employment
 - Substance Abuse
 - Hospice
 - School Social Work
 - Other, specify _____ No. What is your primary reason for choosing a non-social work job?

3. Is your position considered an hourly or salary job? hourly salary

4. How many hours per week do you work? _____

5. How many months have you been employed since graduation? _____ months

6. Once you started looking for employment, how long did it take you to become employed?
_____ months

7. What is your job title? _____

8. What is the annual salary range for your position based on full time employment?
 - less than 15,000
 - 15,000 - 19,000
 - 19,001 - 23,000
 - 23,001 - 27,000
 - 27,001 - 31,000
 - 31,001 - 35,000
 - 35,001- 39,000
 - 39, 001- 43,000
 - 43,001 - 47,000
 - 47,001 - 50,000
 - 50,001 +

9. What benefits are available to you through your employment? (Please check all that apply)

- Full time work
- Flex Time
- Vacation Time
- Sick Leave
- Health Care/Dental Care / Eye Care
- Child/Dependent Care Subsidy or Services
- Retirement Benefits
- School Tuition
- In-service/Training
- Professional Membership
- Advancement Opportunities
- Other, please identify _____

10. Which of the following factors did you consider when exploring employment options since graduation?

(Check all that apply)

- Location close to home
- Hours of employment
- Flexibility with family obligations
- Salary
- Benefits
- Agency reputation in the community
- Perception of agency values
- Field of practice related to personal interest
- Job responsibilities related to social work
- Profession of supervisor
- Opportunity for advancement
- Perceived stress of the job
- Other, Please identify _____

11. What advice would you offer to current students about seeking and choosing employment after graduation?

12. Please rate your perceptions of how well the social work curriculum at University of Michigan-Flint prepared you for employment based on the following scale:

N = No understanding of the concept

1 = Strongly agree

2 = Agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Disagree

5 = Strongly disagree

My supervisor perceives me as well prepared.	N	1	2	3	4	5
My employer perceives UMF as a good program.	N	1	2	3	4	5
My education prepared me well for the transition to employment.	N	1	2	3	4	5
I received adequate instruction on the appropriate roles of a social worker.	N	1	2	3	4	5
I obtained useful skills for employment.	N	1	2	3	4	5
My education allowed me to gain the knowledge I need for employment.	N	1	2	3	4	5
I received guidance to adjust my attitude about people.	N	1	2	3	4	5
I receive support to develop a professional attitude about social work.	N	1	2	3	4	5
I was adequately prepared to work with people in other professions.	N	1	2	3	4	5
Group projects prepared me to work as a team member in interventions.	N	1	2	3	4	5

13. Please describe here, any aspects of your job that you were not adequately prepared to handle and that we could improve in the Social Work Program at University of Michigan – Flint.

14. Please rate the following activities based on how frequently you are expected to use them.

The scale is:

N = No understanding of the concept

1 = Daily

- 2= Weekly
- 3 = Monthly
- 4 = Infrequently
- 5 = Never

Assessment tools

DSM IV	N	1	2	3	4	5
Planned Change Process	N	1	2	3	4	5

Report Writing

Initial plans of intervention	N	1	2	3	4	5
Measurable outcomes	N	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluate your own practice	N	1	2	3	4	5
Case notes - record keeping	N	1	2	3	4	5
Agency reports	N	1	2	3	4	5
Conference-journal articles	N	1	2	3	4	5
Client progress reports	N	1	2	3	4	5

Presentations

Presenting at conferences	N	1	2	3	4	5
Presenting to the public	N	1	2	3	4	5
Presenting to agency staff and officials	N	1	2	3	4	5
Presenting to client groups	N	1	2	3	4	5

Work Settings

Independent work, or working alone	N	1	2	3	4	5
Working with a partner	N	1	2	3	4	5
Working with a team	N	1	2	3	4	5
Working on a committee	N	1	2	3	4	5

Perform Roles

Case management	N	1	2	3	4	5
Advocate	N	1	2	3	4	5
Behavior Change	N	1	2	3	4	5
Caregiver	N	1	2	3	4	5
Community Planning	N	1	2	3	4	5
Consultant	N	1	2	3	4	5
Data Manager	N	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluator	N	1	2	3	4	5
Mediator	N	1	2	3	4	5
Mobilizer	N	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher	N	1	2	3	4	5

Graduate Studies

15. Please choose the statement which best characterizes your interest in graduate studies.
- I have no interest in a Masters degree. (Please continue with question # 22)
 - I am interested in taking classes but am unsure of the program.
(Please continue with question # 20)

- ___ I have applied to a masters program.
 What school? _____
 Your major? _____
 Is this advanced standing? ___ Yes ___ No
 (Please continue with question # 16)
- ___ I am currently attending a Masters program.
 What school? _____
 Your major? _____
 Is this advanced standing? ___ Yes ___ No
 (Please continue with question # 16)
- ___ I have completed a Masters degree.
 What school? _____
 Your major? _____
 Was this advanced standing? ___ Yes ___ No
 (Please continue with question # 16)

16. What motivated you to go to graduate school?

17. Why did you choose a particular school for graduate studies?

18. How long was the delay between your bachelors degree and attending graduate school
 _____ months

19. Please rate your perception of how well you were prepared
 for graduate studies using the following scale:

- N = No understanding of the concept
- 1 = Strongly agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 = Disagree
- 5 = Strongly disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I was well prepared for graduate school. | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Faculty of the graduate school perceive UMF as a good program. | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I was well prepared for the transition to graduate school. | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I knew a lot of social work theory before starting graduate school. | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I had the necessary library skills. | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I was better at professional writing than my graduate school peers. | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I knew enough about research to be successful. | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The practice skills I learned at UMF prepared me for my graduate school field placement. | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

20. What obstacles did you experience getting a Masters degree? (Please mark all that apply)

- ___ Lack of interest in school
- ___ Financial aid/Tuition too high
- ___ Programs not available
- ___ Travel, commute

- ___ Employment conflicts
- ___ Family obligations
- ___ Unaware of opportunities
- ___ Unable to be accepted by program
- ___ I like what I am currently doing
- ___ Other, please specify _____

21. Please describe here, your recommendations to us to improve the curriculum for prospective graduate students.

Professional Education

22. Since UM-Flint which of the following opportunities have you participated in? Please mark all that apply.

- ___ Agency training or in-service
- ___ Membership in NASW
- ___ Other professional organization membership
- ___ Professional workshops/conferences
- ___ Read professional journals
- ___ Established a mentor/mentee relationship
- ___ Use of library/computer
- ___ Interview/consult other professionals
- ___ Attend college courses
- ___ Other, please identify _____

23. Please describe the steps you are taking (or have taken) to obtain your Social Work Licensure.

24. Please describe your knowledge of the requirements for continuing education in social work.

If you are aware of the requirements, how have you found opportunities to earn continuing education credits?

What is your general perception of the utility and value of the continuing education programs you have participated in?

Evaluating the Curriculum

25. Please rate your satisfaction with your preparation in each of the following outcome objectives.

N = No understanding of the concept

1 = Greatly dissatisfied

2= Dissatisfied

- 3 = Neutral
- 4= Satisfied
- 5 = Greatly satisfied

Program Goal 1

- Effectively utilize critical thinking in practice settings. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Embody the values and ethics of the social work profession. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Exhibit a consistent sense of professionalism in interactions with others. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Demonstrate an appreciation of the tradition and history of the social work profession and exhibit a working knowledge of important emerging professional trends. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Adapt the knowledge and skills of generalist social work to practice settings of varying sizes and approaches. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Utilize knowledge of bio-psycho-social characteristics as they apply to individual behavior as a means to understand interactions among and between individual and the various social structures they encounter. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Demonstrate the ability to respond to appropriate supervision in the practice setting. N 1 2 3 4 5

Program Goal 2

- Demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the positive value of diversity. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Understand the origins and workings of oppression and discrimination and demonstrate the ability to implement change in order to advance social and economic justice. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Communicate appropriately and effectively with the variety of audiences regularly encountered in social work practice. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Exhibit the ability to differentially assess and apply appropriate intervention skills necessary to serve diverse populations. N 1 2 3 4 5

Program Goal 3

- Exhibit the ability to operate successfully within a complex organization and to successfully utilize appropriate change strategies as necessary. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Demonstrate insight into the impact of social policies upon client systems, workers and agencies. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Engage in collaborative efforts to promote social justice. N 1 2 3 4 5

Program Goal 4

- Evaluate and apply current research findings to one’s personal practice and the practice of other relevant professional systems. N 1 2 3 4 5
- Demonstrate quality within one’s personal practice and continuous growth in the knowledge and skills of the profession. N 1 2 3 4 5

26. Please rate the following statements based on the following scale:

- N = No understanding of the concept
- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2= Disagree
- 3 = Neither disagree or agree

- 4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

Generalist Practice

I was prepared to work with different types of people.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I was ready to work with individuals, families, groups and communities.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I know how to implement the 8 step Planned Change Effort.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I learned how to intervene based on the client & issue.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I learned the principles of generalist practice.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I learned how to facilitate organizational change.	N 1 2 3 4 5

Diversity

I am able to recognize populations at risk for oppression.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I was encouraged to appreciate diversity.	N 1 2 3 4 5
Inter-racial communication skills were taught well.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I recognize different coping strategies used by clients who are members of minority groups.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I understand how experiences of oppression can limit a client's ability to trust me.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I was prepared to communicate with diverse groups.	N 1 2 3 4 5

Values and Ethics

I learned about social work values in several classes.	N 1 2 3 4 5
The program helped me learn how to apply social work values to real life.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I was encouraged to maintain social work values despite value conflicts.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I understand the importance of the NASW Code of Ethics.	N 1 2 3 4 5
The value of confidentiality was appropriately emphasized when compared to real life.	N 1 2 3 4 5
The value of self-determination is appropriately emphasized for the real world.	N 1 2 3 4 5
The value of human dignity and worth as taught at UMF is critical to good social work practice.	N 1 2 3 4 5

Critical Thinking

I learned how to apply theories to real situations.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I am able to recognize when a client is different from theory.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I am able to make appropriate judgments from conflicting observations.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I was taught to gather information efficiently.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I use critical thinking to maintain objectivity.	N 1 2 3 4 5

Field Placement

My field placement supervisor was helpful to me.	N 1 2 3 4 5
My field placement helped me grow professionally.	N 1 2 3 4 5
Experiences in field placement prepared me for life.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I would recommend my field placement to other students.	N 1 2 3 4 5
Field placement prepared me for the transition to work.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I had a positive relationship with my field placement supervisor.	N 1 2 3 4 5
My field placement was similar to the work I do now.	N 1 2 3 4 5

Liberal Arts

The courses I completed outside of social work were important to my learning.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I learned how to analyze information at UMF.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I was prepared for citizenship at UMF.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I learned to participate in public life at UMF.	N 1 2 3 4 5
My education transformed my thinking.	N 1 2 3 4 5
I was empowered by my education.	N 1 2 3 4 5
My education changed my life.	N 1 2 3 4 5

My education made me a “well rounded” person. N 1 2 3 4 5

Practice Skills

I learned how to communicate with many people. N 1 2 3 4 5

I learned to write well. N 1 2 3 4 5

I had adequate opportunities to practice interviewing skills. N 1 2 3 4 5

I learned how to assess client needs. N 1 2 3 4 5

I was taught to involve clients in problem solving. N 1 2 3 4 5

The role plays prepared me for professional practice. N 1 2 3 4 5

27. Please describe how you have observed “Comportment” within your professional experiences since graduation... Here comportment is considered social work professionalism – demonstrated behaviors and words of a professional, reflecting values and purposes of the profession.

28. Please describe how obtaining your college degree has impacted your life since graduation. Speak specifically about your growth and development.

29. Please describe here any additional thoughts you have to share with us about your experience at UMF and your recommendations for improving the program for future students.