

**Final Report**  
Bi-annual Survey of Social Work Graduates  
1997-1999 Cohorts

Submitted to the Department of Social Work  
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Every two years the Department of Social Work at the University of Michigan-Flint conducts a mailed survey of students who had graduated approximately 2 years before. This biannual survey is conducted to achieve three outcomes. First, the bi-annual 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 Committee on Assessment and Strategic Planning (CAASP, 2000).

This project began in June 2000, when students who had completed the SWK 250 course were invited to join a research project to survey graduates about their experiences since graduation. Fifteen students agreed to participate and are co-authors (Appendix A) of the report. Charles Bailey and Kathleen Woehrle met with the group of students in August and outlined the purposes of the project and the scope of the students' responsibilities of the project.

### Literature Review

The first step of the project was to outline the direction of the current survey. Students began with a review of the literature on graduate surveys. Literature from social work journals was sought using Social Work Research and Abstracts on-line, and from general literature using First-Search on-line. Although articles generally related to this topic were identified, no specific citations were used to develop the instrument.

The Student Outcome Assessment Plan (2000) submitted to the CAASP was outlined in compliance with North Central Association Accreditation (NCA). The plan described the relationship between the program's mission statement to prepare students for entry-level social work practice as a generalist practitioner and the significance of graduate outcomes as a measure of program effectiveness. Literature review of this document provided the project with direction to evaluate three areas of student outcomes: employment, graduate school experience and curriculum focus on generalist practice.

The Council on Social Work Education, Curriculum Policy Statement (1992) that mandates social work undergraduate education to prepare graduates for generalist practice. This document further describes the parameters for the definition of generalist practice adopted by the social work program, and guidelines for supporting content in the program's curriculum. Literature review of this document provided the project with direction to evaluate the specific curriculum elements of the program, and the specific outcomes in graduate school and employment relative to the program's definition of generalist practice.

The literature review process also included consultation with was also key constituents of the social work program. Key constituents (i.e., individuals and groups directly involved with the provision of the social work curriculum) included: current students; Judy Beaven, department secretary; Professors Bailey, Blakely, Jones, and Wolosuk, social work faculty; field placement supervisors; other CSWE accredited institutions in Michigan; Jack Maynard, Dean of the School of Education and Human Services; and Juan Mestes, Chancellor of University of Michigan – Flint. Team members, in groups of two, were assigned to interview a constituent. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the constituent and used an open-ended qualitative interview format with an interview schedule of a single research question "What questions should be asked of graduates two years after graduation?" Team members were encouraged to ask follow up questions and respond to questions from each constituent. Following the interview, the pair of researchers met to compare interview notes and identified emergent themes of this portion of the literature review.

## Methodology

### Design

Ex-post facto research design was chosen for the project. The past event was identified as graduation from the social work program at University of Michigan – Flint in the 1997-1999 cohorts. The present events were identified as: employment experiences, graduate school experiences, and reflective perception of the social work curriculum.

Two forms of data collection were chosen to implement this design. Case record review was implemented to measure the past event. Student academic records were accessed to identify key demographic variables and academic achievement standards, and graduate status. The current events were measured using standardized mail survey techniques (Dillman, 1978)

### Population

The team decided to survey the entire cohort of students 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 71 students. A list of current addresses for these students were obtained from the Office of Alumni Relations which is updated monthly and includes change of address information provided by the Postal Service.

The population can be described based on demographic data collected using the case record review technique. The population of graduates in the 1997-1999 cohort can be characterized as predominantly women (84.3%). The racial composition of the cohorts were predominantly white (67.8%), with a substantial representation of African American students (27.1%). The average age of the students was 38 years (mean = 38.8, s.d.= 11.2). However, significant variability also exists (mode = 25, 26, range of 39) with reported ages between 25 and 64 years, and one quarter of students over 50 years of age. The majority of students were single (50.0%), with a significant number of students married (28.3%) or divorced (13.3%). Regardless of marital status, the majority of students maintained primary care for one or more dependents (67.4%). All of the students worked while in school (100%), and a majority of students maintained full time enrollment (73.9%) for some portion of their educational experience. The vast majority of students were transfer students (96.9%). Great variability existed however, in how many credits were transferred. One quarter of students(34.6%) transferred in at the junior status with the maximum number (62-75credits) of transfer credits, one half (53.8%) of students transferred in within junior status (49+ credits); one third (35.4%) of the students transferred in within sophomore status (25-48 credits); and one tenth (10.8%) of the students began their University of Michigan – Flint studies within freshman status (less than 25 credits).

### Instrumentation-

The instrument was developed as a combined effort to repeat questions from the previous study and to add content emphasized in the literature review. The focus group technique was used to synthesize the results of the constituent interviews with the content from the other literature sources. In the focus group, each of the research team-pair reported results of their constituent interview to the entire research team. The group analyzed the composite results for emergent themes as well as outlying themes. 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.

These emergent themes were incorporated with questions that were identified from the previous graduate survey as standard questions for comparative study into a draft survey. In October 2000 the draft instrument was mailed to two individuals for review by a panel of experts and subsequently mailed to 3 previous students for pilot testing. Based on the recommendations of these individuals the instrument was revised a final time. As a follow up to the interview of constituents, member checking was conducted by presenting the final instrument to each of the interviewed constituents for review of their areas of concern.

The final instrument contained 40 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 November 8, 2000.

### Procedures

The initial mailing was made on December 1, 2000. Each envelope included the survey instrument, a personalized cover letter, a stamped self-addressed return envelope and a tea bag with note to encourage each participant to respond to the survey. A second mailing, including an updated letter, return envelope and instrument was sent to all those graduates who had not returned the survey by January 17, 2001. At the final analysis stage, the 13 students were identified as unreachable and 41 students completed the written survey.

In an attempt to measure non-response error, phone calls were made to the students who did not return the survey between February 19 and March 25, 2001. Phone surveys were completed by seven students. Responses on the oral survey were statistically compared to the responses of like questions on the mailed survey. Results of the responses to the oral survey were compared and differences were determined to be negligible. Therefore, results from the oral interviews were included with the mailed survey data and led to a final response rate of 86% (50/58).

Non-response error was further measured by statistical comparisons between respondents and the entire population on key demographic variables. Average age of respondents was 37.85 years (s.d.= 11.46) with a range of 25 – 59 years. The majority of respondents were women (87.8%). The majority of respondents were white (69.4%) with a significant proportion of African American respondents (27.8%). Respondents represented students who were single (45.5%) during their undergraduate studies, with a significant number of responses from those who were married (27.3%) during their studies. The majority of respondents (65.4%) were responsible for one or more dependents while in school. These statistics match the demographic information of the population. Therefore, non response error was determined to not be a significant issue and results from the respondents were determined to be generalizable to the population.

### **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, Agency funding, 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" (90.2%, n=41) indicating that students are employed two years after graduation. Graduates who were not employed, universally cited continuing their education 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 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 one field of practice best representing their employment focus. Of those students who indicated they were currently employed, the modal response was "yes, a social work position" (89.0%, n=37) 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</u>	<u>Field of Practice</u>
<u>Employed</u> 19.4%	Gerontology
5.6%	Housing
8.3%	Child Welfare
16.7 %	Health
19.4%	Mental Health
0.0%	Developmental Disabilities
5.6%	Criminal Justice/Juvenile Justice
0.0%	Work Place/Employment
8.3 %	Substance Abuse
16.7%	Other (schools)

Agency Funding

Funding Source of the agency was used to classify the organization into one of three social welfare sectors: government, corporate, and voluntary. The most frequently identified funding source for employing agencies was the government (83.3%), followed by charitable

contributions (46.7%), Insurance/third party pay (40.0%), and least often mentioned client fees (23.3%). The majority of graduates indicated that their employing agency had multiple funding agencies; 63.4 % of graduates indicated that there were 2 or more funding sources.

### 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 (48.6%) of the students who are employed report working hourly positions and the other half (51.4%) report working salaried positions. The majority of working graduates report working full time (mean number of hours worked = 35.9, s.d.= 10.23; mode = 40 hours, range = 56.0) 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?*," students reported being employed 1.25 years (mean = 17.14 months, s.d. = 11.46 months). The large variability of these results led to further assessment of the experiences of graduates. The bi-modal scores (mode = 6, 28 and range of 32 months) suggests that there is a division among graduates in their employment experience. This discrepancy correlates with the students' graduate school experiences. Those students who chose to attend graduate school experience did so at the expense of continuous employment (mode of 6 months employment) whereas students who have not yet initiated graduate school plans have been employed continuously since becoming employed (mode=28 months).

### 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 patterns emerged from their responses. Social Worker (n=7) was most frequently indicated job title and reflected their status in the agency which directly related to their academic work and professional affiliation. The second pattern of responses that emerged reflected the employing agencies orientation to the range of tasks assigned to the graduate associated with their relative status in the employment position and included: Case Manager (n=6), Supervisor (n=2), Assistant (n=2), Director (n=1) and Volunteer (n=1). The third category of responses was organized around a specific method of intervention and included: Therapist (n=6), Coordinator (n=5), Specialist (n= 4), Teacher (n= 4), Counselor (n=1) and Nurse (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 less than \$15,000 to \$50,000).

Table 2: Annual Income as Full Time Equivalent

<u>Percentage</u> <u>Graduates</u>	<u>Annual Salary</u>
6.5%	less than 15,000
3.2%	15,000 - 19,000
19.4%	19,001 - 23,000
12.9%	23,001 - 27,000
19.4%	27,001 - 31,000
22.6%	31,001 - 35,000
6.5%	35,001- 39,000
6.5%	39, 001- 43,000
0.0%	43,001 - 47,000
3.2%	47,001 - 50,000
0.0%	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 four most frequently mentioned benefits were full time work (82.8%), vacation time (82.8%), Health Care, Dental/ Eye care (79.9%) and In-service training (72.4%). Each graduate also indicated the number of benefits available. On average, graduates had eight categories of benefits available (mode = 8; range = 10). Every field of practice had at least one employee with at least 7 categories of benefits.

The hypothesis that employment agencies would offset low wages with benefits was not substantiated by the data. In fact, lower salaries were associated with fewer benefits. A positive correlation between number of benefits and higher salaries emerged. Through contingency table analysis, specific relationships were identified as: Higher salaries were associated with opportunities for full time employment, child care benefits, retirement benefits, school tuition, in-service training and opportunities for advancement.

Table 3: Available Benefits

<u>Percent Graduates</u>	<u>Benefit</u>
82.8%	Full time work
48.3%	Flex Time
82.8%	Vacation Time
65.5%	Sick Leave
79.3%	Health Care/Dental Care / Eye Care
10.3%	Child/Dependent Care Subsidy or Services
51.7%	Retirement Benefits
31.0%	School Tuition
72.4%	In-service/Training
17.2%	Professional Membership
55.2%	Advancement Opportunities
0.0%	Other, (none)

Graduates employed in the field of practice of education received the lowest range of salaries occurring between less than \$15000 and \$31000. Housing had the fewest opportunities for employment but the highest reported salary range of \$47001-50000. Mental Health and Health care had the greatest number of employment opportunities and the greatest variability of salary: Mental health salaries ranged from \$19001-39000 and health care salaries ranged from \$15001-35000.

### **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.

Some factors were determined to have little effect on the employment status of graduates. The jobs were evenly split between hourly and salaried compensation. The employing agency's funding source has little influence on the level of the graduates' compensation.

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: the transition to employment, the graduates' preparation for employment, and the graduates' job experiences.

### Transition to Employment

Since the survey was measuring the employment status of graduates up to two years since graduation there was a distinct possibility that current results were radically different than the recent past. Similarly, concerns existed about the possibilities that serious delays in finding employment would represent problems with the curriculum. In an effort to evaluate these potential issues, graduates were asked a series of open-ended questions regarding their transition to employment including the length of time, decision-making strategies, and recommendations for new graduates about job searching.

Students reported being employed quickly once they start seeking employment. When asked "*Once you started looking for employment, how long did it take you to become employed?*" students reported an average of 3 months (mean = 3.0, s.d.= 5.1). Interestingly, 28.6% of students were hired immediately following graduation, and within one month of searching, 60.7% of graduates were employed.

Even though the time period between graduation and employment was relatively short, students described this period as a time of questioning and uncertainty. In an effort to understand this experience, graduates were asked an open ended question "*Please describe your experiences in the transition from school to your employment setting.*" Every respondent reflected that their transition was not difficult as they were prepared for the transition by their undergraduate education. One student commented "with a social work education focusing on a generalist perspective, I received the basics that I needed to do my job."

The transition itself, however was characterized in three patterns of emergent themes. The first theme reflected the experience of graduates who indicated that they did not have a transition. These individuals indicated that they went right to graduate school (n=7) or were employed immediately following graduation (n= 6). One graduate reported: "Well prepared with modern terminology. I was hired before I finished graduate school. I realized I knew more than the other competitive university. I feel as if I have been out of school for years with my knowledge. I excelled and I feel competitive in job seeking."

The second emergent theme reflected the fact that some graduates (n=4) perceived the transition to employment as extending beyond the first day of employment. These individuals described the transition as becoming socialized to an organization. For example, one respondent reported "Everyone was understanding and understood I came right out of school. They all encouraged me to trust my instincts, ensuring the rest would fall into place. This took a few months to feel comfortable, but it did happen." Another student reported "I obtained immediate employment upon graduation. The good thing was that I started out at the bottom and learned the job requirements before rising in levels."

The third emergent theme reflected the experience of some students (n=4) who needed time between graduation and their next step to meet personal goals. As one student reported "I was out of school 1 ½ months before I was employed full time and that time frame was my choice." Another student commented "student to employment was an uneven event because of a change in my occupation and working in an area not in my field."

### 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, both quantitative and qualitative 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. Graduates reported a complex priority setting strategy unique to their circumstances. 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: Hours of employment (79.3%), location (69.3%), and salary (72.4%), benefits (69.0%) and Field of Practice (69.0%) (Table 4).

These decision making factors were reiterated as the emergent themes from the graduates’ responses to a qualitatively based open-ended question “*Please list the three most important factors in your final decision for accepting a job.*” Five emergent themes developed in response to this question. The “field of practice” including references to the type of clients served and/or the type of social issue addressed was mentioned by 7 graduates and identified first by 6 graduates. This pattern corresponded to the quantitative report from Table 4 in which field of practice was a deciding factor for 69% of respondents. The qualitative data provides evidence of the relative high degree of importance of field of practice as 6 of the 7 graduates who considered it, also indicated that field of practice was the first consideration.

Table 4: Factors Influencing Employment Decisions

<u>Percent Graduates</u>	<u>Factor</u>
69.3%	Location close to home
79.3%	Hours of employment
41.4%	Flexibility with family obligations
72.4%	Salary
69.0%	Benefits
44.8%	Agency reputation in the community
48.3%	Perception of agency values
69.0%	Field of practice related to personal interest
51.7%	Job responsibilities related to social work
21.4%	Profession of supervisor
37.9%	Opportunity for advancement
24.1%	Perceived stress of the job

The second emergent theme was labeled compensation. Compensation was further clarified by “salary” which was mentioned by 18 graduates and identified first by 6 graduates and “benefits” which was mentioned by 12 graduates and identified first by 1 graduate. This pattern directly relates to the quantitative data in Table 4 that indicates that “salary” was a deciding factor for 72.4% of respondents and benefits was a deciding factor for 69% of graduates.

The third emergent theme was labeled “organizational characteristics.” Organizational characteristics” were identified by 24 graduates and identified first by 5 graduates. Organizational characteristic were those elements of the job that were controlled by the employing agency and included specific mention of location, advancement opportunities, values of agency, co-workers, atmosphere, and stress level of agency. This qualitative data is a mirror of the quantitative rating in Table 4 of each respective factor and reiterates the fact that each factor was considered when making a decision. However, the relatively small number of graduates who reported these factors first suggests that graduates did not perceive these elements to be critical to the final decision.

The fourth emergent theme was labeled “Position Description.” Elements of “Position Description” were identified by 26 graduates and identified first by 9 graduates. “Position Description” incorporated comments regarding hours of employment and job flexibility, tasks associated with the job description, roles, and opportunities for practical experiences. This qualitative data reiterates the quantitative ratings included in Table 4 of hours of employment, flexibility as employment considerations. The qualitative data further differentiated job responsibilities to include specific elements of tasks, roles and opportunities. However, the relatively small number of graduates who reported these factors first suggests that graduates did not perceive these elements to be critical to the final decision.

### 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?” four themes emerged. One emergent theme was the recommendation to delay seeking employment and instead to continue directly to graduate school. The graduates who made this recommendation cited salary and job characteristics as incentives to avoid bachelor level employment and seek masters level opportunities. One graduate summarized this theme with the statement “Get your MSW if you want to make a living. You may still have to work 2 jobs like me.”

A second emergent theme related to the graduates’ recommendations regarding specific job search strategies. Graduates mentioned strategies including casting a wide net of job prospects, starting early, networking, and being patient with the search process. For example, one graduate stated: “Be patient and consistent with effort to secure employment.”

A third theme reflected the graduates’ perception that a successful job search required mastery of skills. Graduates urged students to maximize their undergraduate experience. Graduates specifically mentioned writing, speaking, and networking skills. One graduate summarized this theme by stating “Learn all you can, there are employers who will be interested in your skills and abilities.”

A final theme reflected the graduates’ wisdom about finding a match between the individual’s unique qualities and the agency. The graduates encouraged students to consider their unique strengths, interests, values, needs, desires, and happiness in light of the employment context. For example, one graduate stated: “Search for job opportunities based on your interests, strengths. Burn-out can happen quick.” Graduates encouraged students to pursue this goal even if they were initially unsuccessful, as one graduate stated “Start ASAP! If you are employed in a n agency you are not happy in remember that it is still experience no matter what.”

### 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. Ten elements of generalist practice were identified as universal employment responsibilities (Table 5). These elements included: Problem Resolution Skills, Planned Change Process, Initial Intervention Plans, Systems Theory, Measurable Outcomes, Case Notes, Client Progress Reports, Independent Work , Partner Work, and Team Work (mode=1 = daily use).

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>
DSM IV	4	4
ICD 9	5	4
Problem resolution skills	1	4
Systems theory	1	4
Planned Change Process	1	3
<b>Report Writing</b>		
Initial plans of intervention	1	4
Measurable outcomes	1	4
Evaluate your own practice	1,3	4
Case notes - record keeping	1	2
Agency reports	3	4
Conference-journal articles	3,5	4
Client progress reports	1	4
<b>Presentations</b>		
Presenting at conferences	5	4
Presenting to the public	4,5	4
Presenting to agency officials	4	4
Presenting to agency staff	2	3
Presenting to client groups	3	4
<b>Work Settings</b>		
Independent work, or working alone	1	4
Working with a partner	1	4
Working with a team	1	3
Working on a committee	3	4

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: *Working with other professionals* and *Using group projects to prepare students to work in teams.*

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	1
My employer perceives UMF as a good program.	1,2	4	2
My education prepared me well for the transition to employment.	2	4	2
I received adequate instruction on the appropriate roles of a social worker.	1	3	2
I obtained useful skills for employment.	2	2	0
My education allowed me to gain the knowledge I need for employment.	2	3	1
I received guidance to adjust my attitude about people.	1	4	2
I receive support to develop a professional attitude about social work.	1	3	1
I was adequately prepared to work with people in other professions.	1	3	3
Group projects prepared me to work as a team member in interventions.	2	4	3

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

### Employment Strengths and Weaknesses

Social work professional practice often provides intrinsic rewards not measured in salary and benefits. These intrinsic rewards in employment offset the discrepancies in salaries as measures of comparable worth and encourage sustainable commitment to the profession. In an effort to determine what graduates perceived these intrinsic rewards to be, the strengths and weaknesses of the employment situation were measured on the survey.

Employment strengths and weakness were identified by two open-ended questions: *Please list the three aspects of your job which are most satisfying.*" and *"Please list the three aspects of your job which are least satisfying."* Identifying emergent themes from each question separately led to a similar characterization in both questions. However, when the situation was positive for a particular theme, graduates identified the situation as satisfying, and when the situation was negative for the particular theme, graduates identified the aspect a dissatisfying. The four themes were: Experiences with Clients, Job Description, Professional Relationships and Opportunities for Professional Growth.

The emergent theme of *Experiences with Clients* referred to graduates' comments about the population they worked with and client outcomes. The most frequently mentioned strength identified by graduates was the client population they worked with (n=16). Similarly, graduates reported satisfaction from the success experienced by clients (n=13). Although no graduate reported dissatisfaction working with the client population, graduates were dissatisfied with their caseloads (n=4). Graduates also expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as obstacles to successful client outcomes such as lack of staff and "politics" (n=5).

The theme of *Job Description* included comments regarding the tasks performed, the relationships with other professionals, degree of autonomy in the work they do, and the compensation they receive in salary, benefits, and flexible hours. Graduates didn't object to doing any specific task, what they classified as dissatisfying was the relative amount of time spent on unfavorable tasks in comparison to tasks they enjoyed.

*Professional Relationships* received equal mention as a source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. For example, one graduate reported a satisfaction of "working with an interdisciplinary team" and simultaneously reported dissatisfaction with "lack of good work ethic/teamwork among co-workers." Autonomy was characterized as the ability to act independently, and was rated by graduates as a "twin edge sword." For example, one graduate reported satisfaction with "freedom-self directed" and simultaneously reported dissatisfaction with "co-workers are not 'team oriented', little encouragement or praise from supervisors." A few graduates reported satisfaction with each of the elements of compensation: salary (n=3), benefits (n=3) and flexible scheduling (n=6). In contrast, compensation was also the most frequently mentioned area of dissatisfaction (n=10).

The emergent theme of *Professional Growth* included elements of opportunities for advancement, attending conferences and training, receiving public recognition, and opportunities to learn through challenges. Graduates indicated that these opportunities were a source of satisfaction (n=7). Simultaneously, four students indicated that lack of these opportunities represented a source of dissatisfaction.

### **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 and easy 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 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.
- Graduates reported receiving significant intrinsic rewards from their employment experiences.

- Graduates reported satisfaction with their undergraduate degree preparation for employment.

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.

- Employment characteristics associated with “satisfaction” and “least satisfaction” are also necessary components of the graduates' emerging concept of themselves as professionals.
- 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 bachelors 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 five strategies for continuing their education including: Professional workshops/conferences (80.0%), Use of library/computer (80.0%), Agency training (73.5%), Interview/consult other professionals (71.4%) and reading professional journals (68.6%).

Table 7: Continuing Education Activities

<u>Percent Graduates Participating</u>	<u>Activity</u>
73.5 %	Agency training or in-service
52.9%	Membership in NASW
54.3%	Other professional organization membership
80.0%	Professional workshops/conferences
68.6%	Read professional journals
37.1%	Established a mentor/mentee relationship
80.0%	Use of library/computer
71.4%	Interview/consult other professionals
31.4%	Attend college courses
22.9%	Other (CAC, i.e., Certified Addictions Counselor Training; Publishing own research)

### Graduate School Status

Graduates were asked about their plans for and experiences with continuing their education in graduate school. Results indicated that within 2 years of graduating with a bachelor’s degree, almost half of the graduates had initiated (n=9, 23.4%) or finished their masters degree [n = 10 (23.8%)]. An additional 42.9% (n=18) of the graduates were considering graduate school two years after graduation but had not yet chosen a program.

All of the students who initiated graduate programs chose to attend one of three schools located near the University of Michigan – Flint. The schools chosen were Wayne State University (n=7), Michigan State University (n=4) and University of Michigan (n=1). When asked why they chose a particular school, four factors emerged. Location (n=10) as a measure of travel time or distance was the most frequently cited decision making criteria. Program duration (n=7) (finish date, part time and advanced standing options), Program reputation (n=6), and Cost/financial aid (n=4) were also used to choose between local schools.

Although a few graduates (n=3) chose to study different content at the masters level (Masters of Liberal Studies, Early Childhood Development, and Law), the majority continued to study within the profession of social work (n=12). These graduates cited two major reasons for continuing to study within the profession of social work. The first reason related to the individual’s marketability within the profession. Five students indicated they needed the degree for advancement, three students indicated they wanted to increase their earning potential above the salary at the bachelor level, and three graduates indicated they wanted the specific school social work credential. The second reason graduates gave was related to their commitment to the profession and the resulting need for specific content taught at the masters level. Three graduates indicated they wanted to learn more about a topic of personal interest to them, two graduates indicated they wanted to “advance” in what they have learned, and two graduates indicated they wanted to learn specific therapy skills.

### **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. The undergraduate degree appears to be valuable to other disciplines for advanced study as well.

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. Therefore, one of the curriculum outcome goals for the social work program is to prepare students for continued studies at the master's degree level. 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 five priorities.

The single most frequently identified motivation for graduate school was the perception that masters level social worker had greater salary potential. Seven graduates indicated that earning money was a motivating force to attend graduate school. Similarly, graduates were motivated by the perception that professional advancement opportunities were greater with a masters degree (n=6). Graduates reported being motivated by the desire to grow professionally by learning more content and advanced intervention skills (n=6). Some graduates (n=4) reported that a graduate degree was a personal goal they had set for themselves a-priori and were motivated to meet this goal. Two graduates indicated that they were motivated to attend graduate school by a mentor's encouragement.

The motivation for graduate school as indicated by the perception of the impact on salary was substantiated by the quantitative data. Contingency table analysis substantiated a positive relationship between salary and graduate school status. Graduates who did not attend graduate school, experienced a salary range of less the \$15000 to a cap of \$35,000. Graduates who obtain a masters degree experienced a salary range of \$27001-39,000 immediately following graduate school graduation.

#### 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

Obstacle	% graduates reporting “yes”
Lack of interest in school	10.0%
Financial aid/ Tuition too high	50.0%
Programs not available	20.0%
Travel	25.0%
Employment conflicts	25.0%
Family obligations	35.0%
Unaware of opportunities	15.0%
Unable to be accepted by program	5.0%
I like what I am currently doing	15.0%
Other	15.0%

Further analysis of the obstacles to graduate studies revealed interesting results in comparisons of graduates throughout the masters degree process (Table 9). Graduates anticipating graduate school are more likely to identify obstacles of interest, financial aid, lack of programs, travel, and family obligations when compared to current masters students. Current students when compared to those who completed a masters degree are less likely to identify financial aide, travel, employment and family conflicts as obstacles to graduate study. It appears that these obstacles are long-term stressful events and have the potential for consequences well beyond graduation.

Table 9: Obstacles to Graduate Studies by Masters Degree Status

Factor	Percent Graduates Reporting “Yes”		
	Pre-Masters Status (n=18)	Current Masters Status (n=9)	Masters Graduate Status (n=10)
Lack of interest	14%	0	11%
Financial Aid/Tuition	28%	25%	66%
Program not available	43%	0	11%
Travel	17%	0	44%
Employment Conflicts	14%	25%	33%
Family Obligations	28%	25%	44%
Unaware of Opportunities	14%	25%	11%
Unable to be accepted	0	0	11%
Like what currently doing	14%	25%	11%
Other	14%	0	22%

One strategy identified by graduates to mediate the effects of these obstacles can be surmised from the overwhelming interest in a local MSW program. The majority of graduates (63.9%, n=31) who had not yet begun a masters program, indicated an interest in a masters program available in Flint. Of those graduates interested in a local masters program, 39.1 % indicated that they could attend full time, whereas 75.0% indicated that they could attend a part time program.

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). Two areas of further curriculum review were identified by the significant variability in scores (range =4) and included “library skills” and “research skills”.

Table 10: Perception of Preparation for Graduate Studies

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

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., salary, employment advancement and additional knowledge and skill acquisition).
- Graduates indicated that they face obstacles to graduate school that were consistent with the expectations of graduate school: finances, location and balance of work and family obligations.
- Graduates reported that the University of Michigan-Flint curriculum offered adequate preparation for graduate studies.

Two concerns need to be further addressed regarding the preparation of graduates for the realities of graduate school. First, although the curriculum has been successful in preparing graduates for admission to graduate school there remain three areas for improvement. Graduates requested further assistance with library skills and research skills and indicated that rigorous standards be maintained regarding professional writing skills.

Second, there is an interactive effect between the non-traditional nature of the demographic variables of the graduates and reported obstacles of tuition, travel, family and employment obligations. A concerted effort is needed to meet the needs of non-traditional University of Michigan – Flint graduates by offering an affordable, flexible and locally housed graduate program.

## **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 the comprehensive curriculum and the concerns of constituents as seven subdivisions of the curriculum: field placement, liberal arts, CSWE accreditation, 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 thirteen outcome objectives of the curriculum and content for preparation as a "generalist practitioner."

### 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 11). Each of the thirteen 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 =3) 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 two curricular areas: understanding social and economic justice and applying research to practice (Table 11).

Table 11: Satisfaction with Preparation by Outcome Objective

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
Apply critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice.	4	3	1
Practice within the values and ethics of social work.	5	2	0
Practice with an understanding of and respect for the positive value of diversity.	5	2	0
Demonstrate the professional use of self.	5	2	0
Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination.	5	2	0
Understand the strategies of change that advance social and economic justice.	4	3	4
Understand the history of social work and social welfare practice with systems of all sizes.	4,5	3	2
Knowledge of bio-psycho-social variables that affect individual development.	5	3	1
Use theoretical frameworks to understand the interactions among individuals and between individuals and social systems.	4	2	0
Analyze the impact of social policies on client systems, workers, and agencies.	4	2	0
Evaluate research and apply findings to practice.	4	3	5
Evaluate your own practice and interventions of other relevant systems.	4	3	1
Use communication skills differently with a variety of client populations, colleagues, and members of the community.	5	3	1
Function within the structure of organizations and service delivery systems.	4	2	0
Under supervision, seek necessary organizational change.	4	2	0
Develop skills for life-long learning.	5	2	0

Key: 1=Greatly dissatisfied, 2=Dissatisfied, 3=Neutral, 4=Satisfied, 5=Greatly satisfied

### Generalist Practice

Generalist practice is defined within the social work program by five key elements. 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 12.

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. Although variability was an important quality indicator, 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” (Table12).

Table 12: Perception of Generalist Practice Preparation

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Number 1 or 2 scores</u>
I was prepared to work with different types of people.	5	4	1
I was ready to work with individuals, families, groups and communities.	5	2	0
I know how to implement the 8 step Planned Change Effort.	4	3	7
I learned how to intervene based on the client and issue.	5	2	0
I learned the principles of generalist practice.	5	2	0

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

### Program Strengths

It was the intent of the faculty to identify strengths of the program to assure that continued focus on these areas would assure continued quality in the program. The survey included items to measure the graduates’ perceptions of the program strengths. Two open-ended questions were asked of graduates to identify the strengths of the program. They were: “Please describe the aspects of the University of Michigan-Flint, Social Work program that you liked the most.” and “What should be kept the same about the social work program?” Identifying emergent themes from each question separately led to a similar characterization in both questions. The three common themes were: Professors and Staff, Course Content and Class Size.

“Professors” and “staff” were the most frequently mentioned program components of what graduates liked the most (n=30) and what graduates believed should be kept the same (n=13). Graduates indicated that they appreciated the interpersonal relationships they developed as well as the quality of the instruction they experienced. For example, when asked “What did you like most?” two responses from graduates were: “the instructors were really encouraging and helped push me to higher standards, they saw me as an individual” and “I enjoyed the enthusiastic approach illustrated by each instructor that taught the principles and methods of the program.” Similar responses occurred when graduates were asked “What should remain the same?” One graduate’s response was: “I would think it would be wise to maintain the intimacy the program offers because it was at least for me, an essential key to my success. I also think the availability of faculty should not change.”

Course content was an emergent theme that included *Course Topics* (i.e., human behavior, class examples, methods, values and ethics, working with other professionals, and policy), field placement experiences and accreditation status. This theme incorporated the ratings

of seventeen graduates. Similarly, eleven graduates indicated that items from the course content should be kept the same with specific reference to: unconditional positive regard, role plays, values and ethics, research, team-work, history, diversity, theory and practice, writing requirements, and NASW Code. Depth is added to this emergent theme through the words of graduates. For example when asked “What did you like most?” one graduate stated: “Discussing social work values and ethics and how to apply these in the real world. Preparing for work with other professionals that may not follow these ethical guidelines.” Similarly, when asked, “What should be kept the same?” two responses were: “The writing requirements, do not limit papers and research, I did not realize how vital to learning those assignments were. I plan to write and stay abreast of current research throughout my career.” and “During my contact with other like-degreed professionals, I have found UMF’s program to be superior to other universities (i.e., quality of instruction, and choice of text in class!)”

The emergent theme *Class Size* refers to two types of comments made by graduates who liked small class size the most (n=12) and graduates’ identification of what should be kept the same (n=2). These comments included references to the cohort experience that allowed students to establish significant and long lasting relationships with their peers, and references to course enrollment limits that allowed for class interaction and personal attention from the professor. For example, one graduate reported “I especially liked the intimate class size. I felt they allowed for an excellent learning environment where a student could ask questions without feeling intimidated.” One graduate identified what should be kept the same by stating: “The smaller class size to maintain low ratio of students to professor/instructors.”

### Areas of Growth

An explicit intent of the survey was to gather information to guide a process of continued improvement in student outcomes. The survey included items to measure the graduates’ perceptions of program weaknesses. One open-ended question was asked of graduates to identify the weaknesses of the program. The question was stated: “*What aspects of the social work program should be changed?*” Three themes emerged from analysis of the graduates’ responses to this question: Course Content, Community Connection, and Personal Growth.

The emergent theme of *Course Content* encapsulated the specific recommendations for additional content to be covered. All of the mentioned items reflect topics that are already in the curriculum, however, graduates indicated they wanted more coverage so that they are better prepared for the post graduation experiences. The specifically mentioned items include: Theory, Methods, Assessment, Role Plays, Research statistics, Case notes/care plans, Public speaking, Managed care, DSM IV, Team work, Gerontology, and Mental health. For example, one graduate stated: “more classes available on research, public speaking, and social work techniques. Maybe even a class which requires students to do volunteer work to gain experience before field placement.”

The emergent theme of *Connection to Community* again refers to the graduates’ request for more direct contact with agencies. Graduates requested more options for field placement assignments. Graduates wanted more field placement experiences. Graduates suggest building community connection by increasing options for field placement assignments, incorporating agency based assignments prior to the professional block, providing more lecture content on how agencies work and local agencies as community resources, and incorporating the Social Work Club in direct services to the community. Responses from two graduates reflected this perspective: “More diversity of different areas of social work. Much of my education was

focused on families and the mentally ill. I would have benefited more from additional classes in gerontology. I strongly believe social work would be better prepared for employment with 2 years of classes and 3 years of internship experience. But how would the universities make any money? Hmmm” and “Community assignments throughout the program, Make arrangements each semester for students to visit various areas of social work practice, they could “job shadow” 1:1 for a day with social workers in various areas and get ideas for jobs of interest.”

The emergent theme of *Personal Growth* refers to graduates’ comments which request attention to non-academic aspects of the curriculum. Graduates made remarks about needing assistance with the emotional and psychological aspects of field placement and assistance creating a balance between their obligations for work, family and school with field placement.

### **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 13 student outcome objectives.
- Graduates reported adequate preparation for generalist practice.
- Graduates identified strengths of the program to include faculty/staff, course content, and class size.
- Graduates identified areas of improvement based on requests for “more” rather than voids in the curriculum.

Although graduates’ report that the comprehensive curriculum was adequate to meet the outcome objectives, there were areas for improvement. Based on the recommendations of graduates attention should be placed on curriculum areas of:

- understanding of social and economic justice.
- applying research to practice.
- implementing the 8 step Planned Change Effort.
- more practice specific content.
- connection to the community.
- personal growth.

### **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 to be an opportunity to be in a learning role while practicing the application of 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.

The first strategy used to assess field placement was the use of 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 “agree” (mode=4)

or “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about the specific curriculum content (Table 13).

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 areas of: field placement relationships with supervisors, relationship of field placement to life, and the likelihood of recommending the placement to others (Table 13).

There is one statement “*My field placement was similar to the work I do now.*” which was rated as “disagree” (mode=2). On this item, there was also extreme variability (range=4) and a significant number of graduates (n=15) reported “agreement” with this statement (Table 13). 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 13: 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.	4	4	6
My field placement helped me grow professionally.	5	4	1
Experiences in field placement prepared me for life.	4	4	5
I would recommend my field placement to other students.	4	4	7
Field placement prepared me for the transition to work.	5	4	3
I had a positive relationship with my field placement supervisor.	5	4	2
My field placement was similar to the work I do now.	2	4	15

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

A second strategy used to evaluate graduates’ experiences in field placement was an open ended question stating: “*Please describe what you learned in your field placement experiences which continue to influence your life since graduation.*” Overall, comments from graduates reflected a very positive response to their field placement. Four themes emerged from graduate responses.

Twelve graduates mentioned that field placement was an opportunity to integrate their academic work with real life experiences. One graduate characterized field placement as “a safe place to test knowledge with supervision.” Within these twelve responses specific references were made to liberal arts/diversity, assessment and intervention skills and human development theory. For example, quip responses from graduates include; “the diversity of clients,” “I learned to put theory into practice with clients.” “the importance of diverse communication skills,” and “working in field placement prepared me by improving writing and problem solving skills.” One graduate reported: “This is where I really learned client interviewing skills-both for children and adults. I also learned about play therapy for use with children – I still use it today.”

Twelve graduates made reference to specific employability skills they acquired through their field placement experience. Specifically mentioned by graduates are employment tasks of: “paperwork,” “assessments,” “advocacy,” “diffuse suicide” “politics” and “community resources.” One graduate wrote: “My field placement exposed me to the older adult population in a way which previously had been unknown. I utilize the skills I used during geriatric assessments daily. I also was “a step ahead” because of my experience with guardian reviews. Two graduates indicated that they were directly hired by their field placement agencies after graduation.

Three graduates described the impact field placement made on their personal growth. One graduate indicated a benefit of personal insight by writing: “Being of service to others has made me more empathetic to circumstances and situations that confront me on a daily basis.” In contrast, another graduate reported developing positive personality qualities from this experience by stating “Patience, tolerance, self-examination. How to be non-judgmental. Recognizing my own limitations. Respecting the rights of others to make ‘bad’ choices.”

There was a small but dissenting voice of graduates who indicated that the field placement assignment was not worthwhile (n=3). One graduate reported not benefiting from a specific field placement by stating “nothing! I had a terrible experience in field placement. I was used to fill in a gap (lack of staff). I had to counsel 14, 15, 16 year old pregnant girls by myself.” In contrast the other two did not perceive a benefit from any field placement, as stated by one graduate “My field placement did not greatly impact me through skill building or preparedness. It simply provided necessary credits.”

### **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.
- Unanticipated positive outcomes occurred from field placement in terms of personal growth as well.

Two areas of potential improvement emerged from these results. First, the curriculum could be improved to expand attention in three areas: 1. field placement relationships with supervisors, 2. relationship of field placement to life, and 3. the likelihood of recommending the placement to others. Second, the curriculum could be enhanced to address the small but dissenting voice of those graduates who view field placement as irrelevant.

### **Liberal Arts**

Liberal Arts is the foundation curriculum of the social work degree, as outlined by the Council on Social Work Education. At the University of Michigan-Flint the liberal arts are defined 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 14). Each of the eight statements about liberal arts were rated “agree” (mode=4) or “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 achieves “preparation for participation in public life.”

Table 14: 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.	4	4	4
I learned how to analyze information at UMF.	4	4	1
I was prepared for citizenship at UMF.	4	4	2
I learned to participate in public life at UMF.	3,4	4	8
My education transformed my thinking.	5	4	3
I was empowered by my education.	5	4	1
My education changed my life.	5	4	3
My education made me a “well rounded” person.	5	4	2

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

A second strategy used to evaluate graduates’ liberal arts experiences was an open-ended question stating: “Please describe how the liberal arts classes (i.e., humanities, social science, English, natural science, fine arts, foreign language and values inquiry/ area options) contributed to your thinking after college.” Overall, comments from graduates reflect a very positive response to the liberal arts curriculum. Three themes emerged from graduate responses to this question: individual development, professional development and no benefit.

Eighteen graduates indicated that the liberal arts contributed to their *Individual Development*. Several graduates described this individual development as “broadening my thinking” or “making them a well rounded person” (n= 12). Two graduates’ comments summarize this perspective well “English and literature classes helped me to see history of oppression in various areas. Language just helped me respect a different culture. Biology was crucial in understanding physical stress.” and “All classes worked together toward the development of the person who graduated. They gave me a broader view of life.” Other graduates focused on their personal growth as a result of the liberal arts (n=6). One graduate wrote: “I have a greater appreciation of the arts, sciences, and the English studies have improved my writing abilities. These studies improved my quality of life.” Another graduate wrote “The liberal arts classes broadened my exposure to a variety of subjects. I feel that the classes I had with \*\* (name

confidential) in particular, had an incredible impact on how I thought about women, oppressed populations. Overall, liberal arts made me a more well rounded person.”

Thirteen graduates indicated that the liberal arts contributed to their *Professional Development*. The liberal arts have impacted their direct practice with clients in three ways. First, the liberal arts improved the graduates’ direct knowledge base regarding clients (n=6). One graduate wrote “All of these classes have contributed to my knowledge base and I’ve been able to pass some of this on to my clients.” Second, graduates describe the liberal arts as increasing their sensitivity to clients (n=3). One graduate wrote: “foreign language difficulties gave me an appreciation for individuals that (sic) do not speak or understand English.” Third, graduates describe the liberal arts as impacting their critical thinking skills (n=4). One student wrote “I am able to distinguish logical from illogical in what I read and hear. It amazes me how much “illogical” is out there!”

Eight graduates indicated that they perceived the liberal arts as *not benefiting* them. One graduate stated “I believe forcing students to take elective courses to make them ‘well rounded students’ is nothing more than a money making scheme for the university. They were a waste of my time, especially my money. I strongly disagree with this type of forced education.” Four of the students who indicated a negative value of the liberal arts specifically mentioned the foreign language component as a negative element. For example one graduate wrote “I think foreign language in the curriculum is overrated – too high of credits – on one uses it afterward, should be elective.”

### **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.

### **Bachelor of Social Work Degree**

Students frequently express confusion about the nature of the degree that they receive. This is particularly true when distinctions between the degree and diploma are considered to be a liability to their potential for graduate school or employment. In an effort to measure the magnitude of the consequences students experienced when they receive a diploma with the title Bachelor of Arts, graduates were asked an open-ended question about their post graduation experience. The question stated: “*Has the fact that your diploma indicates you have earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) instead of a Bachelor of Science (BS) or a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree influenced your experiences since graduation? \_\_\_\_\_ and if so, describe how.*” Graduates’ responses indicate that the majority of graduates (66.7%) reported that the BA degree had no effect on their post-graduation experience.

Although a minority in numbers, the qualitative response of those who reported experiencing an effect represents a different voice. Three graduates advocated for a BSW as they reported more employment credibility (e.g., “some employers want the diploma to say BSW”). However, one graduate clarified accreditation as more important to employment: “both

employers I have worked for questioned how much social work I really had – until I explained UMF had CSWE Accreditation in social work. Then immediately they knew what and how much I learned.”

Five students advocated for the BA degree based on the perception that the BA is more credible. One graduate wrote “I feel it states a more well rounded education, with your concentration in social work as a specialty.” Similarly, the BA is perceived as more flexible in pursuing other interests. One graduate wrote “Yes, it made a difference when being considered for law school (admissions).” Another graduate reported “since I am working on a science degree, I was able to use my electives taken from my BASW twice (apply them to my science degree). This saved a lot of time and money. I feel my arts degree really taught me how to write a great APA style paper.”

Two graduates advocated for a BS degree instead of either the BA or BSW. They indicate that the BS is more credible in employment and/or graduate school when interacting with professionals with different backgrounds. One graduate wrote “BS carries more weight clinically” and the other graduate stated “have to explain what the degree is and why it is not a BSW or BS.

Two graduates reported that the degree held personal significance for them. However, the significance is opposite in interpretation. One graduate wrote “I don’t know about how others perceive the BA, but I feel sad that it doesn’t say BSW” whereas the other graduate wrote “It give you, the degree holder, an opportunity to brag about the education received at UMF!”

### **Interpretation:**

Interpretation of this data leads to the conclusion that there was no immediate need to change the title of the degree for employment or graduate school purposes. Future consideration of a Bachelor of Science alternative may be warranted to meet the emotional and professional identification needs associated with the title of the degree.

### **Accreditation**

CSWE accreditation was a process that required extensive intellectual and economic resources over a ten year period to achieve. The University of Michigan – Flint was granted accreditation status in 1997. Since that time, information about the effect of this status on student outcomes has only been antidotal. In an effort to measure the magnitude of the consequences students experience as a result of accreditation, graduates were asked an open-ended question about their post graduation experience. The question stated: *“Achieving CSWE Accreditation required a significant effort by the faculty and students, because we believed it would benefit students. We wonder if this assumption is true. Please indicate here how you perceive accreditation to have benefited you since graduation.”*

Graduates were overwhelmingly positive in their comments about the impact of accreditation. Those graduates who noticed a difference emphasized one or more examples from three areas. First, graduates indicated that accreditation influenced their opportunities for graduate school. Thirteen graduates indicated that accreditation helped them in their graduate school application and/or admission to advanced standing programs.

Second, graduates indicated that accreditation was a positive influence on their employment experience. Graduates reported being more likely to be hired with an accredited degree (n=5). One graduate wrote: “Most importantly, all my employers usually wouldn’t consider an applicant without lots of experience, unless their undergrad degree is from an

accredited school.” Graduates also reported the perception that on the job, accreditation represents more quality to the work performed. One graduate wrote: “An accredited program hold much more value and respect in the working world.” Similarly, graduates perceived accreditation as job security. One graduate wrote: “Truer words were never written! In foster care, if the BSW didn’t/don’t have a degree from an accredited school they either have to go back to school or resign their employment.”

Third, graduates reported that accreditation represented a standardized curriculum with a reputation for rigor and legitimacy. Completing an accredited program enhanced graduates self-perceptions and their perceptions of themselves as professionals. One graduate wrote: “I also feel more confident in my employment knowing my major-subject is accredited.” “I received a great social work education. I work with other bachelor level social workers from other schools and I feel I have more social work knowledge.”

Only 4 of the 30 graduates who responded to this question indicated that they had not personally observed an effect. These comments reflected a positive perception of accreditation however, as they were qualified by disclaimers. For example, one graduate reported “it will be beneficial to future students but it had no impact on me.”

### **Interpretation:**

The expectation that accreditation would positively impact graduates marketability for graduate school and employment was supported by the research. The perceptions that graduates’ self image and professional orientation was also enhanced by accreditation was unanticipated and very positive finding.

Interpreting these findings led to the conclusion that the investment of resources was appropriate for the desired outcome. Further investment of professional and economic resources is merited as the marketability of graduates continues to be a desirable goal.

### **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 15). 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: “practice interviewing skills” and “role plays” (Table 15).

Table 15: 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	2
I learned to write well.	5	4	2
I had adequate opportunities to practice interviewing skills.	4	4	7
I learned how to assess client needs.	4	4	1
I was taught to involve clients in problem solving.	4	4	3
The role-plays prepared me for professional practice.	4	4	5

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

A second strategy used to evaluate graduates' perceptions of practice skills was the use of two open-ended questions. These questions were: *“Are there social work techniques you are using on the job which were not discussed when you were in school? \_\_\_ if yes, please identify: \_\_\_”* and *“What changes in your field of practice do we need to cover in the curriculum?”* Results from these questions indicate the curriculum is closely linked to practice realities. The majority of graduates reported that all the techniques used in the job were discussed in class (74.1%) and the majority of graduates did not indicate any changes in their field of practice to be included in the curriculum (54.4%).

Responses from graduates who did indicate suggestions could not be organized into emergent themes. Instead, listed here is an exhaustive list of their responses to both questions: problem solving in management, unconditional positive regard, reframing, COFAS, natural and logical consequences, patience-progress takes time, clients leading clients, psychiatric diagnosis and work guidelines, cognitive-behavior therapy, DSM IV, dual diagnosis/co-occurring disorders, more group practice and dialectics, case noting, prevention, correlation of mental health issues with neglect/abuse and delinquency, geriatrics, confronting supervisors, dynamics of family structure and addiction, psychosocial influences of HIV/AIDS onto infect and affected individuals, process of effective communication- therapeutic and non-therapeutic, theory, more assessment tools (i.e., Hudson scale), and managed care.

### **Interpretation:**

Interpretation of this data leads to the conclusion that there was room 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 the foundation of 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 16). Each of the five statements about critical thinking were rated with "agree" (mode=4) or "strongly agree"(mode = 5) to a positive statement about critical thinking content.

There is one item with a high variability (range=3) that indicated some discrepancy in the rating of "I was taught to gather information efficiently." However, when considered with the high mode, the outcome was that no graduate reported disagreement with the statement (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.	4	2	0
I am able to recognize when a client is different from theory.	4	2	0
I am able to make appropriate judgments from conflicting observations.	5	2	0
I was taught to gather information efficiently.	5	3	1
I use critical thinking to maintain objectivity.	5	2	0

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 17). The five statements about diversity were rated with "agree"

(mode=4) or “strongly agree”(mode = 5) to a positive statement about the specific diversity content. High variability (range=3) 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 17).

Table 17: 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	2	0
I was encouraged to appreciate diversity.	5	2	0
Inter-racial communication skills were taught well.	4	3	1
I recognize different coping strategies used by clients who are members of minority groups.	4	3	1
I understand how experiences of oppression can limit a client’s ability to trust me.	5	3	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 18). 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=less than 3) indicating that no graduates disagreed with the statements (Table 18).

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 18). This statement had a relatively large variability (range = 4), however only one individual indicated support for the statement (Table 18).

Table 18: 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	1	0
The program helped me learn how to apply social work values to real life.	5	1	0
I was encouraged to maintain social work values despite value conflicts.	5	1	0
I understand the importance of the NASW Code of Ethics.	5	1	0
The value of confidentiality was over-emphasized when compared to real life.	1	4	10
The value of self-determination is appropriately emphasized for the real world.	5	1	0
The value of human dignity and worth as taught at UMF is critical to good social work practice.	4	2	0

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 be 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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## Appendix A: Identification of Student Researchers

Great gratitude is expressed to each of the students who collaborated with the faculty to develop the research project. Their contributions are embedded in the intent and the outcome of this report. The faculty hopes that the results of their effort serves to foster further love of learning for each student and contributes to the enrichment of the program. Thank you,

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