BSW & MSW Reaffirmation Update

The School of Social work has been engaged in preparing for the 2012 reaffirmation of both the BSW and MSW programs. One of the components of reaffirmation is conducting an overall program assessment and explicating how the School will be using the collected data to inform the programs and respective curricula.

Program assessment consists of outcome measures for the competencies and accompanying practice behaviors collected from two sources: (1) core course outcomes and (2) student self-assessments. There are three sets of data: BSW, 1st-year MSW (foundation), and 2nd-year MSW (advanced practice). Data was collected during the 2010-2011 academic year. The administrative team, BSW Program Committee, and MSW Program Committee (both committees composed of faculty and students) were given the charge to analyze the assessment data and make recommendations for modifying both the explicit and implicit curricula. A timeframe was provided that allowed full faculty to discuss and approve (as needed) any modifications presented by these committees at the October 2011 faculty meeting. The Associate Director of the MSW Program attended all three committee meetings and at the faculty meeting provided an outline of all the recommendations and concerns.

In general, it was agreed that we need to be careful of the curriculum changes implemented based on one year’s data with one cohort of students at each of the three program levels (e.g., first-year MSW cohort has approximately 23 students). A second year of data collection will be more helpful in looking at trends across cohorts and provide better validity.

Based on faculty feedback, the following changes in the explicit and implicit curricula are going forward:

- After one year of acclimating to the new competencies/practice behavior terminology, faculty need to increase their use of such terminology in their syllabi, course outlines, PowerPoint presentations, and assignments. For example, description of a written assignment should have the purpose of the assignment stated and aligned with the proper competencies/practice behaviors. Course outlines that have session topics should be aligned with competencies/practice behaviors. Faculty should identify creative ways to use terminology to assist students in making the connections to specific competencies/practice behaviors.

- Due to increased use of part-time instructors (PTI) and/or scheduling multiple sections of a course, the School will have designated “lead faculty” to oversee each course of the core curriculum (BSW and MSW). The PTI is accountable to the lead faculty and the lead faculty is responsible for insuring PTI compliance with syllabi, course content, and outcome measure requirements. Lead faculty are asked to observe the PTI in the classroom and provide feedback to the Director as appropriate.

- The BSW and MSW Program Committees are responsible for overseeing and approving any major textbook changes in all courses. Individual faculty members can suggest
changes and present recommendations to the appropriate program committee. This eliminates a past problem of having two sections of the same course using different textbooks (supplemental readings are in the purview of the individual instructor).

- For BSW and MSW foundation: Competency #9: “Respond to contexts that shape practice” with the practice behavior of “provide leadership in promoting sustainable changes in service delivery and practice to improve the quality of social services” will be changed to “promote sustainable changes in service delivery and practice . . . .” Faculty approved this change at the October faculty meeting.

- BSW Program Committee is charged with exploring the redesign and restructuring of the four “methods” courses in the curriculum (case management, communication skills, methods I, and methods II). With the suggestion of moving the research course from fall to spring, it was recommended that the case management course be shifted from spring to fall. Currently, both case management and communication skills are taught the same semester. This presents an opportunity to review the four methods courses, better articulate that there are four methods courses, and review content to ensure we are building on one to the other.

- BSW Program Committee is charged with developing a new SW 3000 – Communications and Cultural Diversity course. The modified course will become a required core social work course with an emphasis on human rights and social/economic justice and possibly introducing content on intergroup dialogue and having an experiential component. Competencies/practice behaviors will be developed to support the course.

- MSW Program Committee is charged with expanding the 1st-year MSW new student orientation to focus on the social work profession, generalist practice, competencies/practice behaviors, field education, etc. Although both BSW and MSW foundation year focus on generalist practice, the BSW students have one year of coursework prior to entering field in their senior year. The 1st-year MSW students represent diverse disciplines and do not have the same understanding of the social work profession upon entering the program and beginning field one month later. The outcome measures of the students’ self-assessment after the 1st-year were generally lower than the course outcome measures. A better job of socializing students about the profession may produce higher self-assessment measures at the end of the first year.

- Administrative Group will develop and facilitate faculty training (individual/group) around the competencies/practice behaviors and outcome measures; specifically, the need to address the increased integration of the accreditation language in social work courses.

- BSW/MSW Program Committees is charged with reviewing course outcome measures and recommend modifications as needed.