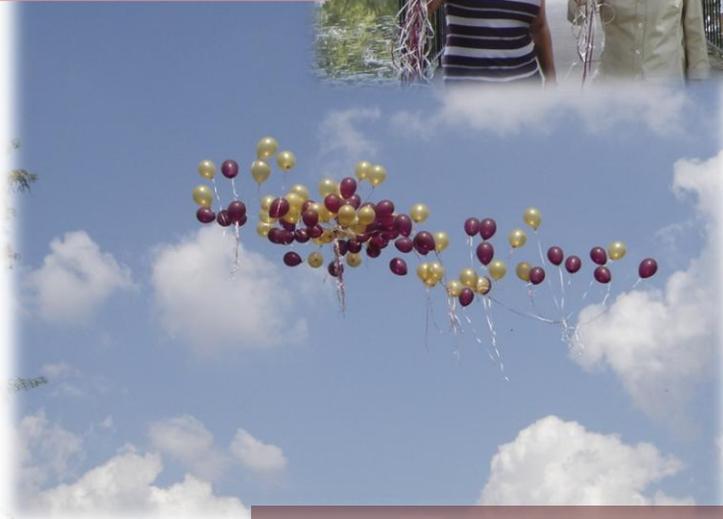


## CHAPTER 8: THE SOCIAL WORK PROCESS



### *Alum Celebration 2007*

*Bottom photo: The first cohort of online MSW students  
(with Mary Jo Garcia Biggs, far left)*





## Context, Engagement, Assessment, Intervention, Evaluation: The Heart of Social Work Practice

### *The Social Work Process from Beginning to End*

**T**he School views teaching MSW students to understand, appreciate, and negotiate context as the beginning of the social work process. Students move from that contextual beginning to the process of engaging and assessing the client or client system. Based on context, engagement, and assessment, the student progresses to intervention and finally evaluation of the process. This is the core of social work practice on micro, mezzo and macro levels.

Social work students yearn to facilitate real, positive differences in the lives of their clients. Practice courses satisfy that yearning with more immediacy than studying research, policy, or human behavior. Practice courses, for most students, hold promise for bridging the academic world and the real world, and students, expect practice courses to be engaging and meaningful. Texas State School of Social Work faculty recognize the eagerness with which students face the practice sequence. The sequence helps students integrate personal identity and professional persona by experiencing both the theory and application of the true professional's knowledge, values, and skills. Built on a broad array of liberal arts content, our curriculum incorporates the systems-ecological perspective, a strengths base, an appreciation of diversity, and an integration of values and ethics. The practice curriculum moves along a continuum of increasing skill development, beginning with sensitivity and developing to competence.

“You don’t  
understand anything  
until you learn it  
more than one  
way?”. –*Marrin*  
*Minsky*

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### Conceptualizing Practice Frameworks

Practice is a broad concept, and real-world cases require practitioners to deal with different systems—individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities—often at the same time. Students learn how to play different roles with these various systems, moving from broker/case management to therapeutic

Justin, a member of Phi Alpha Honor Society, completed his Administrative Leadership internship at Community Resource Coordination Group. His master's Research Project dealt with the effectiveness of using a wrap-around system of care to treat clients. He is working at an integral care agency.

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intervention. Because our School mission emphasizes public service with the most disadvantaged populations, we always highlight how students can advocate for their clients, developing strategies, resources, and policies leading to more humane services. This broad view of practice, which requires students to develop competence in a number of parallel activities, necessitates creativity and critical thinking in assessing the client's situation and how best to intervene on different levels and in different contexts. Practice links theory (knowledge) with application (skills). The framework that we use to shape our practice skill-building approach consists of two overarching constructs which guide our approach to practice. These constructs are presented on the foundation level, but the concentrations build and expand on them to develop advanced theories and techniques.

- **Systems theory**, which grew out of the natural sciences, informs us that there is interdependence among individuals, processes, and structures. Any change within one system generates changes among other parts of that system, as well as changes to all other connected systems. Systems theory leads us to rely on the critical roles of relationships, collaboration and systemic approaches to problems.
- **Ecological theory**, which grew out of the ecological movement, guides us to examine the person-in-environment. It is a holistic view of the individual client or client group's internal biological, psychological, social, relational, and spiritual functioning, surrounded by the cultural, political, economic, ideological, physical and natural aspects of environment.

Our approach to practice involves a core commitment to the strengths of the client or client system. All effective, ethical social work practice is grounded in a meaningful, empathic helping relationship, and building those treatment alliances is consistent with social work's purposes and with an integrative perspective. Students study relationship building, learning a traditional problem-solving approach as well as current intervention methods, which are supported by research. Because students learn differently, we vary our presentation techniques, using lecture, experiential labs, a broad variety of web-based and technological teaching strategies, and work in community projects. We also aim to integrate practice with research, so we push students to read, evaluate, and employ research in practice.

## Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Approaches

Our practice curriculum is anchored in the basic purposes of social work, covering macro, mezzo, and micro approaches and emphasizing the well-being of clients and client groups. Students learn to cooperate with clients and communities to enhance social functioning, while striving to make society more just and to develop effective strategies to weaken the destructive hold of poverty and oppression on clients. They learn to use both research and social policy to buttress practice in a culturally diverse society. And they learn to value and fortify the strengths that clients and client groups present.

We require MSW **foundation** students to take these three generalist practice courses that present macro, mezzo and micro level approaches:

Tania completed  
her foundation  
placement with Any  
Baby Can, an  
agency which serves  
infants and young  
children with  
disabilities or  
illnesses.

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- **5313 Practice I**, which centers on working with individuals, treatment groups, and families, teaches students how to gather and assess data about problems, how to plan and apply intervention with clients or client groups, and how to evaluate the intervention.
- **5314 Practice II** teaches students the social work process with task groups, organizations, communities, and larger systems.
- **5316 Practice III** helps students develop interpersonal and communication skills, centering on interviewing, assessing, and planning skills. We also move students toward communication leadership skills, such as public and persuasive speaking and court testimony.

The **Administrative Leadership (AL) concentration** practice courses focus on working with professionals, support personnel, boards, agencies, and larger systems using macro and mezzo level approaches.

- **5320 Advanced Administrative Leadership Practice I: Introduction to Management** emphasizes advanced skills in doing needs assessments and developing programs to enhance small and large organizations, including non-profit and public entities.
- **5334 Advanced Administrative Leadership Practice II: Resource Development** highlights how to write grants, how to market organizations and services, and how to extend resources.
- **5325 Advanced Administrative Leaders Practice III: Challenges and Innovations** focuses on advanced supervision and management, applying professional values to diverse workforce situations. Students get a great deal of material on real-world ethical situations and how to make action decisions in these situations.

**Direct Practice (DP) concentration** students take three practice courses and focus on learning advanced intervention theories and skills with individuals, families and groups.

- **5326 Advanced Direct Practice with Individuals** builds on multi-dimensional assessment. Students learn advanced intervention theories and modalities, and ethics for practice with individuals.
- **5324 Advanced Direct Practice with Families** uses a systems orientation to explore advanced current theory, research, and practice models for working effectively with diverse families.
- **5327 Advanced Direct Practice with Groups** presents advanced group practice skills, including clinical assessment of group process, intervention, evaluation, ethical thinking, and needs of diverse populations.

Students in practice courses learn the theoretical and practice foundation they need to think of themselves as practice leaders, advocating for just treatment of clients, being active in modifying policy, and developing new practice technologies or researching practice. Most of our practice assignments highlight vulnerable and diverse populations, *and all of our practice courses begin by considering the complex and varied contexts that shape practice.*

## Contexts that Shape Practice

Because professional social workers face complex, demanding practice environments, they must be able to multi-task, dealing with various systems at

Caroline, an MSW student originally from Canada, won a \$5000.00 Hogg Foundation scholarship for students who want to work in the mental health field. She has “brittle bone” disease and is small in stature. “I want to be a little voice for people with special needs”, she says. She is employed with Connections, an agency that serves homeless and abused youth. Caroline wants to work with people who have special needs.

the same time to accomplish intervention goals and create more effective services. Students need to understand and work within different contexts, which include varying locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging social trends. All of these contexts affect client systems, and though a student by inclination and training may be more skillful with one system than with others, they need to understand the basics of working in all systems.

The need to address multiple system levels at the same time is even more pronounced in dealing with those clients usually served by public monies. These often-forgotten people are beset by a range of serious difficulties which are intertwined: low income is connected with poor health care; poor health care is associated with low school achievement; low education is associated with criminal activities; and on and on. To address the needs of people served by public monies, professionals must deal with various systems. It is therefore entirely consistent with our School’s mission to teach students to respond to complex contexts that shape practice.



**EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.9—Respond to contexts that shape practice.** Social workers are informed, resourceful, and proactive in responding to evolving organizational, community, and societal contexts at all levels of practice. Social workers recognize that the context of practice is dynamic, and use knowledge and skill to respond proactively. Social workers continuously discover, appraise, and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends to provide relevant services; and provide leadership in promoting sustainable changes in service delivery and practice to improve the quality of social services.

The overarching practice behaviors that our practice courses teach in order to achieve Competency 2.1.9 include:

- *discovering, appraising, and attending to changing contexts to provide relevant services;*
- *providing leadership in promoting changes in service delivery and practice to improve service quality.*

These practice behaviors are relevant to micro, mezzo and macro levels of social work practice. Foundation and Advanced Standing students in both concentrations must hone the ability to respond to the complex contexts that shape practice.

### **FOUNDATION STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.9—Respond to contexts that shape practice.**

MSW Students in the **Foundation year** apply this competency by learning about the importance of intra-organizational advocacy for clients and social work practice. They assess the relationship between community organizations and institutionalized societal attitudes. They begin this process by analyzing macro practice, including values, ethics and law, and then move towards a deeper understanding of community, organizational, family and group contexts that influence clients.

- **5313 Practice I** foundation students focus on group interaction, constructing a sociogram and examining the strengths of the group. They also produce a social history from interviews they have conducted or a character in a novel.

They examine various practice theories and apply them to several case examples. From a case vignette, they develop an intervention plan and a genogram, ecomap, and timeline. Students see questions on exams, which call for them to demonstrate that they understand the basic premises of major intervention theories.

- In **SOWK 5314 Practice II**, foundation students examine community contexts and conduct a community assessment for a project relating to children and families, attending to 1) community strengths, weaknesses, 2) developing intervention strategies and 3) identifying beneficiaries. Finally, they propose and implement a community intervention and report on project goals, strategy, tactics (timeline, evaluation, and termination or transfer of action). This macro project is a core assignment for measuring practice behaviors.
- **5314 Practice II** students assess the context, needs, and capacities of diverse communities, and analyze case examples of mezzo and macro practice with diverse communities. In one classroom activity, students watch a film called the “Two Towns of Jasper” which documents the reactions of the White and Black residents to the brutal dragging murder of an African-American resident and the subsequent trials of the perpetrators. Students then assess the assets and capacities of the community in order to develop an intervention to promote racial healing grounded in the residents’ understanding of the experience.
- **5316 Practice III** foundation students interview one another about their cultural history and identification. They also complete a psychosocial assessment of a client, as well as participate in client-professional role plays and simulated case staffings in which they present their client assessment.

Trish is an MSW students who has a stipend from Title IV-E, a program which supports students who commit to go into child welfare work. Trish says that: “I have learned in my MSW studies how to educate clients to advocate for themselves. I’ve also learned how policy tickles down from the top and affects services.”

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### ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP (ADVANCED) STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.9—Respond to contexts that shape practice.

MSW students in both the online and on-campus Advanced Administrative Leadership concentration apply this competency by understanding the role of context in an organization’s development, analyzing an organization’s internal and external environment, and grasping the decision-making processes and leadership styles to improve service quality with vulnerable populations.

- In **5320 Advanced Administrative Leadership Practice I: Introduction to Management**, Administrative Leadership (AL) students engage in exercises to apply management tools to organizational scenarios and case studies. They study how leaders plan for and implement changes to improve service quality with vulnerable populations.
- Learning in **5329 Organizational Development** helps students understand the context of organizational life and how it affects intervention. Students examine the history, purpose, and mission of an organization and its changing internal and external environment.
- AL students in **5334 Advanced Administrative Leadership Practice II: Resource Development** discuss consumer-oriented models of evaluation and the importance of gathering stakeholder data through tools such as focus groups, surveys, and technology. Students complete grant applications for human service organizations.
- AL students in **5325 Advanced Administrative Leaders Practice III: Challenges and Innovations** learn about managing situations of sexual

harassment and disability in the workplace. They get practice constructing performance appraisal instruments.

A single mother, Cessily was employed with public child welfare when she entered the MSW program. She became a Direct Practice concentration student and completed her internship at a county juvenile probation agency, doing her research project on diversion programs for juvenile offenders. A first-generation college student, Cessily has graduated and entered law school.

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### DIRECT PRACTICE (ADVANCED) STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.9—Respond to contexts that shape practice.

MSW students in the Direct Practice advanced concentration apply this competency by developing specialized knowledge of current treatment options for people with mental illness, and critically analyze the appropriateness of these treatment options based on issues of oppression, poverty, and gaps in service. Teaching students to identify, analyze, and implement appropriate interventions that consider the context in which the client exists is part of social work practice knowledge. **SOWK 5319 Diagnostic Assessment**, an HBSE advanced course, gives students the chance to learn about contexts that affect practice. Students integrate social work values and ethics with the use of diagnostic assessment, and research and identify treatment options and gaps in services for vulnerable and disadvantaged populations. This research paper is one of the core assignments for measuring these practice behaviors; however, students learn to respond to contexts that shape practice in other Advanced Direct Practice courses.

- In **5326 Intervention with Individuals**, DP concentration students complete a comprehensive, in-depth assessment and treatment plan of an individual using one of the advanced practice models, such as psychodynamic or cognitive-behavioral. In most class sessions, students role-play a clinical interview using one of the advanced practice models.
- DP concentration students in **5324 Intervention with Families** evaluate advanced psychotherapy theories and techniques in class readings, discussions, and role plays. For instance, they study humanistic, gestalt, and psychodynamic theories with advanced techniques related to those theories. Students also write a family assessment and family intervention paper on a family, explaining why they chose to implement their identified theory. Students sculpt families in class, as well as videotaping simulated family interviews and assessing the process. Further, students complete a group presentation on working with families, using recent research.
- In **5327 Intervention with Groups**, DP concentration students plan and implement two 6-week simulated experiential therapy groups, focused on an issue peculiar to a vulnerable population. Half the class portrays the group; the other half observes. The students then critique the group processes, as well as the student facilitator's use of theory-based techniques.

## Engaging, Assessing, Intervening, Evaluating



**EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10(A)–(D)—Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.** Professional practice involves the dynamic and interactive processes of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation at multiple levels. Social workers have the knowledge and skills to practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Practice knowledge includes identifying, analyzing, and implementing evidence-based interventions designed to achieve client goals; using research and technological advances; evaluating program outcomes and practice

effectiveness; developing, analyzing, advocating, and providing leadership for policies and services; and promoting social and economic justice.

Arnie graduated from our MSW program in 2011. He was one of ten MSW students across the state to receive a \$5000 scholarship from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health for students committed to working in mental health services. Arnie, a Navy veteran and former journalist, wants to help veterans who suffer mental health issues. He now works with the VA in Arizona.



#### EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10(A)—ENGAGEMENT

Social workers substantively and affectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities; use empathy and other interpersonal skills; and develop a mutually agreed-on focus of work and desired outcomes.

Throughout our practice curriculum, we encourage students to center on building strong working relationships and empathic treatment alliances that are ethically sound. As a precursor to building those relationships, whether on the micro, mezzo, or macro level, students must first understand their own internal motivations and responses to the client/ client group's situation. They must also be cognizant of the boundaries which frame their behavior vis-à-vis the client. Students learn the importance of building relationships often hear from social workers in the field who discuss how to relate appropriately, not only to clients, but to collateral people important to the client's situation, and to other professionals.

The overarching practice behaviors which demonstrate competency 2.1.10a include:

- ⇒ Substantively and affectively preparing for action at all levels of practice
- ⇒ Using empathy and other interpersonal skills
- ⇒ Developing a mutually agreed-on focus and desired outcomes

#### FOUNDATION STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10a—Engagement.

- In **5314 Foundation Practice II**, students partner with an agency to identify a need for a short-term macro intervention within the agency.
- In **SOWK 5314 Foundation Practice II**, students complete a multi-component assignment including a cultural immersion process that involves self-reflection. They also attend a community activity related to a specific cultural population.
- Faculty in **5316 Foundation Practice III** set the stage for studying relationships by stressing how important it is that students listen to their internal voices, understanding their own responses to client situations. Students read an actual decision by a social work licensing board, which results in disciplining a social worker. They discuss how and where the social worker's relationship with the client went awry. They also review taped simulations of client-social worker encounters, discussing how relationship issues played out in the simulation. And students discuss how social workers can relate to groups of people that shape effective, ethical services, like agency boards and community support groups.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10a—Engagement.

- **5320 Administrative Leadership Practice I** students engage in an advanced partnership with a community agency to identify a needs assessment project in

A team of students enrolled in SOWK 5339 Troop and Veteran Transitions completed a project to train all the Resident Assistants and other dorm staff to work more effectively with veteran students. They trained over 100 people.

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the community. They conduct the assessment and develop a program development plan to implement.

- In **5334 Administrative Leadership Practice II: Resource Development**, students engage in advanced community organization to identify a need in the community or the agency that should be addressed. They write a grant proposal to address that need.
- **5325 Administrative Leadership Practice III: Challenges and Innovations** students learn advanced skills, including SOLER skills, to supervise professionals and staff persons. They discriminate between supervision for employment and supervision for professional development. They expand these skills to overseeing units and agencies.
- In both **5325 Challenges and Innovations** and **5334 Resource Development**, Administrative Leadership concentration students deal with relationships that support and enhance formal leadership. In their grant-writing projects, students examine how leaders use different techniques to relate to various constituent groups, assessing how effective and how ethical those strategies are.

#### DIRECT PRACTICE (ADVANCED) STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10a—Engagement.

- Direct Practice concentration students in **5324 Intervention with Families** apply ethical and legal standards to advanced clinical work with families. They deal with such issues as confidentiality and divorced parents' rights to access a child's treatment record.
- In **SOWK 5326 Advanced Practice with Individuals**, students role-play clinical interviews in which they must build rapport with the 'client' in order to gather history about the client's situation. This endeavor must include empathy and cultural competence.
- In **SOWK 5326 Advanced Practice with Groups**, students take turns facilitating a mutual aid group made up of fellow students. They take on the role of creating emotional safety in the group by conducting pre-screening interviews with clients, and also establishing group norms and expectations.



#### EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10(B)—ASSESSMENT

Social workers collect, organize, and interpret client data; assess client strengths and limitations; develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives; and select appropriate intervention strategies.

How effective a social worker is with a client or client system depends on the quality and quantity of information that social worker has to guide his/her practice. Consequently, information is vital. We stress that professional social workers do not need to know everything about any case; in fact, they will never know as much as the client or client group knows about the situation. However, the professional social worker needs to be clear about:

- ⇒ what information he/she needs to have to effectively work the case;
- ⇒ what gaps in information he/she needs to fill to be effective;
- ⇒ how interaction shapes the information that emerges;

Patrice, a Direct  
Practice  
concentration  
student, took  
SOWK 5334  
Resource  
Development (an  
Administrative  
Leadership practice  
course) as an  
elective. She really  
enjoyed the course,  
particularly learning  
to create Logic  
Models. “This class  
allowed me to  
integrate my direct  
practice knowledge  
with tangible  
dialogue for grant  
writing.” She was  
part of a student  
group that  
submitted a grant  
proposal to El  
Buen Samaritano  
Episcopal Mission.

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- ⇒ where and how to collect missing necessary information;
- ⇒ how to identify and weed out information that is superfluous to dealing appropriately with the case; and
- ⇒ how to synthesize, summarize, and document case-related information appropriately and in a timely manner;
- ⇒ how to look for client strengths in any system.

Our School’s orientation is that people have enormous, if often untapped, strengths to bring to bear on both their problems and society’s difficulties. We therefore encourage students to appreciate the inner potential of every person, group, and organization.

The overarching practice behaviors which operationalize competency 2.1.10b:

- ⇒ Collect, organize, interpret client data
- ⇒ Assess client strengths and limitations
- ⇒ Develop mutually agree-on intervention goals and objectives
- ⇒ Select appropriate intervention strategies

#### FOUNDATION STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10b— Assessment.

- **5313 Practice I** foundation students discuss practice theories that emphasize strengths, such as the narrative model, and they incorporate the strengths perspective in their case analyses and assessments.
- **5313 Practice I** foundation students hone their skills in assessing information through doing mock interviews and studying case vignettes; they complete genograms, ecomaps, and timelines. They learn about assessing client strengths. For example, faculty provide students case scenarios, and students conduct individual and family assessments from a bio-psycho-social perspective.
- **5314 Practice II** foundation students work in small groups with agencies to develop and implement an intervention that can be completed within the semester. Students gather information on the agency’s needs and capacities through their contact person and through on-site visits.
- Foundation students in **5314 Practice II** gather information on diverse communities, from the perspective of community strengths.
- In **5316 Practice III**, foundation students learn that the first communication system they must know and evaluate is their own internal communication system. That system is a base on which to analyze client information. They do many simulations of gathering information from clients, as well as simulations of collateral contacts with groups (such as agency boards), which affect service delivery.
- In **5316 Practice III**, foundation students complete a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment on a client, integrating the strengths perspective.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10b—Assessment.

Lavina, an MSW student in field, worked with an elderly gentleman. He finally said to her: “Hush. Just slow down. You worry too much and you do too much.” Lavina was a little stunned. She thought she was supposed to “do stuff” all the time. What her client taught her was to be present and attentive.

- In **5320 Advanced Introduction to Management**, AL students assess a local nonprofit organization, conducting a needs assessment of a social problem in a certain community. For example, one student collected and analyzed data on the number of kinship care placements in one community. The assessment identified the need for more training for child protective workers to better assess families for potential kinship care placements. Students also complete an assessment survey of an organization.
- Administrative Leadership concentration students in **SOWK 5334 Resource Development** learn to use focus groups to collect stakeholder data on what works well and what needs improvement in organizations. Also students learn about marketing techniques and how to build on an organization’s strengths in reaching new markets.
- In both **5329 Organizational Development** and **5334 Resource Development**, AL concentration students center on how to acquire, synthesize, and communicate information to effectively manage complex human service organizations. They learn how to gather data about the organization’s environmental context, and how to elicit information from various stakeholders. The goal of this information, they learn, is to incorporate it into creating more humane, effective social services.
- In **5325 Challenges and Innovations**, AL students watch videos of supervision and management issues, conducting an assessment of the situation and the employees’ needs and struggles.
- AL students in **5334 Resource Development** actually do a needs assessment with an agency and then respond to an RFP to propose a program development activity. They also identify and complete a marketing project for a local agency, such as a marketing audit, and a pamphlet promoting a program.

**DIRECT PRACTICE (ADVANCED) STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY**  
**2.1.10b—Assessment.**

- DP students in **5324 Intervention with Families** apply experiential theory by sculpting their families-of-origin in class at different points in the life cycle. They videotape simulated family interviews demonstrating psychotherapy and write a short paper assessing the family and its life cycle issues. Students also spend a good deal of time analyzing various family assessment and intervention tools, which becomes the base for their required papers.
- In **5324 Intervention with Families**, DP students watch videos of leading family therapy practitioners.
- Direct Practice concentration students in **5326 Intervention with Individuals** incorporate a strengths orientation into their required comprehensive assessment and intervention plan.
- In **5326 Intervention with Individuals**, DP concentration students also role-play a clinical interview, and using the data collected, they formulate an advanced assessment. Then they critique each other’s assessments.
- In **5327 Intervention with Groups**, DP students are trained about group process, emphasizing a growth-oriented strengths perspective. Students incorporate this perspective into their simulated experiential group, and critique their own strengths as group facilitators.
- DP concentration students in **5327 Intervention with Groups** watch part of a two-hour video in which expert group therapists conduct an insight-oriented personal development group. Students apply this video to what they have

been learning about group process and stages of group development. They pay particular attention to how process and development affect the flow of information, as well as responses to that information. Students then apply what they have learned to their own simulated group exercises.

Clint, an AL graduate of Texas State several years ago, is now Dean of Student Services at Austin Community College.



#### EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10(C)—INTERVENTION

Social workers

- initiate actions to achieve organizational goals;
- implement prevention interventions that enhance client capacities;
- help clients resolve problems;
- negotiate, mediate, and advocate for clients; and
- facilitate transitions and endings.

Our School teaches students to think critically. Critical thinking skills are essential when students are asked to identify needs, problems, issues, resources, and assets. We encourage students to think in divergent ways about these elements, considering all aspects and determining what are the most salient points that will lead to effective, humane, ethical interventions. We also stress that this thinking process is one that professionals work on all their careers; we never completely achieve the goal. We also help students create strategies to prioritize essential elements in order to handle the always complex and often conflicting issues that cases bring to light.

The overarching practice behaviors which operationalize competency 2.1.10c include:

- ⇒ Initiating actions to achieve individual, group, and organizational goals;
- ⇒ Implementing prevention intervention that enhances client capacities;
- ⇒ Helping clients resolve problems;
- ⇒ Negotiating, mediating, and advocating for clients;
- ⇒ Facilitating transitions and endings.

#### FOUNDATION STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10c— Intervention.

- Foundation students in **5313 Practice I** develop assessments and intervention plans from case vignettes, identifying needs and resources, as well as pertinent issues that affect intervention.
- **5313 Practice I** foundation students interview each other and complete a process recording in which the student reflects on his/her performance as an interviewer. In simulations, students give each other feedback on communication skills. Students also engage in exercises on empathy, authenticity, and confrontation, all elements central to effective interventions in practice.
- In **5314 Practice II**, foundation students meet in task groups to develop an intervention plan that can be implemented in a community agency. Students create an intervention plan to address an organizational need.
- Through their interface with agency contacts, foundation students in **5314 Practice II** learn to make quick, concise, focused communication to achieve a specific goal. They develop self-confidence in presenting themselves as professionals to an agency professional.

Students in SOWK 5319 Diagnostic Assessment usually take a field trip to the State Hospital, where they learn how mental health policy affects services. Recently students were able to witness a commitment hearing, which they found fascinating.

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- **5316 Practice III** foundation students do a simulated case presentation in an agency staffing meeting, fielding questions and accepting feedback. They also interview each other about their cultural history and identification, giving feedback about that issue. In the Day in Court simulation, students conduct a mock hearing on a civil case involving child custody, which teaches them critical elements of how to testify effectively. One potential witness is the child welfare worker's supervisor, and the questioning of that witness brings out many supervision issues which students discuss afterwards. Students identify the different procedures and legal ramifications distinguishing a consultant's role and a supervisor's role. Students also submit case documentation in simulated client encounters, and they discuss the critical elements and boundaries of case documentation. They also learn strategies of persuasive communication, which they can use to garner support and resources for humane services.
- Using specific case scenarios, foundation students in **5316 Practice III** simulate meetings, such as agency case staffing sessions and community interest groups, in which they examine the issues presented in the case scenario and determine ways to deal with the needs presented, given available resources.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10c—Intervention.

- AL students in **5320 Advanced Introduction to Management** students create an advanced program development evaluation. They develop measurable objectives and outcome measures derived from program goals.
- AL concentration students in **5325 Challenges and Innovations** consider communication in leadership and supervision roles. They learn to affirm employees' positive achievements, while confronting employees in ways that diminish defensiveness. They also deal with the legal dimensions and requirements of management tasks, such as hiring and firing employees and managing employee records appropriately.
- AL students in **5334 Resource Development** study how to develop and communicate a service proposal in an ethical but persuasive manner to funders and to constituent groups. They learn the necessary written communication techniques to craft a fundable proposal.
- In **5334 Resource Development**, AL students concentrate on how to develop and fund resources. They study fund-raising and grant-writing techniques. One assignment is to write a grant proposal, but students must also learn how to market the proposal and craft reasonable and useful deliverables from the proposed project. They also strategize about the most effective ways to bring agency staff and management on board with the proposed project, and they do not neglect the evaluation component of the project.

#### DIRECT PRACTICE (ADVANCED) STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10c—Intervention.

- In **5323 Advanced Research**, concentration students learn skills for evaluating practice and program effectiveness.

A graduate of Texas  
State's  
Administrative  
Leadership  
concentration,  
Charles is Deputy  
Director of the  
Legislative Finance  
Committee in New  
Mexico.

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- DP concentration students in **5324 Intervention with Families** identify and apply the concept of Levels of Need of families, assessing which family practice theories best fit families with different Levels of Need. They demonstrate skills with families having different levels of needs.
- In **5324 Intervention with Families**, DP students develop cultural genograms and develop more advanced sensitivities to how culture affects people, and how services may not respond appropriately to these needs.
- DP students in **5326 Intervention with Individuals** role-play situations that involve issues of justice, such as cases of poverty, domestic violence, chronic illness, and child protection.
- DP students in **5327 Intervention with Groups** simulate a group comprised of members that represent a spectrum of diversity – age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, SES, gender, ability.



#### EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10(D)—EVALUATION

Social workers critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions.

As part of the School's reliance on empirically supported practice strategies, we make sure that students grasp techniques and concepts about evaluating practice, particularly their own practice. The overarching practice behaviors which operationalize competency 2.1.10d include:

- ⇒ Critically analyzing, monitoring, and evaluating interventions.

#### FOUNDATION STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10d—Evaluation.

- **5313 Practice I** students use measurement tools to assess progress toward goals, particularly in their individual and family assessments.
- Foundation students in **5314 Practice II** develop a proposal for agency intervention. The proposal must include an evaluation plan.
- Foundation students in **5316 Practice III** complete a psychosocial assessment and intervention assignment, which includes a component on how they will measure progress toward goals.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1.10d—Evaluation.

- AL students in **5320 Advanced Introduction to Management** develop evaluation plans as part of their program development project. This project can be incorporated into their learning in 5323 Advanced Research.
- AL students in **5334 Resource Development** view measurement as a critical component of grant proposals.
- In **5622-5623 Administrative Leadership Field**, students design and complete a program evaluation study in their field agencies. They present their project in the Research Forum and write up their project as an article for publication.

**DIRECT PRACTICE (ADVANCED) STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY  
2.1.10d—Evaluation.**

In 5316 Foundation Practice III, students research their family culture on genealogy sites and by interviewing relatives. They assess their own culture and what impact that culture might have on their interviewing skills. When students get to 5324 Practice with Families, they build on their culture project by doing a cultural genogram of their families.

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- In **5324 Intervention with Families**, DP students read and discuss assessment tools for working with families. In their Family Assessment and Intervention papers, students identify ways to measure progress toward meeting goals. They learn to evaluate research on how effective different family therapy techniques can be measured, and how much evidence really backs up those techniques. Students also learn about how the feminist movement has challenged family therapy, increasing awareness of how culture and class affect family relations, and how social work has flavored family therapy with social work values.
- DP students in **5324 Intervention with Families** role-play Cinderella’s family at different stages of the life cycle, but they also identify communication techniques that are effective and ineffective in Cinderella’s case. Students also videotape simulated family interviews using different practice theories. Students learn about non-defensive communication through an in-class exercise of turning blaming statements into “I” statements.
- DP students in **5326 Intervention with Individuals** learn empirically-based guidelines for using different DSM diagnostic categories. For example, they study research about using cognitive-behavioral methods to treat mood and anxiety disorders. They do comprehensive treatment plans and simulated role-plays which must include an evaluation component, based on their foundation research and practice classes. Students also read an article pertaining to empirically-based group intervention and then write a critique of the article.
- DP students in **5327 Intervention with Groups** find at least one article pertaining to empirically-based group intervention and then write a brief critique of the article.

## **Taking Evaluation Further: Empirical Knowledge and Technology**

In our School, faculty instill a respect for evaluating interventions empirically, and for investigating whether intervention techniques are supported by research. While we recognize that professionals must approach practice in a flexible, individualized, creative way, we emphasize that this flexibility and creativity must be tethered to proven technologies. New interventions and technologies must be tested before professionals engage in them widely.

This admonition is balanced by the caveat that, unfortunately, empirical research of human service technologies and interventions is somewhat limited because of lack of public interest and funding for such research, as well as the inherent difficulties of applying empirical methods to human subjects. So it is a goal for professional social workers to seek ways to study interventions so that human subjects are not adversely affected.

There is more empirical evidence on potential interventions, however, than most professionals can digest in the course of their careers. So we start students on a diet of reading and analyzing journal articles that address empirical evidence on various interventions. Building on their growing skills in identifying theories and understanding empirical implications, we encourage them to adapt theories and empirical methods to their own practice. Throughout this process, we encourage students to be creative in devising and implementing interventions.

We encourage students to take advantage of the technological assistance available to them to improve their learning and humanize services. To begin that process, faculty use TRACS extensively, which forces students to become comfortable with using the Internet for learning and information. Increasingly, of course, students come to us as computer-savvy learners, but we build on that. For students who are computer-challenged, we match them up with University-sponsored training in computer labs.

Under the supervision of Dr. Hill Jones, Erin, an MSW student, conducted a research study of older adult women diagnosed with ADHD. Erin and Dr. Hill Jones presented their findings at the 2009 CSWE meeting, and wrote a manuscript which was published by *Women & Aging*. Erin shared the article with her field agency, and they have been very grateful. They share the article with staff and find it helpful.

Though we do not specifically teach web-based therapy, we recognize that this is a growing area of practice, and we discuss the effectiveness of using the internet for therapy, as well as the ethical implications of such approaches. We discuss using social media as a way of reaching clients and client groups.

- **5313 Practice I** foundation students develop an intervention plan from a case vignette, justifying their selection of a theoretical base for the plan. They examine the ethical considerations and boundary issues of using technology (such as Facebook and other social media), and develop strategies to protect confidentiality in such issues.
- **5314 Practice II** foundation students discuss how technology and social media can bridge communities through communication.
- Foundation students in **5316 Practice III** read and discuss information about empirically-based practice approaches. They demonstrate their knowledge in the psychosocial assessment and implementation plan they produce, as well as in the simulated case staffing. Students also discuss Internet therapy and use of social media, examining the legal and ethical ramifications of these approaches.
- In **5334 Resource Development**, AL students use various technological means to research funding bodies, their topic of interest, and the grant proposal they make about their topic of interest. They form teams to develop ways to market their proposals, and they conduct much of their work via Internet and TRACS.

## Experiential Learning in Social Work Practice: Exploring our Signature Pedagogy

Students in our MSW program receive hands-on learning throughout the curriculum in order to prepare them for real-world experiential learning in agency settings during their field internships. Field practicum is our signature pedagogy; it is where we “put the practice into social work practice”. Because ours is a professional program, it is our ethical obligation to make sure that students are adequately prepared to work effectively in agencies and facilities. We intentionally create classroom and field experiences that promote behavioral competencies in our students. Consequently,

our practice coursework and our field program are highly integrated. Students are prepared to work in a variety of agencies, a sampling of which follow:

- Foundation students do field placement in generalist agencies such as:
  - Public child welfare agencies
  - Public agencies which protect the elderly
  - Communities in Schools
- Administrative Leadership students do advanced work in such entities as:
  - Legislative offices and other policy-making bodies
  - State offices of child welfare, services for the elderly, services for the disabled, state health services, etc.
  - Administrative offices of Veteran's Affairs, Red Cross, USO, and family advocacy programs
  - Agencies which serve troubled families and children, particularly in grant-funded initiatives or program-planning roles
  - Military installations, such as Brooks Army Medical Center, Randolph Air Force Base, and Wounded Warrior Battalion
- Direct Practice students complete advanced placement in settings such as:
  - State and private in-patient mental hospitals
  - Agencies serving those affected by drugs and alcohol
  - Prisons and juvenile justice agencies
  - Facilities serving people with head injuries and developmental disorders
  - Medical hospitals in various programs, such as transplant units, oncology units, emergency departments, etc.
  - Hospice
  - Agencies serving families and children