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"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"

**BEGINNING AN MSW PROGRAM WITH AN ESTABLISHED
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**

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Introduction

Starting new programs are challenging endeavors that require intentional strategic planning and commitment by those creating the program. As more master of social work (MSW) programs are being created, it is important for departments, faculty, and administration to fully understand the requirements and key issues of the accreditation process and standards, curriculum development. They must also consider the challenges and realities of change that will occur with the addition a new master's program and the hiring of more faculty. For many programs, a new masters program doubles the size of the faculty.

Initial Questions and Considerations

When departments grow from a small BSW program to a department with a BSW and an MSW program, there are some considerations that need to be addressed by faculty. Faculty need to be clearly supportive of the addition of a new program. They need to be able to articulate why an MSW program is necessary. It is important to be realistic and accept the fact that these changes will created a more complex environment. Systems theory postulates that whenever one part of a system changes the rest of the system also changes to achieve balance. It is important for faculty to discuss how they can make the necessary changes in a functional and productive way. The following are some questions that could aid in the process?

- What are the benefits and difficulties of a new MSW program for the department, the university, and for the community as a whole?
 - How can we change the difficulties to positives?
- Is the department equipped to handle the necessary changes required, such as the addition of new faculty, additional students, and increased workloads?
- Is there enough commitment to the new program by administration and current faculty?
- How will resources in the department be handled?
- Who will write the curriculum?

The hiring of graduate faculty can also create complex issues that need to be addressed by the department. Usually the rank for graduate faculty is at the associate/professor level. If assistant professors are hired, they should be faculty with some experience as full-time faculty members.

The hiring of newly minted doctorates with little to no teaching experience can create difficulties. For example, it is difficult for new assistant professors to deal with learning to teach, new preparations for all courses, creating/adjusting syllabus, learn a university system and, adjusting to a new position, deal with scholarship issues associated with the move toward tenure, and being expected to participate and contribute effectively with the accreditation process.

Another consideration is that teaching as an adjunct is very different than teaching as a full-time faculty member with all the responsibilities that go along with being faculty. Sometimes these types of issues create tensions within the faculty that can undermine relationships and programs.

Another issue that might create complex responses from the faculty is salary. Graduate faculty, with experience in accreditation and teaching, may be require a higher salary. This may cause problems and tensions for new faculty if they are given a larger salary than current faculty. This may be particularly important in public settings where salary information is accessible to

the public. In order to prevent conflict and disruptions in program development, these issues should be addressed before the program is established and before new faculty are hired.

Social work departments and administration should be proactive in their development of a new program. This approach permits social work faculty and administration to anticipate concerns that may arise. Creating solutions for problems beforehand allows faculty a contingency plan to rely on rather than being uncertain of what action to take. It also promotes a positive work environment and decreases reactivity and defensiveness in the workplace.

Developing and improving the understanding of all social work faculty about the CSWE standards and of the accreditation process prior to starting a program is necessary. This presents all faculty members with an understanding of the expectations for themselves and new faculty members as the program begins to take shape. It also provides the framework for the development of the new program. Knowledge about CSWE standards will decrease the chances that there are misunderstandings about decisions. For example, it is important for faculty to understand the CSWE standards about reassigned time for the program director and the field director. The designation of money for training and for conferences is vital. Graduate faculty should attend CSWE's APM¹. The Department should also become a member of NADD once the program is admitted to candidacy, and send the director to the annual meetings. The workshops are informative on the processes of accreditation and relationships with other faculty will be very helpful as the program progresses through the accreditation process.

Getting current faculty on board and in support of a new MSW program is a vital. Faculty may be opposed to creating a new program because of the increase in their workload and because of the inevitable changes in the department. Faculty may be apprehensive of the research expectations that always accompany the addition of graduate faculty. The adjustments by faculty

¹ Annual Program Meeting

may be viewed negatively and impact their overall attitude toward the program. If this is not fully addressed tension may occur in the department as changes begin to be made, and as graduate faculty are being held to the expectations of increased scholarship.

The department must also address the MSW curriculum. A major question initially is who will create the curriculum. Curriculum development needs to integrate CSWE standards and the program's vision, keeping in mind how the curriculum will be carried out long term. Leadership directly impacts curriculum development and is an important consideration in this decision. A problem that we have seen is that some faculty perceives the development of curriculum by someone other than the person who will teach in the program as a violation of academic freedom. It is important to understand that syllabi need to be created, texts need to be identified, and embedded assignments need to be developed in order to demonstrate that the program is able to link the mission, goals, and competencies to the curriculum, and that the program is a strong program. One way to address this problem is with the development of a curriculum committee comprised of those who will be assigned to teach in the program, and others who agree to help. If the faculty want a strong voice in the program they need to be willing to take on the extra workload, cooperate with the development of a curriculum and syllabus, and complete the work well in advance of final deadlines for submission of CSWE documents. It should also be discussed that curriculum will be developed before MSW program is fully staffed. Faculty need to come to some agreement about how they will address the issues that may arise when new faculty are given syllabus that have been created prior to their hire. Senior faculty can help new faculty by showing them how they can make the syllabus their own, as much as possible, without changing the learning objectives and embedded assignments designed to meet competencies.

The autonomy of the MSW program and the program director are critical issues that should be discussed prior to the establishment of the program. The program director must have the freedom to develop the program and move it forward. Collegial cooperation is necessary for committee work. However committee members and faculty must be committed to the MSW program and be able to work together cooperatively.

Another issue that is a consideration and a reality is that faculty who are involved in the creation and development of a new MSW program may not be able to produce scholarship necessary to meet tenure due to the high demands of the program. The self-study is a comprehensive document that requires intense focus, concentration, and time. It is comprehensive scholarship that involves the development of curriculum, teaching, program evaluation research, and data analysis. It should be considered scholarship and acceptable in the tenure/promotion process. Considering the leadership necessary for the development of a new program, universities should be strongly encouraged to bring a program director into the university with tenure.

Realities

There are realities that social work departments must be aware of as they create an MSW program. One reality is determining the leadership and structure of the MSW Program. Frequently the leadership for a new program comes from current and tenured faculty members. This demonstrates commitment from current faculty and provides the new program with a solid foundation. Existing faculty have knowledge about policies, procedures, and structure of the university or college and CSWE standards which is a benefit to program development. Collegial working relationships have already been established.

Sometimes faculty have not had experience in graduate level work and do not feel they are in a position to be the director of a new program. Or, faculty do not want to move into administration, or they are very busy conducting research and participating in scholarship. When a director from the outside is hired, it is important for existing faculty to be helpful in educating the new director on the way the university operates, be open to new ideas the director might have in how the program may look, and attempt to establish a collegial and flexible environment. This is important because it allows the director to focus attention on leadership and the creation of the MSW program.

The field director is also a critical position for starting a new program. It is most helpful if the field director has a good command of the community in which the MSW program is housed. This is particularly true in areas where there are not a lot of degreed social workers or MSWs. Having a field director who is knowledgeable about the community, agencies, and existing MSWs in the field allows the field program to come together more quickly in terms of the development of internship. It is also helpful to have the political connections so the community can feel they have a stake in the MSW program.

The creation of a new program has the potential to cause conflict, stress, and tension among faculty and in departments. Also, in new programs, there are a number of unexpected issues and concerns that occur and increase stress for all involved. As a result, it is beneficial when social work administrators and faculty are experienced in crisis management and conflict resolution. Being able to work through conflict successfully helps with the process of change and leads to effective resolution of these concerns. Avoidance of conflict in departments can lead to problems later on that impact the overall functioning of the new MSW program.

CSWE requires that six full-time faculty members be primarily assigned to the MSW program. So, what *does* primary assignment mean? When considering the work load for faculty who are creating a new program, primary assignment really means 100% assignment, or at least 95% of the faculty's time. The creation of a new program involves intense work. It is difficult for faculty to be involved in both programs. Faculty need to decide on primary assignment for each program. Consequently, social work departments must make decisions and have long-term plans for faculty assignments. This will impact advertising and the hiring of new faculty.

Another consideration is the timing of new hires. It is important to be aware that integrating new faculty into a department creates changes. The practice and academic experience of new faculty and the exposure to the CSWE accreditation processes will have an impact on the integration of new faculty. Individuals who are ABD or recently graduated with their Ph.D.'s may be better suited for an existing and accredited program. A new program in initial accreditation might be a difficult assignment for newly graduated Ph.D.'s. The nature and intensity of academic requirements for tenure-track faculty make it difficult for new Ph.D.'s to step into a new program and contribute. New Ph.D.'s and ABD faculty may struggle more than normal with adjusting to an academic setting, new preps for courses, and working on the new program. Ensuring that these faculty are positioned where they will succeed is important. Faculty also need to be prepared to mentor new academics. And, new academics need to be able to seek and accept mentoring efforts by senior faculty.

The community where the MSW program is housed is another consideration. Accessibility for the community generates support for the program and a larger pool of applicants. The faculty needs to work with one another to ensure that the communities' voices are heard and to seek their support. A supportive community allows for reciprocal interactions

between the department and community members. Social work departments rely on community members and social agencies to provide internships and supervision for students. Consequently, social work departments are heavily reliant on communities, and their support is important when developing a successful MSW program. Community needs will also be important when considering a focus for the program, a concentration, curriculum, and field placements.

Another aspect of community that social work departments need to evaluate is the competition that exists. Are there other MSW programs in the community or surrounding areas? Will the program be the same or different than the other programs? What makes the program unique from other programs? Is there a demand for more programs?

Developing a Vision and Curriculum

Developing a vision will provide the foundation for the MSW Program and curriculum development. Creating a vision moves the program forward and helps to engage faculty in the process. The surrounding communities should impact the vision of the MSW program also. Considering community needs supports interaction with the community, internships and the employment opportunities for graduates. Surveys and focus groups are tools that can be used to collect information about community needs.

During the creation of a vision, departments must decide what the focus of the MSW program will be, such as clinical specialties, administrative, advanced generalist, etc. Decisions should be based on the nature of the communities where the program is located and where the students will practice. The advanced generalist degree may be appropriate for small rural communities, whereas a clinical specialty may be a better fit for urban communities.

Incorporating everything that is needed for the degree into the curriculum is challenging. There is so much to teach and knowledge to be shared. Most programs offer 60-65 credits. There

are many ways the curriculum can be packaged. Usually one person pulls together the conceptualization and then gets feedback from the faculty. This collaborative process is helpful.

While the knowledge base in the foundation year is basically the same, programs can structure the foundation year to support the concentration. Each textbook has a theoretical perspective, regardless of the similarities between them. Clinical programs would select more textbooks that strengthen the clinical concentration. An advanced generalist program would likely select textbooks that provided a variety of theoretical perspectives. For example, to support the strengthening of clinical knowledge, a HBSE textbook at the graduate level might have a psycho-social theoretical framework throughout. This would strengthen the micro-system knowledge base. Other courses would have theoretical frameworks that would support mezzo and macro practice. Essentially, this would ensure that the multi-system theoretical knowledge base is covered through perspective and content. Some programs are also offering courses on line. There are many differing opinions about on line courses. It is our opinion that there are some courses that can be offered on-line. Other courses are better offered in the classroom, such as practice classes.

Advanced Generalist

The advanced generalist concentration provides students with a comprehensive package of theoretical models and frameworks to practice in multiple areas of social work. The advanced generalist curriculum provides a strong theoretical foundation for students to create complex and effective interventions on the micro, mezzo, and macro systems level. Advanced generalist students are able to do extensive and simultaneous problem solving with all system levels. This curriculum also prepares students to creatively address multifaceted concerns using refined and advanced social work practice skills. Students are provided with knowledge that will help them

in clinical work, work in communities, and in larger systems. This would include knowledge on supervision, political advocacy, organizational structure, grant writing, and etc.

Clinical social work curriculum, on the other hand, teaches students the knowledge, values, and skills to provide mental health services to individuals, families, and groups. Clinical social workers are trained to do diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of behavioral, mental, and/or emotional disorders with the goal of increasing the client's overall social functioning. Clinical social workers work in mental health centers and agencies, schools, in private practice, hospitals, and other such institutions where they are able to provide a wide array of mental health services and interventions to their clients.

Considerations in the Field

Consideration of potential field placements, diversity of sites, and available supervision is an important consideration. Some programs are being developed where there is a dearth of available MSWs to supervise students. A more recent development is that with the increased work load of many local agencies, due to the current economic conditions, some supervisors are hesitant to take on the additional workload required when supervising a student.

To address some of the barriers associated with the dearth of available supervisors programs can have alternate plans. An MSW in an agency would not necessarily need to be the primary supervisor. Students can have a direct supervisor and also an MSW within the agency who only meets weekly for the required processing of the experience and supervision. An off-site supervisor is an option. Programs can set up a plan for an off-site supervisor to have an agency supervisor in communication with the MSW, who then provides the weekly hour of supervision. Sometimes advisory boards are helpful and supportive.

Another option is to obtain a list from NASW of the MSWs in surrounding communities. This would provide the program with potential supervisors for field placements. Networking and developing relationships with the agencies where MSWs are employed would expand opportunities for students and strengthening the MSW program.

Another way to encourage the cooperation of MSWs to accept interns is to become creative with incentives. For example, colleges may consider giving field supervisors three (3) free credits from their university as a recruitment technique. This would give the supervisor an opportunity to take a course that interests them at no cost. If the university was not in favor of offering free credits for this service, faculty might consider seeking out potential grants that could be used to pay for university credits. A grant might also be used to pay off-site supervisors for their time.

Additional Issues Relating to Students

In the creation of a new program, admissions and recruiting students is always a top priority. Developing criteria for admissions is important because this determines who will and will not be in the MSW program. Administration likes to see a program full. It is also important to admit students who are mature enough for the responsibilities of an MSW, who will be able to handle the intensity of an MSW curriculum, and the required out of classroom time for reading and completing assignments. Will the student be a part-time student or a full-time student? If students are working full time, it will be difficult for them to attend as a full-time student. Some programs use a rubric to assist in the review.

Another question that must be answered about admissions is will the program have rolling admissions or a set date? Rolling admissions means that the program is continuously admitting students throughout the year, until a specified date. A more traditional way is to

establish a set date when applications are due. After the deadline the applications are reviewed and a decision is made.

There are pros and cons to each method for admission. Many professional programs find that there are many advantages to using a process of rolling admissions. Rolling admissions allows faculty to review files on an ongoing basis and admit students throughout the year. The process encourages students to get their applications in early, before the program is filled up. The department usually knows sooner whether or not the program will be full. Another advantage of rolling admissions is that marketing is often a slow process for MSW Programs. As word of mouth and other marketing strategies begin to take effect, students are able to apply even though other programs have deadlines.

An admission deadline for applications is a more traditional way of handling admissions. Applicants have a set date that their MSW application is due. The admissions committee can then pick and choose from the applications. The process of reviewing applications is more concentrated to one period of time.

Accreditation and Students

The accreditation process can be stressful and ominous for students. It is important to keep students updated regularly especially as the initial accreditation process occurs. Students may have increased anxiety over time. It has been our experience that this fear emerges most clearly when students are about half way through the program, in the early months of the second year. By that time, students have a significant amount of time and money invested in the program. The site visits sometimes have a tendency to create more fear than relieve fear. It is helpful for faculty to keep students informed about the process, answer their questions, and continuously encourage them about the good standing of the program. Students who are nervous

about the process and have increased anxiety tend to reactive negatively in the classroom and in the community. It is important for faculty to present a united front, demonstrate collegiality, and be supportive of one another. When there are difficulties among the faculty, the students will find out and only add to the disagreements.

Diversity

Enhancing diversity is universally beneficial for students, faculty, the college, and the community in general. Consequently, there are several aspects of diversity that need intentional planning, such as recruiting and retaining students, faculty, and field supervisors, available services for diverse students, and how to create a safe learning context for diversity. Social work departments could network with the diverse campus organizations and programs as one way to recruit a diverse student body. Reconnecting and contacting alumni from the BSW program is another avenue to pursue.

A key aspect of diversity for social work departments is how to effectively create a safe learning environment and context for diverse students. It is not enough to recruit diverse students, but programs need to identify how they will enhance and support learning for students. One of the ways that programs can do this is to have diversity among the faculty and staff.

Diverse faculty could include diversity of race, culture, gender, and academic background. It isn't wise to have too many graduates from the same university. Faculty from many different universities will bring different perspectives of education, teaching, culture, and social work practices. It also provides a broader spectrum of opportunities for scholarship and research interests. And, it establishes collegial relationships that are supportive.

Conclusion

With the growing number of MSW programs being created, social work departments and colleges need to be proactive planners when considering a new program. By reviewing the many factors and considerations that need to be addressed before starting a new MSW program, departments increase their chances for success. With careful and proactive preparation about hiring, leadership, curriculum, CSWE standards, potential students, and diversity, social work departments can develop a strong MSW program that benefits communities and the social work profession.