

Institutional Effectiveness Report for 2010-2011

Assessment Summary

Academic Department or Division: Social Work

Degree Program: Master of Social Work

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Assessment Cycle: 2010-2011

Mission

The Mission Statement of the Division of Social Work at Valdosta State University (VSU) is an extension of the university mission statement which provides an overarching framework for the academic unit:

Mission Statement of the Division of Social Work

The mission of the Division of Social Work is to contribute to the resolution of social problems and social inequalities in South Georgia as well as other geographic areas through the advancement and development of the social work profession through scholarship, service, leadership, and the preparation of qualified advanced generalist practitioners who are able to engage in informed, systematic, and increasingly complex practice at multiple levels while critically evaluating and shaping the social work practice environment.

Expected Student Learning Outcomes (identical to outcomes that are published online and in current VSU catalogs) **To Be Evaluated This Cycle:** The Council on Social Work Education, the major professional accrediting organization for the field of social work, requires that educational programs evaluate all of their curriculum objectives on an annual basis. The MSW program at VSU has 19 curriculum objectives which are evaluated annually as outcomes. These objectives include:

At the time of graduation, students will be able to:

1. Conduct multi-level generalist practice based on the planned intervention process.
2. Demonstrate the ability to apply critical thinking within the context of professional social work practice.
3. Analyze and apply the values and ethics of the social work profession.
4. Using the strengths perspective, practice without discrimination and with respect, knowledge, and skills that are appropriate for the range of human differences.
5. Understand and challenge mechanisms of oppression and discrimination.
6. Apply strategies of advocacy and social change to advance justice.

7. Understand and interpret the history, development, and current trends of the profession.
8. Select and apply human behavior theory and evidence to inform practice using the ecosystems perspective as an organizing framework.
9. Demonstrate the ability to analyze, formulate, and influence social policies.
10. Evaluate and apply research findings to practice and evaluate individual practice interventions at multi-levels appropriately.
11. Demonstrate the ability to communicate across client populations, colleagues and communities, in written and verbal form.
12. Demonstrate the ability to appropriately use feedback, supervision and consultation in the service of professional conduct and growth.
13. Demonstrate the ability to function within the structure of organizations, delivery systems and community networks and seek organizational change.
14. Identify with the social work profession and behave professionally.

Concentration objectives (these begin in 2nd year)

15. Demonstrate an increasing ability to engage in informed and systematic Self-Directed practice.
16. Demonstrate elements of leadership and the ability to shape the professional environment.
17. Demonstrate an ability to analyze and critically evaluate the contextual elements to inform social work practice.
18. Apply attention to balanced, multi-level practice.
19. Demonstrate the ability to practice at increasing levels of complexity using specialized theories and practice methods.

The first 14 curriculum objectives begin in the foundation (first year) of the program and are carried over into the concentration (second) year. Four of the foundation objectives (FPO 1 , 8, 12, & 13) are not carried over, but rather are incorporated into the more complex objectives in the second year. Thus, there are 15 objectives that are directly evaluated at the time of graduation.

Assessments/Measures (include how, when, and to whom these are administered, and align outcomes with specific assessments or measures): The annual outcome is part of our overall evaluation plan as shown in Appendix A. As part of the outcome evaluation, we use three measures for all 19 objectives: 1) the POCO Map evaluation; 2) the Final Student Learning Plan (FSLP) Evaluation; and 3) Student Self-Efficacy Ratings. We contend that these three measures capture all areas of the graduate learning experience including the classroom, the student practicum and internship, and self-evaluations of efficacy. We also use a secondary measure as ancillary support for our major measures. This measure is a simulation of the initial social work licensing examination, and although it does not directly measure our curriculum objectives, the ability to pass this examination is considered a professional standard of endorsement for a

beginning social worker. This multi-method approach is congruent with our focus on triangulation in our evaluation.

Measures

POCO Map Evaluation. The POCO Map essentially is an extended grid which displays the relationship of each course outcome and its measure of achievement with all 19 curriculum objectives. A measure for a particular course outcome may be a free-standing assignment, one section of an assignment, or a combination of assignment parts. All course outcomes for each course have been aligned with at least one curriculum objective. This becomes the template for an annual POCO evaluation measure. During the fall of each academic year (between August and October), the faculty members select a number of course outcomes and related classroom assignments from the POCO Map to be used with the current POCO evaluation form. Although the POCO Map is a comprehensive mapping of course to curriculum alignment, it is sufficiently comprehensive so as to allow for a flexible evaluation process that highlights the evaluation of some objectives and not others or for a differential weighting of objectives. What is most important is that the POCO map evaluation for each year uses a number of specific course assignments or parts of assignments from that year to create an index for each objective to be evaluated using a simple standard score (percentages as mean).

Based on an evaluation which was made three years ago, we expanded the number of course outcomes used for objectives 1 through 14 from 3 to 5 outcomes per objective and for objectives 15 through 19, we expanded to seven course outcomes per objective. We believed that this procedure would increase the variance for the scores per objective as well as expanding the representation of course outcomes per objective. A minimal standard aggregate mean for each objective has been set at 80%. In the data analysis, curriculum objectives that demonstrate an average of below 80% or above 95% are flagged for further analysis by the Curriculum Committee. In this way, faculty members attempt to identify program objectives that are not being met or appear to be inflated. As stated above, particular curriculum objectives were flagged for closer review this year, a decision that was based on an evaluation that was carried out last year. Although the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) requires that programs evaluate all curriculum objectives annually, we focused narrowly on objectives from last year that were identified as problematic. Particular attention was given to objectives 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. A template for this year's POCO evaluation can be found in Appendix C.

Student Self-Ratings. Beginning three years ago, students were asked to rate their proficiency on each learning objective. Student self-efficacy scales are considered an acceptable method of student outcome evaluation by CSWE. Self-evaluations used a 10-point likert-type scale wherein each student was asked to self-evaluate after completing the POCO evaluation for the objective. Problematically, the self-evaluations did not use clear anchors for the scale and the self-ratings were tied directly to the POCO evaluation. These problems generated a strong response bias as indicated by the high scores on the self-evaluations. Beginning last year, the

self-evaluation was conducted separately from the POCO evaluation and clear anchors were assigned to the scale. This method was continued for the current (2010-2011) assessment.

Final Student Learning Plan Evaluation. The Final Student Learning Plan Evaluation (FLSP) directly utilizes the 19 curriculum program objectives as the objectives of the practicum and specifies a number of outcome indicators based on the performance of specified professional competencies for each objective. In other words, practicum is viewed as reflecting an agency-based achievement of program objectives. Although evaluated at the end of each semester, only the FSLP Evaluation conducted at the time of graduation is used in the annual outcome evaluation. At this time, there are only 15 objectives included in the FSLP because four of the foundation objectives (1, 8, 12, & 13) have been incorporated into the five concentration objectives (similar to the arrangement on the POCO evaluation). This evaluation is conducted with one faculty member, an agency-based field instructor, and the student, and it occurs near the end of the student's final semester in concentration practicum. Consensus must be reached by the three on each practicum outcome for each curriculum objective. In 2011, the practicum grading system of Unsatisfactory/Satisfactory was changed to a letter grading system, and students now will receive grades of A-F in field. All field participants have been trained to use the new grading system which will be implemented during the 2011-2012 academic year.

The number of discrete practicum outcomes for each curriculum objective ranges from 5 to 20, and each separate outcome will be rated by using a 5-point likert-type scale, using 3 as a satisfactory midpoint which is equivalent to the grade of B. All program objectives are assigned a grade based on the average of the course outcomes. Finally, a student will be assigned a letter grade of A, B, C, D, or F depending on the average score for all program objectives.

The minimum standard for achievement for each objective is a mean score of 3. Students who receive a mean of below 3 for an objective at the time of graduation are expected to extend their practicum until the minimum standard has been achieved. Objectives are "flagged" for further analysis if they fall below a mean of 3 or above a mean of 4.5. As stated previously, because we are mandated to assess outcomes on all curriculum objectives every year, our evaluation flexibility is constrained. We anticipate that at some point in the future, CSWE will relax the requirement mandating measurement of at least 12 curriculum objectives annually for the foundation year. An example of a blank final FLSP can be found in Appendix D.

The Simulated Licensure Examination. Professional licensure in the field of social work is considered as a criterion for the achievement of a base standard in social work and is overseen by the Association of Social Work Licensing Boards (ASWB). Because efforts to track the licensing status of graduates have been unsuccessful, we developed a truncated version (50 questions rather than 150) of the actual examination, using an examination from the ASWB and factors specified by this organization. Questions were selected and examined by three independent raters as to face validity and congruence with all factors and their weights on the

licensing exam. The shortened version is given to students under simulated testing conditions each April. We recognize that the licensing simulation does not represent our 19 program objectives and is not a measure of these objectives. By extension, the simulation is not a primary measure of outcomes. However, we posit that the exam is an accurate representation of the examination that beginning social workers must pass in order to achieve the status of Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW). Thus, if our students meet our outcomes as operationalized by our primary measures, and then pass the Licensure Examination at a rate similar to the national pass rate, the licensing simulation may be considered an artifact in establishing criterion-validity for our primary measures as well as a supplemental affirmation of our graduating students' fitness to practice. Additionally, aggregate data on VSU's Division of Social Work pass rate will be compared with national pass rates for the 2011 academic year.

Data/Evidence Results (qualitative or quantitative summary; raw data should be included in an attachment)

POCO Evaluation. Means for the seven program objectives (FPO11, FPO14, CPO15, CPO16, CPO17, CPO18, and CPO19) ranged from 80.13 to 89.26, and the means for each of the seven program objectives were lower than those of last year: (See Appendix B, Chart #1)

- 1) FPO11: 98.76 (last year)→89.26 (this year)
- 2) FPO14: 91.87 (last year)→88.08 (this year)
- 3) CPO15: 92.51 (last year)→83.05 (this year)
- 4) CPO16: 90.22 (last year)→84.98 (this year)
- 5) CPO17: 91.06 (last year)→82.39 (this year)
- 6) CPO18: 89.00 (last year)→87.15 (this year)
- 7) CPO19: 93.39 (last year)→80.13 (this year)

Program objectives with excessively low scores from last year were of particular interest; program objectives 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 comparisons between last year's graduating class and this year's class confirmed that the scores for this year for the program objectives were lower. According to the results of t-tests, comparisons between this year and last year revealed significant differences on the following program objectives: FPO11 ($p=.000$), CPO15 ($p=.000$), CPO16 ($p=.018$), CPO17 ($p=.000$), and CPO19 ($p=.000$). In other words, individual scores for all of the program objectives except FPO14 and CPO18 were significantly lower when the two years were compared.

None of the means of seven objectives was over 90. Compared with last year, fewer individual scores on the seven program objectives exceeded the upper bound of 95. In fact, no individual scores on CPO15, CPO17, and CPO19 exceeded the upper bound of 95, whereas there were only a small number of individual scores on the remaining program objectives (FPO 11, FPO14, CPO16, and CPO18) for this year that exceeded the upper bound.

There were other differences between individual scores for last year and the current year. All of last year's program objectives (with the exception of CPO18) contained at least 10 individual scores that exceeded the upper bound of 95. For the current year, all of the seven program objectives revealed a higher number of student scores below the cutoff of 80. Specifically, more than 5 to 12 students had scores below 80 on four program objectives (CPO15, CPO16, CPO17, and CPO19) for the current year.

Each program objective contained at least one student score below the cutoff of 80 (See Chart #1, Appendix B). This finding suggests that there is less of a tendency for assignments to demonstrate inflated measures when compared with last year. Further, these reductions suggest that faculty efforts toward more rigorous grading of assignments have been successful. Finally, compared with last year, the means for the 5 concentration program objectives (CPO15, CPO16, CPO17, CPO18, and CPO19) tended to be lower than those of the two foundation program objectives. This finding suggests that students had or perceived difficulties in endorsing their learning for the more advanced or concentration objectives. This finding suggests that the faculty have been successful in reducing the number of concentration year assignments with inflated measures, and that faculty members have been successful in their efforts to grade more rigorously in the concentration year.

Student Self-Ratings. Two years ago, student self-ratings were extremely high. This led to a modification of the self-rating process as was discussed in a previous section. This year's self-ratings again were markedly lower than was reflected last year, yet more in line, in our estimation, with realistic self-appraisals:

- 1) FPO11: 6.92 (last year)→5.68 (this year)
- 2) FPO14: 7.05 (last year)→6.56 (this year)
- 3) CPO15: 6.41 (last year)→5.48 (this year)
- 4) CPO16: 6.36 (last year)→5.52 (this year)
- 5) CPO17: 6.08 (last year)→5.32 (this year)
- 6) CPO18: 6.10 (last year)→5.40 (this year)
- 7) CPO19: 6.05 (last year)→5.00 (this year)

Last year's means for the student self-ratings on the seven program objectives ranged from a high of 7.05 to a low of 6.05. In comparison, this year's self-ratings ranged from a high of 6.56 to a low of 5.00. The midpoint anchor for self-ratings was a 5 which reflected adequate proficiency/efficacy. Overall, student endorsements of self-efficacy for each program objective suggest that students are demonstrating at least an adequate level of achievement on all program objectives (See Appendix B, Chart #2). According to the results of t-test comparisons of the student self-ratings between this year and last year, there were significant differences on the following program objectives: FPO11 ($p=.000$), CPO15 ($p=.005$), CPO16 ($p=.012$), CPO17 ($p=.016$), CPO18 ($p=.015$), CPO19 ($p=.000$). All of the individual scores in the student self-ratings (except for FPO14) were significantly different between this year and last year. Similar to the pattern shown in the POCO evaluations, most of the concentration objectives received lower

ratings, suggesting that students rated themselves lower in terms of their self-perceived achievement on the more advanced concentration curriculum objectives. The result is shown in Chart 4 in Appendix B which displays the ranking of scores for each program objective by measure. This pattern suggests that students' self-appraisal of learning is more in line with what the faculty expects of students enrolled in our curriculum.

Final Student Learning Plan (FSLP) Evaluation. Means for the seven program objectives ranged from 4.25 to 3.87 which is similar to, but slightly higher than last year's range (the range for last year was from 4.24 to 3.62) (See Appendix B, Chart #3). According to the results of t-test comparisons between this year's and last year's students, there were no significant differences in the means per program objective. Based on existing mean scores, it appears that field instructors found the overall field performance of MSW students to be at least satisfactory. Three means for program objectives CPO16, CPO18, and CPO19 fell below 4.0. Field instructors appear to have rated students lower on concentration program objectives with the exception of CPO15. In other words, field instructors tended to score students in ways that were similar to the ways in which students rated themselves on concentration program objectives with the exception of field instructor ratings for CPO 15 and CPO16.

Because three objectives (FPO14, CPO15, and CPO18) with high means were of particular interest based on their 2008-2009 performance, a goal for last year was the reduction of mean scores for these objectives. The mean for CPO18 was reduced in 2009-2010 from 4.18 to 3.81, but the mean of CPO18 actually increased slightly to 3.96 this year. A similar pattern was demonstrated in CPO15 which increased slightly (4.01 to 4.17) in 2010-2011 after a drop in previous year. In contrast, the mean for FPO14 decreased to 4.15, after having dropped to 4.17 in 2010 and 2011. Only for FPO14 did field instructors appear to be evaluating students more realistically. These changes are difficult to explain.

Simulated Licensing Examination 2010-2011: Results and Discussion. The mean score on the licensing examination was 71.07 with a median of 72 and mode of 62. Sixteen of 30 MSW students passed the simulated licensing exam with a 53.3% pass rate, lower than last year's 69.7% rate. For first time, pre-test data on the simulation exam was collected on the majority of MSW students as the time that they began the MSW program. Pretest data allowed for a comparison of scores at the beginning and end of the program. Despite the lower simulated licensing exam passing rate compared to last year, the mean of the exam on the post-test was higher (71.07, n=30) rather than pre-test (65.13, n=32). There was a partially significant reduction on post-test scores ($n = 29, t = 1.77, p = .088$), a finding that indicates that the majority of students appeared to perform better after being in the program. Closer scrutiny of the data revealed that the scores of 9 students (31%) had decreased at the time of post-testing, a finding that is perplexing.

According to the current report from ASWB (2011), the pass rate for the national licensure exam for 2010 MSW graduates at VSU was 69%, a percentage that is much higher than the national pass rates from schools across the country. ASWB data from 2008-2010 reveal an

increase in pass rates for VSU students over the 3 years. The rate in 2008 was 43%, in 2009, 64%, and in 2010, an increase to 69%. The significant increase in beginning in 2009 and 2010 co-occurred with a series of purposeful and key curriculum changes that were initiated with the goal of strengthening the MSW curriculum in preparation to a successful Reaffirmation in 2010. It appears that the curriculum changes have contributed to the students' passing the national licensure examination at a much higher rate.

OVERALL RESULTS. Based on the data collected in 2011, MSW student graduates satisfied at least minimal standards for achievement. Field instructors indicated that practicum students had satisfied at least adequate standards for achievement. For both the POCO evaluations and student self-ratings, the means for *all* seven program objectives (FPO11, FPO14, CPO15, CPO16, CPO17, CPO18, CPO19) were lower than last year. POCO evaluation results suggest that there were fewer assignments which contained inflated measures, and faculty members were successful in their efforts to grade more rigorously.

Results of student self-ratings indicate that students evaluated their achievements or competency more realistically than they did last year. In both the POCO evaluation and student self-ratings, compared with last year, the means for the 5 concentration program objectives (CPO15, CPO16, CPO17, CPO18, and CPO19) were lower than means of the foundation objectives. This finding suggests that students had or perceived difficulties in endorsing their learning for the more advanced or concentration objectives. Students' self-appraisals of learning appear to be much more in line with what the faculty expects in our curriculum for the five advanced program objectives (CPO 15 through CPO19). In fact, both the POCO evaluation and the student self-ratings indicate that students found the program objectives CPO17 and CPO18 to be the most difficult for them to achieve.

On the Final Student Learning Plan (FSLP) evaluations, the means for the seven program objectives (FPO11, FPO14, CPO15, CPO16, CPO17, CPO18, and CPO19) had not changed significantly between last year and this year. Field instructors rated the overall field performance of MSW students as at least satisfactory, and they also tended to rate students lower on concentration program objectives (with the exception of CPO15). Results indicate that field instructors tended to evaluate students more realistically. The means of objectives 15 and 18 slightly increased from last year, although the mean difference between last year and this year was not statistically significant, suggesting that this is a minor issue. The pass rate on the stimulated licensing exam was lower than last year, although the mean of the post-test exam was higher than the pre-test. This finding emerged in last year's data and remains perplexing. It is particularly noteworthy that the pass rate for MSW students (69%) on the national licensure examination was significantly higher than the national pass rate in 2010 (59%), a finding that is extremely important.

Issues and Modifications for Curriculum 2011-2012. Decisions about modifications as well as how and where they should occur, will be part of the faculty's ongoing discussions for improving our teaching quality. Additionally, decisions must be made about the dissemination

of outcome results through the groups, methods, and protocols which are a part of our ongoing process evaluation. What follows is a list of issues and their dispositions.

- Students have rated themselves as less proficient/competent on the advanced (concentration) program objectives. At the same time, they received lower scores on course outcome measures that are aligned with these objectives compared with the foundation program objectives. This has led the faculty and curriculum committee to continue to focus more attention on the concentration curriculum, and more faculty are - with adequate preparation - are moving into teaching in the concentration year.
- We have instituted a formal mentoring process for new faculty that we hope will introduce faculty to the complexity and coherence of the curriculum and help them to address such pedagogical development issues such as 'grading'. This process has been found to be helpful according to faculty mentees, and this process will be continued.
- For the first time this academic year, several part-time instructors have been assigned to teach foundation classroom courses. If the strategy is successful, the practice will allow for more faculty members to teach in the second year. However, initial feedback indicates that this strategy has been only marginally successful because of the steep learning curve related to instructors' mastery of the BlazeVIEW platform even with assistance from faculty mentors. We will continue to focus attention on identifying a group of part-time instructors who can successfully master core foundation courses and content and who are skilled at using the BlazeVIEW platform.
- All concentration program objectives will again to be the major focus of the course-based evaluation process for the 2011-2012 evaluation. Thus, the evaluation component that uses course outcome measures to assess achievement, the POCO Evaluation would continue to focus, almost exclusively, on objectives 15 through 19. Likewise, the faculty has agreed to continue the focus on two important foundation program objectives (11 and 14), so as to develop a strong baseline of measures for future evaluation efforts.
- Determination needs to be made on how to proceed with the FSLP evaluation. For 2011-2012, the grading system (A, B, C, D, F) for field practicum has been changed, so we must consider strategies for evaluating the new grading system. We will need to continue: 1) not to change any of the indicators and place more rigid demands on liaisons to ensure their use as well as more rigid requirements for students to include all outcomes; 2) reduce the number of outcomes on program objectives; and 3) allow field instructors and liaisons to selectively include and exclude outcomes, based on the agency, which they then can use to calculate final means for each student on each program objective before the final submission; 4) determine the impact of the change to a letter grade system.
- Continue efforts to educate field instructors in the use of the mid-point (number 3) on the 5 point likert-type scale in ratings of student performance. Intensive training has begun for the purpose of assisting field instructors with the change in the grading scale.

- Continue to initiate more active involvement of faculty liaisons in the development of FSLP Evaluations and in conducting final field evaluations. More faculty are working more closely with liaisons.
- Maintain closer attention to the grading of course outcomes that are selected for use on the POCO evaluation. The POCO evaluation was designed to make the alignment of course outcomes with curriculum program objectives more transparent. Student feedback suggests that the process was successful. The use of different course outcomes from year to year for the POCO evaluation permits instructors to give more attention to more rigorous grading.
- In regard to the simulated licensing examination, the pass rate for this year once again was lower than last year. However, these results are at odds with ASWB data in which VSU graduates demonstrated a high pass rate for each of the years from 2008-2010, and the rates for each year exceed the national pass rates. ASWB data suggests that the MSW Program is beginning to be more successful in preparing students for the examination, and potentially, preparing students for post-graduate practice.
- In an effort to develop a more robust ongoing evaluation process, the faculty will continue to designate an Evaluation Chair who will create a standing evaluation committee for the unit to recommend changes in next year's evaluation and to carry out the evaluation.

Dept. Head/ Director	Date	Dean	Date	VPAA	Date
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Adapted from: University of Alabama SACS site
(<http://sacs.ua.edu/degreeInfo2.cfm?college=2&dept=50>) and

University of Western Kentucky SACS Accreditation Review Process
(<http://www.wku.edu/sacs/assessmentmanual.htm>)