

Testimony of

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“Caring for the Vulnerable: The State of Social Work in America”

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Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony for this important hearing. My remarks are focused on undergraduate social work education. I will generalize some of my comments to baccalaureate social work education, giving some specific examples from my experience at Monmouth University. I began teaching at Monmouth in social work in 1992, became the BSW Program Director in 1998 (when we added a master of social work program to our curriculum), became the Chair of the Department and MSW Program Director in 2004, and I am now the Dean of the School of Social Work which was just created on July 1, 2008.

Monmouth University has had a Bachelor of Social Work program since 1977 and we added a Master of Social Work program to our curriculum in 1998. We are very typical of a small to medium size baccalaureate social work program. Currently, we average 100 to 110 BSW students in our program.

There are over 400 Bachelor of Social Work programs in the United States. Some BSW programs stand alone in a department that is often combined with sociology, anthropology and/or criminal justice. Some BSW programs (like ours at Monmouth) are in a School of Social Work or a Department of Social Work which also offers a Master of Social Work program. Fewer are in Schools of Social Work that offer the BSW, the MSW and the Ph.D. in Social Work.

All undergraduate social work programs draw heavily from content in the liberal arts. Students are usually required to complete courses in Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Economics, Political Science, Biology, and Mathematics, along with History, English and Literature.

All undergraduate social work programs are generalist in their focus. Students in BSW programs do not concentrate in any area of practice or theoretical focus, as is common in MSW programs. BSW students are taught to be able to work in many areas of practice, whether it is casework or case management, group work, community practice or even research and policy. And they should be able to work in any field of practice, be it gerontology, mental health, child welfare, criminal justice, etc.

The undergraduate social work curriculum introduces students to human behavior (the life to death sequences of events and milestones that all individuals go through), they are taught to assess clients, how to interview them, and then how to form an intervention plan with the client for their treatment. Students then look to evaluate how well their interventions worked, engaging in both practice and program evaluations. Students learn to make these assessments at the individual level (micro), with families (mezzo) and with communities (macro). They use a variety of skills in making assessments and in planning for treatment or for an intervention. A key component to these assessments is learning systems theory which helps the students see all of the factors involved in a client's situation. Another component is to take a strengths perspective to all assessments, looking specifically for strengths of the individual first, and deficiencies second.

Critical to the BSW curriculum is the field internship, where students are placed in social service agencies to learn the day to day aspects of social service delivery. At Monmouth, our BSW students complete a 30 hour volunteer experience in the sophomore year, a 100 hour internship in the junior year, and a 450 hour internship in the senior year. These internships are always supervised by a licensed social worker at the master's level, and these agency supervisors often take a course in supervision and field that many social work programs offer. For example, we run a SIFI course – Supervision in Field Instruction – for all our new internship supervisors.

The field internship is the place where academia meets practice. It is the applied aspect of social work, and as such is the vehicle that allows students to grow personally and professionally. A baccalaureate student usually knows they made the right choice of profession when they begin their field internships. It is sometimes the case that students get hired by their field agencies upon graduation from their BSW program. For a social service agency that can hire their student intern, their investment into that student over the course of the academic year is very beneficial, as they know their new employee before they start work, and that person is already oriented to the agency and its culture.

Not all BSW students go right to work however. Our experience at Monmouth is that about 80% of our students go right on to graduate education, usually the Master of Social Work. The other 20% go into employment.

The advantage of going straight into an MSW program comes from the ability of a BSW graduate of an accredited program to apply for Advanced Standing in a number of MSW programs in the US. Advanced Standing programs allow accredited BSW graduates who meet admissions requirements to move into the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of graduate work. This means that the MSW degree is completed in one year, rather than the 2 years it normally takes for someone who enters an MSW program without a BSW degree (if the coursework is done on a full-time basis of 15 credits/semester).

This is an important feature of BSW – MSW education, as it indicates that the senior year of the BSW program theoretically is equivalent to the first year of graduate education and that prepared BSW graduates have the knowledge base and the skills to skip one year of graduate school. From my experience, properly prepared BSW graduates can move into graduate level education without a problem, and can then spend their year in graduate school refining their skills and deepening their knowledge.

The first year of most MSW programs contain “foundation” courses, like Social Welfare Policy, Research, Human Behavior and the Social Environment and usually several practice courses like Individuals and Families, Group work, etc. Students also complete first year internships. At Monmouth, our students in the MSW program take their classes concurrently with their field internship, and complete 500 hours of field work in the first year of the program. Two days of the week are spent in class and three days are spent in the field.

In the second year of the MSW curriculum students choose a concentration, where they focus their academic work and their internship in a more specific area of social work practice. Almost all MSW programs offer at least two concentrations; some offer more depending on the size of the School or University. At Monmouth, we have two concentrations: Clinical Practice with Families and Children and the other is International and Community Development. The latter concentration is the only one of its kind in the US in a social work program. The ICD concentration allows students to go overseas in the spring semester of their final year to complete an 8 – 10 week internship in an NGO or government agency. We have internships currently in Ghana, Bangladesh, Southern India, Mexico, Chile, and Hong Kong. Both concentrations require another 500 hours of field internship.

The Master of Social Work is the terminal degree in the social work profession, meaning that you do not need a Ph.D. to practice as a social worker and to receive third-party reimbursement for your clinical work. However, you do need a license. Licensure for social workers is required in all 50 states, and all 50 have varying requirements to obtain a license to practice social work. Each state differs on the naming of their licenses and not all states offer reciprocity to social workers who want to move their license from say New Jersey to Florida or to Wisconsin. Some states require a re-test, others require verification of clinical course work.

In New Jersey, there are two social work licenses and one certification (the CSW, the LSW, and the LCSW). If you graduate with a BSW and go right to work, you apply for your CSW – or Certification in Social Work. There is no test for this certification, you need only to submit proof of your graduation from an accredited undergraduate social work program and pay the fee to the State.

When a student completes the MSW, they can then take a test for their LSW – the License in Social Work. Any student at the MSW level should apply for their LSW. If you want to specialize in clinical social work and receive 3<sup>rd</sup> party reimbursement for your services (from Medicare, Medicaid, HMO's etc), then you have to take an additional test and work (with your LSW) under the supervision of another social worker who has the License in Clinical Social Work (LCSW) for approximately 2,000 hours to qualify for the LCSW license.

Those social workers who desire the Ph.D. or DSW (Doctorate in Social Work) usually pursue doctoral work in order to enter the academic world. It is increasingly a requirement at Colleges and Universities for tenure-line faculty to hold a Ph.D. in their discipline in order to teach and to be conferred with tenure.

Strengths of a BSW degree:

1. BSW graduates have generalist skills and knowledge, which allow them to work in many facets of social work.
2. These skills are portable – they are not tied to a specific job or function, but can be taken wherever the graduate goes and are applicable to a number of fields of practice.
3. BSW graduates are idealistic and enthusiastic – they definitely want to “change the world.” This idealism often helps social service agencies because social work interns allow agencies and their staff to remember their own idealism and many times can help agencies see their situations in a new light and can bring about needed change and renewed enthusiasm.
4. BSW graduates are at an advantage in a workplace, because they are taught systems theory, and learn to see “the whole picture.” They work well with professionals from other disciplines because they can see everyone’s role, see how all roles fit together, and with their interpersonal skills can help to mediate difficult situations.

Challenges for undergraduate social work education:

1. Recruitment is the biggest challenge facing undergraduate social work programs. Many people (especially parents) are under the impression that social workers only help the poor and take children away from families. They also have the impression that social workers do not make livable salaries. All academic social work programs work hard to negate these impressions, but until society at large begins to change their opinion, this will be difficult. Public education on what social work is, and what we do as professionals is essential.
2. Ensuring cultural awareness and sensitivity can also be a challenge, depending on where the BSW program is located and who the students are. We need more bi-

- and tri-lingual social workers. And we need students to develop cultural awareness for all the clients and agencies that they might come into contact with.
3. Ensuring that social work as a program stays vibrant and is respected at the College or University level can also be a challenge to programs. This is an applied, working discipline that does not often garner large research grants, or large donations, and there are times when its usefulness to the larger University can be questioned.