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Competency-Based Social Work Education: 25 Years of Innovation & Leadership

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JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL
SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Competency-Based Social Work Education: 25 Years of Innovation & Leadership

A white paper exploring the continuous quality-improvement process of curriculum assessment and implementation and organizational change

(October 2022)

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**Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences
at Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio**

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| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY |

The creation of this white paper emerged from our desire to meet a number of goals. First, it is created as way of documenting the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences' (the Mandel School) long history of innovation in curriculum development and delivery. Secondly, it seeks to capture both the process and product of our most recent efforts to radically reimagine our social work curriculum. Thirdly, the paper is crafted as a source document for current and future Mandel School scholars to use to spark writing and dialogue about curriculum development, evaluation, revision, and evolution. Finally, it provides us with an opportunity to take a step back to reflect on what we have learned as we continue our journey as social work educators.

The reader who is interested in the historical context will find the initial chapters to be helpful in articulating how the Mandel School's over one-hundred-year history of innovation has nurtured a fertile environment for fostering continuing leadership and creativity in social work education. The school has benefited from the work of early groundbreakers who launched the first program of study in the country in group work. They in turn were followed by generations of pioneers who envisioned curricula based on what students should know, believe, and be able to do (outcomes) rather than the content faculty wanted to teach, and led efforts to fashion the first set of competencies in social work education. These enthusiastic innovators subsequently set the stage for adapting Alverno's (Student Assessment-as-Learning at Alverno College, 1994) concept of assessment *as* learning as well as assessment *of* learning as both being vital components of transformative social work education. In 2002 the first competency-based social work curriculum was launched. Known as ABLE (Ability-Based Learning Environment), the curriculum focused our efforts at assessing the competency achievement of our students. Further innovations such as the development of integrative seminars, intensive weekend programs for employed professionals, and the development of a fully online social work education program all ultimately positioned the Mandel School to be able to use what it had learned from prior experiences to take important next steps.

Using data from multiple sources, a new generation of faculty curricular innovators took the bold step of radically re-envisioning the curriculum in its entirety beginning at the

generalist level. The next sections of this report focus on the process that was used to lead the change effort, the curriculum that was developed, the adjustments that were made, and the lessons learned.

We believe that a fundamental tenet of such efforts is an understanding that *curriculum change is organizational change*, that a series of governing values must undergird the change effort. The values adopted by our school served us well. They were:

- Assessment and outcomes drive the process and inform decisions.
- Curriculum change is organizational change.
- Organizational change is strengths based and builds upon existing assets among faculty members and within the current curriculum.
- Innovation is inclusive and collaborative, not top-down.
- Planning is iterative and based upon assessment and outcomes.

We describe the iterative process whereby the curricular leaders undertook a creative reimagining of possibilities followed by discussions with faculty about priorities and interest, returning many times to revise, reimagine, and reflect. This ultimately resulted in the decision to design a curriculum that could prepare students for competency at the generalist level in the first semester of their program, thus leaving more time and space for students to engage in specialized learning.

Also discussed are specific strategies for assuring integration across the curriculum. Among these are various matrices allowing us to map competencies, theoretical perspectives, and later assignments across all courses. We also identify the importance of assuring alignment within each course between competencies, learning objectives, content, and assessment and introduce the alignment table which became a constant fixture in all of our courses.

Two barriers that were encountered during the planning stage are highlighted. The first was an internal issue. While we were able to secure faculty buy-in for major changes to the generalist and an advanced second semester curriculum, we reached an impasse regarding proposed changes to our areas of specialization and the specialized curriculum. Remembering that curriculum revision is an iterative process, we made the decision to move forward with the changes on which we could agree, and to focus on the new generalist and advanced coursework, leaving the more difficult discussions to a later date. The second barrier, was the onset of a global pandemic just at the time that we were slated to launch a brand new in-person experience for our incoming students. Our prior experiences with online education and our decision to begin developing course assets that could be used in all formats allowed us to quickly pivot and to offer the new curriculum remotely.

Subsequent sections describe the specifics of the newly developed generalist curriculum. We begin by highlighting the new CHAI (Change Agent Intensive) course that jump starts the semester. CHAI is an immersive experience that introduces students to the mission, purpose, and values of the social work profession, acquainting them with some of the social issues and problems that social work addresses, and challenging them to think about how these issues manifest and must be addressed at all levels of the social environment. The course also begins students on their journey of developing critical thinking and self-reflection skills and heightens their awareness of the importance of advocating for social, economic, and environmental justice throughout their practice.

Other unique features of the revised curriculum include a specific focus applying theory to practice skills at all levels of intervention; a new course that addresses theories of human diversity and human development in an integrated offering; a reimagining of the traditional research course to focus helping social work students to be good consumers, contributors, and evaluators rather than conductors of research; a true integration of micro and macro practice so that all social workers think intentionally about the best level(s) for intervention in each instance, and purposeful efforts to integrate assignments across courses. We conclude by discussing a variety of strategies used for evaluation and a series of lessons learned. Among the most important of these lessons is that while *curriculum change is organizational change*, it is also an iterative process that will never be completely achieved.

We seek to be transparent throughout this monograph, identifying where innovations were successful, where resistance to them emerged, and where they needed to be modified or walked back. By taking the stance of life-long learners who seek to make decisions based on data and experience, we are the first to acknowledge that we have not always gotten it right. However, we have been able to carry forward our commitment to viewing social work education as continually evolving, and to remain curious about the next steps.

Our hope is to spark continuing dialogue with our colleagues nationally and internationally about both the process and the products involved in curricular innovation. While we must ground our efforts in our own individual contexts, we have a great deal to learn by working together.

Keywords: social work education, generalist curriculum, social work curriculum, curriculum integration, competency-based education, field education, leadership, remote instruction, academic policy, curriculum innovation, teaching innovation, EPAS, curriculum change, organizational change, outcome assessment, online teaching, flipped-classroom, change agent, macro-micro integration

| SECTION 1 |

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum Innovation Begins with Honest Self-Reflection

Anyone who has been involved with curriculum innovation in higher education as a planner, administrator, or teacher of new courses knows that it can be a complex and arduous process with many pieces and parts to manage and perspectives to consider. As a result, there are creative tensions that occur throughout the process of change at many levels of the academic organization. Faculty members of the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences (the graduate school of social work and nonprofit management) at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, are intimately familiar with this work. In fact, we have been actively embracing these challenges to create the most forward-thinking social work curriculum for more than a century. The Mandel School was founded in 1915 in Cleveland as one of the first university-affiliated schools of social work in the United States. Since then, we have been consistently ranked among the top schools in the nation and the highest in the State of Ohio.

Because of our long history of curriculum innovation—spearheaded by a lineage of passionate and creative innovators—we, as an institution, have learned a few things about developing integrative competency-based and outcomes-based learning experiences, making us not only a highly-ranked school for research and scholarship but also a top-ranked school for teaching. Our School continues to be one of the premier environments for social-work education and training.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The inspiration for this white paper, titled “Competency-Based Social Work Education: 25 Years of Innovation & Leadership,” came during a four-year process of designing and

implementing a significant curriculum transformation for our Master of Social Work (MSW) program, which we launched for new students **in Fall Semester 2020**. At first, we intended to use this writing project to summarize the planning and implementation process and lessons learned from the initiative and submit the findings to academic journals for publication. After all, we created our current innovation with very little guidance from expected channels of information: we found very few discussions in the social-work-education literature by colleagues at peer institutions engaged in comprehensive curriculum redesign, except for the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work (Colby, 2013). Some colleagues have published articles that provide guidance for using tools such as curricular mapping during the process of curriculum transformation (Bracy, 2018; Ballantyne, et al., 2019; Cheung, et al., 2019), but they provide less guidance on the overall curricular design. Most of the other literature describes innovation at the level of individual courses. We wanted to jumpstart a much-needed larger discussion.

However, as we delved into the brainstorming and writing process, we realized with an increasing sense of clarity that our current approach to social-work curriculum has a narrative thread reaching back through time. Upon closer examination, that thread revealed distinct periods in the School's more recent history which have served as a foundation for our current thinking. Yet, those past innovations had not been recorded in a systematic and public way. We saw an opportunity. We followed a hunch. We expanded our writing into a much larger document.

This white paper is intended to serve several purposes. First, we create it as an historical document for the Mandel School and Case Western Reserve University to demonstrate our faculty's ongoing commitment to excellence in curriculum design and teaching—a commitment that has endured for more than one-hundred years. Secondly, we write it to capture **the nuanced complexity** of the process of innovation which has occurred over the last 25 years with the advent of our ability-based and outcomes-based curriculum in the 1990s. Thirdly, we craft it as a source document for us and future curriculum innovators at the Mandel School to use while writing scholarly articles for academic and professional journals and books which aim to inspire conversations among schools of social work about curriculum development, revision, and evolution.

So, with the publication of this white paper via *Scholarly Commons* at Case Western Reserve University, we begin formally to disseminate *a process and product* of curriculum innovation and encourage other schools of social work to engage with us in ongoing dialogue in the literature and at professional conferences about lessons learned and best practices **for big-picture innovations** that go beyond the implementation of individual courses. By doing this, we embrace and promote the assertion of the Council on Social Work Education's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE-EPAS) that "social work education is advanced by the scholarship of teaching and learning" (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 5). We also promote a much-needed source of technical assistance for curriculum design for schools nationally and internationally: that is, the sharing of practical knowledge through formal and informal channels about successes, failures, unexpected pitfalls, lessons learned, and useful tools and methods to help get the job done right.

BEING VULNERABLE ON THE PAGE

When we embarked on this writing project, we were encouraged by Grover (Cleve) Gilmore, PhD, Dean of the Mandel School, to be honest not only about the facilitators of change, the successes, and lessons learned but also to be vulnerable on the page about the barriers to change, including our own miscalculations and missteps, institutional failures, and resistance to change from some faculty members and staff who, for conscious or unconscious reasons of their own, did not recognize or embrace the value in integrative competency-based curriculum transformation.

Dean Gilmore served in the School's chief leadership role for nearly 20 years from 2002 to 2021. Toward the end of his tenure, he commissioned this white paper, recognizing that curriculum change—the starts, stops, shortfalls, and successes—since the advent of our Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE) in the 1990s have been, above all, forward-thinking, trailblazing, and instrumental in shaping social work education locally, nationally, and internationally. As Dean Gilmore explains, there is great courage and strength in personal and institutional honesty, openness, and vulnerability when evaluating one's performance and outcomes. We agree. These qualities are integral to the success of all assessment and change processes.

As we finish writing this white paper in Summer 2021, we are approaching the end of the second year of our new curriculum. We are aware that while our efforts are innovative, they are also not perfect. We will continue to make changes in response to evaluation and feedback from our faculty, students, alumni, and our extensive network of stakeholders in the practice community in northeast Ohio and neighboring states as well as nationally and internationally. The writing of this paper has been a unique opportunity for which we are grateful. It has given us a moment of self-reflection and self-analysis. It has enabled us to pause consciously to examine the manner in which we have arrived in this moment, so, as we move forward, we will be informed by past insights as we continue to assess, evaluate, and innovate.

A PROCESS & PRODUCT OF CHANGE

As evidenced in the table of contents, we have organized this white paper in a timeline that begins in the 1990s and ends in summer 2021 to provide a logical narrative arc which demonstrates to our readers how innovators within our faculty have built upon successes and lessons learned incrementally over time. This timeline is clustered into distinct sections (chapters) that highlight significant periods which have served as the aforementioned building blocks of our new curriculum:

- Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE), 1994
- Integrative Seminars, 2007
- Online Learning Format, 2011
- A New Era of Curriculum Assessment & Planning, 2013
- The New Competency-Based Curriculum, 2018-2021

As you will see, each section is written to illustrate that each era has been defined not only **by a product** of curriculum change (i.e., new courses and approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment) but also **by a process** of organizational change. This examination also demonstrates how the process and product of each era has become absorbed into the culture of the organization. In other words, as we reflect upon our history, we notice that

previous innovations never actually go away or disappear. They serve as a scaffolding for the next era of advancement, creating **an ongoing iteration** of curriculum change and organizational change that responds effectively to the contemporary needs of social work students, the social work profession, and communities nationally and internationally.

With this introduction, we highlight a few themes and insights about the products and processes of change over the last 25 years that have emerged during our writing to give our readers a synthesis of what we have found most significant within our journey. We anticipate and hope that curriculum planners at Case Western Reserve and at peer institutions may find nuggets of truth within this introduction and within each chapter of this document that will inspire them through their own processes of discovery and invention.

LAUNCH OF NEW CURRICULUM, VERSION 1.0 | AT-A-GLANCE

Let's begin with the most recent product of change, that is, our new integrative competency-based MSW curriculum. We started planning it in 2016 as the result of a formal self-assessment process that prepared us for our reaffirmation by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), which accredits social-work schools and programs in the United States. Four years later, in Fall 2020, we began offering a new *generalist curriculum* and *advanced curriculum* to all new, incoming students in three different learning formats—on-campus, intensive weekend, and online—including students with and without advanced-standing status (i.e., those who have earned a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree from a CSWE-accredited program). For our traditional on-campus students, we restructured our generalist curriculum from a two-semester foundation experience to one semester. (Students in our intensive-weekend and online formats complete the same courses but in a sequence that is slightly different and does not fit neatly into traditional semester categories.)

The new generalist curriculum **is radically different** from the old curriculum for a number of reasons. For starters, it includes a one-credit Change Agent Intensive (CHAI) Seminar during the first week of the semester in which the entering class of first-year students is organized into small groups for the CHAI experience. This encourages group cohesion and social support while the course content and learning activities of the seminar acquaint new students to the social work profession as a whole, providing a big-picture context for their learning journey at the School and their emerging identities as professional social workers on a career trajectory.

Each CHAI cohort then moves through the sequence of generalist courses together, further encouraging cohesion and social support. The new generalist curriculum is structured as a unique **integrative-learning experience** that features a total of nine (9) new courses (including CHAI) and field practicum for a total of 18 credits. The curriculum integrates the following *within and across* each course as much as possible: theory and practice; perspectives from the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities; and 10 professional competencies—knowledge, values, skills, cognitive (intellectual) and affective (emotional) processes, and behaviors expected of and demonstrable by all graduates (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 6). These nine new courses are

- Change-Agent Intensive (CHAI) Seminar
- Foundations of Social Policy and Service Delivery
- Theories of Human Development and Human Diversity

- Community Theory & Practice
- Individual Theory & Practice
- Group Theory & Practice
- Family Theory & Practice
- Evidence-Informed Practice
- Field Seminar and Organizational Theory & Practice

The new one-semester generalist curriculum is designed to produce social work professionals who have knowledge of and experience with theory and evidence-informed practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. At the same time, it provides them **with more opportunities to choose courses** in our *specialized curriculum*, which occurs in the third and fourth semesters of study; to select more electives; and to earn more certificates that further demonstrate their chosen practice-specialization to employers. We also launched a new one-semester *advanced curriculum*, which occurs in the second semester of study and serves as a bridge for and gateway to courses in the specialized curriculum. It also provides all of our graduates with basic knowledge and skills so they will be prepared to practice anywhere along the micro-to-macro practice continuum throughout their careers. In other words, it prepares them with practical knowledge and skills to be flexible with career choices as their interests, experiences, and job opportunities evolve over time.

(Editor's Note: Our curriculum evolves continuously and iteratively as a result of the School's ongoing quality-improvement process of curriculum assessment. See Sections 7, 8 & 9 of this paper for discussions of the ways in which this initial curriculum innovation continues to progress.)

ASSESSMENT | A FOUNDATION OF CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Let's now shift to *the process* of change that produced the curriculum briefly described above. When we speak of curriculum innovation, it may be easy for the mind to focus on the nuts and bolts of redesigning courses and the sequence in which students complete them and progress through the master's program. However, something has become crystal clear to us from doing this work: the best innovations are informed by outcomes that emerge from *ongoing assessment*. In other words, the best innovations begin with honest self-evaluation.

While the Mandel School had historically conducted evaluations of its curriculum, the focus of assessments began to shift toward student-learning outcomes and institutional outcomes in the 1990s and early 2000s with our Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE), a competency-based and outcomes-based initiative (see Section 3). Between 2013 and 2015, Dean Gilmore made a significant institutional investment in data collection, assessment, and outcomes to deepen the School's commitment to an ongoing quality-improvement process. He created the Office of Educational Outcomes Assessment (OEOA) and appointed Zoë Breen Wood, PhD, a full-time faculty member, to be director. Since then, under Dr. Wood's leadership, the OEOA has utilized a variety of part-time faculty, staff, graduate students, and doctoral students to conduct its work of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting curriculum outcomes data. Through the OEOA, the Mandel School engages in a formal and systematic process of ongoing institutional self-reflection

which ensures that our curriculum is meeting the needs of social work students who are studying to be the next generation of leaders in organizations that face new and emerging challenges in contemporary society.

The School's faculty continues to appoint Dr. Wood to chair the Outcome Assessment Subcommittee of the faculty's Curriculum Committee. This subcommittee meets regularly to provide oversight of and guidance for OEOA's ongoing curriculum assessments, and it makes recommendations to the School's faculty and Dean's Office based upon the findings. In 2013, Marji Edguer, PhD, joined OEOA as a doctoral student to assist with outcome assessment and preparing our self-study for the School's 2017 reaccreditation. Since joining the faculty in 2017, she has remained intimately involved in the iterative process of curriculum design, evaluation, and innovation that has led to the new generalist curriculum. She currently serves as the co-chair of the School's Curriculum Committee.

With the leadership of Drs. Wood and Edguer, OEOA has made institutional self-evaluation not only integral to our reaccreditation review by CSWE, which occurs every seven (7) years, but also essential to the day-to-day operations of the School. Assessment of our explicit curriculum and implicit curriculum is ongoing and continuous. Assessment is a part of our culture. It is the engine that drives quality improvement. Examples of quantitative and qualitative assessment data that we continue to utilize include the following:

- Course-embedded assessments of the 10 competencies
- Field education evaluations
- Focused midcourse evaluations across the generalist curriculum
- Student course evaluations
- Student listening panels
- Graduating-student surveys
- Alumni six-month post-graduate surveys
- Marketing research via focus groups with community leaders, employers, alumni, students, faculty, and consumers of social services about their expectations for and needs of new social work graduates
- Literature reviews of published research and scholarship in professional journals dedicated to trends in job markets and advances and innovations in social work education

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

As we continue to speak of curriculum innovation, it may be easy for the mind to focus, again, on some of the more practical and obvious components, like collecting and analyzing assessment data and redesigning courses and the sequence in which students complete them. However, something else has become crystal clear to us from two-and-half decades of doing this work: *curriculum change is organizational change*. There is no separating the two. And the success of organizational change depends upon the readiness, willingness, and ability of the people within the organization to change. So, following the logic, to change a curriculum is to expect—or hope—that people will change their values, beliefs, preferences, and ways of being, including their methods of teaching.

Champions of Change

If we were asked to point to one component (or factor) that has contributed most to the success of our most recent curriculum innovation, we would argue for two highlights. The first, as noted above, is the School's ongoing assessment activities through the OEOA and its experienced staff. The second is having a cohesive group of committed *champions of change*, who are capable of managing the entire process of curriculum design, development, implementation, and assessment.

Currently, this group of change agents consists of the five primary authors of this white paper. We first acknowledge **Dean Emeritus Grover (Cleve) Gilmore**, PhD, who, as the chief executive of the Mandel School, provided the moral, administrative, and financial support throughout the entire process to make it possible. His calm and patient yet persistent brand of leadership provided a much-needed ballast to keep the ship buoyant in some tumultuous waters, not only through the organizational-change process but also through a monumental era (perhaps an epoch) of social instability and unrest during the global COVID-19 pandemic crisis and nationwide protests against systemic racial injustices.

Despite these crises, with Dean Gilmore's support, we decided to adhere to our implementation timeline. We kept designing and developing the new generalist curriculum through the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as the University closed its physical plant in March 2020 and mandated that all classroom learning and office work occur remotely from home offices via internet technologies. (It was a tectonic shift in the way we were accustomed to doing our work.) We launched the new generalist curriculum in the on-campus and intensive-weekend formats in Fall 2020 during the pre-vaccine phase of the pandemic and ongoing remote-work mandates. We then launched the new curriculum in our online format in January 2021, during the continuation of the pandemic, protests against racial injustices, and political unrest that culminated with the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. All of these events created a shaky ground of uncertainty for all students, faculty, administrators, and staff of the Mandel School and University. It is not hyperbole to write that everyone was mentally and emotionally preoccupied with the health and safety of self and others: the toxic anxiety made concentration and focus difficult.

The next four authors and champions of change are all full-time faculty to whom we informally refer as the *curriculum innovation leadership team*. Dean Gilmore made the conscious choice to ensure the leadership team appealed to different faculty interests, experiences, perspectives, and concerns. Therefore, the team members include full-time faculty who are both tenure-track and non-tenure track. Together, they had over 100-combined years of teaching, with additional combined expertise in the following when the new curriculum launched in 2020:

- Curriculum assessment and design
- Teaching in the social work master's program (generalist, advanced, and specialized courses)
- Teaching in all three learning formats—on-campus, online, and intensive weekend
- Teaching in field education
- Teaching theory, policy, practice, research methods, and diversity and discrimination
- Teaching in the doctoral program

- Direct practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and systems
- Community practice (e.g., neighborhood assessment, planning, and organizing)
- Conducting funded research, writing, and publishing
- Participating as members of and providing leadership for the faculty Curriculum Committee and its subcommittees, including the Outcome Assessment Subcommittee
- Leading and contributing to the School's research and training centers
- Managing organizational-change processes

This leadership team worked to gain the respect of colleagues. As a result, other faculty and staff became actively involved in the design, development, implementation, and teaching of the new generalist courses. The four members of the curriculum innovation leadership team include the following:

- **Zoë Breen Wood**, PhD, MSW, is associate professor and director of the Office of Educational Outcome Assessment. She is also chair of the Outcome Assessment Subcommittee of the faculty Curriculum Committee.
- **Marjorie N. Edguer**, PhD, LISW-S, LICDC-CS, is assistant professor and co-chair of the Mandel School faculty Curriculum Committee.
- **David L. Hussey**, PhD, LISW-S, is associate professor and director of the Mandel Leadership Fellows Program and the Research Director of the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education. He is also co-chair of the faculty Curriculum Committee.
- **Mark Chupp**, MSW, PhD, is associate professor and founding director of the Community Innovation Network. He is also chair of the concentration in Community Practice for Social Change.

As current champions of curricular change, we acknowledge that we have been inspired by and are standing on the shoulders of many of our faculty colleagues who have gone before us and helped build a culture of curricular leadership and innovation at the School. Our predecessors include Drs. Kathy Farkas, Wally Gingerich, Karen Kaye, Lenore Kola, Sharon Milligan, and Elizabeth Tracy.

STAGES OF CHANGE

With buy-in from many of our colleagues (internal stakeholders), we have hit the mark on many of our goals; however, we have also missed the mark on some. One shortfall in our curriculum innovation initiative has been this. The curriculum innovation leadership team recognized the need to revise the generalist curriculum first to build a solid foundation on which to anchor change at the specialized level. However, many faculty members were more interested in changing the specialized curriculum first, even though they had not built consensus about what those changes should look like. The lack of agreement about the

specialized courses coupled with the huge efforts involved in revising the generalist and advanced curricula resulted in a delay with innovation in our *specialized curriculum*.

In part, perhaps our initial vision was too grandiose: we bit off more than we could chew. Also, the organizational-change process was broad in scope and labor intensive (see Sections 7, 8 & 9). However, in part, perhaps our vision was not in synch with the interests of some faculty members and staff who presented reluctance about changes to the generalist curriculum and resistance to change for the specialized curriculum. In other words, we did not have complete buy-in from everyone. This was also the case in the 1990s and early 2000s during the ABLE initiative (see Section 3) and the creation of our online-learning format in 2011-13 (see Section 5).

As we reflect upon resistance to curriculum innovation, we turn to the *stages of change* to understand what felt like a barrier to the organizational-change process. Stages of change is a relationship-based clinical framework that research has validated as effective for people who want and need to make personal changes that enhance the quality of their lives. The approach is based on the premise that change occurs incrementally over time through five stages—*pre-contemplation*, *contemplation*, *preparation*, *action*, and *maintenance* (Prochaska, Connors, and DiClemente, 1995). Thus, a big personal change—like stopping the use of tobacco, quitting alcohol and other drugs, losing weight, managing a chronic illness like diabetes, or reducing the impact of mental health symptoms—is built upon a series of small, incremental changes in thinking and behavior over time. In our curriculum-innovation process, it appears the leadership team and other champions of change had moved quickly through earlier stages of change and were ready for *action*. In contrast, some faculty and staff were in *pre-contemplation* and *contemplation* and not ready for action. It has now become apparent that, for the Mandel School, a big change like implementing an integrative competency-based curriculum throughout the entire master’s program will be built upon a series of incremental changes in philosophies, policies, **and individual beliefs and practices over time**.

In other words, the success of large-scale organizational change will likely be connected to and reliant upon the readiness, willingness, and ability of individuals in the Mandel School to embrace and enact change *internally* within themselves *and externally* in their social interactions with colleagues and students.

INTEGRATIVE-LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Historically, the Mandel School, like most academic institutions, has organized its curriculum and, thus, student learning experiences around faculty content expertise. Students interested in community practice would enroll in courses taught by faculty who specialized in that content. Likewise, students interested in direct practice with individuals, families, or groups would study with faculty content experts in direct-practice specializations, such as aging; substance use disorders and recovery; children, youth, and families; health; and mental health. Of course, effective professional practice does include mastery of knowledge in content areas where our faculty specialize; however, as many of our readers will understand or come to understand, expert practice goes way beyond that. Expert practice develops from an *ongoing integration* of many sources of knowledge and experience.

Integrative Thinking & Being

We agree with the Council on Social Work Education’s Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE-EPAS) when it asserts the following:

“Competency-based education is an outcomes-oriented approach to curriculum design. The goal of the outcomes approach is to ensure that students are able to demonstrate **the integration** and application of the competencies in practice. In EPAS, social work practice competence consists of nine interrelated competencies and component behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes” (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 6, emphasis added).

Since the mid-1990s, the Mandel School has been dedicated to what we call an Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE), a competency-based and outcomes-based integrative-learning experience for students that predates CSWE’s competency-based Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), which was first articulated in 2008 and revised in 2015 as a new system for evaluating and accrediting schools of social work in the United States. (CSWE expects to release new standards in 2022.) In the early days of our abilities-based initiative, the Mandel School explained in a guidebook for students that

“ABLE helps you develop a habit of mind—more specifically, a habit of self-evaluation—that encourages you to become a self-directed social work professional who is committed to lifelong learning and to integrating evidence-based knowledge and skills into practice continuously, even after you graduate” (Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 2002, p. 4).

It is this habit of mind and habit of self-evaluation and habit of integration that we continue to emphasize today as our focus of outcomes assessment shifts from 8 abilities to 10 competencies, nine of which are prescribed by CSWE and a tenth, leadership, being added by us for our students exclusively (see Section 7 of this paper for the list of competencies). In fact, we have designed our new generalist curriculum to be a practical learning environment that challenges students and faculty alike to practice *integrative habits of mind* and self-evaluation together as learning collaborators. This is why, as noted above, the new generalist curriculum includes nine (9) new courses that combine the following within and across the courses as much as possible: theory and practice; perspectives from the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities; and 10 professional competencies—knowledge, values, skills, cognitive (intellectual) and emotional (affective) processes, and behaviors expected of and demonstrable by all graduates.

We have intentionally designed our new curriculum as an integrative-learning environment in this way, because we have learned an essential lesson from our ABLE initiative (see Section 3) and our Integrative Seminars initiative (see Section 4):

that responsibility for integration lies **throughout the curriculum**, not just in one area, such as the classroom or the field practicum or an integrative seminar.

In other words, each and every classroom experience and each and every field practicum experience must be structured in such a way that course instructors continually help students develop a *habit of mind* and *habit of self-evaluation* and *habit of integration*. In this way, self-reflection and integration become a daily practice: they become the intellectual and emotional equivalent of muscle memory.

Non-Integrative Habits of Mind

Since the onset of our ABLE initiative in the 1990s, we have learned a few additional important lessons about CSWE's wish for integration in the learning environment and as an outcome of that environment. A good number of students are not conscious of integrative thinking nor do they understand what it is, how it occurs, how to develop it, and how to do it with increasing mastery. We suspect this comes from an educational system of primary schools, secondary schools, and undergraduate schools that require students to take separate classes in separate subject matters—for example, mathematics, language arts, anthropology, psychology, biology, chemistry, physics—and rewards them with grades for mastery of content in those separate classes and *not* for mastery of making connections across courses and content areas. We realize that if we are going to expect students to integrate and apply their learning, we must provide them integrative tools and demonstrate how integrative thinking is done.

Therefore, we have designed a new generalist (foundation) curriculum of courses in which we strongly encourage faculty to guide students intentionally through the process of integration—of acknowledging and articulating connections between and among professional social-work competencies and theory and practice on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. We aim to deliver an advanced curriculum and specialized curriculum that do the same.

Encouraging Faculty to Embrace Integrative Thinking

We make the process of *integrative thinking* known to students and faculty alike by encouraging them to name it, demonstrate it, and practice it—together. We strongly believe that conscious and collaborative participation in this process of integration in a student's *external environment* (the in-person or online classroom discussions with faculty and peers) can serve as a model of and a scaffolding (or support) for each student as they bring that process into their *internal environment*. In this way, we truly co-create a daily ritual and routine of discovery that will last a lifetime.

Another important lesson we have learned from our ABLE initiative since the 1990s is this. Some faculty members who are specialists in a niche of knowledge, a body of literature, an area of research and/or practice struggle with thinking integratively about the social work profession as a whole—on a micro, mezzo, and macro level simultaneously—and, thus, experience resistance to and frustration with curriculum innovation which asks (and requires) them to guide students through the integrative-learning process. Again, we suspect this comes from an educational system—from primary schools to post-doctoral programs—that requires students to take separate classes in separate subject matters and rewards them with grades for mastery of those separate classes and *not* for mastery of making connections across courses and content areas.

In addition, institutions of higher education recruit new faculty members who are content experts who have already published in a chosen area of specialization and reward

them with promotion and tenure for acquiring grants to conduct research and publish scholarship that advances the body of knowledge in their specialization. Faculty members are less likely to be rewarded for conducting deep thinking and publishing scholarship that integrates bodies of knowledge across content areas. As a result, **faculty members may present a bias** toward non-integrative thinking and learning that occurs in intellectual silos. Therefore, in our planning for curriculum redesign and innovation, we intentionally included the following goals from the get-go: to inspire all faculty to think about and invest in (“buy into”) a common curriculum that integrates competencies and content, beginning with the generalist curriculum; and to encourage faculty to think not just about individual courses in their scholarly specialization but also about all the courses in a social work curriculum and how these courses complement each other and advance the value, knowledge, skills, and cognitive and affective processes of students as practitioners.

SUMMARY | A METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTING & SUSTAINING INNOVATION

In summary, in this white paper, we highlight *the iterative process* of curriculum innovation utilized by the Mandel School over the last 25 years and describe our methods for managing organizational change and our methods for supporting ongoing quality improvement through formal assessment initiatives. We will also highlight *the product* of our most recent curriculum innovation, namely, the one-semester generalist curriculum briefly described above as well as the following: a new one-semester *advanced curriculum*, which serves as a bridge for and gateway to courses in the *specialized curriculum*; and expanded certificate options in the specialized curriculum.

As a concluding introductory note, in each section of this paper, we make the effort to describe the *process* and *product* and *lessons learned* in each iteration of curriculum innovation, beginning in the 1990s and leading to the launch of the new generalist curriculum in Fall 2020 and the new advanced curriculum in Spring 2021. From this narrative, we hope, in the end, to present a framework for and overview of a change process that others may encounter in their curriculum re-design efforts now and in the future. Perhaps this framework will provide that big picture and birds-eye-view to help keep you organized, focused on positive facilitators of change, and looking out for potential barriers to transform and pitfalls to avoid. It is easy to get lost in the process of change when you are immersed in all the practical details and all the emotional ups and downs as students, faculty, and staff alike **navigate their own internal terrain** through the change process toward a new way of seeing and being in the world of social work.

With this in mind, we would like to tune your attention (prime your awareness) with a simple outline that we believe may represent some of the core components of the **continuous quality-improvement process** that the Mandel School has employed to facilitate curriculum innovations over the years. This outline presents a potential framework of action steps. However, we will emphasize that the process is not as linear—or as simple—as the outline may suggest. In fact, we notice that in our own institutional story it is almost impossible to break down each curriculum iteration into consistent stages and steps. However, the items in the list below represent what we are hearing and seeing in the narrative thus far. We anticipate this framework will help us sustain the changes we have made and keep our eyes and ears tuned to the needs of the Mandel School and the profession as it evolves over time:

- Identify desired learning outcomes
- Assess student learning experiences and outcomes continuously
- Engage in a process of organizational change that actively involves all stakeholders
- Deliver the products of change (curriculum innovation)
- Assess the process of organizational change, including ongoing feedback from stakeholders
- Review, document, and apply lessons learned
- Share (disseminate) student learning outcomes and lessons learned to internal and external stakeholders
- Share (disseminate) organizational-change outcomes and lessons learned to internal and external stakeholders
- Repeat these activities and keep the process going

| SECTION 2 |

ABOUT THE MANDEL SCHOOL Leadership in Research, Scholarship & Education

The Mandel School is the professional school of social work at Case Western Reserve University, a research institution in Cleveland, Ohio. The School was founded in 1915 as one of the first university-affiliated schools of social work in the United States (Cutler, 1930) and is consistently ranked among the top schools of social work in the nation and the top choice in the State of Ohio. It has a long and continuing tradition of recruiting nationally-recognized faculty with academic training in social work and allied disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, public health, public policy, anthropology, nonprofit management) who contribute to the advancement of the social work profession with cutting-edge applied research, scholarship, knowledge development, teaching, curriculum assessment and innovation, and community service throughout northeast Ohio and nationally and internationally as well.

The School currently offers a master's degree program in social work in three study formats (i.e., on-campus, online, and intensive weekend for working professionals); dual-degree programs; a master's in nonprofit organizations; a doctoral program in social welfare; a robust for-credit study-abroad program; one of the few social work libraries in the country that is located within the School; and many other assets, such as its nine (9) research and training centers, which facilitate collaboration in research and training between faculty and community partners, including human service organizations, service delivery systems, and policy makers:

- Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education
- Center for Evidence-Based Practices, a recognized Center of Excellence

- Center for Innovative Practices, a recognized Center of Excellence
- Center on Trauma and Adversity
- Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development
- Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Center of Excellence
- Community Innovation Network
- National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities
- Partnership for Evaluation, Research and Implementation

Many of these centers and their research and training initiatives are multidisciplinary and multi-institutional partnerships that address social policy, social problems, and social-work practice. These initiatives place a strong emphasis upon the dissemination of new knowledge and skills that enhance practice and service delivery in the community. The centers also provide opportunities for students to participate in all aspects of the research process.

MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM | MICRO & MACRO PERSPECTIVES

Our Master of Social Work (MSW) is a 60-credit degree that has been continuously accredited since 1919. (Historically, the School had offered a Master of Science in Social Administration (MSSA) but changed the name of the degree beginning in August 2021 to eliminate confusion among prospective students and potential employers who were more familiar with the popular MSW nomenclature and less familiar with the MSSA.) Our MSW includes foundation training in generalist social work practice (generalist curriculum) and advanced training (specialized curriculum) in direct practice and/or community practice. At the time of this writing, the direct-practice concentration provides specializations in the following: aging; children, youth, and families; health; mental health, and substance use disorders and recovery. Certificate programs are offered in gerontology, global health, nonprofit management, school social work, and trauma-informed practice. Students may also customize educational experiences to focus on early childhood education; international social work; and dual disorders (co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse).

All students in all learning formats (see below) engage in field education experiences concurrently with coursework. Students also gain experiences in interprofessional education (IPE) through CWRU courses that create collaborations with students from other health-related academic programs at the University. In addition, dual-degree programs are offered in collaboration with other academic departments at the University, combining an MSW with a master's in one of the following: bioethics; law; business administration; nonprofit management; and public health.

STUDY FORMATS | INCREASING ACCESS TO SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Throughout our long history, our students and alumni have affirmed over and over again what our faculty has known: that the world is full of talented people from diverse circumstances and walks of life who have the passion to solve contemporary social problems. Yet, faculty members have also known from their own research, scholarship, and practice experiences that it takes more than just passion to help solve complex problems. It takes a unique ability to engage people; to assess information about their challenges; to plan, encourage, support, and implement change; to evaluate the outcomes; and to inspire new

ways of thinking and acting to help individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and systems reach their greatest potential.

The Mandel School has asserted confidently throughout its history that a master's degree and doctoral degree in social work are the best sources of professional training to accomplish this important work. That is why we, as a faculty, have engaged in **ongoing institutional self-reflection** to identify ways to maximize access and minimize barriers to our transformative learning environment. To achieve this goal, we have developed methods for supporting students through paid field stipends, fellowships, scholarships, and other forms of financial assistance as well as through learning formats that accommodate learning preferences and busy schedules of work and family responsibilities.

We highlight this because these learning formats create a complexity in curriculum design that must be managed strategically to ensure that a school of social work is providing a consistent learning experience and outcomes for all students. The learning formats include the following:

Learning Format #1 | On-Campus

This traditional four-semester learning format involves concurrent weekly coursework and field education (practicum). Courses take place on our Cleveland campus and typically take two years to complete. Graduates of bachelor's programs who prefer in-person collaborative learning usually choose this option. Recent graduates of bachelor's programs in social work typically enter with advanced standing and complete coursework in three (3) semesters instead of four (4).

Learning Format #2 | Intensive Weekend

The School created this learning format in 1985 to accommodate working professionals who wish to remain employed and advance or change their careers with a master's degree in social work. Students take one course at a time along with field education and meet for three to five full days on campus in Cleveland during two weekends that are spaced a month apart. They attend courses throughout the year and typically complete their degrees in three years. This format continues to attract students throughout Ohio and other states who prefer an in-person learning environment. Students with advanced standing (e.g., with a bachelor's degree in social work) may complete the degree in approximately two years.

Learning Format #3 | Online

The Mandel School launched its completely online format in 2013 as one of the first of its kind in the country to provide greater access for students who are unable to complete their social work degree in a traditional face-to-face format. The online format meets the needs of those who are geographically isolated and those for whom family and professional obligations or financial circumstances make physical travel to Cleveland difficult.

Students typically take two classes plus field education over a 14-week period. Classes involve a combination of weekly *asynchronous* learning activities (i.e., outside of and prior to the class meeting), which are followed by *synchronous* learning activities inside the virtual classroom during a scheduled meeting time. Each course is designed to meet the needs of online learners with learning assets, such as video-recorded lectures and common case studies, among others. The School ensures each course is fully comparable with those offered in the on-campus and intensive weekend formats and, thus, meets the Council on

Social Work Education’s Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE-EPAS). Learning assets developed for the online format are also used in the on-campus and intensive-weekend formats.

Since its inception in 2013, the online learning format has accommodated students from across the nation. During a typical semester, students from all U.S. time zones take courses online.

(Editor’s Note: For a more complete description of the online learning format, see Section 5 of this white paper.)

DOCTORAL PROGRAM

The Doctoral Program at the Mandel School prepares individuals from communities throughout the United States and around the world to be leaders in social-welfare research, scholarship, policy, administration, and teaching. The PhD Program is a cornerstone of the Mandel School because it provides students with an unprecedented opportunity for career development at the highest level of the social work profession.

Our students become experts in a body of knowledge of their choice by focusing their research and scholarship interests in one or more areas of specialization that examine contemporary challenges that face individuals, families, groups, organizations, or communities. We prepare graduates to advance the field of social work for the betterment of future generations through research, scholarship, teaching, and community-based technical services, such as program consultation, clinical consultation, evaluation, and training.

The PhD Program offers students the unrivaled opportunity to engage with world-renowned faculty, cutting-edge research, and an integrative competency-based doctoral curriculum in a highly supportive environment that is committed to student success. Established in 1952, our PhD Program is one of the oldest doctoral social-work programs of its kind in the United States and consistently ranks among the top in the nation. The program offers a PhD in Social Welfare in both full-time and part-time formats.

The Next Generation of Innovators

Our doctoral program prepares scholars, teachers, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to be leaders in social work and social welfare in a variety of professional settings. In addition to preparing students to be experts in research and scholarship in an area of specialization, the program also prepares them to be outstanding educators by providing training, support, and opportunities to teach in the master’s program. Thus graduates of the program are encouraged to develop as social work educators as well.

A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP IN TEACHING & CURRICULUM INNOVATION

As noted in the introduction of this white paper, while the Mandel School faculty has gained a national reputation for its applied research and prolific contributions to the advancement of social work knowledge and practice, the School has also maintained its historic commitment to teaching “in a balanced relationship [of] the two elements of technique and knowledge,” first articulated by James Elbert Cutler, PhD, dean of the Mandel School from 1915-1941 (Cutler & Davie, 1930, pp. 20-30) with a number of curriculum innovations over time. Many of these transformations have been described in the book written by Elise C.

Hagesfeld and Elizabeth Salem, titled *Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences: 100 Years of Inspiring Hope and Shaping the Future*, which the School published in 2018 to celebrate its Centennial. We include some edited excerpts below:

- In 1923, the School was the first in the nation to offer **studies in group work**. The School recruited group-work innovator and social-work icon Grace Longwell Coyle to assist in writing the curriculum. She later joined the faculty in 1934. This bolstered the faculty's commitment to innovations in group work and solidified our national reputation as a leader in the theory and practice of this mode of service delivery for decades.
- By 1946, improvements in the School's curriculum kept it at the forefront of social work education. The faculty **adapted a core curriculum** that included what the National Association of Schools of Social Work (NASSW) referred to as "the basic eight" subject areas: case work; group work; community organization; public welfare; social administration; social research; medical information; and psychiatric information. NASSW recommended that these eight areas be included at the center of graduate social-work education across the country. The faculty also began offering courses that addressed the needs of veterans returning home from the Second World War, including vocational, mental, and physical rehabilitation. This specialization would receive support from the Federal government for the next decade.
- In 1948, the School hosted a workshop with the American Association of Social Workers to address the question of **research in the social work curriculum**. The conference inspired the formation of the Social Work Research Group, founded in 1949 as the first national organization to promote social work research as central to the advancement of scholarship and classroom teaching. It later became one of the founding organizations of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).
- In the 1950s, the Mandel School created **the first social-science-based curriculum** that became the model for all social work education while also being one of the first schools in the country to establish a doctoral program in social welfare.
- In 1953, the School published the results of a self-study which recommended the creation of **a curriculum designed to provide** students with a basic core of knowledge concerning society, social work methods, and the purposes of social work in society. Launched in the fall of 1954, the curriculum consisted of core courses that all students were required to take before they majored in either **social casework** or **social group work**. A concentration in **community organization** was added a few years later.
- By the end of the 1950s, the School **expanded its core curriculum** to add courses in social-work research and research methods; psychopathology and

physical illness; and community organization, administration, and legal issues. The new curriculum was well-received nationally. After faculty presented a report on the changes to the annual meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, many American and Canadian schools of social work reached out for consultation about the curriculum innovations.

- In the 1960s, we were among the first in the nation to add **advanced specializations in practice**.
- In 1976, when few schools were interested in teaching about substance abuse, the Mandel School stepped up and established a highly regarded curriculum specialization **in alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA)**. Since then, the School has received more than \$16 million in grants to train thousands of social work students, licensed professionals, and faculty members.
- Also, during the mid-1970s, curriculum adjustments continued in the master's program. The School began to move away from three concentrations of study toward **a series of specializations**. Students continued to take core introductory classes in the first semester but now chose a specialization in their second semester. The specializations included the following: aging; alcoholism; community and neighborhood development; criminal justice and corrections; the family and the child; federations; health; low-income groups; maternal and child health; mental health; public welfare; social work and the schools. The focus of the specializations **allowed students more flexibility in designing a course of study** and allowed students to complete classes in multiple specializations.
- By the late 1970s, the School also expanded its interdisciplinary focus, **creating joint courses** with other Case Western Reserve departments, including gerontological research and labor relations. The first student graduated from the MSSA/JD program, a collaboration with the School of Law. Faculty members made plans to expand its dual-degree programs with more academic partnerships across campus.
- In the 1980s, access to a master's degree in social work for older, employed social workers was basically nonexistent, so the School developed **the first intensive weekend** learning format in 1985. This highly successful program was built upon an adult-learning model. As a result, enrollment in the master's program increased significantly throughout the decade. The intensive-weekend and extended-degree learning formats allowed students to complete their degrees over a longer timeframe and attend classes during evenings, weekends, and a summer semester.
- A new joint MSSA/PhD program in 1986-87 provided students the opportunity to complete both degrees within four years.

- The innovations didn't stop there. In 1989, Case Western Reserve University founded one of the **first nonprofit management** graduate programs as a partnership between its schools of social work and business.
- As part of the School's mission to train students to be leaders at the cutting edge of social work practice, the faculty continued to make adjustments to the curriculum. In 1982, it introduced a program in occupational social work, which trained social workers to assist employees in factories and the workplace rather than in an agency setting.
- In 1987, curriculum innovators merged two course-tracks—the “B Stream” (planning, development, and organization) and “C Stream” (human service management)—into a new stream called Planning, Development & Management. The faculty also made a significant change by establishing the **Direct Practice** program, which created innovations in social-work practice in the community through new curriculum, continuing education programs, and research.
- In 1991, a faculty task force suggested dividing the master's program into the *foundation curriculum* and *advanced curriculum*. The foundation curriculum consisted of 15 credits from four core classes (e.g., social policy, social work methods, socio-behavioral theory, and research), plus a semester of field education and a skills lab. The advanced curriculum included 45 credits in six concentrations, plus four electives and three semesters of field education. In 1993, career tracks in fundraising and **community development** were also added for master's students.
- An Assessment Task Force at the end of the 1990s recommended changes to the master's program and the **creation of learning outcomes**. Faculty explored the idea of creating a community-practice framework for the curriculum and identified Eight Abilities (or skills) that competent social workers needed to develop to be effective practitioners. These abilities would ultimately be incorporated into the Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE), which would reshape the curriculum over the next decade.
 - The story about ABLE, learning outcomes, abilities, and competencies continues in detail on the following pages of this white paper.

| SECTION 3 |

**ABILITY-BASED
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (ABLE)**
(1994)

A major shift in the Mandel School’s historic commitment to innovative teaching and curriculum design occurred in the early 1990s with an emerging national interest in assessment and accountability in higher education. This set the context for the School’s faculty to take a bold step forward in social work curriculum design. At the time, the School offered mostly separate courses in theory, practice, and research methods; micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice; and field education (practicum). Some courses did combine or integrate content areas, but the School had no institutionally guaranteed way of confirming that students were experiencing the integration of knowledge and practice across the curriculum, as intended. As a result, the faculty began to ask some important questions, such as the following:

- How do we know the curriculum is effective?
- How do we know we are providing our students with the knowledge, skills, values, and cognitive (intellectual) and affective (emotional) processes that they need to practice effectively in today’s society?
- What should a graduate of the Mandel School know, believe, and be able to do?
- Do students understand the value of integrating knowledge into practice and how to do it effectively?

ASSESSMENT INSPIRES INNOVATION

The 1994 CSWE accreditation standards were the first to require ongoing assessment of program objectives, and the CSWE-EPAS standards approved in 2001 devoted an entire standard (Standard 8) to program assessment and continuous improvement (Buchan, et. al., 2004). The new emphasis on program evaluation generated a high need among social work programs for new methods and approaches to assessment. At that time, however there was little interest in scholarly investigation of program assessment as reflected in few such publications in the *Journal of Social Work Education*.

In 1995, Wodarski, Feit, and Green reviewed the empirical research and concluded that “evaluations of social work educational methods are limited in quantity and scope” (Wodarski, Feit, & Green, 1995, p. 124). Also, a 1990 nationwide survey of graduate programs’ methods for assessing outcomes (Standard 1.5 in the 1994 CSWE standards) found that most programs relied upon alumni surveys, field evaluations, grades, and student course evaluations to measure educational outcomes (Garcia & Floyd, 2002). Capstone tests and assignments were used by fewer than 25 percent of the responding programs. Garcia and Floyd concluded that program assessment presents a “clear challenge to social work education, and graduate social work programs in particular” (Garcia & Floyd, 2002, p. 380) and by implication they noted the need for the development of a broader array of methods and procedures for assessing program effectiveness.

PLANNING PROCESS

It was in this context that the faculty of the Mandel School took a bold step forward. In 1994, the School wrote a new strategic plan and began developing an assessment-based curriculum designed around clearly identified measures. This would become the basis for establishing program outcomes and assessing students’ attainment of competency.

Yet, curriculum innovators among the faculty also acknowledged that this *summative assessment* was not enough. The curriculum also needed *formative assessment*, known then as assessment-as-learning. In *assessment-as-learning*, students receive feedback about their demonstration of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes in classroom experiences and field practica not only from instructors but also from peers and their own self-reflections: all of these assessment-as-learning activities help shape and strengthen their performance in social work competencies (abilities). Thus, both assessment and learning can be seen as an ongoing process that occur continuously throughout one’s professional life. Faculty innovators felt a competency-based program such as this would help us develop an innovative curriculum that would lead to improved student learning and performance: it would ensure that our graduates were prepared to enter social work practice as lifelong learners in the 21st Century.

So, in 1994, the Mandel School began work on what would eventually become its innovative outcomes-based and competency-based approach to social work education known as the Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE). Seeds for the initiative were planted and nurtured by two symposia hosted by the Mandel School with leadership from Dean Darlyne Bailey, PhD: the first in 1995, titled “Social Work Education—Today and Tomorrow: Midwest Deans and Directors Leadership Retreat” (Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 1996); the second in 1996, titled “Ability-Based Social Work Education: The First Conference of the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences’ National Advisory Panel

on Assessment in Social Work Education” (Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 1997).

Leadership for the development and implementation of the Mandel School’s Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE) was provided by Wallace J. Gingerich, PhD, professor of social work and associate dean for academic affairs, and Karen Kaye, PhD, MEd, assistant dean for student administration and academic support. Kaye’s doctoral studies in education introduced her to the pioneering assessment-as-learning initiative at Alverno College, a small Catholic women’s college in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which would serve as a source of inspiration and technical assistance for our curriculum transformation.

PRODUCT | 8 ABILITIES & STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

Gingerich and Kaye conceived ABLE as an outcomes-based, *assessment-as-learning* initiative and described this as “a process integral to learning that involves observation and judgment of each student’s performance on the basis of explicit criteria with resulting feedback to the student. Assessment-as-learning focuses on the student’s development of knowledge and abilities. **Student self-assessment** becomes the basis for self-discovery and self-development and hopefully equips the student for continuing professional and personal development throughout his or her career” (Gingerich & Kaye, 1997, p. 25-26, emphasis added). Five key principles guided development of the ABLE program:

- Student abilities (educational outcomes) drive the curriculum
- Abilities are developed and assessed in both classroom and field practicum
- Students demonstrate attainment of abilities upon graduation
- Student self-assessment of their abilities becomes a lifelong professional skill
- Assessment of student learning leads to continuous program improvement

To determine what outcomes would be assessed, the Mandel School conducted market research by asking a number of individuals from 14 different stakeholder groups to identify the values, knowledge, and skills that professional social workers need to become a specialist in an area (concentration) of contemporary social work practice. More specifically, we asked what our graduates should know, believe, and be able *to do* as they entered the profession. (This was a valuable method and lesson learned that we would apply to our competency-based generalist curriculum innovation over 20 years later.) Among those who participated in the market-research discussions were community leaders, students, alumni, faculty, employers, and consumers of social services. We combined their responses with information that we obtained from the social work literature and professional accreditation standards to create the eight abilities, which became the School’s program objectives. The original eight abilities were

1. Intentionally Use Yourself
2. Apply Social Work Methods
3. Integrate Social Work Values and Ethics
4. Value a Diverse World
5. Think Critically
6. Communicate Effectively
7. Advocate for Social Justice
8. Succeed in the World of Work

(Editor's note: The Mandel School revised the eight abilities in 2008 and 2011. For the most recent list, see Section 7 of this document.)

Integrative-Learning Experiences | ABLÉ Seminar & ABLÉ Portfolio

Once the abilities were identified, faculty developed full ability statements and designed a program to implement an outcomes-based educational model. We took the five key principles that we used to guide the planning of ABLÉ (see above) and expanded them to include the following:

- The eight abilities form the intellectual environment for the program, describe the outcomes we would like our students to achieve, and constitute our program objectives.
- The classroom curriculum, field experience, and other learning experiences are designed to provide students the opportunity to develop and demonstrate their competence in the eight abilities.
- The **ABLÉ seminar** and **ABLÉ portfolio** form the nexus of the program, the place where students **integrate** their learning and develop the habits of self-assessment and lifelong professional development.
- Throughout their time in the program and at graduation, students self-assess and are assessed by others regarding their competence in the eight abilities.
- Student competence in the eight abilities is aggregated by the School to determine if the program has achieved its objectives (Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 2006, p. 3).

In 2002, after eight years of planning and development, the Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLÉ) was implemented under the leadership of Dean Grover (Cleve) Gilmore, PhD, making it the first comprehensive outcomes-based graduate social work curriculum (program) in the United States. By May 2007, approximately 500 students completed the ABLÉ program. Most faculty participated as ABLÉ seminar facilitators, and faculty members and field instructors used the eight abilities to assess student performance. The School also collected systematic pre-post data on a variety of outcome measures.

It is important to emphasize here that, from the beginning, ABLÉ focused on both an integrative-learning experience and assessment simultaneously—two activities that would later serve as the foundation for our competency-based generalist curriculum innovation in 2020. Notice that the **ABLÉ seminar** was the core of the ABLÉ initiative. It was a four-credit *integrative seminar* facilitated by faculty that met three to four times per semester to provide opportunities for each student (12 to 13 in each seminar) to engage in the habit of assessing the development of their professional selves. The seminar required each student to evaluate their own experiences and their peers' experiences with and integration of the eight abilities in three components of their professional education: courses and field education, which CSWE calls the *explicit curriculum*, and in the learning environment and other learning experiences, which CSWE calls the *implicit curriculum*, that include many components, such as student groups; student council; and special events like lunch-and-learn lecture series and community-outreach initiatives; as well as student development admissions; advising, retention, and termination; student participation in governance; faculty; administrative and governance structure; and resources. ABLÉ included these implicit learning experiences because the faculty recognized that education is a lifelong process which occurs outside of

traditional coursework and field education experiences. The faculty believed it was important to help students identify, seek, and engage in these experiences as a way to gain momentum in lifelong learning and ongoing professional development.

During each ABLE seminar, students participated in group discussions and made case presentations to their instructor and each other about all of their experiences in class, field practicum, and other learning experiences, focusing their presentations and discussions upon the eight abilities and the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive (intellectual) and emotional (affective) processes associated with each. These presentations included time for questions and answers, providing students with opportunities to engage with each other in spontaneous moments of co-creative reflection, discovery, and integration—a connecting of dots that produces the “ah-ha!” of insight and personal change.

The ABLE seminar served another important role in the life of students. Faculty members who facilitated each seminar were assigned to be an **ABLE advisor** (and academic advisor) for students in their classes. In this way, ABLE created *continuity* in the student learning experience by providing students with a de-facto mentor. Faculty members had many opportunities to get to know their students and to provide them with consultation not only for their academic journeys but also their professional development. This was one way in which the explicit and implicit curricula were purposely integrated.

The **ABLE portfolio** was an assignment in the ABLE seminar which consisted of two case or project presentations that each student made during the seminar sessions: one during foundation studies (now known as the generalist curriculum) in the first year of the program and one during advanced studies (now known as the specialized curriculum) during the second year. Students chose a case or a project from their field practicum and prepared written and oral presentations describing and assessing their capacity to integrate the eight abilities with course content and field experiences. Students structured their presentations with four basic components:

- Description of their case or project, including specific *artifacts* (exhibits of materials) that they discovered, developed, and/or utilized in their case or project
- Description of how the eight abilities were demonstrated in the case or project
- Self-assessment of their experience with and integration of the eight abilities in the case or project and in relevant coursework
- Learning plan to enhance their use of the eight abilities

Our curriculum innovators had intended the ABLE portfolio to serve a dual purpose for students while they were enrolled in courses and as they approached graduation. With the ABLE portfolio, students would have a tool to organize, present, and discuss the *integration* of their learning experiences and *integration* of the abilities in their courses and the ABLE seminar. As they approached graduation, they would then convert this tool (or transform it) into a career portfolio: students could use it to demonstrate to potential employers what experiences and abilities they would bring to an organization and what strengths they would contribute to a team. Unfortunately, the dual purpose of the ABLE portfolio was not clearly articulated and both faculty and students struggled to stay focused on the utility of the portfolio as both a learning and career tool.

The Integration of Knowledge Silos

The ABLÉ seminar—and its ABLÉ portfolio—was the locus for (hub of) an intentional integrative-learning experience for both students and faculty alike. It was the intersection of the Venn diagram that included coursework, field practicum, and other learning experiences. At the time, both the ABLÉ seminar and portfolio were necessary and essential for the integrative-learning experience. This is why. Although courses in the curriculum included the eight abilities, those courses were, for the most part, designed separately by content areas (e.g., human development, social work practice with older adults, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, community development, evidence-based practice) and often separately as a theory course, a practice course, a policy course, or a research course—with some courses integrating content like policy and practice. The curriculum was essentially designed and delivered around faculty content expertise—or silos of knowledge. While individual faculty in their classes may have tried to link the content of their courses with content of other courses, there was no way for the Mandel School as an institution **to ensure that this important integrative work was being done**. So, instead of attempting to redesign and restructure each course to link content across those courses intentionally, the School created a separate course, namely, an integrative seminar—the ABLÉ seminar—to encourage and ensure this important work was occurring.

The attempt to create an intentionally integrative experience as a separate course had advantages and disadvantages that would provide valuable lessons which would inform our integrative competency-based generalist curriculum innovation in 2020.

ASSESSMENT & OUTCOMES

During the ABLÉ era, the Mandel School began to experiment with a formal, institutionalized method for collecting and analyzing educational outcomes data. This would nudge the School in the direction of a more permanent institutional process embedded in its day-to-day operations. For instance, from 2002 to 2004, the School began assessing curriculum outcomes (learning outcomes) using three standard measures (Jack, Joseph & Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 2017, p. 406):

- Pre-post licensure practice exam, administered to students upon entry to the master’s program and at graduation
- Social Work Self-Efficacy Scale administered to students using a pre-post-then design
- Field evaluations

The School also experimented with a qualitative assessment in which students described the eight abilities of social work practice that they observed in a video documentary of a social worker intervening with a family. However, in 2004, the School stopped using the experimental qualitative assessment because it did not produce meaningful data for assessing competence in the eight abilities of the ABLÉ initiative. This is when the School also began using the practice version of the newly revised Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Masters Exam as a pre-post measure. Through this experience, we realized that the assessment of learning outcomes can only be meaningful if it “closes the loop” in the learning cycle, which means that findings from assessments should strengthen the students’ learning experience. We discovered that the outcome measures being used often lacked the specificity needed to provide clear recommendations for curriculum change.

In addition to gathering data on outcomes, ABLE also gathered data from students and faculty on the effectiveness of the ABLE seminar and portfolio. By 2004, data revealed that although some faculty facilitators of the ABLE seminar found the class to be worthwhile, many others did not. This ambivalence was seen in student reactions to the ABLE seminar and ABLE portfolio as well. Students cited a lack of clarity of purpose and little added value to their overall experience in the master's program. This assessment was based on a review of the ABLE portfolios, seminar-course evaluations, focus groups with students and faculty, and anecdotal feedback.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ABLE

When reflecting upon the design and implementation of ABLE, Drs. Gingerich and Kaye have noted that faculty members who reported having positive experiences with the ABLE seminar and portfolio often were those who had experience using *group-work techniques* from clinical practice. This gave them a level of comfort and confidence facilitating a seminar-styled class that was based upon open dialogue among the course instructor and a group of students from diverse backgrounds and life circumstances. In this way, their seminars provided a structure for a spontaneous co-creation of self-reflection and integration of knowledge, values, skills, the eight abilities, and cognitive (intellectual) and affective (emotional) processes. Class discussions might include challenging self-reflections in an effort to understand the clash of one's own established beliefs with new experiences from field practicum, classroom discussions, and other learning experiences, including current events locally, nationally, and internationally. It was these discussions—sometimes emotionally charged as students made efforts to resolve internal conflicts—that often provided unique opportunities for individual and group learning and transformation. However, faculty members had varying levels of expertise in facilitating these types of group conversations and the School had not sufficiently invested in developing formal mechanisms to assist faculty in developing the needed expertise.

Lessons from Stages of Change

Drs. Gingerich and Kaye also reported that, in retrospect, they believe they did not do enough to prepare faculty members for ABLE's transformative way of looking at and presenting course content and learning experiences through the lens of the eight abilities. The break from educational tradition was too much for some faculty, who were accustomed to teaching in ways they had been taught in their own master's and doctoral programs. These faculty members focused on helping students master intellectual content (knowledge) and, in a sense, left the self-reflection and integration of values, abilities, and cognitive and emotional processes as a separate matter.

As we reflect upon this part of our curriculum history, we notice that, when it came to understanding and wanting curriculum transformation, Drs. Gingerich and Kaye were at a different stage of change than many of their colleagues (see "Stages of Change" discussion in the Introduction of this paper). They were in an *action stage* while those feeling and exhibiting the most resistance were not. The recollections of Drs. Gingerich and Kaye illustrate that each faculty member had an individualized capacity for responding to and acclimating to innovations in curriculum design and teaching. Going into the project, the School had not fully grasped the implications for organizational change that would emerge from such a major curriculum innovation, nor had it sufficiently invested in the resources necessary to

bring the transformation to fruition. In addition, as discussed in the Introduction to this paper, students had their own capacities for and reactions and resistance to change. For some, the integrative emphasis of ABLE was a major shift: it challenged their internal paradigms (expectations) of what the educational experience would be.

Lessons from Assessment & Outcomes

As explained above, curriculum innovators at our School conceptualized ABLE as a comprehensive innovation that coupled programmatic assessment of student competence with student self-assessment of competence, called *assessment as learning*. However, there was a disconnect between these two vital components. Data from the ABLE seminars and portfolios were not used to assess overall program outcomes. In addition, outcome assessment data were not tied directly to specific aspects of the curriculum: instead, the data continued to come from more traditional sources, such as student course evaluations, grades, field evaluations, and alumni surveys.

Because of strong student reaction and mixed feedback from faculty, the School decided to suspend the ABLE seminars and portfolio beginning **in Fall 2006**, with the intention of reviving some version of them after a systematic analysis. However, the School continued to link the eight abilities and the ability statements to course objectives, learning activities, assignments, and grading/assessments. The course credits that had been allocated to ABLE seminars were reabsorbed into the overall curriculum. While the ABLE seminar and portfolios were suspended, the lessons learned from the experience were carried forward into the next era of curriculum innovation.

| SECTION 4 |

INTEGRATIVE SEMINARS

(2007)

In Fall 2007, as part of its curriculum assessment, the Mandel School assembled a small workgroup of faculty to study the School’s experience with the ABLE seminar as an alternative self-study project for the reaccreditation process with CSWE. Two faculty members, Lenore A. Kola, PhD, associate professor of social work and chair of the alcohol-and-other-drug concentration, and Zoë Breen Wood, PhD, who at the time was director of field education, were named as co-chairs by Dean Gilmore. Drs. Kola and Wood had been involved in the ABLE initiative and in the School’s transition to and deepening interest in a competency-based curriculum. Two other faculty also participated to represent the perspectives of faculty teaching in the School’s two concentrations: Kathleen Farkas, PhD, associate professor of social work and chair of the *direct practice* concentration (micro practice); and Mark Chupp, PhD, assistant professor of social work and chair of the *community and social development* concentration (macro practice). This group articulated a mission that would shape future curriculum initiatives:

“We are committed to learning from our ABLE experiences and to developing models for helping students **integrate their learning across the curriculum**. This would include being able to integrate theory and practice as well as to integrate the other curriculum components—policy, research, human behavior and the social environment (HBSE), and field. We are also looking at how to be able to assess student learning both for the student him/herself as well as to provide feedback to the curriculum. These models must take into account current resource availability” (Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 2009, p. 1, emphasis added).

In addition to this mission statement, the workgroup committed to three activities for curriculum assessment and planning: review lessons learned from the ABLE seminar; conduct a literature review of models of integration of learning in social work and in related professions; and **develop models for integrating student learning across the curriculum.**

LITERATURE REVIEW | SEARCHING FOR MODELS OF INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

The workgroup's literature review sought to understand how the integration of theory and practice is defined; to identify models for how integration occurs; and to identify barriers to theory-practice integration. The workgroup also looked for efforts by other schools of social work to integrate theory and practice in field practicum and in the classroom as well as techniques used for this purpose and evaluations of these efforts.

The workgroup found no universally accepted definition in the social-work literature of what it means to “integrate theory and practice.” The two major theoretical perspectives were Schon's “Reflective Practitioner” model (Schon, 1987) and Bogo's “ITP Loop” model (Bogo & Vayda, 1998) and both of these perspectives shared some common components, including the following:

- All practice has a theory base (implicit or explicit). It is important to help students identify the theoretical assumptions of their practice.
- The **integration** of theory and practice is crucial to social work education; yet, students, faculty, and field instructors alike find this **a difficult task** (Mok, 1993).
- In spite of agreement among educators of the importance of this integration, there are different opinions about **who holds the primary responsibility for integration**: classroom instructor, field instructor, or field liaison. There is also disagreement about the best models of achieving integration and **which venue** should be the primary place to foster integration: classroom or field placement (Boisen & Syers, 2004).
- The **student's ability to assess** the effectiveness of practice revolves around critical reflection (*in-action and on-action*).
- Responsibility for integration lies **throughout the curriculum**, not just in one area (Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 2009, p. 4, emphasis added).

While the workgroup focused on finding effective methods for integrating theory with practice, the group also recognized that practice involves the integration of theory with research and policy across varying levels of practice.

INTEGRATIVE PRACTICE SEMINARS

The workgroup decided that, given limited resources available at the School, they should pilot integrative seminars not across or throughout the curriculum as hoped but in field education and in two specializations within the direct-practice concentration of the curriculum: 1.) the mental health specialization, which created one seminar for mental-health practice with adults and another for mental-health practice with children and adolescents; and 2.) the alcohol-and-other-drug-abuse (AODA) specialization.

The integrative seminars in the direct-practice concentration began in Spring 2009 semester. Faculty who specialized in mental health and AODA facilitated the seminars. Students enrolled in the seminars in their advanced year (now the specialized curriculum), typically in their last semester. The seminar functioned as a *reflective capstone experience* to help students integrate theory and practice in the context of a variety of community-based social service settings. The seminar format also provided students with opportunities to interact with professionals from various treatment and practice settings.

INTEGRATIVE FIELD SEMINARS

The integrative seminars in field education also began in Spring 2009 with two groups of students: those in their second (advanced) year and those with advanced standing (having recently completed a bachelor's degree in social work). These seminars involved partnerships between the Office of Field Education and selected community agencies and were jointly planned and facilitated by a field faculty-advisor and an agency representative. Distinctive features of the field-based integrative seminar included the following:

- Infusion of case material from the faculty, the agencies, and from the students' field experiences.
- Opportunity for students to have an in-depth experience with one agency in a seminar format and to learn about service delivery and the micro- and macro-levels of practice (e.g., clinical change and organizational change) from the perspective of that agency.
- Regular journaling with intensive feedback from the field faculty members.
- Emphasis on building a safe and strong learning community among the students who remained together throughout their program, meeting on a monthly basis (Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 2009, p. 6).

ASSESSMENT & LESSONS LEARNED

In retrospect, the workgroup did create a useful experiment in integrative learning for both field and classroom experiences with the integrative seminars, which were rated highly by students. We attribute this success, in part, to having **faculty facilitators who were committed to integration** of classroom and field experiences within their content area of specialization. In other words, there was faculty buy-in. There was also student buy-in, because they had a clear understanding of and expectation for this kind of learning experience, trusting that it would advance their mastery of their chosen area of social-work practice specialization.

The integrative seminars not only helped the Mandel School advance integrative learning, but they also helped advance curriculum evaluation efforts. The School included course-embedded assessments in the seminars for determining student competence in the eight abilities, and it also began to utilize two regular outcome measures throughout the curriculum:

- Course-embedded assessments in all generalist courses and in a selection of required specialized courses
- Field-education-performance assessments, conducted by field instructors and supplemented with input from faculty field-advisors

Lesson for Legacy of Integrative Learning

As of summer 2021, *integrative seminars* continue to be included as required courses in some portions of the School's specialized curriculum (the final year of study). However, as noted above, the workgroup was not able to apply advice from its literature review and implement an integrative-learning experience "across and throughout the curriculum." However, one important insight from the literature would resonate with faculty whose passion for curriculum design would continue to inform the School's assessment activities and future curriculum innovations:

that "**responsibility for integration lies throughout the curriculum**, not just in one area" (i.e., classroom or field practicum or integrative seminar).

| SECTION 5 |

ONLINE LEARNING FORMAT

A completely online master's degree program
(2011)

In this story thus far, we have been demonstrating how the Mandel School has engaged in institutional self-assessment to enhance the integrative learning experiences of its curriculum, with the goal to equip master's degree students with the knowledge, values, and skills to be lifelong learners who continually strive for excellence in their chosen specialization of social work practice throughout their careers.

Yet, as part of this ongoing process of self-reflection and innovation, the faculty has also remained focused on developing new ways to *improve access* to its cutting-edge learning environment for talented individuals from all walks of life. We have reduced financial barriers by supporting students through paid field stipends, fellowships, scholarships, and other forms of financial assistance. We have also developed new *learning formats* (study options) as alternatives to the traditional full-time, on-campus college experience. We have done this to accommodate students whose life circumstances—such as work, family, parenting, caregiving, and military service, among others—make it too challenging for them to attend weekly classes during the day. For instance, early in our history, the School began offering a part-time study option as well as evening courses to accommodate students with different scheduling needs.

However, by the mid-1980s, with feedback from alumni and community partners, Dean Arthur Naparstek, PhD, recognized that traditional evening programs were difficult for students who worked in challenging social service jobs. Attending two- to three-hour classes at night after a long day at work was not appealing to many people. He suggested to the faculty that a weekend format might enable people to take classes when they were more

rested and better ready to learn. In the 1989-90 academic year, the School introduced the intensive weekend (IW) format, which proved to be very popular. Combined with federal programs that helped fund the training of social workers with tuition assistance, the IW format yielded high enrollment through the mid-1990s (Hagesfeld & Salem, 2018, p. 77).

The School learned a key lesson from this experience: an innovative education-delivery model can meet scheduling needs and, thus, attract a talented pool of students with diverse life experiences and, at the same time, maintain compatibility with other learning formats. Also, it became even more evident that these nontraditional students are essential to social work education. They contribute valuable perspectives to class discussions, creating an even more robust learning environment. The IW format continues to attract students throughout Ohio and other states who prefer an in-person learning environment outside of a traditional work week.

2011 | CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In the spirit of increasing access to our cutting-edge curriculum, the Mandel School embarked on a study in 2011 to explore the potential of offering its master's degree program in a *completely online format*. The technology was finally available for it. Also, at the time, only a few universities had an online MSW, so the Mandel School could develop a competitive advantage by being an early adopter of the technology.

Dean Grover (Cleve) Gilmore, PhD, and Associate Dean Sharon Milligan, PhD, provided leadership for the needs assessment as Drs. Zoë Breen Wood, Lenore A. Kola, Kathy J. Farks, Elizabeth Tracy, and other faculty members studied the value and potential challenges of a completely online format. Several concerns emerged. First, faculty members wondered if social work skills, particularly those dealing with person-to-person interactions, could be taught in a virtual space without interpersonal interactions in a shared physical environment. Secondly, only a few faculty members at the School had experience teaching in a distance-learning format, which, they would learn, is related to but different from an online format. So, a limited number of people could offer insights about online learning—and its flipped-classroom approach—from personal experience. In other words, the Mandel School did not have the internal capacity to build a completely online format by itself and would have to make efforts to invest in and build that capacity.

In response to these concerns, the needs-assessment team conducted a literature search of published scholarship about online learning and held several virtual meetings with social work faculty at other universities who were teaching online. (These virtual meetings were open to all Mandel School faculty members.) A key theme from this research emerged: the online format appeared to be an excellent way to reach students who could not otherwise access traditional on-campus programs. Associate Professor Lenore A. Kola, PhD, who in 1976 created the nation's first social-work concentration (program of study) in alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) and who participated in other curriculum innovations over the years noted that in the 1980s and 1990s, the School innovated the intensive weekend (IW) format to create better access for potential students. In this historical context, the online format appeared to be a new, contemporary way to continue achieving that goal. Online learning would appeal to those who were geographically isolated and those for whom family and professional obligations or financial circumstances make travel to Cleveland difficult. This observation became a turning point in the discussion of whether or not to embark on the project.

At the time, we did not realize how this innovation would also inspire us to think in new ways about increasing the breadth and depth of integrative competency-based learning.

2012 | PLANNING THE ONLINE CURRICULUM

The faculty of the Mandel School voted in early 2012 to develop a completely online format. Adding to this momentum, senior leadership at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) provided support. At the time, CWRU did not offer any degree programs online. President Barbara Snyder, PhD, and Provost William Baeslack, PhD, strongly believed that Mandel School faculty had the capability to translate its nationally-ranked master's program into a completely online format. Furthermore, the School's experience would serve as a model for other programs in the University that might consider offering their degree programs online.

Since the University did not have experience with or infrastructure for building and supporting online teaching and learning, the Mandel School entered into a partnership with an external online academic partner (vendor). CWRU's Vice President of Information Technology Lev Gonick assisted the Mandel School in evaluating proposals and selecting an initial partner. This was an important step in **building capacity for** online learning within our School and the University.

2012 – 2013 | DEVELOPING THE ONLINE CURRICULUM

Once the faculty voted in Spring 2012 to proceed, an intense period of planning and development began with a collaboration among curriculum innovators at the School and *professional instructional designers* from the online academic partner. At the time, no one at the Mandel School could have predicted how influential the online learning format would be in helping faculty members begin to think differently about teaching, both from the perspective of the instructor and the student.

As Dr. Wood reflected upon this era of curriculum innovation, she explained that building a number of new courses in collaboration with professional instructional designers who specialize in online learning began to socialize faculty to think more systematically about **how to** achieve the following:

- Organize a large curriculum around intended program outcomes.
- Organize a large curriculum and sequence courses across several learning formats (i.e., online, on-campus, intensive weekend).
- Organize and sequence the development and delivery of individual courses so the curriculum is cohesive and demonstrates horizontal and vertical integration.
- Structure learning activities and assignments within individual courses to meet course objectives and contribute to intended outcomes of the curriculum, while also assuring that they contribute to a robust assessment of learning.
- Create courses that can be used over a number of semesters but still be nimble and flexible enough to respond to a changing practice environment and to advances in research and policy.
- Manage a course-development process that begins six months to a year in advance of launch (i.e., start of semester).
- Create courses with a consistent structure to provide a familiar learning process (a familiar learning environment) for students and faculty alike as they interact with learning assets (course materials) and other content.

This process of thinking about the curriculum as a whole precipitated a seismic shift among some faculty members for reasons noted in the introduction of this white paper. Many faculty have been conditioned by their own academic experiences to think about course content that aligns with their research, scholarship, and practice interests and specializations. They may demonstrate more of an intellectual and emotional investment in *their* courses in *their part* of the curriculum and have less tendency to think of how their courses fit within overall program outcomes. This was evident in the ABLE era (see Section 3) and during the development of integrative seminars, which occurred successfully in some specializations but not across the entire curriculum (see Section 4).

However, the emphasis on competency-based education embraced by the Mandel School and espoused by CSWE inspired some of our faculty members to demonstrate an innate interest in the larger context of social work curriculum. These champions of innovation were curious about how all specializations fit into the social work profession as a whole and how a curriculum might prepare students to work effectively in a number of areas of professional practice. These faculty innovators began to notice how the online learning format was inspiring new ways to think about, talk about, and apply theories and practices of pedagogy. The online format also provided opportunities to deliver a new brand of classroom instruction, which include several core components that continue to support and promote learning experiences that have **more depth, breadth, and integration**. In fact, they are integral to the new integrative competency-based curriculum that we launched in Fall 2020 (see Sections 7, 8 & 9). These core components include the following:

- Course objectives clearly linked to program outcomes
- Alignment of program outcomes and course objectives with asynchronous and synchronous learning experiences, assignments, and assessments
- Learning Management System (LMS)
- Flipped-classroom model

Learning Management System (LMS)

We begin with the Learning Management System (LMS), which is an internet-based platform that “stores and delivers course content while also tracking who completes a course and tasks within it” (Hitchcock, Sage, & Smith, 2019, p. 114). The LMS serves a range of pedagogical, administrative, and assessment functions and has radically influenced the way in which higher education performs its educational functions (Coates, James, & Baldwin, 2005). The LMS is a hub for *learning assets* (course materials) and a facilitator of interpersonal learning relationships that can occur **across all time zones and geographic and political boundaries**. There are now numerous LMS products. Each includes its own “backend” administrator interface for instructors and a “frontend” (or forward-facing) user interface for students. Each also has its own structure, style, and layout.

In 2012-13, as we began to develop the new online curriculum, LMS technology was becoming a more ubiquitous tool in the design and delivery of college courses for traditional in-person learning. For instance, back then, the Mandel School’s on-campus and intensive-weekend learning formats were utilizing Blackboard. Today, we utilize the Canvas LMS, which is provided by Case Western Reserve University for all in-person courses and academic programs. The Mandel School also uses a separate LMS for its online format, which is hosted by the online academic partner.

In 2012-13, in collaboration with professional instructional designers, we began learning about the full potential of an LMS as we brainstormed all the learning assets and activities that it could host and deliver. It is important to note that we continue to utilize most of these asset types today not only in our online learning format but also in the on-campus and intensive-weekend formats. Examples of assets include the following:

- Video conferencing for face-to-face classroom sessions in real time in a virtual space (e.g., Skype, Adobe Connect, Zoom)
- Video recordings of lectures presenting new knowledge and practice skills
- Video recordings of online classroom sessions
- Video recordings of guest panel discussions and symposia
- Video recordings of role plays and interactions between actual social-work practitioners and clients
- Video documentaries of Cleveland neighborhoods (for courses in community practice)
- Audio podcasts and interviews
- PowerPoint presentations
- Transcripts of videos, audio podcasts, and PowerPoint presentations (to support student learning styles that favor text-based documents)
- Other text-based documents (e.g., book chapters, journal articles, e-books, case studies)
- Message boards (chat rooms) for group discussions that occur in real time or over long time periods

Dr. Wood explains that LMS systems socialize faculty to think about how technology can enhance curriculum and course design. They have moved from repositories of information like syllabi and readings to becoming strategies for intentionally scaffolding the learning process. The structure of the administrative and user interfaces helps organize individual and group thinking about the types of learning assets and learning experiences that can be utilized, how they should be sequenced, and how they can be assessed.

The Flipped Classroom

The flipped classroom is an active learning strategy that inverts the location of the learning process. The instructor's transmission of knowledge through lecture, which traditionally occurs inside the classroom, actually occurs outside of the classroom prior to class meetings: students access video recordings of lectures via the LMS. The learning that takes place inside the classroom involves interactions among students and instructors, who engage in *the application* of pre-class learning. As noted in several recent studies (published several years after we launched our online format), this flipped-classroom strategy **requires a higher degree of student involvement** and increased interaction with the content (Chen, et al., 2017; Gomez-Poyato, et al., 2020; Holmes, et al., 2015). The studies also demonstrate that this learning method is yielding positive results in social work education (Gomez-Poyato, et al., 2020; Olivan-Blazquez, et al., 2019). In the flipped-classroom model, the student is placed at the center of the learning process and is required to play an active role with the instructor, who provides guidance and coaching.

Around the same time that we began planning the online format, several of our faculty members enrolled in training programs about the utility of the flipped classroom for in-person learning in physical classrooms. As a result, the synergy that occurred around our growing interest in and use of the flipped classroom began to further influence and advance our thinking about curriculum design and teaching methods. We began to see how “student involvement and increased interaction” with course content in the flipped classroom could further support and promote our commitment to integrative competency-based learning throughout our entire curriculum and across all learning formats.

Synchronous & Asynchronous Learning

While planning the new online format, we learned that the flipped classroom is essentially built upon two types of learning activities facilitated by the LMS: synchronous and asynchronous learning. These categories not only helped us organize our thinking for course design in the new online format, but they also began to inform our broader thinking about future course development for the in-person formats. (In fact, these concepts would play an essential role in our new curriculum that would launch in Fall 2020 (see Sections 7, 8 & 9).)

Asynchronous learning occurs when students engage in learning activities at their own pace outside the classroom without the instructor. These activities typically introduce students to new knowledge and skills. Some examples include the following:

- Engage with learning assets (course materials) stored in the LMS:
 - Pre-recorded video lectures about new knowledge and practice skills
 - Other video learning assets (e.g., interviews between practitioners and clients; case-study role plays; neighborhood documentaries)
 - Podcasts and other audio recordings
 - PowerPoint presentations
 - Text-based transcripts of video, audio, and PowerPoint assets (to support student learning styles that favor text-based documents)
 - Other text-based content, such as journal articles, book chapters, e-books
- Take notes while engaging with learning assets and formulate questions for discussions with peers and instructors
- Write in a reflective journal about new content presented in the learning assets
- Post questions to and participate in online discussions that occur not in real time but over a specified period of time (e.g., one or two weeks)

Synchronous learning occurs when students and instructors interact together at the same time (in real time) inside a shared space. For the online format, this happens in a virtual classroom created by videoconference technology, such as Skype, Adobe Connect, or Zoom. For on-campus and intensive-weekend learning formats, this occurs inside a physical classroom. Synchronous activities encourage students to apply the newly gained knowledge and practice new skills they learned during asynchronous activities (see above). Examples of synchronous activities include the following:

- Face-to-face group discussions in a virtual (online) classroom, physical classroom, or discussion board (chat room) during an appointed meeting time with peers and the instructor: discussions focus on the content learned during asynchronous learning activities (see above).
- Skill practice and role play with feedback from instructor and peers

- Presentations
- Formal debate
- Peer assessment and review

(Editor's Note: We address some lessons learned about the flipped classroom at the end of this section and in Section 9.)

2012-2013 | FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Many components of online learning were brand new to our faculty members. As noted earlier, few of us had experience with designing, developing, sequencing, and teaching online courses. Nor did most of us have much experience creating learning assets of our own, such as audio podcasts, video lectures, and video documentaries, among others. Nor did we have experience arranging all the learning assets (see LMS section above) in a coordinated way across an entire curriculum to minimize redundancy of use and to maximize the potential of each asset to pack a punch and create moments of insight.

The first experience is always the most difficult because there is nothing to compare it to: there is no benchmark. The first experience is always a test flight into the unknown that produces an anticipation of outcomes, both positive and negative. In an effort to harness eagerness for and to manage anxieties about the new online learning format, faculty members of the Mandel School turned to each other for support. In 2012, at the recommendation of Associate Professor Kathleen J. Farkas, PhD, who was then chair of the faculty Curriculum Committee, the School established *faculty learning communities* in which course instructors would meet regularly to share their experiences with designing, developing, and teaching online courses. The meetings also enabled faculty to discuss their collaborations with instructional designers. Faculty members utilized these learning communities to identify facilitators and barriers to implementation, strengths and challenges in the process, and best practices for creating positive outcomes. The faculty learning communities were instrumental in helping to accomplish the following:

- Syllabus design and development
- Mastering new technology
- Encouraging innovation
- Creating learning assets
- Establishing an online presence
- Teaching courses
- Assessing courses and learning outcomes
- Revising courses

The faculty learning communities would serve an important role in future innovations as well, especially with the new integrative competency-based curriculum that we launched in Fall 2020 (see Sections 8 & 9).

2013 | LAUNCH OF ONLINE LEARNING

The School launched its completely online format in January 2013. As predicted by Dr. Kola, the first cohorts of the new online format proved to be popular among working professionals. Enrollment in the online format has steadily grown over the years,

accomplishing our original goal of increasing access to our nationally-ranked master's program.

2015 | ASSESSMENT & REVISION

When online learning began, students took one class at a time over an eight-week period while participating in field education at an agency that was located near to where they lived. They completed their degrees over three years. Courses had different levels of required synchronous content (see above for examples). Some courses met weekly in a virtual classroom. Others did not meet at all and were delivered and completed exclusively through asynchronous activities.

With data from course evaluations, graduating-student surveys, and other assessments, we revised this initial structure to one in which students typically take two classes and engage in field practicum over a 14-week period, with each class meeting virtually every week. This structure has been relatively consistent since 2018. Online classes continue to involve a combination of weekly *asynchronous* learning activities (i.e., outside of and prior to the class meeting), which are followed by *synchronous* learning activities inside the virtual classroom during a scheduled meeting time. Learning assets developed for the online format (see list above) are also used in the other formats. The Mandel School ensures each online course is fully comparable to those offered in the on-campus and intensive weekend formats, so the entire curriculum is geared to achievement of consistent outcomes, and meets CSWE accreditation standards.

LESSONS LEARNED | FACULTY BUY-IN

In retrospect, the new online format challenged the expectations of many faculty members about their roles as educators. Some leaned into that uncertainty with genuine curiosity and allowed that intellectual and emotional energy to propel them into moments of discovery and transformation as social-work scholars and teachers. Others chose to continue teaching only in a traditional physical classroom environment.

Not surprisingly, the focus on developing an online curriculum and delivery system had major impacts on the structure and culture of the Mandel School and mirrored many debates found within academia regarding online learning. Some faculty members questioned whether it was actually possible to form relationships with students and to teach practice skills in an online environment. Others expressed concern that standardization of content across multiple sections of a course removed the spontaneity and flexibility from the learning environment, essentially interfering with academic freedom and raising questions about the intellectual property of individual faculty members and of the Mandel School as a whole. In addition, others argued that the scheduling of classroom sessions in nontraditional timeslots for instructors who lived in northeast Ohio (e.g., some classes met in the evenings) to accommodate students from different time zones would not only interfere with their research, scholarship, and community-service activities but also with their work-life balance.

As with any change processes, there have been varying levels of buy-in from our faculty over time. The innovators and early adopters (Rogers, 2003) quickly embraced the opportunity to create new ways of teaching and learning. With guidance and support from the Mandel School's Office of Academic Affairs, a core group of approximately 15 faculty members created the first online courses so the program was ready to launch in 2013. As of this writing, there are still a small number of faculty members who have not participated in

creating or teaching online courses. This variable level of investment in curriculum innovation by faculty members is to be expected in a school such as ours that is also so heavily involved in research, scholarship, and community service. The important point to note is that our master's curriculum has been successfully offered and delivered in a fully online format since 2013: the efforts by faculty and staff in making this successful transition has paved the way for our most recent curriculum innovation (see Sections 7, 8 & 9).

LESSONS LEARNED | THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM

Faculty members who did participate in designing and teaching the first online courses learned firsthand what has been discussed in published literature about the flipped classroom: that it supports and promotes “student involvement and increased interaction” with course content. Faculty members discovered how the flipped classroom encourages deeper learning as they facilitated, moderated, and actively participated in conversations that helped students integrate new knowledge and skills from asynchronous learning activities and synchronous activities in real-time. In this way, the instructor and students co-created moments of discovery together. This, it turns out, would be a foreshadowing of innovations that would come to our entire curriculum almost five years later.

LESSONS LEARNED | ONGOING FEEDBACK & ASSESSMENT

Since the launch of online learning in 2013, much of its success has emerged from ongoing assessment of feedback from faculty and students. The faculty learning communities inspired by Dr. Farkas (see above) have provided a formal mechanism for instructors to meet regularly to discuss facilitators of, barriers to, and best practices for teaching and learning. In addition, feedback from student course evaluations, graduating-student surveys, and other assessments have enabled us to make changes to course content and sequencing in a systematic way.

Over time, our ongoing assessment activities would provide us with more insight about the strengths of the online format. For instance, in the early days, we had a hunch that the flipped-classroom model might provide *all students in all learning formats* in our master's program with opportunities for deep, integrative learning. We honored that hunch. We stuck with it. Eventually, our instinct would pay off.

| SECTION 6 |

**A NEW ERA OF
CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT & PLANNING**
(2013)

Although the ABLE seminar and portfolio were discontinued in 2004, the Mandel School continued to use the eight abilities (and the ability statements) to inform course development in the on-campus and intensive weekend learning formats, the integrative seminars, and in the emerging online format. At the same time, the School continued to study how its ability-based learning might dovetail with the new competency-based CSWE-EPAS accreditation standards, which were published in 2008.

In 2013, as we launched our online program, we continued to collect learning-outcomes data for all three learning formats (e.g., on-campus, online, intensive weekend) from multiple sources, including the following:

- Social Work Self-Efficacy Scale
- Licensure practice exam | Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Masters Exam
- Course-embedded assessments
- Field-education performance assessments (grading sheets)
- Licensure pass rates
- Alumni surveys

AN INVESTMENT IN ASSESSMENT

As described in the introduction of this white paper, between 2013 and 2015, Dean Gilmore made a significant institutional investment in the School's ongoing quality improvement. He

created the Office of Educational Outcomes Assessment (OEOA) and appointed Dr. Wood to be director. At the same time, the faculty's Curriculum Committee established an Outcomes Assessment Subcommittee with Dr. Wood as chair. (This subcommittee continues to meet regularly to provide oversight of and guidance for curriculum assessments and to make recommendations based upon the findings.)

In its first year of operation, OEOA and the subcommittee achieved a number of significant goals. We embraced an *iterative approach* to quality improvement by keeping an open mind and lookout for best practices in data collection, analysis, and interpretation as well as best practices for organizational-change processes that help facilitate and sustain curriculum innovations. We also began a self-evaluation of the assessment methods and activities listed.

2015 | IMPROVED ASSESSMENT METHODS

By 2015, with reports from the OEOA and the Outcome Assessment Subcommittee, the faculty's Curriculum Committee concluded that the School needed a more unified, standardized, and streamlined process for outcome-data collection and analysis. This need was made clear by the following:

- Introduction of the revised 2015 CSWE-EPAS competencies and reaffirmation requirements
- Revision of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) reaffirmation process for Case Western Reserve University, which began to emphasize the importance of curricular assessment in academic programs
- Implementation of the School's new online study format, which introduced new methods of course design and delivery

As a result, we created a new strategy to assess student outcomes for all nine CSWE competencies and the Mandel School's leadership competency in the explicit curriculum (e.g., courses and field practicum). We created and implemented new standardized rubrics for the collection of outcomes data, trained faculty and staff how to use them, and began assessing this data regularly from two major sources:

- *Field education learning agreements and evaluations:* these are organized according to competencies and are completed at the end of generalist studies and specialized studies. Field instructors in community organizations (not classroom faculty) assess student performance on each of the behaviors identified in the field-learning contract in real or simulated practice situations. (The behaviors are the ways in which students demonstrate the 10 competencies.) Field instructors use a five-point scale that ranges from 0 (does not demonstrate competence) to 4 (demonstrates high levels of competence). They enter data into the Intern Placement Tracking Systems (IPT) of the School's field education office. IPT data are downloaded for each cohort and transferred to SPSS or Excel for analysis.
- *Course-embedded measures:* the outcome-assessment team identifies the courses and course assignments for which outcomes data will be collected, based on a review of the competencies, and trains each course instructor how to use the evaluation

processes and tools (e.g., Excel workbooks). Course-embedded assessment rubrics are constructed on a five-point scale ranging from 0 (no evidence/ not attempted) to 4 (exemplary). Students who score 3 (proficient) or 4 (exemplary) demonstrate competence on each course embedded measure. OEOA asks instructors to record their assessments of student competence at the same time they are grading assignments. The return rate from instructors regularly exceeds 96 percent each semester.

2013-2015 | ALIGNMENT TABLES

OEOA and the subcommittee achieved another major goal between 2013-15 that would set the stage for the curriculum transformation in 2020. We developed a strategy for aligning the Mandel School's eight abilities with the nine competencies of the 2008 CSWE-EPAS. We convened a workgroup of lead instructors of each required course in the generalist curriculum and the specialized curriculum to evaluate the content of each course against the new 2015 CSWE-EPAS competencies. (Lead instructors are full-time faculty members who provide leadership to a team of full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty who teach sections of the same course. The teams collaborate to create a master syllabus for each course: this creates consistency for courses taught in multiple sections by different instructors across learning formats.)

The workgroup was able to determine (map) where the CSWE competencies were being addressed in each course and assessed in each assignment. The OEOA then created a standardized *alignment table* (matrix) to be used in syllabi for the on-campus, intensive weekend, and online study formats. The alignment table links (or aligns) learning objectives, learning activities, and assignments in each course with the School's eight abilities and CSWE's nine competencies, equipping faculty and students with clear expectations of and a roadmap for learning outcomes.

2017 | SELF-STUDY IDENTIFIES OPPORTUNITIES

As part of the School's extensive self-study for its 2017 CSWE accreditation process, OEOA integrated data from field education evaluations and course-embedded measures described above with findings from other assessment activities, which are briefly described here.

We mapped each course in the curriculum (i.e., course objectives, learning activities, assignments, and assessments/grading metrics) with CSWE's nine competencies and the School's leadership competency, using several tools, including the alignment tables in each course syllabus; Excel spreadsheets; and Miro, an online visual collaboration platform for teamwork (i.e., an online whiteboard tool). This analysis created visual representations (maps) that showed where and how often the 10 competencies were being addressed in each course. This analysis also showed where the competencies were not being addressed. It identified strengths and weaknesses (gaps) in the generalist and specialized curricula and opportunities to enhance curriculum content with the following:

- Group work theory and practice
- Organizational practice
- Integration of micro and macro practice
- Integration of theory and practice
- Practical applications of research knowledge and evaluation techniques in a practice setting

- Inclusion of other CSWE-EPAS 2015 guidelines, such as environmental justice

We also mapped and analyzed curricula of other schools of social work with CSWE-EPAS guidelines and found that some schools had been experimenting with more creative options for covering generalist content. This inspired us to think about condensing our generalist curriculum and, thus, provide students with more choice for electives in the specialized curriculum.

Remembering the process that the School used to conceptualize the ABLE initiative in the 1990s (see Section 3), we interviewed representatives of key stakeholder groups (e.g., faculty, recent graduates and other alumni; field placement agencies; employers of alumni; other community agencies in Northeast Ohio) and asked them for feedback about the following questions:

- What values, knowledge, and skills do contemporary social workers need in their education and training?
- What do graduates of a master’s program need to succeed in the world of work, especially in current employment climates?
- What do service organizations and communities need from these social workers?

We took the data from this stakeholder survey and combined it with data from other sources, including curriculum outcomes, graduating-student surveys, and market analyses of trends in social service delivery and began to think deeply about how this information might inform enhancements to our curriculum.

2017 | LITERATURE REVIEW OF CURRICULUM INNOVATION

To add to this assessment data, OEOA searched the social work literature for examples of curriculum innovations implemented by master’s programs at other schools. As noted in the introduction of this paper, we did find several articles about the development of individual courses but only one significant discussion in the *Journal of Social Work Education* about the content of large-scale MSW curriculum redesign, which occurred at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW) (Colby, 2013).

Here’s what grabbed our attention. Colby’s article “outlines a curriculum model that radically departs from the traditional 50-50 split of a foundation year and a specialization year of study.” Colby explains that the new, alternative approach taken by GCSW would promote the primary purpose of graduate social work education, as described in the 2008 CSWE-EPAS, which is to prepare graduates of MSW programs **for advanced practice**. He adds that faculty members were inspired to make a radical change because the 2008 EPAS also encourages schools of social work to develop new and emerging models of curriculum design (Colby, 2013, p. 5, emphasis added; Council on Social Work Education, 2008, pp. 1 & 3).

Houston’s Lesson Learned #1 | Integrative Learning

Colby’s article shared two lessons-learned which made us more mindful of our past experiences with integrative learning that we would need to revisit if we were to proceed with significant curriculum transformation. Houston’s assessment data showed that “student learning was intensive and deep” and that “students needed additional time to synthesize the

content.” So, the school added a “weaving” session in the last week of the foundation semester. Colby writes

“the singular purpose of the weaving session is to provide a broader overview and **integration** of classroom contents with each other and the field experience. Faculty members act as ‘weavers’ and direct discussion and self-assessment for students to better understand and connect the ways in which competencies in practice, policy, human behavior in the social environment (HBSE), and research fit together. Subsequent evaluations have shown that the weaving component strengthens **the integration** of the foundation content” (Colby, 2013, p. 11, emphasis added).

Houston’s Lesson Learned #2 | Barriers to Change

The other lesson learned by the Houston GCSW that caught our attention was Colby’s discussion of “barriers to change efforts.” While he spends a decent amount of narrative space on a review of literature which explores organizational struggles with change, he does not provide details about resistance to curriculum change that occurred at Houston’s graduate school. He alludes to internal conflict when he writes, “faculty and administrators alike had to overcome their personal reactions to change and truly believe that the external professional environment would support a different approach to graduate study” (Colby, 2013, p. 13).

As a follow-up to these lessons learned, Mandel School curriculum leaders and Dean Gilmore engaged in phone conversations with GCSW leadership. GCSW reported that, by 2018, they had to make numerous adjustments to their curriculum as it had drifted away from its initial design. They attributed some of this change to the fact that faculty members who had originally championed curriculum reform had retired and new champions had not emerged. We decided that this lesson learned about the need for **ongoing faculty involvement** in curricular design, implementation, and assessment was imperative for the Mandel School team if we were to embark on our change initiative.

2017 | INTERPRETATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff of OEOA and other curriculum leaders at the Mandel School utilized all of the assessment activities described above to write the School’s self-study report for reaffirmation, which we submitted to CSWE on December 1, 2017.

Dr. Wood then summarized all findings from the self-study in a special report, titled “Key Observations from Re-Affirmation Process,” for the Dean’s Office and faculty Curriculum Committee. Dr. Wood highlighted a unique opportunity for the School to take all the information from the self-study process and combine it with lessons learned from its 20-year iterative process of curriculum design and assessment and make a significant transformation in the entire master’s program across all learning formats (i.e., on-campus, online, and intensive weekend). The report opened the door to a bold reimagining of the entire curriculum, including the structure of courses.

When reflecting upon this phase of the School’s quality-improvement process, Dean Gilmore, highlighted the special attention that the School, through OEOA, had placed upon assessment. He said, “This illustrates that the development of the new integrative competency-based generalist curriculum was data driven.”

| SECTION 7 |

PLANNING
THE NEW COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM
(Spring 2018 – Spring 2019)

During Spring 2018 semester, Dean Gilmore responded to the call for action in Dr. Wood’s curriculum-assessment report, which had been inspired by the CSWE reaccreditation process. As explained in the introduction of this paper, he invited several faculty members to form a *curriculum innovation leadership team* to act as a steering committee to provide oversight and manage the entire process of planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating the new curriculum. The leadership team would report to the Dean’s Office and the faculty Curriculum Committee. Dean Gilmore emphasized to the team the importance of following recommendations in Dr. Wood’s report and continuing the efforts **to integrate assessment activities** into the proposed competency-based curriculum. This, he explained, would equip the Mandel School with a method of systematic data collection and, thus, enhance its ongoing quality-improvement process now and well into the future.

Dean Gilmore also encouraged members of the leadership team to be strategic about engaging faculty and staff in the process of innovation, reminding the team that curriculum change is organizational change: its success depends upon the readiness, willingness, and ability of individuals to change their beliefs and practices. Not everyone would be ready for such a comprehensive transformation. Also, not everyone would be ready for the speed at which the change would take place. At the time, the School was starting to plan revisions to its online learning format, so it would make sense to ensure curriculum transformation occurred in all three formats (i.e., on-campus, intensive weekend, and online) simultaneously to ensure consistency throughout the master’s program, especially for the next CSWE

reaccreditation in 2026. The School was prepared to move fast because Dr. Wood's special report had summarized everything the Office of Educational Outcome Assessment (OEOA) had been learning through its ongoing assessment processes over time (see Section 6).

Dean Gilmore encouraged the newly formed leadership team to draft an initial concept of a new curriculum during the spring and summer and be ready to present it at the first Constituent Faculty Meeting of the 2018-19 academic year in August, with a goal of faculty approval of the concept in December 2018.

SPRING 2018 | CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

Dean Gilmore chose the first three faculty members listed in the introduction—Drs. Wood, Edguer, and Hussey—to lead the curriculum innovation, because they all had extensive experience in direct practice with individuals, families, and organizations and were attuned to evolving needs of the social work profession; had demonstrated an unwavering commitment to teaching excellence; and had a comprehensive, wholistic view of curriculum development and competency-based learning. He invited the fourth member, Dr. Chupp, a little later in the planning process (spring 2019) when the team identified that they needed someone with experience in community practice to represent that perspective during curriculum design and implementation.

Dean Gilmore assured the team that their efforts would have the full support from senior leadership of the organization, including himself, Sharon Milligan, PhD, associate dean for academic affairs and chair of the master's program, and others. In this organizational-change process, the leadership team could count on Dean Gilmore and Associate Dean Milligan as fellow champions of change.

Five Governing Values

From the initial discussions with the Dean and Associate Dean, the leadership team identified five core values that would govern the entire process of curriculum planning and implementation:

- Assessment and outcomes drive the process and inform decisions.
- Curriculum change is organizational change.
- Organizational change is strengths based and builds upon existing assets among faculty members and within the current curriculum.
- Innovation is inclusive and collaborative, not top-down.
- Planning is iterative and based upon assessment and outcomes.

STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO CHANGE

As the Mandel School embarked on the process of planning curriculum innovation, Dean Gilmore and members of the leadership team made the conscious effort to acknowledge potential facilitators and barriers to change among faculty and staff members. We realized that, over the years, there have been senior and junior faculty as well as research faculty and teaching faculty who have been equally committed to assessing learning outcomes and creating the best possible learning environment for students. There have been faculty members from all ranks who have willingly and actively participated in curriculum innovations, such as the Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE) of the 1990s and early 2000s (see Section 3); the Integrative Seminars of the mid 2000s (see Section 4); and the online learning format of 2011 (see Section 5).

We made the conscious choice to acknowledge these strengths within our ranks, to invite them in as champions of change, and to build momentum for the new competency-based curriculum. Early in the planning stage, we decided to engage *informally* with those faculty who were genuinely curious about and interested in what we were proposing to do: it would be an organic way to begin nurturing buy-in and consensus. Once we had an initial curriculum plan drafted, we would engage *formally* with all faculty members in an inclusive and iterative process. We would utilize feedback to our initial plan from all faculty members, incorporate the best ideas, present the revision, and solicit and incorporate another round of feedback to create the most dynamic and comprehensive curriculum possible.

SUMMER 2018 | PLANNING WITH ASSESSMENT IN MIND

As noted above, the leadership team already had some momentum in its planning for the new curriculum from the assessments conducted over many years: this informed an initial draft of a *curriculum concept* to meet our August 2018 deadline.

As we began the initial stages of planning for curriculum redesign, we reviewed all desired outcomes of the curriculum, that is, the 10 competencies—nine defined by CSWE and one leadership competency defined by the Mandel School. We would build a curriculum of courses that, together, could address and assess the outcomes (10 competencies) at the generalist level of education and practice. We would then embed specific assessment points in assignments and activities in each course. Finally, we would have to revise all of our data collection instruments and train all faculty in the theory and practice of the new methods and tools. That would come later, after we designed the course syllabi.

As noted in Section 6 of this paper, we use a variety of assessment methods not only to report our findings to CSWE but also to inform our institutional self-assessment and quality-improvement process: these include reports to and ongoing conversations with the Dean's Office, Associate Dean's Office, the faculty Curriculum Committee, lead instructors of courses, and individual instructors. Examples of quantitative and qualitative assessment data that we planned to utilize in the initial stages of curriculum design and organizational change included the following:

Assessment of the competency-based curriculum:

- Course-embedded assessments (i.e., selected assignments in courses are assessed for student competencies: this is a process different from grading, which is used to evaluate a student's level of mastery of a particular assignment)
- Field education evaluations (i.e., competency assessments conducted by field instructors)
- Course evaluations (i.e., formal student feedback)
- Graduating-student survey
- Alumni six-month post-graduate survey

Assessment of the organizational-change process:

- Feedback from Faculty Learning Communities (regular meetings with faculty who help design new syllabi and teach new courses)
- Feedback from staff who will help support the initiative (e.g., registrar, recruitment, field placement, student success coaches)

WEAVING THE PROCESS & PRODUCT OF INNOVATION

As illustrated above, assessment occurs at two essential levels: we continuously assess *the product*, which is our curriculum; and we continuously assess *the process* that makes it happen, which is our organizational-change activities. So, in this section of the white paper, as we explain our planning of the new competency-based curriculum, we will essentially weave two narratives together to illustrate how the process and product of transformation influence each other and how assessment drives and, thus, ties both together.

WHO & WHY? | BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Members of the curriculum innovation leadership team came to a consensus almost immediately about its purpose to continue the legacy of many educators in the Mandel School's history who had been dedicated to excellence in curriculum design and teaching. The leadership team acknowledged that the transition to outcomes-based education that began with the Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE) in the 1990s (see Section 3) had been a particularly challenging and rewarding *iterative process* that has given the faculty a transformative shift in the focus of curriculum design from what the professor is teaching to what the student is learning.

The insights gave the four members of the leadership team confidence to begin their work with the end in mind. We asked each other a very simple but poignant question: what kind of person—and social work professional—do we want to emerge from the Mandel School learning environment and experience? We first turned to the 2015 CSWE-EPAS professional standards and found part of our answer in this statement:

“Social work competence is the **ability to integrate** and apply social work knowledge, values, and skills to practice situations in a purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being. EPAS recognizes a holistic view of competence; that is, the demonstration of competence is informed by knowledge, values, skills, **and cognitive and affective processes** that include the social worker's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment in regard to the unique practice situations. Overall professional competence is multi-dimensional and composed of interrelated competencies. An individual social worker's competence is seen as developmental and dynamic, changing over time in relation to continuous learning” (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 6, emphasis added).

We then reviewed the School's 10 competencies and eight abilities (Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, 2017, p. 77; CSWE, 2015, pp. 7-9):

10 Competencies | Learning Outcomes

This list includes nine competencies required by CSWE and one leadership competency custom-designed by the Mandel School:

1. Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
2. Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice
3. Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice
4. Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

5. Engage in Policy Practice
6. Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
7. Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
8. Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
9. Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
10. Develop as a Social Work Leader

8 Abilities | Learning Objectives

These abilities were revised in 2011 and have remained the School's program objectives. The Eight Abilities include the following:

1. Identify as a Reflective Professional Social Worker
2. Advocate for Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice
3. Apply Social Work Practice Methods
4. Uphold Social Work Values and Ethics
5. Integrate Cultural, Economic, and Global Diversity
6. Think Critically about Theory and Research Knowledge
7. Communicate Effectively
8. Develop as a Social Work Leader

Our Graduates & Alumni

We concluded that graduates of the Mandel School learning environment should emerge

as self-evaluative lifelong learners and leaders who are conscious of and deliberate about developing integrative thinking and evidence-based knowledge and practice continuously.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We then examined existing strengths within the current curriculum and asked how we might build upon these assets to create the learning experiences that would produce self-evaluative life-long learners and integrative thinkers. We identified these guiding principles for curriculum development:

- Curriculum must be known and owned by all members of the faculty.
- **More integration** is needed across the curriculum and could be accomplished with learning assets such as common case studies of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities as well as the use of **an integrative assignment** at the end of generalist studies.
- Identify opportunities for more integration of coursework and field practicum and more coordination (collaboration) with field instructors.
- Courses about social-work research at the generalist level should focus on teaching students about the importance of using evidence-informed practice, how to be more informed consumers of research, and how to apply that research to their practice.
- Students in the generalist curriculum should

- Understand and value the integration of theory and practice at all levels (micro, mezzo, macro); how all levels of practice benefit clients and constituency groups; how social work values and skills are applied at each level.
- Demonstrate why theory is important; how to apply it in all levels of practice; how it is impacted by culture and cultural variation; and how it relates to research.
- Be aware of their own values (moral compass) and how to utilize social work values, the Code of Ethics, and ethical models for decision making at all levels of practice and for recognizing and managing ethical dilemmas and violations.
- Value and demonstrate **cultural humility** and understand that individuals—including social workers and the people they serve—belong to a number of different groups: it is the *intersectionality* of experiences in those groups that forms identity.
- Develop and demonstrate a professional social-work identity.
- Develop and demonstrate skills and attributes (i.e., cognitive and affective processes) such as the following: self-awareness; self-reflection; self-regulation; self-care; critical thinking; appropriate boundaries; empathic responding; use of supervision; skillful practice-documentation; professional writing; ethical use of electronic communications, such as health records, tele-health technology, social media, texting, and use of apps, among others.
- Demonstrate proficient use of key models of and skills for engagement, screening, assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation, and termination at each level of practice
- Understand the reciprocal relationship between policy and practice.
- Develop an awareness of and choice for their personal interests in specialized study (specialization).

WHAT & HOW? | INTEGRATE THROUGHOUT THE CURRICULUM

The leadership team asked *how* the curriculum might create a learning environment to produce self-reflective and integrative-thinking social work professionals who embody the values, knowledge, skills, and cognitive (thinking) and affective (emotional) processes noted above. Dr. Wood, whose experience with curriculum innovations at the School dated back to the ABLE days in the 1990s, reminded her colleagues of an important finding from the literature review conducted for the retrospective analysis of the ABLE seminars and planning for the concentration-based integrative seminars in 2007 (see Section 4):

that responsibility for **integration lies throughout the curriculum**, not just in one area, such as the classroom or the field practicum or an integrative seminar.

In other words, each and every classroom experience and each and every field practicum experience would need to be structured in such a way that faculty would be helping students develop a *habit of mind* and *habit of self-evaluation* and *habit of integration*. In this way, self-reflection and integration would become a daily practice.

Mechanisms of Integrative Learning

The leadership team identified the mechanisms of integration that would support and promote integrative-learning experiences for students. The new curriculum would strive to achieve the following:

- Integrate theory and practice
- Integrate micro, mezzo, and macro practice
- Integrate 10 competencies and 8 abilities within learning objectives, learning activities, assignments, and assessments
- Integrate classroom and field practicum

Integration would occur *horizontally* in courses within each level of the curriculum—generalist, advanced, and specialized. Integration would also occur *vertically* throughout the entire curriculum as students progressed from the generalist to the advanced and finally to the specialized curriculum, creating a cohesive learning environment and, thus, a consistent learning experience that would enable students to practice integrative learning continually and, thus, **internalize the process**.

SUMMER 2018 | THREE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE CURRICULUM

Before attempting to design new courses, the leadership team also revisited some assessment techniques utilized by OEOA in the 2017 self-study for CSWE reaccreditation to assess the entire master’s degree curriculum and identify which parts of the existing curriculum could be repurposed into the new concept of a three-part curriculum—the generalist, advanced, and specialized courses.

According to Dr. Wood, the leadership team conducted the analysis of the existing courses in collaboration with the lead instructor of each class. The Mandel School uses a lead-instructor model to guide course instruction across the curriculum. As briefly described in Section 6, lead instructors are full-time faculty members who provide leadership to a team of full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty who teach sections of the same course.

The leadership team conceived these three essential building blocks (parts) of the Master of Social Work (MSW) curriculum:

1.) Concept for New Generalist Curriculum

The team worked with each lead instructor to map each course in the generalist curriculum—course objectives, learning activities, assignments, and assessments—with CSWE’s nine competencies and the School’s leadership competency, using several tools, including the alignment tables in each course syllabus; Excel spreadsheets; and Miro, an online visual collaboration platform for teamwork (i.e., an online whiteboard tool). This analysis once again created visual representations (maps) that showed where and how often the 10 competencies were being addressed in each course. However, this time, the analysis showed the team **which parts of the old generalist curriculum** had worked well and could be woven into new, more integrative courses that intentionally teach the integration of competencies. The team began to identify **an initial concept** for new integrative courses that would need to be designed and built. The team acknowledged that the generalist curriculum would be unique in several ways. It would

- Provide a generalist learning experience in 18 credits instead of 27 credits and, thus, provide students with a strong foundation in generalist practice and more choices and opportunities for specialization.
- Integrate theory and practice within all courses that teach social work practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
- Restructure research courses to teach practitioners how to be discerning consumers of research in an effort to strengthen their practice in the field; in other words, transform courses that teach practitioners how to conduct a sophisticated research study into courses that teach them to understand the strengths and limitations of research designs, methods, and results and how to utilize evidence-based practices.
- At the generalist level, teach theories of human development simultaneously with theories of diversity, equity, and inclusion in one theory course. This approach would also be used in each of the practice courses, which would teach students how theories of human development may or may not take into account experiences of cultural diversity and discrimination.
- Conceptualize and create an introductory Change Agent Intensive (CHAI) seminar as an immersive “jumpstart” into the social work profession to provide students a solid foundation in the profession’s mission, values, and identity.
- Build all courses in the entire curriculum concurrently and in a coordinated fashion to ensure the integration of competencies and abilities across the curriculum.
- Prepare students for a one-semester **advanced curriculum** that provides a bridge to the *specialized curriculum* and a larger choice of electives to support each student’s personal interests in and preferences for specialization.

2.) Concept for New Advanced Curriculum

The leadership team acknowledged that courses in the *advanced curriculum* would need to be analyzed, deconstructed, and rebuilt in a similar fashion and recruited lead instructors who taught those courses to participate in the planning process.

All students would be required to take courses in an advanced curriculum, which would focus on and integrate both direct practice and community practice. This would ensure that all students would be prepared for professional social-work practice at all levels—with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities—no matter what their choice of specialization might be. They would also be prepared to pass the social-work licensure exam.

Two courses which had previously been specialized courses in direct practice would be moved into the advanced curriculum. Faculty in the community practice concentration would create a new course for the advanced curriculum. The curriculum would also include a redesigned research course focusing on practice and program evaluation skills, and a new (second) field seminar that would continue to explore organizational theory and practice.

3.) Concept for New Specialized Curriculum

The leadership team also knew that courses in the *specialized curriculum* would need to be analyzed, deconstructed, and reconstructed so these courses could build upon foundations

laid by the generalist and advanced curricula. We invited chairs of the specializations and lead instructors of specialized courses to engage in planning discussions. The goal of the new specialized curriculum would be to provide students with more opportunities to deepen their practice skills, learn specific intervention strategies, and earn certificates in specialized areas of practice—all within the 60-credit structure of the existing master's program.

SUMMER 2018 | A PLAN TO ENCOURAGE BUY-IN FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

To achieve this level of transformation with success, the leadership team would include a process of building trust and buy-in among faculty and staff *over time* by meeting regularly with all faculty (i.e., full time, part time, and adjunct) in small groups and at faculty meetings and retreats to brainstorm ideas and to explain the proposed curriculum; to document perspectives, insights, and input for revisions; and to provide updates about the progress. Examples of original goals and objectives for facilitating the **organizational-change process** with faculty and staff included the following:

Goals:

- All faculty will be inspired to think about and invest in (“buy into”) a common curriculum that integrates 10 competencies and course content; micro, mezzo, and macro perspectives; theory and practice
- All faculty will think not only about individual courses in their scholarly specializations but also about all the courses in the curriculum and how those courses complement each other and advance the value, knowledge, skills, and cognitive and affective processes of students
- All faculty and staff will view curriculum innovation not as a pilot project but as a reinvented curriculum that will evolve in iterations over time with feedback from faculty, staff, and students
- All faculty and staff will be able to explain consistently to students the value of integrative-learning experiences

Objectives:

- Meet with all faculty and key administrators and staff in small groups (or individually) to explain the new curriculum and document their perspectives, insights, and input for revisions
- Meet regularly with faculty, administrators, and staff who are champions of curriculum innovation and transformation and encourage their participation in and advocacy of the change process
- Meet regularly with the faculty Curriculum Committee and Dean to share progress reports and solicit their perspectives, insights, and input for next steps
- Meet with lead instructors of each course before, during, and after the development and implementation of the master syllabus of each new course to document their perspectives, insights, and input for revisions
- Support lead instructors as they meet regularly with their teams of full-time, part-time, and adjunct instructors who teach different sections of each new course

- Encourage all faculty who teach different sections of each course to contribute to the creation and/or revision of the master syllabus for each new course
- Make presentations at faculty meetings and staff meetings regularly to update the entire group about progress and next steps; to encourage questions and dialogue; and to solicit their perspectives, insights, and input

FALL 2018 - SPRING 2019 | ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

In August 2018, at the start of fall semester, the curriculum innovation leadership team met Dean Gilmore's challenge to be ready to present a curriculum *concept* at the first Constituent Faculty Meeting of the 2018-19 academic year.

At that meeting, Dr. Hussey, a member of the leadership team and co-chair of the faculty Curriculum Committee, formally announced to faculty and staff the School's intention to re-design the curriculum. Drs. Wood and Edguer also presented. With this communication, the leadership team officially kicked-off its engagement with the School's internal stakeholders as planned. Dr. Hussey commenced a series of formal presentations to the faculty, highlighting **five core principles** that were shaping curriculum design. The principles also served as consistent messaging from the leadership team in their interactions with faculty, staff, and administrators. The core principles emphasized that this curriculum transformation is

- Informed by marketplace feedback from community stakeholders about the need for more social work specialists
- Informed by feedback from Mandel School graduates about their needs for succeeding in a competitive job market, including a solid foundation in generalist knowledge and practice and more opportunities for specialization
- A major philosophical shift toward integration of theory and practice; integration of micro, mezzo, and macro practice; and integration of competencies and abilities
- A significant, transformational innovation in curriculum design that will improve over time
- Not a pilot project but a permanent change that is an iterative process of innovation: the School will implement, assess, and revise the curriculum continuously and disseminate lessons learned and best practices for pedagogy

After the August faculty meeting, Dean Gilmore challenged the leadership team to keep its momentum and have a curriculum plan ready for presentation at the December meeting.

While reflecting on this early phase of curriculum transformation, Dean Gilmore said, "It was a very short period of time for such a big undertaking, but I felt the team could do it. The short runway would add the urgency necessary for all faculty to become engaged. I have witnessed curriculum revision take multiple painful years in other places. I knew we could do better."

Fall 2018 | First Round of Interviews with Faculty Stakeholders

In Fall Semester 2018, Dr. Edguer and other team members embarked on a first round of interviews with approximately 30 constituent faculty members, presenting the first draft

(iteration) of a *concept* for the new generalist curriculum to solicit perspectives, feedback, and insights. The interviewers asked each full-time faculty member to identify what they felt were important knowledge, values, and skills that students needed to acquire and demonstrate at the generalist level of practice.

The interviews included standard questions about what each faculty member saw as the core content of and most effective teaching strategies for students in the generalist curriculum. Examples of the questions included the following:

- What are the essential competency-based learning outcomes for social work students in the first semester of a master’s program?
- In your area of content expertise, what is essential for students to understand in applying theory, practice, and policy to phases of social work practice (i.e., engagement, assessment, intervention, evaluation, termination) and levels of social work practice (i.e., with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities)?
- In their generalist studies, what competencies do students need to develop related to social work values and ethics, professional behavior, diversity and inclusion, advocating for human rights, and leadership?
- Review each competency in which you have expertise and answer the following questions:
 - How have you taught students to achieve this competency in the past? Can you identify some specific resources and learning assets (e.g., books, articles, films, activities, assignments, case studies)?
 - How have you helped students integrate classroom and field experiences?
 - How have you helped students integrate content across the curriculum?
 - How should we evaluate students’ achievements of each competency?
 - Do you have other innovative ideas for helping students develop competency in any area of practice during the first semester?

From these interviews, the leadership team identified 49 possible learning objectives to address in the new generalist curriculum. We knew it would not be possible to include all of these objectives, but the interviews did produce a wealth of information that enabled us to compare faculty input with our original guiding principles (see above), which would help inform next steps.

Spring 2019 | Second Round of Interviews with Faculty & Key Themes

In December 2018, the faculty of the School voted to accept the *curriculum concept*, giving the leadership team the green light to proceed with the next phase of the process. In Spring Semester 2019, the team conducted a second round of interviews with faculty, either in small groups or individually, to present the second iteration of the curriculum concept and to solicit additional perspectives, feedback, and insights.

The team then synthesized responses from both rounds of interviews to develop a short report for Dean Gilmore and the faculty Curriculum Committee, highlighting *key themes* from faculty (stakeholder) feedback, which would inform a revision to the leadership team’s guiding principles for new course content and teaching approaches (Wood & Edguer, 2019). While some faculty feedback did overlap with the CSWE-EPAS competencies, the

leadership team also listened closely for themes of faculty values that exceeded CSWE expectations for generalist competencies.

Lesson Learned from Interviews

When analyzing interview notes for themes, the leadership team noticed that faculty members may not have been thinking globally about the entire curriculum—generalist, advanced, and specialized courses—being built together upon integrative-learning experiences. However, they were at least acknowledging **the value of the integrative exercise** in the form of a capstone or seminar. This interest in integrative exercises would eventually become a facilitator of change toward—a seed for—a broader curriculum-wide approach to integrative thinking and learning.

(Editor's Note: Theoretical perspectives most often cited by faculty included the following: ecological/person-in-environment; intersectionality; systems theory; strengths, resilience, and empowerment; risk factors and protective factors; life-course perspectives; neuroscience (basic brain development); critical social theory; other theories that apply to all levels of practices, such as the following: impact of trauma upon individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and systems; attachment; new institutionalism; transformational leadership or servant leadership; and asset-based community development, among others.)

FALL 2018 - SPRING 2019 | REVISION OF ONLINE LEARNING

It is important to highlight that while the curriculum innovation leadership team was engaging faculty stakeholders, revising the concept for the new curriculum, and planning for course development, another organizational-change process was occurring simultaneously. The School had decided to revise the Learning Management System (LMS) of its online learning format significantly. This included creating new learning assets to fit the format of a new LMS (see Section 5 for a detailed explanation of the core components of online learning, including the LMS).

Beginning in Fall 2018, faculty members commenced their work with online instructional designers to plan revisions to courses and learning assets (course materials) in the old curriculum style (i.e., a two-semester generalist experience) because the new curriculum was still in the concept phase. However, members of the leadership team were among those participating in that process, so a close collaboration began that created an important feedback loop. From the onset of the collaboration, the instructional designers and the leadership team planned how they might repurpose existing learning assets and utilize new ones (e.g., video-taped lectures and role plays, neighborhood documentaries, common case studies) for the new competency-based curriculum in all learning formats—online, on campus, and intensive weekend—once that new curriculum was ready. In other words, the leadership team helped inform the structure and content of the new online learning assets for the old curriculum style with concepts from the new curriculum. At the same time, the instructional designers helped the leadership team think about how to structure learning activities in the new competency-based courses to create a consistent learning experience among all three of the School's learning formats.

According to Drs. Wood and Edguer, the School's experience with professional instructional designers, dating back to 2011, continued to give them and other faculty members useful insights into curriculum and course design (see Section 5). They emphasized that this was especially helpful because most faculty typically do not have academic training

in curriculum development: they have advanced degrees in social work and other allied disciplines, often specializing in the creation of new knowledge through research and scholarship. They do not have degrees in education.

Internal Workgroups Manage Development of Online Experience

In May 2019, the School formed two internal workgroups to help facilitate development and management of the new online learning assets.

The first group, called the *online learning collaborative*, was originally formed as faculty learning communities under the leadership of Dr. Kathy Farkas during the planning process for online learning in 2011 (see Section 5). The second group, called the *online learning management team*, included Drs. Wood, Edguer, and Sharon Milligan; Scott Wilkes, PhD, assistant dean of academic affairs; LaShon Sawyer, PhD, director of the online learning format; administrative support staff; and some course instructors. This group met weekly internally to review administrative issues.

Internal workgroups like these would be instrumental to our success during the next two phases of curriculum innovation: development and launch of the new courses.

| SECTION 8 |

DEVELOPING THE NEW COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM

(Summer 2019 to Summer 2020)

In Summer 2019, with the concept for the new generalist curriculum in place, the leadership team developed a *generalist-theory matrix* and *competency matrix* to map out how each of the new generalist courses would address the 10 competencies and key theories of practice that had been identified in interviews with faculty during the previous autumn and spring (see Section 7). With the competency matrix (i.e., Excel spreadsheet and Miro online whiteboard), the leadership team and OEOA staff could select any one of the competencies and abilities to see where they were being addressed and assessed in the generalist curriculum—in each course, learning objective, learning activity, assignment, and assessment.

SUMMER 2019 – JANUARY 2020 | SYLLABUS DESIGN

We then assembled work teams to begin the first draft of a master syllabus for each new generalist course listed below. Each team consisted of a lead instructor who was also a member of the leadership team, and at least two other full-time or adjunct faculty members with expertise in the subject matter of the course. To help ensure coordination across multiple courses, Drs. Wood and Edguer oriented team members to the structure of the new generalist curriculum and illustrated where and how content needed to integrate with and complement other courses. The teams utilized the *alignment table* (matrix) as a primary tool to link (or align) learning objectives, learning assets, learning activities, and assignments in each course with CSWE's nine competencies and the School's eight abilities (see Section 6 for a discussion of alignment tables). They also utilized learning assets (course materials) from previous courses and developed new assets where needed. Finally, the team established

design standards to help manage the student workload. Each of the two-credit courses was to have no more than two readings per week, and no more than two major assignments during the semester. Attention was also given to the amount of pre-class asynchronous work required weekly for each class

In September 2019, the leadership team presented an update about activities at the first Constituent Faculty Meeting of the 2019-20 academic year. By January of 2020, the syllabus teams transformed into *course-development teams* and held kickoff meetings to flesh out the following:

- Learning objectives
- Learning activities for each day and week of the course
- Learning assets (e.g., books, book chapters, journal articles, video-taped lectures, video documentaries, case studies, common case studies, PowerPoint presentations)
- Assignments
- Assessment and grading rubrics
- Competencies and abilities addressed and assessed in objectives, learning activities, and assignments

Syllabus Design for New Generalist Courses

With guidance from the curriculum innovation leadership team, the syllabus teams developed the following new generalist courses (see Appendix for course descriptions):

- Change Agent Intensive (CHAI) Seminar (1 credit) (SASS 502)
- Individual Theory & Practice (2 credits) (SASS 508)
- Family Theory & Practice (2 credits) (SASS 515)
- Group Theory & Practice (2 credits) (SASS 509)
- Community Theory & Practice (2 credits) (SASS 507)
- Evidence-Informed Practice (2 credits) (SASS 528)
- Theories of Human Development & Human Diversity (2 credits) (SASS 504)
- Foundations of Social Policy and Service Delivery (2 credits) (SASS 503)
- Field Education Seminar / Organizational Theory & Practice (1 credit) (SASS 495)
- Field Education Placement (2 credits) (SASS 601)

Syllabus Design for New Advanced Courses

During this same period of time, we began work on courses in the advanced curriculum, which would serve as a bridge experience between the generalist and specialized curricula. We used a design process similar to the generalist courses by including lead instructors and at least two other faculty with expertise in the content areas. Two courses in the advanced curriculum had been specialized courses in the old curriculum model, so the design teams had some existing material and points of reference with which to work.

We conceived the advanced curriculum to include several required courses which would focus on both direct practice and community practice and ensure that all students would be prepared for professional social work at all levels of practice—with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities—no matter what their choice of

specialization might be. In this way, students would also be well positioned to pass the social-work licensure exam. Also, we know from conversations with alumni and from our own experiences that while students may specialize in one area of practice during graduate school, many find themselves working with different populations or at different levels of practice at some point in their careers. Therefore, the advanced curriculum would prepare them for that reality. The advanced curriculum would also include a research course redesigned to teach students how to conduct both program and practice evaluations.

Syllabi being designed for courses in the new advanced curriculum included the following (see Appendix for course descriptions):

- Problem Identification, Screening and Assessment/Diagnosis (SASS 547)
- Theory/Practice Approaches in Direct Practice Social Work (SASS 549)
- Assessing and Engaging Community for Community Change (SASS 566)
- Evaluating Programs and Practice (SASS 542)
- Field seminar and Organizational Theory and Practice (SASS 495A)

(Editor's Note: SASS 547 and SASS 549 were courses that had already been part of the specialized curriculum for direct practice students in the old model but were being revised and required of all students. SASS 566, SASS 542, and the field seminar were built as new courses.)

Incentives to Participate in Curriculum Innovation

During this phase of development, Dean Gilmore offered a one-time payment to faculty members participating in the design and teaching of new courses as an incentive for them to commit to the iterative process of curriculum design. Each person would receive the financial bonus the first time they taught a new course, as long as they participated in meetings throughout the semester to discuss strengths and limitations of the courses, facilitators and barriers to success, and best practices for teaching and responding to challenges. They also agreed to participate in revising the courses after the initial semester ended.

SPRING 2020 | COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In March 2020, the faculty Curriculum Committee approved the nine (9) new generalist syllabi for a Fall 2020 launch at the same time the COVID-19 pandemic hit Ohio and most other states. In response to recommendations of the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Office of Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, Case Western Reserve University closed its campus and shifted all on-campus courses to a remote-learning model (which is different from the online format), requiring all faculty to make major adjustments to their teaching methods and their availability for student support. In the middle of the semester, all faculty members participating on the course-development teams for the revised online format and new competency-based generalist curriculum had to continue their work from home, meeting via Zoom videoconferencing technology. The shift to remote learning and remote meetings created a major disruption in the flow of work—its rituals, routines, resources, and the spontaneous co-creations of insight, learning, and productivity that often occur in a shared physical space.

Despite the unexpected and rapid shift to remote learning and remote meetings, the curriculum innovation leadership team decided to maintain its momentum and not revert to the old curriculum for the Fall 2020 Semester. The unfolding transition to the new generalist

curriculum had not only inspired structural revisions to the generalist curriculum but to the advanced curriculum as well and could not be undone at such a late date (March 2020) in the academic cycle.

SPRING 2020 | SPECIALIZED CURRICULUM: BARRIERS TO & OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

As noted earlier, the leadership team had viewed the change process for the generalist and advanced curricula as a precursor for taking a similar deep dive into the School's specialized curriculum.

Therefore, from Spring to Fall Semester 2019, we engaged lead instructors to review specialized courses in both concentrations, that is, community practice and direct practice in aging; substance use disorders and recovery; children, youth, and families; health; mental health with adults; and mental health with children and adolescents. Like the courses in the generalist curriculum, the specialized courses would need to be analyzed, deconstructed, and rebuilt to integrate the 10 competencies, theory and practice, and other integrative components (see "Mechanisms of Integrative Learning" in Section 7). The faculty would also need to look for ways in which students could increase choices for electives.

During these meetings and during a faculty retreat, the leadership team observed that it was challenging for faculty to reach consensus about changes at that specialized level of the curriculum. By Spring Semester 2020, we decided it would not be prudent to engage in the faculty debate while managing the change processes for the generalist and advanced curricula, so we decided to postpone revisions to the specialized curriculum and revisit it in time for the next CSWE accreditation process. (That process will be informed by new CSWE-EPAS standards, which will be published in 2022.)

Certificates for Specializations

In the meantime, we collaborated with faculty members who teach in the specialized curriculum to identify opportunities to provide students with more choices to specialize in an area of practice via the School's *certificate programs* (e.g., gerontology, global health, nonprofit management, and school social work).

As a result, the School developed new standards for adding certificate options to the curriculum and to student transcripts. A *transcriptable certificate* program is a way for the School to offer new content and enable students to develop an expertise in more than one specialization. For instance, a student in either the direct-practice or community-practice concentrations could earn a transcriptable certificate in trauma-informed practice by taking a prescribed number of trauma electives (the trauma certificate had, in fact, emerged from this process). Certificate options give faculty and students additional opportunities to engage in more specialized content via a deeper or broader exploration of an area of practice. A transcriptable certificate also provides students with an official credential from the School to demonstrate their specialized expertise to potential employers.

Lessons Learned | Incremental Change

After reflecting upon challenges with the specialized curriculum, it became evident that, for the Mandel School (and we daresay most other schools), a big change like implementing an integrative competency-based curriculum **throughout the entire master's program** will be built upon a series of incremental changes in philosophies, policies, and individual beliefs

and practices over time. Developing the certificate model is one example of an incremental change which paves the way for further enhancements when the time is right. We plan to achieve this through continuous engagement of our stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students.

MARCH - AUGUST 2020 | BUILDING & SEQUENCING NEW COURSES

With the new generalist curriculum set to launch in the on-campus and intensive-weekend formats in August 2020, on the first day of Fall Semester, the curriculum innovation leadership team and other champions of change who were participating in the design of new courses pushed ahead with their work, even as the COVID-19 pandemic raged like a wildfire through Ohio and communities worldwide. From March to August 2020, curriculum innovators at the Mandel School continued to meet remotely to flesh out the syllabi for the nine new generalist courses, to meet with instructional designers from the School's online academic partner, to make trips to video-production studios to record video lectures and other learning assets, to record video lectures and other assets in home offices, and—let's not forget—to teach courses, grade assignments, and meet with students to provide feedback about their academic work, advising for next steps in their academic journeys, and mentoring for their professional development.

Finally, throughout all of this, the faculty also found themselves spending additional time with many students, providing emotional support by helping them sort through and reflect upon their feelings and thoughts about all the life-and-death uncertainties and anxieties presented by the global pandemic and the social and political unrest throughout the nation. It is important to remember that during the pre-vaccine phases of the pandemic, students as well as faculty experienced and expressed doubts and fears like everyone else: doubts and fears about their academic experiences; their financial circumstances; their career potentials; and, of course, the health, wellness, and safety of themselves, their family members, friends, and peers.

In the face of all this, Mandel School faculty members remained focused upon and committed to implementing the transformative curriculum innovation: it was, to say the least, a super-human commitment to the future of the institution and to the students and communities it serves.

The Unexpected | Interprofessional Education (IPE)

While this white paper has focused, thus far, on our process of developing competency-based education to advance the social work profession, it is important to note that a University-wide initiative to develop a new interprofessional education (IPE) course was occurring simultaneously, which presented us with additional challenges and opportunities for our curriculum design.

According to the World Health Organization (2010), interprofessional education occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from, and with each other. IPE is a way to prepare students for multidisciplinary collaborations that are becoming more common in community-based health and behavioral healthcare initiatives. IPE is aligned with the values of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), both of which encourage schools of social work to include IPE in bachelor's and master's programs.

In Fall 2019, Provost Ben Vinson, PhD (chief academic officer) of Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) created the Office for Interprofessional and Interdisciplinary Education and Research to develop curricula and community experiences for CWRU students and faculty to learn skills for becoming high-impact team members in complex healthcare settings. One goal of this University-wide initiative is to provide *collaborative practice courses* for students of the University’s health-related schools and departments (e.g., social work, medicine, nursing, and dentistry, among others) in which students work with each other on real-world, team-based projects. The University’s first collaborative practice course (CP-1) was designed as a yearlong community-based experience. Because participants are all students in their first year of professional studies, it is felt they do not yet possess the expertise to work in clinical settings. Instead, the course focuses on teaching teamwork skills in classroom sessions and having students apply their learning as teams that work together on community-based projects.

According to Dean Gilmore, interprofessional education, if done correctly, enables students of different professions to begin to understand and integrate each other’s professional language, culture, and scope of practice. Dean Gilmore had been collaborating for several years with deans of the schools of medicine, nursing, and dentistry to develop IPE. To advance the momentum of this work, he continued to support the IPE initiative when it began to offer collaborative-practice courses in 2020 when the School planned to launch its new curriculum.

Adjusting Our Curriculum Plan to Include IPE

Although the IPE initiative of the Provost’s Office presented the Mandel School with an opportunity to increase the breadth of its learning environment, its timing did present a significant challenge to the leadership team. Our new curriculum was being conceived as a transformation in social work education. It would be packed with learning experiences to support the mastery of knowledge and skills at the generalist, advanced, and specialized levels of practice. In an effort to give students more opportunities to pursue *their choice* of specialization—by taking more courses in the specialized curriculum—the generalist curriculum would become an intensive 18-credit sequence of required courses.

Unfortunately, planning for the University’s IPE collaborative practice course was not closely coordinated with our curriculum planning and presented an unanticipated challenge in the curriculum design process. This led to resistance from students: the new University IPE course would be required, meet for two hours each week for one year (two semesters), and provide no credit toward completion of the degree. Faculty were also concerned that some of the material in the IPE practice course would duplicate content in the existing generalist curriculum. In an effort to address some of these concerns, the Mandel School’s curriculum innovation leadership team sought to integrate the University’s required IPE course with the School’s field education (practicum) experience. However, the team was mindful that the additional requirement might create a crisis both in perception and experience. From the generalist student’s perspective, the workload of the first semester of graduate school might feel overwhelming, because they would have to manage the following:

- Seven (7) two-credit generalist courses
- Two (2) one-credit generalist courses
- One (1) two-credit field placement/practicum

- One (1) no-credit, two-hour weekly CWRU-IPE course

Course Sequencing | The Pace of the Learning Experience

On one hand, the timing of new University-based IPE course was inconvenient for the Mandel School’s planning and development process. Yet, on the other hand, this was the time to find a place for it—before launch of the new curriculum. So, we continued our work on sequencing of new courses in all three learning formats to ensure an effective delivery and pace of learning activities and assignments. Each learning format has a different schedule. In the new one-semester generalist curriculum, students in the *on-campus format* would take eight courses two days per week and engage in field practicum two days per week for 15 weeks. Students in the *intensive-weekend format* would take one course at a time and meet four or five full days during two weekends, spaced a month apart, during each semester. And students in the *online format* would take two classes at a time over a 14-week period. In all learning formats, students without advanced standing would commence their social-work studies in the immersive CHAI seminar (SASS 502). An example of the original concept for sequencing **in the on-campus format** included the following (see Appendix for course descriptions):

Fall 2020 Original Concept of Course Sequencing in Generalist Curriculum					
Day	Meeting Time	Course / Activity	Course #	Contact Hours	Credit Hours
Monday		• Field Practicum	SASS 601	7.50	2.00
Tuesday	9 to 10:30 am	• Foundations of Social Policy and Service Delivery	SASS 503	1.50	2.00
	10:45 am to 12:15 pm	• Theories of Human Development and Human Diversity	SASS 504	1.50	2.00
	12:15 to 2 pm	• Lunch			
	2 to 3:30 pm	• Individual Theory and Practice	SASS 508	1.50	2.00
	3:45 to 5:15 pm	• Community Theory and Practice	SASS 507	1.50	2.00
Wednesday		• Open Study Day			
	3 to 5 pm	• CWRU’s Interprofessional Education Experience (IPE): Collaborative Practice		2.00	0.00
Thursday	9 to 10:30 am	• Family Theory and Practice	SASS 515	1.50	2.00
	10:45 am to 12:15 pm	• Evidence-Informed Practice	SASS 528	1.50	2.00
	12:15 to 2 pm	• Lunch			
	2 to 3:30 pm	• Group Theory & Practice	SASS 509	1.50	2.00
	3:45 to 4:30 pm	• Field Seminar and Organizational Theory & Practice	SASS 495	0.75	1.00
Friday		• Field Practicum	SASS 601	7.50	

The sequencing of courses was a critical piece for the new generalist curriculum, because the leadership team anticipated there might be perceived and real challenges experienced by faculty members and students alike with managing the new workload. The redesigned generalist curriculum essentially transformed seven (7) three-credit courses, previously taken over two semesters, into seven (7) two-credit courses and two (2) one-credit courses taken in one semester. New experiences are often the most difficult because there is no benchmark for comparison. The maiden voyage of the new curriculum in Fall 2020 would provide faculty members, administrators, students, and the leadership team with that initial set of experiential data. How each group would respond to the uncharted open waters was not fully known at the time.

MARCH – AUGUST 2020 | LEARNING ASSETS & MULTIPLE LMS

Technology shapes the learning experience for students and faculty in every learning format, not just the online program. As noted in Section 5 of this white paper, the Learning Management System (LMS) is a web-based software which emerged in the late 1990s with products like Blackboard. It is now a ubiquitous tool in curriculum and course design and delivery. An LMS is a technology platform that manages the uploading, archiving, and delivery and scaffolding of course syllabi and learning assets (course materials), such as book chapters, articles, video-recorded lectures, PowerPoints, case studies, and much more. It also tracks who completes learning activities and assignments for the course. Each LMS has its own structure, style, and layout. During the curriculum development phase between March and August 2020, the leadership team was essentially managing issues related to three different systems:

- The LMS of the online academic partner which was being phased out: the learning assets in this system could not be transferred to the LMS of the new online platform or converted for use in any way.
- The LMS of the new online platform.
- The LMS of CWRU (called Canvas), which is used in the on-campus format and intensive-weekend format.

LMS | Barriers to Change

When reflecting upon this phase of curriculum redesign leading up to the launch, Drs. Wood and Edguer explain that the leadership team had not anticipated the magnitude of some intensive, time-consuming issues related to LMS technology. For instance, they discovered that learning assets and other materials could not be transferred directly from the LMS of the School's online format to the LMS of the on-campus and intensive-weekend formats (i.e., CWRU's Canvas) and vice versa. The assets had to be downloaded from one LMS to Google Drive, renamed to fit filing conventions and protocols of the other system, then uploaded to the other LMS in the appropriate place in each course. The download-and-upload process turned out to be painstakingly slow, depending upon file sizes and the data-transfer speeds of internet connections. Remember, the University required all Mandel School faculty and staff to work from home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. So, staff did not have access to the lightning-fast fiber-optic network in their offices on the CWRU campus. The data-transfer speed of home offices dictated progress with these tasks.

LMS | Converting Barriers to Facilitators

To inventory, catalogue, and manage *all* learning assets in the School’s repertoire, Drs. Wood and Edguer turned to Google Drive and Google Sheets to create a comprehensive database archive, which included the following for each asset: title; key search-words; hyperlink to the resource; status of conversion to text or audio for different learning preferences and disabilities (e.g., visual and auditory challenges); competencies addressed by each asset; and courses, learning activities, and assessments that utilize the asset. Drs. Wood and Edguer explain that the learning-asset database not only provided them with an inventory but also a quality-control mechanism for each asset by ensuring they were not being overused in multiple courses. This would prevent redundancy in learning experiences across courses. It would also provide opportunities to identify needs for new assets in different courses.

During this work with the LMSs and the asset database, Drs. Wood and Edguer turned to an invaluable internal resource. They enlisted the help of Samantha Skutnik, director of the School’s Lillian and Milford Harris Library, and its staff of librarians. The Harris Library is one of a few libraries in the United States located in a school of social work and dedicated entirely to the literature and scholarship of social work and nonprofit management. As the School received learning assets from its online academic partner, the librarians helped Drs. Wood and Edguer catalog the assets with a consistent file-naming scheme and upload the files to Canvas. Examples of assets included in the catalogue included the following:

- Video-recorded lectures
- Video documentaries of Cleveland neighborhoods (for courses in community practice)
- Transcripts of recordings (to support learning styles that favor text-based documents)
- Common case studies
- Other documents (e.g., book chapters, articles, other readings), which had also been remediated with an HTML code called “alt text”.
- PowerPoint presentations (also remediated with “alt text”)

For this stage of curriculum development, Dean Gilmore highlights the leadership team’s engagement of the library staff. He explains that most schools would not have this kind of technical support for curriculum work.

“This is a great example of the intrinsic benefit of having our own professional library and professional librarians,” he says. “The catalogued assets can now be identified and used by faculty in future curriculum initiatives and course development. The catalogue is an incredibly useful resource.”

He adds that staff in the Office of Student Services also assisted the Harris Library team in transferring learning assets and reviewing and remediating PDF files to ensure they would be accessible to students with different learning styles, preferences, and disabilities.

LMS | Lessons Learned

During this process, we discovered that it would be helpful in the future to have a dedicated instructional designer on staff at the School to manage all LMS activities, which would include programming a standard page layout (template) for all courses; managing the asset database (i.e., Google Drive and Google Sheets); naming and uploading the files;

troubleshooting and fixing technology glitches; and providing faculty members with training and technical assistance for envisioning and implementing innovations for the LMS. A dedicated instructional designer could help the leadership team identify faculty innovators who enjoy the LMS technology and want to experiment with new ways to use the LMS; support them in the process; and, thus, potentially elevate thought-experiments to real-world applications and innovations in the Mandel School learning environment. As this white paper is being written, the Mandel School does not yet have such a position on staff.

| SECTION 9 |

**LAUNCHING
THE NEW COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM**

(Fall 2020 - Summer 2021)

The launch of a new curriculum under normal circumstances is enough to create a nervous buzz among faculty, staff, and students alike. So, it was no surprise that feelings of anticipation and uncertainty vibrated to a higher frequency within the Mandel School community as we launched our new integrative competency-based generalist curriculum in the on-campus and intensive-weekend formats at the start of Fall Semester 2020. (We would rollout the new curriculum in the online format in spring semester.)

In August 2020, the highly contagious and life-threatening COVID-19 pandemic was still infecting large numbers of people at alarming rates in communities around the world with no vaccine available or in sight. Also, throughout spring and summer, faculty, staff, and students did not know if they would be returning to campus. Case Western Reserve University, like most colleges throughout the United States, did not decide until July—just before the start of the new semester—whether to maintain its policy of all-remote learning and work activities. This required a rapid response from the curriculum innovation leadership team and all instructors to teach the new generalist courses, which had been designed for in-person delivery, as a *remote* experience with Zoom videoconferencing software. Remote learning is different from online learning: it presents a different set of expectations for instructors and students alike (more on this later). Nobody could predict the outcomes of the switch from in-person to remote learning. It would be uncharted territory for everybody.

If this were not enough stress, add to it the uncertainty of political and social unrest that continued to rage in the American consciousness. It was a profound and historic

moment to begin a social work education and career as a social worker. The circumstances presented opportunities for students to become more actively involved in social change.

FALL 2020 | CHANGE-AGENT INTENSIVE (CHAI) SEMINAR

For new students beginning their master's degree program amidst so many uncertainties, the Mandel School's new CHange Agent Intensive (CHAI) seminar was a timely innovation. This two-week introductory seminar had been created specifically to help new students transition smoothly into the profession and the School's learning environment. No one could have predicted its utility for taking the edge off high anxiety as students who preferred in-person learning on campus began their master's degree in relative isolation in their homes. Although CHAI took place over Zoom videoconferencing, it provided a two-week safe container and holding environment for new students, which helped build a momentum of confidence that would carry them into a full load of classes.

The School designed and offered the CHAI seminar in multiple sections with small class sizes of 10 to 12 students each, which enabled new students to become acquainted with each other in small groups (cohorts) to foster social support and cohesion as they began an intensive study of social work. Each cohort met daily via Zoom for class and small-group discussions. They also established connections on their own via social-media apps.

A Big-Picture Introduction to Social Work

The CHAI seminar was inspired, in part, by the University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work generalist curriculum (Colby, 2013) and by *ProjectGo*, a Mandel School program established in the 1970s to provide students of color with the same kind of supportive cohort experience and introduction to the School and the social work profession.

More specifically, CHAI is an initial, immersive experience for students to engage with faculty and peers to examine social issues and social problems central to social work. The seminar introduces the values and ethics that guide the profession and the dilemmas that professionals face. This course centers the learning experience **within the context** of greater Cleveland so that students will begin to value the importance of community as a means of understanding social work practice at all levels—with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

At the same time, the CHAI seminar supports and promotes the development of **self-awareness and critical thinking** by presenting students with opportunities to reflect upon the role of privilege, oppression, and discrimination in their own lives and the lives of others. CHAI introduces the Social Work Identity Reflections, which focus students on areas of societal privilege and discrimination related to identity (Ability [mental and/or physical]; Age; Ethnicity, citizenship, and indigenous; Gender identity; Race; Religion; Sexual Orientation; Socio-Economic Status/Class). Each course asks students to focus on an area in reflection about their own identity. CHAI's focus is on ability and disability. In this course, students are challenged to understand and value the worldviews of persons different from themselves and to develop the ability to understand different perspectives in their work. This course introduces four main areas that are foundational for social work, weaving some together and covering others in stand-alone units:

- Professional identity
- Ethics and values
- Diversity, equity and inclusion

- Community

An Introduction to Integrative Thinking

The CHAI seminar also establishes an important theme of *integrative thinking* that will thread through every course in the master's program. It introduces students to the 10 competencies and eight abilities of social work practice (see Section 7 for a list), which serve as learning objectives and outcomes for class discussions, assignments, grading, and assessments throughout the master's program. It also introduces students to the integration of macro practice (with communities) and micro practice (with individuals, families, and groups). To illustrate this theme of integrative thinking and learning, the CHAI seminar utilizes a case study of the history of redlining (discriminatory mortgage lending) in Cleveland and explores how this practice of economic injustice has negatively impacted individuals, families, groups, and communities for more than a century.

FALL 2020 | GENERALIST COURSES

After the initial two-week introductory immersion in CHAI, student cohorts from each section of the seminar began taking other generalist courses together in a carefully scheduled weekly sequence. These included eight new integrative courses, field placement (practicum), and a collaborative-practice course in interprofessional education (IPE) hosted by the University (see “Course Sequencing” in Section 8). The courses were designed to address and assess the competencies and abilities identified in previous sections of this paper. Student cohorts took all eight classes together as a group.

FALL 2020 | ONGOING ASSESSMENT

As described in Section 7, we planned this new competency-based curriculum with assessment in mind. We built each course to address and assess specific aspects of the 10 competencies and eight abilities at the generalist level of education. We had all of our revised assessment points for those outcomes in place. *Assessment points* are not the same as grading course assignments: grades evaluate a student's mastery of a particular assignment, which may cover aspects of multiple competencies; assessment points evaluate a student's mastery of specific aspects of a competency as defined by CSWE. We had revised all of our data collection instruments, so we were also training faculty members and other course instructors in the theory and practice of the new assessment methods.

As a reminder, we use a variety of assessment methods not only to report our findings to CSWE during the reaccreditation process but also to inform our institutional self-assessment and quality-improvement process, which includes reports to and ongoing conversations with the Dean's Office, Associate Dean's Office, the faculty Curriculum Committee and its subcommittees, and all faculty members and adjunct instructors. In addition to the standard types of assessments we had used previously, we also sought to assess the organizational change process using the following strategies:

- Qualitative feedback from Faculty Learning Communities (regular meetings with faculty who helped design new syllabi and teach new courses)
- Qualitative feedback from staff who help support the initiative (e.g., interviews with registrar, recruitment, field placement, student success coaches)

During this initial semester of the new curriculum, we would also add student listening panels to the ongoing assessment process. These monthly meetings with student representatives would provide a formal mechanism of qualitative feedback by which students could provide insights about their experiences as a way to inform possible enhancements. More on this below.

Midcourse Evaluations

As part of our regular assessment activities, we ask students to complete course evaluations in the middle and at the end of each semester. In October 2020, we created and administered a *common midcourse evaluation survey* that students completed for all of their generalist courses. In the past, instructors created and administered their own surveys. With our new standardized evaluation document, we learned which courses students perceived as most challenging (e.g., social policy and research) and which student concerns emerged as thematic across courses (e.g., a number of assignments due on the same day).

FALL 2020 | STUDENT FEEDBACK & LESSONS LEARNED

Take a formal or informal survey of students and faculty in most master's degree programs and odds are that no one will say that graduate study is easy, especially in a professional social-work school such as ours that requires 15 clock-hours per week of field practicum with almost 18-clock hours of classes, plus time invested in asynchronous learning activities, reading, and other assignments. Yet, when students openly share their observations, experiences, and frustrations about the workload, faculty members do have a choice of response. One might listen objectively with a calm and compassionate demeanor, ask reflective and clarifying questions, take some notes, and share the feedback with colleagues to compare experiences, decipher what is relevant for the curriculum, and decide how to make enhancements. In contrast, one might present a flat-affect wall of stoicism and reply with multisyllabic euphemisms to cloak a judgmental attitude which essentially says, "This is graduate school, and these are our expectations for your performance. Just do the work." In other words, there is a choice to welcome students as partners in the creation, assessment, and evolution of the learning environment. Or to dismiss them.

During the Mandel School's first semester of curriculum innovation from August to December 2020, the leadership team learned that faculty and staff responses to students' concerns varied on the continuum from welcoming to dismissive, with the data stacked toward the genuinely curious, compassionate, and collaborative. At first, faculty and staff received feedback from students through multiple venues, for instance, during remote classroom sessions, in advising meetings, and via email and social media messaging. Students also voiced their opinions at scheduled feedback sessions with the dean of the School, the associate dean for academic affairs, and others. These multiple sources then shared feedback with one or more members of the leadership team, which quickly realized they had not built-in a *formal qualitative feedback mechanism* for students to advocate on their own behalf. This haphazard system also led to inconsistent attention and recognition of various pieces of feedback depending on how that feedback was communicated and to whom.

Lesson Learned | Student Listening Panels

To strengthen the student-feedback process, we quickly created monthly listening panels to collect and evaluate student perspectives systematically and decide how to use the

information for the current and future semesters. The listening panels included eight students—two representatives chosen by their peers from each of the four new-student cohorts. These representatives collected information from other students in their cohort and presented concerns on their behalf to the leadership team, who then solicited and shared responses from faculty and administration. Some examples of programmatic feedback from students about the Mandel School’s new generalist curriculum included the following:

- The CHAI seminar was inspiring and useful, but a two-week class was too long. The most relevant content was covered during the first week.
- Juggling assignments from eight courses (syllabi) simultaneously was challenging. It would be helpful to have a chart (matrix) that shows all courses with all assignments and due dates.
- CWRU’s Learning Management System (LMS), Canvas, often acted “glitchy” (unstable), creating barriers to the learning assets. For example:
 - Some PowerPoint slides would not load properly or were missing.
 - Some reading materials were not accessible or did not download successfully.
 - Video lectures (and other videos) took a long time to load or stream (e.g., home-office bandwidth issues) or had not uploaded successfully.
- Adjusting to the flipped classroom model was challenging for many students and some instructors. The prep work for each in-class experience seemed overwhelming at times.
- Faculty had varying levels of understanding of the new curriculum, which occasionally lead to some confusion.

We decided to make some curricular adjustments and postpone others for next year’s iteration. For example, we immediately reviewed all of the assignments and eliminated or combined some. We then developed an *assignment matrix* adjusting some of the due dates so that they were not all clustered at the same time. We also went into the LMS to test links and try to remedy some of the most challenging glitches. Our response to feedback about the length of the CHAI seminar would have to wait until the next academic year.

Lesson Learned | Be Realistic & Transparent about Student Feedback

In the generalist curriculum, students learn to advocate for social, economic, and environmental justice. This is one of the nine competencies identified by CSWE. Social work students can begin to develop this skill by learning to advocate effectively for their own academic needs while in the master’s program. The student listening panels turned out to be an important experience for this kind of learning.

However, the curriculum innovation leadership team came to realize that some students believed that as long as they asked for a change, it would be granted. This understanding of advocacy and our response to it led to disappointment and frustration from these students when some of their requests could not be accommodated. For example, some students did ask for a retroactive policy to enact a “pass/no-pass” grading system for generalist courses instead of the traditional continuum of letter grades (i.e., A, B, C). Students did not understand the complexities of University policies that govern its academic structures, nor did they understand the complex processes for appealing and potentially changing those policies.

Through the listening panels, we were reminded how important it is for faculty members to be transparent with students about how feedback might be realistically used. Unfortunately, we did not consistently communicate back to students our responses. We should set clear expectations by articulating what items can be included for consideration and which cannot. We also learned about how to frame the request for feedback in a way that allowed students to reflect not only on what needed to change but also what did, in fact, work well. We borrowed questions from an Appreciative Inquiry approach and found that framed in this manner, the student feedback was very helpful (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Overall, the listening panels turned out to be a positive and constructive mechanism for successful curriculum innovation. We do recommend these panels as a best practice for the process of curriculum implementation. They provide a formal mechanism for student advocacy, which demonstrates an institutional commitment to their inclusion, academic success, and development as a professional.

Lesson Learned | Revise Student Orientation Process

With this initial student feedback from the first semester of the new generalist curriculum, the leadership team acknowledged that the School has an opportunity to revise its new-student orientation process to prepare incoming students better with clear expectations about the program. Many come from undergraduate programs with traditional curriculum structures, which organize courses by topic and not by the integration of content, competencies and abilities, and theory, research, and practice. Many new students enter the master's program with biases based upon previous experiences. In addition to the general content covered in orientation, a revised orientation process could be organized to answer some important questions, such as the following:

- What are integrative-learning experiences?
- What is the value of integrating competencies and abilities?
- What is the value of integrating theory, research, and practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels?
- What is the meaning of and difference between competency at the generalist level, competency in professional practice at the time of graduation (LSW), and competency in professional independent practice after at least two years of supervised practice (LISW)?
- How is graduate school similar to and different from the undergraduate learning experience?
- What is the student's preferred style of learning? How might a student learn to learn in different ways?
- What are some effective strategies for managing the workload of eight two-credit courses in a semester plus field practicum?
- What is a flipped-classroom model of learning? Why and how is it being used in the generalist curriculum?
- What are strategies for maximizing learning without being totally overwhelmed by the pre-class preparation?
- What are some of the basics of writing in APA format? What resources exist for receiving guidance on writing in graduate school?

- What are some strategies for developing good study skills and avoiding excessive procrastination.
- What resources are available within the school and the university that can help students with the transition to graduate school.

FALL 2020 | FACULTY FEEDBACK & LESSONS LEARNED

Just as the student listening panels provided a useful feedback channel for students, our faculty learning communities and course team meetings did the same for instructors. The learning communities originated during the development and launch of our online learning format from 2011 to 2013 (see Section 5). They have continued as a best practice in our ongoing quality-improvement process and were instrumental during the launch of the new competency-based curriculum. The learning communities enable faculty members to meet regularly throughout the semester to discuss what is working and not working in each course across multiple sections, to troubleshoot, to offer suggestions for enhancements, and develop emerging best practices for teaching.

Like students, instructors reported positive experiences with the CHAI seminar and noted its utility in preparing students for the rest of the courses in the generalist curriculum. Instructors also reported generally positive experiences with teaching the new courses. This occurred, in part, because of the leadership team’s implementation plan. In its goals and objectives, the team included faculty learning communities as a facilitator of change and a source of support for teachers. Some examples of faculty observations and suggestions included the following:

- *Challenge:* Some course materials (learning assets) were not accessible from the LMS during the rapid shift from in-person to remote learning in response to COVID-19. There were also problems synching between two LMS systems (Canvas and Echo 360 for in-person learning formats and a proprietary LMS for the online format) even though Echo 360 was embedded in Canvas.

Possible solution: Design a process for testing all links before the course goes “live”. Prepare for a faster response to technology glitches by having a help desk or other technical support available. It is also important to recognize unanticipated technology glitches that will arise. Once the course is launched, test links again to make sure they work.

- *Challenge:* Multiple courses had assignments due the same week.

Possible solution: Develop a matrix (chart) that shows required assignments across all generalist courses to help faculty and students be fully informed with the “big picture” of workload expectations across the generalist curriculum as well as the big picture of competencies being addressed in all learning activities and assignments. Adjust the due dates of assignments across courses so that they are more evenly spread across the semester.

- *Challenge:* In some sections of each course, instructors customized their syllabus and required additional readings or assignments but were not aware of the impact of this additional work upon the overall student experience.

Possible solution: Before the semester begins, hold a kickoff meeting for all faculty teaching in the generalist curriculum and provide them with an overview of all of the generalist courses and how they fit together. Make sure instructors in each course adhere to the master syllabus, especially the number of readings and assignments, and not add to the workload (i.e., “workload creep”). Develop a matrix (chart) that shows required assignments across all generalist courses.

Lesson Learned | Teaching Integrated Content

Drs. Wood and Edguer compiled other observations from faculty experiences throughout the semester, especially with the restructured content in the new courses:

Integrated Theory-and-Practice Courses

Faculty members who taught the new integrated theory-and-practice courses (e.g., Individual Theory and Practice; Family Theory and Practice; Group Theory and Practice; Community Theory and Practice; Field Seminar and Organizational Theory and Practice) had a lot of previous experience teaching both theory and practice as separate courses in the old curriculum. Therefore, their transition to the integrated content was relatively smooth. All faculty, however, learned from each other and developed new ways of addressing this integration.

Introductory Research Course

This course was a shift from teaching students to be researchers to teaching them to be informed consumers of research. As a result, some faculty members who taught the new research course, titled “Evidence-Informed Practice,” experienced a more challenging transition because it was a radical shift from the old course, titled “Research Methods,” which essentially taught students how to design a research study. In contrast, the new course teaches students how to find, evaluate, and apply the research to practice with a specific population. Faculty who taught the previous research methods courses (in the former curriculum) had to invest more time than anticipated to understand the new course structure and content, even though they had been prepped about changes well in advance of the semester. It was also more difficult for some faculty to buy into this revised approach to teaching research.

Theories of Human Development and Human Diversity

This is a new course. It represents a radical shift in thinking in the way it explores models of human development across the lifespan: it challenges students to re-evaluate traditional and emerging theories by analyzing the ways in which systemic cultural biases and racism impact human development—from birth to old age. Thus the course seeks to help students understand two bodies of theories that frequently have been presented in distinct courses – the first is theories of human development, and second is theories of discrimination and oppression. The emphasis is on examining these two bodies of theories and considering how they inform each other.

Reflective-and-Integrative Journals

Topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are no longer relegated to a single course but are infused throughout the curriculum. Each course presents specific content on an area of societal privilege and discrimination related to identity (Ability [mental and/or physical]; Age; Ethnicity, citizenship, and indigenous; Gender identity; Race; Religion; Sexual Orientation; Socio-Economic Status/Class). Students are then asked to focus on that area in reflection about their own identity and write a reflective *identity journal* about their understanding of that area, how it has affected them personally, and how it might impact their practice. The journal writing challenges students to compare new information about diversity, equity, and inclusion with their own previous opinions and experiences and to integrate both in a way that produces a new insight or perspective. Many faculty members found the journaling exercises to be a useful tool for encouraging students to think about issues related to oppression and prejudice and to reflect upon their own role and position in multiple aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

DECEMBER 2020 | THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM

In this section, we combine observations from course instructors and students about their experiences with the flipped-classroom model of teaching because both perspectives overlap in a way that provides meaningful insight about the heart of the learning experience in our new curriculum. (For an explanation of the flipped classroom, see Section 5.)

Lesson Learned | Deeper Learning through Conversation and Application

Feedback from faculty and students about the flipped classroom was mixed, mainly because it was a significant shift from how they experienced education in the past. The flipped classroom required significant adjustments in expectations and practice. Both faculty and students confirmed an insight we have gained over the years from the flipped-classroom structure in the online-learning format, since its launch in 2013. All of the work that students do outside the classroom before the appointed class time prepares them for deeper learning experiences that occur inside the classroom, as they apply, analyze, and synthesize new knowledge and skills in the presence of the instructor and fellow students. In this way, students gain experience with deep learning as it *occurs in a social context*. They practice the skill of co-creating a living moment of discovery with other people in the context of human relationships, which, we re-emphasize here, is the essence of social work practice: this is the heart and soul of the profession.

In addition, the flipped classroom gives instructors the opportunity to engage in deep conversations and integrative thinking with students about the 10 competencies as they apply to the knowledge and skills being addressed in pre-recorded lectures, course assignments, class discussions, and other learning assets and activities.

Lesson Learned | Faculty & the Flipped Classroom

For all of its perceived advantages, the flipped classroom model poses a number of challenges as well. Faculty members have different levels of comfort and facility with active learning strategies such as the flipped classroom. Therefore, this model of teaching was unevenly applied by different faculty members, even though every course in the curriculum was designed using a flipped classroom model. In addition, many students lacked knowledge

of and experience with the flipped classroom and expressed their discomfort. Combine this student anxiety with faculty discomfort and the stage can be set for growing dissatisfaction and frustration.

As a result, we now know that future efforts must be made to help faculty members learn about this model of teaching. One idea is to have an in-service workshop for instructors to learn together best practices for teaching with the flipped-classroom model. Such a training would also encourage all faculty members to employ a consistent practice to create clear expectations and, hopefully, improved outcomes for students. Inconsistencies from class to class create confusion and frustration among students. In addition, some technical glitches with the LMS did occasionally present challenges for successful completion of asynchronous learning.

Lesson Learned | Students & The Flipped Classroom

Many but not all students struggled with the concept of the flipped classroom and struggled to manage multiple asynchronous learning activities for multiple classes. It appears that some incoming students are not familiar with seminar-styled learning and the opportunities it presents for deeper learning through conversation and other social interaction. In addition, some students who are less comfortable with social learning and more comfortable with contemplative, solitary learning did find the flipped classroom a bit challenging.

With feedback from Student Listening Panels, Faculty Learning Communities, and course instructional teams, members of the leadership team recommend that new-student orientation include ample time for explaining the structure and value of the flipped classroom and provide guidance for students about how to benefit from the model. We also recommend that instructors find ways to include tasks in synchronous learning activities that all students may find more conducive to their participation in group activities. For instance, some students could fill roles as classroom scribes, taking notes during classroom discussions then providing written reports (or minutes) and short presentations that integrate themes from the in-class activities over time. Additionally, to accommodate more contemplative learning styles, all students may benefit from brief reflection time before beginning classroom activities or discussions.

The leadership team is also exploring methods for helping faculty members increase their comfort with this learning strategy as well as encouraging them to communicate more clearly to students the value of the flipped classroom. Finally, it should be noted that there may be some content that does not fit with the flipped model. The leadership team is exploring a more nuanced approach to helping students learn challenging content.

DECEMBER 2020 | LESSON LEARNED FOR FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

We learned several additional lessons from our meetings with instructors of courses throughout and after the initial semester, especially during the faculty learning communities and course instructional team meetings. For instance, to strengthen integration across the curriculum, it was essential to have at least one member of the leadership team participate in planning sessions *for every course* to help faculty members conceptualize the flipped-classroom structure and competency-based content and to assure that there is horizontal integration of the 10 competencies across all of the courses. At least one of the four innovators on the leadership team (Drs. Wood, Edguer, Hussey, and Chupp) participated in development meetings for each of the courses.

The leadership team also learned that a best practice would be to *encourage all generalist faculty* to participate in the faculty learning communities while they are teaching courses. This would ensure the inclusion of all perspectives and voices in our ongoing process of institutional self-reflection and assessment. This participation would advance the utility of faculty learning communities as a best practice for capacity building among all instructors, because all would be exposed to conversations about successes, concerns, and solutions to challenges. This would strengthen their teaching, create consistency in the learning environment across multiple sections of each course, and, thus, improve the student experience. It would also be helpful for faculty members who did participate in the learning communities to explain the value of the meetings to those who did not participate. Ultimately, however, this is a decision that individual faculty members must make for themselves.

Doctoral Students | Next Generation of Curriculum Innovators

Participation of all instructors would also enrich the experiences of our doctoral students who are teaching in the master's program. These meetings would expose them to more perspectives and, thus, provide more insights about curriculum as they prepare to become the next generation of innovators in social work education. The meetings would function as a source of mentoring and professional development around the theory and practice of pedagogy that focuses on integrative competency-based learning experiences.

Our doctoral program prepares scholars, teachers, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to be leaders in social work and social welfare in a variety of professional settings (see Section 2). However, many of our doctoral students pursue careers as faculty members at institutions of higher education, where there is still a need for **professionally trained social work educators** with doctoral degrees to shape and advance social work education in baccalaureate and master's programs.

Our students develop teaching competency in a doctoral-level course that focus on pedagogic theory and methods as well as the history of social work education in the United States. They also develop competency through mentorships with faculty who teach in the master's program. During these mentorships, students practice didactic, interactive, and experiential teaching strategies for in-person and online classroom settings, including the use of multimedia learning assets. Students also acquire practical skills in curriculum design and development; the delineation of educational objectives; and assessment of outcomes.

(Editor's Note: For more information about our PhD in Social Welfare doctoral program, see Section 2 of this white paper.)

SPRING 2021 | ONLINE LEARNING FORMAT

In January 2021, we launched the new competency-based generalist curriculum in our online learning format. The faculty learning communities and student listening panels and midcourse student evaluations provided similar positive feedback about the introductory CHAI seminar. Instructors and students also complemented CHAI's ability to provide students with a momentum of confidence and enthusiasm that carried into the other generalist courses.

Overall, feedback from online students and instructors revealed fewer frustrations, which we attribute to several factors. First, the sequencing of courses in the online format is

different from the in-person formats. Online students typically take two classes plus field education over a 14-week period, which accommodates the need to manage other responsibilities, such as work, family life, and caregiving, among others. In contrast, on-campus students complete eight courses and field practicum over a 14-week semester. Intensive-weekend students take one course at a time and meet for three to five full days on campus in Cleveland during two weekends that are spaced a month apart each semester (see Section 2.) In the first semester however, both online and intensive weekend students begin with the CHAI course before moving into other, slightly shortened, generalist courses for the remainder of the semester.

Secondly, the LMS for the online format is a completely separate system, not related to CWRU's Canvas LMS. The LMS for the online format has a full-time 24/7 help desk. Reported glitches can be attended to and fixed at any time of day, which minimizes downtime and maximizes access to the learning assets that support both asynchronous and synchronous learning activities.

Thirdly, faculty members who taught the new curriculum online had been teaching in the online format for a while and were already prepared for and comfortable with the flipped-classroom model. In addition, some online students who completed their undergraduate degrees online may be more familiar with a format that uses both asynchronous and synchronous strategies.

SPRING 2021 | LAUNCH OF NEW ADVANCED CURRICULUM

We launched the advanced curriculum in January 2021 at the start of Spring semester for the in-person formats. The advanced curriculum occurs in the second semester of the first year of the on-campus learning format. It functions as a bridge semester to the specialized curriculum, which takes place in the second year. Unlike in the generalist curriculum, courses in the advanced curriculum use a combination of traditional and active-learning methods, such as the flipped classroom. The courses include the following:

- Problem Identification, Screening, and Assessment/Diagnosis (3 credits) (SASS 547)
- Theory/Practice Approaches in Direct Practice Social Work (3 credits) (SASS 549)
- Assessing and Engaging Communities (3 credits) (SASS 566)
- Evaluation of Programs and Practice (3 credits) (SASS 542)
- Field Seminar (1 credit) (SASS 495A)
- Field Placement (3 credits) (SASS 602)
- CWRU Interprofessional Education Experience: Collaborative Practice (two contact-hours per week, 0 credits)

Lesson Learned

During the generalist semester, when students were taking eight courses at the same time, some anticipated that the advanced semester with “only” four courses plus field seminar, field practicum, and IPE would be much easier and less stressful. However, they came to see that the workload was similar.

We observed that less effort and planning had gone into preparing students and faculty for classes in the advanced semester. As a result, some innovations that had helped to

integrate the courses in the generalist curriculum, such as the assignment matrix and standards for number of readings, did not carry forward. We acknowledge this as an area for improvement.

SUMMER 2021 | ASSESSING & REVISING THE CURRICULUM

By the end of Spring semester, we had gathered enough qualitative assessment data from student listening panels, faculty learning communities, course instructional teams, and several midcourse evaluations to plan and implement some revisions to the new competency-based generalist and advanced curricula for the following school year. We acknowledged to each other, as members of the leadership team, that it was important to collect enough data over the course of the year that would reveal meaningful themes (i.e., consistent issues needing to be addressed). As our work progressed, we took more time to collect data to ensure we did not overreact to every perceived challenge reported by students and instructors. Our patience enabled us to make *thoughtful and relevant adjustments*, not whimsical or radical changes.

When reflecting upon this phase of implementation, Dr. Wood offered some additional insight. “We wanted to be sure we were moving in the right direction,” she said. “We did not move too fast with changes that might create unintended negative consequences. We did not want to unintentionally abandon things that were actually working. And we did not want to add new components that might just confuse people and add unnecessary stress.”

After identifying recurring, thematic challenges, we made some adjustments to the structure of the curriculum for Fall Semester 2021.

Sequencing of Courses & Assignments

The next iteration of the curriculum began in August 2021 with new students taking the Change Agent Intensive (CHAI) seminar (1 credit) *for one week* instead of two. Then, like students from the previous year, they took eight courses in the generalist curriculum (see table below). As a reminder, students in the on-campus learning format attend classes and complete assignments in these courses each week for 14 weeks. The sequence is different for students in the in-person (i.e., on-campus and intensive weekend) and online formats. Assessment data obtained from students and instructors during the previous year had referred to the first iteration of the new curriculum as having “too many moving parts,” which meant there were a lot of asynchronous learning activities to be completed before class meetings and a lot of assignments to complete for the different classes, often with competing deadlines.

With assessment data obtained from students and instructors, we made some changes in the sequencing of courses and the timing of assignments over the course of each week of the semester. For example, the Evidence-Informed Practice course and Group Theory and Practice occurred on the same day in consecutive time slots with a key assignment potentially spanning both courses. We also moved a group assignment for a community-practice course in the generalist curriculum to a course in the advanced curriculum. Individual Theory and Practice and Family Theory and Practice were moved to Friday morning, allowing for less densely packed class days as well as allowing for better integration of these two courses. In addition, because the CHAI seminar had been reduced from a two-week to a one-week experience, we did gain a few hours to add to each course.

By changing the sequence of courses and the timing of assignments over the course of each week of the semester, we would achieve the following objectives:

- Make the workload more manageable and enjoyable for students and instructors
- Enhance clarity about the existence of and interrelatedness of the 10 competencies and the legacy of the 8 abilities in the curriculum
- Coordinate assignments among all the classes to maximize understanding and mastery of the 10 competencies
- Increase awareness and integration of related content in different courses among faculty and students

The sequence of courses in the Fall 2021 iteration of the new generalist curriculum in the on-campus format is listed below. (To compare it with the sequence from Fall 2020, see Section 8 of this white paper.) Remember that students commence their social-work studies in the one-week immersive Change Agent Intensive (CHAI) seminar (SASS 502) then take the following courses in this weekly sequence (see Appendix for course descriptions):

Fall 2021 Second Iteration of Course Sequencing in Generalist Curriculum					
Day	Meeting Time	Course / Activity	Course #	Contact Hours	Credit Hours
Monday		• Field Practicum	SASS 601	7.50	
Tuesday	9 to 10:30 am	• Foundations of Social Policy & Service Delivery	SASS 503	1.50	2.00
	11 am to 12:30 pm	• Theories of Human Development and Human Diversity	SASS 504	1.50	2.00
	12:30 to 2 pm	• Lunch			
	2 to 3:30 pm	• Community Theory and Practice	SASS 507	1.50	2.00
	4 to 5 pm	• Field Education Seminar: Organizational Theory & Practice	SASS 495	1.00	1.00
Wednesday	9:15 to 10:45 am	• Evidence-Informed Practice	SASS 528	1.50	2.00
	11:15 am -12:45 pm	• Group Theory & Practice	SASS 509	1.50	2.00
	12:15 to 3 pm	• Lunch			
	3 to 5 pm	• CWRU's Interprofessional Education Experience (IPE): Collaborative Practice		2.00	0.00
Thursday		• Field Practicum	SASS 601	7.50	
Friday	9 to 10:30 am	• Individual Theory and Practice	SASS 508	1.50	2.00
	10:45 am to 12:15 pm	• Family Theory & Practice	SASS 515	1.50	2.00

Faculty Meetings

Also in summer 2021, the leadership team held several meetings with all full-time and adjunct faculty members who would be teaching generalist courses to provide guidance on the adjustments to course sequencing and assignments.

FALL 2021 | ONGOING ASSESSMENT & QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

By mid to late summer 2021, Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), like most colleges and universities in the United States, decided to end mandatory remote learning and return to campus for in-person learning. However, with continuing caution about the enduring COVID-19 pandemic, CWRU did mandate that everyone entering campus wear a facial mask and provide proof of vaccination. COVID vaccines had become available nationwide in spring.

This would be the first time that the generalist curriculum that had been designed for the on-campus and intensive-weekend formats would actually take place in-person and not remotely via Zoom videoconference technology. We are eager to see what the data will show us about the in-person learning experiences without the complications of remote learning.

As we launch the second iteration of our generalist curriculum in August 2021, we have our assessment tools in place to track the progress. As noted in Section 6 & 7 of this paper, we use a variety of assessment methods not only to report our findings to CSWE during the reaccreditation process but also to inform our institutional self-assessment and quality-improvement process, which includes reports to and ongoing conversations with the Dean, Associate Dean, faculty Curriculum Committee and its subcommittees, and individual instructors.

COMPLETE DATA

By December 2021, the School's Office of Educational Outcome Assessment (OEOA) will have collected assessment data for the following:

- Two complete semesters of the new generalist curriculum in the on-campus and intensive weekend format
- A full sequence of generalist courses in the online format
- One semester of the new advanced curriculum in the on-campus and intensive weekend formats

The leadership team has consulted some preliminary assessment data and proposed further adjustments to the curriculum for Fall 2022. These include combining two courses, Individual Theory & Practice and Family Theory & Practice, into one four-credit course; providing academic credit for the IPE experience; and moving the advanced research course out of the second semester into the specialized year. The team is also looking how to maximize the effectiveness of the identity journals; beginning an audit of the readings and videos in each course to assure that they are appropriate for the overall student workload; adding ADEI (anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion) content into all of the courses; and paying attention to **intersectionality across courses**. These adjustments, their rationales, and additional lessons learned will be detailed in future manuscripts.

Of all lessons learned in this curriculum innovation process, the most important one is that **curriculum innovation is a continuous and iterative process**. We can appreciate our accomplishments, but there are always additional improvements to make. When driven

by a set of guiding principles and ongoing data collection and analysis, the curriculum becomes a living, breathing entity that is responsive to the changing needs of the profession and the students, clients, and constituencies that we serve.

| SECTION 10 |

CONCLUSION

This white paper on competency-based social work education chronicles the journey that one school of social work faced when redesigning its entire generalist curriculum during an era of unprecedented pandemic and social unrest. Within the rather extraordinary historical landscape surrounding this curricular initiative, there were substantive opportunities to study and learn from the process of graduate social work curricular reform that may generalize to other schools and curriculum design leaders.

It was clear to us that transformational curricular change is both a process and a product - a constantly evolving multi-layered phenomenon that can always be improved. We kept our eye on the big picture and kept the end in mind. Curriculum change is organizational change built upon existing assets and strengths such as our robust outcomes assessment process and distinguished history with ABLE and competency-based education. Outcomes assessment drove our process and helped to inform our decisions. Other strengths included our breadth of learning platforms (on campus, intensive weekend, online), the development of learning assets and delivery systems, and the use of active learning and flipped classroom models.

The curriculum change process was informed by overarching governing principles which were collaborative, iterative, transparent, and involved frequent communication updates with multiple opportunities for constituent feedback. Because transformational change involves multiple constituents – students, faculty, staff, administrators, community agencies, field advisors, alums, etc., -- there needed to be mechanisms to create frequent high-yield touch points and feedback loops. These mechanisms guided our change process and provided important problem-solving structures. We used a series of student, faculty, and community surveys and listening sessions to gather key information and feedback along the way. While this was time consuming, we became much more efficient at developing

mechanisms to collect key student and faculty input. This greatly enhanced a collective sense of ownership for the new curriculum throughout the school.

In concert with overarching governing principles, we developed a series of key design principles which were central to making the case for transformational curriculum change. Informed by marketplace feedback from both surveys, community stakeholders, and our own graduates, it became apparent that students wanted greater opportunities to gain specialized knowledge. This required us to better consolidate and integrate our generalist curriculum into one semester. The Change Agent Intensive seminar (CHAI) is an immersive learning experience that stands as our premiere example of how to introduce students to the field of social work in an integrated community-based way. It provides a supportive cohort model to jump start graduate social work education. Self-awareness and critical thinking are core features of CHAI helping students to appreciate the multiple interesting perspectives that will shape their classroom and practicum experiences across the levels of social work practice.

Integration lies at the center of our applied curriculum, and it necessitates that students understand how to apply theory and research to practice. It can be conceptualized across both horizontal and vertical dimensions. Horizontally, the curriculum integrates the following *across* each course as much as possible: theory and practice; perspectives from the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities; and 10 professional competencies—knowledge, values, skills, cognitive (intellectual) and affective (emotional) processes, and behaviors expected of and demonstrable by all graduates (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 6).

Vertical integration crosses the generalist and advanced semesters leading to the specialized semesters. Can students apply a theory that they've been introduced to in the generalist semester (e.g., attachment theory) to examine a case in the advanced or specialized semesters to guide the selection and application of a specific practice intervention? Even though students seemed to understand the theoretical models that we were teaching, they clamored for more application examples of how this theory actually is utilized in micro, mezzo, and macro practice situations and settings.

Integration is a shared responsibility and one of the most essential features in our curriculum design because it prioritized the student learning experience across the curriculum while examining issues of redundancy, duplication, as well as gaps in content areas. The small group of curriculum leaders who spearheaded the redesign process taught across all semesters and platforms and were familiar with the actual content of course offerings. This allowed us to more easily identify pockets of duplication and consider opportunities for expanding or deepening applied and specialized student learning. The practicum experience, which is at the heart of social work education, still remains a challenging endeavor to seamlessly coordinate with the student classroom experience.

A major challenge going forward is legacy succession planning to continue this type of curricular leadership. Tenure-track and our most senior faculty often must prioritize research over teaching which can create significant gaps in curricular and pedagogical leadership. We greatly benefited from having a long and consistent succession of curricular leaders. Curriculum belongs to the faculty and the faculty need to be willing and able to invest in its development and maintenance. It is not just a response to accreditation standards but about preparing the next generation of social change leaders to be lifelong learners.

Transformational curricular change is exciting, dynamic, and ongoing. We hope that our experience resonates with others who are considering similar initiatives to shape future social work leaders. We look forward to continuing to learn from and write about our process but also to learning from and witnessing the work of others.

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| APPENDIX |

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

The course descriptions for the new *generalist curriculum* and *advanced curriculum* described in this white paper (see Sections 8 & 9) have been excerpted from the 2020-2021 *Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) General Bulletin*, which can be viewed in its entirety online:

- <https://bulletin.case.edu/bulletinarchives/2020-21/>

GENERALIST CURRICULUM

SASS 495. Field Education: Organizational Theory and Practice Seminar. 1 Unit.

This course is designed to be taken by social work students in the first semester of their master's program. Students enrolled in SASS 495 take SASS 601 Field Education I concurrently. The course provides the support and guidance necessary to assist students to begin to integrate professional experiences as developing social work practitioners and to learn how the human service organization influences the delivery of social work services. Students will be introduced to organizational theory and practice through development of an understanding of their field site. Students will also be introduced to their role as a social work intern, the effective use of supervision, and mechanisms to identify and evaluate their learning goals throughout the course.

SASS 495A. Field Education: Organizational Theory and Practice Seminar II. 1 Unit.

This one credit course is designed to be taken by social work students during the second half of their generalist field education experience. Students enrolled in SASS 495A take SASS 602

Field Education concurrently. The course builds on the first seminar and provides additional support and guidance necessary for students to integrate professional experiences as developing social work practitioners. It also continues the focus on how the human service organization influences the delivery of social work services. Students will continue to learn about social work practice with organizations through continued learning about their field site, and will design a brief intervention to be used at the site. Finally, students will develop a more advanced understanding of the learning agreement, the realities of ethical dilemmas and decision making, self-care and self-advocacy, and prepare for furthering their learning in a specialized field placement. Prereq: SASS 495 and SASS 601. Coreq: SASS 602.

SASS 502. Change Agent Intensive. 1 Unit.

This course provides an intensive introduction to the practice and profession of social work. It is styled as an immersive experience for students to work with faculty and their peers to begin to understand the origins of the profession, the social issues and social problems that are central to social work, the values and ethics that guide our work, and the dilemmas faced by practitioners at all levels of practice. By centering learning within the context of greater Cleveland, students will begin to value the importance of community as a means of understanding practice at all levels—individual, family, group, organization, and community. As a foundational course for developing the ability to value a diverse world, this course provides students with an opportunity to enhance self-awareness and critical thinking through a systematic reflection of their own experiences with oppression and privilege. Students also will be challenged to understand and value the worldviews of persons different from themselves and develop the ability to take different perspectives in their work.

SASS 503. Foundations of Social Policy and Service Delivery. 2 Units.

The course focuses on ethical dilemmas inherent in social policy issues, the political and organizational processes used to influence policy, the process of policy formulation, advocacy, and the use of ethical reasoning in frameworks for examining social policies in light of principles of social, economic, and environmental justice. It examines the philosophical, historical, and socioeconomic foundations of social welfare and the evolution of social policy and the social work profession in the United States. Students are taught to consider current social policy within the context of historical and contemporary factors that shape policy.

SASS 504. Theories of Human Development and Human Diversity. 2 Units.

This generalist course examines theories and research on human development and human diversity. The course explores theories and research on biological, social, cultural, and spiritual development over the lifespan, as well as how oppression and privilege manifest at the individual, institutional, and social/cultural levels and how oppression impacts the life opportunities of members of minority and disenfranchised groups. The course stresses interactions between an individual and their environment.

SASS 507. Community Theory and Practice. 2 Units.

This theory and practice course introduces community (or macro) practice social work. This course advances multiple theories (critical social theory, community capitals theory, conflict theory) and methods of community practice for social workers as agents of social change.

Students learn to design and implement a participatory assessment process at a community level and provides foundational theories and assessment methods. Students learn to conduct quantitative research for assessing community needs and assets. Course work focuses on the development and application of practice skills in work with communities and organizations, particularly models and skills in community building. Focusing on real world situations, the course includes both didactic and experiential teaching and learning. The course integrates and applies foundation learning in the areas of social policy, diversity, discrimination with theories of power and empowerment, human capabilities and asset based community development.

SASS 508. Individual Theory and Practice. 2 Units.

This course focuses on theory and practice with individuals. The overarching goal of ITP is to develop culturally competent social work generalist practitioners who are armed with the knowledge and skills necessary to practice ethically with individuals in diverse social work practice settings. This course is structured to include pre-recorded lecture to be viewed before class, and discussion and experiential laboratory learning in a 1.5 hour face-to-face session. In addition to watching the pre-recorded lectures, there is also considerable preparation time required before each class session. The lab portion provides the opportunity for students to practice skills and receive constructive feedback from the instructor and peers.

SASS 509. Group Theory and Practice. 2 Units.

This course focuses on theory and practice with groups, with a particular emphasis on task groups, psychoeducational groups, skill development and remediation groups, and growth groups. The overarching goal of group theory practice is to develop culturally competent social work generalist practitioners who are armed with the knowledge and skills necessary to practice ethically with groups in diverse social work practice settings. This course is structured to include pre-recorded lecture to be viewed before class, and discussion and experiential laboratory learning in a 1.5 hour face-to-face session. In addition to watching the pre-recorded lectures, there is also considerable preparation time required before each class session. The lab portion will consist of student participation in a live support group regarding their experiences in the social work program and provides the opportunity for students to practice skills and receive constructive feedback from the instructor and peers.

SASS 515. Family Theory and Practice. 2 Units.

This course focuses on theory and practice with families. The overarching goal is to develop culturally competent social work generalist practitioners who are armed with the knowledge and skills necessary to practice ethically with families in diverse social work practice settings. This course is structured to include pre-recorded lecture to be viewed before class, and discussion and experiential laboratory learning in a 1.5 hour face-to-face session. In addition to watching the pre-recorded lectures, there is also considerable preparation time required before each class session. The lab portion provides the opportunity for students to practice skills and receive constructive feedback from the instructor and peers.

SASS 528. Evidence Informed Practice. 2 Units.

This course is an introduction to the research methods and tools used in social work. Premised on CSWE competencies #4 and 9 this course provides the foundational skills needed to evaluate evidence-based/ evidence-informed practice interventions. It includes qualitative and quantitative research content that provides understanding of scientific, analytic, and ethical approaches to building knowledge for practice. Social workers employ research in the provision of high-quality services; to initiate change; to improve practice, policy and social service delivery; and to evaluate their own practice.

ADVANCED CURRICULUM

SASS 542. Evaluating Programs and Practice. 3 Units.

This course prepares social work students in all specializations to critically evaluate the practice and programs that they are involved in. It builds upon the evidence informed practice course in the generalist curriculum and deepens and expands this content as applicable at the advanced practice level. Students learn to use evidence-based research methodology and findings to inform their social work practice. Students will learn to evaluate their practice within their field setting. Students will learn to use single system design methods to evaluate social work interventions with individuals, families, and groups, learning about specifying the intended outcome of worker intervention, systematically collecting and analyzing client system outcome data throughout service delivery, and using this information to guide clinical and ethical decision making.

SASS 547. Problem Identification, Screening and Assessment/Diagnosis. 3 Units.

This course will provide a bio-psycho-social approach to identification, screening, assessment and diagnoses of common psychosocial problems/dysfunctions experienced clients. This course introduces the student to the etiology, recognition and diagnoses of these problems in the context of social work practice. Through use of a competency-based model, students will be introduced to techniques used to screen, assess and diagnose problems such as serious mental illness, suicidality, depression and anxiety, substance abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, and exposure trauma. Students will also become familiar with the use of the DSM IV TR in providing axis I diagnostic formulations. A skills-based approach will be used in presenting students with specific screening, assessment and diagnostic protocols. This course is designed to incorporate a range of issues associated with stages across the lifespan from childhood to late life. Prereq: SASS 477 or SASS 400-TR.

SASS 549. Theory/Practice Approaches in Direct Practice Social Work. 3 Units.

This required, three credit course introduces selected theories and practice approaches commonly used in social work with individuals, families and groups. The course is designed to provide students with knowledge of theoretical explanations and practice frameworks commonly used in direct social work practice. The course also encourages students to apply critical thinking skills to theory and its practical applications. Case presentations, class discussions and assignments will require students to apply various theoretical perspectives to common problems and issues in social work practice. The course will highlight the use of professional social work values and attention to human development issues, diversity and

cultural perspectives as they apply in each theory or framework. Prereq: SASS 477 or SASS 400-TR.

SASS 566. Assessing and Engaging Community for Community Change. 3 Units.

This course enables the student to become a change agent in their organization and community. This course advances multiple theories (critical social theory, community capitals theory, conflict theory) and methods of community practice for social workers as agents of social change. This course builds on foundational theories and research methods, instructing students on applied community facilitation, planning, and organizing models and skills. We will examine strategies of community building and organizing, focusing on communities and organizations as a means of fostering social change and improving the quality of life for individuals and families, especially in historically marginalized communities. Students will learn frameworks and models of community building and community organizing, focusing on the role of the change agent and the change process in the context of structural racism, privilege, and inequity.