Infusion of Gerontology Content in 2005 and 2006 Bachelor and Master of Social Work

Accreditation Reports: A Content Analysis

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Introduction

With the aging of America, increased attention is being given to the needs of older Americans. In 2000, those ages sixty-five and older comprised 35 million people or 12.4% of the American population (United States Census Bureau, 2004). The proportion of the population age 65 and older is projected to increase to nearly 20% by 2030. Perhaps most dramatically, the percentage of those eighty and older will increase from 9.3 million in 2000 to 19.5 million by 2030 (Kinsella & Velkoff, 2001). In anticipation of these trends, social work educators and national organizations such as the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) have placed increased emphasis on preparing students for practice with older adults (CSWE, 2006; Kaye, 2005).

Examples of this increased focus include several John A. Hartford Foundation funded projects such as the CSWE Strengthening Aging and Gerontology Education for Social Work (SAGE-SW) and GeroRich projects, and the New York Academy of Medicine Practicum Partnership Program (PPP). Among their results, the SAGE-SW and PPP projects developed a framework of competencies and evaluation to guide the gerontological education of social workers nationally. The GeroRich Project developed a model for planned curricular and organizational change in order to infuse gerontological competencies and content in foundation coursework (Hooyman, 2006). Seventy-four BSW and MSW programs throughout the United States participated in this three year program from 2001 to 2004.

The best practices and lessons learned from the former SAGE-SW and GeroRich projects have led to the establishment of the CSWE National Center for Gerontological

Social Work Education (Gero-Ed Center). Established with funding from the John A. Hartford Foundation of New York City, the CSWE Gero-Ed Center has developed initiatives to promote the development of gerontological competencies and expertise among faculty in BSW and MSW programs nationwide. In doing so, social work education programs will be able to prepare students to work effectively with older adults and their families as our population grows older (Council on Social Work Education, 2006).

As a result of the national social work initiatives' promotion and support of program and individual faculty development, there has been an increased educational focus on the need to prepare students for gerontological social work practice. Given these efforts, there is a need to assess the degree to which gerontology education is being infused into social work academic programs. Multiple means of assessment are needed to examine the quantity and quality of this infusion. The Gero-Ed Center has begun this assessment by evaluating the impact of the SAGE-SW and GeroRich programs. In addition, Gero-Ed Center programs such as the Curriculum Development Institutes (CDIs), Gerontological Education Institutes (GEIs), Gero-Ed Forum, and various resource development initiatives offer insights into the ways in which this infusion is taking place. Social work researchers, through the SAGE-SW project and Gero-Ed Center, have also contributed to this assessment by examining social work textbooks for content in aging (Tompkins, Rosen, & Larkin, 2006).

An additional way to assess the extent of gerontology in social work education programs is by examining the initial accreditation and reaffirmation self-study documents prepared by university and college social work programs for the CSWE Commission on

Accreditation and Educational Excellence. These documents offer a window into the goals, objectives, and curricula of all accredited social work programs in the United States and its territories. While the primary purpose of these documents is to demonstrate compliance with CSWE accreditation standards, programs report their educational goals and curricula based on their individual mission statements, geographic location and educational needs.

In 2006, the Council on Social Work Education approved a proposal to conduct this analysis as a Senior Scholar Project. The purpose of this report is to present the results from this analysis of gerontology content in self-study documents submitted to CSWE by BSW and MSW programs from fall 2005 to summer 2006. This project had three primary goals:

1. To document the amount of gerontology-related content in BSW and MSW programs as reflected in their self-study documents;

2. To describe the nature and context of the inclusion of gerontology content as well as gaps in content; and

3. To identify recommendations for curriculum development which will promote the continued strengthening of social work gerontological education.

Recent Literature

In the past several years, research on the infusion of gerontology content in social work curricula has continued to increase. A preliminary literature review identifies over forty articles which have been published on this topic since 2001. In addition, professional social work journals such as the *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* have

been presenting research and practice innovations for many years. Recent studies have examined student attitudes toward aging, the need for increased gerontology education for social work students, national and program-specific educational programs and innovations, practice methods, and continuing education.

In the early part of this decade, Tan, Hawkins, and Ryan (2001) conducted a survey of the attitudes toward older adults held by 204 BSW students. They found that overall student attitudes tended to be neutral, though more negative attitudes were expressed toward older age categories. However, students who reported closer relationships with older adults or who had taken gerontology courses tended to report more positive attitudes. The authors note that exposing students to gerontology content is important in order to help students to develop more positive attitudes toward aging and increase student interest in working in gerontology settings.

At the beginning of this decade, research also emerged which indicates that social work education had neglected providing gerontology education to students while the demand for competent practitioners in aging settings was increasing (Rosen & Zlotnik, 2001). Trends in healthcare such as technological advances, increasing patient diversity, family involvement as caregivers, and the growing emphasis on community care have all contributed to the need for increased gerontology instruction in social work education. Research also found that a serious obstacle to preparing students has been a shortage of faculty trained in gerontology (Berkman, Silverstone, Simmons, Volland, & Howe, 2000). As part of the Millennium Project, Sharlach, Damron-Rodriquez, Robinson, and Feldman (2000) also report these concerns and note that the social work profession is not adequately prepared to practice in an aging society.

In response to these findings, other research began to examine the response of national social work organizations, such as CSWE, to addressing these needs. Dobrof (1999) reported on early joint efforts of CSWE and the National Association of Social Workers to assess educator needs, develop aging practice competencies, and develop models of best practices in gerontological social work. Baskind and Briar-Lawson (2005) recently noted this crisis facing the social work profession and discussed several ways our profession is responding through the John A. Hartford Foundation funded Gero-Ed Center and related educational initiatives. Through such initiatives, BSW and MSW programs have begun developing innovative strategies for educating students in gerontology practice. Research which reports these initiatives is now appearing in peer-reviewed journals and books. For example, Hooyman (2006), reports on the impacts of the CSWE Geriatric Enrichment (GeroRich) projects. Her evaluation found that these projects have been successful in infusing gerontological education in social work foundation courses and also in achieving organizational changes which support these curricular efforts.

To address student reluctance to enter the field of gerontology, Sowbel and Ernst (2005) conducted a qualitative content analysis of student interview assignments. They found that factors impacting student interest in gerontology included inexperience in aging issues, fear, and negative stereotypes of aging. In addition, they identified that requiring interviews with older adults helped to reduce these barriers and led to positive learning outcomes for students. Sidell (2006) reported on the experience of a BSW program, located in a rural geographical area, in teaching on-line gerontology content.

An on-line course, developed as part of an interdisciplinary minor in gerontology, now includes social work content for BSW students.

Patterson (2005) found that an effective means for exposing students to aging is the use of intergenerational and cross-cultural narratives. This approach is able to broaden the knowledge base of students about both aging and culture. Crewe (2004) has reported that using ethnogerontology through the curriculum, rather than relying on a single course or concentration, can have positive learning outcomes for students.

Attention has also been given to teaching spirituality and end of life issues. Murdock (2005) presents ideas for infusing spirituality and aging content throughout the curriculum and notes that combining coursework in spirituality and aging can increase student interest in gerontology. Sanders and McFarland (2005) also report on student interest in end of life issues. They note that the subjects of gerontology and end of life issues are related and that students who were interested in gerontology were more likely to be attracted to end of life practice.

In the area of human behavior courses, Gray and Kabadaki (2005) report on enriching HBSE course content by using a strengths perspective for assessing older adults. Innovations in their work include the use of life story techniques, dramatic vignettes which can sensitize students to the challenges of aging, and the use of older adults as guest speakers.

Downey and Miles (2005) report infusing gerontology content into entry-level practice courses for BSW students through the use of experiential learning. Through the use of one-on-one relationships, students develop an appreciation of growing older and knowledge of the aging process while older adults received companionship and the

opportunity to contribute to the development of future social workers. Wilke and Vinton (2003) discuss how the subjects of domestic violence, elder abuse and aging can be interrelated in the social work curriculum in order to expose students to elder domestic violence. The research of Haulotte and McNeil (1998) and Jarotte (2001) also reinforces the value of using experiential learning to enable students to gain an appreciation of geriatric practice. They present models of experiential learning which were used effectively with students in long term care, nursing home, and dementia care settings.

Moving beyond a single course or content area, Lee and Waites (2006) discuss the efforts of their BSW program to infuse aging content throughout the foundation curriculum.   To achieve this goal, the authors implemented a process for curriculum change that included increasing student exposure to aging content, faculty development, and developing an aging-rich environment for faculty and students. Evaluations of this process indicated that students who were exposed to the innovation demonstrated improved attitudes and competencies in gerontology practice.

Vansburger, Crawley-Woods, Gottlieb, and Shelek-Furbee (2005) examined how a stress and resiliency framework can be used to teach adult development and aging to BSW students. Noting that while old age is often a time of increased stress due to declining health and loss, it can also be seen as a period of resilience.   Related to the strengths perspective, the authors propose that using this conceptual model will aid students to develop a comprehensive understanding of aging and the coping strategies used by elders. Barton, Cohen, Thomas, and Sandel (2005) also describe their efforts to infuse gerontology content into their BSW program. An evaluation of four cohorts of students found that the program was successful in increasing student career aspirations in

aging, perceptions of faculty knowledge of aging issues, and positive perceptions of older adults. Part of the CSWE GeroRich project, the authors report on the curricular and organizational changes needed for project sustainability.

Most of this prior research has focused on BSW-level education. Within MSW-level education, Olson (2002) reports that gerontology education can be effectively delivered in brief, concentrated modules. Responding to claims that BSW and MSW curricula is too crowded to accommodate additional content, the author notes that using these modules can be effective in increasing student knowledge and skills. Cummings and Galambos (2002) use symbolic interactionism to identify predictors of student employment interest in geriatric settings. They found that rewarding interactions with elders, frequency of contact and gerontology practice skill level were the most significant predictors of student desire to secure aging-related employment.   Stevens-Roseman (2002) reports on the development of a gerontology concentration in a graduate social work program. The author describes the origins of the concentration and notes that sustainability is attributed to program and community investment in a skilled geriatric social work workforce.

Continuing education in gerontology for social workers has also received new attention. Geron, Andrews, and Kuhn (2005) report that increases in our aging population requires practicing social workers to learn new skills and adapt to changing technology. The authors describe the strategies of the Institute for Geriatric Social Work, funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, and note that continuing education must be affordable, accessible and focused on teaching skill-based competencies.

These recent studies reflect several trends. First, there is recognition of the need to prepare social work educators and students in gerontology. Second, preparation must be skill and competency-based. Third, the CSWE Gero-Ed Center's Curriculum Development projects are working to respond to these needs. While the literature on program specific efforts to increase gerontology education is growing, many of the recent articles are exploratory-descriptive case studies and only a few discuss what is needed for long-term sustainability. Additional research is now needed to identify how, or if, programs across the social work educational spectrum are infusing gerontology content into their curricula. This study attempts to shed some light on this question.

Method

This research was completed during the period of July through December, 2006 and was approved by the Council on Social Work Education as a Senior Scholar Project. The following research questions were addressed in this project:

1. What is the frequency of gerontology related content in social work curricula as reflected in recent BSW and MSW self-study documents?

2. In relation to curricular content areas, where is gerontology content most frequently identified?

3. What is the context in which this content is identified?

4. What curriculum areas can be identified as strengths and which appear to be weaker?

5. Are there differences between programs based on auspice, program size, curriculum model, or prior GeroRich/CDI participation?

      6.   What recommendations can be made for strengthening the infusion of

gerontology content in BSW and MSW programs?

It is important to note that this analysis did not attempt to identify differences based on

participation in the New York Academy of Medicine's Practicum Partnership Project.

Instead, the focus was on CSWE gerontological curricular development initiatives.

Research Design and Sample

      A pre-experimental exploratory case study and content analysis of gerontology

content included in recent BSW and MSW self-study documents was performed to

answer the research questions. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

From October 2005 to June 2006, 79 initial accreditation or reaffirmation self-study

documents were reviewed by CSWE. The Director of the Office of Accreditation and

Educational Excellence requested permission from these 79 programs to use Volume I of

the self-studies in this project. Forty-five programs gave permission and submitted their

Volume I self-studies electronically. Accordingly, an availability sampling method was

used. The response rate was 57%.

Analysis Plan

      To complete the analysis, each self-study was copied to a CD-ROM and

transmitted to the researcher. Each self-study document was loaded into the qualitative

analysis software program Atlas.ti 5.0. This program allows the researcher to conduct

qualitative analysis of large bodies of text and graphical data. In addition, it performs

text, word, and contextual searches as well as compiling frequency distributions and other

univariate means of displaying data (Muhr, 2004). In this project, 10,621 pages of self-

study text were entered into Atlas.ti 5.0.

The project was completed in three phases. First, in the summer of 2006, key word, phrase, and contextual search strategies were developed and tested using a small number of self-study documents. The Atlas.ti program was also tested at this time to determine whether it would be able to perform the word, phrase and context searching needed for a large body of text. Second, all self-studies in the sample were loaded into the program and the content analysis was completed during the months of September and October, 2006. Finally, telephone interviews were held in December, 2006 with three programs which reported a higher than average infusion of gerontology content to examine the rationale and process for their curricular developments.
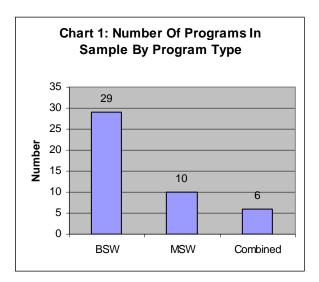
Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. First, the results are representative of only those programs who had recently undergone the initial accreditation or reaffirmation process with CSWE and agreed to participate in this study. It is probable that other programs have gerontology content infused in the curriculum. Second, since this is the first time this analysis has been completed, there is no basis for comparison with the past. Therefore, this study provides only a baseline snapshot of the frequency and context of recent gerontology infusion. Third, it is probable that some of the programs which participated in this study are doing more in the area of gerontology than their self-studies reflect. Since self-study documents are written to demonstrate compliance with CSWE accreditation standards, programs may have not presented detailed discussions of their gerontology content. Lastly, the small sample size of 45 self-studies resulted in small categories for analysis which limits the strength of the results and conclusions.
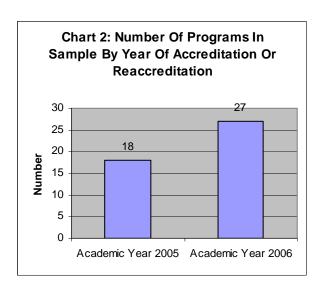
Results

Sample Characteristics

The sample for this study included the 45 BSW, MSW, or combined programs which

agreed to participate in this project. All major geographic areas of the United States were

represented in the sample. Chart 1 presents the sample by type of educational program.

Chart 1: Number Of Programs In Sample By Program Type

Program Type	Number
BSW	29
MSW	10
Combined	6

This chart shows that 29, or 64%, of the programs in the sample were BSW programs and ten, or 22%, were MSW programs. Six or 14% were combined programs.
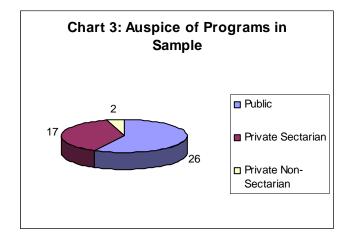
The programs included in the sample had recently submitted self-study documents for initial accreditation or reaffirmation. All of the programs in the sample had been reviewed in 2005 and 2006. Chart 2 presents these results.

Chart 2: Number Of Programs In Sample By Year Of Accreditation Or Reaccreditation

Year	Number
Academic Year 2005	18
Academic Year 2006	27

Eighteen, or 40% of the sample, of the program documents were reviewed in 2005. Twenty-seven or 60% were reviewed in 2006. Eleven, or 24% were reviewed for initial accreditation and 34, or 76%, were reviewed for reaffirmation.
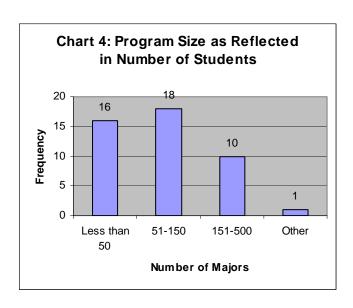
Programs in the sample also varied by auspice: public, private-sectarian, and private non-sectarian. Chart 3 presents an analysis of the auspice of the programs.

Chart 3: Auspice of Programs in Sample

2
17
26

Public
Private Sectarian
Private Non-Sectarian

Twenty-six or 58% of the sample were classified as being located in public institutions, 17 or 38% were classified as private sectarian and two programs, or 4%, were classified as private non-sectarian institutions.
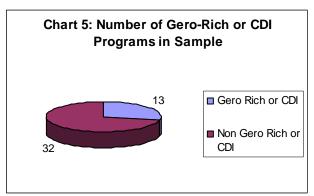
Program size, as reflected in number of BSW and MSW students, was also examined. The programs varied considerably in size. Chart 4 presents this information.

Chart 4: Program Size as Reflected in Number of Students

Frequency

20
16
18
15
10
10
5
1
0

Less than 50   51-150   151-500   Other

Number of Majors

Sixteen, or 36%, or the programs had fifty or fewer students. Eighteen, or 40%, had fifty-one to one hundred and fifty students. Ten programs or 22% had over one hundred and fifty one students. One program was not classified.

The experience of programs in the sample with the CSWE GeroRich or CDI program was also examined. The sample included programs with these experiences and

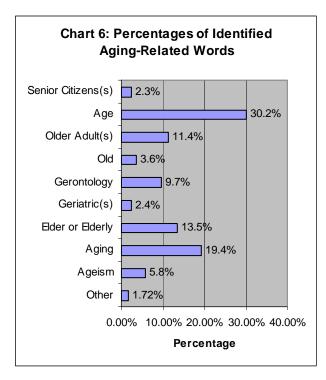those which had not participated. Chart 5 presents these results.

Chart 5: Number of Gero-Rich or CDI Programs in Sample

13

32

☐ Gero Rich or CDI

☐ Non Gero Rich or CDI

Thirteen, or 29%, of the programs in the sample had participated in the CSWE GeroRich or CDI projects. Thirty- two, or 71%, had not participated in these programs. Nationally, 139, or 21% of accredited programs have participated in the GeroRich or CDI projects.   A higher percentage of programs in this study had participated in the GeroRich or CDI projects than was the case of all programs nationally.

Frequency of Gerontology Content

Chart 6: Percentages of Identified Aging-Related Words

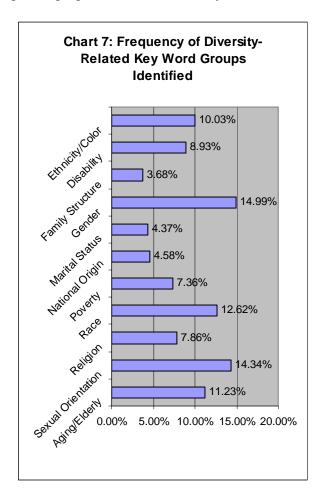| Category	Percentage
Senior Citizens(s)	2.3%
Age	30.2%
Older Adult(s)	11.4%
Old	3.6%
Gerontology	9.7%
Geriatric(s)	2.4%
Elder or Elderly	13.5%
Aging	19.4%
Ageism	5.8%
Other	1.72%

Percentage

An initial key word search was conducted of all 10,621 pages included in the self-study documents. They key words were drawn from the Library of Congress and from discussions with staff in the CSWE Gero-Ed Center. A listing of these key words is included in Appendix I.

The most frequently identified word was "age". This word was used primarily in each program's statement of non-discrimination, in program objectives which assure non-

discrimination, and in Accreditation Standard (A.S.) 6, Non-Discrimination and

Diversity.   In the initial analysis, it was found that the appearance of this term did not

always imply the inclusion of gerontology content. Rather, it may have referred to non-

discrimination on the basis of age which could also include children, young persons,

middle age adults, or older adults. An example from one self-study document which was

reflective of this finding was:

> *Program Objective # 3: Our program prepares students to practice without discrimination on the basis of age, class, color, culture, disability, family structure, ethnicity, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.*

In those cases where the term "age" <u>directly</u> referred to an age group other than older

persons, the key word occurrence was deleted from the analysis. Key words which were

identified most frequently and reflected content on gerontology instruction included

"age", "aging", "elders" or "elderly", "older adults", and "gerontology".

Chart 7: Frequency of Diversity-Related Key Word Groups Identified

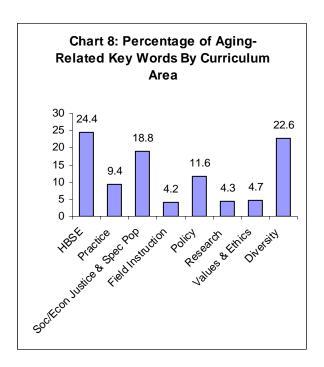| Key Word Group	Percentage
Ethnicity/Color	10.03%
Disability	8.93%
Family Structure	3.68%
Gender	14.99%
Marital Status	4.37%
National Origin	4.58%
Poverty	7.36%
Race	12.62%
Religion	7.86%
Sexual Orientation	14.34%
Aging/Elderly	11.23%

The analysis also compared the frequency of key aging and gerontology related words with other key words associated with diversity in social work education and reflected in CSWE required content on non-discrimination and diversity.   Chart 7 reflects the result of this analysis.

As Chart 7 shows, terms related to aging and elderly appeared more frequently than most other words

associated with diversity. In 11.23% of the total occurrences of diversity-related words, terms related to aging and elderly appeared. Only the terms related to sexual orientation, race, and gender appeared more often.

Curriculum Content Areas

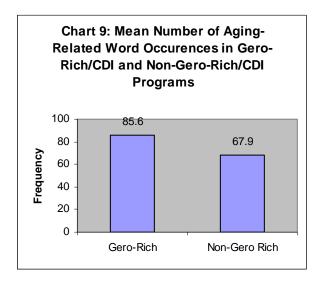**Chart 8: Percentage of Aging-Related Key Words By Curriculum Area**

The analysis also examined the context of where the key words appeared. In this analysis, the documents were electronically segregated into the eight CSWE required curriculum area and a key word search was performed. Chart 8 presents the results of this analysis.

In this analysis, the curriculum areas of human behavior and social environment (24.4%), diversity (22.6%), and social-economic justice and vulnerable populations (18.8%) were the areas with the most frequently identified key words related to gerontology. Areas with lesser gerontology content included policy (11.6%), practice (9.4%), field instruction (4.2%), research (4.3%), and values and ethics (4.7%). An example of this content in HBSE courses was stated by one university with a

BSW program: *Recognize and correctly apply theories of human behavior relevant to middle, late and very late adulthood (Psychosocial theory stages 7 & 8, successful aging theory, i.e., Vaillant, Baltes, spirituality theory) (B.A.S.W. Program Objective 6).*

An analysis of the mean number of gerontology-related words in CSWE GeroRich or CDI participant projects (n=13) as compared with non-participating programs (n=32) was also completed. Chart 9 presents these results.

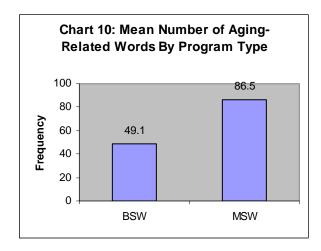**Chart 9: Mean Number of Aging-Related Word Occurences in Gero-Rich/CDI and Non-Gero-Rich/CDI Programs**

As this chart shows, those programs which participated in the GeroRich or CDI projects had a higher mean number of gerontology key word occurrences than did those programs which were not participating in the GeroRich or CDI projects.

Specifically, the programs participating in the GeroRich or CDI projects had a mean of 85.6 gerontology-related word occurrences. Programs which were not participating had an average of 67.9 word occurrences. This difference was statistically significant ($F=4.09$, $df=1,43$, $p<.05$).

Several of the programs which participated in the GeroRich initiative wrote about how the project led to increasing gerontology content in their curriculum.

For example, one university with a combined BSW-MSW program used their GeroRich project to infuse their curriculum with gerontology by requiring students to write integrative papers in each curriculum area with a focus on aging. Another combined BSW-MSW program has infused gerontology content by 1) providing a gerontology course for all BSW junior students, and 2) infusing the BSW practice methods course with gerontological counseling skills. Further, in field instruction, students are placed in gerontology settings and continuing education on gerontology is provided to field instructors.

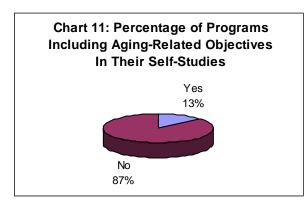**Chart 10: Mean Number of Aging-Related Words By Program Type**

The analysis also examined differences between BSW and MSW programs. Combined programs were not included in this part of the analysis. Chart 10 shows that MSW programs had a mean number of 86.5 occurrences of gerontology-

related words in their self-study documents, and BSW programs had a mean number of 49.1 key word occurrences. This difference can in part be explained by the fact that BSW programs have a curriculum model of generalist social work practice while MSW programs may offer an aging-related concentration or specialization in the advanced curriculum year. For example, in this analysis, three of the ten MSW programs in the analysis, or 30%, had specific concentrations related to aging services.

Goals, Objectives and Instruction

To more fully understand the context in which these key words appeared, an analysis was done of whether the gerontology-related key words appeared in 1) program goals and objectives and 2) classroom instruction and assignments. Chart 11 presents the results of this analysis for program goals and objectives. Chart 12 presents the results for classroom instruction.

Chart 11: Percentage of Programs Including Aging-Related Objectives In Their Self-Studies

Yes 13%

No 87%

Six, or 13%, of the programs in the sample had specific objectives related to aging in their self-study documents. Thirty-nine, or 87%, did not have objectives related to aging.

As an example, one public university described the geographic location and needs of citizens as factors which lead to the establishment of their gerontology objective:

While preparing students for entry-level professional practice in any geographic setting, the Social Work Department seeks to address the particular needs of the _____ region, a largely rural, impoverished area where the populations at risk are predominantly African American, children, women, and the elderly.

Another university, with a private sectarian auspice, identified a specific objective as follows:

Demonstrate the generalist practice model with two populations at risk, vulnerable children and the disenfranchised elderly.

What were the areas of classroom or field instruction where gerontology-related content most frequently occurred? Chart 12 presents the results of this analysis.

Chart 12: Percentages of Aging-Related Words By Type of Assignment

Other Assignments: 4.2
Field Instruction: 13.6
Experiential Assignments: 11.4
Student Presentations: 3.8
Written Papers: 9.5
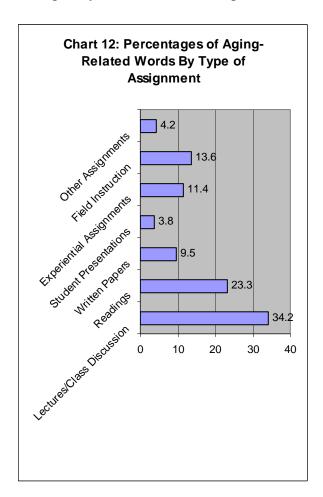Readings: 23.3
Lectures/Class Discussion: 34.2

Chart 12 shows that gerontology content was most frequently identified in lectures and class discussion (34.2%), readings (23.3%), field instruction (13.6%), and other types of experiential assignments (11.4%). Written papers (9.5%), student presentations (3.8%), and other student assignments (4.2%) were identified less frequently as having gerontology-related content. A number of the programs wrote about these types of assignments.

For example, _____ university requires all students to complete specific gerontology course work. Several require experiential interviews with older persons. Integrative papers which relate gerontology theory to practice are required by _____ program.

Accreditation Year

Finally, an analysis of mean gerontology-related word occurrences was completed for the years of 2005 and 2006 to determine whether differences existed. Eighteen, or 40%, of the self-study documents were reviewed by CSWE in 2005 and twenty-seven, or 60%, were reviewed in 2006. Chart 13 presents the results of this analysis.

Chart 13: Mean Number of Gerontology-Related Word Occurences By Accreditation Year
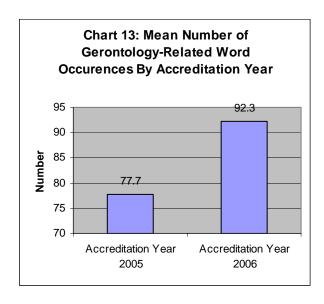
Chart 13 shows that the mean number of gerontology-related word occurrences increased from 2005 to 2006. In 2005, there were a mean number of 77.7 words in each self-study document and in 2006, the mean increased to 92.3 words.

Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews were held with three programs which reported a higher average amount of gerontology content in their self-studies. Two programs were accredited BSW programs and one was an accredited BSW/MSW combined program. The three programs included public and private sectarian institutions and they varied in size from less than 50 majors to over 151 majors. One program was located in a small city, near major metropolitan areas in the northeast and the other two programs were located in the southern United States, one in a rural area and the other in a major metropolitan area. Each interview was thirty minutes in length and the respondents were program directors or senior faculty. Each respondent was paid a small stipend for their participation. A copy of the interview schedule is included in the Appendix Two.

The focus of the interviews was on identifying factors that had been influential in the program's decision to infuse gerontology content in their curriculum. A number of consistent themes emerged during these interviews. Factors which were cited most frequently included geographic area and community need for hiring social workers

trained to work with older adults, faculty expertise and interest in gerontology, the expectation of the faculty that gerontology content will be infused in every course, and the development of a multi-stage process for this infusion. Although not consistently sequential, these programs all used a process which included such steps as 1) hiring faculty with gerontology expertise, 2) small group or committee for gerontology curriculum development, 3) identification of specific program and curriculum objectives addressing the infusion of gerontology content, 4) requiring that all foundation courses include gerontology content, and 5) receiving strong support from the program director or chairperson.

In these interviews, two programs identified the curriculum areas of human behavior and social environment, and policy as having the most gerontology content. They noted that more effort is needed to include gerontology content in practice and field instruction courses. This was consistent with findings from the review of all 45 programs in this study. All three programs had a strong commitment to the demographic imperative of preparing gerontologically competent graduates. One program reported that if it were up to the students they would not have gerontology infused into their curriculum but state that, "We genuinely believe and know that…all students either working in the public or private sector will encounter issues around aging and geriatrics. We just believe that."

Discussion

The results presented in this report are representative of only the 45 programs which agreed to participate in this study. While the results offer only a snapshot of

gerontology content infusion as reflected in these self-study reports, there are several important themes which emerged from the data analysis.

First, the content analysis indicates that the number of gerontology-related key words is increasing over time. While the reasons for this increase are not completely clear and this study lacked the methodological rigor required for any statement of causation, it could mean that the growing emphasis on gerontology education by CSWE is resulting in an increase in gerontology content by programs. This possibility is bolstered by the results of this study which show that GeroRich or CDI participating programs had more gerontology content in their self-studies than did non-participating programs.

Secondly, the majority of gerontology content was infused in the curriculum areas of HBSE, diversity, social-economic justice and vulnerable populations, and policy. To a lesser extent, the areas of practice, field instruction, research, and values and ethics reflected this content. This suggests that programs are including gerontology content in courses which serve as a foundation for practice and are often theory-driven. However, converting theory from HBSE, and knowledge from policy and diversity into practice knowledge and skills remains a challenge. Efforts by CSWE to showcase innovative gerontology practice course and field instruction initiatives is occurring with such events as the Gero-Ed Forum and with the extensive curricular resources available at no cost on the Gero-Ed Center's web site. These events and resources, as well as individual program efforts, will be needed to bridge the gaps from theory to practice in social work gerontology education.

Third, it is encouraging that the results of this study indicate that the Hartford Foundation investment in the CSWE SAGE-SW and GeroRich projects and the CSWE Gero-Ed Center has resulted in an increase in gerontology content in the participating programs' curricula. A number of the participating programs in this analysis have expanded course offerings and individual faculty are involved in gerontology research and community outreach.

Fourth, there do not appear to be significant differences among programs based on program auspice or size. There is, however, a difference between BSW and MSW programs. MSW programs, in this sample, reported higher levels of gerontology content than did the BSW programs. As noted previously, this may result from the fact that BSW programs are generalist in scope while many MSW programs offer specializations or concentrations in aging related practice.

Fifth, over 40 percent of the programs in this study reported using experiential learning exercises such as volunteer assignments, interviews with older persons, and field instruction to teach students about gerontology. Previous research has shown that these experiential opportunities can lead to an increase in positive attitudes about aging and in gerontology career aspirations by students (Downey & Miles, 2005; Haulotte & McNeil, 1998).

Finally, findings from both the content analysis and follow-up interviews indicate that programs tended to have more gerontology content if they articulated specific program goals or objectives for gerontology education, hired faculty with expertise in this area, created organizational opportunities for curriculum development, and received support for gerontology education from the chairperson or director. In those BSW and

MSW programs where objectives on teaching gerontology content were included, there was a greater likelihood of gerontology content throughout the curriculum. In those cases where there were no objectives related to gerontology, content on aging was more limited, defused, and tended to appear in theory-driven courses such as HBSE that typically include a portion of the course on later life and older adulthood. Programs that identified higher community needs for gerontology practice also reported higher levels of gerontology content.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how gerontology content is being infused into social work educational curricula by reviewing recent BSW and MSW initial accreditation and reaffirmation reports. Forty-five BSW and MSW self-study documents were reviewed using qualitative content analysis and quantitative methods. All self-study reports were submitted to the Council on Social Work Education during 2005 and 2006.

The results show emerging themes and patterns which suggest that gerontology education is being increasingly embedded into curricula in many programs. In addition, CSWE projects such as GeroRich and SAGE-SW, as well as the CSWE Gero-Ed Center, have demonstrated success in increasing gerontology content in participating programs (Hooyman, 2006). However, this study has also found that there are gaps in content across programs, and greater efforts are needed to move from the inclusion of gerontology content in foundation HBSE and diversity courses to practice methods and field instruction courses.

Since there is no basis for comparison of these findings with years prior to 2005, it is difficult to examine historical trends. Future research on this topic might replicate

this content analysis method and begin examining the infusion of content on a longitudinal basis. A similar content analysis after five years would identify changes in gerontological content over time as well as whether they have been sustained. Future research on the Partnership Practicum Project, following the implementation of the currently funded programs, is also recommended to determine their impacts on moving gerontological social work education from the classroom to the community.

Appendix One

Listing of Gerontology-Related Key Words Used in the Analysis

Age
Aged
Agedness
Ageism
Aging
Cross-generational
Elder abuse
Elder care
Elder
Elders
Elderliness
Elderly
Geriatric
Gero
Gerontology
Intergenerational
Kinship care
Later adulthood
Maturate
Mature
Multigenerational
Older adult
Older adults
Senectitude
Senescence
Senior (not grade level)
Senior citizen
Senior citizens
Seniors (not grade level)

Appendix Two

Telephone Interview Schedule

1. Name(s) of Respondent:
2. Name of Institution:
3. Date of Interview:
4. Auspice of Program:
5. Program Type: ____ BSW _____ MSW _____ Combined
6. Participated in the GeroRich Program (2001-04) ____ Yes _____ No
7. Currently participating in the CDI program _____ Yes _____ No
8. We have noticed in your most recent self-study that you have included content on gerontology in your foundation curriculum. What factors have been most influential in your faculty's decisions to include this content?
9. Please tell us about the process you have used to include this content.
10. Have you identified specific student learning goals or objectives in gerontology?
11. Have you used any of the gero competencies available on the Gero-Ed Center website – or developed gero competencies on your own?
12. What areas of your foundation curriculum include the most gerontology content currently?
13. What future plans do you have for continuing to include gerontology content in your foundation curriculum?
14. Do you have faculty who specialize in gerontology? If so, how many?
15. Do you offer specialized coursework in gerontological social work (e.g., electives, a concentration, a minor or certificate)?   If so, approximately how many students enroll a year?
16. Are there other things you would like us to know about how you are providing gerontology education for students?

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