This document begins with a brief overview of the MSW curriculum. It describes our approach to assessment, assessment methods, and analysis and application of results. The MSW program is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and CSWE requirements guide the purpose, content, and structure of the curriculum. They also influence heavily our approach to assessment, and its procedures, content, and timing.

Curriculum Overview
The MSW Program implements its mission and goals through a curriculum aimed at the preparation of advanced social work practitioners. The curriculum consists of a professional foundation in the first year and advanced curriculum in the second year.

The foundation curriculum provides a generalist perspective and emphasizes preparation of social workers who can practice with diverse population groups. To assure a common base for social work practice, the faculty has identified a required foundation curriculum to be completed by all students, regardless of their choice of concentration. This includes required courses in generalist social work practice, social welfare policy and services, diversity and social justice, human behavior in the social environment, and research. The generalist social work practice sequence is designed to prepare students to offer social work services in a generalist practice framework based on the ecosystems, strengths and empowerment perspectives. Students develop skills in anti-oppressive and non-discriminatory practice with diverse populations across five levels of practice – individual, family, group, organization, and community. Content on social work values and ethics, populations at risk, and diversity and social justice are infused throughout the foundation curriculum. Three terms of concurrent foundation field placement are an integral part of the foundation curriculum.

The advanced curriculum builds on the professional foundation. Students choose one of three advanced practice concentrations, Direct Human Services, Community Based Practice, and Social Service Administration and Leadership. The Direct Human Services concentration prepares students for agency-based direct social work practice. The courses focus on application of theories to the direct social work practice process and the development of each student’s personal model of practice, taking into considering the importance of culture, strengths, and empowerment. In Community Based Practice students learn about assessment, planning, and intervention at the individual, family, neighborhood, and service delivery system levels. Students in this concentration explore individual and community resilience while assisting in implementing local strategies that strengthen protective factors and lower risk factors for ethnically and culturally diverse families, schools, neighborhoods, and communities. The Social Service Administration and Leadership sequence prepares students to develop and manage the conditions, processes, and systems that support the effective delivery of services that benefit consumers. Students in this concentration will be prepared to occupy diverse social work roles.
including leading and managing programs, teams, and work groups, supervising and supporting others, securing and coordinating resources, assessing consumer needs and developing programs, advocating for the needs of groups of consumers, collaborating with community agencies and consumer groups to improve services and service delivery, and participating in the policy-making process.

The three concentrations prepare professional social workers to fulfill the purpose of social work:
1) to promote, restore, maintain and enhance the social functioning of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;
2) to plan, formulate, and implement social policies, services, resources, and programs to meet human needs and develop human capacities;
3) through organizational or administrative advocacy and social or political action to empower groups at risk and to promote social and economic justice; and
4) to develop and test professional knowledge and skills.

In addition to foundation and advanced coursework, students complete a concurrent two day-a-week field placement in generalist practice in their first year and in their concentration in the second year. Field experience provides students with the opportunity to apply and test theories and skills learned in the classroom and to engage in practice with diverse and often marginalized populations. In addition to generalist practice learning objectives that outline the knowledge, skills, and values all students must achieve in the foundation field placement, each concentration has identified learning objectives specific to the advanced field placement and complementary to the advanced practice courses. In the second year, required advanced elective courses in research, HBSE, policy, and social work practice and free electives complete the students’ course of study.

**Approach to Assessment**

**Moving Towards Continuous Assessment of Competencies**

The MSW faculty views assessment as a critical tool for ensuring program accountability. In the past, comprehensive assessment of the entire curriculum and its elements has occurred in conjunction with reaccreditation. Assessment of curriculum elements occurred annually, with feedback to faculty. Assessment centered on content delivered in the classroom.

Recent changes in CSWE reaccreditation standards emphasize continuous assessment with immediate feedback and ongoing program improvement. These ideas are consistent with initiatives already underway in our School. This is occurring at a time when we are in the early phase of revising the MSW curriculum in preparation for the upcoming reaccreditation cycle. The timeline for reaccreditation of the MSW program by CSWE appears below, because the timeline will guide us as we complete this transition.
Our goal is to have a fully operational continuous assessment and feedback system in place at the conclusion of the upcoming reaccreditation cycle.

**Curriculum Assessment**

In addition to a shift towards continuous assessment, CSWE now mandates that the MSW curriculum – and its assessment – center on a set of 10 core competencies:

1. Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.
2. Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.
3. Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.
4. Engage diversity and difference in practice.
5. Advance human rights and social and economic justice.
7. Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.
8. Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.
9. Respond to contexts that shape practice.
10. Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

This represents a departure from a focus on what is *taught*, to an emphasis on what graduates need to be able to *do* upon program completion.
In recent years, a focus on competencies has featured more heavily in our approach to assessment, independent of CSWE’s new mandate. The competencies we identified and are now assessing are similar to those required by CSWE, although we will need to modify these as we move through the curriculum revision and reaccreditation process. CSWE encourages further specification of each competency and individualization across programs through the identification of discrete “practice behaviors.” These can be thought of as indicators of a particular competency. As described in “Assessment Methods” (below), current assessment of competency attainment principally occurs in students’ field placements.

As we revise the MSW curriculum we aim to build in assessment procedures for each curriculum element (e.g., course, practicum, course of study for School Social Work) that use multiple methods to assess practice behaviors linked to targeted competencies relevant to that curriculum element. Procedures are likely to include a mix of existing methods along with new means for measuring competency attainment. We will also strengthen existing procedures, and develop new procedures, for feeding back information from assessment to faculty to ensure ongoing program improvement.

Assessment of Other Program Elements
Consistent with CSWE requirements, our approach includes assessment of the School’s “implicit curriculum,” which refers to contextual characteristics that influence the learning environment (e.g., institutional capacity, faculty qualifications). Of note, this includes assessment of the school’s climate, especially regarding the extent to which students from diverse backgrounds perceive the school to be a welcoming, affirming, and constructive learning environment. To date, we have completed a single comprehensive assessment of climate, and we aim to move towards continuous assessment in this key area.

The MSW Student Handbook appears in the section that addressed Precondition E. The Handbook describes in detail how we assess student learning in classroom and field instruction. Student course evaluations occur at the completion of each academic term, and results are provided to instructors and, as applicable, to the MSW administration and/or the School’s Promotion, Tenure, and Merit committee. Instructors are expected to use student evaluations to guide ongoing course improvement. An important component of our assessment approach involves obtaining retrospective information from graduates through an annual Alumni Survey about their experiences in the program and its usefulness in preparing them for their career.

Stakeholder Participation
Input from a broad range of stakeholders will feature heavily in curriculum revision and the design of procedures for continuous assessment and program improvement. We will convene focus groups and use World Café methodology to collect this information, beginning in the current term (spring 2011). Key stakeholders include students, alumni, consumers of social work services, agency staff and administrators, and other groups. We are interested in designing and implementing procedures that will ensure that the voices of stakeholders – especially those from marginalized communities – are well represented in assessment. Further, the envisioned system of
continuous improvement will provide stakeholders with easy access to assessment results and to information regarding the extent to which the program is responsive to community concerns.

Summary
Our approach to assessment is undergoing a major shift. In the past, assessment has been closely linked to the reaccreditation cycle, with an emphasis on a comprehensive assessment conducted in conjunction with the reaccreditation self-study. Ongoing assessment and program improvement occurred, but was not emphasized as heavily as it will be in the future. We are moving to an approach characterized by continuous assessment of core competencies, with ongoing feedback and program improvement. This will be increasingly true as we embark on a revision of the MSW curriculum and enter the next CSWE reaccreditation cycle. Throughout this process we aim to draw heavily on the experience and perspectives of stakeholders as we strengthen existing methods and develop new methods for assessing the curriculum and other program elements, and for ongoing program improvement.

Assessment Methods
Until recently, assessment of the curriculum occurred primarily through student self-reported ratings of pretest and posttest knowledge and skills in selected foundation and advanced courses, along with rubric-guided ratings of a random sample of student work from these courses. In the 2009-2010 academic year we moved to use of a newly devised tool for evaluating student competencies in the field practicum. The rationale is that student competencies in field are strong indicators of the extent to which students are mastering and applying the knowledge and skills they gain in classroom and field instruction. Additionally, both the student and field instructor rate attainment of each competency, thus increasing the validity of the tool and providing a means to assess its reliability. A notable limitation of this approach is that a true pretest is lacking, because the first measurement occurs near the end of the student’s first term in field, and not at the beginning of the program. That PSU operates on a quarter system, with each term lasting only ten weeks, mitigates this limitation somewhat.

Below are details of the current Field Evaluation System as it is implemented at the individual-student level. Current assessment of the MSW program curriculum and its elements occurs by aggregating data from field and examining descriptive statistics over the three academic terms for foundation (i.e., Generalist Practice) students and students within each advanced concentration. As noted above, we will modify the procedures as we revise the MSW curriculum and prepare for reaccreditation. Consistent with CSWE guidelines, we will also ensure that assessment includes at least two methods for measuring attainment of each competency.

Field Evaluation System
Key tools in the Field Evaluation System are the Field Educational Plan and the Evaluation of Student Learning, documents that are used to guide and evaluate students’ progress toward mastery of social work competencies. Copies are appended to this document. Current assessment of competency attainment occurs in the field, but it should be emphasized that classroom instruction aims to provide students with the knowledge base necessary for mastery of competencies, as demonstrated in field. Thus, we believe assessment of competencies in
field represents a strong indicator of classroom learning.

The Field Educational Plan outlines specific activities at the student’s field placement that will facilitate competency attainment and allow for evaluation. The student and field instructor, in consultation with the faculty advisor/liaison, develop the plan at the beginning of the placement, revising it quarterly as needed. The Evaluation of Student Learning provides a list of competencies that students are expected to master. The student, field instructor, and faculty advisor/liaison complete the evaluation at the end of every term to document the student’s progress toward mastering these professional competencies.

The Field Educational plan articulates the schedule and activities that support development of social work competencies. Social work practice activities are site-specific and individualized with the goal of facilitating the student’s successful professional development. The expectation is that the student will have various experiences that allow her/him to be evaluated on the competencies in the Evaluation of Student Learning. The Student and Field Instructor develop the plan during the first five weeks of the field placement. The faculty advisor/liaison is available for consultation around appropriate learning activities. The Field Educational Plan is completed online at the School’s Student Web Center.

Educational activities are opportunities that allow students to demonstrate development of professional practice skills and move toward mastery of competencies. Selecting educationally useful activities that are tied to this professional growth requires thought and planning. The following questions are useful guides to assess the value and relevance of an educational activity.

- What is the purpose of the activity? Will it give the student an opportunity to practice the kind of skill being evaluated?
- Does the activity build on and complement knowledge and skills gained in classroom instruction?
- Does the activity build on, or encourage the student to examine, knowledge or skills brought from past experience? Learning is incremental—a process of growth; learning activities need to be appropriate to the student’s present knowledge/skill level.
- Does the activity challenge the student to grow and provide satisfaction in carrying it out? Doing familiar tasks or "busy work" does not increase competency.
- Is there a balance between observational and participatory activities? It is important to provide ample opportunity for the student to put theory into practice.
- How feasible is the activity? Are there agency resources to support the activity? Once an activity has begun, there should be sufficient agency resources to assure its completion.
- Does the activity give the student an opportunity to increase independent performance? Activities should permit the student to progress from supervised to self-directed practice.
- Does the activity give the student a sense of ownership and accomplishment? Activities that are clearly linked to competencies and allow for some autonomy encourage growth.
- Does the activity engage the student in thinking about the total problem/case/issue? Task focused activities increase growth when students can appreciate how they link with other
The Evaluation of Student Learning is designed to evaluate the student on a list of professional competencies that align with the School of Social Work’s goals and objectives. This list of competencies is a useful guide for field instructors and students in identifying educational activities (cases, projects, meetings, etc.) that promote the development and demonstration of skills. The evaluation is completed online at the Student Web Center. Each term the student and field instructor determine a performance rating for each of these professional competencies. In addition, students and field instructors are given opportunities to identify strengths, concerns and areas of growth through a series of open-ended evaluative questions. The faculty advisor/liaison uses this information and professional judgment to determine whether the student passes the field placement. Evaluation at the final term of each sequence is modified slightly to reflect an overall evaluation that identifies the student’s readiness to proceed to the MSW advanced year or professional MSW practice.

The MSW Generalist Practice evaluation contains 16 competencies that have been identified by CSWE, the School of Social Work, and the professional practice community as representing the core outcomes of the generalist practice (i.e., foundation) year. The MSW Advanced Practice field placement evaluations (Direct Human Services, Community Based Practice, Social Services Administration and Leadership) include the 16 generalist as well as additional competencies that represent the advanced expectations associated with those practice areas. The original 16 generalist practice competencies continue in the advanced year as students are expected to continue to strengthen, deepen, and solidify their performance in these domains.

The ongoing evaluation of a student's performance is an integral part of the field instructor's responsibilities. During weekly supervision sessions, the field instructor can help the student identify specific performance strengths and weaknesses, evaluate progress toward mastering competencies, and demonstrate professional responsibility. The evaluation conference at the end of the term, which includes the faculty advisor/liaison, the student, and the field instructor is used to summarize the student's performance in relationship to mastering the competencies identified on the Evaluation of Student Learning. It should also provide the student with a clear sense of direction for future learning activities.

In addition to the field instructor’s direct observation and supervisory discussions with the student, using information from multiple sources, increases the reliability of the evaluation. Various sources of evaluative information can include:
• Student written reports, case evaluations, process recordings, audio or video recordings, and self-evaluation;
• Field instructor observations of student interviews, case presentations and participation in staff meetings;
• Feedback from colleagues and professionals who have worked with or observed the student.

Each quarter the field instructor and the student evaluate the student’s performance on all competencies using a five-point scale. Each competency represents a continuum running from
exceptional to marginal performance and is relative to a typical student at this point in their development

5 – Exceeds competence level expected by the end of the year
4 – Competent
3 – Achievement of competence in progress
2 – Needs focused attention and learning
1 – Concern, needs immediate attention

N/O – Not observed (field instructor) or No opportunity (student)

In addition to the rating for each learning outcome, students and field instructors respond to open ended questions about the student’s professional development. The last page of the Evaluation of Student Learning form provides space for additional comments by student, field instructor, and faculty advisor/liaison.

Other Tools
A copy of the annual Alumni Survey, used to assessment graduates’ satisfaction with the MSW program and its usefulness in preparing them for their careers, is appended. Also appended is the survey designed to assess the School’s Cultural Climate. This survey has been administered to students, faculty, and staff once; in the future it, or a revised version, will be administered on a yearly basis. Under development is an exit survey for graduating students that aims to assess students’ perceptions of various program elements. Ideally, this will be complemented by student-led focus groups. The target date for implementing this for the first time is Spring 2011.

Analysis
Field Evaluation data for each student from all three terms are stored in a secure database and exported into an SPSS dataset. Separate descriptive analyses on data aggregated by program status (i.e., Generalist, Advanced DHS, Advanced CBP, and Advanced SSAL) are completed to assess the impact of each curriculum element. The focus is on the mean student rating and mean field instructor rating at the end of fall, winter, and spring terms within each of these groupings. Results are presented graphically. For example, below please see results for a Generalist Practice competency related to anti-oppressive practice:
Similar graphs are generated for each Generalist Practice competency and for each competency related to the three Advanced Practice Concentrations.

Analysis of data from the Alumni survey includes obtaining descriptive statistics for respondents as a whole along with subgroup analysis by key demographic variables (race/ethnicity, gender), program status (full-time, part-time), and advanced concentration. A graduate assistant prepares a summary report of these findings. We used a similar approach in analyzing results from the survey of the School’s Cultural Climate.

**Application of Results**

The MSW Program engages in program evaluation – and curriculum redesign – primarily through the MSW Curriculum Committee and its subcommittees. The MSW Program Director presents results of field evaluation data on competency attainment for a particular academic year to the committee, usually in late fall or early winter term of the subsequent year. The Curriculum Committee comprises chairs of each curriculum sequence and concentration, who share evaluation results with the faculty teaching in the respective curriculum areas. The chair may invite the Program Director to attend a sequence or concentration meeting to go over results in greater detail. Within each sequence and concentration, faculty review results regarding competency attainment and use this information to revise and fine tune course content and instructional methods as warranted.

Results of the Alumni Survey are presented to the entire faculty at a regular faculty meeting, and concentration and sequence chairs and instructors are encouraged to consider these results as they revise course content and methods. However, items on the Alumni Survey focus on rather broad perceptions of the usefulness of curriculum elements and do not yield detailed information to guide specific curriculum revisions. At the same time, this feedback provides faculty with general information that aids in assessment of overall program effectiveness.

The Climate Survey provided detailed information about the perceptions of students, staff, and faculty regarding issues such as the extent to which the School (a) welcomes and supports diverse students, (b) promotes inclusiveness, and (c) incorporates values of social justice into its formal curriculum, policies, and practices. Below is the conclusion of the report of the survey results:

While the School of Social Work has made important steps to increase the diversity of our faculty, staff, and students and to provide support for student success, this survey suggests that further work is needed to assure a climate of inclusiveness and enhance the quality of our instruction related to diversity and social justice. Despite the limitations of the study methods, the findings of this survey provide useful ideas to guide future work to improve the School of Social Work’s climate of diversity and social justice. We recommend that this report be reviewed by faculty, staff, and students and that the recommendations be considered by each of the program committees, as well as the MSW Curriculum Committee, the Faculty Affairs Committee, the Cultural Competence and Diversity Council, and the new Social Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee with view to developing strategies for
improvements. We also recommend that the new Social Justice Committee devote attention to developing a reliable and valid survey instrument for assessment of the School’s diversity and social justice climate, that this survey be administered annually, and that the findings be shared with faculty, staff, and students regularly to guide future improvements. Additionally, the use of focus groups would be a useful way to gather more detailed impressions and advice from representatives of stakeholder groups. With accurate information from a variety of viewpoints the SSW will be better equipped to welcome and support diverse faculty, staff, and students, and to deliver programs that prepare our students to serve increasingly diverse communities.

The report was disseminated to faculty, staff, students, and the community. The committee that conducted the Survey presented results to a faculty meeting, and faculty discussed these results and generated potential strategies for addressing critical issues and concerns. The School’s standing committee on Social Justice and Inclusion provides leadership in efforts aimed at promoting a more inclusive climate. Students were invited to provide comments about the results and suggestions for change at a series of Student Faculty Dialogs. To date, the response has been quite limited. The program remains committed, however, to repeating this survey and using results to guide future efforts in this area that is of central importance in the field of social work.

Summary

This document provided an overview of the curriculum of the MSW program and described the program’s approach to assessment. Currently, we are moving towards a model characterized by continuous assessment of CSWE-identified core competencies with ongoing program improvement. Elements of this approach are in place, and continued progress will occur as we move into the upcoming reaccreditation process. The aim is to have a revised curriculum and continuous assessment/quality improvement system in place at the time of our next reaccreditation. This document also described our current procedures for assessment and provided information about our analysis and application of data resulting from assessment activities.