

**MSW Evaluation Report: 2014-2015****Submitted by: W. Jay Gabbard, MSW, Ph.D., WKU MSW Program Assessment Coordinator****To: Dr. Dean May, Department Head-Social Work-Western Kentucky University****Dr. Patricia Desrosiers, MSW Program Director****Date: 10/20/2015**

Contained in this report is a summary of evaluation data gleaned from the MSW program for the academic year 2014-2015. This information will be utilized to supplement departmental and college reports, as well as for CSWE Accreditation purposes. As well, these results will be shared with the faculty and larger social work community, in order to continually receive input and improve the quality of the MSW program at WKU. The different evaluation modalities covered in the report are: ACAT, Lum's Cultural Awareness Inventory (2003), ASWB Master's Licensure Pass Rates, Practice Readiness Examination, and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

**ACAT**

In order to assess the mastery of foundation level knowledge of MSW students at WKU, the ACAT assesses standard curricular areas within accredited graduate social work programs in the United States. Curriculum A, the one administered to "traditional" WKU MSW students, assesses knowledge in the following curricular areas:

- Human Behavior in the Social Environment
- Social Policy
- Social Work Practice
- Research Methods
- Diversity
- Populations at Risk
- Social and Economic Justice
- Values and Ethics

Results from the ACAT are provided to individual students in the form of standard scores for each curricular area as well as for overall performance for the cohort taking the test. These curricular areas and the standard scores associated with them can be linked directly to current program objectives.

The ACAT specifically assesses the following explicit curriculum standards from the 2008 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS): 2.1.1-2.1.10.

### **ACAT Results-2 Year Traditional Cohort (Class of 2016)**

As is done annually, the ACAT was administered to approximately **23 WKU MSW students** at the end of their foundation year of courses on **April 25, 2015**. The exam is carefully proctored and traditional students are required to sit for the exam. Below are the results of this latest administration:

<b><u>Area</u></b>	<b><u>Standard Score</u></b>	<b><u>%ile</u></b>	<b><u>Reference Group Size</u></b>
Diversity	458	34	5801
Populations at Risk	465	36	5801
Social/Economic Justice	479	42	5801
Values and Ethics	507	53	5801
Policy & Services	512	55	6328
Social Work Practice	512	55	6328
HBSE	507	53	6328
Research Methods	522	59	6328
<b>OVERALL PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>5801</b>

The results of this administration indicate that overall, this cohort of traditional MSW students performed at the 48<sup>th</sup> percentile compared to similar MSW students nationwide. Thus, per the official ACAT report, based on a comparison group of 5801 MSW students taking the ACAT with 8 areas evaluated, 48% of students would be expected to score at or below WKU's overall performance score and 52% would be expected to score higher.

Per the 2014-2015 WKU MSW score report, "ACAT scores range from 200 to 800 with an average of 500 and a standard deviation of 100. Nationally, 68 percent of the scores in any given year fall between approximately 400 and 600. Year to year variations in the size of the reference groups will cause scores to fall outside these limits. The content area scores are compared with a reference group of other examinees taking the same content area. The overall performance score is compared with other examinees taking the ACAT in this discipline with the same number of content areas."

Students in this cohort scored highest in the areas of social work practice, research methods, and policy. Traditionally, in the ten year administration of the instrument, students have scored highest in practice and research methods and lowest in policy, which often they have struggled with. However, in the last two years, policy has been one of their stronger areas. They also had a standard score of above 500 in ethics and HBSE, two areas where they have often scored lower. The lowest mean scores were in the domains of diversity and populations at risk. These results were interesting, given the heavy infusion of diversity content in foundation courses, flagship diversity course required during the first semester, and an extensive discussion of populations at risk in SWRK 501 and other foundation courses. However, these results will be reviewed during a faculty meeting and at the Departmental Advisory (DAC) committee in Spring 2016 to see if additional (or different) diversity content needs to be added or modified in the curriculum. The focus of the flagship course is more experiential rather than more factual information about diverse client populations (tested on the ACAT) so perhaps additional content could be added with the latter.

In terms of overall performance, the standard score decreased 17 points since the last administration in 2014. The area of greatest growth were in HBSE (plus 3 percentile points). This was the only domain in which students improved since the 2014 administration in terms of standard score points and overall percentile. The areas of most significant decline were in Social Work Practice (minus 22 percentile points), Research Methods (minus 14 percentile points), and Social/Economic Justice (minus 14 percentile points). Interestingly, research methods and practice remained two of the highest rated areas, even though they were also the domains where there was the most significant drop in performance based on percentiles.

One significant trend with this administration of the test that likely impacted overall results was that approximately 5 students scored at the 1<sup>st</sup> percentile or lower in overall performance on the test. While in past administrations it has not been uncommon to have one or two students with single digit percentile scores, 5 scores below the 1<sup>st</sup> percentile certainly lowered the overall average of scores on the ACAT. As all of these scores were from students where English was not their first language, perhaps additional resources or training

could be developed to better prepare these students for standardized tests like the ACAT and CSW (even if the latter is not required in their home country).

As in prior years, the results of this administration will be discussed at an MSW Program Meeting on **October 21, 2015** and a strategy devised to buttress strengths and address perceived deficiencies in the aforementioned areas. As well, ACAT results will be shared at the next Departmental Advisory Committee (DAC) meeting during Spring 2016, in order to solicit feedback from community members and stakeholders on how to improve in weaker areas. This helps close the feedback loop with a group heavily vested in the success of the program.

Additionally, there has been some discussion about moving to a test other than the ACAT that is more competency based, given the recent shift to new EPAS standards. This issue will be explored further at the Program and DAC meetings in the 2015-2016 academic year.

Individual results were also provided to students, in order that they might assess areas of strengths and weaknesses as they move forward into their concentration year of studies and prepare for the Practice Readiness Exam (PRE) exam. Their academic advisors play an integral role in this process.

### **LUM'S CULTURAL AWARENESS INVENTORY**

One of the primary goals of the MSW program at WKU is that graduates emerge with the knowledge, skills, and self-awareness required for culturally sensitive practice (EPAS 2.1.4; Gabbard, Starks, Cappiccie, & Jagers, 2011). Towards this end, both advanced standing and traditional students complete flagship diversity courses (SWRK 612 or SWRK 501) to master diversity and cultural competency content. This material is also infused throughout the curriculum and in many electives such as Homelessness, Forensic Social Work, Expressive Therapies, and Alternative Therapies. In order to assess student's cultural self-awareness, the MSW program at WKU utilizes an instrument that has been validated and employed in numerous diversity evaluative studies nationwide.

The **Cultural Awareness Inventory** is adapted from Lum's Social Work Cultural Competencies Self-Assessment (2003). The Cultural Awareness Inventory consists of a number of sections, including an introduction, background information, 44 statements that are answered on a 4-point scale, and two open-ended items at the conclusion of the instrument.

The majority of the instrument is made up of the 44 self-reported statements that encompass the cultural domains of: cultural awareness, knowledge acquisition, skill development, and inductive learning. Students respond to each statement based on the following directions:

Rate yourself on your level of competency on a scale of 1 – 4:

1 = *Unlikely*    2 = *Not very likely*    3 = *Likely*    4 = *Definitely*

Circle the appropriate number.

Given EPAS 2.1.4 and the MSW program's stated mission, "To educate and prepare students for professional social work practice to meet the needs of increasingly diverse rural populations," the Cultural Awareness Inventory is used to assess a critical component of this program standard and mission. This instrument measures self-perception of cultural awareness while two additional instruments (ACAT and PRE) assess more concrete diversity concepts learned throughout the program. It is this combination of knowledge, skills, and self-awareness that constitutes the preparation of culturally competent social work practitioners (Gabbard, Starks, Cappiccie, & Jagers, 2011). The program wants to produce graduates who know the traditions, histories, and cultural norms of multicultural groups and can put this knowledge into practice by designing culturally sensitive interventions.

#### **Cultural Awareness Inventory-How the Instrument and Data are Used:**

The Cultural Awareness Inventory is employed as a pre-and post-test assessment procedure, statistically evaluated with dependent t-tests. It is administered at the beginning (orientation) and conclusion of the student's MSW program. The goal is to assess for significant changes (or lack thereof) in students' perceived level of cultural competency and cultural self-awareness. While self-perceived change does have its obvious limitations (diversity content is also measured more concretely on the ACAT and PRE), it does allow for students to reflect back on the knowledge and skills they have acquired in courses and in fieldwork, which is a valuable exercise for them to engage in at the conclusion of their study. This, coupled with a self-reflection paper they write in their flagship course, helps them to identify biases, stereotypes, and schemas they must come to grips with in serving multicultural (often oppressed) clients.

		gender			Cumulative Percent
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Valid	male	5	23.8	23.8	23.8
	female	16	76.2	76.2	100.0
	Total	21	100.0	100.0	

In this particular sample of 2015 graduating students (only Advanced Standing students were analyzed due to missing pretest data for foundation year-students), females constituted approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the sample with males representing around  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the total group.

ethnicity					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	european american	13	61.9	61.9	61.9
	african american	5	23.8	23.8	85.7
	latino american	3	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	21	100.0	100.0	

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of the sample was European American, followed by African American and Latino American (no Asian Americans, Native Americans, or other ethnicities were represented in this sample).

Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
age	21	25	22	47	27.19	6.005	36.062
pre cc score	21	70	101	171	133.29	15.866	251.714
post cc score	21	38	137	175	155.57	10.943	119.757
Valid N (listwise)	21						

The average age in the sample was 27 years old, with the youngest respondent being 22 and the oldest 47. In terms of performance on the pretest, the average (out of total of 176 possible) was a 133.29 with a standard deviation of 16 and variance of 252. The post-test average rated out at a 155.57, with a standard deviation of 11 and variance of 120. Thus, from the pretest score to the posttest score, this particular sample of students increased approximately 22.28 points in terms of cultural self-awareness as measured by the Lum's Inventory (2003). In terms of whether this was a statistically significant difference, a dependent t-test was run to assess significant differences between group means. Since the t-test is relatively robust statistic, it can be used with sample sizes <30 so the parametric version was employed in this instance.

**Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pre cc score	133.29	21	15.866	3.462
	post cc score	155.57	21	10.943	2.388

**Paired Samples Correlations**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 pre cc score & post cc score	21	.204	.375

**Paired Samples Test**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pre cc score - post cc score	-22.286	17.338	3.784	-30.178	-14.393	-5.890	20	.000

The results of the dependent t-test revealed a significant (at the .01 level) increase in self-rated cultural self-awareness from the pre-test score at orientation to the post-score pre-graduation for this sample of Advanced Standing MSW students. These results mirrored past results (which also included foundation students) in that all dependent t-tests (regardless of cohort or program track) have yielded statistically significant results. This indicates that the program likely exerts a positive influence on students in terms of their cultural self-awareness and sensitivity (notwithstanding the influence of intervening variables). As increasing cultural sensitivity in students is a goal of the MSW Program, these are auspicious findings.

### **ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORK BOARDS (ASWB) MASTERS LICENSURE PASS/FAIL RATES**

One of the primary foci of the MSW Program at WKU is to sufficiently prepare its MSW graduates to pass the ASWB Masters Level Licensure Examination, in order that graduates might obtain professional licensure in the profession of social work. A number of activities in the program are geared toward this end, including a comprehensive examination (the PRE) that mirrors the content of the ASWB exam, a review session for the PRE designed to help students remember key concepts gleaned from the program, an optional session on how to successfully take multiple choice-tests, a review of sample ASWB questions in class, and an optional session on reducing test-taking anxiety. It is hoped that all of these activities help graduates successfully pass the exam, which some take immediately before graduation and others usually attempt soon afterwards.

Beginning in 2015, the MSW Evaluation Coordinator requested Masters Level pass results from past administrations of the exam from the ASWB, in order to assess how graduates actually performed. Below is a summary of WKU MSW graduate first-time pass rate data beginning in 2009 (the first year listed in the ASWB data) along with national first-time pass rate data:

#### **ASWB Masters Level Exam First-Time Pass Rates (2009-2013)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>WKU First-Time Pass Rate (%)</b>	<b>National First-Time Pass Rate (%)</b>
2009	74% (19 attempted)	75%
2010	50% (36 attempted)	74%
2011	70% (46 attempted)	83%
2012	87% (46 attempted)	84%
2013	68% (38 attempted)	82%
<b>Overall (Avg.)</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>80%</b>



Looking at the five-year data reflected above, around 70 percent of those WKU MSW graduates attempting the ASWB Masters Level exam for the first time (with variable numbers attempting per year) passed, compared with a success rate of 80 percent nationally. While the national first-time pass rate has steadily climbed into the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile, the WKU rate has consistently fluctuated. It is suggested that, in addition to other performance indicators for the MSW Program, that a definitive benchmark be established to work towards with regards to yearly first-time pass rates. This will allow faculty to adjust the curriculum to better encapsulate pertinent concepts that are covered on the exam. It appears that the program is somewhat successful in preparing students to pass the ASWB MSW exam, but there is room for significant improvement (e.g. meeting and/or exceeding national averages). Any conclusions though should also be tempered by the fact that not all graduates take the licensure exam immediately after graduation (some never take it).

### **PRACTICE READINESS EXAM (PRE)**

Per departmental and WKU Graduate School requirements, all graduating MSW students must successfully pass a Practice Readiness Exam (PRE) during their final semester in order to successfully complete the program. Per the 2014-2015 MSW Student Handbook, the PRE exam gives students the opportunity to demonstrate basic competency in essential content areas of social work practice with an emphasis in rural settings.

The exam contains 100 multiple choice questions in an objective format, similar to social work licensure exams. It is indeed an excellent tool to prepare students to pass the Intermediate licensure exam post-graduation, one of the desired outcomes of the MSW Program at WKU. There is some evidence (see section on CSW licensure pass rates) that this goal has been attained over the last six years (with rates reported since 2009).

Students are required to pass the PRE exam with a score of 70 or better in order to graduate from the program. Per the WKU Graduate School Policy, a student only has two attempts to pass this comprehensive exam. Consequently, a student who fails the exam two times is subject to dismissal from the MSW Program. However, it should also be noted that students who fail the exam are provided with written information regarding their performance and advised on areas they need to improve on before they take it (in several weeks or during the next Fall semester).

As the test assesses knowledge of specific content from readings, lectures, and field practicums/experiences, it is considered an important evaluative measure of student learning and retention in the program. It measures not only concrete concepts gleaned but also puts students in “practice situations” where they must respond based on their professional and ethical training. It has been continually refined over the 11 years it has been administered and an item analysis is conducted after each administration to assess the efficacy of specific questions (to decide which ones to keep and which to discard). New questions are continually developed to have fresh questions on each administration, in addition to “battle tested” ones.

It should also be noted that, after evaluating the evaluation strategy employed in years past, a decision was made this year to drop the self-rated foundation and concentration level objective tool in lieu of a more concentrated evaluation of the PRE, which is anchored in conceptual knowledge and the actual ability of students to evaluate practice and ethical situations. In the future, even more complex analyses will be conducted with PRE results and they will be correlated with other measures such as the ACAT and Lum's Cultural Competency Inventory, in order to assess program outcomes.

The 2015 exam included questions in the following subject areas (numbers of questions on each area exam are denoted):

- Cultural Competency and Diversity (5)
- Foundation (22) and Advanced Practice (16)
- Human Behavior in the Social Environment (7)
- Ethics (5)
- Foundation (7) and Advanced Social Welfare Policy (4)
- Groups (7)
- Diagnosis (4)
- Family Practice (5)
- Administration and Supervision (4)
- Community Organization (6)
- Rural Communities (2)
- Research (6)

Approximately 54 students took the PRE on March 23, 2015. Of these, 43 achieved a passing score of 70 and 11 failed to achieve this benchmark (following item analysis). Thus, approximately 80 percent of students taking the exam passed and 20 percent failed during this administration. On the first retake of the exam on April 20, 2015, approximately 8 students passed the exam with a minimum score of 70, while two did not attain the required benchmark and one opted to take the exam in September 2015 (and passed).

Over the decade-long history of the exam, the 2015 exam was the lowest pass rate of any administration (which usually averages around 10 percent needing to retake) of the test, doubling earlier averages. The PRE Committee will review this information (along with the MSW Program) and make a decision whether the test requires additional modifications in 2016.

**2015 PRE Test Questions Missed by Curricular Area (Percentage Missed):**

HBSE (7)	35%
Foundation Policy (7)	32%
Advanced Policy (4)	24%
Family Practice (5)	30%
Supervision and Administration (4)	9%
Research (6)	44%
Groups (7)	29%
Rural Communities (2)	37%
Diagnosis (4)	58%
Ethics (5)	9%
Diversity (5)	29%
Foundation Practice (22)	23%
Advanced Practice (16)	9%
Community Organizations (6)	24%
Total Questions (100)	

Looking at the table above, the subject areas where the most students appeared to struggle (taking into account the percentage of questions in each area) were: Research, Diagnosis, Rural Communities (taking into account only 2 questions), and HBSE. The areas students missed the fewest questions in were: Advanced Practice, Supervision and Administration, and Ethics.

These results are interesting given the fact that the students in this group who took the ACAT tended to fare best in the domains of practice and research methods on the former. This trend held for both advanced standing and traditional students in terms of practice performance (particularly in Advanced Practice) but research performance overall was lower on the PRE. While these two tests are not identical in terms of content, it is valuable to look at trends across evaluative measures.

The trend of students performing better on advanced practice questions versus foundation practice ones is also interesting. The committee should investigate the etiology behind why this trend is present, as well as investigating how this trend differs for advanced standing students (who have foundation practice in the BSW program) versus foundation students. Students have traditionally performed well on these advanced practice questions on the PRE, which is indicative of some degree of success in teaching this material in the concentration year. Interestingly, they have usually scored low in the Ethics domain on the ACAT but in recent years, have performed exceptionally well in this area on the PRE.

The results of the PRE will be reviewed at the MSW Program Meeting on October 21, 2015 and discussed at the Departmental Advisory Committee (DAC) meeting in Spring 2016. The PRE Committee in the MSW Program will review the efficacy of the questions from this year and also discuss the move to a computer administration of the exam (more similar to actual CSW test conditions) in Spring 2016.

### **MSW FIELD DATA/EVALUATION**

Just as with the domains assessed above (and in accordance with the accreditation standards established by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)), the MSW Program annually collects field data, in order to assess the program's compliance and success in meeting established benchmarks for each standard. More specifically, the percentage of students achieving each CSWE competency is calculated for both traditional and advanced standing graduates. This information, which is gathered by the Field Director and posted on the MSW Program website, helps the program evaluate areas of strength and potential growth in field objectives. Below is a summary from May 2015 summarizing the field assessment for academic year 2014-2015:

## **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

### **WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY MSW PROGRAM**

#### **LAST COMPLETED ON MAY 2015**

This form is used to assist the COA in the evaluation of the program's compliance with *Accreditation Standards* stated below.

**4.0.2** *The program provides evidence of ongoing data collection and analysis and discusses how it uses assessment data to affirm and/or make changes in the explicit and implicit curriculum to enhance student performance.*

**4.0.5** *The program appends the summary data for each measure used to assess the attainment of each competency for at least one academic year prior to the submission of the self-study.*

All Council on Social Work Education programs measure and report student learning outcomes. Students are assessed on their mastery of the competencies which comprise the accreditation standards of the Council on Social Work Education. These competencies are dimensions of social work practice which all social workers are expected to master during their professional

training. A measurement benchmark is set by the social work programs for each competency. An assessment score at or above that benchmark is considered by the program to represent mastery of that particular competency.

COMPETENCY	COMPETENCY BENCHMARK	PERCENT OF STUDENTS ACHIEVING BENCHMARK	
		% OF STUDENTS ACHIEVING BENCHMARK (TRADITIONAL)	% OF STUDENTS ACHIEVING BENCHMARK (ADVANCED STANDING)
Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	82%	94%
Apply social work ethical Principles to provide professional practice.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	95%	94%
Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	82%	89%
Engage diversity and difference in practice.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	91%	94%
Advance human rights and social and economic justice.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	91%	89%

Engage in research-informed practice and practice informed-research.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	<b>82%</b>	<b>85%</b>
Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	<b>86%</b>	<b>94%</b>
Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	<b>78%</b>	<b>94%</b>
Respond to contexts and shape practice.	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	<b>78%</b>	<b>87%</b>
Practice Engagement	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	<b>82%</b>	<b>92%</b>
Practice Assessment	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	<b>82%</b>	<b>96%</b>
Practice Intervention	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	<b>82%</b>	<b>96%</b>
Practice Evaluation	70% of students will earn 4 or higher	<b>82%</b>	<b>96%</b>

Looking at the results above, it is apparent that the MSW Program was 100 percent successful during the 2014-2015 year in meeting all of the competency benchmarks established by the CSWE, across both program tracks of traditional and advanced standing. Overall, on all objectives, the percentage for traditional students achieving competency benchmarks is 84%, compared with advanced standing students, who rated at 92% overall in achieving benchmarks.

Traditional students rated particularly high on applying ethical principals in practice, engaging in diversity in practice, and advancing human rights and social justice in practice. This is an interesting finding particularly given that these traditional students tend to rate lower on the ACAT in these areas but much higher on this competency based benchmark measure. They rated lowest in the areas of engaging in policy practice and in responding to contexts that shape practice. These areas will be reviewed for potential enhancement in the curriculum.

Advanced standing students rated highest in the areas of practice assessment, practice intervention, and practice evaluation. They also significantly exceeded the benchmark on applying HBSE knowledge, applying ethical principles in practice, engaging in diversity in practice, and engaging in policy practice. The lowest domain rated was in the research-practice linkage (see below).

One area that rated lower for both groups was the research-practice linkage, which is continually stressed in the Research Methods and Applied Research courses. While students exceeded the benchmark in this area, perhaps new strategies can be devised to help students better recognize and apply research concepts in the field/practice arena. This topic will be discussed at an October 2015 MSW Program Meeting and with the DAC.

### References

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- Lum, D. (2003). *Culturally competent practice: A framework for understanding diverse groups and justice issues*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.