



Aligning Education and Practice: Challenges and Opportunities in Social Work Education for Community-Centered Practice

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Project Sponsors and Team Members

The Alliance for Children and Families, created in 1998 when Family Service America and the National Association of Homes and Services for Children merged, has a national membership of nearly 400 family service and child welfare organizations. The Alliance continues to be one of the oldest and largest networks of community-based human service organizations in North America. Member agencies provide a wide range of community-centered human services and campus-based residential care, delivering more than \$2 billion annually in services in more than 1,500 communities across the United States and Canada, and coming in contact with upwards of 4 million people every year. The Alliance's leadership in this project was guided by Peter B. Goldberg, President & CEO, and coordinated by Patrice A. Heinz, Project Manager.

The Consensus Organizing Institute is a national nonprofit organization that develops and implements pragmatic strategies for reversing civic isolation. The Institute is dedicated to the teaching and practice of consensus organizing as a means to alleviate poverty, improve public policy and inspire more people to trust and work together. The Institute's participation in this project was originated by Michael Eichler, now a member of the social work faculty at San Diego State University, and is managed by Karen DeMasi and Mary Ohmer, social workers and Vice Presidents of the Consensus Organizing Institute.

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SOCIAL WORK: A NEED FOR DIRECTION

A Commentary by Thomas J. Harvey, MSW
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Social work is one of the world's younger professions. As such, it still begs for the understanding and status routinely given to the legal or medical professions. Law and medicine each have more specialization than was ever envisioned a few decades ago. Nonetheless, the general public knows what makes up those professions. As a profession, social work needs to clarify its fundamental purpose and values if its role and function in society are to be properly understood and appreciated.

In its early stages of development, social work focused on the needs of individuals, families or communities that were challenged by a stressful environment. As a profession, social work presented itself as expert in accessing resources to empower the "client" to negotiate the challenges coming from some situation in the environment. For the unemployed, the resource could be a training program. For a refugee, it could be legal expertise and/or language training. For a family touched by death, the resource could be grief counseling. For a neighborhood affected by a plant closing, it could be economic development.

Obviously, such a diversified portfolio of possible interventions can itself be a cause for ambiguity. Nonetheless, the integrating principle for the social work profession was to strengthen the ability of the client to deal with the real environment to attain effective problem resolution. In such a scenario, the professional must make a needs assessment from which a course of action could be charted. The first question had to be - what needs to be done? Only if the identified problem was deemed insurmountable would the question be changed to - how shall the client cope with this problem?

Unfortunately to this observer, coping support has moved to the center of the profession's practice. This is supported by cash flow. Counseling is something that is supported by fees, by insurance payments and by public policy initiatives. Mobilizing resources to empower a client - be that client an individual, a family or a community - to negotiate a stressful environment often has less support. Funders, whether public or private, are more likely to invest in helping the client cope rather than in solving the problem.

This creates an especially challenging conundrum for schools of social work. They have market-driven pressures. The majority of students choosing schools of social work want the counseling credential. As the primary customer, that need is shaping the profession. Thus, nonprofit, social welfare organizations are forced too often to look elsewhere for trained leadership to maintain a practice which is less focused on coping and more on problem solving and community-centered practice.

The Alliance for Children and Families is publishing this discussion paper to challenge social work educators and practitioners to work for their mutual benefit and to clarify what the profession of social work should be at this time in history. Specialization is to be expected. However, such diversity must be within the framework of an agreed-upon value and definitional base for social work.

INTRODUCTION

The Alliance for Children and Families commissioned this paper, with support from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, to help it answer two questions posed by a growing number of its member agencies:

- Why is it so hard to recruit social workers with education and training suitable for community-centered work?
- What can we do, with schools of social work, to increase the number of graduates prepared for community-centered work?

This paper is a first step by the Alliance to promote discussion and planning toward effective responses to these questions.

Method of Inquiry To prepare this paper, a group of consultants and Alliance staff drew on two sources. First, a group of social-work educators, agency executives, students and others interested in this topic were contacted and interviewed between June and December 1999. The team conducted more than 50 one-on-one interviews and three focus groups. In addition, the executives of 60 Alliance agencies were interviewed to identify community-centered program staffing patterns and determine perceptions of social worker preparedness for community-centered work. Finally, the team reviewed the recent literature addressing various aspects of the social work profession, community-centered practice and social work education. (See Appendix A for list of interviewees and Appendix B for articles reviewed.)

The interviews and discussions explored three related questions: (1) Is there a mismatch between the needs of community-centered employers and social-work education? (2) If so, what is the nature of the mismatch? And, (3) What can be done to close the gap?

Second, the team drew on the experiences of the Consensus Organizing Institute in managing a companion project, funded under the same grant from the Bradley Foundation, to develop new social-work education strategies. The Institute has launched and managed three pilot programs to develop or strengthen community-building recruiting and teaching programs at graduate schools of social work (see Appendix F: “Lessons from the Field”) giving it an excellent vantage point for considering the potential for and obstacles to community-centered social-work education.

Report Organization This paper has been organized into four sections:

- I. **Background** on how the Alliance’s community-centered work led to questions on human resource challenges;
- II. **The Human Resource Challenge**, a review of how our observers view the challenge of staffing community-centered services, including a discussion of recent trends and developments impacting this challenge;

- III. **Thoughts on Solutions to the Problem**, a presentation of ideas which emerged from our interviews; and
- IV. **Strategy Questions**, a brief discussion of the some of the findings raised by our research.
- V. **Reactions From The Field**, an overview of the general reactions to this paper by Schools of Social Work deans and faculty, agency executives, students and professional association representatives.

I BACKGROUND

The human-resource questions discussed in this paper arise out of the Alliance's recent efforts to support community-centered work among its membership. Since 1995, the Alliance has offered a number of services – education, training, consultation, and research – to member agencies that are committed to community-centered strategies.

Agencies' Rationale for Community Building The decision to offer a range of community building programs (aimed at youth development, public safety, economic opportunity, and organizing) stems in part from a shift in the population that the family-service agencies were reaching. According to Alliance research, compared to the population served in 1990, the population served in 1997 was “far poorer, [with] a high proportion of single parents, the vast majority of whom are women [with] relatively low levels of education and a shockingly high rate of unemployment and under-employment.”¹ Facing immediate problems with employment, housing and unsafe neighborhoods, agencies began to conclude that a significant share of their client base, was not always best served by micro interventions.

As a result, the percentage of time that family-service agencies offered counseling to families seeking help began to decline during the 1990s, from 67 percent of the time in 1990 to 60 percent in 1997.² Interestingly however, during the same time period, agencies began to place greater emphasis on community centered programs – so much so that by 1999, in an Alliance-sponsored study, more than 75 percent of Alliance agency executives said they believed the need for community-centered programs would increase over the next three years.

Agencies' Human Resource Quandary The shift to community-centered strategies – for many agencies, the shift *back to* community-centered strategies – has not been without its conflicts. Building commitment to the strategies at the board level and then reorienting staff toward new approaches has been a major undertaking, involving painful shifts. Many employees were not eager to trade in counseling jobs for community-organizing or outreach jobs. Nor has hiring new staff, especially for agencies committed to recruiting social workers, always been easy.

In interviews and focus groups, agency directors expressed their frustration with social workers that have a commitment to helping families, but lack skills and experience with community-centered strategies. In a recent Alliance survey on staffing for community-centered programs, more than 60 percent of agencies responding felt that recent MSW graduates are not adequately prepared for community-centered work. (Over 70 percent felt that recent BSW graduates are not prepared.) They trace many of the problems to schools of social work, arguing that “there is too much focus on serving individuals

¹ Thomas E. Lengyel, et al. *Strength in Adversity: The Resourcefulness of American Families in Need* (Milwaukee: Family Service America, Inc.) 1997.

² *Strength in Adversity*.

[while] we need social workers who understand families and the role of community in their lives.” Some agency directors feel the root of the misalignment between schools and agencies lies in the isolation of faculty from the community. As one executive observed, too many faculty members are “purely academic. Most faculty members have done very little field work or have been out of it for years. They don’t get it, so neither will their students.”

Why is Social Work the Answer? Given all the challenges they face in developing new community strategies, it is almost surprising that so many agencies remain committed to a social-worker human resource strategy. They can, after all, find other employees in the non-professional labor market, recruiting from youth-service providers, or community development organizations for starters, or by recruiting new graduates with a diversity of degrees beyond social work. More than 75 percent of the directors responding to the Alliance survey reported that they already employed non-social workers in community-centered work. Some, in fact, expressed doubt about the wisdom of even trying to meet their needs within social work. “I can’t tell the difference between social workers and anyone else,” one frustrated agency executive put it. “They say they think about families, and systems, and communities, but really their eyes glaze over [when you talk about community-centered work].”

Some agency directors, though willing to look beyond the profession, are pressured by government funders to keep recruiting social workers. Government grants often require that supervisory positions in an agency be held by licensed social workers. Because licenses generally emphasize clinical skills, some directors feel forced to hire social workers who may not be inclined toward community-centered work – or to forego government grants. Similarly, some government funders require that agencies be accredited by the independent Council on Accreditation (or, more recently, by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals) whose standards have typically governed micro practice, once again endangering the funding prospects of community-centered agencies.³

But many agency directors feel that social workers, regardless of government funding requirements, are ideally suited to work on community challenges. They see a profession that attempts to understand individual well being in the social context, addresses external forces that create “problems in living,” and embraces a broad spectrum of skills and activities. Finally, and not least important, a number of agency executives and managers are social workers themselves and want to recruit from social work because of their loyalty to the profession. They believe that social work can do a good job and would like to see the profession return to what they feel is its historic, dual commitment to both individuals and their communities.

³ Recognizing the problem that this creates for community-centered agencies, the Council on Accreditation is now developing community-centered standards. These would allow agencies to earn accreditation in part on the strength of their community-centered programs, and thereby protect their eligibility for some government funding.

Agencies' Conceptions of Community-Centered Work The Alliance members, like the people interviewed for this report, conceive of “community centered work” in different ways, and this paper does not attempt to impose a definition on a still-developing field. Short of that clarity, it may be helpful to note that while their programs vary, many Alliance members have concluded that clinical services alone will not change the prospects of families. They have looked, in addition, to strategies that would connect families to each other and to their communities – to institutions, to informal social networks and to formal political governance. This work requires employees who are willing and able to work in community settings – in schools, community centers, or public housing projects – and who are prepared to work as community organizers and developers. According to agency executives, social workers entering the field lack the skills necessary to work in these community settings. “An ability to organize people, to think outside of the box, to understand community dynamics and economic development practices” these are skills one executive identified as lacking among his newly hired social workers. Another executive lamented, “It’s attitude and skills; they [social workers] lack group empowerment skills, building capacity, leading processes, and the desire to work in the neighborhood...but the emphasis in schools appears to have been in building clinical skills for an office setting.”

At any rate, the lack of a single community-centered construct has not hindered this inquiry so far. Alliance members with varying approaches to community-centered work have articulated the same human-resource challenge. And with only one exception, the dozens of people interviewed for this paper have found the general distinction between “community work” and “clinical or direct service” -- or between “micro” and “macro” social-work education strategies -- entirely workable for framing the challenge and possible solutions. Their disagreements are not about community-centered work as an end, but about whether and how schools of social work can be the means toward that end.

II THE HUMAN RESOURCE CHALLENGE

Most observers interviewed for this paper assess the prospects for community-centered human resource strategies by trying to relate them to recent trends and developments in the social work profession and in social work education. In both contexts, community-centered social work has attracted enthusiastic supporters, but also faces competing ideas and pressures. We review our observers’ assessments of both contexts below, drawing on parallel discussions in the literature.

The Profession

For many observers, community-centered social work is at the core of the profession’s mission but at the margins of social work practice – at least in recent decades. It has no opponents *per se*; the idea of social work as a profession that works with the “person in environment” is hardly contested. But after attracting much attention in the 1960s, community-centered practice fell into relative neglect as the profession worked to establish its legitimacy. Successful campaigns to establish licensure for social workers –

which resulted in licensing requirements in all 50 states⁴ – reflected what many see as a troubling reworking of the profession’s mission and identity.⁵ The new profession is more about changing individuals and less about changing both individuals and communities. Most of our observers lament the shift. “We need to get back to basics,” as one put it. “We’re not psychiatrists. Our mission historically is working with communities.”

Missing Out on Community Building Just when interest in community strengthening is once again ascendant, the profession is no longer seen as exclusively, or even closely, associated with it. A complicated set of influences – from a conservative backlash against War-on-Poverty social programs to academic and practitioner interest in theories of social capital and civil society⁶ -- has revived support for community strengthening strategies. Large foundations have invested millions of dollars in numerous ambitious “comprehensive community initiatives” or “community building” programs.⁷ Nonprofit human service agencies, as we discuss below, are now complementing personal interventions with community strategies. Social work, meanwhile, remains on the sidelines. Some observers even suggest the profession will have a hard time reclaiming its historic dual mission of changing people and systems.

The profession, in the words of one observer, “is in a state of disarray. I am struck by how much of community practice has moved out of social work.” Reflecting a common sentiment, another underscored that, while social work has been busy with licensure, “others have filled the [community-centered] gap. There are many people out there in the trenches – ministers, outreach workers, case-managers without social work credentials – doing ‘real social work.’” Ironically, the very path that promised social workers decent jobs and professional stature – as counselors working with individuals -- has become much less promising thanks to managed care, with its cost controls and second-guessing of professional judgments.

Obstructing Community Building Some go so far as to cast social work and the institutions most closely associated with it not just as irrelevant to but actually as obstacles to community building. Many have found John McKnight’s critique, and his alternative vision, compelling. He attacks a profession that thrives on treating, even contriving, personal pathologies instead of helping communities mobilize their own assets to create natural and informal helping networks.⁸ Taking a similar view, many

⁴ Barbara A. Pine and Lynne M. Healy, “Is State Licensing an Obstacle to Macro Practice?” in *Controversial Issues in Communities and Organizations*, Michael J. Austin and Jane Isaacs Lowe (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon), 1994.

⁵ See, for example, Specht, H. and Courtney, M. *Unfaithful Angels: How Social Work Has Abandoned its Mission* (New York: Free Press) 1994.

⁶ See, for example, Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone,” *Journal of Democracy*, 6, January 1995.

⁷ See Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives: www.aspenroundtable.org.

⁸ John L. McKnight, “A Nation of Clients,” *Public Welfare*, 38, Fall 1980.

funders and policy makers are now championing the potential of churches and grassroots organizations -- not professional human-service organizations -- as the next best hope. It's a review of this landscape that prompted one of our observers to conclude: "the whole field has lost direction if you consider the roots and purpose [of the profession]."

Schools of Social Work

Schools of social work are engaged in the same debate about community strategies and professional mission. On individual campuses and in the national associations of social-work schools, a few educators are working to raise the profile of community-centered work. For example, within the Council on Social Work Education, the Association for Community Organization and Social Administration has become an important venue for community-oriented educators to work on their shared interests. In addition, longstanding, independent associations such as the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society, which serves as a community-oriented action alliance across the social services, continue to attract members. *The Journal of Community Practice* aims at a similar audience. And as we show in the appendices of this report, a number of schools, or individual faculty members within schools, have been launching community-oriented programs. (See Appendix C: "Designing Innovative Curricula", and Appendix D: "University Outreach: Catalysts for Community Builders Program")

Advocates' Many Agendas for the Schools Schools of social work are everyone's favorite lever for reshaping the profession and advocates are continuously pressuring schools to change their curricula to advance one or another agenda. Deans cited a number of attempts by various associations, employers or advocates to influence social work curricula. One complained about a recent report exhorting schools of social work to improve their clinical curricula. Another dean reported "getting bashed" by a state clinical association with the same demand.

Several deans had mixed reactions to recent state-sponsored efforts to encourage schools to provide new offerings for child-welfare workers. Some appreciated the idea of a state and schools of social work working together to develop standards and curricula. Others see not collaboration but heavy-handedness. For example, Illinois effectively made an end-run around the schools by imposing new licensing requirements for child-welfare workers. The schools will be in a difficult position to deny a huge wave of students, many with their jobs at stake, the kind of education they want, yet they had little say in designing licensing standards intended to upgrade the skills of these vital front-line workers.

Deans also face ad hoc demands by advocates of one or another cause to change their curricula. "We'll have people call and say," according to one dean, "I'm appalled that you don't have a course that offers training in how to handle 13-19 year-old girls with eating disorders!" Another dean tries, in vain, to tell advocates that graduate social work education is still a generalist course, and that specialized training should be handled as post-graduate professional development. Yet he's "inundated by employers who want more specialized training. We had one big agency demand, 'You must triple the number of development disability specialists you graduate.'" All of these are cautionary lessons

for the Alliance as it attempts to work with schools of social work on community-centered strategies.

Several observers suggested that community-building proponents might learn from a new initiative designed to influence the profile of gerontology within social work education. They pointed to what they considered a thoughtful, long-term strategy, sponsored by the John A. Hartford Foundation, to interest schools in improving education for geriatric social workers, soon expected to be in big demand because of the aging population. (See Appendix E: “Aligning Education and Geriatric Social Work Practice”).

Market Trends and Conflicts Perhaps more influential than the ad hoc and organized advocates is the invisible hand of the social work marketplace. Educators noted a number of powerful, sometimes conflicting, market trends. The number of students entering schools of social work is declining, in part because young people typically bypass professional education when the economy is hot and good jobs are available. Except for two periods, enrollment in MSW programs has increased steadily since 1950. The first period of decline was from 1979 to 1986. After climbing again, enrollments declined again in 1998, dropping to 31,760 students from 35,560 the year before.⁹

Meanwhile, presumably because of a lag in market feedback, the number of MSW social work programs has continued to grow – from 96 programs in 1988 to 126 in 1998¹⁰ -- increasing competition for students. Schools accepted 59.6 percent of MSW applicants in 1998, compared to 46.7 percent in 1988. The growth in MSW programs has also increased competition for faculty, and many educators speculate that the current shortage of faculty will become worse as a large cohort of today’s faculty reaches retirement age.

Graduate students interested in community-centered work, meanwhile, are a relatively small minority of current social-work classes. Most of our observers described macro enrollment at their institutions at about 10 percent. According to CSWE statistics, only about 12 percent of students enrolled in MSW programs in 1998 were pursuing a macro concentration, and only 2.7 percent were focusing on “community organization and planning.” The others were either in management and administration or were combining community organization with these, or with direct practice.¹¹ As many of the observers analyze it, the profession succeeded so well in projecting a new “micro” identity that young people interested in community organization work began looking elsewhere for career opportunities, which forms the basis of the Alliance’s challenge. If employers do prefer to recruit social workers, what are they to do?

⁹ Todd M. Lennon, *Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States: 1998* (Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education).

¹⁰ Elaine C. Spaulding, *Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States: 1988* (Washington DC, Council on Social Work Education)

¹¹ Lennon

III THOUGHTS ON SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

Three strikingly consistent views about the nature of the human-resource challenge emerged from the interviews and focus groups:

1. There is nearly universal support for the idea that there is a mismatch between the needs of community-centered employers on the one hand and the interest in or ability of schools of social work to meet those needs;
2. One set of observers traces the roots of the mismatch to weak demand for community-centered approaches – by employers, funders, and students; and
3. Another group of observers traces the roots of the problem to weak supply – i.e., indifference to community-centered practice within schools of social work.

We summarize these views below, and then use them, in the section that follows, as a starting point for proposing some specific strategies for addressing the mismatch.

Is There a Mismatch Between Employer Need and Social Work Education?

Virtually without exception, our observers felt that schools of social work, taken as a whole, are not doing enough to prepare students for community-centered work. Given that we sought out people who are knowledgeable about or involved in community-centered work, this is perhaps not surprising. Their responses, however, were important in validating the Alliance’s original proposition. In affirming that proposition, observers raise a series of other critical questions, including How is community-centered defined? What does a community-centered curriculum look like? And what are the new approaches to community organization?

Defining “community-centered.” The common use of the terms “macro practice” (to refer to work aimed at producing systemic or environmental change) and “micro practice” (to refer to work aimed at producing individual change) complicates any assessment of community-centered curricula. While “micro practice” covers a fairly narrow span of activities, mostly counseling and case management, “macro practice” covers roughly anything that is left over, including program planning and development, management and administration, and community organization.

These terms can obscure what students and teachers are doing. To discover that only 10 percent of students at a given school are enrolled primarily in macro courses does not necessarily indicate how many are interested in community-centered practice. Ninety percent of that group might be focusing on management and administration, with the objective of running an agency that may or may not have any interest in community-centered practice.

Even the commonly used term “community organization,” while more helpful for our analysis than “macro practice,” actually covers a wide conceptual terrain. As discussed

earlier in this paper, Alliance members' "community organization" or "community-centered work" can refer either to what might be called community *engagement* (efforts to involve families in the institutions or informal networks of their community) or community *empowerment* (for instance, efforts to equip them for political action) – or both.

New Approaches to Community Organization While our observers did not describe or propose any orthodox conception of "community organization," they did describe in consistent terms how they felt the approach now taken by schools in teaching community organization differed from the approach prevalent in the 1960s. They describe a shift from adversarial political empowerment strategies to consensus-oriented strategies aimed at practical community problem solving. Many spoke of facilitating collective action to solve problems, involving residents in the life of the community, and making community institutions more responsive to residents.

Only a few spoke forcefully for or against a more explicitly political strategy for system reform or community improvement. The current "consensus strategies" said one observer who is worried about a neglect of political strategies, "is throw the baby out with the bath water." In contrast, another worried about courses that appear "to teach political propaganda, and what is particularly disturbing is that faculty are gun-shy about forcing students to think about their opinions for fear of being seen as politically incorrect."

On both the education and practice side, then, there is some variation in the way people think about community organization or community-centered work. Regardless of the nuances in meaning, however, it is clear to virtually all the observers that social work education is heavily invested in micro practice, while the world beyond it is returning to the potential of macro strategies.

Our observers tended to explain the mismatch in market terms, tracing the problem either to weak demand or inadequate supply.

The Roots of the Problem: A Demand Explanation

The demand analysis is straightforward. It argues that education and practice *are* aligned. Funding and public policy favor clinical or direct practice as the primary means of dealing with at-risk youth, child welfare, troubled families, or the isolated elderly. As a result, this is where the jobs are. Students opting for social work understand that this is where the jobs are and pursue social-work education precisely because they find these jobs appealing. And schools of social work, ultimately, have no choice but to respond to student demand for micro practice. Indeed, this is a plausible explanation for what the statistics show: a steady decline in student enrollment in macro practice.

Schools Educate for Jobs, Not for Advocates' Agendas According to this analysis, the only mismatch is between funding and the *aspirations* of community-centered proponents. Following this logic, the Alliance should not exhort schools to change their curricula but rather should be aiming to increase demand. "It's hard to leverage good

will alone,” one educator argued, pointing out that the only way to succeed is to create a mandate for more funding, at a large scale, of community-centered work. Several observers mentioned that foundation support for community-centered social work might stimulate more demand by government, which would then translate into more jobs, more student demand for macro courses, and, finally, an alignment behind a new agenda.

Focus on Job Quality, Not Just Quantity Some observers recognized that new jobs were emerging, particularly among nonprofit human-service organizations, but argued that employers needed to improve the quality of those jobs, raising the pay and prestige to attract more interest by young graduates. In sum, without a large supply of *good* community-centered jobs, there is no reason for schools to urge community organization courses on their students.

The Roots of the Problem: A Supply Explanation

Most of our observers explain the misalignment between education and practice as a supply problem, generally arguing that schools are: (a) underestimating demand; and (b) missing an opportunity to influence and further stimulate that demand.

Schools Underestimate Employer Demand These observers argue that jobs are abundant, but that the social-work profession is so remote from community work that it doesn't even see them. They point to foundation-funded community-building initiatives, nonprofit human service organizations, community development organizations, and even public agencies as job-generators, arguing that there has been a revival of interest in and funding for community-centered strategies. Their assessment is consistent with a recent U.S. News & World Report's characterization of “community practitioner” as an appealing growth opportunity for young workers. These observers concur, believing that community-building jobs are now being filled by candidates from outside social work: young workers with graduate or undergraduate degrees in business, public, or human service administration, or the liberal arts.

Within social work, moreover, the market may be somewhat opaque to young job seekers – “you won't see ‘wanted – community practice social workers,’” cautions one educator, “but the jobs are there.” In part because finding good community-centered jobs is a challenge, the George Warren Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis has hired a full-time career placement specialist, an unusual move among schools of social work.

Schools Neglect Student Demand A number of observers argue that not only is there demand among employers for graduates trained in community-centered principles, but that there is also a growing, though sometimes latent demand among students for that training. Ann R. Alvarez, professor at Wayne State University's School of Social Work, for example, explained that with modest effort, she and a colleague increased enrollment of students in the school's community concentration from nine to 24. They organize annual meetings for students choosing a concentration and introduce them to students currently doing community-centered field placements, as well as to employers who need

community-centered social workers. “You particularly need to help them see what the jobs are like,” she said.

Others have had the same experience. At Boston University, according to Melvin Delgado, chair of macro practice, about 80 percent of students come in with a preference for micro course work. But the school now exposes all students to macro practice after their first semester, at which point the department typically sees macro enrollment double. Both Delgado and Alvarez, along with other observers, cite the importance of well-structured field placements, ideally ones with a stipend, as another critical resource for attracting students.

Macro-practice students who participated in a focus group at the University of Pittsburgh supported the idea that exposure to macro practice often leads to interest in community-centered practice. Having first learned about macro options from friends, mentors, fellow students and co-workers at field placements, the Pitt students were able to articulate both the types of jobs they were attracted to and the larger social-work mission they found appealing. They expressed interest in community development, asset-based approaches to family and children’s issues, work with immigrants and migrant workers, and economic or social justice issues. Most of those who had switched from micro to macro tracks characterized the micro practice they had studied as “too narrow,” and sought the opportunity to work on political and other systems that affect the individual.

Some observers argue for intervening earlier to expose students to opportunities in community-centered work. Noting the steady growth in undergraduate social work enrollment -- from 21,471 students in 1988 to 35,816 ten years later¹² – they point out that better courses at that level, where students are “more malleable,” could increase the demand for graduate-level macro courses. A pilot program of the Consensus Organization Institute starts even earlier, aiming to educate high school students, especially minority urban residents, about community-centered social work. (See Appendix F, “Lessons from the Field” for a discussion of one such effort taking place in San Diego.)

Schools Should “Mainstream” Community Curricula Several observers emphasized the problem of segregating community work as its own specialty, arguing instead for integrating a community perspective into the discussion of virtually every social-work concern. Youth development, family support, and geriatric approaches, for example, could all feature strategies for helping clients connect to and find support in their communities – in addition to traditional individual interventions. The risk of integration, of course, is that the community-centered focus becomes blurred over time. Without faculty specialists and champions, it can become a mere add-on.

Schools Should Make Better Use of the Growing Intellectual Foundations of Community Curricula While several observers argued that faculty and students lack an intellectual foundation on which to develop community-centered courses and programs,

¹² Lennon; Spaulding

others pointed to a growing literature – with new textbooks, articles and books – that is now available as source material for community-centered courses. Working to integrate these resources into courses is therefore another important supply-side strategy.

Some argue that there are few incentives, however, for faculty to further expand the intellectual foundation for community-centered work. Many view community-centered work as an inherently unsuitable research topic for articles in peer-review journals, which faculty are under pressure to produce. Those committed to publication on micro topics will likely have little time to engage in community-based projects, which might lead them, eventually, to formulate appealing research questions. To correct this situation, says one faculty member, “universities need to reward faculty for community work and community connections.”

Schools and Employers Should Invest in Professional Development Another supply-side weakness is in continuing education or professional development, which one dean considers a “glaring, staggering omission” in social work. In his view, even graduate social-work education remains essentially generalist, and students should acquire more specialized training and education through professional development. Following that logic, community-centered employers should support the creation of specialized professional education opportunities for their staff.

Along those lines, another dean is assessing the potential for reviving his school’s professional development institute, which could become a resource for social workers to complement their formal education and job experiences with more focused community-centered education. The institute would allow the school to overcome another problem on the supply-side: “we’re further and further distant from public and private agencies. We need more traffic and interchange with them – even going beyond consultation about curricula change.”

IV STRATEGY QUESTIONS

In light of the issues and opinions uncovered in this scan, the human-resource challenge of Alliance member agencies seems more complex. On the one hand, agencies’ needs are fairly clear: they want students who are prepared, and willing, to work in community-based settings, offering not just clinical services but also playing new roles as community organizers and community developers. Their question is, “Can schools of social work be the answer?” On the other hand, both the observers and the literature describe sometimes-conflicting forces – from market pressures to advocates’ efforts – that shape the environment in which Alliance members are attempting to develop these community-centered social workers. Community-centered schools and agencies face a number of important questions as they contemplate how – and with whom – to go forward. To begin the work of developing an effective strategy, we conclude with a review of five of these questions.

- ***How can we advance the short-term goals of community-centered employers without losing sight of long-term strategies for reforming the profession – and vice-versa?***

Some of our observers were actually speaking to a long-term agenda for reforming the entire social-work profession, and proposed using social-work education as the point of entry. Others, particularly at nonprofit agencies, see the challenge as a nearer-term question of meeting employers' human-resource needs. Are the two tactics compatible? Is a short-term employer-responsive strategy sustainable in the absence of more far-reaching reform of the profession? Is it possible to pursue both simultaneously?

- ***Who are the stakeholders?***

Observers pointed to the many stakeholders – including students, employers, schools, public policy-makers, public and philanthropic funders – who can influence the course of social work education. But who should be engaged first? What might motivate stakeholders outside the profession to help social work reconnect to community strategies? In light of alternative sources for community-centered workers – e.g., non-professionals, human service administrators, or youth workers – whose job is it to reform social work?

- ***What should agencies do to solve their HR problems?***

Some observers pointed out that agencies could improve the quality, prestige and pay of community-centered jobs, arguing that this would attract more and better qualified and motivated workers. How can employers take on this challenge? How much can they accomplish working only the demand side? Will it be enough? Or must they engage with schools of social work to make meaningful progress?

- ***What should schools do to advance community-centered agendas?***

Given the many pressures on schools – to compete for students, to deal with conflicting demands of advocates, employers and public funders, and to find qualified, interested faculty – how much can be expected of schools working alone? For those inclined to strengthen their offerings in community-centered work, how should they divide their energies among: Recruiting interested students? Exposing current students to macro options? Encouraging faculty to develop the intellectual foundations, research and curricula to support community-centered social work?

- ***What can schools and agencies do together?***

If neither schools nor agencies working alone will be enough, how should the two collaborate to advance community-centered social work? At the local level, what can willing schools and agencies do together in the near term – to improve field placements, the flow of information about jobs, and specifications for community-centered social workers? At the national level, what can schools and agencies do, through formal or informal coalitions, to change the environment that influences these issues? For the near-term, what's the most effective balance between on-the-ground partnerships between pioneering schools and agencies and national action for broader change?

V REACTIONS FROM THE FIELD

In early May, a group of representatives from private agencies, schools of social work, ACOSA, the Council on Social Work Education, The National Association of Social Workers and the Alliance for Children and Families met to review and discuss the findings presented in this paper. (See Appendix G: Chapin Hall Discussion Group)

During the meeting, participants affirmed the needs and opportunities articulated in the paper. However, while agreeing on the importance of influencing schools of social work to integrate more community-centered practice into their curricula, reaching consensus on the strategies to accomplish that proved more difficult. Some argued for a more proactive stance by employers to stimulate a stronger market-driven approach to curricula change, while others argued for the need to allow schools to change at the pace they deemed appropriate for the field and the needs of their students.

Despite the disparity in opinions on change strategies, participants did agree that four activities be pursued in the short term:

- That the paper be widely circulated;
- That the Alliance conduct additional research to identify community-centered curriculum models already in existence at schools of social work;
- That a job bank linking employers with graduates qualified in community-centered practice be established; and
- That closer communication and coordination between the Alliance, CSWE and ACOSA occur in the effort to influence curriculum change.

In addition to these short-term activities, three other *possible* long-term strategies were also identified by participants:

- The creation of a national coalition that would be funded to promote an agenda to change schools of social work curricula;
- The creation of a smaller, more results-oriented Task Force that would focus on better field placements of students educated in community-centered practice;
- The creation of an “Academy” that would investigate existing community-centered curricula models, identify standards for such curricula, publish a sampling of models and provide training in community-centered practice to professionals already in the field.

Moving The Agenda Forward. . .

Distribution of this paper is the first step in moving forward the agenda to promote better integration of community-centered practice into schools of social work curricula. Looking towards the future, the Alliance for Children and Families fully expects to continue the exploration and advancement of other strategies to promote community-centered practice in social work education. We look forward to working with representatives of the field to accomplish that.

APPENDIX A

Interviewees and Focus Group Participants

Deans, Practitioners and Agency Executives

Catherine Alter
Dean
School of Social Work
University of Denver

Ann R. Alvarez
Professor
School of Social Work
Wayne State University

Nancy Amadei
Professor of Social Work
University of Washington, Seattle

Harry J. Aponte
Family Therapist
Philadelphia

Elizabeth L. Beck, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Social Work
Georgia State University

Fred Brooks
Associate Professor
School of Social Work
Georgia State University

Steve Burkhardt
Professor of Social Work
Hunter College

Soraya Coley
Dean, School of Human Development and
Community Services
Cal State-Fullerton

David Cronin
Associate Dean
George Warren Brown School
Washington University/St. Louis

Melvin Delgado
Professor
School of Social Work
Boston University

Brenda DuBois
Associate Professor of Social Work
St. Ambrose University
Davenport, Iowa

Jim Dumpson
New York Community Trust
former dean, Fordham University
School of Social Work

Cynthia East
School of Social Work
Georgia State University

Michael Eichler
Director
Consensus Organizing Center
School of Social Work
San Diego State University

Patricia Ewalt
Dean, School of Social Work
University of Hawaii at Manoa;
President, National Association of Deans
and Directors of Schools of Social Work

Bob Fisher
Professor of Social Work
University of Houston

Sid Gardner
Director, Center for Collaboration for
Children, School of Human Development
& Community Service, California State
University, Fullerton

Lorraine Gutierrez
Professor of Social Work
University of Michigan

C. Matthew Hawkins
Assistant Professor
University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Santos H. Hernandez
Professor and Dean
School of Social Work
The University of Texas at Arlington

Catherine Hiersteiner
Faculty Member
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Missouri – Kansas City

Alice K. Johnson
Associate Professor
Mandel School of Applied Sciences
Case Western Reserve University

Peggy Jones
Executive Director
Family and Children's Services
Fort Wayne, IN

Robert Labbe
President & CEO
Family Services
Akron, OH

Francis W. Lewis
former Division Director
Children and Families First
Georgetown, Delaware

Sheldon Gelman
Dean, School of Social Work
Yeshiva University

Anita S. Harbert
Director, School of Social Work
College of Health and Human Services
San Diego State University

Rebecca L. Hegar, D.S.W.
Associate Professor
The University of Texas at Arlington

Patrick J. Heron
President & CEO
Catholic Social Services of Wayne County
Detroit

Cheryl Hyde
Professor of Social Work
University of Maryland

James Johnson
Executive Director
United Family Services
Charlotte, NC

Jim Killacky
Adjunct Associate Professor
School of Social Work
Tulane University

Edward Lawlor
Dean
School of Service Administration
University of Chicago

Mark Lieberman
Executive Director
Family Services of Montgomery County,
Norristown, PA

Jane Lowe
Senior Program Manager
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Maurice F. Macey
Assistant Professor
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Missouri
Kansas City

Ruth Mayden
Dean, Graduate School of Social Work
and Social Research, Bryn Mawr College
President, National Association of Social
Work

Jacqueline McCrosky
Professor of Social Work
University of Southern California

James Midgely
Dean,
School of Social Welfare
University of California, Berkeley

Larry Murray
Senior Program Associate
National Center on Addiction and
Substance at Columbia University

Robert W. Nelson
Social Work Coordinator
Dayton Public Schools
Dayton, OH

Ronelle Neperud
Program Officer
Local Initiatives Services Corporation
Kansas City, MO

Janet Nes
Associate Professor and Chair
Department of Social Work
University of St. Francis
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Fred Newdom
Professor of Social Work
SUNY Albany
Smith College

Josephine Nieves
Executive Director
National Association of Social Workers

Mark Pierman
Executive Director
Family Service Association
Dayton, OH

Ramon Rajano
Director
Connecticut Dept. of Human Services

Lee Rathbone-McCuan, Ph.D.
Director
School of Social Work
University of Missouri – Kansas City

Michael Reisch
Professor of Social Work
University of Michigan

Felix Rivera
Professor of Social Work
San Francisco State University

Laura Robbins
Senior Program Officer
The John A. Hartford Foundation

David Saltman
Executive Director
Jewish Family Service of Greater Miami

Ellen Schall
Director - Wagner School of Public Service
Capstone Program
New York University

John Shallet, MSW, LCSW
Director, Program Services
Family Service of Greater New Orleans

Patricia Whatley Showell
Associate Executive Director
Program Services
Families First, Atlanta

Edward W. Sites
Professor
University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Tracy Soska
Director of Continuing Education
Coordinator, Post Master's Certificate
Program in Family Therapy
University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Lee Staples
Professor of Social Work
Boston University

Carol Swenson
Professor of Social Work
Simmons College

Keith Sykes
Director, Square One
City of Hampton, VA.

Betsy Vander Velde
President & CEO
Heart of America Family Services
Kansas City, KS

Norma Van Dyke
Former Interim Director
Family Service of Philadelphia

Lynn Videka-Sherman
Professor, former Dean
School of Social Welfare
SUNY, Albany

Bruce Wallin
Executive Director
Family Service Agency
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Robert Weaver
Executive Director
Families First
Atlanta

Anne Weick
Dean and Professor
University of Kansas
School of Social Welfare

Mindy R. Wertheimer
Director of Field Education
Department of Social Work
Georgia State University

Toby Weismiller
Director of Advocacy and Policy
National Association of Social Workers

Sandra Wexler
Assistant Professor
University of California – Berkeley

Betty Williams
Former Director of Professional Services
Metropolitan Family Service
Chicago

Thomas Wilson
Chief Executive Officer
Family Resources
Bettendorf, IA

James Wolk
Professor
Department of Social Work
Georgia State University

Joan Levy Zlotnick
Special Assistant to the Executive Director
Council on Social Work Education

MSW Students

Georgia State University

Lesa Hope
Bob Jones
Howard Marlow
Kelly Prejean
April Stutters

University of Pittsburgh

Joleen Andelmo
Maurice Flourney
Susan Klinedist
Ayana Ledford
Kenneth Nesbit
Denise Nickolich
Emalee Ranalli
Juanita Sanchez
Pam Shomo
Jill Shuey
Jennifer Thomas

Agency Employees: Community Centered-Workers

Families First, Atlanta

Peggy Baird
Dianne Burton
Yvonne Burton
Kathy Courtney
Tanita Cox
Diana Daring
Mary Early
Quint Gresham
Mary Hammons
Rosalind Haralson
Phil Hedrick
Katrina Henderson
Barbara Johnson
Jayce Johnson
Scott LaSalle
D'Andre Marshall
Nancy Moore
Wilhemina Purvis
Marcelo Rodriguez
Julie Steeno
Rafael Villar
Freddy Wilson
Gary Wright

Family Service, Inc. Fort Worth

Yvonne Butler
Jim Clingan
Zona Neuman
Debbie Perrin

Heart of America Family Service, Kansas City

Dennis Boody
Don Schempp
Jeff Umbreit

Family Service Association, Dayton

Victoria Bricker
Joyce Ferrar
Marnee Hanson
Vonnie Happy
Valerie Kapp
Amanda Malko
Cheryl McMahon
Paul Merrick
Linda Nace-Thomas
Scott Rathje
Kathleen Riggs
Diana Thomas

APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

Devising Innovative Curricula

Deans and faculty members at a number of schools reported they were involved in revising their MSW programs, in many cases strengthening their macro or community-organization offerings. As the examples below indicate, schools are taking a variety of approaches to community work, though all of them envision a comprehensive course of study that reflects the profession's dual commitment to the person and environment.

- ❑ The *University of Houston School of Social Work's* mission centers on achieving economic justice. The curriculum is geared toward socializing the students to this end, including courses on confronting oppression, and pursuing social justice. In the second year there is a political social-work concentration which includes course work on empowerment, integrative practice, political economy, affecting policy, and advocacy research.
- ❑ *Washington University's George Warren Brown School of Social Work* has, for the last ten years, offered courses in marketing, resource development and community relations; community development practice; revitalization of depressed communities; organizing, coalition-building and lobbying, budgeting, and fiscal analysis.
- ❑ *The University of Washington/Seattle's School of Social Work* has a concentration in multi-ethnic practice, in which virtually all of the course work is conducted outside of the classroom. Students are located in diverse agencies and community settings with faculty instructors spending large blocks of time there as well.
- ❑ *St. Ambrose University* in Davenport, IA has recently established a new MSW program with a single concentration in "Advanced Empowerment Practice." The program believes that clinical work without political work is not social work, and focuses on issues of social justice, economic systems and the strengths-based practice.

APPENDIX D
University Outreach:
Catalysts for Community Builders Program
University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work

The University of Pittsburgh launched the Catalysts for Community Builders Program in 1996. Originally operating as the African-American Community Builders Program, it equips students with the skills they need to create positive change in local communities. The program reaches students who might not otherwise enroll in the school – including community volunteers -- and enables them to earn a certificate in community organizing.

The University invited COI to help design and implement the program as a response to a report by the University's Center for Social and Urban Research, as well as a series of articles by local newspapers, that highlighted the economic and social disparities between African Americans and whites in metropolitan Pittsburgh. The program became a way for the University to positively respond to these concerns and to strengthen relationships between the School of Social Work and poor communities in the area.

The courses cover a variety of critical skills, from neighborhood analysis and assessment strategies to strategic planning and organizational development, and looks for ways to build on topics of special concern to Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. For example, several students living and working in public housing communities benefited from courses and fieldwork designed to focus on public housing policies. The current program focuses on community economic development and workforce development – key issues throughout the area's low-income neighborhoods. MSW students are also placed with the program for their field placements and professors from the School of Social Work and other University departments are linked to the program.

The program has enabled most of the students to influence plans and strategies in their own communities, and has opened up new careers for a number of them. After completing the certificate program, several have applied for and been accepted in bachelors and masters programs at the University. Some have found jobs as community organizers, including a few who have been promoted to manage community programs.

APPENDIX E

Aligning Education and Geriatric Social Work Practice: The John A. Hartford Foundation's Strategy

The John A. Hartford Foundation has recently launched a \$5.4 million, four-year initiative to strengthen geriatric social work practice through better education and training programs. Several observers we interviewed felt that the Foundation's strategy – which provides support for schools to improve their capacity to teach geriatric social work – may be a useful model for proponents of community-centered social work.

The Foundation hopes to address an anticipated gap between the needs of an aging population and the social work profession. It notes that only 2.7 percent of 35,000 students now pursuing masters degrees are taking a specialized geriatric curriculum. The Foundation is making three grants to address this gap.

First, a grant to the Council on Social Work Education will support development of standards for geriatric social work education and the creation of a clearinghouse for geriatric teaching tools.

Second, with Hartford support, the Gerontological Society of America will help create a cadre of faculty members committed to research and teaching about the needs of older adults. The Faculty Scholars Program will provide professional development opportunities to junior faculty members dedicated to teaching, research and leadership in geriatric social work. In addition to participating in a faculty development institute, scholars will receive support for community-based research projects.

A third grant, to the New York Academy of Medicine, will expand the number of sites available to train future social workers in geriatric issues. Up to 11 universities will receive planning grants to develop five or more clinical sites. Implementation grants for selected sites will follow, and the Academy will provide those universities with technical assistance and support as well as opportunities for cross-site learning. It will also develop a database of resources and evaluation tools.

APPENDIX F
Lessons from the Field:
The Consensus Organizing Institute's Pilot Programs

In 1998, the Consensus Organizing Institute launched three pilot projects to improve community-centered curricula at schools of social work in. After five years of helping communities mount consensus-organizing projects, the Institute began focusing on a long-term solution to a difficult problem. It had developed a successful organizing method, and communities had responded with increasing demand for the Institute's assistance. All that was missing were organizers who were well educated and willing to take on the assignments. The pilot programs – at the University of Pittsburgh, Georgia State University, and San Diego State University – are all aimed at increasing the quantity and quality of community-organization offerings at schools of social work, and are funded in part by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation.

Curriculum Development at the University of Pittsburgh

“The battle in the 21st century will be whether or not academics have the spine to teach students critical analysis versus falling into the trap of the politics of identity. In schools of social work this problem is particularly pervasive. There are many barriers to creating curriculum that is interdisciplinary, rigorous, integrated and forces students to think critically; however, we need to create opportunities to join with other faculty and national thinkers who understand these issues in order to create change.”

*C. Matthew Hawkins
Associate Professor
School of Social Work
University of Pittsburgh*

Over the past several years, Matt Hawkins has redesigned social work curricula for the classes he teaches at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Social Work, changing the way students are challenged to look at social work and the problems of diverse populations.

Working with COI's Mary Ohmer, Hawkins has taken a new approach to teaching *Social Work Practice with Diverse Populations* -- a required course for all MSW students at the University of Pittsburgh. Variations on the course are common at most universities, where the aim is usually to prepare students to provide better treatment to various cultural and ethnic groups. The course might be divided into separate discussions about each ethnic or diverse group. Future counselors are challenged to become more aware of their own biases, prejudices and stereotypes.

Hawkins and Ohmer take a different approach. They take students beyond treating or counseling diverse populations by teaching both direct practice and community organizing. And instead of focusing students on their own attitudes and feelings about

race, the course challenges students write papers analyzing the ideas and forces – including theories of multiculturalism and race relations as well as economic, political and immigration trends – that shape the prospects of diverse groups and their communities.

Students have responded positively to the rigorous curriculum, and several have changed their track from clinical to community organizing. One student asked for a field placement with Ohmer in COI's "Community Support for Work Program" operating in Pittsburgh. Ohmer and Hawkins have extended this approach by developing and teaching two foundation courses for the Community Organizing track --*Introduction to Community Organizing and Planning* and *Community Organization Strategies and Tactics*.

Georgia State University, Atlanta

"Society now embraces partnerships. That didn't happen in the 60's. Citizen participation was more tokenism versus real partnering with community. Outside resources were seen as the enemy, so we limited our possibilities."

*Mindy R. Wertheimer
Director, Field Education
Department of Social Work
Georgia State University*

When the leadership in the Department of Social Work at Georgia State University decided they wanted to develop an MSW program that focused on community practice, they turned to the community for help. One of their first steps was to convene an advisory group of community practitioners from local agencies to help them learn what jobs were available in community practice and the types of skills employers required. Based on this research faculty developed skill sets for the MSW program. "This up-front work gave me a high level of confidence then when it came time to begin setting up field placements, Georgia State students would have the skills agencies needed," Wertheimer said.

By convening local leaders, not only did GSU get important information for the development of the skills sets for their program, but involving prominent community people in an Advisory capacity helped convince the University that the MSW program was a good idea. In the spring of 1998, the Georgia State Department of Social Work offered a new MSW program with only one track, Community Partnerships.

In addition to the local advisory group, the University received assistance from the Consensus Organizing Institute. Former COI President Michael Eichler was responsible for early work with the University including, facilitating discussion of this idea at various levels of the organization and providing practical advice in the development of the program. COI helped the University develop a basic skills course for first year students,

define the type of faculty needed for the program, and gave the faculty advice about the types of field placements that could be developed for students in the program.

In 1999, COI's Atlanta Program Manager, Katie Russell, and Vice-President Karen DeMasi have also been guest faculty providing consensus organizing and community building instruction in several sessions of the core Foundation courses. In addition, COI has provided a GSU student with a field placement in our community organizing efforts in Atlanta. Currently, COI and GSU are seeking joint funding for an innovative project that would establish a Consensus Organizing Internship program. The program would provide four paid field placements for Georgia State MSW students interested in developing a career in community organizing. COI staff would offer intensive training in consensus organizing and community building, provide direct supervision to the students all of who would be placed in organizing projects with COI's partner organizations in Atlanta. COI staff, working closely with Dr. Wertheimer, would build a relationship between the field site organizations and the University.

Now reviewing applications for its third entering class, the MSW program has doubled its enrollment. When asked what advice she would give to other Universities trying to develop community practice MSW programs, Wertheimer, offered the following: "Ideally hire people with community experience who can also teach. The Faculty needs to continue to read and learn about community work. At Georgia State, faculty involvement in community activities is expected and valued. That's not true at all Universities. Be flexible about field practicum sites; look nontraditionally and recognize that there will not always be an MSW on site so you may need a faculty liaison to facilitate that role. Be clear on the skill sets you are providing. This made a real difference in explaining the program and securing placements. Lastly, a social work program's curriculum committee should be sensitive to new ideas that may come from the student's field experience."

San Diego State University

"Ten years ago I would not have even met with Mike Eichler or COI because I was not convinced there were jobs for social workers in community development in San Diego. Today I see lots of good employment opportunities for social workers with these skills. What we are trying to do with Mike at SDSU makes perfect sense now. There is a market for social workers with these skills and SDSU can be the University that fills it."

*Anita S. Harbert, Director
School of Social Work
San Diego State University*

The School of Social Work at San Diego State University has created a Consensus Organizing Center, a community laboratory for the teaching and practice of consensus organizing in San Diego. The center's mission is to educate and train a new generation of

social workers in community building techniques in order to make them effective catalysts for civic engagement and social change.

The Center grows out of the Consensus Organizing Institute's efforts to enlist schools of social work as partners in developing new educational resources for community organizing. SDSU's Anita Harbert responded to the challenge, and posed one of her own to Eichler: "join our faculty and help us do it." Eichler has accepted a faculty position at San Diego, and continues to work closely with Consensus Organizing Institute.

Among several new initiatives at San Diego is a pilot program to reach potential community practice social workers at virtually the earliest possible point – while they are still in high school. Under this pilot program, eligible high school students take an introductory, college-level social-work course, with ample treatment of community organizing strategies, during their junior year in high school.

The course, which began in the spring of 2000, has attracted seventeen students from Hoover High School, located in San Diego's City Heights neighborhood, which has the city's highest concentration of poverty and new immigrants. Students attend class on campus two days per week for a total of three hours. In addition to their class work, they will devote forty hours each semester to a community project aimed at increasing parent involvement in a City Heights elementary school (which most of them attended as children). The students will receive practical field advice from Consensus Organizing Institute staff based in San Diego.

Eichler team-teaches the class with five of his undergraduate social work students. These students have either completed the introduction to community organizing course offered at SDSU or have completed a field project in community building. While Eichler teaches the bulk of the course content, each student is assigned a subset of the group and acts as a mentor, giving the high school students more opportunity to learn about the interests of social-work students as they weigh their own plans for higher education and career planning.

By offering the course on campus and allowing the high school students to earn credit, explains Eichler, "We keep the bar high. This is a college level course, not a watered-down version for high school students. We need to help young people stretch." SDSU waives tuition for the participating students.

Beyond providing a special opportunity for San Diego youth and educating more young people about the potential of community social work, the program may become a valuable tool for the school of social work to enhance its minority recruitment efforts. The first class of seventeen has Vietnamese, Cambodian, Asian, African-American, Caucasian and Hispanic students.

Designing and launching the program was an organizing project in its own right. "A lot of pieces had to fall in place to make this work," explains Eichler. "First, a high school with a principal and teachers that believe that young people can be successful at college-

level work. Second, a group of high school students that are willing to make the commitment this course requires. Third, leadership at the University, among the Director and faculty, that this is an experiment worth doing. And lastly, undergraduate social work students that value what they can contribute to the young people in the program. The combination of these four elements are what made the difference.”

In collaboration with Dr. Harbert and faculty, other ideas being developed or considered include:

- A certificate program in Consensus Organizing for underemployed young adults in selected low-income areas who are unable to formally attend college
- Expanding on the Hoover High School project by developing partnerships with other selected high schools; and
- A professional development series for social workers currently working in low-income areas in San Diego to learn consensus organizing techniques.

APPENDIX G: Participant List – Chapin Hall Discussion Group

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