

Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences
Outcome Assessment Plan
March 17, 2005

The Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences employs an evaluative strategy that informs faculty on issues of curriculum content, curriculum outcomes and student and alumni opinions. The evaluative strategy includes both quantitative and qualitative information gathered through a variety of tools and techniques. The evaluative strategy is one that depends on measures the School has used routinely over a number of years as well as measures that are in the process of development and refinement. Information from the evaluative strategy is fed back to the faculty through committee structures; the curriculum groups, e.g., concentration meetings; individual communication between the associate dean and the faculty member; and periodic reports and memos.

Outcome assessment at the Mandel School occurs in the context of our Ability-Based Learning Environment (ABLE). Faculty of the Mandel School identified eight abilities necessary for competent professional practice that students should develop by the time they graduate from the program. The abilities were based in part on input received from fourteen stakeholder groups, and they serve as the learning objectives for each student and are the standard against which learning outcomes are assessed.

Evaluation of Field Learning

Achievement of the eight abilities is assessed in each student's field education performance using a learning contract and evaluation form based on the abilities. The evaluation instrument underwent a rigorous factor analysis confirming its usefulness as an outcome measure. Students receive a systematic evaluation from experienced professional social workers of their abilities as evidenced in their practicum work at the end of each semester.

Grades

MSASS uses a traditional grading system as a summative measure of educational obtainment in the classroom. The course grades are based upon assignments and assessments in each course that derive from the course objectives which in turn are based upon the eight abilities. Consequently, course grades assess students' achievement of the particular aspects of each ability addressed in that course.

Portfolios

Upon entrance to the Master's Program, each student begins developing a portfolio in which they accumulate artifacts attesting to their competence on each of the eight abilities, their reflective self-assessment of their abilities, and learning goals based upon that assessment and their ultimate career goals. Portfolios also contain the assessments of their ABLE faculty mentors, assessments by practicum supervisors and classroom instructors, and student peers.

During the students' final semester they complete their portfolios demonstrating their competence on each of the eight abilities. The portfolio includes artifacts, assessments and self-assessments pertaining to each of the eight abilities, with a heavy emphasis on the student's performance in their internship and the degree to which it reflects practice competence in "doing" the eight abilities. Students then present their portfolios in their ABLE seminars and receive feedback from their ABLE instructor and academic advisor. Many students shape their learning portfolios into job portfolios which they subsequently use in their job searches.

Licensing Examination

Social work is licensed at the bachelor's level, and the master's level plus two years of experience in the State of Ohio. All MSASS students are expected to pass the Basic examination which is required for licensure at the bachelor's level and master's level without experience by the time they graduate. Pass rates of MSASS students on the Basic licensing examination have consistently been higher than the statewide average, sometimes one hundred percent.

Licensure Practice Exam

At completion of the program all students are administered an abbreviated practice version of the masters level licensure exam to provide an approximation of their practice knowledge. Comparison with national passage rates for the actual exam are used to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the program, and have influenced the curriculum revision that is currently underway in the school.

Course Evaluations

MSASS has established a uniform course evaluation system that provides students an opportunity to evaluate classroom experiences. This includes an informal mid-course evaluation protocol as well as a formal written assessment at the end of the course. The mandatory end of course evaluations are intended to provide uniform measures of goal attainment across the curriculum and to provide instructors individual feedback.

Alumni Survey

The Office of Career Services annually surveys recent graduates to develop a profile of the jobs MSASS graduates move into, patterns of career development, and general professional success. This study is conducted as part of a larger survey developed and used by twelve social work master's programs.

Social Work Self-Efficacy

Upon entrance to the program all students complete the Social Work Self-Efficacy Scale, a broadband assessment of social work practice skills. Students complete the Self-Efficacy Scale again at graduation, and pre-post comparisons are made to assess the degree of student learning during their program of studies. Pre/post comparisons show students increase substantially in their self-efficacy by the time they complete the program.

Factor analysis of the responses of our students have confirmed the factor structure of the Self-Efficacy Scale based on samples of students from other universities.

Exit Focus Groups

Focus groups are conducted at the point of graduation with each student in their Ability Based Learning seminar. The focus groups address students' assessments of their learning in the program, their satisfaction with the program, and their suggestions for improvement. Results from the focus groups have been instrumental in refining and improving the quality of the educational experience, particularly the implementation of the Ability-Based Learning program.

Current Status of Assessment Activities in the Mandel School

Concurrent with the implementation of our Ability-Based Learning Environment in the fall of 2001 the Mandel School has made significant advances in the systematic assessment of student learning and program objectives. We now data that can be used to assess student learning during the program, and achievement of program objectives over time. Current "objective" measures are limited in varying degrees by their reliability and content validity, but do provide a good beginning basis for studying individual and program level outcomes over time.

No well-developed comprehensive measure of social work knowledge or practice competence exists at the present time, although we are exploring the feasibility of developing such a measure in collaboration with several other universities and the Association of Social Work Boards. We are also conducting comprehensive, systematic reviews of the literature in social work and related professions to identify measures that may be useful in assessing some of the eight abilities, such as cultural competence or critical thinking.

A promising area of formative and summative assessment is the use of standardized patient assessment. Within the next year we expect to begin using standardized patient assessment in a limited way in conjunction with the new Simulation Center being developed by the Case School of Medicine. In conjunction with several other leading schools of social work, we expect to develop a multi-site demonstration project to assess the feasibility and validity of using standardized patient assessment in social work education.

Given the complexity and reflexive nature of professional social work practice, however, such "standardized" methods of assessment will always have limited validity for assessing social work practice competence. Thus, we are continuing to concentrate major efforts on specifying clearly our eight abilities in terms of course objectives and measurable outcomes so they can be assessed more reliably in course assignments and field practicum, and reflected in a comprehensive manner in the students' portfolios.