Learned Lessons: Growing Social Workers' Preparation for Upstream Policy Practice

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Abstract: Over the last 10 years, the MSW program at Portland State University has gone from graduating 15% of its students in the macro concentration to 32%, while the national average is at 13.2%, among students who have declared specializations. This article traces that experience through a historically-grounded narrative line, administrative datasets, program surveys and the results of a world cafe, and extracts lessons that are potentially relevant for the profession. Although a range of factors, both intentional and unintentional, are perceived as important for this growth, key factors are discerned to be sequencing of the curriculum to ensure students get exposure to macro practice prior to selecting their concentrations, relationships with faculty who hold secure positions and are engaged in local practice, curriculum design and practice that ensures horizontal and vertical integration, student and community influence in the curriculum, and scheduling that ensures advanced year faculty teach in the first year and teach some of the field seminar courses. Insights including faculty stabilization, strong vertical and horizontal curriculum integration, early introduction to macro content, high levels of student choice and faculty's community engagement are shared. The article also includes tensions that emerged during the development process with potential to derail the effort.

Keywords: Macro practice; advocacy; equity; policy; organizational change; leadership

The Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work has called for "20% by 2020" (ACOSA, 2017), meaning they aim for schools of social work in the US to graduate, on average, 20% of students with a macro specialization. Although the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW, 2017) Code of Ethics confirms all social workers have responsibilities in macro practice, emphasizing social work's need to address social problems, to challenge social injustice, and "act to expand choice and opportunity for all people, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed and exploited people" (p. 24), there is uneven capacity within higher education. The limited numbers of those specializing in macro practice calls into question the commitment to achieve a more equitable balance. Credentialing processes within the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) identify that social work's purpose is to advance "social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty and the advancement of the quality of life for all persons" (CSWE, 2015, p. 5). MSW programs across the USA, however, are persistently stuck at levels just over single digits, graduating on average about nine micro specialized practitioners for every macro specialized practitioner. This lack of balance is not only a matter of student choice, but also the result of program availability, as well as a number of longstanding barriers identified comprehensively by Rothman (2013).

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Even for programs that want to promote a stronger balance, the current literature is elusive about strategies for attracting more students to macro practice. This article describes the journey of one MSW program's efforts to strengthen the macro concentration. It has been a journey shared by the three authors, and these insights are the result of dialogue and a combination of individual and shared reflection on the events of the last ten years in the program. Additional information on student numbers and course offerings were identified in administrative databases, a world café event to assist in curriculum restructuring, and the results of surveys conducted with students, community members, and field instructors. The authors are three organizational leaders: the 8-year lead of the macro concentration, the current lead of the concentration, and the MSW Program Director. This allows us to identify long-term patterns and bring forward details that are the purview of those in administrative roles.

The umbrella term we use in this paper is *macro practice.* We draw from Netting's (2013) definition:

> Macro social work practice includes those activities performed in organizational, community, and policy arenas. Macro practice has a diverse history that reveals conflicting ideologies and multiple theoretical perspectives. Programmatic, organizational, community, and policy dimensions of macro practice underscore the social work profession's emphasis on using a person-in-environment perspective. (para. 1)

At Portland State University (PSU), in the School of Social Work (SSW), we have grown the macro concentration from 15% to 32% of our graduate population, surpassing the historically low numbers of 3% in 2000 (de Saxe Zerden, Sheely, & Despard, 2016) and the current national average of 13.2% among students with a declared concentration (CSWE, 2017), up from 9% in 2014 (Reisch, 2016). This does not include students in an advanced generalist concentration, as the degree of macro integration cannot be discerned at this time. In a school that has almost triple the national level of macro students, we anticipate that our experience holds insights that are likely relevant for other schools aiming to heed the call for 20% by 2020.

The SSW is a well-established program within the Pacific Northwest. Established in 1961, the PSU School of Social Work is among the top 20% (33rd in the nation) of schools of social work based on its ranking by *U.S. News & World Report* (2019). Over the last ten years, we have grown this concentration from fewer than 25 students to approximately 90 students who specialize in macro practice each year. This paper focuses on the efforts made to strengthen the program, which in turn widened its appeal for students, attracting more students into the macro specialization. In addition to the curricular efforts implemented across the last ten years, we also detail the ways in which students in the region have been drawn to macro social work and the ways the SSW has positioned itself to be attractive. In the spirit of transparency, we also include issues that held potential to derail these efforts and conclude with the activities we perceive to be replicable for other universities to similarly grow their macro concentrations. First, we set the context by describing our program.

The SSW holds a distinctly social justice orientation. Its mission reads:

> …[to] educate students for advanced leadership and practice that recognizes and dismantles systems of oppression; builds racial equity and social, political, and economic justice; and advances the well-being of diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and tribal nations. We endeavor to deliver a social work education that is critically informed, theoretically driven, empirically supported, reflexive, ethical, vigilant and resistive to colonial, heteropatriarchal, classist, and white supremacist agendas. (PSU SSW, 2017)

The critical emphasis continues in the curriculum, which is formally grounded in principles of equity, social justice, and anti-oppressive practice. Educational content includes values, principles, and skill development for culturally responsive practice that enable students to gain skills to work effectively, cross-culturally, and innovatively. In addition, the School prioritizes research and scholarship that focuses on understanding, preventing, and ameliorating social problems (PSU MSW Program, 2018). The SSW has also developed a strategic plan that includes diversity and equity, and community and policy impact. Among larger goals of teaching and research excellence, these two elements reflect what we perceive to be the forte of the macro concentration.

With this commitment to social justice and equity formally embedded in the SSW, the school has largely welcomed growth of the macro concentration. Working upstream to address the causes of downstream distress is a valued focus in PSU's SSW. We recognize that not all social work programs are oriented to this perspective which might be a limiting factor for other programs seeking to grow their macro concentrations.

We begin by introducing a few necessary contextual elements. PSU's MSW Program is the only CSWE-accredited public university in the state of Oregon. It has had the advantage of a non-competitive environment, which is beginning to be challenged as two private universities are now delivering MSW programs. The program has developed five key offerings: regular and part-time campus programs, distance delivery in four regional sites, an online program, and an advanced standing program, that admits students with BSWs into the second year of the curriculum. Annual admission numbers are sizable: 180 on campus, 40 students online, and 30 in the distance program. The vast majority (87%) of the 530 enrolled students are from Oregon. Over the past six years, 30% have been students of color, which is equivalent to the local urban region, and higher than the state of Oregon itself (at 24% people of color).

The macro concentration is called "Practice and Leadership with Communities and Organizations" (PLCO). It includes policy practice within the system as well as advocacy practice to influence policy from outside the system. Through a combination of instruction, assignments and field practice, we prepare students for a wide range of macro roles, ranging from community organizing to leading not-for-profit organizations, to running for public office, and just about everything in-between. Practice skills emphasize partnership work with marginalized communities and building the power of vulnerable communities to durably influence organizations, coalitions, research, policy, and public discourse. Overall, the program emphasizes a principles-led approach to practice, establishing values that drive practice regardless of but sensitive to the context. Examples include "nothing about us

without us" drawn from the disability rights movement, and "walk your talk" that aims for integrity of values and practice across the range of roles practitioners hold. An achievement occurred this past year when two recent MSW graduates were elected to the state legislature.

Literature Review

Important scholarship has centered on the necessity of macro practice for the profession of social work as well as the wellbeing of society, and on the problems facing macro practice. A smaller body of literature focuses on content that is needed in the curriculum, both from CSWE (2015, 2018) and from individual scholars. Supplementing these directives are the generalist textbooks that continue to affirm the importance of both macro analysis and macro practice skills to affect change, addressing the upstream factors of downstream distress. New work addresses the journeys of macro faculty in how they have been influenced institutionally, in terms of the issues they have faced in being macro instructors in a predominantly micro faculty. Each challenge will be addressed in turn.

Reisch (2016, 2017) leads the current efforts to define the benefits of macro practice in the profession. Positioning macro practice as a key feature for manifesting social justice in the field, he recounts the history of macro social workers in social movements and in influencing the policy evolution from residual to institutional models of welfare in the era of the welfare state (circa 1945 to 1975). Social workers were instrumental in building the welfare state, although rarely afforded recognition. Today, this influence is much reduced, and we see a corresponding decline of macro practitioners in public policy and institutional influence. Neoliberalism has undermined the welfare state and its rugged individualist discourses and merit beliefs devalue the importance of social programs and systems change to support marginalized communities (Aronowitz, 2003; Korten, 1995; Stanford, 2008). This larger ideological context narrows the attractiveness of macro practice. The "market compliance" ideology observed among those dependent on social programs (Schram, Soss, & Fording, 2014, p. 379) cannot help but stretch to potential social workers.

Pushing for a revitalization of the macro specialization is at the heart of the Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work and their call for "20% by 2020." Deeming macro practice as essential for advancing social justice, adhering to the Code of Ethics, infusing public policy debates, and ensuring that social services are led by social workers, the Special Commission has embarked on a campaign based in the belief that critically-oriented macro practitioners hold potential to address a range of "isms" that threaten the wellbeing of a range of communities.

A thread in the literature urges caution in a universal approach to social work that integrates macro and micro practice with established theories, content, and pedagogy. Grey and Fook (2004) suggest that the push for an established balance of macro and micro is prone to being unresponsive to local conditions, and to becoming a western-infused curriculum. Although their focus is on international social work, their messages are worthy in American schools of social work. Local contexts need to be centered in the curriculum, and scholars will be most relevant when they are steeped in local issues. Social work is primarily place-based, and needs to hold local issues in the foreground of the curriculum.

Later in this paper, we argue that local priorities of racial equity, poverty and homelessness, and the campaign of "Disarm PSU" need to be integrated in the curriculum. McBeath (2016) reinforces this approach. While defining key content for the macro curriculum, he simultaneously identifies a range of desirable practices to ensure that the program is responsive to local issues, and emerging community priorities, and is led by professionals who are in deep partnerships (research and advocacy) with community groups.

Netting et al. (2016) share an invigorating journey into the lives of macro educators and the types of challenges that have served to limit the presence of macro practice in their schools of social work. The limits are pronounced and reinforced by personalities, funding patterns, subject positions, and professional investments, enacted by other faculty and discourses about the field as a whole. Also implicated is the ambivalence that the field has had about the type of leadership roles we envision for students and for the profession itself – and whether we prepare students for top leadership roles or for management functions. We also note the often-conflicting choices faced by macro scholars in their careers, such as choosing between grant writing and solidarity action with communities in distress. Heightened awareness to the multitude of social justice issues makes academic life difficult. In addition to the plurality of sites to which we are drawn to practice, Cochrane-Smith (2000) issued a stark missive for higher education when she surfaced the consequences of not working as an ally with students within one's own department; the students subsequently perceived her educational work as irrelevant. She highlights the need to ensure our roles do not end at the classroom door.

The literature provides us with glimpses of relevant knowledge about history and current experience that helps us to name some of the patterns that align with and diverge from the experiences of others. It does not provide us with narratives of how programs have addressed challenges and built stronger MSW macro programs. We hope this contribution catalyzes more programs to share their stories and deepen our understanding of what has been effective elsewhere. For now, we share the story of the macro concentration at PSU's SSW. This article conducts a historic review of efforts undertaken to strengthen the concentration, which subsequently expanded its appeal.

History

Four periods of growth have occurred in the program (see Table 1). The first was the intentional quality improvement effort to the community-based practice concentration that occurred from 2006 to 2010. The second was the curriculum revision process associated with re-accreditation, and the third was the development of the online program. Fourth, and ongoing, is a renewed curriculum development process that is infused with the faculty's capacity to assess horizontal and vertical integration that aims to ensure that courses in the curriculum are both comprehensive and logically sequenced, with minimal overlap or omissions. Each period of growth is described. Table 1 has some overlapping time frames as some phases continued as others began.

Table 1. *Periods of Program Growth at PSW SSW*

Phase	Brief Description	Time Frame
I	Hiring and curriculum improvements	2007 to 2011
II	Reaccreditation opportunities	2011 to 2015
III	Online innovation	Launched in 2014
IV	Longer term influence of horizontal and vertical integration	2015 to present day

Phase I: Hiring and Curriculum Improvements

The first phase began in 2007 and continued until the start of the formal reaccreditation process in 2011. Hiring to build and stabilize the tenure-stream base for the macro concentration was a key part of this effort. The decision to expand the macro track was made by the Dean, with agreement from the MSW committee. Existing faculty were "all but dissertation" (ABD) status and the school recognized that this placed the concentration out of balance with other concentrations. Without tenure, faculty were unable to advocate and take risks in bringing contentious issues forward, such as the thin focus on macro practice within the first year of the curriculum. It is this type of marginalization of non-tenure faculty that contributes to what Netting et al. (2016) suggest is a more widespread pattern among their faculties who are less informed about macro practice. Although these authors' more global portrayal of disregard for macro practice was not experienced at PSU, the features noted above signal a power imbalance among the faculty.

These hirings occurred without conflict, coinciding with the appointment of a dean who aligned with macro practice. As well, the SSW had (and largely continues to have) cultural valuation of macro practice. When assessing why this culture exists, the authors perceive that it is partly a function of "Portland nice" which refers to a cultural norm that defaults to "let's all just get along" (Gragg, 2012, para. 2,). It is also due to a relatively conflict avoidant culture within the faculty, which is female-dominated, university-based, middle class, and relationship-valuing, all factors linked to conflict avoidance (Barsky & Wood, 2005). We also believe this culture exists due to macro practitioners being "heavy lifters" within the SSW, with a reputation of shouldering significant administrative and service activities. Faculty are more likely to agree with those on whom they routinely depend. It is also likely a function of the long-term hiring practices of the SSW, with macro-related questions being embedded in faculty hiring, and active participation of most faculty in hiring decisions. Candidates who communicated exclusivity about their professional orientation were unlikely to be hired. Ensuring that all faculty have voice in hiring practices assists in promoting this culture. It has also been helpful that PSU had macro-oriented deans for ten of the last twelve years who supported macro tenure lines and the hiring culture noted above.

Faculty hiring of macro scholars prioritized community-based engagement, emphasizing those who were activist/advocate scholars and who were deeply steeped in local community research and advocacy. The benefits were to advance the school's reputation and regard in the community; imbue the curriculum with real life examples of applications to practice, which for students excites possibilities for their own future practice; and help students make sense of the relevance of what they are learning.

This era's curriculum included the following required 1ˢᵗ year courses: a 3-course generalist practice sequence, a policy history course, and a macro theory course. Within generalist practice, one term was macro practice (in theory) but few instructors were steeped in such practice and often narrowed this content. In response to this shortcoming plus the arrival of two new tenure stream faculty who were eager to strengthen the concentration, we assessed the concentration and revised the three-term advanced (second year) macro practice curriculum. Input was gathered from students, graduates, field instructors, and faculty. At the time, input was not directly sought from members of communities served by social workers. Since then, faculty have established these stakeholder commitments, although have yet to formalize methods for gathering such input. Students are taught approaches to involve service users in service delivery, the SSW does not operationalize this commitment. Our primary service users are defined as students, their field placements, employers, and community partners. Service users and community members whose lives are more directly affected by the quality of social work services and supports have yet to be involved. Such an initiative could be rooted in a research study of the valuation of macro education by service users, as a vehicle to ensure that service users' insights are respected and shared more widely.

Resultant curricular improvements included updating relevant research and theory, and more importantly, adopting stakeholder commitments that have been retained to this date. Curricular priorities are to more holistically prepare students for macro practice, even when it stretched beyond the forte of existing faculty. We decided that should faculty be unable to deliver sections of the curriculum, we would adapt teaching practices such as co-instruction, guest presenters, and shifting away from the traditional 3-term instructor consistency, flexing instruction to curriculum needs. We also decided to integrate micro practice within the 3-term advanced practice curriculum. Many students were drawn to upstream macro practice yet were similarly drawn to organizations where these roles were blended with micro interventions. To neglect preparing students for micro practice would invalidate their micro interests, as well as render numerous community practice settings ineligible for our macro students. We shaped this part of the curriculum within anti-oppressive practice and critical social work traditions such as feminist, structural and radical micro practices. As emphasized by Reisch (2017), "macro social work is not indirect practice… all social workers work with people..." (p. 7). Being able to say, "and we also support students who have micro roles with clients" makes the choice easier to make. This inclusion is retained today.

We also began to listen more deeply to students and their priorities for their own learning. Stretching beyond conventional approaches to grading, faculty established much greater flexibility in assignments. The major assignment in the second and third term was open to the preferences of students, and they identified their own project, including the ways they wanted their work to be graded. This took many different shapes over the years. Sometimes it was an intervention project that they engaged in at their practicum, including an evaluation of its effectiveness. Other times, it was a conference presentation, or an arts-informed reflection of a current social justice issue. Students did this alone, in pairs, or in larger groups. It was not without some anxiety for students as self-directed learning is countercultural in higher education. We provided students with an alternate assignment

which was to identify a job they wanted to apply for, and customize their resume for the position, prepare a cover letter, and prepare written versions of how they were going to respond to a few interview questions, such as:

- How has your recent education (your MSW, with a macro concentration) contributed to your skills and capacities for this position?
- We understand that the School of Social Work has been expanding student exposure to "anti-oppressive practice." Please describe what this is, and how you anticipate that we will benefit from this approach to social work practice. Please make sure your answer to the second part of this question is rooted in the activities of our organization.

In most cases, students actually submitted their application for available positions.

After one year of curriculum improvements, instructors began to include students in customizing the curriculum. In the middle of the first term of the advanced practice year, a survey was administered to all students in the concentration (n=23). The framing of this was to both honor the existing curriculum and elicit student input. The survey asked students to identify the degree to which learning about specific topics was relevant to their professional and personal goals. By the time they took the survey, they had been in practicum for about 6-8 weeks, allowing them to discern relevant practices.

Response rates were above 80% and responses helped instructors shape and balance the curriculum. We also asked students about their preference for assignments, identifying what was traditionally used and offering open-ended questions to elicit their ideas for strengthening the curriculum. Typically, students affirmed the planned content, with one exception which has been responded to: a desire for more content on how to advance racial equity relationally, structurally, and institutionally. This survey practice continues and keeps faculty grounded in local priorities, builds student voice and influence, and heightens expectations for our responsiveness.

Our final innovation was to hold a regional macro conference to showcase student projects developed through the three-term advanced practice course. It was also an opportunity to add faculty presentations, as well as community presentations. The purpose was not just to profile these projects, but also to promote awareness of macro roles in social work and create a network of macro social workers in the region. The workload was considerable, and faculty partnerships with Oregon's NASW, the Portland chapter of the Social Welfare Action Alliance, and with students (a student coordinating committee) did not diminish the work, although the conference attendance increased. After four years, faculty were unable to sustain the effort and while the idea remains a good one, it is not viable with current workloads. The results of this phase of growth efforts was to increase enrollment in the macro concentration from less than 25 students a year to approximately 40 students a year.

Phase II: Reaccreditation Opportunities

The second phase of our growth of macro practice occurred in the re-accreditation process that began in 2011, integrating broad and deep engagement practices with the

community, and emphasized more effective preparation of students for practice. Three major input processes occurred in re-accreditation: a survey of 116 current and prior students, field instructors, and allies of the program; a "world café" engagement process with 85 community partners who spent the day surfacing community priorities and advice for the SSW; and a series of working groups (comprised of faculty, students and interested allies) that created proposals for consideration. Community input included research partners, grassroots coalition members, alumni, employers, and field instructors.

In this design process, we shaped and differentiated the content that needed to be available to all students (and thus within the first year of the program) and that which should be available at the advanced level. Overall, macro faculty were instrumental in moving more macro practice content into the first year, drawing from their learning in Phase I. Here were key decisions:

First Year Foundation

- o The first-year policy course was revised to be more practice-oriented, integrating policy practice into what had been a social welfare history course. Its focus has served to help build capacity among students in public policy engagement, and has enlivened interest in macro practice;
- o A three-term generalist sequence was eliminated, letting us refine macro courses and better integrate macro instructors in one-term courses;
- o While there had been a macro theory course, we needed to add macro practice. Broad social theories, political theory and social change theory were reduced in number although we retained broad social theories (deferring more to second year), and macro practice was added to both the social welfare policy and communities and organizations courses. Content was revised to ensure key macro theories were kept in courses that all students needed. More specialized theories were moved to the advanced year for the macro concentration. We have tried to keep these courses early in the first year of the MSW but had limited success: faculty prefer their courses to come early in the curriculum. These courses pique student interest in macro practice, and would ideally be scheduled early enough to influence concentration choice (which occurs in February);
- o A new required first-year course was created called "Advocacy and Empowerment" that included a range of practices: case advocacy skills, use of self in advocacy, empowerment-based practice across levels, and service user voice. This course, more than any (we believe), has strengthened micro-level practitioners' engagement in advocacy, particularly in the area of service user voice, as a vehicle for organizational accountability, empowerment for clients and systems improvements. While not directly serving to "grow" the macro concentration (as it is scheduled after selection of concentrations has occurred), it is still an influence in strengthening macro engagement among micro practitioners, which in turn strengthens the school's culture of support for macro practice.

Second Year Advanced Concentration

- o Two macro-focused concentrations ("Community-Based Practice" and "Social Service Administration and Leadership") were collapsed into one, re-named "Practice and Leadership with Communities and Organizations" (PLCO). Content included the strengths of each prior concentration, with the benefit that each group of students gained key advantages that broadened their skill acquisition and subsequently their employability. Community practice students gained organizational operations content (including budgets, human resources, and fundraising), and administration students gained a more astute critical and social justice perspective. Students now consider a wider array of jobs, as observed in an assignment where students identify and apply for a job of interest to them;
- o In response to community and student priorities, we added content on advancing racial equity in organizations, and students have an assignment oriented to supporting their practicum sites in doing an equity assessment;
- o Students have been given more flexibility to build a program that reflects their interests with six electives taken in the advanced year. This has allowed macro students the ability to build micro skills or to widen their macro skills. Greater responsiveness is useful for higher student satisfaction (which is also relevant for micro students);
- o The PLCO concentration, like other concentrations, is three terms long. In PLCO, we allow students outside the concentration to enroll for just one term, expanding options for learning macro content, although such figures do not show up in our specialization numbers. We still consider it a success to attract micro students into macro courses.

One year we had a decline in student enrollment in macro; we noticed that macro faculty were no longer teaching in the first year of the program, and their reputation among incoming students who had still to decide their concentration diminished. In subsequent years, the faculty made sure that the instructors of the advanced macro courses also taught at least one first year course. The success of these revisions was to grow student enrollment numbers in macro practice to two large sections, at about 50 annually.

Phase III: Online Innovation

The third phase of change efforts in macro practice created the largest increase in student numbers, growing from 50 to 90 students annually. Our online MSW program was created in 2014 and its sole specialization was macro practice (the PLCO concentration). While the reason was idiosyncratic in nature (as the leads of the creation of the online course were both the lead macro faculty and director of the MSW program), it was a curriculum focus that aligned well, given broader faculty reticence about online education. Numerous faculty had difficulty envisioning how clinical practices could be adapted online, and thus this choice did not activate as much resistance. A niche also existed for this specialization, as less than 18% of 74 online programs in the USA include such a concentration (CSWE, 2019).

The online program has been vastly successful, with 40 students accepted into the program annually and all of them specializing in macro practice. Retention rates have been steady at 97%. Two new features are now on the horizon: adding a specialization in health care and admitting advanced standing students. Access to Oregon's only public university and continuing to specialize in macro practice retains considerable appeal and we are resourcing students in rural areas and supporting non-traditional students to better access higher education.

The process for developing the online curriculum included two weeklong retreats for faculty who were participating in course design, led by the two lead faculty for the initiative and supported by a range of staff who provided expertise on instructional design, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, accessibility considerations, copyright legalities, and online technologies. A significant dimension of these retreats was to develop horizontal and vertical integration of the curriculum. The program was designed to maximize the student experience by ensuring that the parts of the curriculum "hang together" and are understood as a larger, integrated education about social work (horizontal integration). This approach strengthened the inclusion of macro content in the first year. We also committed to student skill development so that students, became increasingly capable and advanced practitioners as they moved through the program, with content sequenced intentionally to eliminate gaps and repetition (vertical integration). We also found that the rigors of online course design (as required by the instructional design faculty) transferred into the campus program. An example here is the grounding of each curriculum element in measurable objectives. The ongoing benefit of this process is that faculty can now view their courses as interrelated with other courses, and they continue to prioritize such alignment.

A related dimension of this online focus (although it did not align with this phase of the work) was dialogue about the number of students coming into the advanced standing program. Over the years, many faculty revealed concern about the advanced standing program believing that students were not as well prepared for clinical practice coming out of BSW programs. The macro faculty participating in these dialogues did not feel the same way and had experienced advanced standing students as well-prepared for the advanced macro curriculum. This holds potential for increasing the size of the macro concentration. We have yet to stratify incoming students in this way, but identify it as a possible option for growth.

Phase IV: Longer Term Influence of Horizontal and Vertical Integration

The fourth and final development period for strengthening and growing macro practice occurred after the online macro specialization was developed, and the residual capacity for vertical and horizontal integration remained in the foreground of our curriculum insights. Since 2015, we have seen the evidence of horizontal and vertical design capacity in pathways to strengthening the entire curriculum, with two examples provided below.

The advanced standing program requires students to have a "bridge course" that they take in the summer before they join the advanced year. The course had been taught by many different instructors, each with their own priorities. In 2018, the course was led by

two instructors steeped in awareness of the entire curriculum and with experience in understanding vertical and horizontal integration. These principles were forwarded in the new course design, with an emphasis on applications of theories to practice, and the consequences for practice of different theoretical perspectives. In this way, students built understanding of the intersections of various fields of study and an appreciation for their full relevance to practice.

In a second example, it became clear that in a required course on groups, the instructional faculty were omitting non-clinical, macro-oriented group practices, such as coalitions and popular education. After advocacy efforts for inclusion did not work, the macro practice faculty successfully moved popular education into a different first year course, while additional elements were moved into the advanced year macro courses. Being aware of the importance of the entire curriculum (achieved through engaging with horizontal and vertical integration in Phase 3), strong relationships across faculty allowed for macro faculty to adjust to these conditions. That said, losing this content from the required groups course is, indeed, a loss for the broader student body as non-macro students do not gain broader exposure to macro groups elements.

This fourth period has not resulted in more students entering the macro concentration. In fact, numbers have declined a little. Such a shift, we believe, is the result of greater choice in the online program (whereby students can now take a concentration in health, which is primarily micro practice) and some reduction in student support for macro practice due to various staffing changes (e.g., one senior macro faculty left the university, a second was on medical leave last year, and a third reduced their presence on campus due to a significant residential move). This aligns with earlier insights when we learned (or rather, hypothesized) that macro faculty presence on campus (e.g., engaging in advocacy practice or instructing first year macro courses) served to attract more students into the macro concentration. While there is an incoming stream of tenure-track faculty into the macro concentration, the importance of having faculty known by students in the first year needs to be consistent. We have come to believe that students are primarily relational, and make decisions with attention to both the ways they are being equipped for professional practice and their confidence in those instructors who will lead their education. Proactive succession planning holds potential to reduce the vulnerabilities of faculty transitions.

Future Options

We identify five opportunities to expand growth of the specialization. Most are related to building awareness about the possibilities for macro practice. First, incoming students and potential applicants are rarely aware of the macro dimension of social work. Communication efforts that detail skill development, impact possibilities, job opportunities and career trajectories (such as the high likelihood of being involved in macro social work upon graduation) can be developed. Recent research highlights the importance of macro skills training for all students. De Saxe Zerden et al. (2016) identify the need for micro students to learn macro skills as their movement into administrative positions comes with weaker management skills. We have the potential to better market taking a single advanced course in macro practice. Students are able to take just one of the advanced three-term sequence but very few do this. Given we have a facilitative structure for this,

communicating it more effectively could increase the number of students prepared for macro practice even if they do not take the whole curriculum. Second, to attract students who are more likely to want to concentrate in macro practice, we will market the MSW to sociology, public health, women's studies, cultural studies, and political science students, many of whom may be eager for professions (and their related credentials) that help them establish pipelines towards engaged policy and systems reform practice. The macro MSW holds this potential.

Third, we have learned that introducing first year students to macro practice is essential, and where these courses are positioned in the curriculum is very important. Ideally, such course work would occur early enough to inform specialization decisions.

Fourth, we have just identified the importance of ensuring that those who teach field seminars in the first year include macro practitioners, or practitioners with strong macro orientations. Such instructors are more likely to support serious exploration of the macro specialization and infuse reflections on practice from an upstream orientation. Without this, students have limited integration of macro practice connections to their field experiences. In our opinion, omitting macro capacity of such instructors is a mistake. The field seminar is an important course to influence students' choice for their MSW specialization, and while clinical savvy is needed for such instructors (as micro practice is expected of first year practicum experiences), the opportunity to also integrate macro dimensions of practice diminishes both the imperatives of the NASW Code of Ethics and the upstream dimensions of the social justice dimensions of the PSU MSW mission statement.

Fifth, we could stratify entrance selection based on students' anticipated desires for their concentration. If concentration preferences were a part of the application process, we could bring in more macro-oriented students. This would require agreement within the faculty body which could potentially be gained through dialogues about how we want to see the field develop. Providing students with a range of online resources to better explain the concentration, as well as having macro instructors host information sessions, would assist students in making this a well-informed decision. This would be a radical shift among schools of social work which typically do not stratify according to concentration preferences. Doing so would necessitate a shift in discourse that prioritizes faculty interpretation of what the field needs over student preferences.

Emergent Tensions

Tensions emerged during this evolution that held potential to derail progress. Literature suggests that some of these challenges were not uncommon, and thus might have relevance beyond PSU. The first is a version of the historic divide between micro and macro practice. Social workers have long been writing about the emphasis that clinical practice has in the field, and the limited exposure students have to macro practice (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Newer contributions highlight the marginalization that macro instructors experience in faculties of social work (Netting et al., 2016). Missing as yet is literature on what this means for macro students in predominantly micro-focused MSW programs. Our experience identifies challenges including reduced curriculum options, isolation within micro classes, lack of instructor capacities to support their interests, and

weaker capacities to explore field challenges and areas for growth. At the PhD level, Rothman (2013) highlights this influence in directing students away from macro dissertations due to a shortfall in macro faculty. Greater exploration has been limited; our experience may begin to shed light on this tension and possible solutions.

We all know that there can be a *zealotry of converts* and anticipate the energy that can be released through transformative learning practices (Mezirow, 1991). Our experience was that students in macro practice were enthusiastic about experiencing a welcoming and affirming "home" environment within the MSW program. The combination of their zeal and a place of belonging (in the macro classrooms) showed up as arrogance of being the "better" social worker when compared to micro practitioners. From students' perspectives, their positionality of being a macro practitioner was tied to one of superiority for doing "real" social change and social justice practice. Instructors generally supported this emphasis for how they envisioned their role, and initially did not try to minimize this divide.

Two problems existed with this issue: the first is that it was associated with a professional identity that rendered one "innocent" of being complicit with oppression (Rossiter, 2001) because one was a macro student. It is relatively easy to criticize the profession as being satisfied with putting band aids on problems that should be addressed at their roots, and to reason that if one endeavors to work at root cause levels, then one is doing "better" social work. But the macro practitioner can be just as culpable as micro practitioners. Macro practice can be just as expert-infused, disempowering, silencing, and marginalizing of those who experience distress. Shragge (2007) identifies the equivalent need to address power relationships between social workers and the communities with which we work, and that the work of rebalancing power is essential to minimizing the oppressive relationships that appear within macro practice. Fay (2003) ventures into similar territory, highlighting how the post-modern era in organizing addressed power and stature among coalition members.

The second tension emerged not from macro content but from the social justice content that has sharpened student analyses of power. This lens, while aiming for students to bring it into their practice with clients and communities, became targeted at the operations of the SSW itself. Faculty and administrators learned the hard way that a social justice lens cannot be limited to engagement outside the SSW, and expectations for the school to "walk its talk" were raised. While this was an early learning (circa 2007), it continues to manifest among students and there is a perpetual critique of our actions and inactions, particularly enlivened by the principles-based teaching that flows from macro-oriented courses including principles such as "walk your talk," "nothing about us without us" and "power sharing." Falling short on consistently practicing social justice in the department remains a source of discomfort within the faculty, although it is ideologically embraced among administrators as an important source of growth for the SSW and the university itself. It is simply hard to become the focus of change efforts of students who find aspects of our work unacceptable. In response to these raised expectations, the SSW has created the "Student Inclusion Coordinator" position that aims to improve the educational experiences facing students from marginalized communities. In addition, an equity assessment and action plan has been implemented along with, an ongoing committee to address equity issues, and a

student-led "Student of Color Caucus" that has agitated for reform. Universities are notoriously difficult to change, but movement is occurring and it is essential that the SSW remain both responsive and accountable to the importance of equity and inclusion.

The third tension was that the traditional marginality facing macro practitioners within the School of Social Work was being challenged as the macro numbers increased. While clinically-oriented students had definitely been the majority, and were reflected in dominant discourses about social work, their dominance was being challenged. At this time, macro practice had grown to three sections of students, and both a greater visibility in the school, as well as influence to support more macro electives, correlated with narrowing electives for micro practice. To some degree, this was cause for celebration and energizing for the concentration as it moved out of the shadows, and the influence of clinical students was diminished.

The celebratory dimension was short-lived. Fracturing of the faculty emerged, and some open hostility towards macro students and faculty occurred. This was painful, and the common interpretation was that macro students were in the wrong for being arrogant in their positioning as the "better" social worker. Tensions also reflect diminished centrality for clinical students, but it was more readily construed as the arrogance of the macro practitioner. Once the dialogue began to consolidate around this framing, we took action. This took two forms: the first was to share back with students how others perceived their attitude of superiority and defend the importance of micro practice, particularly when undertaken within an anti-colonial, anti-oppressive, critically-infused approach. Second, we added content on the complicity of the macro practitioner with relations of domination. Explicit attention in the curriculum was etched out to pay greater attention to how power arrangements were embedded in macro practice. Curriculum adjustments included more content on power-sharing partnership practices within community and policy practice, deeper "troubling" of the profession (with this concept drawing from Kumashiro, 2001), and critical reflexivity which were approached through focusing on identities, biases, and professional positionality. A core message was the ongoing need to implicate oneself as a professional with considerable privilege, even when one shoulders additional marginalized identities. This stance has enhanced the capacity of macro students to practice with greater attention to power and to identify pathways that build the power of clients and communities and integrate organizational changes that raise the power and influence of the communities being served. The negative attributions by clinical faculty to macro faculty and students diminished considerably, although they are still present from time-to-time. Macro students demonstrate greater humility and stop themselves from criticizing micro students for their concentration choice.

Reflecting back on these years, we wonder if this action–of responding by taking actions that induced greater humility and awareness among the macro students – was an incomplete response. In essence, we interfered with both the transformational learning of students, and may have diminished the pride they held as macro practitioners, through adding curriculum that caused them to be more self-aware of privilege, identifying pathways to power-sharing with the clients and communities with whom they work. Going forward, we wonder three things: was this an act of disloyalty to macro students who were rejecting the discourses that kept them (and continue to keep them) in the margins of the

profession? In the interests of minimizing the fracturing among faculty, did we sidestep an important conflict about the ways the faculty reinforce the primacy of micro practice, and the ways in which macro shows up in the school? Third, we missed the opportunity for non-macro students and faculty to learn about the alienating features of the marginalization of macro students in the field, and the attribution to oppressed groups as being the cause of this disharmony. This connects to the tensions that Netting et al. (2016) suggest:

> … it seems we need to be crossing curricular boundaries and engaging in dialogue with colleagues who are equally passionate about the micro aspects of social work education… social work has always housed diverse interests… and these tensions have been replete with challenges related to control and dominance. (p. 168)

The authors of this article have used this experience in teaching as a case study of institutional power arrangements. Shared are the critical reflections on how power relationships were addressed within the macro program, alongside our omission in bringing this issue to the faculty more widely. We have learned the incompleteness of our response as only macro students learned more deeply about power and how macro students were perceived as responsible for this disharmony, instead of implicating the conventional clinical/macro power relationships.

Currently, the cohesion of the faculty is stronger than in the earlier era, although the decision to sidestep this tension was potentially a form of conflict avoidance. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as an effort to articulate a boundary-crossing understanding of the importance of all levels of social work, provided they were steeped in effective responses to power hierarchies. Faculty and students in the advanced year of the macro practice concentration shouldered responsibility to mend the fractures within the student and faculty body. It is unclear if it was matched by similar accommodations within the micro-oriented streams.

Analysis: Who is drawn to macro practice and why?

The history section describes the efforts that faculty engaged in to make the concentration more accessible, responsive and appealing to students. At the same time, there have been important regional and professional dynamics that also make macro more appealing. This section documents the authors' understanding of this pattern, building possible explanations for the increased appeal of macro practice.

At first glance, the dimensions are beyond our control, as local dynamics shift across time, sometimes yearly, as political patterns emerge from crises, historic events, and electoral politics. Our macro concentration now includes more enduring content on administration, leadership and partnership practices, and we have reduced available curriculum space to respond to contemporary issues. That said, we are committed to responding to student priorities, emerging community and regional conditions, and our curriculum process attends to these. Local dynamics include heightened attention to racial equity, borne of the strategic research and advocacy agenda led by the Coalition of Communities of Color, including a seven-year research and advocacy partnership with the lead author of this article. Also prevalent is environmental advocacy, which several in social work have endeavored to stretch to include social sustainability (Dujon, Dillard, &

Brennan, 2013). In response, how to conduct a racial equity assessment is included in the curriculum, and environmental analysis and advocacy is included as an option for assignments. Greater choice in assignments also allows students to follow their passions.

We have identified the types of students who are drawn to the program, noting a few patterns that might be relevant for other universities. In our situation, more advanced standing students are drawn to the PLCO concentration than regular two-year students. We think this is because they are already steeped in BSW curriculum that tends to retain its generalist orientation, gaining more macro content. When students take between one and four years of BSW studies (and abundant numbers of courses), there is greater likelihood of exposure to macro content. While we do not have data to support this, we find advanced standing students are well-prepared for macro practice. This may be a regional attribute and suggest others shore up their BSW macro content and delivery.

We also have tracked the portion of students who select the macro concentration, comparing those who are part-time to those who are full-time. Our part-time students take three macro-oriented first year courses before making their concentration selection, while full-time students have only one such course prior to the selection. We analyzed the current cohort and found wide variations in the numbers of students who had different levels of exposure: part-time students have triple the level of enrollment in the macro concentration at 20.4% compared with 6.7% of full-time students. This does not include our online students who only have the macro option. This is important for other universities: in our experience reviewing transfer requests, we know that it is rare for first year MSW curriculum to include macro content. This is a lost opportunity, suggesting potential for improvement.

The macro concentration tends to appeal to more experienced students. In 2017-2018, students who selected macro practice had an average of four years of prior experience, compared to the micro students who tend to have closer to a two-year average. While we were unable to disaggregate our data in this way, we used a proxy measure of advanced standing students: 30.3% of advanced standing students enrolled in macro practice, while (as noted above, again omitting online students) only 6.7% of regular students made this selection. Our shared experience in teaching such students shows they have become disillusioned with solely micro-levels of intervention and are eager to engage in systemic-level change. Their priorities tend to be focused on how to improve institutions and public policy.

We continue to attract students who are activist-oriented, who aim to learn skills and gain experience in advocating for social justice. For most, the inclusion of "community practice" within the name of the concentration tends to organically suggest we are focusing on social change, alongside the SSW's mission statement which is clearly oriented to social justice. These students are mostly identifying as such when they enter the program, although there is growth of such students as they engage with the critical orientation of the program and its focus on how power works to create and sustain marginalization of an array of communities and populations. They often critique a solely micro orientation to social problems, and practitioners who disengage from the macro context of the micro

experience. For these students, "light bulbs go on" when instructors name the macro dimensions of client issues, gaining motivation to work upstream.

The regional dynamics of this ten-year period of macro growth is not one with heightened social movement and social change. Few movements have been pronounced – certainly in comparison with the 1960s and 1970s. The election of President Obama with his community organizing history did not seem to build our numbers, although it gave us much to explore within the macro curriculum. The new era of black activism, alongside the Black Lives Matter movement, and the opposition to President Trump's incarceration of undocumented children (among other actions), hold potential for more activist-oriented students to be drawn to the SSW. For this to materialize, faculty would need to be embedded in these struggles, working as academic activists in partnership with community groups. This involvement exists but it is not consolidating in a reputation, as yet.

Students are drawn to the reputation of those leading the macro concentration. When we examine the appeal of macro faculty, we discern that holding community leadership positions attracts students. Community leadership emphasizes leadership that focuses on building community power and influence, and works through strategies of building social capital and civic engagement within communities (Doherty, 2003; Kirk & Shutte, 2004). First author Curry-Stevens built a considerable profile from working with racialized communities and her combination of research, advocacy, and organizational equity work is widely known (among them are Curry-Stevens, 2012a and 2012b; Curry-Stevens, Cross-Hemmer, & Coalition of Communities of Color, 2010; Curry-Stevens, Reyes, & Coalition of Communities of Color, 2014; Har, 2010). Integrating this content into the curriculum has occurred and so too for second author Hawash. Hawash has longstanding local and community-based anti-poverty work, including research and project work alongside her consulting work that prioritizes socially-just fundraising and grant writing, all of which now feature in the curriculum. She is also a leader in "Disarm PSU" that emerged after the recent administrative decision to arm the security staff, and their subsequent 2018 killing of Jason Washington, a black man and non-violent bystander trying to defuse the conflict. Students are leading this campaign, and faculty are supporting this leadership. These advocacy efforts seem to inspire students to be drawn into the SSW and its macro concentration, as several routinely seek additional engagement with these activities, as demonstrated through seeking practicums in these efforts, independent study requests, and enthusiasm for classroom teaching and assignments that relate to these activities. Additional instructors hold a mix of scholarship in the area of macro practice and well-recognized practice in the local community. We also believe that if social work faculty are to maximize awareness of our contributions, we need to move into advocacy-based scholarship so our work has relevance, visibility, local credibility, and the possibility to generate resources that are more accessible than journal articles.

We are coming to understand that community leadership also emphasizes the principle of "walking our talk" which is essential to demonstrate to students. Students are drawn to leaders they respect. Being advocates in local struggles demonstrates to students that their faculty are "walking their talk," taking social justice beyond the classroom into the lives of marginalized communities. For the macro concentration, students seem more interested in local engagement than national and international reputations. They might have become

familiar with instructors' reputations before entering the program, and respond enthusiastically when these experiences are brought into classroom teaching and assignments are offered that can support these advocacy goals. In one example, macro students participated in outreach for the annual homelessness count. In another example, students reviewed racial equity policies globally to identify common features that local organizations could draw from. Whatever the local context, engaged instructors demonstrate the type of community leadership to which students are drawn. There is simultaneous emphasis on being advocates for students within the university.

A brief note about practicum opportunities is needed. The requirement by CSWE to have an MSW-credentialled supervisor limits the range of options for students. Many vibrant and exciting settings (advocacy coalitions, networks and small organizations) do not have this capacity, and while our field team endeavors to find a process supervisor to supplement a non-MSW task supervisor, this is often not possible. Innovations to support a broader range of possibilities and reduce this CSWE requirement are recommended.

In summary, the macro concentration at PSU SSW has grown from less than 25 to approximately 90 students a year. Four broad factors are responsible: (a) macro faculty leaders have been intentionally working to improve its quality; (b) faculty themselves are committed to engaged community practice and "walking their talk"; (c) an array of initiatives were adopted to introduce students to macro practice in the first year, and (d) the online program was created with macro as its sole concentration, adding 40 students to the program. In our estimation, half of this growth is due to the first three factors, and half is due to the creation of the online program. We also have tapped into the natural orientation of advocacy-infused MSW students to draw them into the program. Our credibility as activist-oriented scholars and educators has been strong, maintaining reputations for meaningful engagement with community partners. We were challenged by an array of tensions which have been, so far, navigated with some success, and adversity was transformed into a series of discomforting events, difficult but possible to address.

Recommendations

We have grown the macro concentration from an average of 15% to 32% of our student body, standing at roughly triple the national average. Significant features have been identified, as we reflect on the last ten years of the School of Social Work at Portland State University. Highlighted are the domains of innovation and responsiveness that we have found key to this development:

- Faculty stability and tenure, insuring the availability for service roles;
- Faculty who are actively engaged in the community, with various advocacy and research endeavors that inform the priorities that faculty bring into teaching;
- Faculty who enact leadership in the university to advance social justice, and ally practices that support students inside and outside the classroom;
- Student relationships with macro faculty, highlighting access, respect, responsiveness and active attention to the macro context of the micro experience;

- Sequencing curriculum so students are exposed to macro practice early;
- Flexibility and choice in the curriculum, supporting students to respond to their passions;
- Attention to growth opportunities, such as online development where the macro concentration was not resisted by faculty;
- Curriculum development that is firmly rooted in horizontal and vertical integration, and ongoing awareness of this importance outside of formal assessment processes;
- Adaptable curriculum to integrate current issues and local dynamics;
- Collegial relationships that are respectful, depicted by humility and remedy for missteps, heavy lifting in service roles, and willingness to compromise;
- Student and human service professionals influence in the curriculum to ensure that curriculum reflects local priorities and links students to macro practice networks outside the university;
- Culture that respects the contributions of all levels of practice;
- Recruitment of students from fields of undergraduate studies that are more likely interested in macro practice (for example, sociology and political science students);
- Monitoring the number of students selecting macro practice and identifying factors that are influencing the numbers so early intervention is possible.

Our final note is one of advice to other programs and to the profession at large: it is in all our interests to legitimize and raise the number and importance of macro practitioners in the field of social work as a whole. When social workers lose their focus on the upstream causes of the downstream distress of clients and their communities, we risk de-socializing this distress, and implicitly support framing distress in terms of pathology and illness. When we ignore the deficiencies of the market to generate enough well-paid jobs, and the discourses that continue to diminish the integrity of and respect for communities of color, and when we fail to invigorate resistance to injustice, and neglect the urgency of reforms needed to address institutional racism and the multitude of other "isms," we put all of society's wellbeing at risk. When we have this upstream focus, actions that invigorate resistance and promote opportunity, social justice and human rights expand.

If civil society is enlivened, we could expect our political leaders to value social wellbeing and work more effectively for the collective good. The empowerment of marginalized communities increases, and the institutions that provide services become more responsive and useful. Critically-oriented macro practitioners are steeped in these skills, understanding the upstream contributions that challenge wellbeing and holding the skills and knowledge on how to reform major institutions in our lives. By extension, their untapped potential can improve the wellbeing of those we serve. It is time to invest in their development and extend their influence in the profession.

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