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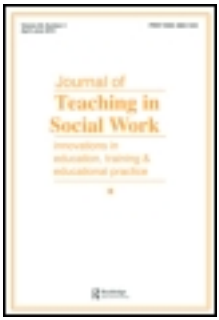

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Policy Practice

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Policy Practice: Training Direct Service Social Workers to Get Involved

Christine Flynn Saulnier

ABSTRACT. Policy practice training is needed for all social work students to encourage them to see themselves as part of the policy making process. The hope is that with specific training and hands-on experience in policy making, social workers will continue to be active in this arena post-graduation. However, there is a lack of information in the social work literature about educational techniques that encourage students to engage in post-masters policy intervention. Using a post-test design followed by an eight months post-graduation follow-up, students reported on their policy making activities. Class assignments in policy practice resulted in a wide array of intervention projects ranging from congressional lobbying and labor organizing to active support of consumer involvement in policy making. At follow-up, participants reported they continued their high level of policy practice subsequent to graduation. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.haworthpressinc.com>]*

KEYWORDS. Policy practice, policy intervention, educational techniques, policy training, social work education

Policy practice is increasingly emphasized in social work education to encourage students to see themselves as part of the policy making

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process (Wyers, 1991). Policy intervention training is useful for all social work students, not only for those who go on to practice at a macro level. Most MSWs intend to engage in clinical rather than policy work (Butler, 1990). Those who view themselves as clinicians are often only minimally familiar with approaches to policy intervention, and may need more specific guidance to learn how they can intervene in the policies that shape both their work and their clients' lives. There is some attention in the literature to innovative cognitive exercises (Huber & Orlando, 1993) or computer simulated policy analysis assignments (Flynn, 1977) designed to help social work students conceptualize policies. There is a lack of information about educational techniques in social work which encourage students to actually engage in policy intervention.

This paper reports on the development, implementation, and initial evaluation of a cluster of policy intervention assignments in which MSW students, the majority of whom had reported that they did not plan to engage in macro practice full time upon graduation, were required to engage in policy work. This advanced master's level course, ''Health, Mental Health and Disability Policy'' helped students learn concepts and build skills for intervening effectively in agencies, communities and larger social welfare systems. Within the broad arenas covered in the course, students learned to analyze, develop, and support policies that promote social justice.

The assignments were based on the assumption that students who practice skills, such as advocating on behalf of clients for specific policy change, may be more likely to use policy skills upon graduation (Schinke, Barth & Blythe, 1985). Although the empirical data on teaching social welfare policy is sparse, Wodarski, Thyer, Iodice and Pinkston's (1991) review of social work education research documented some evidence that engaging in simultaneous classroom education and policy work increases the relevance of course material to students.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The goal was to train students in three areas: policy analysis skills, policy intervention skills, and commitment to engage in policy change efforts. The course included objectives related to analyzing social problems, analyzing health, mental health and disability policy, and

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understanding how such policies were formulated and implemented and how they differentially affect various populations. The second set of objectives concerned skill development. Students were provided the opportunity to articulate their opinions and recommendations, hone their policy intervention skills, and intervene in policy. Finally, the course focused on trying to increase students' intent to intervene in social policy by increasing their understanding of the many opportunities they will have to formulate policy, improving their sense of efficacy in this area, and heightening their commitment to actively engage in promoting social justice.

Since social work simultaneously focuses on individual and social problems (Jackson, Macy & Day, 1984) and there is some evidence that policy issues are of more interest to students when the connection between clinical work and social policy is clarified (Meenaghan & Gruber, 1986, as cited in Humphreys et al., 1993), one classroom activity explicitly presented policy making as an extension of clinical work (Humphreys et al., 1993). Students were given three vignettes, generally used in a clinical interventions course. They were asked to identify the policies that were impinging on the social worker's ability to assist each of the clients.

The historical context of the course helped to make these clinical-policy connections more apparent. With dashed hopes of national health insurance so recent and the current debate about changes in Medicare and Medicaid making clear the impact that federal and state policy have on client access to health and mental health care, it was an easy connection for students to make. Additionally, New York, under Governor George Pataki, has been trying to eliminate most social work services from hospital settings. The very personal impact of a shrinking job market secondary to health policy changes also helped to drive the points home.

From the beginning of the semester the instructor emphasized that all social workers must engage in policy making, whether at the micro (e.g., agency, social work unit), mezzo (e.g., community, city, county) or macro (e.g., state, national, international) levels (Wyers, 1991). Throughout the course, students engaged in policy work outside the classroom. Such work included participation in social change activities intended to promote the well being of social work clients or other marginalized people. A distinction similar to Jansson's (1993) was drawn between policy work and policy-sensitive clinical practice, and

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students were required to do the former; that is, students needed to work toward improvements which would benefit a *population* rather than an individual client or client system. Any of the types of policy change described by Wyers (1991) were acceptable. That is, students could participate in policy making: (1) as change agents in their work environments, focusing on improving policies where they were employed or were interning; (2) as change agents external to their job or internship environments, for example, testifying at hearings, advocating for marginalized populations or participating in social change movements; (3) as "policy experts," providing a social work perspective on community and legislative issues; and (4) as "policy conduits," implementing and commenting on the effects of policy, providing feedback to policy makers at the agency or higher level. Students were provided with a list suggesting activities that had a policy or social change focus.

In addition to in-class exercises, students completed six assignments.

1. *Article critique*. Students read and critiqued a journal article on a policy issue. This assignment was intended to start them thinking about policy arguments in a systematic way, preparing them to write an analysis of a social problem and related policy. They were required to evaluate someone else's arguments, articulating the strong and weak points.
2. *Debates.* Starting early and continuing throughout the semester, students participated in formal, timed debates. They were given a proposition; for example, "Disability is a medical problem that is best solved through government interventions." Not knowing to which side they would be assigned, students came to class prepared to debate either side of the issue. They needed three arguments pro and three con. Each argument was to be supported with a minimum of three pieces of evidence. They also prepared potential points of negotiation to resolve the disagreements, and suggestions for directions that the negotiations could take. The exercise was intended to encourage students to clarify, clearly formulate and articulate their opinions on a policy, and to prepare them to solve the problem in the context of working with colleagues with whom they may disagree.
3. *Policy Analysis Paper.* Students wrote a formal policy analysis paper. This was intended to help them develop their problem

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definition skills. They had to carefully determine the definitions and extent of the problem, evaluate whether current policy solved the problem, explore the impact that a policy has on different populations, and suggest and critique alternative policies.

4. *POC Grid*. Self-selected student teams completed and presented a POC (Problem/Policy of Concern) Grid. This was based on an assignment developed by Dean Pierce (1984). Students were given a grid listing six policy levels, from the individual through social welfare systems. For each level, there was a list of five components of the policy making process, from identifying values that influence problem definition and policy needs through describing output, or the policy itself. The assignment was intended to help students understand the complexity of policy formulation and implementation, the conflicting needs of those who influence and are influenced by policy, and the many levels at which social workers can intervene in the policy definition, formulation and implementation process. Students were encouraged to interview clients, social workers and administrators and policy makers as part of the assignment.
5. *POC Presentation*. Teams presented their POC Grid findings to the class. They were required to suggest directions for policy change and to specify ways that their colleagues could become involved in influencing policy relative to the problem under examination.
6. *Policy Intervention*. Each student documented a minimum of six hours of policy practice and wrote a brief description of their efforts. The requirements were that the work be consistent with promoting social justice, and that interventions be relevant to health, mental health or disability and pre-approved by the instructor. The final class session was devoted to informal presentation and discussion of their intervention experiences. This assignment, policy intervention or policy practice, was the culmination of the rest, the one for which the others served as preparation, and the primary focus of the research described here.

METHOD

A post-test design was used, followed by an eight months post-graduation follow-up.

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Participants

All participants were Master's level social work students enrolled in the School of Social Work at the University at Buffalo, SUNY when the research began. All participants signed a consent form describing the study, and indicating that data would be used for on-going research and publication, in addition to the usual course evaluation. Participation was voluntary and students were assured that their decision as to whether to participate would not affect their grade, that their responses would not be available to me until after their grades were submitted, and that their identity would be protected in any format in which the data were used. They were also given the option to participate in the follow-up portion of the study, after graduation.

The students were concentration ("second") year MSW students enrolled in a course in Health, Mental Health and Disability Policy (H/MH/D Policy). All but one was concentrating in the Health, Mental Health and Disability sequence, for which this is a required course. Data were gathered for two semesters. Twenty-six of forty-two students (62%) completed the detailed response grids on each of six assignments. Thirteen participants of twenty-one (62%) from the Spring, 1995 H/MH/D Policy course, who were eight months post MSW graduation, and who had signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the follow-up, were contacted.

Post-Test

At the end of the semester, students responded to a paper and pencil instrument with questions concerning how well the assignments: (1) had improved their understanding of policy formation and implementation; (2) had improved their policy intervention skills; and (3) had increased their intention to intervene in policy making as social work practitioners. Students were asked to complete a chart, indicating their perception of the extent to which each assignment contributed to course goals. For each of nine specific objectives, using a scale from one to ten, they indicated the effectiveness of the six assignments in accomplishing each objective. The objectives were: (1) improved my understanding of problem analysis, (2) improved my understanding of policy analysis, (3) improved my understanding of policy formation, (4) increased my opportunity for policy intervention, (5) improved my policy intervention skills, (6) increased my sense of my capacity to

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change policy, (7) increased my understanding of opportunities for policy intervention, and (8) increased my level of comfort in giving my opinion of policy issues. Students also responded to an open-ended question, in which they were asked, simply, to comment on each assignment. This qualitative data provided them the opportunity to make comments not anticipated in the scales.

Follow-Up

Eight months after graduation, former students were contacted by telephone. Brief (fifteen to twenty minute) interviews were conducted in which they were asked closed and open ended questions concerning their work experiences, their participation in various policy related activities and the influence, if any, of the H/MH/D Policy course assignments on their policy related activities. Specifically, they were asked whether, since graduation, they had done any policy, political, social action, or "community" work. If they had, they were asked whether the work was related to their current job and whether the work was considered part of their normal responsibilities. They were also asked whether they had used their knowledge of policy practice on the job. Finally, they were asked: "Now that it's been eight months since you graduated, I'm interested in your perception about the contribution of (class) assignments to your actual engagement in social change or policy or political or community work." They were read the list of assignments and asked, "On a scale of 1-10, can you tell me how much each one contributed to your doing that kind of work?"

RESULTS

Recall that this is a description of students' self-report of learning and change.

Post-Test

The twenty-six students' mean scores for self-ratings, on a scale of one to ten, were calculated for each of the six assignments, and for each of the nine objectives. These mean scores and the associated standard deviations are displayed in Table 1. Not surprisingly, the policy intervention assignment was thought to contribute most to stu-

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TABLE 1. Mean scores (□) and standard deviations (sd) for each assignment, by each objective, on a scale of 1 to 10.

	Improved understanding of *problem analysis*	Improved understanding of *policy analysis*	Improved understanding of policy *formation*	Increased opportunity for policy intervention	Improved policy intervention skills	Increased sense of capacity to change policy	Increased likelihood of intervening in policy	Increased understanding of opportunities for policy change	Increased level of comfort in giving opinion of policy issues
Critique policy articles	□ = 6.84 sd = 1.92	□ = 6.48 sd = 2.04	□ = 5.76 sd = 2.08	□ = 5.40 sd = 2.19	□ = 5.56 sd = 2.40	□ = 5.56 sd = 2.42	□ = 5.40 sd = 2.41	□ = 5.40 sd = 2.20	□ = 6.32 sd = 2.53
Debates	□ = 6.63 sd = 2.63	□ = 6.33 sd = 2.82	□ = 6.21 sd = 2.86	□ = 4.83 sd = 2.23	□ = 5.25 sd = 2.49	□ = 5.50 sd = 2.47	□ = 4.79 sd = 2.57	□ = 4.75 sd = 2.36	□ = 6.00 sd = 3.21
Policy Analysis Paper	□ = 8.84 sd = 1.15	□ = 8.84 sd = 1.15	□ = 8.44 sd = 1.53	□ = 6.76 sd = 2.80	□ = 6.72 sd = 3.03	□ = 7.56 sd = 2.32	□ = 7.40 sd = 2.62	□ = 7.28 sd = 2.50	□ = 7.72 sd = 2.37
POC Grid	□ = 8.00 sd = 2.19	□ = 7.84 sd = 2.47	□ = 7.92 sd = 2.17	□ = 7.36 sd = 2.64	□ = 6.96 sd = 3.16	□ = 7.40 sd = 2.75	□ = 7.20 sd = 2.84	□ = 7.64 sd = 2.27	□ = 7.28 sd = 2.68
POC Presentation	□ = 7.32 sd = 2.88	□ = 7.12 sd = 2.82	□ = 7.40 sd = 2.62	□ = 6.72 sd = 2.87	□ = 6.44 sd = 2.87	□ = 7.20 sd = 2.92	□ = 7.16 sd = 2.88	□ = 7.12 sd = 2.61	□ = 7.68 sd = 2.54
Policy Intervention	□ = 8.06 sd = 1.93	□ = 7.86 sd = 2.32	□ = 7.75 sd = 2.04	□ = 8.78 sd = 1.77	□ = 8.33 sd = 1.42	□ = 8.44 sd = 1.50	□ = 8.64 sd = 1.42	□ = 8.89 sd = 1.42	□ = 8.25 sd = 1.78

dents' perception of the opportunities available to social workers to change policy (X = 8.78, sd = 1.77). Correspondingly, students reported that the debates contributed least to this objective (X = 4.83, sd = 2.23). This is reasonable, since the debates were designed to help students understand problem and policy analysis, and articulate their opinions regarding policy. Students gave some of the their highest ratings on the debates to those objectives (improved understanding of problem analysis: (X = 6.63, sd = 2.63); improved understanding of policy analysis: (X = 6.33, sd = 2.82); increased level of comfort in giving opinion of policy issues: (X = 6.00, sd = 3.21). The policy analysis paper was rated higher than any of the other assignments on the analysis objectives; that is, of all the assignments, the policy analysis paper was thought to contribute most to understanding of problem

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analysis (X = 8.84, sd = 1.15) and policy analysis (X = 8.84, sd = 1.15), as intended.

The scores on each of the nine objectives were averaged, for an overall rating of each assignment. The mean overall ratings, in ascending order were as follows: Debates: 5.59; Critique of articles: 5.86; Presentation: 7.13; POC grid: 7.51; Policy paper: 7.73; Policy intervention: 8.33. Generally speaking, at post-test, the students thought they benefited most from the policy intervention assignment and least from the debates.

Qualitative Analysis

This section is divided into two subsections: (1) *Intervention choices* reviews some of the projects undertaken by students when they were required to spend at least six hours outside the classroom engaging in policy practice, and (2) *Student comments on assignments* describes the written responses that students provided at the end of the courses.

Intervention Choices

The twenty-six Health, Mental Health and Disability Policy students engaged in a fascinating array of interventions. The complete list is included in Appendix A. Choices in intervention ranged from producing political art, to assisting clients who have developmental disabilities to vote in state elections. In another intervention two social work interns, both placed in grade schools for their field practice, organized an essay writing contest to promote their students' awareness of violence and to encourage the students–all seventh and eighth graders–to develop solutions to domestic, street and international violence. One of the most ambitious projects involved an MSW student who worked with other members of her church on laying the groundwork for a free health clinic and a free child care center for low income Hispanic people.

Some of the more creative interventions were done by (1) a woman who wrote a brochure and created a poster on emotional abuse of children; (2) a man who wrote a very moving poem about the abduction and murder of a woman who lived thousands of miles away from him; and (3) a woman who wrote a humorous brochure explaining the potential pitfalls of applying for SSI and SSDI.

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Others chose more traditional interventions such as coordinating a letter-writing campaign about the death penalty. Indeed, countless letters were written on dozens of topics ranging from letters protesting cuts to legal services for homeless people, to letters supporting a local newspaper's coverage of AIDS statistics and services; another letter hailed *Schizophrenia Digest* for producing their publication. Students represented their field agency at legislative hearings, participated in town board meetings, arranged in-services on cultural competence. One spoke out at a town board meeting to lend support to a proposal for low and middle income housing. Several students marched to protest against family violence. One marched in the Sovereignty Peace Walk on the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation.

On the more "radical" end of the spectrum, one student organized co-workers-successfully-to improve labor conditions at her job. Another student lobbied a city council member to encourage her to support adoptions by lesbians and gay men. One student wrote a letter to the editor pointing out the negative effect of the political environment on the health and welfare of Seneca people. Another wrote a letter of protest to Burger King in response to a placemat that depicted employees arranged in a pyramid, with white people at the top and people of color at the bottom.

Student Comments at Post-Test

When asked to comment on the policy practice assignment, students were generally enthusiastic, although not all responses were positive. Only one student wrote negative comments about policy practice, saying that it felt like "busy work" to her. Student comments are grouped here by the three most frequently appearing themes: their perception that they were better informed about policy, that is, that they increased their *knowledge*; comments indicating their belief that they had more insight into the policy making process are grouped under the heading *comprehension of process*; and students' comments indicating a sense that they can have an impact on the policy making process are listed under *self-efficacy.*

Knowledge. Basic knowledge-building in the broad arena of health, mental health and disability policy issues was a goal of the course. At post-test, several students noted their increased familiarity with policy issues in their areas of interest, for example, learning the importance of local, state and national domestic violence policies, and, in the

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process, coming to understand how common the problem of domestic violence is: "Preparing the fact sheet showed me the horrifying statistics on the abuse of women." One student described how she kept informed on important issues:

> This year I made an ardent effort to be an informed voter. . . . I reviewed the platform of each candidate carefully. I took note of their positions on numerous social issues including, but not limited to welfare reform, budget cuts for . . . Medicaid and Medicare, and the reduction of health and social services. I contacted NASW to obtain information regarding which candidates were supported by NASW.

Some students described how their assignments gave them the knowledge they needed for policy-sensitive clinical practice (Jansson, 1993). "I found out that cost was a major deterrent for older women to having mammograms." "I learned that unless they have their own mode of transportation, it must be very difficult for persons who are oppressed to get themselves to medical appointments." Another student described her plan for improving her practice, a plan which resulted from her increasing awareness of service access problems.

> This project was both frustrating and meaningful to me . . . I realized why Hispanic people in the mental health system are unable to get the . . . help they need. I also became aware of how easy it is for such a large group of people to fall through the cracks. . . . I decided that after I get my MSW I want to take more Spanish classes.

Once students gained basic knowledge of the issues, the next step in the process was to determine how the policy making process worked, so that they could be better prepared to influence the process. In the following section students describe what they learned about how policy is made.

Comprehension of process. Many of the students said they had improved their understanding of the challenges involved in the policy making process. For example, one student said he learned that "outsiders" are sometimes suspect in an agency and now understands the need to establish relationships before trying to make changes. Another

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learned a new respect for the amount of work involved in making change. One student spoke of dealing with resistance to change.

> Although my [proposal] was accepted, the administration was very skeptical at first. This was a challenging experience because I met with resistance . . . being able to work within agencies was the most critical skill that I learned.

Students saw first-hand how policy decisions are influenced: "I got to see how personal politics can get in the way of social action." "The scrapbook . . . made clearer to me how rhetoric really does affect policy." "I learned . . . politicians usually respond to their constituencies who support their agendas." One student spoke of the importance of joining together to make change.

> Participating in the managed care meeting, public workshop presentation, and public demonstration have enhanced my awareness of the prevalence of oppression in society and the need for empowerment and advocacy. While the "majority" will continue to design social policies upholding its advantageous position of power, it is the organized, politically active minority groups and social workers who will . . . demand just policies.

Sharing their projects with each other in the classroom helped broaden their understanding of ways to intervene: "It was interesting to realize how many ways there are to influence policy–how many ways there are to try to target the roots of problems instead of settling for the "band-aid" approach."

While the students used their new knowledge and skills to influence social change, they gained an appreciation for their ability to promote social justice, as the following comments demonstrate.

Self-efficacy. Many of the students expressed a strong sense of efficacy, insisting that by doing the work, they learned they were capable. They said the policy practice assignment "gave us an opportunity to be more than just students," that it was "a good way to learn that policy is changeable by me!" What's more, they felt strongly that social workers need to be key players in the change process, that social workers have an obligation to engage in such work.

> I found myself experiencing the feeling of knowing that I was doing something *necessary.* It didn't matter how few of us there

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were. What mattered was we were the ones making a difference, challenging the system, demanding to be heard.

I had a good experience . . . It gave me a 'push' to do things I would like to always be doing. It is so easy to let things go by and feel that I have no control over them. Doing things like this helped me realize that I do have some power to change the way things are done.

I realize now that I can no longer afford to be silent. I have been well prepared to speak intelligently on a number of issues. Now is the time for me to take action.

They were enthusiastic about their work, describing both client- and self-empowerment. They learned that "involvement, activism, and empowerment do make changes for the better." They described their sense of fulfillment and motivation with enthusiasm.

It was . . . especially fulfilling participating in [a pro-choice demonstration] while pregnant because if I have a daughter, I want her to have the same rights I have had over my body.

I . . . feel more motivated to pursue more change with AIDS policy . . . I found that the policy intervention has really become more of a habit than an assignment.

At times, client-empowerment was intertwined with their own sense of empowerment and provided a direction and a new appreciation for their own skills.

As a social work intern at the VA, it felt very empowering as a professional to be able to address a policy proposal before the social work administration.

I found myself . . . being able to discuss with some degree of coherence . . . policy on . . . legalization [and] decriminalization of drugs. . . . I have found myself speaking out more on issues of policy at the agency level . . . It seems that I might have a direction . . . for some energy that has been undirected.

In the course of this active involvement in policy, I gained a greater appreciation for the ability to impact on a community or national level. I felt quite involved in truly positive work that was

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> aiming to make change and better people's lives. . . . I certainly still had time for my family and myself; but I discovered that I was able to create time for my community. . . . I felt good about my active involvement in policy. I now see the need for social workers to have a strong, active voice in politics and policy making.

The following section describes the responses given by some of these same people when they were practicing social workers who had been out of school for eight months.

Follow-Up

Fourteen of twenty students who took the H/MH/D Policy course in the Spring of 1995 completed post-test data collection forms; thirteen of them agreed to be interviewed at follow-up. Eight months after graduation, all thirteen of them were located and were interviewed.

Ninety two percent (n = 12) of the MSWs responded "yes" to the question, "Since graduating from the MSW program, have you done any policy, or political, or social action or "community" work on any level (micro, mezzo or macro)?" Seven said the work was job related. Only one social worker reported that it was a normal part of his responsibilities. That is, for the other six social workers who were doing the work as part of their job and for the six who were doing such work outside of the job, their social action or policy activities were above and beyond their normal work responsibilities.

Ninety two percent (n = 12) reported that they used their knowledge of policy to do their job. All of them were able to articulate a connection between the course in Health, Mental Health and Disability Policy and their current job. An interesting qualitative finding was that several people's perceptions of the likelihood that each assignment would contribute to their efforts toward policy work had changed from post-test to follow up. The debates and other assignments that required oral communication skills were rated higher once they had practiced post-MSW social work. Nearly half of the practicing social workers reported that being required to argue their points in front of their colleagues on multiple occasions: the debates, the presentations of their policy practice, honed skills they have needed regularly.

Post MSW Policy Work

Comments from the social workers who responded to the post-MSW survey are summarized below. All names and some additional,

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potentially identifying information have been changed. The comments are grouped by common themes in their responses: *Use of assignments, Keeping informed and informing others, Advocacy,* and *Agency policy change*.

Use of assignments. Six people (38%) used their assignments in their jobs. One woman reported that writing a pamphlet helped her do the same thing on the job; it gave her credibility in developing brochures for the agency. Another MSW is using her paper to guide policy making in her agency and has been asked to submit excerpts from the paper for policy recommendations. Two students who developed directories of Medicaid service providers were using them; in one case, Child Protective Services adopted the directory for referrals for the clients they serve. Another MSW reported that he used the paper he wrote as documentation of his interest in health policy issues and the paper helped him get his current job. One woman is still involved in work she started for the course, addressing domestic partnership benefits in her agency.

Keeping informed and informing others. Eight (62%) of the MSWs described their perceptions of themselves as being informed and able to inform others of policy issues because of taking this course. "I have a better understanding of how state budgets, the political climate and decisions made in Albany (NY) have a direct effect on clients." Participants said they had a better understanding of what went on in their agencies, and how policies affect clients. They keep others, including clients, informed about how policy changes affect their lives. One woman said the course changed her perception of clinical work, in that she now realizes how much policy education needs to be provided to clients to help them get their needs met. Another MSW is writing disability awareness columns for the newsletter at her agency, and for the community.

Advocacy. Eleven of the thirteen MSWs (84%) described advocacy work, or other ways in which they had made their opinions about policy known. One woman has been active in local policy, protesting bow hunting in her area. Another MSW uses her knowledge of health benefits and health needs to make recommendations concerning the needs of people in her agency who have chronic health problems. Two social workers reported that within their agencies, they use their knowledge of new policies to guide referrals, and to help ensure that clients do not lose services.

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Two participants mentioned being more assertive since taking the course. One said, " I'm not as likely to sit back and say I am okay with proposed changes when I'm not." The other reported, "I challenge policies and makes suggestions." She felt she was encouraged to do this by the course. "It's considered a "given." Of course you open your mouth."

Six MSWs took their social work advocacy efforts to the macro level. One wrote letters to the governor in support of social work in hospitals. Another has been lobbying parliamentary government regarding needed services. A third is the program representative to "legislative day" in New York where she will be participating in senate hearings. A fourth MSW has been examining state and federal laws regarding narcotics consumption and lobbying for the use of certain narcotics to treat pain in cancer patients. Two have been organizing against domestic violence; one woman is networking with other agencies with similar interests. The other is organizing a bus for clients to attend a statewide lobbying effort, "Since I saw last year that it was clients, rather than workers, who made a real impression on legislators."

Agency policy change. Five people said they have been formally involved in policy making within their agencies. Two are working on getting domestic partner benefits for staff. Another MSW is trying to improve access to services for people of color by doing multi-cultural/diversity training for the agency. One of the social workers has been working to change policy regarding client length of stay. The fifth sits on a policy making committee, using her knowledge of health issues to make recommendations.

DISCUSSION

Clinical social work students need policy training. This study helps fill the gap in knowledge about educational techniques that encourage social work students, particularly those who plan a career in direct practice, to also engage in policy work after they graduate.

Student preference for policy assignments varies. The benefits of each assignment vary as well, so there seems to be some merit in providing them with multiple approaches to learning, especially given the initial apprehension and lack of efficacy that "clinical" students express about their policy courses (Huber & Orlando, 1993). It seems

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to help to have them actually doing the work as part of the class requirements. Adding a policy practice assignment, whether in conjunction with their internship or not (most of them were not), appears to encourage them to engage in social change efforts after graduation.

We need additional information to evaluate this training more definitively. We need to study the effect of assignments both at the end of the course and in follow-up studies. It would help to study a larger number of participants and to include a control group. The small number of respondents limits the results reported here. Those who chose not to respond may differ in their level of policy intervention and their perception of assignments. Still, it is encouraging to note that the vast majority of the social workers who participated seem dedicated to changing policy, and that they were able to draw connections between their policy work and their training in that area.

Supporting MSW participation in policy making may contribute to a reinvigoration of the profession and could help stem the tide of conservatism which has been growing in social work (Wyers, 1991). The importance of engaging in policy work can not be underestimated. Social workers must see themselves as responsible for such activities as actively opposing current moves toward service cuts and overly punitive restrictions on eligibility for social programs (Jansson, 1993).

It should also be acknowledged that the post-MSW interventions were not the only meaningful social change events that occurred during this study. The projects in which students engaged while taking the course were powerful examples of social work policy practice. The impressive follow-up reports of ongoing policy work notwithstanding, students made a difference, *while they were still students*. This alone would be enough to continue the work. The follow-up provided additional encouragement to continue the training and research in the hopes of developing ever-improved methods of training social workers to engage in policy, social action and other community work, aimed at eliminating oppression and improving the lives of marginalized people. In the words of one of the students: "Policy intervention is something I will always support in any school of social work program. . . . much more needs to be done by social workers to make our voices heard."

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT POLICY INTERVENTION PROJECTS

Attended
- a meeting
  - introducing managed care to county mental health center
  - about HMO's and aftercare for Cancer Center patients
  - representing women who depend on American Cancer Society for financial and practical assistance
  - of Task Force on Alternatives to Incarceration
  - (Post-Beijing Roundtable) to discuss the 4th UN Women's Conference on welfare reform
  - of Board of Ed. re: increasing child care services for employed mothers
  - of Western NY School Social Workers re: supporting Family Support Centers at schools
  - of Board of Directors of agency serving men coming out of prison
  - of NAACP, where intercultural conference with Nigeria was discussed
  - of supporters of Seneca Nation of Indians President to discuss jurisdiction on Indian lands
  - of Town Board
  - of Village Board
  - of Western New York Coalition for the Homeless
  - of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill
- a forum
  - on drug policy
  - on bi-national perspectives on economics, politics and gende
  - on governor's budget plan
- a hearing
  - on proposed decreases in bus services
- a Press Conference on NY State funding of mental health services
- a presentation
  - by Director of Governmental Affairs for National Cerebral Palsy organization
- a community meeting on children who had been murdered
- a conference
  - on AIDS
  - on building leadership among women

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APPENDIX A (continued)

- a workshop
  - on availability of utility subsidies in Western New York
  - on women prisoners
- a rally
  - protesting Medicare and Medicaid cuts
  - supporting pro-choice policy
  - anti-tax–as a monitor
- a retreat on ''Violence in Ourselves and in the Community''
- Africa Night at the University at Buffalo
- a summit on domestic violence

Marched

- against family violence
- with Anti-Rape Task Force in Take Back the Night March
- in Sovereignty Peace Walk on the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation

Voted

Helped clients to vote

Helped plan open house for AIDS services agency

Helped publicize March Against Family Violence

Helped establish link between local business and health care agency

Helped encourage teens and administrator's plans to develop teen crisis phone line

Helped prepare a newsletter about concerns of people with mental illness

Helped write proclamation for Assembly members to read for World AIDS Day

Organized

- an essay writing contest to promote 7th & 8th grade students' awareness of violence and encourage solutions
- a ''budget forum'' to bring together people working for the empowerment of socially disadvantaged people
- a panel discussion and town hall meeting about improving the quality of life for people with cerebral palsy
- a free health care clinic for low income Hispanic people (with others)
- a child care center for low income Hispanic people (with others)
- family benefits workers to make recommendations re: softening the impact of provincial cutbacks of children's services
- intensive children's services workers re: working conditions

Lobbied/advocated

- local and State Administrators

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about Medicaid reform
about child custody and expanding the definition of family
about services for homeless people
about services for women in domestic violence situations
social service agency to provide caregiver support group to decrease elder abuse
superintendent of correctional facility about providing AIDS information to inmates
director of health advocacy program of correctional facility about providing AIDS information to inmates
on behalf of a young, unemployed, African American man
for use of Spanish language admission materials in psychiatric hospital
city council member re: supporting adoptions by lesbians and gays

Educated
caregiver support group members about local disability resources
social service agency workers about the culture of disability
self on own cultural heritage (African American)
arranged inservice on cultural competence re: Hispanic people
P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) about gay adoptions

Spoke
at Town Board meeting in favor of building low/middle income housing
at Village Board meeting in favor of installing street lighting
on a call-in radio talk show to support "drug court"

Participated in Western New York Food Shuttle

Did a sand painting depicting the prevalence of oppression in our country

Joined
two mental health advocacy groups
an alternatives to incarceration task force
sub-committee to organize a national drug policy presentation
Organization of Chinese Americans
NASW
Social Justice Committee at church

Subscribed to a publication by and for people who are poor and/or homeless

Helped raise money
for Mental Health Association
for women's shelter

Campaigned
for county candidate supportive of services for underprivileged people

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APPENDIX A (continued)

Circulated petition/letter

to the Dean re: including information on domestic violence in the curriculum

Wrote letters

To:	About:
Pres. Clinton	budget cuts in social services
	welfare reform and racism
	funding child care and child welfare services
	providing health care to all Americans
Vice Pres. Gore	funding child care and child welfare services
Mmbr. Prov. Parliament	violation of victim's rights in high profile trial
Congress People	Medicaid cuts and people with disabilities
	urging them to fight the Contract With America
	opposing proposal to create block grant program for Food Stamps
	funding child care and child welfare services
	urging them to update the method for measuring poverty
	providing health care to all Americans
	urging reform of corporate welfare
US Senate Sub-commit.	protesting inadequacies in IEP and transition
on Disability Policy	planning and suggesting specific reforms
Gov. Pataki	protesting budget cuts for homeless services
	protesting cuts in legal services for homeless people
	protesting SUNY budget cuts
Sch. Superint.	increasing accessibility of Dist. Admin. Bldg.
County Legislators	protesting unhealthy conditions at a county psychiatric facility
Town Supervisor	resources for homeless people
NYS Off. of Educ. Chil. w	protesting inadequacies in IEP and transition planning and
Handicapping Conditions	suggesting specific reforms
editor	mental health policy
	driving while intoxicated
	the effect of the political environment on the health and welfare of Seneca people

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	supporting coverage of AIDS services and statistics
columnist	mental health policy
	commending him for accurate and non-biased commentary on the Seneca Nation
Schizophrenia Digest	providing support and encouragement for the publication
National Cancer Institute	distributing information on Medicaid/Medicare and cost of mammograms
Pepsi-Cola	inaccessibility of event billed as accessible
Burger King	protest arrangement of workers by race on placemat (whites at top; people of color on bottom)

Organized letter-writing

Distributed postcards to Senators urging retention of Medicaid/Medicare coverage for people with disabilities

drafted example letters

- for families of people with disabilities re: Medicaid cuts within MR/DD agency
- for employees, parents, guardians and consumers to encourage Pres. Clinton to veto proposed changes in Medicaid and Medicare
- informing Pres. Clinton of effect of proposed Medicaid block grant on ICF-MR residents
- protesting proposed state regulations allowing discharge planning by any employee

Wrote

- an article on psychological abuse of children for a newsletter
- an article on lesbian and gay adoption for scholarly journal
- a poem about the abduction and murder of Melanie Carpenter in British Columbia
- comments to Planning Director on the *Town of Amherst and Village of Williamsville Community Development Block Grant*
- editorial commentary on IEP and transition planning for children

Assembled information/developed reading list/resource directory/researched

- transportation to appointments for Planned Parenthood patients
- obstacles women face in accessing health care
- information on domestic violence
- fact sheet on domestic violence for sports figure to use at press conference
- to promote caregiver support groups at my agency
- scrapbook of articles on SSI and SSDI

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APPENDIX A (continued)

- directory of local dentists and optometrists who accept Medicaid
- self-help directory with people at Action for Mental Health
- list of legislators, attorneys, and commissioners involved in changing regulations re: discharge planning from hospitals
- Spanish language admissions questions and distributed them to ER staff at psychiatric hospital
- after school programs for children on Buffalo's east-side

Wrote a brochure

- on emotional abuse of children
- explaining potential pitfalls of applying for SSI or SSDI
- defining AIDS and HIV; distributed brochures with condoms

Created a poster on child abuse

Submitted a proposal

- to agency, to increase services to clients
- to agency, to increase services to caregivers
- to agency for sexuality programs for head injured and stroke patients