

Introduction

Special Issue of *Administration in Social Work*: “Educating Future Social Work Administrators”

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This issue of *Administration in Social Work* grew out of an innovative approach to taking stock of the educational issues facing MSW students who specialize in administration, their faculty, and, to some degree, the social work profession. For the first time in its 25 year history, the Editorial Board convened a Board Institute where various members took responsibility for presenting discussion papers in the following areas: 1) teaching materials, 2) field work issues, 3) theory issues, 4) practice issues, 5) curriculum issues, and 6) research issues. The articles in this Special Issue reflect the creative contributions of their authors as well as the discussions that unfolded at the Board Institute in Charleston, South Carolina in June 2002. Under the able leadership of the journal’s new editor, Professor Leon Ginsberg, this Special Issue includes articles that focus intensively on educational topics, questions, and concerns facing the field of social work administration.

The Special Issue on Educating Future Social Work Administrators begins and ends with curriculum issues. The first article by Tom Packard describes the efforts of one program to develop an administration curriculum that is responsive and relevant to the needs of the local practice community. It raises important issues around the capacity of institutions of higher education to continuously monitor the relevance of the curriculum in relationship to the needs of the practice community. Staying with the theme of the practice community, the second article by Michal MorBarak, Dnika Travis and Gary Bess features one of the first in-depth assessments of the impact of fieldwork on the careers of MSW graduates. As an exploratory study, it poses

many questions about the quality and intensity of administrative fieldwork and the need for national data.

Some other experiential data comes from the work of the National Network of Social Work Managers, as reflected in the third article by Shelly Wimpfheimer. She describes the competencies used in assessing applicants for national certification by the Network and gives our readers the first inside look at how practitioners, as opposed to educators, are defining practice competencies.

In the next set of articles, we move from the practice community to the academic community where Mark Ezell, Roslyn Chernesky and Lynne Healey explore the climate of the academic community in which future social work administrators are educated. They look closely at the tensions surrounding the preparation of administrators in an educational environment primarily concerned with the preparation of clinicians. In addition to the broad concern about the organizational climates of schools of social work, there are multiple curriculum issues facing faculty who teach students of administration. Some focus on the role of theory for practice, as Elizabeth Mulroy does in her explication of an “organization-in-environment” framework for students interested in macro practice. Similarly, Hillel Schmid addresses some of the organizational-environment theory issues that face the managers of human service organizations and their implications for practice. Finally, Michael Austin and Jean Kruzich focus on teaching administrative practice as they assess the textbooks and teaching materials available to faculty. Their assessment results in a call for a more comprehensive approach to learning materials development.

From our perspectives, this Special Issue only scratches the surface of the issues facing the education of future administrators. For example, given that nearly 80% of all graduates of

MSW programs have direct service or clinical research interests, it is not surprising that many future administrators will come from the clinical ranks. What does this mean for the teaching of macro practice (administrative, community, and policy practice) for all MSW students? Similarly, how well does the social environment component of Human Behavior and Social Environment courses prepare students for both clinical and macro practice? Also, given the growing interest in policy practice, how does this aspect of both direct (case advocacy) and macro (systems advocacy) practice get developed for students of administration? And finally, what role does research play in informing administrative practice (e.g., evidence-based practice), especially the knowledge and skill needed for research dissemination and utilization?

We have found the preparation of this Special Issue, from preparing for the Board Institute to completing this state-of-the-art review, not only a pleasure but also a privilege to work with such gifted scholars, educators, and practitioners. It is our hope that this body of work contributes in a meaningful way to the much-needed dialogue among academics as well as between academics and practitioners. Much more is needed and we encourage others to prepare papers for *Administration in Social Work*, especially the Management Currents section, in order to keep up the momentum of our ongoing dialogue.