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# Community Partnerships: An Innovative Model of Social Work Education and Practice

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**SUMMARY.** Community challenges force human service agencies to collaborate in providing services. Such collaborations require practitioners to have skills not found in mainstream social work curricula. This paper explores how a new MSW program evolved through dialog with community leaders and resulted in a curriculum with a sole concentration of community partnerships. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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## *INTRODUCTION*

The new millennium has brought major changes, challenges, and hardships in human service delivery. With communities confronting rapidly changing demographics, the growing disparities between rich and poor, and reduced human services funding opportunities, human service agencies are no longer able to operate as independent or competitive entities. Rather, they must develop collaborative networks for service delivery in order to survive and thrive. Such collaborations lead to a re-examination of the skills and knowledge applied by professional social workers and, consequently, to a reconsideration of the curriculum in schools of social work particularly with respect to community practice. Against this backdrop, colleges and universities have sought to broaden their mission to become engaged partners in addressing community needs and issues (Boyer, 1996). The American Association of Higher Education promotes the concept of the engaged campus, connecting the critical tasks of teaching, research, and service with the needs of local communities and the larger society (Astin, 1995).

The move by universities to seek out more community collaborations, the human service agencies shift to embrace collaborative service delivery opportunities, and the social work profession's renewed focus on community practice all converged to present an exciting confluence of conditions for Georgia State University to develop a unique MSW program. The planning for the program focused on the principles that: (1) partnership is critical for human service delivery and building communities; (2) challenges facing individuals and communities are interrelated and that solutions must be as well; (3) students should commit themselves to addressing social and economic justice issues that test the spirit of individuals and communities; (4) students should be educated for leadership roles to facilitate partnerships; and (5) the program must continue to be relevant to the professional lives of students and practitioners and to the needs of diverse communities.

This paper will explore how these five principles guided the development of an innovative MSW program with a sole concentration of Community Partnerships. Addressed specifically are the ways in which these principles interact with the historical evolution of the program, the theories and philosophical orientations used in the development of the community

partnership concentration, the development of MSW program objectives and skill sets for the concentration, and examination of specific courses integral to the community partnerships concentration. The discussion includes a focus on student outcomes and program self-renewal.

## *EXAMINING CURRICULUM IN THE AGE OF PARTNERSHIPS*

During the last decade, major changes have affected social work education and practice. Primary in this alteration are: (1) changes in the social and economic context; (2) social work's re-examination of its role with respect to its focus on psychotherapy vs. community practice and the movement toward the strengths and empowerment perspectives in social work; (3) the pressure on universities to broaden their mission and become engaged partners in addressing community needs; and (4) the role of partnership in addressing specific social issues. In speaking about this time in history, Mizrahi (2001, p. 181) states that "overall, the social climate is not conducive to meeting human needs or implementing the values of social or economic justice."

Building on the work of Fisher (1994) and Fisher and Karger (1997), Cox (2001) has identified six factors that have implications for community practice and can be seen as affecting social work practice in general. These factors include privatization and cutbacks in public welfare, de-industrialization and globalization, the ascendancy of individualism over collectivism as an American value, increased availability of technology, and the support of multiculturalism and postmodern theory as challenging universal assumptions that often promote oppression (Faubion, 2001). Other factors affecting the context of social work practice include devolution (Mizrahi, 2001; Sanfort, 2000), changing demographics, growing disparities between rich and poor (Fisher & Karger, 1997), and reduced philanthropic funding for the economically disadvantaged (Foundation Center, 2003).

While most of these factors hamper social work practice they also provide important opportunities and a sobering reminder that social work must be involved in policy and advocacy (Weil, 1996). Specifically, social workers must act to contain federal safety net cuts, engage in local efforts to determine service delivery, and respond to the needs of individuals and families in a resource lean environment (Mizrahi, 2001; Weil, 1996). Given these factors, many social work scholars have emphasized that the community needs to be viewed as the context for

service delivery and community practitioners (Coulton, 1996; Johnson, 2000; Netting, Kettner, & McMurtry, 1998).

The re-examination of social work with respect to its focus on psychotherapy or community practice, largely promulgated by Specht and Courtney (1994) and Cox (2001), has been followed by a re-examination of skills within the areas of community and direct practice. In 1999, Cloward and Piven spurred a dialogue among community practitioners when they wrote that community-organizing ventures failed to build power for low-income people, rather they effect change by nurturing a subculture among the poor in which the idea of justice is maintained. Definitions of community practice have shifted to embrace forms of practice that have moved away from traditional conflict (or Alinsky-style) organizing. One such practice is community-centered practice, epitomized by Comprehensive Community Initiatives. These initiatives integrate service delivery, neighborhood, economic development, and civic development (Lambert & Black, 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Others are using models of organizing based on consensus building rather than conflict tactics (Beck & Eichler, 2000). In the areas of direct practice, empowerment (Cox & Parsons, 1996; Delgado, 2000; Dietz, 2000; Gutierrez & GlenMaye, 1995; Parsons, 2001), the strengths perspective (Brun & Rapp, 2001; Chapin & Cox, 2001; Saleebey, 1996; Weick, Rapp, Sullivan, & Kisthardt, 1989), and the realization that a client's community context is integral to therapy are significantly altering practice (Rose, 2000).

Outside the schools of social work, universities are also expanding their mission. Taking heed from Peter Drucker's prediction that universities might find themselves irrelevant as a result of their cost and disconnection from society, colleges and universities are seeking to become involved with communities (Overton & Burkhardt, 1999). Taking the lead in defining a new role for universities and colleges, Boyer (1990;1996) argued that the academy needs to become a vigorous partner in the search for answers to pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems. The outcome of such partnerships he termed as the scholarship of engagement. The seriousness of the academy's commitment to engagement is evidenced in the burgeoning literature that examines the effects, processes, and practices of university and community partnerships (see, for example, Fogelman, 2002; Lundquist & Nixon, 1998; Nyden, Figert, Shibley, & Burrows, 1997). More recently, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has weighed in on university-community partnerships through the development of

Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC), which channel federal funds to university and community partnerships.

The proliferation of partnerships can be seen as a response to strained resources and to practices that have emanated from the public health approach in which the individual or problem is viewed within a multidimensional context, and as a requirement of private and public money. Successful partnerships are found in the areas of infant, child, and maternal health; primary education; community building and urban planning, and others (Barry & Britt, 2002; Dooley & Naparstek, 1997; McMahon, Browning, & Rose-Colley, 2001; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). However, there are questions surrounding partnerships as well. Mizrahi (2001) cited the role of partnerships as one of the factors that is affecting the practice of social work and indicated both strengths and concerns about the partnership approach. A community's assets, expertise, and resources are being used to create local approaches, but such collaborations may side-step social justice issues and place local leaders in the role of the oppressors. Her solution is the infusion of knowledgeable, skilled, and principled practitioners. This creates a role for schools of social work in retooling the role of the social work practitioner and designing a curriculum that is responsive to community needs.

## *DEVELOPING A NEW MSW CURRICULUM*

Georgia State University has had an accredited BSW program since 1981. However, the only public MSW program in Georgia was at the University of Georgia in Athens. In 1995, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia approved the establishment of three additional state-assisted Masters of Social Work programs with Georgia State's program having a *community organization and planning* specialization. This specialization articulated well with the urban research mission of Georgia State University and its goal of becoming an engaged institution of higher education. More importantly, the expanded definition that developed from this original directive was synchronous with the five principles discussed previously that emphasize partnership and community engagement.

The School of Social Work faculty viewed this political decision as an opportunity to take advantage of the strengths available in metropolitan Atlanta to develop a MSW program with a unique community focus and a community partnerships concentration. From the outset of the planning for this program, the faculty embraced the contributions of the

MSW Advisory Committee comprised of social workers and others from across the public and private human service sectors of greater Atlanta. The Advisory Committee was pivotal in collaborating with faculty on the philosophy and mission of the MSW program. As the philosophy and mission became operationalized into a comprehensive curriculum of program objectives, skill sets, and courses, the Advisory Committee continued to serve as a sounding board for maintaining the integrity of the interface between education and practice. Parenthetically, people in the larger social work practice community, but more pointedly in social work education, admired this direction for the School, but had serious doubts about its potential success. Practitioners and educators questioned whether enough students would be interested in a school with this sole community partnerships focus since the overwhelming majority of students wanted clinical concentrations. They questioned whether sufficient field placements could be located to provide internships. They questioned whether research opportunities could be generated within the context of the community focus. They questioned whether there would be jobs when students graduated. All of these questions have been answered.

### *Community Partnerships Concentration*

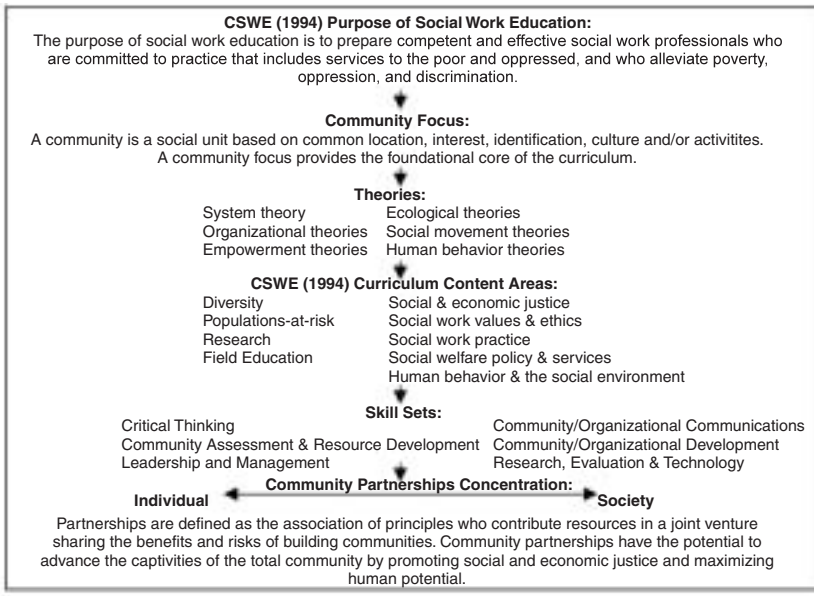
The community partnerships concentration evolved in a nonlinear style. Lengthy deliberations between and among faculty and community representatives around philosophy, theory, mission, curriculum, the profession, and community needs, produced a philosophy that sought to educate students to advance the needs and capacities of the total community by promoting social and economic justice while maximizing human potential. Students would be educated to commit themselves to addressing the life circumstances, such as poverty, violence, discrimination, and disparities in social and economic justice that fall disproportionately on vulnerable groups and challenge the spirit of the entire community. This focus incorporates multiple entry points for social work practice at any systems level. Hence, addressing direct practice with individuals and families took on the community focus as context for needs assessment and intervention. From this philosophy, the mission of the MSW program was created: To prepare students in advanced social work practice for leadership roles in the effort to solve, in partnerships with others, the existing and developing challenges that confront communities in the United States and internationally.

Community is defined as a social unit based on common location, interest, identification, culture and/or activities–a definition that reaches beyond a geographical community to acknowledge communities not always visible. Community partnerships, defined as the association of principals who contribute resources in a joint venture sharing the benefits and risks of building communities, have the potential to advance the needs and capacities of the total community through strengthening individuals and families; bridging and reinforcing relationships within and among community groups, among community agencies/organizations, and between community groups and community agencies/organizations; and creating new community resources. Community partnerships are predicated upon an empowerment orientation, which acknowledges and develops the strengths and creativity of all members. The importance of community demographics, politics, economics, geography and human service delivery systems is recognized. In this framework, social work practice integrates and applies values, principles and techniques of the profession to bring about planned change in community systems and its sub-systems. From the philosophy, mission, and these definitions, the School of Social Work began the development of a curriculum for a sole concentration in community partnerships.

### *MSW Program Overview*

Figure 1 summarizes the philosophical and theoretical components of the MSW curriculum. Since the School was working towards an accredited MSW program, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) became another partner in the creation of the MSW program. Beginning with the purpose statement of social work education (CSWE, 1994), a linear application of all the program components was created in order to articulate a clear rationale for the MSW program. The community focus, supported by the purpose statement, in turn supported the definition of social work practice that was evolving. In support of the community focus, multiple theoretical perspectives are presented including social systems theory, ecological perspective, empowerment theories, social movement theories, organizational behavior and dynamics, group behavior and dynamics, and individual behavior. These theoretical perspectives inform the nine MSW curriculum content areas required by CSWE. These curriculum content areas are added to the diagram to acknowledge the importance of the professional foundation curriculum in providing core knowledge for competent social work practice. The concentration in community partnerships builds on this professional foundation, which establishes the community, rather than the individual, family or small

FIGURE 1. Community Partnerships Concentration




group, as the unit of analysis. The community partnerships concentration is organized around skill sets, taught in the second year, which have been developed for creating student competencies in the assessment, development, maintenance and evaluation of community partnerships.

### *MSW Program Objectives and Skill Sets*

The original five planning principles provided the essential elements in the development of the MSW program objectives and the skill sets. The objectives and the skills sets shaped each other as educators and practitioners conceptualized the essence of community partnerships in social work practice. The concept of organizing around skill sets rather than objectives began as an intriguing concept that ultimately guided curriculum development. The skill sets focus was thought to allow for more flexibility for meshing educational objectives with community needs.

The MSW program objectives for the foundation year conform to the program objectives for the first year of virtually all MSW programs irrespective of the concentration because of the importance of ensuring that students acquire foundation knowledge, skills, and values. It is in the concentration-year objectives that the uniqueness of the community

partnerships perspective is outlined and the clarity of the skill sets can be defined. Specifically, the objectives for the community partnerships concentration are:

- Demonstrate communication/facilitation skills in building community partnership structures.
- Conduct community assessments and engage in community resource development.
- Demonstrate skills for influencing necessary organizational and community change to address populations at risk and advance social and economic justice.
- Demonstrate skills for influencing policy formulation and change in communities.
- Apply knowledge and leadership skills in managing projects, and working with community groups and/or organizations.
- Apply advanced information technology skills to community-based practice.
- Demonstrate skills in quantitative/qualitative research design, data analysis, and knowledge dissemination.

The six skill sets operationalize these concentration objectives without mandating a single course to achieve the objective or acquire a particular skill set. On the contrary, courses have been developed because they are institutionally necessary, but the objectives and skill sets permeate several courses in the concentration year. Knowledge and skills may be shifted between courses should evaluations indicate that the knowledge and/or skill set has a better *goodness of fit* in a different course. Although critical thinking is listed as its own skill set, it is infused in the other five. In Figure 2, the examples given are intended to be representative of a specific skill set and not an exhaustive list.

### *Overview of MSW Courses*

Given that the concentration year is community partnerships, the community becomes the lens through which the professional foundation content is analyzed, understood, and experienced. In the first year, MSW students are required to take *SW 7100: Foundations of Community Partnerships*, which introduces students to the concepts of economic and social justice; to community partnerships using social systems theory, ecological perspective, and the empowerment model; and to additional content to support the community as the unit of analysis. The theoretical knowledge is applied in an experiential commu-

FIGURE 2. MSW Community Partnerships Concentration: Skill Sets

| CRITICAL THINKING | COMMUNITY/ ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS | COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT | COMMUNITY/ ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT | LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A process to assess, critique and evaluate modes of practice, beliefs and attitudes, and research while always considering alternative or opposing points of view. | Varying written and oral modes of interaction and relationship building between individuals, groups, organizations and communities. | Collaborative and cooperative methods to develop and interpret agreed upon needs and goals, and to collectively act toward achieving those goals. | An ongoing process of developing, maintaining and strengthening relationships/ partnerships that builds healthy communities. | The use of concepts, skills, & knowledge from organizational theory, management, community social work, & social administration to address problems at mezzo/macro system levels. | The use of evaluative measures, technological processes, & management of information to facilitate healthy communities through neighborhood associations, institutions, and organizations. |
| **EXAMPLES:**<br>Analytic skills<br>Problem-solving process<br>Evaluation of practice | **EXAMPLES:**<br>Participatory skills<br>Group facilitation<br>Negotiation and mediation<br>Training and consultation skills<br>Record keeping<br>Project monitoring | **EXAMPLES:**<br>Goal setting<br>Assets mapping<br>Project identification and development<br>Resource identification and development<br>Grant writing<br>Social entrepreneurship | **EXAMPLES:**<br>Capacity building<br>Partnership development<br>Partnership structures<br>Constituency building<br>Grassroots development<br>Community education<br>Policy formulation | **EXAMPLES:**<br>Strategic planning<br>Supervision<br>Human resources<br>Fiscal management<br>Fund raising<br>Marketing & Public relations | **EXAMPLES:**<br>Information technology skills<br>Information management<br>Scientific method<br>Program planning & evaluation |

nity-based assignment. As a core course that provides context for the program's community focus, SW 7100 is one of the summer bridge courses required for advanced-standing BSW students entering the MSW program.

The second-year courses were developed from the skill sets in conjunction with the program objectives to provide students with an integrated repertoire of competencies for partnering with individuals, families, small groups and organizations in the community. *SW 8100: Skills and Techniques of Community Partnerships* focuses on communication skills (e.g., assertiveness, public speaking, persuasion, building consensus, facilitating meetings, use of the media) and resource development (e.g., grant writing, fundraising). *SW 8200: Evaluation and Technology* focuses on formative and summative evaluations of community service delivery systems and addresses the application of technology in assessing and improving programs, policies, and community partnerships. *SW 8300: Leadership and Management* explores management theory and practice, strategic planning, power, and personnel management along with the manager's role as leader to initiate and facilitate community partnerships. The final required course, *SW*

*8800: Community Projects* is experientially designed to have students apply and synthesize content from the overall MSW curriculum, with an emphasis on the skill sets. There is a required field education course each semester. During their first year, students are placed in a field placement (400 hours) that focuses on generalist practice; in the second year, students are placed in a field placement (500 hours) related to the community partnerships concentration. To illustrate the unique community partnerships concentration, three course examples are presented. Each course has an experiential component, which supports the skills-based curriculum.

*SW 7100: Foundations of Community Partnerships* course has both a didactic and practical component. Students are provided with an overview of community practice through an examination of theories, history, applications and domains. Explored also are the ways in which the social, political, and economic contexts affect practice. The importance of participation and relationship building are two themes that underpin content related specifically to partnership. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation serves as reminder that manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation and placation can easily mask as participatory partnership, and further supports that partnership requires vigilance, time, and a dedication to shared power. Consensus organizing, feminist organizing models, and conflict styles of organizing are used to address oppression and explore the importance of true participation and relationship building in community development (Beck & Eichler, 2000; Bradshaw, Soifer, & Gutierrez, 1994; Freire, 1970; Hyde, 1995).

Students gain a sense of the practices necessary to engage individuals in viable partnerships. They have a chance to practice some of what they are being exposed to in class through experiential learning. Each year the class engages in a community-based activity. The instructor works with local community groups to determine a class project. Projects have included the development of assets maps, needs assessments, and the creation of a community profile. Recently, students have been working with a community-based child protective program on developing community capacity. Students who conducted a community assets map uncovered a plethora of religious organizations, and the following group of students organized a meet and greet with religious leaders so that the community-based child protective program and the religious community could share ideas and resources. There are now several flourishing partnerships between religious institutions and the program.

In the second year of the MSW program, students take a two-semester sequence–Skills and Techniques of Community Partnerships course and

*SW 8800: Community Projects*–taught by the same professor. Rather than completing a research thesis or an exit exam, the students in the community projects capstone course work in groups with local agencies on community projects. Students are free to initiate their own project with one or more agencies or they can select from over twenty-five project proposals submitted by non-profit agencies. From June through August, the School of Social Work solicits proposals in three ways, including a mailing to 2nd-year field placement agencies, a Request For Proposals (RFP) announcement in a statewide newsletter for nonprofit organizations, and an on-line RFP on the School's web site. The majority of proposals arrive electronically.

In the fall semester students divide into groups and begin reviewing project proposals. Students contact agencies to negotiate the community project goals, objectives and timelines. At the end of fall semester, each group turns in a 10-15 page written proposal that includes project goals, objectives, and deliverables; a review of the empirical/theoretical/practice literature pertinent to the project; a description of how the skill sets will be applied to the project; and a timeline of implementation plans. During the spring semester, students are expected to work approximately ten hours a week on the project in lieu of a weekly class meeting. Groups submit weekly progress reports and meet with the professor as needed or a minimum of once a month. Besides completing project objectives, students are required to submit a process evaluation focusing on their group's dynamics and their own role in the group. At the end of the semester, students make two formal presentations of their project. Students present their project findings to their project sponsor(s) in the form of an in-service workshop or to another appropriate audience in the community. Projects are also presented to classmates and School of Social Work faculty. The success of sharing their respective projects outside the school strengthens the linkage between education and practice in community partnerships.

Although the community project course has not been formally evaluated, feedback from both students and project sponsors suggest that most projects are succeeding at both educational and instrumental goals. Many students say the projects required them to apply much of what they have learned. Course evaluation comments like this are common: "The community project was an excellent way to combine the skills we have learned throughout the [MSW] program." Several projects that did feasibility studies have resulted in concrete new programs in the community. For example, one group conducted a feasibility study to establish a residential shelter for adolescent girls who were in the ju-

venile justice system for prostitution. Today the shelter is open and the project sponsor credits the MSW student project for jump-starting the creation of this shelter. Another project examined the feasibility of establishing after-hours, supervised visitation centers in places of worship for parents who had lost custody of their children but were working toward reunification. Today one center is up-and-running and expansion of the model is currently underway.

In a 1998 editorial in *Social Work*, Stanley Witkin asserted that the academic-practitioner relationship in social work education is an important part of the effort to develop university-community collaboratives. Although *SW 8500/8900: Community Field Education* is designed to meet the objectives of the social work curriculum, at the same time, it can support the University's mission to be an engaged community partner. Establishing field placement sites for the community partnerships concentration is not difficult since the skill sets have relevance for almost every community entity from a small grassroots agency to a formal bureaucratic organization. All agencies and organizations are seeking to increase collaborative opportunities in service delivery and funding, so once the MSW skill sets are shared with potential field supervisors and they understand what our students can accomplish, there is strong interest in supervising a student. Even in more traditional placement settings such as a medical center, students can practice with a community partnerships focus. The organization around skills sets allows for such adaptability in identifying diverse field placement settings.

Most of the field supervisors are executive directors, associate directors, and program managers and many do not hold a MSW degree. The faculty liaison, with a background of community practice, provides the social work supervision to students without on-site social work supervision. The liaison also facilitates a biweekly field seminar. As part of their orientation to field, students are put through a community building exercise. This exercise sensitizes them to diverse perspectives, goal identification, and the challenges of collaboration. Upon starting field placement, the student is responsible for completing a learning contract, labeled an *Individualized Partnership Plan (IPP)*, which operationalizes the partnership between the university and the agency at the level of student and field supervisor. In developing the IPP, equal consideration is given to the educational objectives/skill sets and agency needs. In addition to the IPP, the student is responsible for completing field seminar assignments that focus on the critical analysis and evaluation of one's community partnerships practice. For example, the student is asked to examine the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics and critique its relevance to community partnerships practice.

The students complete field education with the ability to apply the knowledge, values, and skills of creating and maintaining community partnerships and to apply critical thinking skills in the integration of academic learning with field-based practice. The major comment that students make about the class is that they saw it as invaluable as a foundation for their other MSW program experiences.

## *EVALUATION AND SELF-RENEWAL*

The School of Social Work engages in a number of evaluative measures to assess student outcomes. Two of the measures will be highlighted in this section. First, a follow-up survey with graduates assesses their preparedness to apply, and importance of, the skill sets in their current employment. Second, use of an email listserv allows the School to collect current information on all MSW graduates' employment. Of the 80 follow-up surveys sent to graduates in 2000-2002, 38 usable surveys were returned. There were no significant differences between the year of graduation or full-time or advanced-standing students. On a six-point Likert-type scale with 1 being unimportant and 6 being very important, student responses to the importance of a skill set to job performance ranged from 4.5 to 5.6. With 1 being not prepared to 6 being very prepared, student responses to their job preparedness for a skill set ranged from 4.5 to 5.2. The means for the importance of a community perspective and community partnerships in the success of their work were 5.0 and 5.2 respectively. In short, graduates highly endorsed the importance of the skill sets and their preparation to engage in them.

Through an electronic mailing list, the School keeps in close contact with most of its graduates and maintains a listing of their employment. They are employed in organizations that represent a range of interests such as child welfare, mental health, criminal justice, housing, healthcare, and community empowerment. Within these special interests, graduates are applying their skills of community partnerships. One graduate is the executive director of a county collaborative that has over seventy-five member organizations. Her community partnership field education experience was a factor in being offered this position. A convenience sample of several employers of these graduates indicated that employers were not always necessarily looking for social workers with a community partnerships concentration, but they have found the perspective a benefit. Moreover, they are very pleased with the performance to date and would hire the person again.

In his landmark monograph on self-renewal chastises higher education, Gardner (1964, p. 76) notes that "much innovation goes on at any first-rate university–but it almost never conscious of innovation in the structure or practices of the university itself." He quips, "University people love to innovate away from home." The School of Social Work at Georgia State University has labored diligently to consistently and thoughtfully apply the partnership philosophy of the educational component of the MSW program to overall school change. For example, the MSW Advisory Committee has evolved into an Advisory Council. In this newly defined role, the Advisory Council helps guide the full nature of the School's activities within a community context. Recently, the School undertook a strategic planning process that involved the Advisory Council. Recognizing its own limitations, the Advisory Council concurred that an even broader community hearing was essential to assist the School with its planning. To that end, the School arranged a community dialogue on the future direction of the School that included additional community representatives and current and former students. One change that resulted from this dialogue was shifting continuing education from a service that met the needs of primarily clinical practitioners to a resource that meets the training needs of community-based workers.

## *CONCLUSION*

The faculty and community partners at Georgia State University planned and implemented a new MSW program in an historical and environmental context that fostered a different approach to social work practice and social work education. A confluence of social and economic conditions, an interrelationship of social problems, a renewed recognition in the importance of socially and economically just institutions, the accelerated pace in the needs of diverse communities, and the need for leadership and a collaborative spirit, led the School of Social Work to its sole MSW concentration in community partnerships. Nothing in the intervening years has given pause to alter that position. Even CSWE's (2003) newly approved accreditation standards and modified definition of the purpose of social work education continue to lend support to the program.

This experience has solidified the belief that the social work profession has the responsibility to take on this leadership role as a primary function of graduate education. This role is grounded in *community* as

the framework for the School. The community continues to change and the School of Social Work has a responsibility to respond to, as well as influence, those changes. This reinforces and celebrates social work education's longstanding attachment to, not detachment from, the community. As a result, the School of Social Work supports and educates social workers who are community-based practitioners and is a leader in the University's mission to be an engaged community partner.

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