

Syracuse University

College of Human Ecology

**Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages,
Relationships, and Families**

**Elective Course and Project Course Audit Results – Summary Report
April 18, 2008**

This audit report is based on the fourteen approved elective courses in the Promoting Child Welfare (PCW) project in addition to the course designed for the project called: Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families: Intervention, Research and Policy. Elective courses were identified by the project team in the three participating academic units: Child and Family Studies, Marriage and Therapy, and Social Work:

Child and Family Studies:

CFS 600: Family Life Education
CFS 667: Childhood and Family in Cross Cultural Perspectives
CFS 774: Parenting and Family Enrichment Programs and Research
Special Topic: Latino Children and Families in the United States*

* Not offered routinely.

Marriage and Family Therapy:

MFT 672: Couples Therapy Theory and Technique
MFT 673: Child Development and Family Therapy
MFT 684: Cultural Diversity: Family Theory and Therapy

Social Work:

SWK 702: Social Work Practice in Family Mental Health II
SWK 707: Short Term Intervention in Social Work
SWK 709: Social Work Practice with Children and Families
SWK 727: Family Violence: Policy, Practice, and Research
SWK 730: Family Systems Theory
SWK 734: Feminist Social Work Practice
SWK 735: Principles and Methods in Social Work Practice with Black Families

The basis for the audit of courses was the creation, in August 2004, of an audit matrix that was developed from curriculum learning objectives and competencies identified as important learning sets for students to acquire. The curriculum area competencies represented in the matrix included the following:

1. Child and Family Development Theory
2. Policies/Services/Systems

3. Assessment
4. Interventions
5. Cultural Competency
6. Social Support/Communities
7. Organizations
8. Values and Ethics

Learning objectives were then defined by the project team under each competency.

The resulting interdisciplinary curriculum learning objective and competency matrix was used to review the syllabus of each elective course and the project course. The matrixes were completed by the most recent faculty member teaching the course. The original request for the audit report was sent to faculty on October 17, 2004 with a follow-up request sent on November 15, 2004. The project course audit was completed at the end of the third implementation in early 2008. Completed audit reports were received for all offered courses. The Child and Family Studies department did not complete audit reports on two courses, the special topics course Latino Children and Families in the United States, and CFS 774: Parenting and Family Enrichment Programs and Research, because neither course was offered during the time period of the audit. The CFS department did complete an audit on one additional course not found on the approved electives list: CFS 648: Family Theories: Interpretation and Application. The detailed audit information from the faculty responses to their individual audit reports is included in the attached Course Audit Data Summary. The following report summarizes the data.

Summary of Data from Faculty Syllabus Reviews of Courses

The following summary describes competencies in the course syllabi that were reviewed for this audit. The eight curriculum competency areas and learning objectives are first identified and the result of the audit in each area is then presented.

Theory:

1. Demonstrate an understanding and an ability to apply various development theories to maximize healthy child and family relationships.
2. Demonstrate ability to critique and synthesize existing and subsequent theory to appropriately meet the diverse needs of the target population.

The theory competencies were most strongly present in CFS 648 and 667, MFT 684, and SWK 730 and 734 courses. Theory content was assessed to be covered to a high degree and with very specific and visible objectives. In addition, SWK 709 evidenced a strong presence and visibility of critique and synthesis of theory. However, developmental theory application was less visible in this course syllabus. This is most likely related to the advanced nature of the SWK 709 class and the assumption that the foundation for development has been provided in prior classes.

In the audit of the project course, Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families: Research, Policy and Intervention, it was evident that both developmental and systems theories were foundational to the curriculum. Developmental theory was broadly reviewed with the

assumption that most of the students were already well informed in this area. However, developmental theory could be more “specifically” visible in future presentations. Family systems theory was integrated throughout the course supported by case studies discussed in class.

Policy and Policy/Service System:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of federal and state legislation that regulates child welfare practices and services and influences family formation and well-being.
2. Demonstrate an ability to apply knowledge regarding policy, services and systems that influence family health, well-being and formation.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the court system and the role it plays in influencing family health and formation.
4. Demonstrate the ability to assess an individual's (adult and child) cognitive, behavioral, and emotional strengths and weaknesses including culturally based assets and to apply this information to formulate case goals and plans.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of the court system and the role it plays in influencing family health and formation.

Policy and Policy/Service System are separate on the attached Elective Course Audit Data Results report but are combined for the purposes of this summary. In general the policy content area was the least robust across courses and learning objectives. SWK 734 and 735 were reported to have the strongest and most specific aspects of policy/policy systems content.

In the project course, policy related to TANF (McClintock-Commeaux, Anderson, and Kuvallank, 2004) and the Administration of Children and Families’ Healthy Marriage Initiative were consistent throughout the curriculum. Student also had the opportunity to discuss DOMA, marriage law and policies affecting gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered individuals. The Marriage and Family Therapy students seemed to appreciate the discussion and analysis of policy in particular as their degree program curricula is limited in this area. Application of policy was more a function of field placement efforts than the course. The course did not directly address the ability to identify and connect clients with local service network however this type of discussion was usually present in the case studies or discussion generated from questions brought to class by the students.

Assessment:

1. Demonstrate the ability to assess an individual's (adult or child) cognitive, behavioral and emotional strengths and weaknesses including cultural based assets and to apply this information to formulate case goals and plans.
2. Learn and apply assessment tools, skills, and practices appropriate to the target population for couples, children and families as a whole in order to discern challenges and supports to a family's health, well being and formation.

Assessment competencies were determined to be present in all of the courses. However, they were most prominent in one of the Child and Family Studies courses (CFS 667) and three of the Social Work courses (SWK 709, 734 and 735).

Assessment is an implicit part of the project course as much as the material centered on the student gaining sufficient knowledge of the individuals and couples served in the child welfare system in order to identify strengths and needs as well as choose and/or adapt interventions. In addition, much of the literature regarding enhancing couple relationships within those served by the child welfare system is very recent. A tool called the Assessment Map was developed which provided students with a framework to sift through the literature so that it can inform their assessment process. A great deal of time was spent on helping students to improve their cultural competence so that they can understand and utilize the unique strengths found in various cultures.

Interventions:

1. Demonstrate the ability to develop treatment plans that promote child welfare through the enhancement of marriages, relationships and family formation.
2. Demonstrate the ability to think critically about solutions, interventions and programs and to apply the best practices to individual cases.
3. Understand child and family theories and can critique and synthesize for use as interventions that will promote child welfare through healthy marriages, relationships and families.

Audited courses in the Social Work department dominated the data report in interventions content areas. They dominated in terms of specificity of learning objective, visibility and level of coverage of content areas in the syllabi. Although one Social Work course, SWK 727, was evaluated to have low levels of coverage and low visibility or specificity of objectives, all other Social Work courses had some element of assessment. The Marriage and Family Therapy department's Couples Therapy course was also rated highly for interventions. In addition, CFS 667 was evaluated to show strong evidence of assessment content.

The development of treatment plans was not covered explicitly however pseudo coverage of this particular topic was through learning about relationship education, foundational theories and other interventions and learning how to apply them to cases. The course did however emphasize and nurtured the students ability to think critically about solutions, interventions and programs as well as apply best practices to individual cases. The students learned to critique and synthesize child and family theories for application to individual cases through the extensive use of case studies and other interactive class exercises. Students also learned about specific marriage education programs and effective intervention strategies for working with people within the child welfare system. Within this course, students gained a broad and specific knowledge of practice.

Cultural Competence:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of oppression, racism and prejudices on the formation, development and status of families (socio-economic issues).
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the continuum from traditional to acculturated values, norms, beliefs and behaviors of major ethnic groups and the ability to develop an ethnographic assessment of a child, couple and family in the provision of child welfare services.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the unique issues of immigrants including socio-economic issues and their impact on family health, well-being and formation.
4. Demonstrate the ability to analyze and critique models of intervention for their application, use of best practice for target population, possible modification and overall relevance to child welfare populations.

Faculty who evaluated course syllabi reported the strongest evidence of cultural competence content in CFS 648, MFT 672, 684 and SWK 707, 730, 734 and 735. However, none of the courses assessed addressed all of the identified objectives with a reported high level of coverage or specificity. The course objective related to the demonstration and understanding of the unique issues of immigrants including socio-economic issues and their impact on family health, well being and formation, was most wanting among the courses assessed.

Culture is very much a part of relationships. Hardy and Laszloffy (2002) state “all relational interactions are cross-cultural.” Furthermore they found that “culture is a powerful organizing principle in human lives.” Using this multicultural perspective in addition to attending to the professional values and ethics of each of the disciplines represented in this course, developing the trainees cultural competence, especially as it relates to couples and families, was an important and productive element of the project course. More material could be covered regarding immigrant families and their unique strengths and needs.

Social Support/Communities

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the demographic profile of families being served and the socio-demographics of the communities they live in (Macro-issues).
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of prejudice, racism, and oppression on the formation, status and development of families.
3. Demonstrate the ability to help families identify and use personal, family and communal resources that support the formation of healthy marriages, relationships and families.

Evidence of curriculum content in the area of social support and communities was present in all elective courses. However, the strongest presence of this content with the most extensive coverage and most specific and visible learning objectives was in MFT 672, 684 and in SWK 707, 730, 734 and 735.

Like cultural competence, understanding the macro as well as the micro issues faced by families served by the child welfare system was an important and productive element of the project course. The practical daily concerns, the often “unknown or unseen” strengths and the constant stressors of living with poverty, racism, prejudice, and oppression significantly impact the population targeted for service. In addition understanding the “chaotic” family lives experience by this population resulting from a variety of community and family stressors that impact on child well-being, safety and permanency, it was imperative that students understand how to identify and enhance support networks inherent in a clients’ life or ones that could be woven into their lives. This competency was one that was emphasized within the lesson plans and syllabi.

Organizations:

1. Demonstrate the ability to participate effectively in cooperative problem solving among peers, co-workers and managers to enhance service delivery to clients.
2. Demonstrate an awareness of agency/organizational dynamics that impact on policy and change efforts and understand her/his own role with regard to policy and facilitating change within an organization, community networks and inter-professional endeavors.
3. Demonstrate the ability to negotiate differences in values and practices between professionals and within an organization.

The presence of organization competency that is well covered, and with high levels of visibility and specific learning objectives was evident in only MFT 672, 684 and SWK 734 courses based on the assessment reports of the three participating academic units. The objective: Demonstrate the ability to negotiate differences in values and practices between professionals and within an organization, was the least supported across all of the offered elective courses in terms of the extent of coverage, specific objectives and high visibility content in the syllabi.

Organizational competency was a productive element of the project course. The interdisciplinary nature of the project course created a unique learning environment for the trainees involved. Coupled with the frequent interactive exercises, each lesson using case studies, role plays, and group discussions to underscore and practice major learnings, students were able to articulate clearly about the dynamics of organizations, teams and networks of professionals. In addition, they were able to develop a better understanding of themselves as professionals and as individuals; understanding how they interjected their unique character and experiences in the process. One specific category in the Assessment Map framework revealed personal insights through literature that dealt with the practitioner/educator and his or her impact on the delivery of services.

Values and Ethics:

1. Demonstrate the ability to articulate personal, professional, agency affiliation and client's values regarding marriage, relationships and family formation and understand the importance of doing so.

2. Demonstrate the ability to facilitate meaningful and effective dialog where there are differences in values and ethics that impact various service delivery domains in child welfare systems and in the formation of healthy marriages, relationships and families. (Markman, Stanley and Blumberg, 2001)
3. Develop and demonstrate an ability to practice within the ethical standards of their chosen professions.

Most of the courses in this final content area showed evidence of content in the area of values and ethics. However, only the Social Work faculty reported a strong presence of values and ethics content, with highly visible and specific learning objectives in the course syllabi (SWK 707, 730, 734 and 735).

Personal values were addressed in the very first lesson of the course helping students to understand how their values impact their ethics. Lessons on ethics were both implicit and explicit with this topic being carried throughout the lessons in a wide variety of ways. Developing competency in the area of ethics and values was an integral and productive aspect of the project course.

Limitations of the Audit

The learning objectives of the audit were left to the interpretation of the person completing the audit on a specific course. Their completion of the audit was also based on their assessment at that time and may differ at a later time based on changing circumstances. We realize that as the project evolves and more information is added to the understanding of healthy marriage and family formation, particularly in regard to the child welfare population, such an audit may be completed differently at the end of the project. The syllabus audit process might be improved by having the faculty member and an independent faculty member audit the syllabus or by incorporating a portion of the audit into a midterm evaluation by the students.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The entire curriculum content areas that were identified as important for workers serving families with children in the Child Welfare system were addressed in designated learning objectives in one or more of the approved elective courses in the PCW project and in the project course. In general, the policy content area was least supported across courses and learning objectives. This earlier finding suggested that additional emphasis was needed on the area of policy with regard to all of the learning objectives and within the specific course being developed to address the project's mission. Content area was added as a result.

Since the Child and Family Studies department did not offer two of the courses they proposed as electives: special topics course Latino Children and Families in the United States, and CFS 774: Parenting and Family Enrichment Programs and Research, no audit reports were completed. As neither of these courses has actually been offered for several years, they should be eliminated from the list of approved electives. CFS 648: Family

Theories: Interpretation and Application, should be added to the list of approved electives as it does address a number of the learning objectives.

The new interdisciplinary project course, Healthy Marriages, Relationships, and Families: Interventions, Research and Policy (CFS 600, MFT 600 & SWK 700, cross listed for each academic unit), was developed as the capstone course for the project. In a final review of the project course audit it was evident that three learning objectives were not covered in detail.

5B. Demonstrates an ability to become familiar with the local service network and connect clients appropriately to resources within it.

7B. Demonstrates an understanding of the court system and the role it plays in influencing family health and formation.

10D. Demonstrates the ability to develop treatment plans that promote child welfare through the enhancement of marriages, relationships and family formation.

Seven of the elective courses reviewed capably address learning objective 5B, four addressed 7 B and eight out of the fourteen elective courses addressed learning objective 10 D. Given the large volume of information to synthesize and present in lessons for the project course (Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families: Interventions, Research and Policy), a decision was made to address these objects as part of course discussion but not on a formal basis.

Works Cited:

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