

**Where Have All the Organizers Gone? The Career Paths of
Community Organizing Social Work Alumni**
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ABSTRACT.

In this era of fiscal constraint and political conservatism, it is essential that graduate schools of social work recruit and prepare professional practitioners skilled in organizing and planning to play a role in improving the social conditions of functional and geographic communities. To develop a strategy for the future, an urban graduate school with a 25-year history of educating social workers with a community organization specialization studied the career paths and perspectives of its Community Organizing and Planning (CO & P) alumni. This paper reports on the views of over 100 graduates of Masters of Social Work (MSW) programs on their pre-and post-MSW values, jobs, work activities and professional identification.

There was considerable overlap between the activities performed by organizers and administrators, an increase in administrative and supervisory positions, and a commensurate decrease in direct CO and clinical jobs over time. However, many CO & P alumni were engaged in CO & P activities, held CO jobs and titles, and identified as organizers without categorizing or perceiving the job as CO. The vast majority identified as social workers while also retaining a "CO perspective," operationalized as both a social change orientation, and a client involvement/process approach to practice. Findings suggest both value-based and career-enhancement motivations for pursuing graduate professional education in CO social work; however, prior CO work experience was a better predictor of pursuing CO career track. There is a need for concerted efforts by educators and practitioners to promote and support

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There is a resurgence of interest in community organizing and planning (CO & P) inside and outside the social work profession. This is evident in (1) an increase in public policies that promote the planning, development, and coordination of neighborhood-based services;

(2) an expansion in the use of advocacy, lobbying and social influence strategies by human service agencies on behalf of their clients and services; (3) the proliferation of coalitions and other inter-organizational networks that allow groups to effect larger social agendas; and (4) the reconfiguration of social movements of women, lesbians and gays, persons with AIDS, seniors to combat the reduction in urgent health and social programs in this time of economic and political conservatism (Mizrahi and Morrison, 1993; Richan, 1991; Fisher and Karger, 1997).

In spite of attacks on entitlements, social programs and the poor, we are witnessing calls for progressive mobilization of programs and policies that focus on rebuilding neighborhoods and communities to improve social conditions. The development of community service collaborations and the creation of empowerment zones suggest that local initiatives will continue to incorporate community and citizen involvement as core components.

Social workers trained in macro intervention methods are needed to help promote and implement systemic change on behalf of vulnerable populations disempowered by the market economy. Ironically, however, the social work profession has minimized community practice, eliminating community organization concentrations from graduate education or merging them into macro or generalist tracks. This marginalization on the education side has had the unfortunate effect of constricting opportunities for career development as well as limiting the contribution of the social work profession to social and community change.

Given these trends, what is the message conveyed to graduates of the relatively few masters programs that have maintained a traditional community organization component? Do graduates of Masters of Social Work (MSW) programs who majored in community organizing and planning recognize and seek opportunities for career development in this field? How do they manage the contradictions of their chosen field within the profession, their social commitments reinforced by socialization to a strong community organizing curriculum, and the broader potential for professional roles in community building and change?

The concern about CO career prospects may increase as resources shrink and the profession markets its competencies primarily in micro interventions (Schwab & Dattalo, 1990). Students have perceived that community organizing jobs *per se* do not exist or, if available, are extremely low-paying. They suspect that a macro or systems change thrust in class and field education may be a handicap in a contracting social service job market that has promoted clinical knowledge and skills.

The Hunter College School of Social Work (HCSSW) in New York City (NYC) has an established, nationally respected method specialization in CO & P. Students expressed a combination of anxiety and optimism about their professional prospects just before the 1994 elections that saw the realignment of federal, state and local governments against entitlements for the poor and disenfranchised (Gans, 1996). Although applications for the MSW degree have been increasing, applicants and graduates alike continue to question whether they will find jobs in community organization, planning, policy and development. They worry that their choice is impractical, a "luxury" they may not be able to afford, or one that forces them to compromise the core social values that brought them into CO & P within social work. This perception holds in spite of evidence that most Hunter CO & P graduates have found professional employment in organizing and planning broadly defined.

In order to understand the economic and social realities affecting our graduates, and to begin examining career development in CO & P practice within social work, we conducted a study of HCSSW CO & P alumni spanning three decades. The purposes of the study were to:

1. ascertain the career paths and service orientation of these graduates;
2. evaluate the impact of the CO & P field and classroom curriculum on their career development and its congruence with professional demands (Richan, 1989; Gamble, Shaffer and Weil, 1994); and
3. better prepare CO graduates of social work programs for the potential and problems of the job market.

This paper highlights study findings about CO & P alumni and their career paths, job responsibilities, and professional identity. Over 100 alumni responded to the CO & P Alumni Survey. Specifically, we sought answers to the questions, “*Where have our organizers gone?*” and “*What’s out there?*” for CO & P graduates. Respondents’ data provide a complex picture in which, for many, CO perspectives and responsibilities are embedded within broader social work roles and positions. Moreover, the data reflect the individual entrepreneurial nature of CO job marketing and acquisition, rather than proactive institutional development of job opportunities utilizing organizing and planning expertise.

CO & P AS A FIELD OF PRACTICE AND EDUCATIONAL CHOICE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The perception in many quarters has been that CO & P is not viable or marketable as a field of practice. Indeed the profession witnessed a drop in the number of masters programs offering community practice in the 1980s, and in the number of self-identified organizers as members of National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (Gilberman & Shervish, 1993). The percentage of CO & P “majors” by primary method has ranged from 2.9 to 4.5 percent since the beginning of the 1990s when combined with administration or direct practice (Lennon, 1992; Lennon, 1995). Most schools include some CO specialization content due in part to continuing Council on Social Work Education requirements (McNutt, 1995; Wilson, 1991); a few, including HCSSW, have continued their CO specialization because of professional commitment as well as opportunities to influence the broader community.

We know very little about the impact of macro education on CO & P practice and on the practitioners who select it. Until the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a paucity of literature on macro career development in general (Biggerstaff, 1978; Martin, Pine and Healy, 1995) and CO & P in particular (York, Denton and Moran, 1990; Mizrahi and Morrison, 1993). There is little empirically-based research on the practice of community organization and on community-based practitioners inside or outside of social work (see Mizrahi, 1993 for a review of CO research; Mondros and Wilson, 1994; Weil, 1996). Moreover, to our knowledge there are no published reports of surveys of professional social workers who majored in CO & P. This study begins to address this gap by illuminating the circumstances, challenges, and potential of this diminutive, but integral component of the social work profession.

Community Organization and Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work

The HCSSW is the only public MSW program in New York City. As such, its mission to educate professional practitioners for work with vulnerable populations in the urban community is served by the community building, social planning, and systems change thrust of its CO & P practice method. The HCSSW program has maintained CO & P as a discrete practice method since the School's inception in 1957. It also supports the Education Center for Community Organizing (ECCO) founded and directed by one of the authors since 1982, and has recruited faculty, field instructors, and students who have interest and expertise in this area. CO & P, one of four method specializations offered at the School,¹ has benefited from and responded to the rich and varied practice and field education opportunities available through the City's network of human service agencies and community-based organizations. The CO & P practice area maintains a strong connection to many of its alumni, some of whom hold prominent positions in policy, politics, advocacy, and planning, and serve as field instructors. Although CO & P majors have always been a minority (15 to 20%) of HCSSW's approximately 400 full-time and 200 part-time work-study (One-Year Residence Program) students, their numbers have grown in recent years with a renewed spirit of activism and hope for community renewal. Indeed, from 1993-97, the number of applicants and enrolled CO & P students has almost doubled.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

A focus group among CO & P students, faculty, alumni and the questions it generated served as the impetus for a systematic study of HCSSW CO & P alumni reported here. To reconcile diverse perspectives and gauge the external employment environment, second year CO & P students initiated a meeting on job finding and career opportunities with twenty CO & P alumni in the Spring of 1993. Selected for their diverse backgrounds, interests, and post-MSW experiences, these alumni responded to questions about "What's out there?" and discussed the benefits of CO & P training for successful job-seeking and career development.

Study Population

We attempted to reach all CO & P majors graduating from Hunter since the inception of the curriculum in the mid-'70s. Cross-checking information from course rosters, the School's Alumni Office and ECCO, we developed a list of alumni from the 1980s and '90s. It was especially difficult to identify and locate the School's CO & P majors and alumni from the 1970s due to program and record keeping differences at that time.

Survey Instrument

The survey was developed by two full-time CO & P faculty at Hunter (Starr and Mizrahi) together with a CO&P alumna (Gurzinsky). Following review and feedback from other CO & P faculty and students, the survey was pretested by some alumni and revised accordingly.

A total of 336 questionnaires were mailed to CO & P alumni covering twenty years from 1973 through 1993. This represents about 90% of the School's alumni estimated to have graduated as CO & P majors during that period. One hundred ten completed questionnaires were returned representing approximately a one-third response rate.

The questionnaire combined both closed-and open-ended questions and sought both quantitative and qualitative information. We asked questions about what

alumni did before entering the MSW program and why they chose CO; what their field placements were and how they evaluated the components of their graduate curriculum then and now.

We also questioned them about their first and current jobs post-MSW,² the content of their jobs (job activities), and whether they regarded their jobs as primarily organizing. We constructed a list of job activities that comprise social work practice with an emphasis on CO & P. The variations in definitions of CO & P and what constitutes its knowledge, skill, values, and activities made this a challenge that deserves continuing attention (McNutt, 1991; Gamble, Shaffer and Weil, 1994; Jansson, 1987; Lowe and Austin, 1994; Weil and Gamble, 1995). Alumni identification with CO, the social work profession, and social activism was pursued through questions on attitudes, affiliations and activities outside work (Reeser, 1991; Abo El Nasr, 1991).

An optional, standard demographic data section was followed by four open-ended questions: the perceived impact of CO graduate education on their careers, their use of a "CO perspective" in their work, suggestions for curriculum changes, and their advice for CO graduates. Finally, alumni were asked if they wanted ongoing connections with the CO program through student mentoring and continuing education.

Data Analysis

A data base was developed using SPSS for Windows for the closed-ended questions. Statistics including Chi Square and Lambda were used to examine significance. The open-ended questions were independently analyzed by the three authors using a grounded qualitative method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Mizrahi and Abramson, 1994). There was almost complete unanimity among the three authors as to the major categories which emerged from the qualitative data.

FINDINGS

Demographics

Thirty percent of the respondents graduated in the 1970s, 40% graduated in the 1980s and 30% graduated in the years 1990-1993. The majority (70%) who provided personal information were female. Somewhat more men (almost 30%) responded than are typically found in the Hunter MSW program. Twenty-four percent of the respondents were 25 to 34 years of age; 40%, 35-44 years old; 25%, 45-54 years old, and 11% were over 54 years old. The racial composition of the sample was 86% white, 6% African American, 6% Latino and 2% Asian. Although people of color were somewhat under represented here, there were no significant differences in study findings with respect to gender, race, or generation (related to any variable).

Post-MSW Career Paths: Congruence and Contradictions in CO Practice

Our graduates followed a variety of career paths that reflected both congruence and contradictions in their jobs and how they perceived them. Based on the pre-study focus group and other discussions, we concluded that there were multiple ways alumni defined a CO career. Therefore, we included several questions related to career path which we capture in four "Career Path" variables: *perception of the job as organizing, job field, job title, and job activity.*

Job Perception. Alumni were asked whether they considered their post-MSW jobs to be primarily in organizing or not. For their first job post-MSW, 33%

percent said “yes,” however, only 15% of the respondents considered their current job primarily organizing.

Job Field. For job field, alumni could select “CO,” “non-CO social work,” or a “different field, not social work.” Forty percent of respondents said their first job post-MSW was CO, while 54% were working in social work, but not in CO. In their current job, 23% were working in CO-related jobs, 61% were in non-CO social work. Sixteen percent were working in other fields, up from six percent. While the trend appeared to be away from CO in both *job perception* and *job field*, more people held CO-related jobs than identified them as “primarily organizing.” Not surprisingly, organizing *per se* probably is defined more narrowly than the broader CO & P practice area.

Job Titles. We grouped respondents’ first and current job titles into five categories: community organizing and program planning (CO & PP), clinical, administrative, teaching and other jobs (see Table 1). CO & PP included such titles as tenant organizer, program director, community liaison, advocate, and community planner. Clinical titles were caseworker, intensive case manager, case manager and social worker. Included in administrative titles were directors, managers and executives. Teaching titles encompassed professor, trainer, and faculty, while the “Other” category incorporated such careers as lawyer, doctor, consultant, and researcher.

More alumni identified CO & PP titles than perceived themselves to be in either CO-related or primarily organizing jobs. In their first job, that is, over half held CO & PP titles and about one-third held clinical titles; the rest were in administrative, teaching and other job titles. In their current job, around one-third held CO & PP titles while less than one-third were in clinical titles. Almost one-quarter held administrative titles, and the rest held teaching or other job titles.

Job Activities. We grouped 17 separate job activities from the questionnaire (see Table 2) into four clusters: CO & PP, administration, clinical, and “other.”³ Alumni rated the amount of time spent on each of these activities for both their first and current jobs.

Small and large majorities of alumni were doing from “some to almost all” of the CO & PP activities in their first and current jobs. *Program planning* was the most frequently chosen job activity for more than 66% of the alumni on their first job, increasing to more than 80% on the current job. Additional time-consuming CO & PP activities that remained constant or increased in their current jobs included *leading/organizing groups*, *community education/outreach*, *coalition building/interorganizational work* and *leadership development*.

Since the percentages of alumni who moved into *program administration*, *supervision*, *teaching* and *research* increased from first to current job, it seems evident that many alumni were taking on more and diverse responsibilities rather than giving up CO & PP job components. One also can speculate that these CO activities reflect skills useful to and adaptive in non-CO social work jobs. Direct service activities prominent in first jobs assume less importance as respondents take on supervisory, administrative, planning, and program development tasks. It may be that many of the CO

TABLE 1. Job Titles of Hunter College School of Social Work CO Alumni

TABLE 2. Relationship Between Job Activities and Job Field of CO Alumni

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND PROGRAM PLANNING (CO&PP)	TOTALS		CO JOB				NON CO		S.W. JOB	
	1ST CURRENT JOB% N	1ST CURRENT JOB% %	1ST N %	1ST N %	CURRENT N %	CURRENT N %	1ST N %	1ST N %	CURRENT N %	CURRENT N %
Program Planning	72.7	81.9	36*	87.8	24*	100	30	57.7	46	74.2
Community Education	67.6	59.8	35*	87.5	18*	81.8	27	51.9	32	53.3
Leading/Organizing Groups	64.2	55.4	33*	84.6	16	72.7	26	50	33	54.1
Coalition Building	63.5	57.4	34*	87.2	19**	90.5	24	45.3	28	45.9
Leadership Development	51.1	52.6	29*	76.3	14	70.0	17	34	29	49.2
Community Mobilization	51	40.6	33*	82.5	16**	69.6	14	26.9	17	28.3
Legislative Advocacy	42.7	40.6	26*	63.4	15**	65.2	13	25.5	17	28.3
Policy Analysis	37.8	44.1	21	52.5	17*	77.3	19	36.5	25	41.0
Grassroots Fundraising	22.3	19.0	13*	34.2	7	33.3	7	13.5	11	18.6
MANAGEMENT/ADMINISTRATION										
Administration	64.2	70.8	31*	25.5	20	87	26	32.6	39	63.9
Supervision	50.0	64.1	25	62.5	15	68.2	21	40.4	40	64.5
Public Relations/Newsletter	45.9	44.6	26*	65.0	17**	73.9	17	33.3	21	35
Grantwriting	34.7	37.3	19	48.7	11	52.4	13	25	22	36.1
CLINICAL										
Individual/Family/Group	70.8	58.8	24	60.0	9*	40.9	41	78.8	44	69.8
Case Management	53.2	32.9	14*	35.0	5**	23.8	42	82.4	44	69.8
OTHER ACTIVITIES										
Research	63.5	70.0	19	48.7	15	65.2	12	24	24	42.1
Teaching	34.4	42.3	30	75.0	18	78.3	28	53.8	42	68.9

* P < .05 † Percentage of those who indicated job consisted of some, a lot or all of the specific job activities

** P < .01 † Total N varies from 94-100 and omits those who are in other non social work fields.

alumni took a clinical or case work job for experience or expediency, but did

	1ST JOB (N = 107)		CURRENT JOB (N = 104)	
	N	%	N	%
Community Organizing and Program Planning (CO & PP)	57	53.3	36	34.6
Clinical	34	31.8	30	28.8
Administration/Management	12	11.2	24	23.1
Teaching	3	2.7	6	5.8
Other Titles (e.g., consultant)	1	.9	7	6.7

not intend to switch career direction entirely.

In sum, an essential finding is that many more Hunter graduates are doing CO & PP activities and are in CO & PP job titles without categorizing their job as either “CO-related” or “organizing.” These data also show an expected

increase in the importance of program, administrative, and supervisory activities consistent with job titles, as almost one-quarter of the alumni began their careers in administrative positions and even more move into them over the course of their careers. Research and teaching functions increased as careers and expertise developed over time.

Career Development and Post-MSW Career Paths: Consistency in Naming and Doing CO

In examining the relationships among the four variables labeled *Career Path*, we found overall consistency among *job titles*, *job fields*, *job activities*, and *job perception* (see summary Table 3) which held up over time from first to current job.

First Job. The title of the first job post-MSW was significantly associated with the job field, job activity, and job perception as an organizer. Twice as many of those working in CO-related jobs held job titles that reflected community organizing and program planning (CO & PP), compared to those in non CO social work jobs. Additionally, the job title was significantly related to job perception in that 42% identified their job as organizing in contrast to 33% with administrative titles and 10% with clinical titles.

First job titles also were heavily correlated with job activity. In other words, respondents' job titles reflected to a large degree what

TABLE 3. Community Organizing Career Path Total N = 110

□ Includes the N of those whose current job IS their first job. □ Figures and percentages for Job Activities listed below are those who said their jobs consisted of "almost all, a lot, or some" of these activities.

. Percentages vary slightly because of slightly different N's.

they did and what we assume to be the content of different social work methods. However, there was significant overlap in some job activities between administrative and CO & PP titles.

Current Job. A relationship continued between the current job title and job field in the expected direction, demonstrating congruence between respondents' titles and CO job content. A relationship between respondents' current job title and perception of the job as primarily organizing also continued. Additionally, there was a high association between current job titles and most job activities. Hence, in relation to *career path*, there was basic congruence in how alumni named and carried out their jobs.

Motivation and Experience as Predictors of Career Direction

Were the circumstances that brought people to HCSSW's CO & P program predictive of whether they would pursue a CO career over time? We examined both the relationship between the motivation for coming to school and the type of pre-HCSSW job experience with the likelihood of continuing in a CO career direction after graduation. Pre-MSW job experiences were more of a prediction of remaining in CO than was their motivation for selecting CO as the MSW specialization.

Reasons for Choosing the CO & P Program. Alumni's reasons for choosing Hunter's CO & P program were later grouped into three categories, *value orientation*, *career enhancement*, and *job dissatisfaction*, from among 14 pre-coded items (see Table 4). Value-based reasons included commitment to social change and commitment to work with a special population; career-based reasons included skill acquisition, need for credentials, broader career opportunities, career mobility, promotion/higher level position, status/prestige, feasible route to MSW program, and reputation of HCSSW and faculty; job dissatisfaction reasons encompassed too few opportunities, lack of job satisfaction, inadequate salary, and burnout.

Commitment to social change was the primary motivation identified by 69%




	FIRST JOB N	%	CURRENT JOB N %
CO-Related Job Activities			
a. Program Planning	70	(72.2)	86 (81.9)
b. Community Education	65	(67.6)	61 (59.8)
c. Coalition Building	61	(63.5)	58 (57.4)
d. Leading/Organizing Groups	61	(64.2)	56 (55.4)
e. Public Relations	51	(45.1)	45 (44.6)
f. Consumer Mobilization	49	(51)	41 (40.2)
g. Leadership Development	47	(51.1)	51 (52.6)
h. Policy Analysis	42	(37.8)	49 (44.1)
i. Legislative Advocacy	41	(42.7)	41 (40.6)
j. Grassroots Funding	33	(34.7)	38 (37.3)
CO & PP Job Titles (vs. Adm., Clinical, Teaching, Other Titles)	57	(53.3)	36 (34.6)
CO Job Field (vs. Non CO Job Field)	45	(40.5)	23 (23)
Perception of Job as Organizing (versus Not Organizing)	34	(32.7)	14 (14.6)

of respondents, much higher than any other single item. Overall, almost three-quarters of the respondents identified value-based factors as central, and almost as many chose career-based reasons. Job dissatisfaction did not figure in most alumni's motivation for choosing the CO & P specialization.

Pre-MSW Job Experiences. Alumni were in a variety of fields be

TABLE 4. Reasons CO Alumni Chose CO & P at Hunter College School of Social Work

□ Total N = 110 □ Percentages Add Up to More Than 100% Because Respondents Could Choose More Than One Reason
 fore they began the MSW program. Seventeen percent were working in CO or related fields; 34% were working in non-CO social work; 29% were working in

	PRIMARY REASON N □ %		PRIMARY & SECONDARY REASONS COMBINED N %
Value Based Reasons _Total		73.2	
Commitment to Social Change		76 69.1	88 79.3
Commitment to Working with a Special Population		17 15.6	25 22.5
Career Related Reasons _Total		71.2	
Skill Acquisition		48 43.6	66 59.5
Need for Credentials		35 31.8	47 42.3
Broader Career Opportunities		35 31.8	50 45.0
Career Mobility		19 17.3	39 35.1
Reputation of HCSSW		14 12.7	37 33.3
Feasible Route to MSW		10 9.1	26 23.4
Promotion/Higher Level Position		7 6.4	12 10.8
Status/Prestige		1 .9	11 9.9
Job Dissatisfaction Reasons _Total		15.3	
Lack of Job Satisfaction		9 8.2	24 21.6
Inadequate Salary		7 6.4	19 17.1
Too Few Job Opportunities in Prior Occupation		5 4.5	11 9.9
Burn Out		1 .9	6 5.4

a different field; 12% were in undergraduate programs and 6% were volunteering. There was no significant difference in the motivation for coming to school between those who held pre-MSW CO jobs and those with jobs in other fields (including social work). This seems consistent with other recent social work studies which show that students choose a range of different methods or practice areas in social work to express their commitment to social justice and other progressive causes (Biggerstaff, 1995).

Reasons for Choosing the CO & P Program and Post-MSW Career Paths. Overall, career-based considerations more than value-based reasons were significantly related to a CO career path. Counter to expectations, alumni who had career-related reasons for choosing CO were somewhat more likely to occupy CO-related jobs and job titles than other social work or non-social work positions for their first job out of school. While significant differences were not found with the current job, there was clearly a group who used the MSW to enhance their mobility and marketability in CO & P. Unexpectedly, those who came into social work school for value-based reasons (i.e., a commitment to social justice or to special populations) were as likely to work in non-CO social work as in CO in their first as well as current jobs.

Pre-MSW Job Experiences and Post-MSW Career Paths. Those working in CO before entering HCSSW were more likely to remain in CO in their first job and, to a lesser extent, in their current job as well. Although a vast majority of respondents (67%) did not perceive their first job as organizing, a higher proportion of those in CO jobs before the MSW viewed their first job as such. Additionally, almost twice as many respondents with CO jobs before entering Hunter were in CO & PP job titles and in CO-related job activities in their first job post-MSW. While the numbers of respondents doing CO activities in their current jobs fell, overall the above pattern remained consistent.

These findings suggest that having CO work experience prior to the MSW is a useful predictor of whether alumni will follow a CO career path after the MSW and, together with our findings on motivation for graduate education, focuses attention on career-related factors.

Impact of a CO & P Education on Post-MSW Career Development: The “CO Perspective”

Responses to open-ended questions demonstrated that HCSSW CO education had a profound impact on respondents' career paths and identity. Respondents provided rich descriptions of how their CO & P training influenced their professional approach and how they defined a “CO perspective.” First highlighted during the alumni focus group, this phrase was used to ascertain the influence of CO graduate training on career direction and was found to be as relevant for those who were as for those who were not practicing community organizing.

Almost three-quarters (72%) of the alumni identified with the concept of a “CO perspective.” Nearly the same majority (69%), including many who did *not* have a CO-related career, explicitly stated that they used a CO perspective in their practice.

Several themes emerged as they discussed the meaning of a CO perspective. The largest number of alumni described a particular world view, philosophy,

and value-base that permeated their approach to their work, and in some instances, to their lives. Several contrasted this broadened view with a narrower individualistic view of problems and problem-solving. On closer scrutiny, a CO perspective constituted both a macro systems and participatory approach to professional practice.

Systems/Macro Approach and/or Social Change Orientation. Respondents' use of a systems approach and/or a social change orientation was the major theme that emerged from the data. A large number of alumni presented how their ability to connect "private troubles to public issues" made them valuable to clients as well as employers. They understood and were comfortable with notions of power and referred often to "the larger picture." An activist perspective frequently reflected strategic and political skills, beyond a philosophical approach to their work, as represented in these quotes from the individual surveys:

I identify areas of common need to outside policy-makers to form a consensus in order to get patient care needs met.

Although I do case and group work, I look for community solutions to individual problems . . . address social issues with impact on clients.... (My agency) was governed by a client council . . . I try to help clients understand their rights and to connect them with others to exert them. People, once informed, can focus their power. . . . In working with clinic patients, I frequently discuss organizing to obtain better services . . . calling Congress, and emphasize understanding the political significance of everyday events . . .

As one alumna put it:

I understand how to advocate and use my power in a non-abrasive way . . . I understand systems, identify power, know how to exert effective pressure. . . . I'm more active in policy and advocacy issues than most administrators.

A Client-Involved/Participatory Process Orientation. Alumni's responses reflected the concept of client empowerment, participation, and ownership. Many cited the social work-CO value base which emphasizes participation and process as well as task or product. As more than one alumna stated: "The 'how' you do it is almost more important than what you do." Comments from the survey responses illustrating these points include:

I'm definitely a bottom-up type of social worker, working with the clients and also trying to advocate, and trying to influence policies affecting clients

. . . . I'm process-oriented and interested in having workers develop their own solutions . . . I use a consensus-driven practice model versus top down leadership. Investment and collegiality are the key.

I seek ways to engage clients in solutions to their difficulties; and I encourage clients to help each other.

Professional Traits, Characteristics, and Styles

In addition to the strategy and philosophy guiding their work, many alumni described professional traits, characteristics, and styles that they credit to their CO & P education. On the whole, they conveyed to us both a conscious and strategic use of self (Burghardt, 1982):

I'm a forthright advocate on diverse issues . . . I feel hopeful re: social change even in the epidemic like AIDS. I have a hand in activism even in periods of rest.

[The CO Program] has influenced my world view. [I see the] importance of taking positions and working toward goals with others.

The ability to perceive hidden agendas and alliances that block program, policy, or clinical case conferences in my treatment services [is what I obtained from school].

[I learned] the importance of being organized . . . and a sensitivity to all peoples regardless of class, sex, race, etc.

Some alumni expressed consciousness of incorporating CO skills into their job responsibilities and redefining the nature of the work:

Even if your job is not a CO-related assignment, CO skills are needed within an organization or community in order to support both social change and individual therapy.

Professional Identity

Because of the CO tradition of political and social change, many social workers have been concerned about the professional socialization of CO practitioners. To ascertain whether and how their MSW education influenced their professional identification, alumni were asked whether they identified as an organizer and as a social worker. The theoretical differences between formal education or subsequent organizational structure as more important in professional socialization need empirical testing in social work.

Identification as a Social Worker. Ninety-one percent of the respondents identified as social workers, consistent with their current jobs which are predominantly in social work. It is clear that a CO & P specialization in an MSW program does not impede alumni identification with or participation in the social work profession, even though most identified as both social workers and organizers.

Identification as an Organizer. The data suggest that organizer identity transcends a specific job or career track. Specifically, the majority of respondents (58%) identified as organizers (see Table 5 on career paths.) Thus, more alumni identified as organizers than were doing

TABLE 5. The Career Path of the 60 Alumni Who Identified as Organizers

□ 58% of the total sample identified as organizers □ CO Career

Path means those alumni who answered “Yes” to the components of CO Identity . Non-CO Career means those alumni who answered “No” to the components of CO Identity . N=59 *p=<.05 . N=57 **p=<.001

organizing, or were in CO-related jobs and CO & PP job titles. While there was a significant relationship between organizer identification and the first jobs held by alumni, identification remained even as the perception and reality of their current jobs changed.

The vast majority (78%) of alumni who were working in CO jobs before the MSW program identified as organizers. Additionally, those who identified as organizers before coming to school were overwhelmingly those whose reason for coming to school was value-based (82% compared to 18%), indicating a relationship between identity and ideology. This group was much more likely to want to mentor CO & P students, remain involved with HCSSW, and want CO continuing education.

DISCUSSION

The results of the Hunter alumni survey revealed useful findings about the career paths and service orientation of professionally-educated social work

	CO CAREER PATH [□] N	%	NON-CO CAREER PATH.	N %
First Job Primarily Organizing*	25	41.7	35	58.3
Current Job Primarily Organizing	14	23.3	46	76.7
1st Job Title In COPP	38.	64.4	21.	35.6
Current Job Title In COPP	21.	36.8	36.	63.2
1st Job Field in CO**	34	56.7	26	43.4
Current Job Field in CO	19	31.7	41	68.3

community organizers. These findings, relevant to social work education and macro practice, have implications for professional recruitment, retention, and career development.

Values and Career Enhancement as Integrated Influences

The high level of respondents’ association with both value-based and career-oriented reasons for choosing CO, viewed in the context of their strong social mission and lived commitments, raises a conceptual question about the meaning of career enhancement as a motivator for professional education.

As noted above, we found that the majority of respondents enrolled in CO & P out of an ideological commitment to work for social change, thus supporting other research on those from other professional disciplines entering CO as a career (Mondros and Wilson, 1990) and consistent with the social justice motivation of those choosing a social work career (Biggerstaff, 1995).

Interestingly, however, career considerations and early CO work experience rather than value orientation were associated with holding a CO job or title after graduation. These findings suggest that students' hopes for professional advancement through the attainment of CO knowledge and skills indeed were realized through successful post-MSW CO employment.

Given these findings on dual motivation for professional CO education, we would argue that career orientation should not be considered solely in instrumental terms, based on monetary or personal advancement, devoid of values. Rather, a career orientation may be perceived as the institutionalization of a value orientation, a way to assure that work and social commitments are intertwined. To the extent that the profession adopts this perspective, we may minimize the dichotomy between issues of professional self-interest and social mission. They are legitimate and, we believe, compatible concerns.

CO and Social Work: Mutuality and Identification

Our findings suggest that graduate social work education, combined with post-MSW job experience, indeed socializes CO-trained graduates to the profession. In fact, the dual identity as social worker and organizer found among many Hunter CO alumni has positively influenced the profession, expanding the practice base and potentially increasing social work influence in non-traditional settings. Given the perceived antagonisms and dichotomies between direct service and social change or between micro and macro practice these findings suggest an encouraging consolidation of cause and function (Lewis, 1976).

Additional studies of other social work CO & P programs will reflect the extent to which this is happening nationwide. When one considers that many students who choose CO as their MSW specialization may be least identified with the profession prior to the MSW program and feel marginalized from the majority practice methods during it, the finding of dual identity should be reassuring to graduate social work educators fearful about the adequacy of socialization to professional social work roles. Social work and CO are not taught or "caught" as divergent enterprises, but rather as congruent and complementary functions with a common core.

The Core of Social Work in a CO Perspective

Defined empirically in this study, a CO perspective constitutes a macro systems and social change approach with significant client participation in the community problem-solving process. The emphasis on process and client involvement as integral to this practice reflects, in our view, a distinct "coming of age" of CO as an acknowledged part of the social work profession. That a concern with process the "how" of professional activity is equal in importance to goal achievement, suggests the congruence of professional ethics with CO strategies when learned and practiced from a social work perspective. In contrast, twenty-five years ago, when the ethics of advocacy and political influence were hotly debated in social work (Brager and Specht, 1973), CO was viewed as sympathizing with, if not fully condoning, a relativistic, utilitarian view of social change in which the ends justified the means (Alinsky, 1971).

Finally, CO can be viewed as influencing, as well as reflecting the social work ethos. As a "world view," a CO perspective provides a way to frame issues, approach problem solving and relate to clients that reinforces the profession's concern with client empowerment, consumer participation, and commitment to

stigmatized populations. The emphasis on the client as empowered decision maker emphasizes a collaborative, egalitarian relationship, long a working reality in CO, that gradually is becoming a tenet of the profession as a whole (Reisch and Wenocur, 1986).

What is CO? (And How Do We Develop It in Today's Job Market?)

We found a high degree of consistency among the career path variables *job field, job title, job activity, and job perception*. Having a CO job title was related to holding a CO job, engaging in CO activities, and perceiving one's job as CO. This suggests the congruence of practice and education, as respondents empirically experienced and defined CO largely as taught in the Hunter graduate program and as generally recognized in the profession. Given the question of curriculum relevance as an important study impetus, these results were encouraging. More broadly, they have implications for conceptualizing and illuminating what CO is in professional practice, and thus can facilitate efforts for more focused recruitment through clearer articulation of CO knowledge, values, and skills as a part of social work practice.

The fact that many of these career path relationships do not hold for respondents' current jobs may reflect more on the state of the job market in the nineties and professionals' increasing lack of control of workplace opportunities than alumni's work-related desires or intentions. This view is further validated by the majority of respondents who still identify as organizers and the positive comments about the importance of their CO & P graduate education, regardless of current jobs.

Nevertheless, we found some contradictions with equally important implications. There is an apparent gap between respondents' emotional and practical affinity for CO and the lack of conceptualization of CO as a core component of their work life. While some alumni saw themselves as organizers even if they were not organizing, more were organizing as gauged by their titles and activities than classified their function as CO or perceived their job to be organizing. This disparity seemed to increase the longer one was out of social work school. Whether reflecting the limitations of the job market or other variables, this dynamic may contribute to the minimization of the level and scope of CO work taking place, which in turn may reinforce the continuing marginality of CO as a minority method and field in social work (Specht, 1994).

To offset this trend, schools of social work, faculty, and an interest in expanding CO practice should be proactive in marketing the richness and variety of the activities that comprise CO & PP job titles and CO as a field. Our study suggests that graduates were creative in reshaping their roles and incorporating CO values and skills in their jobs on their own, without much guidance and support of their alma mater or professional associations.

We believe that students and prospective graduate candidates can and should be educated to recognize the unity of CO with social work, the distinctiveness of its component parts, and the contribution that skills and competence in CO make to the social work profession as a whole (Iacono-Harris and Nuccio, 1987). Once armed with a vision and methodology of CO, students, graduates and schools together can help shape jobs, create job opportunities and

appropriately name CO functions and activities within existing or new parameters.

Individual and Institutional Approaches to Job Development: Enlightened CO Marketing Broadening the Net. Beyond the individual advocacy and entrepreneurship that educated professionals can initiate in job creation and development and that this study demonstrates many of the CO & P alumni were doing an institutional approach is essential in publicizing community organizing. Aided by the growing interest and commitment of national professional organizations such as The Association for Community Organization and Administration (ACOSA) and the National Organizers Alliance (NOA), as well as public demand for a more responsive community-based service delivery system, the profession is well positioned to capture jobs in public policy, human resources, housing and economic development, organization development, foundation management, and political advocacy, heretofore largely forfeited to other professions. This will entail promoting CO-educated social workers as professionals ideally suited to hold positions such as foundation heads, local and regional coalition coordinators, government officials and institutional lobbyists, and directors of advocacy and community-based organizations. It also will require graduate programs to publicize these kinds of activist-oriented professional careers to better recruit prospective CO candidates from a larger political and organizational universe and to cultivate many more career paths for graduates with MSWs in Community Organizing.

Looking Within. In addition to developing new arenas for CO career growth, our data suggest that the profession can take some initiative in reframing and renaming social work jobs to better reflect the centrality of CO tasks and skills. Respondents who moved into clinical/case management positions recognized the value of CO competencies. They believed that they were providing a complex constellation of skills to link clients to community systems that enabled them to move naturally from case to class advocacy and back to case advocacy again (Bromberg, Starr, and Carney, 1989; Hardcastle, Wenocur, and Powers, 1997; Riley, 1971). Clinical work increasingly requires institutional advocacy, resource development, service linkage, brokerage, and coordination (Allen-Meares, 1993). Thus, titles such as “care coordinator” or “service planner” may more accurately reflect CO components of direct service jobs and help employers find professionals with the requisite combination of community and clinical skills. Such labels also may strengthen the notion of professional practice as a balance of micro and macro interventions.

For those schools embracing a micro or generalist practice model, this study suggests the practical importance of embracing CO content as integral to micro level intervention. On the macro side of curriculum development, we need to take advantage of the tendency of CO & P alumni to move rapidly into administrative, executive, and leadership roles in agencies and organizations (as do most masters-trained professionals a few years out of graduate school), at the same time recognizing that these jobs incorporate a range of CO & P activities and skills. Our findings suggest that alumni add to rather than substitute roles and functions in their professional armamentarium. Thus there is a need to articulate and develop the core nature of CO activities and skills in management and administration, and creatively frame job descriptions and titles to better reflect these competencies.

LIMITATIONS AND NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY

There are several limitations to this study. First, we do not know how representative survey respondents are of the two-thirds who did not respond. Non-respondents may be more likely to have left the field, or were less favorably disposed to their MSW education. Studies are needed to compare Hunter alumni in all fields of practice and methods to ascertain whether career path, social commitment, and affinity with social change strategies are associated with HCSSW, the major method, prior work experience, or some combination of these or other factors.

Second, we cannot generalize from this study to alumni of other schools of social work in other parts of the country and with different practice and method curricula. Research on the employment and advancement of MSW graduates in this era of government withdrawal from social service funding will help clarify whether CO skills, alone or in concert with administrative and clinical ones, are valued and rewarded by prospective agency employers.

Replication of this study by schools that use discrete and integrated practice methods is welcome. This would be an important next step to determine whether there are differences in the pursuit of CO & P jobs by social work graduates who specialize in CO & P versus those who complete a generic course of study. Follow-up studies of CO and non-CO alumni would be useful to assess whether a social commitment and change perspective remains their priority and shapes the nature of their practice over time, regardless of method.

What seems clear from our study is that even a school that, by reputation and resources, values and promotes CO & P, by itself cannot shape job trends and directions or alumni's choices. Clearly there needs to be a collective effort of all those who offer macro specialization to address this gap and influence the major social work professional and educational organizations to assist. Conversely, schools or programs which minimize or submerge CO will contribute to a self-fulfilling prophesy of diminution and even disappearance of the grand CO social work tradition. The challenge to the profession is to expand the scope and recognition of CO, while maintaining its integrity and contribution to the philosophical core of social work practice.

NOTES

A method specialization consists of two year-long field placements and three sequential required method courses, with opportunities for additional electives.

For analysis purposes, we counted those whose first job is their only job in both the first and current job categories.

The classification is based on how job responsibilities generally are categorized. Clearly there is some overlap, especially between community organizing and administration. With respect to the HCSSW CO&P

curriculum, for example, grant writing is an elective within the CO&P curriculum, while policy analysis is not explicitly taught in any method. However, we placed grant writing in the administration category to reflect its importance in that arena as well, and to better balance the number of items under each component.

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