Baccalaureate Program Advisory Boards: What Do They Do?¹

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Presented at the Ninth Annual BPD Conference

BSW Education for Practice: Reality and Fantasy

Orlando, Florida

September 28, 1991

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¹ This research was made possible by faculty development grants from Pembroke State University and the University of Rio Grande.
ABSTRACT

A national survey of baccalaureate social work programs [accredited and candidacy status] was conducted in order to determine what social work advisory boards actually do and how effectively they complete their defined tasks. Forty-four percent of the programs responded. Specifically, four empirical research questions were addressed in the questionnaire:

a) Is there an evaluative difference between the sources of constituent input? [advisory boards versus other methods]
b) How important is advisory board input?
c) What do social work program advisory boards do?
d) Who serves on social work program advisory boards?

The primary findings strongly suggest that programs with advisory boards have a higher quality of constituent input. Advisory boards have diverse tasks to perform and generally do a good job if specific structural conditions are met. Adequate constituent representation appears to be a problem in many social work programs. Based on the findings of the survey, the authors make suggestions to program directors who desire to develop or maintain an advisory board.
Introduction

A review of relevant accreditation standards and associated cross referenced citations clearly directs social work program compliance in seeking input from constituencies. Twenty (20) specific references in the *Handbook of Accreditation Standards and Procedures* call for interaction, input opportunity or solicited opinion from "students, faculty and practitioners, field instructors, social agency administrators, field agency administrators, other professionals or other appropriate constituencies" (CSWE, 1988). One method of facilitating constituent input is with the use of baccalaureate social work advisory boards.

The principle of constituent participation is grounded in the social work value of self-determination and the requirement that the relevance of social work activity must correlate with the client's perception of need. The premise that social work programs *should* pursue constituent input is self-evident. However, as a specific academic activity becomes more indirect, i.e., removed from direct client contact, the definition of constituent changes and, although the activity remains relevant, it is not clear how best input can be solicited or used.

CSWE standards and social work literature lack two important pieces of information. First, CSWE standards do not specifically mandate an "advisory board" as a mechanism of constituent input. Second, even though the use of "advisory boards" is the common practice among baccalaureate social work programs, the literature suggests an absence of a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of such advisory boards.

A survey was pursued to address four empirical questions:

a) Is there an evaluative difference between the sources of constituent input? [advisory board versus other methods]
b) How important is their input?
c) What do social work program advisory boards do?
d) Who serves on social work program advisory boards?
Review of Literature

A review of literature revealed only two presentations (Tatzmann and Kelley, 1989; Twiname-Dungan, 1991) that addressed the issue of baccalaureate social work program advisory boards. No citations were discovered that systematically evaluate this type of advisory board. Efforts of reviewing the literature uncovered one particularly interesting and potentially useful resource for social work program directors: *The Center for Board and Administrator Relations* [CBAR]. CBAR publishes several newsletters plus a variety of monographs.¹

The challenge of evaluating the quality of input provided by an advisory board, has been addressed in a number of other applicable social work sectors. Federal regulations and the emergence of consumerism require program evaluation that addresses a multitude of issues related to quality assurance. In public welfare administration, the existence of a professional referent group -- social workers -- was found to encourage rather than stifle public participation through the use of advisory boards (Usher, 1980). A scale to measure the attitude toward citizen participation in community mental health center boards was introduced by Oxer (1983). Kaufmann, Sorensen and Raeburn (1979) developed a research strategy to synthesize the interests of consumer representatives, advisory boards and administrators in a county mental health system. Gale (1976) provides an excellent synopsis of the rationale and use of advisory boards for the community college, with specific emphasis on the strong occupational (i.e., professional social work) orientation of the community-college link. Nine other citations were identified that provide information and/or data that might be appropriately general-

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¹ The authors are not endorsing CBAR or recommending purchasing their literature. We only note that such a resource exists.
ized for baccalaureate social work programs.¹

**Data Collection**

A preliminary questionnaire was constructed during the Fall of 1988 and tested for face validity with a sample of baccalaureate social work professors at CSWE's 35th Annual Program Meeting [March 4-7, 1989]. Significant improvements were made. The questionnaire was retested with a sample of social work program directors at BPD's 7th Annual Meeting [September 22-26, 1989]. Further modifications were made. The questionnaire was then evaluated by the Human Subjects Committee from each of the sponsoring universities. In February, 1990, the questionnaires were then mailed to all Baccalaureate Programs [Accredited and Candidacy] by using the most recent mailing list (CSWE, 1989). A number of Programs that failed to respond to the first mailing were randomly solicited at CSWE's 36th Annual Program Meeting [March 2-6, 1990]. Additional responses were secured during April, 1990. A copy of the final questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. A return rate of 44% was reached.

**Findings**

Our findings are divided into three methodological categories: 1) Descriptive Statistics; 2) Quantitative Analysis; and 3) Qualitative Analysis. Following is a discussion of each.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Data was collected from 177 baccalaureate social work programs. This represents approximately 44% of all CSWE accredited and candidacy status programs in 1988. Following are a table and three figures that create a picture of

¹. These include: Campbell, 1979; Carlton-LaNey, 1987; Gittell, 1967; Magee, 1980; Metsch and Veney, 1973; Morrison and Yablonsvitz, 1978; Pearce and Rosener, 1985; Redburn et al, 1980.
the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>9,726</td>
<td>10,129</td>
<td>390 to 62,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>12 to 300</td>
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Table I
Enrollment

The median for institutional enrollment is 6,502; while the median for program enrollment is 85. There are a few outliers that distort the mean. This suggests that CSWE accredits a diverse range of baccalaureate programs.

Figure I on page 5 illustrates the distribution of geographic locations of the sampled campuses. Later, we will demonstrate that geographic location does not influence the quality of advisory board input. However, our $X^2$ analysis indicate urban programs are significantly less likely to have an advisory board when compared to the other two locations. Figure II on page 6 illustrates the housing of social work programs. Like geographic locations, housing of programs has little to no impact of the quality of the board's performance. However, results from our $X^2$ analysis indicate that BSW programs housed with MSW programs are significantly less likely to have an advisory board when compared to the other two groups. Some may interpret this as a threat to BSW program autonomy. Figure III on page 7 illustrates the type of degree[s] offered by the programs. No relationships were discovered here.

These descriptive statistics identify the wide diversity of baccalaureate programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education.
Figure 1
Location of Campus

- Rural: 33%
- Urban: 44%
- Other: 23%
Figure II
Housing of BSW Programs

- Free Standing: 35%
- Housed with Others: 50%
- With MSW Program: 15%
Figure III
Social Work Degrees Offered

BA 25%
BA & BS 6%
BSW 4%
BSSW 8%
BS 10%
BSW 47%
Quantitative

The overarching research question for quantitative analysis is: Is there an evaluative difference between the types of constituent input? [advisory board versus other methods]. Our sample included 117 social work programs with advisory boards and 55 without. Three statistical techniques are used to address this question. a) Kolmogorov-Smirnov 2 tail test; b) Reviewing the descriptive statistics; c) Step-wise regression.

First, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (two tail) test for two large samples was used [see Siegel and Castellan (1988) for rationale]. The alternative hypothesis is: There is an evaluative difference of constituent input between programs with advisory boards compared to programs without boards. The results indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups:

\[ KS = .262; p < .01 \]

Substantively, this significant difference suggests that social work programs with constituent input from advisory boards received better evaluations when compared to social work programs that have constituent input by other means. See Figure IV.

1. Look at Fig 4
2. Do you see a diff between the 2 distributions?
3. Run mean / median test. No diff
4. Used a software package. Call Statistical Navi and recommend Kolmogoroff-Smirnoff for this type of data
5. Was taught in under MSW Never use it PhD except in class
Figure IV
Quality of Input

Valid Percentage

Level of Quality

- Terrible
- Poor
- Acceptable
- Good
- Excellent

- Advisory Board
- Non Advisory Board
Second, descriptive statistics were examined because it was hypothesized that the significant difference derived from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test might be attributed to variables such as geographic location [i.e., non-rural programs have a greater pool and variety of constituents from which to select]. As a result, baccalaureate programs in rural, urban and other geographical areas were examined. Without exception, the evaluation of constituent input of programs with advisory board had more positive outcomes [see Appendix B]. Furthermore, no difference appeared in the comparison between rural and urban programs. These findings unambiguously indicate that the formal process of constituency input via social work program advisory boards is preferred to the more non-structured format.

Lastly, step-wise regression\(^1\) was used to compare the difference between programs with advisory boards to programs without advisory boards. Two equations were estimated. The first equation included a dependent variable that measured the quality of constituent input for social work programs that had no advisory boards. The second equation included a dependent variable that measured the quality of constituent input for social work programs that had advisory boards. The independent variables for both equations were identical. They included all the variables that satisfied regression assumptions. Variables such as geographic location that would require the use of dummy variables were excluded.

The results of the comparison of the two adjusted R\(^2\)'s was unexpected and nothing less than amazing:

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1. The pairwise approach was used for dealing with missing data. Tabachnick and Fidell (1983) suggest that the pairwise approach is the most appropriate method for this type of data.
Table II

A Comparison of Regression Equation between Quality of Constituent Input

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Adjusted R²</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Signif F</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Boards</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Advisory Boards</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Independent variables for programs with no boards can explain 2% of the variance in the quality of constituent input. Whereas, independent variables for programs with boards explain 14% of the variance in the quality of constituent input. There also seems to be a meaningful difference in the standard error of the estimate.\(^1\) Furthermore, the advisory board equation was statistically significant \([p < .03]\), whereas the non-board equation was not.

Substantively, the findings suggest that we have a better understanding of the quality of constituent input for social work programs that have advisory boards. The unsystematic use of informal constituency input *appears* to demonstrate a random quality. On the surface, quality constituent input for programs without advisory boards cannot predicted. Some of these programs have quality input while other do not. It *appears* that quality input can be attributed to nothing less than luck.

*Lastly*

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis includes efforts to answer two research questions listed earlier. They are: What do social work program advisory boards do? and; Who serves on social work program advisory boards? Another important aspect of qualitative analysis is to present a summary of both written and oral comments

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\(^1\) The *standard error of the estimate* is the standard deviation of the distance between observed and expected data points. A small *standard error of the estimate* indicates that the independent variables do a better job of predicting than a larger *standard error of the estimate*. 
offered to use by Program Directors. As indicated in Appendix A, we initially hypothesized that social work program advisory boards are routinely involved in the following activities:

a) Curriculum Planning  
b) Field Work Planning  
c) Field Work Documentation/Handbook  
d) Student Documentation/Handbook  
e) Student Recruitment/Retention  
f) Community Education  
g) Community Advocacy  
h) CSWE Self Study Material  
i) Faculty Recruitment (i.e., reviewing Vitas)  
j) Other  

Figure V suggests that most advisory boards are involved in all the activities hypothesized except for "other." Although, most of these activities are included as tasks performed by boards, intensity of involvement varies among boards.
Figure VI represents the percent of boards that have constituent group representation. Generally speaking, our findings suggest that advisory boards are lacking in key constituent representation. Although no identified constituent group was confirmed as represented on all boards, the percentages reveal a disturbing pattern.

Since key professional values found in social work are consumerism and empowerment, it seems inconceivable that an advisory board would not have a woman and practitioner represented, but such advisory boards do exist! CSWE standards repeatedly call for integration of input from women and practitioners throughout all aspects of the program. Although students may be considered the primary direct consumers of the educational program, the poor representation afforded recipients of social services, [i.e., clients] is surprising. A portion of the poor showing of other groups can be rationalized as less visible populations but still appear significantly absent in most boards. As the subtitle [Reality and Fantasy] of the BPD Conference suggests, an important question should be raised: Are social work educators really concerned about issues of consumerism and empowerment?
Figure VI
Who Serves on Advisory Boards?

Percent of Boards

- Practitioners
- Women
- Students
- Racial
- Gay
- Elderly
- Handicapped
- Other
- Lesbian
- Ethnic
- Recipients

Type of Constituent Group

"Percent of Boards" (on Y axis) refers to the percent of boards that have such constituent group representation.
Analyzing the comments from the respondents indicated four primary purposes of advisory boards. They include:

1. maintaining educators' awareness of the complexity of tasks facing those involved in direct practice;

2. understanding how social, political and economic changes affect service delivery;

3. learning new developments emerging in or influencing practice.

4. advocating for the social work program to the University and community.

The most overwhelming response addressed the issue of advocating for the social work program. Advisory boards have emerged with an unexpected political clout. Comments confirm the effective use of boards as a mechanism to achieve objectives that have political consequences. These comments include successful curriculum revisions that are unpopular with university administration. Using the advisory board to review resumes for a faculty position was applauded by an university's affirmative action officer.

General Guidelines

Our findings indicate that guidelines for establishing and maintaining social work program advisory boards can be divided into three general areas: 1) Selection of board members; 2) Structure of meetings; 3) Tasks of boards. A additional handout is provided. The handout is a prototype worksheet combining the information provided by 16 baccalaureate programs that included extra material when they returned their completed questionnaire.
Conclusion and Summary

The task of pursuing and integrating community input is well-established in accreditation standards for baccalaureate social work programs. Our survey results reveal that program directors are four times more likely to use a program advisory board than other methods to accomplish this task; and that the quality of advisory board input is significantly better rated by the directors over other methods. Those programs that do not use advisory boards still pursue constituent input but their primary focus is on field activity and their quality of input is rated as less excellent.

As social work programs continue to struggle with the integration of multiple issues of diversity in the educational curriculum, constituent representation will require more efficient methods of mediating the competing interests of diverse groups. Because of variations in regional issues of diversity, it would seem undesirable to mandate absolute constituent representation for all oppressed groups. With high ratings of input quality by baccalaureate program directors, the advisory board offers an opportunity for reciprocal empowerment. Perhaps the success of this form of constituent empowerment can be generalized to other, less visible groups.
Citations


Appendix A

Advisory Board Questionnaire
Advisory Board Questionnaire

1. Name of your institution _____________________________

2. Institutional enrollment ______________________________

3. Baccalaureate Program enrollment __________________________

4. Social Work Degree(s) offered (circle)
   BA  BS  BSW  BSSW  Other __________________________

5. Location of campus
   Rural  Urban  Other __________________________

6. Indicate where the Social Work Program is housed:
   __ Free standing Program or Department
   __ Located in a Department with other academic disciplines
   __ Located with an MSW Program
   __ Other (please specify) __________________________

7. Does your Baccalaureate Program have an Advisory Committee?
   Yes  No  If "No" go to questions "7a," "7b," and "7c" on page 3 of the questionnaire.

8. How long has the committee existed? __________________________

9. How often does the committee meet? __________________________

10. Title[s] of campus personnel who appoint and/or recommend members to the committee?
    __________________________

11. How many committee members are there? __________________________

12. Indicate the number of persons from groups found in your region that are represented on the committee.
    __ Elderly
    __ Gay
    __ Ethnic [What ethnic groups are represented?] __________________________
    __ Handicapped/physically disabled
    __ Lesbian
    __ Racial [What racial groups are represented?] __________________________
    __ Social service practitioners
    __ Social service recipients
    __ Students
    __ Women
    __ Other [Name] __________________________
13. Do members have formal terms of office?  Yes  No
14. During Committee Meetings, are minutes taken?  Yes  No
15. Do you offer any written material to Committee Members describing their roles and/or functions?
   Yes  No
   If "Yes," please enclose a copy when returning the completed questionnaire.
16. Using the following scale, rank the importance of the tasks in which the committee has input:

   5 = utmost importance;  4 = very important;  3 = somewhat important;
   2 = little importance;  1 = no importance;  0 = committee has no input

   __________ Curriculum Planning
   __________ Field Work Planning
   __________ Field Work Documentation/Handbook
   __________ Student Documentation/Handbook
   __________ Student Recruitment/Retention
   __________ Community Education
   __________ Community Advocacy
   __________ CSWE Self Study Material
   __________ Faculty Recruitment (i.e., reviewing Vitas)
   __________ Other

17. How would you rate the quality of the input offered by your Advisory Committee?
   a) Excellent  b) Good  c) Acceptable  d) Poor  e) Terrible!

   Any comments about use of advisory committees?

   __________________________________________________________

Would you like a copy of the analysis of this questionnaire?
   Yes  No

You have now completed the questionnaire

Please return completed questionnaire to:

   Steve Marson, Director
   Social Work Program
   Pembroke State University
   Pembroke, North Carolina  28372-1510

   Thank you!
Questions only for those who respond "No" for item number 7.

7a. How do you comply with the CSWE mandate that requires input from social service practitioners and students?

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Curriculum Planning
Field Work Planning
Field Work Documentation/Handbook
Student Documentation/Handbook
Student Recruitment/Retention
Community Education
Community Advocacy
CSWE Self Study Material
Faculty Recruitment (i.e., reviewing Vitas)
Other

7c. How would you rate the quality of the input offered by the local community?

a) Excellent  b) Good  c) Acceptable  d) Poor  e) Terrible!

Would you like a copy of the analysis of this questionnaire?

Yes  No

You have now completed the questionnaire

Please return completed questionnaire to:

Steve Marson, Director
Social Work Program
Pembroke State University
Pembroke, North Carolina  28372-1510

Thank You!
Appendix B

The four figures found in appendix B indicate that location of the social work program has little or no impact the quality of evaluations of the advisory board. Constituencies represented on advisory boards (regardless of location) consistently receive better evaluation. When rural advisory board evaluations are compared to urban advisory board, little or no difference is indicated.
Not Rural or Urban
Evaluation of Constituents

Has Board

Has No Board

Urban Programs
Evaluation of Constituents

Rural Programs
Evaluation of Constituents

Rural and Urban Advisory Boards
An Evaluation