

Possible Competition between Stockton's MSW Program and a Proposed MA in Counseling Psychology

Comments by the MSW Program Faculty

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The MSW Program faculty members understand that it is not for us to determine whether or not a proposed new program is approved, but we do feel it appropriate to point out the new program's possible impact on our existing program. It is in this spirit that we offer the following comments.

1. The proposed purposes of the MA in Counseling program, as stated in the proposal, are already being accomplished by the MSW Program.

...to educate students about best practices in mental health and human services and train students in the skills necessary to work with clients in a variety of settings, such as hospitals, social service agencies, residential treatment centers, community mental health centers, and other organizations" and to prepare graduates "...to enter the workforce in entry-level positions in counseling and social services." (Item A, p. 2)

This could be a description for an MSW Program, and Stockton's MSW Program offers the same type of preparation.

2. Although the perspectives of the two professions may differ, both professions prepare students for similar careers.

The proposal states:

In general, the training of social workers emphasizes the social and political contexts that contribute to problems people face. Social workers therefore generally receive more training than counselors in social policy and administrative practices. By comparison, the training of counselors is more closely aligned with psychological models that focus on individual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Counselors therefore generally receive more training in research and assessment than social workers.... (Item D, p. 6)

It is true that social work education teaches students to understand how the social, political, and economic contexts in which people live contribute to their problems, but social work education also emphasizes the contribution of biological and psychological factors to these problems. The statement that counselors receive more training in research and assessment than social workers is challenged by the fact that MSW students are required to complete two 3-credit courses in research, and assessment is taught throughout the four foundation- and advanced-level social work practice courses, as well as in other courses.

Social work does have a distinct perspective, one that emphasizes the importance of advancing human rights, social and economic justice, and the ability to work effectively with clients of varying cultural and

other identities. However, the professional roles played by graduates of MSW programs and MA in Counseling programs are very similar in agencies and in private practice settings. Therefore, graduates of these programs compete for jobs.

3. The fact that other universities offer both graduate degrees does not support an argument that Stockton should do the same. Stockton's environment may not be able to support two such similar graduate programs and may not be able to absorb program's graduates into the workforce.

The proposal states:

...many schools (e.g., Kean, Monmouth, Temple, Rutgers, etc.) offer both degrees. (Item D, p. 6)

Although other universities offer both degrees, this may not be the right path for Stockton. Stockton University is situated in a less populated area and may not be able to sustain two such similar degrees, whereas the schools mentioned are in more densely populated areas. The availability of internships, as well as graduates' opportunities for employment, are more limited in southern New Jersey.

4. There most likely will be competition for internships and internship supervisors between the MSW Program and the proposed new program.

The proposal states that:

the concern about competition for internships may not exist, as their students are in macro- and micro-settings for their internships and our students will be required to be counseling clients for most of their internship hours. Counseling students will have the opportunity to work in group and individual private practices and can seek out internships outside of our local area and set up articulation agreements with Stockton through the Internship Coordinator. Additionally, social work students placed in schools would be in a different setting (child study team) than counseling students (guidance counseling). (Item D, p. 4)

Most MSW students are placed in "micro settings," which is social work terminology for settings where work involves the provision of assessment and treatment (counseling) to individuals, couples, families, and/or groups. Social work students are currently placed in the following types of agencies:

Social Work Internship Placement Agencies (Micro Settings)

Type of Agency	# of Agencies Currently Providing Internships
Schools	50
Mental Health/Community Mental Health	48
Family Services	24
Health, Integrative Health and Mental Health	27
Addictions	10
Developmental Disabilities	10
Homelessness Services	4
Domestic Violence	2
Immigrants/Refugees	1
TOTAL	176

These agencies and institutions are located throughout Southern New Jersey and surrounding areas. Current affiliation agreements are developed and maintained by social work field staff. In school settings, social workers are placed in child study teams but also in counseling positions. For example, New Jersey school social workers are not only members of the child study teams but are also members of the intervention and referral services to students. They are on the forefront of providing counseling as an evidence-based intervention, a significant contribution to student wellness. As the MSW Program has grown, it has encountered competition for internships from other MSW Programs in the area (especially Rutgers University, which has established an educational site in Mays Landing at the Atlantic-Cape Community College but also from online programs). It most likely would come up against significant additional competition if a Masters in Counseling program were to be established at Stockton. Stockton's undergraduate social work program has been building relationships with agencies and institutions within the Atlantic, Cumberland, Cape May, and surrounding counties since 1972, so social work field staff have comprehensive knowledge about internship placement opportunities. As it is, field staff scramble to find placements to meet the needs of the growing MSW Program.

In addition to competition for internships, there would be competition for internship supervisors. It is interesting that, although the proposal claims that social work and counseling psychology are distinct professions, it states that licensed social workers can serve as internship supervisors for counseling psychology students (Item G, p. 9). Since a large number of licensed social workers would be engaged in supervising MSW students, they would likely not be available to also supervise students in the MA in Counseling program.

Further justification for the need for this new program is presented:

...online surveys were sent to 58 area social service agencies in nearby communities in May 2015. 15 agencies responded to the survey....(Item D, p. 5)

This is a very low response rate. It appears that not enough conclusive information was collected to demonstrate that agencies see a need for this new program and would be able to provide the sufficient internship opportunities.

5. Southern New Jersey may need more nationally licensed mental health practitioners who will be reimbursable under managed care, but the MSW Program is already preparing such practitioners.

The proposal argues that counselors will be reimbursable under managed care:

...The mental health market will continually require more nationally licensed mental health practitioners, such as master's level mental health counselors, who will fit into the fee structures of the managed care system....

Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) are also reimbursable by insurance companies in the managed care system. In fact, it has been estimated that nationwide 65% of mental health services are provided by clinical social workers (Scheffler & Kirby, 2003). Stockton University's MSW Program is already preparing students to become mental health providers, since many of our graduates go on to obtain their LCSW.

6. An MA in Counseling Psychology program might seriously disrupt the supply of applicants for Stockton's Traditional, 2-Year MSW Program.

A large proportion of the students who are accepted into Stockton's Traditional, 2-Year MSW Program have undergraduate degrees in psychology. It is uncertain how many of these students would choose to apply instead to a new MA in Counseling program. This, along with the probable competition for internships and internship supervisors, may pose the greatest threat to the MSW Program.

7. The proposed MA in Counseling program is seeking to be one of the programs operating out of the new Atlantic City Campus. This plan may exacerbate competition between the two programs.

The MSW Program, which has been offering its classes exclusively in Atlantic City at the Carnegie Library Center since its inception in Fall 2009, is committed to being in an urban environment. It also has been growing steadily and is proposing significant new ventures that would increase its engagement with that community. We suggest that the perspective of the social work profession, with its attention to the social, political, and economic contexts in which people live as well as biological and psychological influences, is well prepared to assist Stockton University in becoming an anchor institution in Atlantic City.

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