

**FITNESS FOR THE HUMAN SERVICES PROFESSION:
PRELIMINARY EXPLORATIONS**

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Preface

The vision of the Council for Standards in Human Service Education (CSHSE) is to promote excellence in human service education, provide quality assurance, and support standards of performance and practice through the accreditation process. In accordance with this vision, the primary business of CSHSE consists of two interrelated components: (1) assisting human service educators and college administrators to achieve maximum educational effectiveness; and (2) formally recognizing and approving programs whose competence warrants public and professional confidence (accreditation).

CSHSE monographs are published to support both of the aforementioned endeavors, to assist in the achievement of maximum educational effectiveness, and, in turn, to encourage the competence that is fundamental to the attainment of accreditation. This particular monograph presents initial explorations of considerations for fitness to practice in the human services profession. Many programs applying for CSHSE accreditation have difficulty documenting “problems and procedures for managing students with behavior or legal problems that may interfere with their development as human services professionals” (National Standards, Standard 5, Specification e). It is CSHSE’s hope that this publication will provide guidance, and stimulate further discussion and research related to this important issue.

***Disclaimer:** The views and opinions expressed in this monograph are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Council for Standards in Human Service Education.*

Introduction

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A Brave Applicant

A fictitious applicant to the human services major, Anita Composite, hesitates at my office door. A grey-haired woman in her mid-50's, she is dressed neatly in a community college tee shirt, loose tie-dyed pants, and black leather Birkenstocks with white socks.

“If you’re too busy—.” She motions vaguely at my desk.

“No, come on in,” I say. “Door open or closed?”

A pause. “Closed, I think,” she decides, shutting the door and perching at the edge of a chair.

“How can I be helpful?” I ask, already forming a tentative idea of what’s to come based on the timing of this visit. I make sure I’m in a relaxed, open body position.

“If a person.... Hypothetically....” She trails off and looks at me nervously. “Sorry.”

“Okay,” I encourage her. “So before we get into it, I want to be sure you know that this is a private conversation unless you tell me something that I’d have to share. Do you know what I’d be mandated to report in this state, and do you have a sense of what I might need to talk about with other people at the university?” It’s a little cumbersome to jump in like this, but what we might think of as *informed consent for being a student* is especially important when faculty or staff may need to breach the student’s privacy.

She brightens. “Oh, yeah, Jenjee taught us that in the intro class. She’s cool. Um, like child abuse, elder abuse, that kind of thing?” I nod. “Yeah, thanks, nothing like that. But... I mean, is, um, drugs in that?”

“Good question. Let’s talk a minute about how drugs could intersect with the reporting mandate and our other legal and ethical obligations as human services people. As an example, meth in the house with kids might be different from just using meth because it’s in our state’s child abuse statute. Then let’s talk about drug use and what a student could say that I can or must keep private, and what might need to be shared. Okay?” We talk for a few minutes, then I ask, “Do you still want to ask your question? Do you have a sense of what I might say?”

“I’m still not sure.” She ponders. “Hypothetically, if a person had a marijuana conviction but the record was sealed, would that show up on the FBI background check? And would something like that disqualify someone from getting into the program?”

It’s a pretty typical question (now somewhat complicated by my state’s legalization of both medical and recreational marijuana). “It’s not a disqualifier,” I begin, knowing that this is her real question. “It shouldn’t appear on the background check if the record was sealed. Do you know if it was actually expunged?” She doesn’t know, and she’s not sure what “expunged” means. “When we’re done, I’d like you to talk with Wilma, our field studies coordinator. Have

you met her yet? Hypothetically speaking, it's better to have the conversation before the background check comes to her."

"Yeah, she said that at the application workshop, but I wasn't sure if it's a deal-breaker."

"She can direct a person to resources and go through the options. The background check gives us some information, but it gives you information, too. It's good to know what shows up before you're applying to agencies that may have restrictions for trainees, and later, for grad school applications or jobs."

She nods. "I did some stupid stuff when I was younger," she offers. Join the club, I think.

"A lot of people did stupid stuff. With a few exceptions, like assault, we care most about whether you're doing stupid stuff now that might jeopardize clients. We also care if you're doing something that might not be good for you. There are some details to discuss, but that's pretty much the bottom line."

"Okay," she says, then "None of that. Whew!"

"It's a good question," I assure her. "You're finishing up at Creswell Community College? So at the U we have a counseling center, too, and we also have a non-trad student office. I'm just going to say in case it's relevant that there are also substance abuse support groups and other free campus resources to support sobriety. Do you know about the classes in the substance abuse training program?"

She beams. "I'm taking a class about veterans with drug problems this term. Jerzy's an awesome teacher. Do you know he had a heroin addiction when he came back from Afghanistan?" I do, but I just nod. "Hey, can I get my chemical dependency certification at the same time as I do HS?" We chat for another few minutes, then I walk her to the field study coordinator's office.

Is this applicant fit for the profession?

"Rough around the Edges"

As I began to receive manuscripts for this monograph, I found myself thinking about Mike (the pseudonym he chose for this publication). Our Family and Human Services program admits students in their junior year through an application and interview process. I hadn't evaluated Mike's file or interviewed him, but he came to my attention early in his first term. In his first few classes, he questioned the instructors and raised concerns about the material being presented. He looked frustrated and impatient. "Prickly" was the word that came to my mind.

At our confidential faculty/staff meeting, the program director let us know that Mike had been in to see him. Remembering his meeting with the program director years later, Mike recalled, "I talked about how I don't even relate to these people in my classes, but [the program director] said, 'We're here for you.'" To faculty and staff, the director said that this was a student who was rough around the edges and needed our support. He asked us to work to retain Mike, feeling that he had a lot to offer the field.

As Mike settled in and I got to know him better, I learned that he was an astute, intelligent, and kind person with terrific critical thinking skills. He also didn't suffer fools gladly and sometimes (as is true for me as well) his irritation showed. He was a wonderful advocate for youth and very politically active. I enjoyed having him in class and appreciated his sophisticated

and informed contributions to our discussions. I saw him collaborating with others. I continued to experience the challenges he posed, and sometimes to find him intense. I hoped that he could feel that I welcomed and valued him, and I hoped that sometimes he found me challenging and intense, too.

During Mike's time in the program, we experienced a tumultuous period of disagreement and heightened tension about how some important diversity considerations were being managed institutionally. A large group of students held several protests, including one during a faculty event. I agreed with many of the students' concerns but didn't feel comfortable either joining this particular protest or continuing to participate in the faculty activity. Instead, I stood at the periphery of the event with the students, hoping I would be seen as a supportive witness.

After a while, Mike joined me. "I really feel like I should be protesting," he confided, "but I'm torn because I think the consequences would be too great." As we talked, he told me that he had an arrest record. There was a threat that the police would be called if the students persisted in their protest, and Mike worried that if he were to be arrested again, this might keep him out of the kinds of helping and advocacy roles that were his passion. Additionally, the agency in which he was placed was involved in active debate about breaking the law. At the same time, he didn't want to abandon his classmates—"I don't want people to think I don't support this cause," he told me. As we stood at the edge of the activity, he decided not to participate more actively, but to talk with his peers soon about his decision-making.

Mike moved through the program successfully. He became one of our shining stars. As a guest speaker in one of my graduate courses, he showed up in clothing that highlighted his many large tattoos. He was open, honest, and challenged my graduate students' perspectives. It was a delight.

Mike graduated, worked, went to graduate school in a human services field, obtained a license, and now teaches in a human service-related program. When he needed a letter supporting his good character in the course of these accomplishments, I happily wrote it. We talked about how he had to keep documenting his fit for the profession.

I contacted Mike to ask if I could write about him in this introduction. So many of the manuscripts evoked him. During our subsequent conversation, he told me two things I hadn't known: That his arrests had been for participating in protests, and that when he entered the program, he was "brand-new sober." He has good memories of the program and his interactions with faculty and staff, commenting that "I grew more in FHS than in grad school. I try to remember that when I'm with our students."

On the experience of having to keep proving himself, he commented, "Multiple times, I've had to submit all of the dispositions. Students who are in this situation have to track down all this stuff. I applied for a position and they rejected me after background screening. I had to appeal and explain everything. Would one more arrest or problem at my undergraduate program work against me? Maybe not. It's helped me to be able to say, 'It's been this many years.'" And, he added, "I've tried to develop more effective ways to protest."

Mike doesn't disclose his history to his students, but says that programs need to have someone knowledgeable about background checks and arrest records to guide their students. The program in which Mike now works makes sure that students know who they can talk to if they have a background check issue or legal record. "We can go over requirements, placement

opportunities, and exemptions. Students don't always know that there may be options for things like exemptions. And site placement can be very tricky—we can't place students in sites just on the basis of their background or a rejection by a site." When I asked if he had advice for students like himself, he replied, "People shouldn't give up."

Is this program graduate and colleague fit for the profession?

Articulating *Fitness*: More Questions Than Answers

What, indeed, is "fitness for the human services profession"? How do we define and recognize it in our students, our colleagues, and ourselves? Is it a matter of character, an essential set of personality traits? Can fitness be developed, and can lack of fitness be remediated? Is fitness a more complex constellation of traits, learning, and setting? What role does culture play, including the cultures of majority and minority communities, poverty and affluence, and diverse group memberships (Hays, 2008), as well as the largely unarticulated cultures of higher education and the field of human services itself? Is the assessment of fitness contextual? In what ways does it reflect unconscious bias and create adverse impact? How does it protect clients, students, communities, and the profession, and how can we continue to investigate and refine this critical topic?

Fitness is a difficult concept to define, though several of the articles in this volume offer suggestions based on standards or pragmatic considerations. Clearly fitness is not just a commitment to ethical and legal behavior, though this may be a good bottom line as these standards include explicit and implicit expectations of integrity, honesty, competence, self-awareness, cultural sufficiency, and continued learning. What about empathy? At first glance, empathy might be seen as essential to the construct of fitness, but what about human services roles such as 911 emergency dispatcher? Could a person with too much empathy be functionally unfit for this role? When we grant a generalist degree, have we agreed that that graduate is suited to every possible job in the vast human services field? Or have we signified that the person is generally fit for much of the profession?

Competence is important, but how should competence be assessed for a trainee versus a supervisor? That vague bugaboo of many licensing and certification requirements, "good moral character," is extremely difficult to articulate. What about people who have been convicted of crimes? How can educators talk with students about different types of illegal activity and the human services positions for which they may be considered fit or unfit (cf. Bratina & Eash, 2016; Kerewsky & Chappell Belcher, 2016; and Zoukis, 2014)?

What about *deviance*, whether moral or statistical? This seems like it could be a reasonable consideration, but again, what is it, and is synonymous with, or a contributor to, unfitness for the profession? Kay Redfield Jamison (1997) recounts her ongoing terror that her bipolar diagnosis, if revealed to her state licensing board, would cause her to lose her license. John Fryer, a gay psychiatrist in the era when homosexuality was still considered a mental disorder in the U.S., presented on a 1972 American Psychiatric Association panel on the removal of homosexuality from diagnostic nosology. He wore a mask because he was at risk of losing his job if it were known that he was gay, and he did not reveal that he had been the anonymous panelist until more than two decades later ("John E. Fryer," 2016). Were Jamison and Fryer unfit for their professions because of their psychological differences? Unfit all of the time, or only sometimes? How about practitioners with autism spectrum diagnoses? A caseworker with three eyebrow piercings and a Narcotics Anonymous tattoo? A Bangladeshi grant writer, or a student

in a polyamorous relationship? How about a faculty member who is convicted for driving under the influence of pain medication?

Does our discomfort with difference sometimes result in our own incompetence or unfitness? Does it decrease our curiosity, identification with others, and flexibility while increasing our stereotypes and –isms? I am a member of many human services-related professional communities, and at some time I have heard the same joking self-characterization in all of them. I don't hear it from my friends in other fields. Is it true? Do we really want to see ourselves as a profession that “eats our own”? How can we really see our students, and how can we determine whether to open a door or shut it? For a recent overview and survey that nicely identifies many of the support versus gatekeeping dilemmas face by counselor educators (and by extension, related disciplines), see Brown-Rice and Furr (2016).

A common source of dilemmas and considerable agony for human services educators, trainers, and employers is legal liability. If we give someone another try, take a chance on someone, flex some requirements, provide a remediation, do we lie awake at night wondering if that person will prove unfit in the future, and that we or others will determine that we were negligent in our gatekeeping role? What if our decision was to set a boundary, say no, dismiss someone, or contact a licensing board? Would we behave differently if we took steps to appropriately document, consult, and in other ways identify the reasoning that motivates our decisions? While this discussion warrants a monograph in its own right, Smith's (2015) *Engaging Risk: A Guide for College Leaders* provides many concrete recommendations for risk reduction and liability. Her suggestions, along with Sue et al.'s (1998) *Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Individual and Organizational Development* provide an excellent starting point for articulating our values and assumptions and developing inclusive, clear, and structured organizational policies. This in turn helps us to create a robust framework within which standards for evaluating and responding to fitness concerns may be more transparently articulated and proactive or responsive measures may be taken.

What about our field's values of diversity, access, and rehabilitation, and our belief in the capacity to change? Do these values apply only to clients, or should they also be considered in relation to human services students and practitioners themselves? How will we balance support for our students and peers while also fulfilling our ethical and legal values to protect clients and the community? It would seem that any definition of fitness must be clear yet flexible, and account for context and role responsibilities. With our commitments to social justice, inclusion, and diversity, human services could serve as a model for related fields wrestling with issues of fitness. A welcome announcement was the Council for Standards in Human Service Education's (2016) recent notice that a revised multicultural standard is in the works.

Contents of This Monograph

We know that “If you are a graduate who was emotionally supported during college, it more than doubles your odds of being engaged in work and triples your odds of thriving,” (Kamenetz, 2016, quoting Brandon Busteed). Assuming at least a good-enough institutional context in which we can both support and set limits for or students on the basis of our working definition of fitness, what aspects of fitness or student characteristics should be considered? This peer-reviewed monograph contributes to what we hope will be an ongoing and spirited conversation.

Former CSHSE Board members Kincaid and Andresen open this monograph with “A Standards-Based Approach to Human Services Professional Fit: Curriculum, Policy, and Social Justice.” They describe the utility of the standards in contributing to our definitions of fitness, and include material that should be of immediate use to CSHSE-accredited programs and others.

This organization-based overview is followed by Mills and Franyo-Ehlers’s report, “Students’ Perspectives on Fitness for the Human Services Profession.” Their survey-based findings are heartening and underscore the importance of including students in dialogues about fitness.

Students with specific characteristics are the focus of the next three articles, which take as their starting point the acknowledgement that students enter this field from a variety of backgrounds and with varying characteristics. In “Advocacy in Action: Supporting Human Services Students with Criminal Justice Histories,” Paulson, Groves, and Hagedorn argue for supporting and advocating for students in this group, with the important finding that their student sample included a large number of students who reported previous convictions.

In “‘Fitness’ and the Human Services Student with a Mental Health Related Disability: Advisement, Assistance, and Accommodations,” Gallo-Silver and Joffe discuss assistance for students with mental health-related disabilities, rejecting the evaluation of fitness while supporting adherence to legal and institutional standards.

Finally, in “Developing the Professional ‘Self’: Working with Adult Learners in an Online and Hybrid Human Services Program,” Moxley-South, Lindstrom, and Pribble describe the policies, both proactive and responsive, that their program utilizes to support adult learners who may be challenged by an online program.

These authors provide exactly what we would hope in a preliminary exploration of this broad topic. Because its primary attention is on student fitness considerations, comparisons and contrasts between the articles are easy to identify. These similarities and differences broaden our scope and enrich our understanding of this sometimes-contentious topic.

At the same time, this volume represents only a start. With its emphasis on students, college policy, and gatekeeping standards and practices, it is narrowly focused. Future areas that would enhance our understanding of these important issues include fitness and trainees in field study settings, colleague assistance, and organizational/institutional cultures that unwittingly create contexts in which students and professionals may appear unfit because they are different from the institution’s unexamined, and potentially stereotyping, ideas about fitness.

Context Matters

A female student in the first year of her master’s program in a human services-related field was placed in a new practicum site at a psychiatric facility. The student, who was re-specializing, had some intervention experience and an undergraduate major that included psychology. She developed the placement in her home community and commuted to her adult-learner program. The site had no experience offering master’s practica, though it did serve as a training site for doctoral psychology interns.

The student worked as a middle and high school teacher at an Orthodox Jewish yeshiva (religious school) with a stringent dress code. She would arrive at her practicum from work in blouses with modest necklines and sleeves below the elbow, skirts below the knee, and stockings. This was her first experience in a medical model setting and she was not familiar with

medical culture. Interested in the patients' medications, she asked many questions of her supervisor, a nurse. She observed group psychotherapy and interacted individually with patients, drafting notes in their medical records. During psychiatric Grand Rounds, which she enjoyed greatly, she also asked questions and participated in discussions.

At her end-of-semester evaluation, she was shocked to find that her supervisor had rated her as unsatisfactory in several areas. When she met with the hospital's volunteer coordinator, who served as the liaison to her program, she was told, with empathy but with strong encouragement to "leave it alone," that she had been evaluated as unsatisfactory because she asked questions about medications, signifying that she lacked this medical knowledge. "Doesn't it matter that I knew I didn't know about this and now I've learned it?" she asked. "Doesn't it matter that I asked in order to know more about the patients? I'm not a medical student. Learning about medication isn't even listed in my practicum outcomes." The answer was that the evaluation was about her deficiencies, not her strengths. She asked, "Is my knowledge level satisfactory now?" Yes, said the coordinator, and this would "probably" be reflected in her end-of-year evaluation.

Further, the coordinator explained, students, should listen respectfully at Grand Rounds. "I haven't interrupted anyone," protested the student. "The docs ask if there are any questions." The coordinator explained that "medical settings are para-military" and despite the apparent invitation, it was really meant for other medical staff, not for students. The student should just be quiet and listen for the rest of the year. That was the culture. She was failing to be appropriate in the role and setting. *Why didn't anyone warn me?* the student wondered. *I don't know how this kind of placement works.* She felt misunderstood and humiliated. When she complained in her professional seminar at school, she was encouraged to "learn from the experience"—good advice, but what about feedback to the site about giving strength-based feedback as well, or a commitment to providing better acculturation information to future students in similar settings? The student shut up in her seminar, fearing that she would be seen as defensive.

When the second semester began, the student stopped wearing her teaching clothes to her placement, instead typically wearing a short-sleeved blouse and pants. Her supervisor seemed to be warmer toward her. She wondered if this was because the coordinator had said something to the supervisor, or because she was no longer dressed like an Orthodox Jew, or for some other reason. She resolved to seek answers to her questions elsewhere. Her pleasure in the placement was sharply curtailed. She shut up. She did not learn as much as she could have if she had chosen to continue her learning experience rather than aim for the more positive evaluation she indeed received at the end of the year.

I was this student. Am I fit for the profession? As a faculty member, what should I take from this experience in service to supporting my own students and their sites? Perhaps future publications will explore this and the other questions raised in this introduction.

While editing this monograph, I faced an unexpected and significant health challenge that preoccupied me and slowed down many aspects of my work. This experience has caused me to reflect more deeply on ways in which we are all vulnerable to stresses and demands that may affect our professional fitness at any given time (Kerewsky, 2015). I am very grateful to CSHSE, the people involved in all aspects of this publication, and my colleagues and students. Thank you for holding onto an image of me that included both my areas of continued fitness and those where I needed your assistance and support to transcend some very difficult challenges.

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A Standards-Based Approach to Human Services Professional Fit: Curriculum, Policy, and Social Justice

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The authors analyzed the National Standards for Human Services Education for overt and inferred indicators of fitness for the profession. They argue that program policies for admission, retention, and dismissal of students are vital to student success or redirection, and to creating a safe learning environment for diverse students. Policies provide a narrative framework for student experience that interfaces with curriculum to facilitate professional development. The Standards themselves provide clear guidelines for a definition of fitness for the profession. The analysis is tied to the historical roots of human services, social justice, and respect for diversity.

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Fitness for the profession, although not directly stated in the National Standards for Human Services Education (CSHSE) (Council for Standards in Human Services Education, 2013) can be inferred through analysis of the program and curriculum standards. The CSHSE has been in existence since the late 1970s, and the first set of research-based National Standards for Human Service Education was published in 1980 with revisions in 2005, 2009, 2010, and 2013. The Standards have historical significance and contribute to an understanding of fit for the profession.

We, the authors, have more than 25 years of combined experience as members of the Board of Directors for the CSHSE. During our separate tenures as Board members, we each held several positions, beginning as regional directors and later serving as executive officers, including Vice President of Accreditation. We were both actively and directly involved in clarifying and updating the National Standards, developing policies and guidelines for programs seeking accreditation, and participating in numerous self-study reviews and site visits. We have drawn from our knowledge and experience to draft this analysis which we hope will add to the context for the development of an agreed-upon definition of fitness for the human services profession. We have included information on the CSHSE as we have experienced it; however, note that we do not speak on behalf of the CSHSE or its Board of Directors.

Because there are three sets of National Standards (CSHSE, 2013) based on degree levels (Associates, Baccalaureate, and Master's), the standard use of American Psychological Association (2009) writing conventions resulted in a cumbersome, awkward, and difficult-to-read manuscript. The Standards for each degree level overlap each other, and therefore, instead of citing page numbers from three documents that are each 9-11 pages in length, we have referenced the Standard names and included a table matching the Standard names, numbers, specifications, and page numbers (see Appendix) which you may reference throughout the article.

Included in the analysis are: (a) CSHSE Operating Principles; (b) Organization and Structure of the CSHSE Standards; (c) Context for Understanding the Implications of Policies Related to Fitness for the Profession; (d) Policies and Procedures Required for Admitting, Retaining, and Dismissing Students; (e) The Standards and Procedures Standard as a Holistic Approach to Policies and Curriculum; (f) Curriculum Standards and Fit for the Profession; (g) Social Justice, Diversity, and Fit for the Profession; and (h) Conclusions.

CSHSE Operating Principles

The CSHSE Board has a history of operating under four principles: (a) provide continuity of human services education through research-based and externally confirmed national standards that are the foundation for program accreditation; (b) conduct the accreditation process with integrity and consistency; (c) avoid creating and enforcing standards that result in overly regulated programs; and (d) be purposeful in addressing issues of all aspects of diversity in student admissions, student success, faculty and staff hiring and promotion, program administration, and curriculum specifications. Additionally, there has been a commitment to issues of diversity and social justice, and recognition that respect for social justice and diversity not only motivate the practice of human services but are the foundation for the existence of human services. These concepts are overtly and covertly embedded in the CSHSE National Standards (2013), both in the General Program Characteristics (called Program Standards in this article) and in the Curriculum Standards.

The Board has been intentional in maintaining the historical founding principles of the human services profession while monitoring the evolutionary process of Standards that change in response to social attitudes and laws. CSHSE policy requirements are and have been developed in response to feedback from program members and requirements of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, <http://www.chea.org>), of which the CSHSE is a recognized member. In general, CHEA policies are congruent with the regional university and community college accrediting bodies. The point is that the Standards are not stagnant, nor are they developed in isolation or arbitrarily based on the whims of individual Board members. They represent multiple levels of the higher education system, a system that encompasses internal and external stakeholders.

Organization and Structure of the CSHSE Standards

The CSHSE (2013) Standards are the basis for human services program accreditation. There are National Standards for Associate, Baccalaureate, and Master's Degree programs, each set forth in a separate document available on the CSHSE website (CSHSE, 2015). The Standards for each level are divided between *General Program Characteristics* and *Curriculum* (including field work).

The Program Standards are related to administration. They cover purpose of the program, philosophical statement that drives the curriculum, program assessment, program evaluation, faculty credentials, staff and faculty evaluation, program support, resource availability, transfer advising, and policies and procedures for admitting, retaining, and dismissing students. They assure that the program and institution are properly credentialed, have adequate resources, operate with integrity and transparency, and deal with diverse faculty, staff, and students in equitable ways.

The structure of the curriculum standards is consistent between degree levels: (a) a name

for the Standard; (b) a context statement (not included in Master's level) broadly stating the rationale for the Standard; (c) the Standard; (d) the statement providing a framework for the breadth and depth of study to be covered by the Specifications; and (e) the Specifications stipulating the knowledge, theory, and skills required to meet the Standard. Some specifications are worded identically between degree levels, pointing to the importance of the statements framing the breadth and depth of study at each degree level which are as follows: (a) Associate: "Demonstrate how the following are included as a major emphasis of the curriculum" (CSHSE, 2013, Standards 11 through 19); (b) Baccalaureate: "Demonstrate how the knowledge, theory, and skills for each of the following specifications is included, analyzed, and applied in the curriculum" (CSHSE, Standards 11 through 20); and (c) Master's: "Demonstrate broad conceptual mastery of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the profession through:" (CSHSE, Standards 9-18).

Rather than reference the multiple sets of standards, we have chosen to use the *names* of the Standards because they are fairly consistent across levels. All three degree levels include the following Curriculum Standards: History of Human Services, Human Systems, Human Services Delivery Systems, Information Management, Planning and Evaluation, Interventions and Direct Services, Interpersonal Communication, Client-Related Values and Attitudes, Self-Development, and Field Experience. Both the Baccalaureate and Master's levels include Administration and Program Planning and Evaluation. The Master's level requires a Capstone Experience that "demonstrates conceptual mastery of the field of professional practice; for example, a portfolio, project, or thesis" (CSHSE, 2013, Capstone Standard).

Taken holistically, the Program Standards work in tandem with the Curriculum Standards to provide a safe environment in which diverse learners may study and master the knowledge, theory, skills, and values necessary to develop fitness for the profession. To illustrate our point, we have examined one specific Program Standard (the Standards and Procedures for Admitting, Retaining and Dismissing Students Standard) and four specific Curriculum Standards (History, Client-Related Values, Self-Development, and Fieldwork). In addition, we have prepared a brief analysis of indicators of fitness for the profession drawn from the context statements of all the Curriculum Standards as further evidence of the role the CSHSE (2013) Standards contribute to defining fitness for the human services profession.

Context for Understanding the Implication of Policies Related to Fitness for the Profession

In general, institutions of higher education have policies that apply to all students in all fields of study, and they are handed to students in a college catalog or similar document, also available on websites. These policies represent the historical thinking of the traditional campus and students and are intended to assure transparent and consistent treatment of students while reducing institutional risk and liability. They address behaviors within the context of the entire institution and represent a written and binding contract between the institution and the student. It is this contractual obligation that necessitates agreement between the policies of the institution and those of any specific program as well as with State and Federal laws.

Additional specific program policies are necessary for human services programs because students are required by the CSHSE National Standards (CSHSE, 2013) to complete supervised internships that are more often than not done in agencies not related to the educational institution. Certainly, institutional policies do and should apply to students in human services programs, but they may not go far enough or be explicit enough to deal with an academically

successful student who may also have behaviors that are not appropriate to the human services profession. Therefore, the policies required by the CSHSE (2013) National Standards do not supersede the institutional standards, they extend them to assure equity in the treatment of human service students and reduce institutional liability for internships.

The *Standards and Procedures for Admitting, Retaining, and Dismissing Students* Standard (CSHSE, 2013), hereafter referred to as the *Standards and Procedures Standard*, requires a specific set of policies. This Standard is directly related to fitness for the profession because it provides a framework for the narrative of how individual students progress through a human services program: (a) what prepared them for admission to the program; (b) what will be required of them while in the program; (c) what steps will the program take to assist them in succeeding; and (d) what responsibilities will students have to assure their own success.

Policies and Procedures for Admitting, Retaining, and Dismissing Students

The Standards and Procedures Standard (CSHSE, 2013) is stated as, “The Program shall have written standards and procedures for admitting, retaining, and dismissing students.” Like a good short story, this standard requires a beginning, middle, and end. The standard is couched in a context statement that, “Students have a right to know, prior to enrollment, the standards of the human services program and the procedures for admitting, retaining, and dismissing students. Both academic and behavior issues need to be considered” (CSHSE, 2013). The Standard is followed by five specifications: “(a) admissions; (b) admission supports for students with special needs; (c) access to personal help; (d) due process for probation, dismissal, appeal, and grievance procedures; and (e) managing students with behavioral or legal problems.”

There may be a tendency to view each of these specifications as separate without regard to the context statement about student rights. Taken together, the Specifications frame the story of who the students are and how the program is committed to their success, especially in the context of underrepresented groups. While it may not be directly stated, this Standard provides the benchmarks for a student to either develop fitness for the profession or be redirected to a more suitable field of study. The word “dismissal” seems punitive but is necessary if a student cannot be redirected.

The policies required by this Standard serve to admit diverse students, provide support for success of all students, assure transparent and consistent treatment of all students, and, at the same time, reduce institutional risk and liability. Policies in any setting exist to insure continuity and expediency in handling routine events, but also to provide continuity of policy and process for unusual situations that potentially increase liability if policies that demonstrate standardized treatment are not in place and followed.

The Specifications for this and every Standard should be viewed as a cohesive unit, for it is the combination that meets the Standard. Together, they provide a concept map or recipe for addressing the detailed aspects of the Standard. Following is discussion of the Specifications for the Standards and Procedures Standard (CSHSE, 2013).

Specification a: “Provide Documentation of Policies Regarding the Selection and Admission of Students” (CSHSE, 2013)

How does a student know if he or she should apply to a human services program? Is it reasonable that a student should have an understanding of fitness for the profession before taking coursework? If it is not reasonable for a student to know, is it reasonable for an admission policy

to require fitness? If education is transformative, what exactly is it that a student should or should not know or have done prior to admission?

Institutional admission policies generally require documentation of prior academic success through degree completion and grade point average (GPA). Some institutions have “open door” policies that are designed to increase admission opportunities for underrepresented groups. They provide assessment of prior learning and classes that bridge gaps in learning where needed. A student who will not be accepted to the institution cannot be accepted to the program. However, once a student is accepted to the institution, there is an obligation to allow access to programs where the student can succeed, but that does not equate to acceptance to every program offered. Admission policies that discriminate against underrepresented groups are, at a minimum, unethical. There is thus the need both for transparency in all policies and for policies that specifically address diversity.

Students have the right to know what will be required of them to complete the human services degree. To that end, as part of the admission process, many programs require signature on an essential skills document acknowledging that the applicant understands and is capable of complying. The essential skills statement is very specific regarding behaviors typical of fit for the profession both in the classroom and field experience settings. This is critical when it comes to successful completion of the field experience and the rare case when the need to redirect or dismiss a student arises. The essential skills statement may include classroom behaviors such as specific active listening skills, non-judgmental dialogue, and respectful body language (e.g., no eye rolling, not using your voice to stop others from being heard, not inappropriately or repeatedly diverting the topic).

Many programs also include criminal background checks. At the least, a statement on the admission application requiring disclosure of any past or pending criminal convictions allows grounds for later program dismissal or redirection based on a fraudulent statement. The application should clearly state that false information is fraud and can be used for program dismissal if discovered after the applicant has been admitted.

Also, if there are convictions that would block an applicant’s admission to the program, they should be specifically named in the policy and the policy should be included in the application packet. The intent is not to exclude a student with a conviction record from educational opportunity, but to provide information for suitable field placements, protection of vulnerable populations, and guidance for the applicant to successful degree completion and career placement.

It may not be reasonable for an admission policy to overly assess fitness for the profession as part of the admissions process, yet programs that have more qualified applicants than they can accept may need some additional information to determine who will be admitted. To that end, some programs require writing samples in response to specific prompts. Of course, writing samples have been and are used for other reasons such as the ability of the student to write at degree level or to identify students who may not understand the field and may be a better fit for a different program. Consideration should be given to how the samples will be evaluated to avoid creating a disadvantage for underrepresented groups who may not have had the same academic or volunteer opportunities.

Another important option related to the admissions process is the offering or requiring of an introductory human services or survey course to students not yet admitted to the program. In

many cases, students who take such a course make the decision to take a program of study more suited to their abilities and interests. The instructor of the course also has the opportunity to observe students firsthand prior to their admission. An introductory course required prior to admission provides an excellent opportunity to review the essential skills statement and other policies in detail.

The importance of the role of admissions policies in the awareness and enforcement of dismissal policies cannot be overstated. It is critical to understand how the policies required by the Standards and Procedures Standard work together to assure successful degree completion and appropriate development of fitness for the profession, and, at the same time, provide a framework to assure both allowance for cultural differences and equity in policy enforcement.

Specification b: “Provide Documentation of Policies for Enrolling, Advising, Counseling, and Assisting Students with Special Needs (e.g., Minorities, Students with Disabilities, or Otherwise Disadvantaged or Underrepresented Students) in Order to Assure Entrance of Qualified Individuals of Diverse Background and Conditions” (CSHSE, 2013)

Specification b enhances the admission policies to specifically address multiple types of diversity through language that is intentionally left open in consideration of the unique situations of individual students. This specification addresses academic needs from admission through entrance to the profession, further assuring diversity among human services professionals as graduates join the work force (Kincaid, 2008). The Standard covers multiple and repetitive processes and is clearly intended to continue after admission.

Specification b codifies the commitment of the program and institution not just to recruiting diverse students but also to creating an environment where all students have the opportunity to thrive as successful learners. In the absence of these policies, the faculty and staff of a program may fail to model the very concepts to which the human services profession is committed. Whether institutional or program policies are used to meet the requirements of the Standards and Procedures Standard, it is strongly suggested that all human services students be made aware of their pertinence to the program. The admission of diverse students with special needs provides a structure for the development of a diverse group of practitioners who are fit for the profession and who reflect the changing demographics of the nation.

Specification c. “Provide Documentation of Policies and Procedures for Referring Students for Personal Help” (CSHSE, 2013)

The policies and procedures required by this Specification (CSHSE, 2013) are directly related to fitness for the profession. It is not uncommon for people who have had personal issues such as abuse, addiction, mental illness, or behavioral problems to be drawn to helping professions. Additionally, students can experience personal crises related to current or past circumstances. The reality that people with problems seek out this profession is both a potential strength and limitation depending on how personal issues are addressed and managed.

These policies and procedures allow faculty and advisors to identify the ways in which personal issues are interfering with a student’s ability to function successfully in preparation as a professional in human services. Personal help could be as simple as time management or writing skills, or it could mean a student needs immediate intervention for crisis or grief, has an ongoing need for counseling, or has a chronic mental illness or personality disorder.

As with other policies, this policy is in place not to exclude students, but to provide the

support and resources that may be necessary to assure student success and fit for the profession. Because education is transformative, many students resolve issues as a byproduct of their studies, but some students need additional help to succeed. A student who is given the opportunity to be proactive in changing behaviors and/or resolving his or her own issues is being moved toward fitness for the profession. A student who is unwilling to be proactive in securing help to resolve an issue may be in the wrong field of study.

A word of caution seems in order here. A policy for referral for personal help should be written with enough clarity that it cannot be abused by those with power who have their own blind spots or who tend to go beyond the parameters of the policy in labeling behaviors as pathologies. This is a place where policies and curriculum meet, providing an opportunity to model a variety of human services values and methods, such as active listening, interventions, referral, feedback loops, client self-determination, and appropriate professional boundaries.

Failure to develop appropriate professional behaviors leads not only to liability for the institution, but to professionals who are incompetent to work in the field and reflect poorly on the institution. The needs of future clients and vulnerable populations must be considerations in policy formation.

Specification d. “Provide Documentation of Written Policies and Procedures Describing the Due Process for Probation, Dismissal, Appeal, and Grievance Procedures Affecting Students” (CSHSE, 2013)

What are the conditions under which a student would be dismissed or placed on probation? If we are concerned about fit for the profession, must we also be concerned about enforcing appropriate boundaries with sanctions for crossing them? How does a student get to that point? What paper trail is required? How many people must agree that a problem is serious enough to invoke this policy? How is the student notified?

Most if not all academic institutions have policies for probation, dismissal, appeal, and grievances including procedures for due process. These policies are generally limited to academic performance and to classroom and campus behaviors. However, these institutions frequently do not have policies that are specific to disciplines like human services that require field work as an integrated and assessed part of the curriculum. The presence of internships as a curriculum and degree requirement creates a third party liability for the institution. In the absence of clear behavioral expectations supported by written policies and procedures for grieving, appealing, and due process, an institution is open to litigation. All policies should be reviewed by the legal counsel.

Without clear policies, there is no basis for dismissing a student whose behaviors are inappropriate for the field, as this can appear as an act of discrimination creating liability. Not only do these policies hold students accountable, they hold Program faculty and staff accountable to consistently interpret and apply the policies through clearly-stated procedures. There are always exceptions to policies, but when too many exceptions are granted, the policy becomes null and the chance of litigation increases.

If a student is unwilling to seek remediation and the behaviors in question are included in the essential skills statement (see the discussion of Specification a above) or are in some other way delivered to all students as required, the behavior becomes grounds for beginning due process towards probation or dismissal. Just as a human services agency requires case notes, an

instructor or administrator involved in disciplinary action or referral for personal help (specification c) should carefully document events leading to the action and the student's response and follow through to an improvement or further action.

Compliance, of course, hopefully leads to successful degree completion. Non-compliance could lead to probation or dismissal from the program. Again, dismissal from the program can mean redirection within the institution. Many institutions have general studies or learner-designed degree programs, and a student may be able to apply credits earned in the human services program to one of those degree types or to elective credits. The point is to develop a standardized way to deal with the behavior of students who are not developing appropriate fit for the profession.

Specification e. “Provide Documentation of Policies and Procedures for Managing Students with Behavior or Legal Problems That May Interfere with Their Development as Human Service Professionals” (CSHSE, 2013)

This Specification adds the final piece to what should be a coherent and established set of policies and a procedural system for addressing a student's development of fitness for the profession from admission to either graduation or dismissal from the program. This specification goes beyond the policies required in Specifications a-d to consistently assist the student who remains in the program.

The key word in this Specification is *manage*. Does the program have a clear set of criteria and a transparent process for addressing, assessing, and handling or remediating students who have legal or personal problems that make it difficult or impossible to continue in the program? Is an advisor appointed to hold the student accountable, to track contract completion, and to meet with students on a regular basis? In other words, what happens next and who is accountable for managing it? Is it consistent? Regardless of advisor, will all students who fall under the policy experience the same level of management?

The Standards and Procedures Standard as a Holistic Approach to Policies and Curriculum

In summary, the Specifications for the Standards and Procedures Standard (CSHSE, 2013) provide a framework for dealing with students from admission through graduation through policies and procedures that require demonstration of increasing fitness for the profession. To that end, students should be given copies prior to enrollment, perhaps in an introductory course or admission packet (or both). These policies are critical to successful completion of both academic coursework and the required field experience at all degree levels. More importantly, they are tied to professional fit and success after graduation.

An understanding of the reciprocal relationship between policies and curriculum can be especially useful to human services faculty as they integrate policies into classroom documents such as syllabi, use the policies as opportunities to discuss and model professional behavior, and maintain appropriate professional boundaries in enforcing the policies. In the next section, we will identify four specific Curriculum Standards (History, Client-Related Values and Attitudes, Self-Development, and Field Experience) and Specifications that address important components of fitness for the human services profession and have a reciprocal relationship with the Standards and Procedures Standard.

History of Human Services Standard (CSHSE, 2013)

The History Standard is stated the same for each level of degree, “The curriculum shall include the historical development of human services” (CSHSE, 2013). According to the context statement, “The history of human services provides the context in which the profession evolved, a foundation for assessment of present conditions in the field, and a framework for projecting and shaping trends and outcomes” (CSHSE). Thus, human services professionals must have knowledge of how different services emerged and the various forces that influenced their development in order to influence and assess future development.

In addition to the statements introducing the Specifications for each degree level, we see clearly how the depth of study is demonstrated in the Specifications themselves. There are four Specifications for the Associate degree level, “(a) The historical roots of human services; (b) The creation of the human services profession; (c) Historical and current legislation affecting services delivery; and (d) How public and private attitudes influence legislation and the interpretation of policies related to human services” (CSHSE, 2013, History Standard). At both the Baccalaureate and Master’s degree levels, there are three additional Specifications; (e) Differences between systems of governance and economics; (f) Exposure to a spectrum of political ideologies; and (g) Skills to analyze and interpret historical data for application in advocacy and social change” (CSHSE, History Standard).

The History Standard, in general, introduces the students to the field of human services itself—its history, principles and values. The History Standard is often covered in an introductory course, and, as suggested in the prior discussion related to the Standards and Procedures Standard, offering an introductory course that is open to any student who may be interested in the field, can serve as an initial screening tool for the admission of suitable students to the program. Understanding the history of the Human Services Profession helps students decide whether or not to apply to the human services program.

In the United States, human services tend to change based on political ideologies when control of the legislature changes. The very creation of the field is tied to political agendas and varying definitions of social justice rooted within those political ideologies. Human services was created as a response to social work, not an extension of it. Some human services undergraduates go on to complete Master’s degrees in social work, but there are others who go into counseling fields, organizational studies, community organizing, food justice, community development, law, and numerous other fields. The point is that an understanding of the political roots of human services, the continued influence of politics, and the underlying values of various ideologies is critical to development of a student’s fit for the profession.

Understand that we are not suggesting indoctrinating students to any specific ideology. In a democracy, that is not the role of education. Rather, we are saying that logical arguments can be built from multiple perspectives, and the more students understand those perspectives and the logic supporting them, the better they can serve a diverse client base and advocate for the needs of those clients in a changing political environment. The more students understand the world around them, the more they understand themselves, and the more likely they are to differentiate their personal and professional values.

Client-Related Values and Attitudes Standard (CSHSE, 2013)

The Client-Related Values Standard is also the same at all degree levels, “The curriculum

shall incorporate human services values and attitudes and promote understanding of human services ethics and their application in service” (CSHSE, 2013). The context statement is the same for both the Associate and Baccalaureate levels, “There are values and ethics intrinsic to the human services profession that have been agreed to as governing principles of professional practice” (CSHSE). The Specifications, too, are the same, but note the statement preceding the Specifications differs for each degree level. The Specifications are: (a) The least intrusive intervention in the least restrictive environment; (b) Client self-determination; (c) Confidentiality of information; (d) The worth and uniqueness of the individual including culture, ethnicity, race, class, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and other expressions of diversity; (e) Belief that individuals, services systems, and society can change; (f) Interdisciplinary team approaches to problem solving; (g) Appropriate professional boundaries; and (h) Integration of the ethical standards outlined by the National Organization for Human Services (NOHS) and the Council for Standards in Human Service Education (available on the NOHS website)” (CSHSE, 2013, Associate, Baccalaureate, Master’s Standards).

Learning is a process, and the Standards are designed to facilitate the process of professional development through an understanding of the various contexts in which human needs and services occur. Regardless of the setting or client group, it is critical for the professional to differentiate personal values and ethics from professional values and ethics, professional codes of ethics, agency policy, and law. Students who cannot or will not do so are subject to pity instead of compassion, judgement instead of empathy, and blame instead of understanding. Conversely, students who differentiate the roles of each of these are more likely to work in settings where their personal and codified professional values overlap and where the agency policies and procedures are within their comfort zone, making them far less likely to experience burnout.

Students who believe their personal values and ethics justify actions outside the parameter of agency policies, professional ethics, or the law may find themselves the subject of remedial action defined in the Standards and Procedures Standard. The Human Services field is extremely broad, and students who are able to differentiate personal from professional values and ethics generally have no difficulty securing and successfully completing an internship that resonates with their personal beliefs.

In the review of self-studies for accreditation, we have often observed the use of codes of ethics from related fields instead of the Ethical Standards for Human Services Professionals (National Organization of Human Services, 2015) which is specifically required in Specification h of the Client-Related Values and Attitudes Standard (CSHSE, 2013). While there is certainly merit to a comparison of codes, it seems remiss to exclude the Code of Ethics developed and agreed upon in the early 1980s and revised in 2015 by both the National Organization for Human Services and the Council for Standards in Human Services Education. In fact, programs may be inadvertently directing their students toward specific graduate studies and diminishing the value of the very program in which the student is enrolled. An understanding of professional ethics, national professional organizations, accrediting bodies, and credentialing is requisite to development of a professional self that is tied to a recognized identity of a human services professional.

The specifications directly address the “worth and uniqueness of the individual including culture, ethnicity, race, class, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and other expressions of diversity (CSHSE, 2013, Client-Related Values Standard). While this statement occurs as

Specification d, it summarizes Specifications a-c, “the least intrusive intervention in the least restrictive environment,” “the right of the client to make decisions” (even when we do not agree with them), and “confidentiality.” We note that all possibilities exist, that the diversity among human services professionals reflects the diversity among clients, that circumstances occur both inside and outside the control of individuals, and that an effective human services professional will have respect for the individual stories of clients and clients as storytellers.

Perhaps the most important value, overtly and succinctly stated is “Belief that individuals, services systems, and society can change” (CSHSE, 2013, Client-Related Values and Attitudes Standard). Actually, belief that any systems can change, not just services systems is an equally important concept as evidenced by inclusion of a specification in the Human Systems Standard that “Processes to effect social change through advocacy work at all levels of society including community development, community and grassroots organizing, and local and global activism” (CSHSE, 2013, Human Systems Standard). The Client-Related Values Standard informs students that belief in change is a value of the profession, and the curriculum provides the knowledge, theory, skills, and concepts to analyze systems and effect change at all levels of society (see CSHSE, 2013, Human Systems Standard).

While the Client-Related Values is a Curriculum Standard, failure to behave in accordance with the behavior requirements of this Standard could be grounds for invoking the policies required by the policies in the Standards and Procedures Standard. Students who cannot or will not act appropriately within the institutional and program policies, the Ethical Standards for Human Services Professionals (National Organization of Human Services, 2015), and the agency policies and procedures where completing field work may need to be redirected or even dismissed under the Standards and Procedures Standard policies. This again demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between the Program and Curriculum Standards.

Self-Development Standard

The Self-Development Standard is the same at each degree level, “The program shall provide experiences and support to enable students to develop awareness of their own values, personalities, reaction patterns, interpersonal styles, and limitations” (CSHSE, 2013, Self-Development Standard.) The context statement further clarifies that, “It also requires an understanding of how these personal characteristics affect clients” (CSHSE). The Specifications are identical between degree levels, and the depth of study is differentiated by the sentence introducing the Specifications. The Specifications for the Self-Development Standard are: (a) Conscious use of self; (b) Clarification of personal and professional values; (c) Awareness of diversity; (d) Strategies for self-care; and (e) Reflection on professional self (e.g., journaling, development of a portfolio, or project demonstrating competency) (CSHSE, 2013, Self-Development Standards).

Clearly, the Self-Development Standard is overtly connected to the Client-Related Values Standard and to the policies requiring accessibility to personal help (CSHSE, 2013, Standards and Procedures Standard). In our reviews of self-studies and conversations with Human Services faculty across the nation, we have observed brilliant strategies for self-development of students across the entire curriculum. Assignments that include but are not necessarily limited to reflection, group projects, class dialogue, exit notes, and journaling in low-stakes assignments are examples of the ways faculty facilitate self- and professional development in students. In particular, dialogue between students in seminars tied to field experience lends itself to a breadth

of understanding the student may not attain independently.

The History, Client-Related Values and Self-Development Standards are tied to the Standards and Procedures Standard and the need for policies that clearly define acceptable behavior and essential skills, remedial actions, referral for personal help, and possible dismissal or probation. These three standards combined provide opportunity for students to develop the skills to focus on the needs of clients rather than their personal issues, and, at the same time, hone the behavior and skills for compliance with institutional and program policies and the Ethical Standards for Human Services Professionals (National Organization of Human Services, 2015).

Field Experience (CSHSE, 2013)

A hallmark of Human Services education is the integrated field experience (internship, practicum). Rather than requiring field experience after the completion of all coursework, it is required concurrently with course work. Programs are encouraged to engage students early in their studies with agencies across the spectrum of services, helping students decide not only what they want to do, but also what they do not want to do.

Programs differ in the timing of field experience. Some have required introductory courses to assure the student knows how field experience benefits them, how to find an appropriate internship or information on preapproved internships; some require completion of specific courses prior to beginning field work; and others use benchmark exams or some combination of these.

Regardless of the specific program requirements, all programs are required to (a) have a manual and guidelines regarding field placements given to students; (b) have seminars and syllabi for the seminars; (c) structure field work with written agreements and clear learning outcomes and evaluation methods for individual students; and (d) monitor the progress of each student through site visits each quarter or semester. Additionally, policies and procedures governing the acceptable behaviors, essential skills, probation, dismissal, and due process (CSHSE, 2013, Standards and Procedures Standard) must be included in the manual. Most programs require journaling (see Self-Development Standard) and dialogue in seminar classes that serve both professional development and increased awareness of services other than the one in which an individual student is placed. If the student population is diverse in the broadest sense of the word, the multiple perspectives shared increase the opportunity for self-development by individual students.

In our meetings with students during accreditation site visits and with our students, we have found that many are enthused by fieldwork and quickly grasp the significance to their own learning. They share stories of both their positive and negative experiences with their classmates. If the seminar requires connection to other courses and other courses require connection to field experience, there is again an opportunity for reciprocal learning opportunities reinforced by both direct and vicarious experiences.

Curriculum Standards and Fit for the Profession

Both the Program and Curriculum Standards (CSHSE 2013) are designed for student success in learning and degree completion. At the same time, they must address the needs of all the stakeholders: individual students, the students as a group, the profession, the various settings in which graduates will work, the clients who are the end consumer of services, the institution

offering the degree, those who fund the education, and the larger society in general. Policies address the behaviors of students while they are students, and curriculum addresses the knowledge, theory, and skills requisite for evolving professional behavior at entry level.

We have already discussed four standards (History, Client-Related Values, Self-Development, and Field Experience) in relationship to the Standards and Procedures Standard; however, every Curriculum Standard addresses some aspect of fitness for the profession. A holistic view of fitness can be obtained from the Context Statements (CSHSE, 2013) that precede each Curriculum Standard, providing the rationale for that particular Standard and implying related professional outcomes as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1***CSHSE Standards-Based Indicators of Fit for the Profession***

Curriculum Standard	Indicators of Fitness for the Human Services Profession
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understands the context in which the profession evolved.• Uses a framework of historical data to assess conditions in the field.• Projects and shapes trends and outcomes.• Has knowledge of how different human services emerged and various forces that influenced their development.
Human Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determines appropriate responses to human needs based on an understanding of the structure and dynamics of individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and society.
Human Services Delivery Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies human conditions that provide the focus for the human services profession.
Information Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appropriately integrates and uses information such as client data, statistical information, and record keeping.• Manages information including obtaining, organizing, analyzing, evaluating and disseminating information.
[Program] Planning and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assesses the needs of clients and client groups.• Plans programs and interventions to assist clients and client groups in promoting optimal functioning, growth, and goal attainment.• At regular intervals, evaluates outcomes and adjust the plan both at an individual client and program level.
Interventions and Direct Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Serves as a change agent by applying core knowledge, theory, skills, and values to provide direct services and interventions to clients and client groups.
Interpersonal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates genuine and empathic relationships with others.
Administrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides administrative supports (indirect service) for the effective delivery of direct services to clients or client groups through a holistic approach to human services.
Client-Related Values and Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interacts with clients to reflect the values and ethics intrinsic to the human services profession that have been agreed to as governing principles of professional practice.
Self-Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses individual experience and knowledge for understanding and helping clients.• Acts in ways that reflect awareness of one’s own values, cultural bias, philosophies, personality, and style in the effective use of the professional self.• Understands how these personal characteristics affect clients.
Field Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draws from a knowledge base integrating classroom learning with supervised field experience in a human services setting.

Note: Adapted from the “Context Statements” of the Curriculum Standards, CSHSE National Standards for Human Services Education. (CSHSE, 2013)

Table 1 does not need further explanation. It provides an outline of fit for the profession as it is embedded in the Curriculum Standards (CSHSE, 2013). They are based on the breadth and depth of the knowledge base supporting human services, an eclectic approach to theories underpinning services, and the requisite skills both in and out of the classroom. While there are personal traits, abilities, and behaviors that may exclude someone from succeeding as a human services professional, programs based on the Standards (CSHSE) provide a process for developing fitness for the profession.

Social Justice, Diversity, and Fit for the Profession

As stated above, social justice and respect for diversity motivate the practice of human services and are the foundation for the existence of human services. Social justice reflects concerns that people have equality before the law, equality of opportunity, economic equality, and equality of respect or social equality (Sargent, 2009), and those same concerns are reflected by the human services literature, the Code of Professional Ethics (NOHS, 2015) and CSHSE National Standards (CSHSE, 2013).

For example, the CSHSE National Standards (2013) require diversity among programs, faculty, staff, and students, concepts that are tied to the historical roots of the field. The birth of the human services profession coincided with the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s as the federal government brought people using social services into the workforce of the Department of Health and Human Services, partly to lower the expense of hiring professional helpers with degrees (Mandell & Schram, 2009). The Client Values and other Standards “reinforce the values upon which the human services profession was originated, tying them to the history and context of the time” (Kincaid, 2008, pp. 5-6).

To understand social justice, one must understand both oppression and privilege, economics and governance, and methodology for initiating and sustaining change to systems at all levels of society, and all of these are included in the CSHSE Standards. Human services textbooks and academic literature should be intentional in presenting both professionals and clients as representing diverse and underrepresented groups. It is as important for a person of color who is a professional to understand the culture of a white client as it is for a white professional to understand the culture of a person of color.

Furthermore, not all services are related to disadvantages and poverty. In fact, all people need human services such as health care, child care, elder care, food, shelter, and clothing. Also, social issues such as addiction and domestic violence occur across all strata of society. How those services are accessed varies, but the services themselves are present at all socio-economic levels. Whether someone lives in a \$3,000,000 home or a tent city reflects how the service of housing is accessed, not the underlying need for shelter. The emphasis on providing services to those with less access overshadows the fact that humans need services because they are human, not because they are poor, contributing to the political atmosphere of shame and blame. Without an understanding of larger systems that contribute to the socio-economic stratification of society, professionals are apt to blame clients for their situations, making them less effective as helpers and diverting them from working to initiate and sustain systemic change.

If social justice is the framework for human services, we might also say it provides a lens for viewing social issues and society in general. A person who wears corrective eye glasses has them adjusted periodically by obtaining expert information on how well the lens is working. In the same way, fit for the human services profession might include periodic adjustment through

continuing education requirements tied to a credentialing process.

Conclusions

Clearly, every CSHSE (2013) Standard, both Program and Curriculum Standards, can be tied to professional fitness. There is a reciprocal nature between policy and curriculum that can be used to develop fitness for the profession before admission and through graduation.

Policies assure transparency and equity of treatment of all students. If vetted through legal counsel, they reduce risk and limit institutional liabilities while providing a backdrop for student success in learning. If followed, they contribute to the process for students to develop fit for the profession, and provide a standardized means for redirection of students who may have chosen an inappropriate field or who cannot, for whatever reason, remediate behavior problems. Policies can be used as tools for teaching and modeling behaviors vital to fit for the profession, and, if intentionally developed to do so, they provide insight to the Client-Related Values Standard.

Curriculum Standards work in tandem with policies and provide a process for professional development throughout the course of study. The value of every Curriculum Standard to professional development cannot be overstated. Learning is a transformative process, and the knowledge theory and skills requisite to fit for the profession are developed through that process.

Social justice is the conceptual framework for human services, and exploration and understanding of its various definitions and paradoxes allow professionals to view their work in a larger context. Students, the institution, and all stakeholders are best served by clarity and precision in policies that provide the backdrop for curriculum while developing professional fit. The CSHSE National Standards for Human Services Degrees (2013) provide the iteration of that conceptual framework.

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Appendix

CSHSE Standards Names, Numbers, and Page Numbers by Degree Level

Degree Level:	AA/AS			BA/BS			MA/MS		
Name of Standard	Std. #	Specs	Pg. #	Std. #	Specs	Pg. #	Std. #	Specs	Pg. #
I. General Program Characteristics									
• Institutional Requirements and Primary Program Objective	1	a-f	1	1	a-f	1	1	a-f	1
• Philosophical Base of Programs	2	a-f	1	2	a-f	1	2	a-f	1
• Community Assessment	3	a-c	2	3	a-c	2	--	--	--
• Academic Advisory Committee	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	a	2
• Program Evaluation	4	a-c	2	4	a-c	2	4	a-c	2
• Standards and Procedures for Admitting, Retaining, and Dismissing Students	5	a-e	3	5	a-e	3	5	a-d	3
• Credentials of Human Services Faculty	6	a	4	6	a	4	6	a-c	3
• Essential Program Roles	7	a-c	4	7	a-c	4	--	--	--
• Faculty and Staff Evaluations	8	a-c	4	8	a-c	4	7	a-e	3
• Program Support [personnel and resources]	9	a-e	5	9	a-e	5	8	a-f	4
• Transfer Advising	10	a-d	5	10	a-d	5	--	--	--
II. Curriculum									
A. Knowledge, Theory, Skills, Values									
• History	11	a-d	6	11	a-g	6	9	a-g	4
• Human Systems	12	a-f	6	12	a-h	6	10	a-g	5
• Human Services Delivery Systems	13	a-c	7	13	a-g	7	11	a-g	5
• Information Management	14	a-f	7	14	a-j	7	12	a-g	5
• [Program] Planning and Evaluation	15	a-c	7	15	a-f	8	13	a-d	6
• Interventions and Direct Services	16	a-c	8	16	a-c	8	14	a-e	6

• Interpersonal Communication	17	a-d	8	17	a-d	8	15	a-e	6
• Administrative	--	--	--	18	a-i	9	16	a-i	7
• Client-Related Values and Attitudes	18	a-h	8	19	a-h	9	17	a-h	7
• Self-Development	19	a-e	9	20	a-e	10	18	a-e	7
B. Field Experience	20	a-j	9	21	a-j	10	19	a-k	8
Capstone experience	--	--	--	--	--	--	20	a-d	8

Notes:

- Adapted from the documents (one for each degree level) located on the CSHSE website, <http://www.cshse.org/standards.html> (2013). The Standard begins on the page listed, and related Specifications may continue on the following page.
- -- indicates that this Standard does not apply at this degree level.
- [Brackets] denote variations in names of Standards for Master's degrees.

Students' Perspectives on Fitness for the Human Services Profession

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This empirical study focused on the results of data obtained from seniors majoring in human services at a Mid-Atlantic University. Each participant had completed an internship and various classes relating to the profession prior to taking the survey. Students rated the importance of fourteen characteristics that were chosen from two Council for Standards in Human Service Education-accredited human services programs' evaluation of fitness for the profession. A 5-point Likert-type response scale was used to determine the importance of each characteristic. The results revealed that more than 90 percent of the participants indicated that all the characteristics were either important or very important. No students indicated that any characteristic was unimportant. The results of the study validate the use of the examined fourteen characteristics to evaluate fitness for the profession.

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Personal characteristics and their related behaviors play a role in determining fitness for the profession of human services (Council for Standards in Human Service Education, 2015); however, a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature related to such attributes in the field of human services revealed this topic as largely unexplored up to this point. Although some researchers identified important skills (Coloma, Gibson, & Packard, 2012; Ricciardi, 2005), there was an absence of studies that focused either directly or indirectly on personal characteristics and their role in providing effective human services.

The effectiveness of human services professionals has been addressed in many introductory human services textbooks by examining characteristics and attributes that contribute to success. Long and Doyle (2004) express that people in the human services field must have proper morals, along with a variety of attributes and abilities to be effective while working with clients and other professionals. In their textbook, the authors make a distinction between the characteristics that all professionals should have and the specific abilities necessary for people working in the human services field. In another textbook, Mandell and Schram (2012) separate what makes human services professionals effective into three categories, which include topics that were learned, qualities, and attributes. These authors argue that there are different ideas regarding necessary characteristics of the professional depending on the program in which a person studies. Similarly, Woodside and McClam (2011) state that there are varied views about the requirements and importance of certain qualities for success in the human services field, and that it is necessary to address both the professional and personal side of a practitioner when looking at effectiveness. Kanel and Mallers (2014) explain that working directly with clients requires human services practitioners to possess positive qualities and understand how to manage emotions. Neukrug (2004), like other authors, agrees that a person working as a human service professional must have specific qualities. However, he notes that due to the extensive list

compiled from research of professions related to human services, it is difficult to list a definite set of characteristics needed to be a successful human services practitioner. He does, though, identify qualities that he thinks are the most important and explains them in detail. Like some other authors, he differentiates between necessary professional characteristics and personal attributes. Every author cited acknowledges the requirement of certain personal characteristics in order for human services professionals to be effective; they differ in what they consider to be the specific, vital qualities that contribute to that effectiveness.

While each author has his or her own set of attributes, some of the individual qualities are described as essential in more than one textbook. Neukrug (2004), Woodside and McClam (2011), and Kanel and Mallers (2014) each describe empathy as one major characteristic human services practitioners must possess in order to be successful in the field. Neukrug and Kanel and Mallers believe that genuineness, acceptance, and being open are three more qualities needed by the human services professional. Long and Doyle (2004) list attributes that human services practitioners and other professionals in various fields have in common that make each successful in their profession. These attributes include being responsible, organized and supportive. They also address particular skills needed in the human services field, which include communicating among coworkers and clients and understanding when to intervene and help a client progress in therapy. Mehr and Kanwischer (2011) divide essential attributes of human services professionals into characteristics and skills. The characteristics include empathy, warmth, and genuineness, while the skills are paraphrasing, reflecting, confronting, interpreting, and communicating nonverbally. While each author describes a different set of qualities in his or her textbook, often similar characteristics were chosen.

Personal characteristics described as necessary for success in the human services field have been used in the measurement of fitness for the profession in various higher education institutions. Some schools choose numerous qualities that the human services program believes are essential and use them as a tool for the evaluation of and reflection by students. Kaufmann (2010) explains how faculty at Elgin Community College (ECC), located in Illinois, created a tool to assess students' fitness for the human services profession within their program. It includes 15 characteristics relating to professionalism and specific qualities required for the human services field. Some of the characteristics used include being punctual, responsible, professional, enthusiastic, and evaluative. Advisors complete the rubric by rating students in each of the 15 characteristics on a scale from deficient (1) to outstanding (5). Students in the program are required to meet with their advisor to talk about the results and areas that need improvement. It is mandatory that students rate a (3) or higher in each of the categories before entering a field experience.

Jacob and Datti (2014) describe the evaluation of fitness for the profession at the University of Scranton. Upon entry into the Counseling and Human Services Program, students are given a document that identifies requirements for being fit for the program. The document includes 10 qualities necessary to be a successful human services professional. Some of the qualities include professionalism, skills relating to communication, problem-solving abilities, and obligation toward education and health. In order to assess students in the 10 aspects, each student must write a paper to reflect on his or her development as it relates to the categories. Faculty members also evaluate students by exploring the 10 characteristics in relation to each student, and discussing strengths and weaknesses with each. Overall, both schools created a tool to measure

students' fitness for the human services profession and evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the field through essential characteristics chosen by faculty members.

While it is important for faculty to determine characteristics significant for the human services profession, it is also significant for students to express their thoughts on the topic. If students' perspectives are taken into consideration, their motivation to achieve and strengthen those characteristics may increase. Students who are motivated to improve characteristics related to effectiveness in the field may be better prepared and successful in the future as a professional. Therefore, incorporating students' perspectives into human services programs will create superior professionals who can positively impact the future of the field.

Examining both students and faculty members' ideas can help validate the tool being used to measure fitness for the profession if both faculty and students agree that the characteristics are essential for effective practice. Agreement of both groups also has the potential to help validate the curriculum of the program.

If, however, there is disagreement between faculty and students as to the importance of some characteristics, some areas of possible further investigation emerge. Faculty could explore the importance of the characteristics on which there is disagreement and may decide to eliminate the particular items on the tool. The investigation of disagreement on items could also result in curricular change if students disagree with items that faculty members consider important.

The purpose of this research study was to identify the characteristics university seniors who were human services majors believed were important in evaluating fitness for the profession. The hypothesis was that more than half of the senior human services majors in the study would agree that all of the characteristics in the survey were either important or very important.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 32 seniors majoring in human services at a small Mid-Atlantic University. Students of male and female genders and multiple ethnicities participated. Each participant had completed a 90-hour internship and had taken classes to prepare for a 410 to 540-hour internship the following semester. This particular sample was chosen because the students had participated in both coursework and fieldwork. These experiences provided both theoretical and empirical knowledge about what comprises fitness for the profession.

Measure

Subjects were asked to complete a survey by indicating the importance of 14 personal characteristics. These were selected by the researchers based on characteristics used to indicate fitness for the profession in two CSHSE-accredited programs, Elgin Community College (Kaufmann, 2010) and the University of Scranton (Jacob and Datti, 2014). The attributes were: (a) accepts and uses suggestions for improvement; (b) collaborates with others; (c) communicates competently (verbally and nonverbally); (d) culturally competent; (e) ethical; (f) evaluates own behavior; (g) maintains boundaries; (h) manages stress; (i) non-judgmental; (j) problem-solves; (k) professional demeanor; (l) punctual; (m) responsible; (n) seeks out and engages in new learning experiences.

A 5-point Likert-type response scale was used to determine importance. Items on the scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and there was also an area where subjects could write additional personal characteristics that were not listed that they believed were important.

The survey was field tested by two recent human services graduates along with a university dean prior to distribution. These participants were asked to identify any ambiguous items on the survey. It was found that two of the items were confusing, and subsequently the items were modified to make them more understandable.

Procedure

Following approval by the university's Institutional Review Board, students enrolled in three sections of a prerequisite course for their senior field experience were contacted in the classroom face-to-face. Students were told that participation was voluntary. After those who volunteered had signed informed consent forms, the surveys were distributed, and the students were asked to place an "X" in the appropriate box to indicate how important they thought it was for a human services professional to demonstrate each specific personal characteristic. Because students did not write their names on them, the surveys were anonymous.

Results

As displayed in Table 1, the 32 student responses were computed into percentages for each characteristic and rating of importance. It is evident from Table 1 that no student believed that any of the characteristics listed were not important or of little importance. The only characteristic that more than one participant (6%) believed was neither important nor unimportant for success in the field was *manages stress*. Of the 32 respondents, 3% (n=1) indicated that *accepts suggestions for improvement, evaluates one's own behavior, non-judgmental, professional demeanor, and engages in new learning experiences* were characteristics that were neither important nor unimportant. The rest of the characteristics were specified as being either important or very important. The results show that very important was chosen by 50% or more of the participants for each of the characteristics. Also, very important and important were chosen by more than 90% of the participants for each quality listed. Additionally, 16% of the participants noted that *having empathy* is a personal characteristic that was important but not listed on the survey, and 9% thought that *having a positive attitude toward helping* was another attribute not listed but important to the profession. Other characteristics listed as being important by one participant each included *understanding, organized, sense of reality, compassionate, creative, sense of humor, personable, genuine, and patient*.

Table 1***Student Responses on Importance of Characteristics***

Characteristic	Rating									
	Not impt.		Little impt.		Neither		Impt.		Very impt.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Suggestions	0	0	0	0	1	3	13	41	18	56
Collaborates	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	19	26	81
Communicates	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	19	26	81
Cult. competent	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	16	27	84
Ethical	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	25	24	75
Evaluates behav.	0	0	0	0	1	3	15	47	16	50
Boundaries	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	25	24	75
Manages stress	0	0	0	0	2	6	11	34	19	59
Non-judgmental	0	0	0	0	1	3	6	19	25	78
Problem-solves	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	50	16	50
Professional	0	0	0	0	1	3	10	31	21	66
Punctual	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	34	21	66
Responsible	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	28	23	72
Seek experience	0	0	0	0	1	3	12	38	19	59

Discussion

The results indicate that the majority of the participants agreed that the 14 characteristics listed are all significant for success in the human services profession. This result supports our hypothesis that more than half of the senior human services majors would agree that all of the characteristics in the survey were important or very important. None of the students indicated that any of the qualities were unimportant. Therefore, it can be concluded that according to these students, the 14 characteristics included in the survey must be possessed by individuals in the human services field in order to be effective professionals. A quality that could be added to the survey is empathy. Of the 32 participants, 5 indicated that empathy was an additional characteristic that they thought was important for the profession.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations that could affect the generalizability of the results. The limitations of this study center on the size and composition of the sample. Only 32 seniors at a small Mid-Atlantic University participated in the study. This small sample size could impact the reliability of the results and affect the conclusions. The sample was limited to senior human services majors, which excludes a large population of the university. The common geographical location of all the participants could have also narrowed results. The sample being comprised of

participants from only one institution is another limitation of this study. Other institutions may follow a different curriculum, which could create views unlike those at the university in this study. We address these limitations in our implications section.

Implications

In a future study, researchers could administer the same survey to first-year students and also to students who had not completed their field placements. Participants in the current survey were seniors who had already completed the majority of their coursework along with an internship in the field; experiences of the participants might have been a factor that impacted how they completed the survey. Prior to the completion of any courses, first-year human services students could be asked to take the same survey that the seniors in the present study completed. If the results were similar for both the first-year students and the fourth-year students, the implication is that the belief in the importance of the characteristics in the survey was not affected by curriculum or field experience. An additional study could be done to assess whether all first-year students or particularly human services majors deem the characteristics important. If the results indicate that only the human services first-year students believe the characteristics are important, then this finding could provide information about the beliefs of individuals who choose the major. If first-year students show different results from senior human services majors, the finding would imply that the curriculum and/or field placements impact students' opinions on the characteristics necessary to be an effective human services professional. To determine whether experience in the field impacts students' thoughts on the characteristics, a study of third-year students without prior field experience could be completed. If these students have similar results to the seniors, then the results would imply that field placements do not play a role in a student's perception of the qualities. However, if different results between the two groups were found, they would imply that field placements do impact students' ideas of important characteristics for effectiveness in the field.

This survey could also be administered to human services majors at other institutions. The results have the potential to help faculty members understand if curricular changes should be made. If faculty members believe that all of the characteristics are important, yet their students do not, they may want to evaluate and adjust their curriculum to educate students on the importance of each of the characteristics. In addition, results could be compared between institutions; for example, students in the Northeast may value different characteristics than students in the Midwest. The resulting conclusions could help professionals understand the cultural differences between various areas. As a result, human services professionals could become more culturally competent by using the knowledge of the characteristics that are important in specific geographic areas. The qualities listed as important may help professionals to appreciate diverse values of various locations and work more effectively with professionals in other areas.

In the classroom, the survey itself could be used as a learning tool. This usage has a direct benefit in teaching students what characteristics are important and why; instructors in introductory courses could administer the survey as a precursor to a discussion of the various qualities that are characteristic of effective human services professionals. The survey could also be used with students of more advanced standing. Alumnae who field-tested the survey encouraged one of this study's authors to administer it to students in senior field placements, and this suggestion was implemented. Students completed the survey during their seminar and then ranked the top qualities that they believed were essential for success in the field. This process

initiated a thought-provoking discussion on the topic and allowed students to relate the characteristics to their past and current experiences in the field.

The survey could also be used as a self-evaluation of student progress. When advisors meet with their students at the beginning of their college education, the tool could be administered, and students could evaluate themselves according to the characteristics. As the students progress, they could reevaluate themselves to ascertain improvement and growth.

As demonstrated by the high percentage of student agreement that the qualities in the survey were important or very important, senior majors in human services validated the importance of the characteristics. Not only the information gained from this survey, but the survey, itself, have multiple possible applications that could be beneficial both directly and indirectly to students and to human services curricula.

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Advocacy in Action: Supporting Human Services Students with Criminal Justice Histories

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Human services students with a history of legal offenses face significant challenges to completing their education and to becoming gainfully employed in the profession. This article discusses the results of a survey conducted in a Council for Standards in Human Services Education (CSHSE) accredited human services program exploring the number of current students with criminal justice histories. Two brief cases of human services students with criminal justice histories who successfully completed training and secured employment in the field will be reviewed. Several guiding principles are offered to assist human services professors, programs, and the profession generally in best addressing this issue.

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Gatekeeping, the process of establishing standards to ensure the goodness of fit between trainees and the profession, has come to be an established expectation in human services educational programs and in the various helping professions generally (Elpers & FitzGerald, 2013). This process is often seen as necessary to help ensure both the quality of services provided and the safety of the recipients of services. Human service workers have the privilege of serving and assisting vulnerable, disadvantaged, under-represented and under-resourced populations. To honor such a responsibility, the profession seeks to train workers who are committed to protecting these individuals while also providing competent services. Another aspect of establishing such training standards is to identify those unfit for the profession and either preventing them from entering training or removing them from training before they enter the profession. While gatekeeping is seen as a necessary aspect of such screening, there continues to be significant discussion and disagreement about best practices for defining and implementing standards (Miller & Koerin, 2001; Sowbel, 2012).

The human services profession shares many priorities, standards and practices with the social work profession, and often students who may complete a two-year degree in human services at a community college later pursue an advanced degree in social work (Rose, 2015). Significant attention has been given to the issue of gatekeeping in the field of social work, especially regarding admission to accredited limited-enrollment Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) programs. The first consideration that programs and the profession face is attempting to define and assess standards, as well as determining whether

academic standards, such as grade point average and courses completed, should be emphasized more than values-based criteria related to the candidate's maturity, attitude, values and behavior. The next consideration with which many programs struggle is deciding when and where gatekeeping should occur, whether at the admissions process, field education, with employers and licensure boards, or with each (Elpers & FitzGerald, 2013; Miller & Koerin, 2001).

Regardless of point of entry, student performance in field education is seen as the primary process for determining if the trainee's skills and behaviors meet professional standards (Miller & Koerin, 2001; Sowbel, 2012). While this is a common vetting process, there can still be issues, especially if field instructors do not endorse a gatekeeping approach, have not received training or clear expectations related to gatekeeping, or fear how being critical might affect the student or the agency's relationship with academic programs or result in litigation. Human service educators and field instructors alike might also struggle with their dual roles of being responsible to students and supporting their development while also being responsible to agencies, the profession, and protecting clients (Sowbel, 2012).

Human services faculty and field instructors who are reluctant about gatekeeping, especially emphasizing and evaluating values and processed-based competencies, tend to adopt a stance that their role and function is as educators, not gatekeepers. They see their responsibility as educating trainees and not determining their goodness of fit for the profession. They maintain that such determinations are best left to employers and regulatory boards. Unfortunately, this reluctance is a disservice to students and trainees. Human services employers, in addition to looking for workers with technical competencies, also want employees with personal values, priorities, and commitments consistent with the profession who will conduct themselves in an ethical manner. These employers rely on human services programs to produce candidates who have already developed and expressed these attributes, as opposed to expecting that such qualities will be developed later by the employer once they are hired (Elpers & FitzGerald, 2013; Evenson & Holloway, 2003).

Despite the challenges in delineating and applying standards, the practice of gatekeeping persists because the helping professions have a sense of duty and responsibility to produce competent and ethical practitioners. Educational and training programs, including field education, are looked to as a type of filter for removing individuals who are not appropriate to work as practitioners. Competency in this process is seen as more than acquiring technical knowledge and skills, but also in conveying and displaying attitudes, priorities and behaviors that reflect ethical and professional standards. The ultimate aim of this endeavor is to protect the safety of clients and communities (Elpers & FitzGerald, 2013; Miller & Koerin, 2001).

The gatekeeping process creates a challenge for students who have a history of legal offenses, especially a history of felony convictions, and whether or not they can or should be able to complete training and enter the helping professions. The primary concern here is deciding whether or not such students pose a continued threat to clients, fellow students, or to universities, agencies, and the profession. A second concern is determining whether or not a criminal justice history will, or should, preclude them from obtaining field placements, employment, licensure, or other credentials (Leedy & Smith, 2005).

In a classic point/counterpoint exchange, Magen and Emerman (2000) and Scott and Zeiger (2000) argued both for and against students with a history of felony being allowed into social work programs. Magen and Emerman (2000) clearly state that programs should not admit

individuals with a history of felony under any circumstances. They make three points to support their view. The first is that while social work educators have a responsibility to students, they argue that students are not clients, that professional education is not an entitlement, and that programs have a responsibility to protect clients and the profession from harm. Their second point emphasizes this sense of potential threat, and they cite recidivism data to state that while it might not be possible to accurately predict whether students with a history of felony will re-offend, the chances are too great, thus supporting a blanket denial policy. They also state that the profession is charged with maintaining and promoting high standards and that accepting those with a history of felony damages the integrity of the profession. They emphasize that courts have repeatedly upheld the rights of programs to use non-academic admission criteria, such as excluding those with histories of offenses. These authors also emphasize that allowing students with such histories into programs likely does a disservice to them because even if they complete their degree, they may never be able to gain employment or licensure.

Scott and Zeigler (2000) argue that inflexible, exclusionary policies which allow no room for exceptions or discretion do a disservice by being counter to the social work profession's core values of affirming individuals and emphasizing their strengths, while also excluding individuals who, due to their history of struggles, receiving services, and successfully overcoming issues might otherwise make for very effective practitioners sensitive to clients' needs. They advocate for programs accepting students with a criminal justice history on a case-by-case basis. They recommend utilizing specific guidelines and policies established by the program and reviewing multiple sources of information, such as the nature and number of past offenses, the amount of time that has passed since the offense, and the outcome of rehabilitative services.

Establishing consistent and effective criteria has proven challenging. Many programs have sought guidance from multiple resources, including standardized decision-making processes and the use of statistics, such as recidivism data, to guide or inform decision-making. This has been questioned due to the inherent limitations of accurately predicting future behavior from past offenses generally, and especially for specific individuals. Since minorities are overrepresented in crime statistics, the use of such data in determining program admission could also contribute to the continued oppression of affected groups (Adler, Mueller & Laufer, 2012; Leedy & Smith, 2005). Many institutions and programs also use criminal background checks in this process, but the use of such checks can be problematic due to wide discrepancies between different reports and the fact that admissions staff often receive either minimal or no training on how to interpret and use such reports (Custer, 2013).

These dynamics create significant challenges for human services students as well. Students with a criminal justice history are often subject to further scrutiny when applying to college. Custer (2013) describes the experience of a woman who applied to a college that required applicants who indicated they had a history of past offenses to write a narrative describing their criminal justice history and the circumstances surrounding offenses. This particular student, who indicated she wanted to study social services, had been convicted of two separate felonies (aggravated assault and theft) eleven years prior to her admission application to the university. After being sentenced for these offenses, she was not incarcerated and was placed on probation, which was terminated early due to her successfully completing all legal requirements. She had even completed some coursework at another institution prior to her applying to this university. The committee asked her to write a second essay further explaining her past charges. The applicant wrote back and expressed her frustration over continually being

asked to provide an account for resolved events in her life that happened over a decade ago, and discontinued her application. Experiences like this one suggest that such processes seem at odds with the general mission of higher education and are likely more detrimental to applicants than they are beneficial to colleges (Custer, 2013).

Rose (2015) articulates this point specific to human services education and professional development. She emphasizes that furthering education is a factor known to reduce recidivism, so efforts that hinder students with a criminal justice history from going to college are both counterintuitive and counterproductive. She states that human services students with criminal justice histories, like their social work counterparts, face similar challenges to securing field placements, gaining employment in the profession, and qualifying for state licensure or other credentials.

An additional difficulty Rose (2015) notes for such students is differences in admission policies and requirements between community colleges and universities. She states that most community college human services programs where students will start their education often use an open enrollment admissions model, meaning that admission criteria are very inclusive and seek to admit rather than reject applicants. This is in stark contrast to universities or professional programs, like social work, with limited enrollment practices. Limited enrollment practices establish specific criteria and requirements (usually focused on GPA, prerequisite courses, and additional supporting materials) that must be met for consideration of admission to the university or program. Applicants are not guaranteed admission and must be accepted by the school or specific program. With the increasing presence of articulation agreements and pathways between community colleges and universities, another impediment that students with criminal justice histories may face is continuing their education beyond a two-year degree, especially in human services and social work. Even if they successfully complete their associate degree in human services and wish to pursue a bachelor's degree, they may not be able to gain admission to certain schools or programs (Rose, 2015).

Most of the literature addressing this issue of students in the helping professions with criminal justice histories, especially history of felonies, has been theoretical and conceptual in nature and has focused specifically on either exploring the ethical considerations involved or detailing priorities, principles, and practices that can guide programs in making policies (Leedy & Smith, 2005; Rose 2015). Little is known currently about how frequently students with criminal justice histories choose to pursue human services education or the nature and number of their past offenses. The current project sought to gather information through a survey on how prevalent a criminal justice history was among current students in a human services program, as well as to explore what type of charges and the number of charges they had.

Method

Participants

Ninety participants, consisting of 76 females and 14 males, completed the survey. All participants were at least 18 years of age and were current undergraduate human services students in a Council for Standards in Human Service Education (CSHSE) accredited program at a Midwestern community college. All participants were in the first two years (less than 60 credit hours) of their education and were working towards an associate degree. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 68 ($M=33.88$) and were 86.7% Caucasian ($n=78$), 11.1% African-American ($n=10$), 1.1% Hispanic/Latino ($n=1$), and 1.1% Biracial/multiracial ($n=1$).

Measure and Procedure

Participants were asked to complete a brief survey where they provided demographic information on age, gender, and ethnicity and indicated whether they had received a misdemeanor, felony, or both in the past. If participants indicated they had past offenses, they were then asked to indicate whether they had one, two to five, or more than five past offenses. Furthermore, they were asked if these offenses had occurred within the past year, more than a year but less than three years ago, or more than three years ago. Participants were also asked to characterize the nature of their offenses as relating to either alcohol or drug use, violence towards others or property, or other categories of offenses. They were given the opportunity to list offenses if they chose. They were also asked whether or not they had sought legal expungement or modification for their past charges. If they had not pursued expungement they were asked if they had not done so due to believing that they did not qualify, did not have the money to afford it, or if they were not sure how to find out information about doing so.

After approval to administer the survey was received, participants were asked to complete the survey during their normally scheduled class time. They were given information about the nature and purpose of the survey and were assured that their participation was voluntary and that choosing not to participate would in no way negatively affect their standing in their course or the human services program. All surveys were anonymous, and participants who completed the survey did not receive extra credit or financial compensation for doing so.

Results

Sixty participants, including 53 females and 7 males, reported no history of having either a misdemeanor or felony. This group ranged in age from 19 to 68 ($M=32.65$) and was 91.6% Caucasian ($n=55$), 6.7% African-American ($n=4$), and 1.7% Hispanic/Latino ($n=1$). Thirty participants reported a history of past misdemeanor, felony, or both.

History of Misdemeanor Only

Seventeen participants (13 females and 4 males) reported a history of past misdemeanors. This group ranged in age from 19 to 57 ($M=34.47$) and was 82.4% Caucasian ($n=14$) and 17.6% African-American ($n=3$). 64.7% ($n=11$) of this group indicated that they had received only one misdemeanor in their past, whereas 23.52% ($n=4$) reported receiving between two to five past misdemeanors and 11.8% ($n=2$) reported receiving five or more past misdemeanors. With regards to the timeframe of these offenses, 41.2% ($n=7$) indicated that their misdemeanors occurred more than a year ago but less than three years ago and 58.8% ($n=10$) indicated that their offenses occurred more than three years ago. No participants reported having a misdemeanor in the past year. When asked to characterize the nature of their offenses, 41.2% ($n=7$) identified them as being related to alcohol or drugs, 17.6% ($n=3$) as being related to violence, and 41.2% ($n=7$) as relating to offenses other than alcohol, drugs or violence (See Table 1).

Table 1***Characteristics of Misdemeanor Offenses***

Misdemeanor only n=17			
	<u>1</u>	<u>2-5</u>	<u>More than 5</u>
Number of misdemeanors	n=11 64.7%	n=4 23.5%	n=2 11.8%
	<u>Within past year</u>	<u>One to three years</u>	<u>More than three years</u>
When in time were misdemeanors	n=0 0%	n=7 41.1%	n=10 58.9%
	<u>Alcohol/drug</u>	<u>Violence</u>	<u>Other</u>
How characterize misdemeanors	n=7 41.2%	n=3 17.6%	n=7 41.2%
Misdemeanors listed	Possession of marijuana, possession of paraphernalia, possession of precursors, minor consumption, public intoxication, driving under the influence, theft, check deception, failure to maintain auto insurance, criminal contempt, possession of a weapon, assault, battery resulting in bodily injury, disorderly conduct, domestic abuse, shoplifting, driving without a license, traffic violations, failure to appear		

History of Felony with and without Misdemeanor

Thirteen participants (10 females and 3 males) reported a history of felonies. This group ranged in age from 30 to 49 ($M=38.69$) and was 69.2% Caucasian ($n=9$), 7.7% African-American ($n=3$) and 7.7% Biracial/multiracial ($n=1$). Twenty-three percent ($n=3$) reported receiving only one past felony, whereas 46.2% ($n=6$) reported a history of two to five felonies and 30.8% ($n=4$) reported a history of five or more felonies. Fifteen point four percent ($n=2$) reported that their offenses occurred more than a year ago but less than three years ago, and 84.6% ($n=11$) reported that their offenses had been more than three years ago. No participants reported having a felony in the past year. 76.9% ($n=10$) described their offenses as relating to alcohol or drug use, 15.4% ($n=2$) as offenses related to violence, and 7.7% ($n=1$) as related to offenses other than alcohol, drugs or violence (See Table 2).

Table 2***Characteristics of Felony Offenses***

Felony n=13			
	<u>One</u>	<u>2-5</u>	<u>More than 5</u>
Number of felonies	n=3 23.0%	n=6 46.2%	n=4 30.8%
	<u>Within past year</u>	<u>One to three years</u>	<u>More than three years</u>
When in time were felonies	n=0 0%	n=2 15.4%	n=11 84.6%
	<u>Alcohol/drug</u>	<u>Violence</u>	<u>Other</u>
How characterize felonies	n=10 76.9%	n=2 15.4%	n=1 7.7%
Felonies listed	Possession of methamphetamine, possession of marijuana, possession of precursors, possession of syringe, dealing controlled substance, maintaining a common nuisance, neglect, theft, forgery		

Eleven of the 13 participants who identified a history of felony also had a history of misdemeanor. Of this group, 18.2% (n=2) reported a history of one misdemeanor, 46.2% (n=6) of two to five misdemeanors, and 30.8% (n=4) of five or more misdemeanors. Eighteen point two percent (n=2) identified their misdemeanors as occurring more than a year ago but less than three years ago, and 81.8% (n=9) reported that their misdemeanors had been more than three years ago. Eighty-one point eight percent (n=9) characterized their misdemeanors as being related to alcohol or drug use and 18.2 % (n=2) to violence (See Table 3).

Table 3***Characteristics of Misdemeanor Offenses among Those with Felony***

Misdemeanor in addition to felony n=11			
	<u>One</u>	<u>2-5</u>	<u>More than 5</u>
Number of misdemeanors	n=2 18.2%	n=6 54.5%	n=3 27.3%
	<u>Within past year</u>	<u>One to three years</u>	<u>More than three years</u>
When in time were misdemeanors	n=0 0%	n=2 18.2%	n=9 81.8%
	<u>Alcohol/drugs</u>	<u>Violence</u>	<u>Other</u>
How characterize misdemeanors	n=8 72.3%	n=1 9.1%	n=2 18.2%

Discussion

The survey sought to explore how many current students in this human services program had a history of criminal offenses, as well as what the nature and number of those offenses were. A third of participants indicated a history of some type of criminal conviction, and 14% of the sample had a history of felony conviction. These numbers suggest that human services students with histories of offenses might be more common than some would predict. Individuals with no history of offenses tended to be slightly younger ($M=32.65$) than those with a history of misdemeanors ($M=34.47$) or felonies ($M=38.69$). This difference in age, coupled with 58.8% of participants with history of misdemeanor reporting their offenses to be more than three years ago and those with past felony reporting 84.6 % of their felonies and 81.8% of their misdemeanors being more than three years ago, may reflect a delay in these individuals pursuing their education until the cessation of behavior leading to offenses and the resolution of their involvement in the justice system.

A troubling observation related to race, consistent with national trends reflecting racial disparities in arrests and convictions (Adler, Mueller & Laufer, 2012) , was that of the ten participants (8 females and 2 males) who identified as African-American, 60% ($n=6$) had a history of misdemeanors or felonies. Three had a history of misdemeanors only, and three had a history of felonies. Each of these individuals with a history of felonies also had a history of misdemeanors accompanying their felonies. Both of the African-American males in the sample had a history of past offenses. The one participant who identified their ethnic identity as biracial/multiracial also had a history of both felonies and misdemeanors.

A majority of identified offenses related to substance use, whether misdemeanors only (41.2%), felonies (76.9%), or misdemeanors along with felonies (72.3 %). Individuals with a history of misdemeanors only were more likely only to have had one previous charge, while those with a history of felonies were far more likely to have had multiple charges, including being more likely to have had multiple felonies (77%) or multiple misdemeanors (81.8%).

These students with not only a history of felony, but of multiple felonies and accompanying misdemeanors, are likely to experience significant challenges to completing their human services education and moving into the profession. Some of these struggles are illustrated by the following vignettes. Both of these individuals previously graduated from the human services program where the current survey was completed. After graduating they went on to receive advanced degrees and eventually secured employment as helping professionals.

Vignette 1: Mary

Mary experienced significant trauma as a teenager and began using drugs and alcohol to cope. She spent 10 years in active addiction, and during that time she incurred several legal charges, including both felonies and misdemeanors. After struggling with substance use for many years, Mary decided to get help and completed both a residential and outpatient treatment program. Following treatment, she chose to move into a supported living facility for women in recovery from addiction and completed the 12-month program there. Mary is currently an active member of a 12-step fellowship and has five years of sobriety.

While in early recovery, she made the decision to pursue a career in the helping professions because she desired to help others overcome addiction, trauma, and other mental health difficulties, just as she had been helped by the professionals she had encountered in her

treatment programs. Mary began school at an open-enrollment community college. She was honest and transparent about her substance use and criminal history despite this level of vulnerability not being easy for her. She majored in human services and after completing her associate degree applied to a university with a limited enrollment social work program. Mary was initially denied acceptance to the university without the opportunity to speak with anyone in person. She called and requested a face-to-face meeting and was eventually allowed to enroll. Mary was frequently and repeatedly told it would be difficult, if not impossible, for her gain field placements, employment, and licensure because of her criminal history. One social work faculty member even told her that they could not believe the social work program would even let someone like her with such a history into the program.

Despite such discouragement, there were several instructors and advisors who were willing to advocate on her behalf. This support made a significant impact on Mary because it offered reassurance that there were people in the field who believed in her. Mary successfully gained field placements through collaborating with agencies that were receptive to working with her despite her history. She successfully graduated with a BSW and currently works as a counselor and case manager in addiction services while pursuing a graduate degree.

Vignette 2: Scott

Over 12 years, Scott's use of alcohol and methamphetamine progressed from casual use on weekends to using for days and weeks at a time. Over the course of these years he was arrested on multiple drug-related felony charges due to committing various crimes to support his use, from stealing items to trade or sell for drugs to dealing drugs. All areas of his life, including his family relationships and his ability to parent and work, were drastically affected by his addiction.

In 2003, Scott was arrested for possession of methamphetamine and was given the opportunity to participate in a newly-developed drug court program. With the assistance from the judge and program staff, he slowly began to turn his life around. He completed a continuum of substance use treatment, vocational rehabilitation, and was introduced to 12-step recovery. It was during his participation in the drug court program that he began to have hope for his future again.

As a result of the incredible experiences he had with the helping professionals he encountered and the benefit he derived from the various programs, Scott decided to go to college to become a helping professional. After a few years of being in recovery he chose to enroll in an open-enrollment human services program at a community college. He later gained admission to a limited-enrollment BSW program and completed both his BSW and MSW degrees. Throughout his training, however, he encountered challenges with gaining admission to the universities and programs he attended. He also encountered difficulties securing field placements while in those programs due to his history.

In response to this challenging and demanding process, he adopted a stance of being fully honest and forthcoming. He came to accept that he would have to fully explain his past at each step along the way, from admission to the university, to prospective agencies regarding internships, to employment opportunities, to licensure boards, and insurance credentialing panels. With the support of past professors, field instructors, and even the drug court judge, he not only completed his education but gained employment in the field as a therapist specializing in addiction services. He was later promoted to a clinical supervisor role. Furthermore, Scott has

been able to obtain two advanced clinical practice state licenses in social work and addiction counseling.

Recommendations

The results of the survey, suggesting that the prevalence of this issue may be higher than first thought, and the experiences of these students, as represented here by Mary and Scott, have led to proposing the following recommendations. These recommendations are offered as suggestions and strategies for successfully engaging human services students with a criminal history and best serving their educational and professional development needs.

Help Individuals with Criminal Justice Histories Feel Valued, Accepted, and Welcomed

Individuals with a criminal justice history are unfortunately all too familiar with being seen and treated differently by others, including institutions and systems. These students experience fear and uncertainty even when deciding to pursue their education and applying to college. They apply seeking a new start, only to find that their application processes for admission and financial aid are complicated by their history. They also find that admissions personnel, advisors and even human services faculty responded to them in a manner that leaves them feeling discouraged, devalued, and unwelcomed not only at the university, but also by the profession.

This is unfortunate because human services professionals seek to advocate for recipients of services, to enhance strengths and self-esteem, and to instill hope, especially with vulnerable and disadvantaged populations prone to social injustice. The student in Custer's (2013) article wrote a letter to the admission committee expressing her disappointment in the way she had been treated. In her letter she stated, "It has made me understand that there will always be individuals, institutions, jobs, and in this case [the university] that will always make it harder for the disadvantage [*sic*] to live productive and meaningful lives" (Custer, p. 18). For a profession to treat its clients one way and its trainees and future colleagues another seems misguided. Scott and Zeigler (2000, p. 410) comment, "If we believe in the capacity of people to grow and learn from their mistakes, having made mistakes should not in and of itself shut the doors to the profession." This sentiment is echoed by Rose (2015, p. 584) who states, "The fundamental concept of social justice for marginalized groups and the promotion of an individual's capacity to grow and change are central to human service ethics."

Individuals with their own histories of struggles, who have successfully overcome those through receiving services, often become passionate, valuable, and effective practitioners. These individuals, informed and motivated by their own challenges and successes, bring powerful insights and a commitment to give back by helping others that should be honored (LeBel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015; Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). Creating a welcoming, engaging, and supportive atmosphere where these students feel valued promotes both their academic and professional success.

Have the Conversation about the Likely Challenges They Will Face Early in Training

While it is important to not be overly pessimistic about the future of individuals with a criminal justice history in this field, it is also necessary to inform students early in their training about likely difficulties they may experience (Scott & Zeigler, 2000). The first of these is the possibility that they might encounter challenges securing field placements or employment working with certain populations, such as children or older adults, if they have a history of

specific types of offenses. Other challenges obtaining employment are the additional procedures and background checks those with criminal histories face. Certain social service agencies or programs are often reluctant to hire individuals with a history of a felony, or if they do consider someone with such a history, the person will still likely be subject to increased screening. Additionally, individuals with a history of convictions often face challenges in obtaining state licensure or national certification.

Throughout this discussion, human services faculty, advisors, and mentors can help students identify these obstacles early in training so that they can know what to expect and prepare. It is also advisable to encourage students to nurture and maintain relationships with supportive others who can attest to their progress, successes, and character who might eventually be needed to write letters of recommendation for employers, as well as licensing and credentialing boards.

Encourage Students to Be Open and Honest about Their History

It is very understandable that individuals with a criminal justice history might not be forthcoming about their past. Doing so opens them not only to judgment and criticism from others, but also to discrimination. Many have been denied employment due to their past, and for some the only way they were able to secure employment may have been to lie about their history on applications. While understandable, this creates an impediment to progressing in human services, which is built on a foundation of ethics that requires and expects workers to conduct their practice with integrity and honesty (National Organization for Human Services, 2015). It seems more likely that concealing a past would be detrimental to gaining admission into limited enrollment programs and securing field placement positions or employment than to acknowledge this background from the beginning.

Often students are reluctant to discuss their past because what is focused on most is their history of mistakes and regrets. It is important that students receive the message that acknowledging the past helps to demonstrate that they are making a commitment to honesty and transparency. It also helps ensure that any past issues which might have contributed to their legal charges, such as addiction, are actively being managed so as to not interfere with their education or impair their ability to work successfully in the field with clients. This conversation also allows an opportunity to highlight the student's strengths and what they have done since their offenses to successfully change their life.

Human Service Faculty and Field Instructors Should Serve as Advocates

Human service faculty and field instructors should actively promote the success of these students and advocate for increased opportunities. A primary area where programs can be of value here is in cultivating relationships with agencies that will accept students who have criminal justice histories for field placement. Another area has to do with advocating for what types of criminal background checks are used and how human services programs, field placement agencies, or employers utilize that information. There are often significant discrepancies between local, state, and national background checks, and these can vary greatly depending on where the offenses occurred and how long ago the offenses occurred. Such discrepancies in results can lead to significant disparities in how these reports are used and how they affect students.

Another area of advocacy for students on a micro level is in the classroom and supporting academic success. Many with criminal justice histories likely experienced educational difficulties in the past, either academically or behaviorally, and might experience challenges adjusting to being students in a classroom again. This is especially likely if it has been some time since they were last in school. Some might view faculty as authority figures and react negatively to them as they have to judges, probation officers, and prison guards. Human services faculty can continue to support and encourage these students by monitoring their attendance, behavior in the classroom, and academic performance in both human services and general education courses. They can also link students to supportive resources, such as tutoring and counseling services, when available.

On the macro level, practitioners can continue to advocate for reforms to laws and policies that negatively affect the opportunities and access to resources available to those with criminal justice histories generally, and more specifically for increased access to expungement of past charges. To date, few opportunities for expungement exist, and often those that do are not readily accessible to people due to cost. Practitioners can increasingly raise awareness of expungement possibilities while also advocating for increased funding to assist individuals to afford these services. This would allow human services students with criminal justice histories to more successfully participate in particular programs, placements, scholarship opportunities, and in securing employment. In this survey, 13.3% of those with a history of either misdemeanor or felony said they had not pursued expungement due to believing they did not qualify, 16.7% said they had not due to not being able to afford it, and 40% said that they were not sure how to go about it, or how to find out more information.

One Bad Apple Does Not Spoil the Bunch

Programs with students who have criminal justice histories may experience issues with students re-offending, which, depending on the nature of the offense, may be highly publicized. They may also face issues with such students being dismissed from field placements due to inappropriate behavior or performance issues. In both circumstances, there is often an immediate reaction of embarrassment and a concern for how this reflects upon the program and college, as well as a sentiment that further restrictions should be placed on students with criminal justice histories.

Caution should be applied here because while individuals with past convictions can commit new offenses or be dismissed from field placement, students without such histories can also commit legal offenses or be excused from field placements for inappropriate behavior and performance issues as well. There is currently no research indicating that human services students with criminal justice histories commit new offenses or are dismissed from placements at a higher rate than for those without such histories.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that are important to note. The first is the small sample size, which raises concerns over how representative it might be. This survey was exploratory and limited in scope, and future efforts would benefit from including larger samples across multiple programs and colleges in various geographic regions. While the number of participants was small, it is relevant to note that during the semester the survey was conducted there were 181 human services majors in this particular program, so this sample represented almost half of the students in that program.

Having a larger and more representative sample would also allow further exploration of possible connections between gender, race, and history of legal offenses. This sample was predominantly female (84.4%) and Caucasian (86.7%). Having more diversity in the sample would be important because criminal justice data consistently shows that men, minorities, and especially minority men are more likely to be charged with and convicted of felonies and are overrepresented in the criminal justice system (Adler, Mueller, & Laufer, 2012).

A second limitation is that the survey relied on self-report data for the number, nature, and timeframe of past offenses as opposed to reviewing official records or conducting formal criminal background checks. Individual self-report might not accurately capture possible differences between arrests, charges, or circumstances when charges were reduced or pled down versus actual convictions. Participants were also not required to provide the specific number of offenses or the exact timeframe when they occurred, but instead were asked to offer general estimations.

With self-report there is always a possibility for bias and a concern that participants might underreport or omit certain information in order to present themselves in a positive light. In this study this could have resulted in an underreporting of offenses or failing to indicate having a criminal history. Such a bias in the current survey, however, may have gone in the opposite direction. Since participants were informed that the data would hopefully be used in part to advocate for improved and increased opportunities for students with criminal justice histories, there is a possibility that some participants over-reported their criminal histories.

Since this survey sought only to gain a general perspective on the nature of past offenses, it was not seen as necessary to require participants to provide a finite number of offenses or the precise period of time in which those offenses occurred. Formal background checks were not used due to potential issues with their accuracy and out of a sense of practicality related to time and financial limitations. It was also assumed that participants were familiar with their own histories.

Future Research

Future research could examine issues related to academic and field performance for human services students with criminal justice histories. Such investigation could explore whether students with criminal justice histories perform the same, better, or worse academically than those without such histories. An additional focus could be determining whether they have more issues with performance in field placements or are more likely to be excused from placements than those without. Since a typical concern about students with histories of offenses is that they will re-offend and create a safety risk for either the college or clients, determining if individuals with criminal justice histories are more or less likely to be arrested and receive charges once they are in school and field placements than those without such a history could also be explored.

Conclusion

The data from this survey suggest the possibility that human services students with criminal justice histories may be more common than what has previously been predicted or believed. These students may experience a number of challenges as they aspire to complete their education and enter the human services profession. Increasingly colleges, human services programs, and the profession will need to develop strategies for effectively addressing this issue in ways that promote the success of these individuals. These strategies will need to include

changes not only to policies and practices, but also changes in attitudes as to how students with a history of criminal offenses are viewed and engaged.

While it is essential to establish and maintain professional standards, adopting overly exclusionary policies ultimately hinders more than it helps. Some in human services programs would likely favor practices that essentially “close the gate” from the very beginning for those with criminal justice histories. Such policies, however, would prevent opportunities for second chances and fail to affirm the possibility of personal growth, both of which are not consistent with the mission and values of the human services profession. They would also result in the profession missing out on the positive contributions these individuals can make to human services. There needs to be a gate, but there also need to be assurances that the gate can be opened and that it is not permanently locked to some solely due to their criminal history.

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“Fitness” and the Human Services Student with a Mental Health Related Disability: Advisement, Assistance, and Accommodations

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The Americans with Disability Act-Amendments Act ensures that students with a mental health related disability have a right to pick any college major including human services. All colleges have public safety responsibilities and response protocols for students who may pose a danger to themselves or others especially following media coverage of acts of violence by students with a mental health related disability. This monograph describes how human services education programs and faculty can follow institutional protocols and remain true to human services principles and ethics when students have a mental health related disability. The authors advocate discarding exclusionary and potentially discriminatory definitions of fitness.¹

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Introduction

A college's responsibilities towards its students with a mental health related disability exist in three interrelated areas: Legal, ethical, and moral. The Americans with Disability Act-Amendments Act (ADA-AA, 2008) provides the context for a college's responsibilities to students with emotional, behavioral, and psychiatric impairments, categorized in this article as a mental health related disability (Barnard-Brak, Davis, Tate, & Sulak, 2009; Collins & Mowbray, 2005; McGrivern, Pellerito, & Mowbray, 2003; McGuire, 2010; Salzer, Wick, & Rogers, 2008).

While the ADA-AA (2008) simplified the documentation process for people with disabilities, it could not remove the persistent, and in some ways more negative, stigma of a mental health related disability. Legally, the college's responsibilities occur only once the students disclose and document their impairment, and request accommodations to ensure their college success (Singh, 2011; Collins & Mowbray, 2008; Salzer, Wick, & Rogers, 2008). Colleges determine what is, or is not, a reasonable and appropriate accommodation (Madaus, 2010).

Colleges also have public safety responsibilities for all students that are often a mixture of legal and ethical in nature. Colleges, and individuals working for the colleges, have an ethical and moral responsibility to students with psychiatric impairments to come to the aid of any student who is obviously suffering and noticeably distressed (Goodpaster, 1978; Jenni, 2001; Starratt, 1991). The media focuses on students with psychotic and paranoid disorders that have committed rare but horrendous acts of gun violence. Even so, the literature reports that most students with a mental health related disability struggle with depression, anxiety, and stress disorders, and are not psychotic (American College Health Association, 2012; Collins &

¹ Ruth Bichsel, PhD served as action editor for this article.

Mowbray, 2005; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Most students with a mental health related disability are more a danger to themselves than to others (Blanco et al., 2008; Collins & Mowbray, 2008; Pinna et. al., 2016). Throughout this paper, the terms *disability*, *impairment* and *disorder* reflect different aspects of the students' experience. *Disability* refers to the socially constructed concept, *impairment* refers to the affected functional issues, and *disorder* refers to the medical condition (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009; Riddell & Weedon, 2014; Shapiro, 1994).

This article recommends a proactive and potentially preventive use of the ADA and ADA-AA (2008), the moral imperative to help students presenting with symptoms of psychiatric deterioration, and rejection of assessing students' "fitness" for the profession. The authors contend that the issue of "fitness" is both paternalistic treatment of students with disability and potentially litigable under the ADA-AA (2008). The goal of this article is to propose the modeling and use of a human services philosophy in helping students with a mental health related disability complete a college based human services degree program.

College Students with a Mental Health Related Disability

The literature focuses on college students with mood- or stress-related disorders as the definition of a student having a mental health related disability (American College Health Association, 2012; Blanco et al., 2008; Gruttardo & Crudo, 2012; Paris, 2013). The age of onset for many mood and thought disorders coincides with older adolescence and young adulthood, with 75% beginning before the age of 24 (American College Health Association, 2012; Blanco et. al., 2008; Gruttardo & Crudo, 2012; Harper & Peterson, 2005; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Therefore, students of high school and college ages are the most at risk of developing these disorders (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Collins & Mowbray, 2008; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). One in four young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 has a psychiatric disorder (American College Health Association, 2012; Blanco et. al., 2008; Gruttardo & Crudo, 2012). While the media focuses on students with psychotic and paranoid disorders that have committed rare but horrendous acts of violence, the bulk of students with a mental health related disability struggle with depression, anxiety, and stress disorders; and are more a danger to themselves than to others (Fox, 2009; Roark, 2011; Kaddison & DiGeronimo, 2004; Whitaker & Pollard, 2013). The literature reports that the number of students entering college with a mental health related disability has increased (American College Health Association, 2012; Eudaly, 2003; Sharpe, Bruinicks, Benson, & Johnson, 2004). This influx of civilian students with a mental health related disability joins a growing number of returning veterans with a mental health related disability entering college at the same time (American College Health Association, 2012; Eudaly, 2003; Sharpe et al.).

Students with a mental health related disability enter college for the same reasons as all people, to be able to enter careers of their choice, improve their earning potential, and to make a new social/interpersonal start after high school (Faggella-Luby, Flannery, & Simonsen, 2010; Banerjee & Brinckerhoff, 2010). A large percentage of people with a mental health related disability live at or below the poverty level (Barnard-Brak et al., 2009; Hartley, 2010; Martin, 2010). Similar to many people with other impairments, people with a mental health related disability fall victim to the "poverty trap" (under employment, low hourly wage jobs, or governmental financial assistance that precludes full time employment) that negatively affects the quality of their lives (Barnard-Brak et al., 2009; Hartley, 2010; Martin, 2010). College is a way of avoiding that trap but is more likely to accomplish this if the student graduates.

Unfortunately, the number of students with a mental health related disability that do not complete college is high (American College Health Association, 2012; Blanco et al., 2008; Collins & Mowbray, 2008; Gruttardo and Crudo, 2012). For some students with a mental health related disability, the disruption or termination of their college careers is due to an increase in psychiatric symptoms and the need for hospitalization coupled with an inability to be reintegrated back into college (American College Health Association, 2012; Blanco et al., 2008; Gruttardo and Crudo, 2012; McGivern et al., 2003; Unger, Pardee, & Shafer, 2000). The larger issue is not that their disorder needs aggressive intervention, but a combination of the lack educational and social support (Brockelman, 2011; Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Collins & Mowbray, 2008; Matthews, 2009; Unger et al., 2000). College students with a mental health related disability have an 86% withdrawal rate from college (American College Health Association, 2012; Blanco et al., 2008; Gruttardo and Crudo, 2012). It is estimated (since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) that 4.29 million students with a mental health related disability could have graduated from college had they not dropped out (American College Health Association, 2012; Collins & Mowbray, 2008; Gruttardo and Crudo, 2012). College disability offices, college counseling services and veterans' programs share responsibilities to help these students through their college careers, if and when, students with a mental health related disability request services (Brockelman, 2011; Corrigan et al., 2001; McGivern et al., 2003).

Issues of Disclosure

Perhaps one of the central issues negatively affecting the success of students with a mental health related disability is the reluctance to disclose (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Harper & Peterson, 2005; Perlis, Teachman, & Nosek, 2008; Rusch, Corrigan, Todd, & Bodenhausen, 2010). Students are not obligated to disclose nor are their parents able to disclose their disability to the college as they can in high school (Madaus, 2010). Students with a mental health related disability are just as likely to delay or never disclose their disability as other students with non-visible disability (Matthews, 2009; Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Collins & Mowbray, 2008). While research is able to describe students who have disclosed, colleges often do not know how many and which students have a mental health related disability unless or until an incident is reported to them, typically through public safety, which describes a small minority of affected students (Harper & Peterson, 2005; Jennings, Gover, & Pudrzynska, 2007; Kaddison & DiGeronimo, 2004). A 2012 study by the National Alliance on Mental Health reported that 73% of students with a mental health related disability experienced a crisis on campus, and of those, 34% reported that they believed their college was unaware that they were in crisis (Matthews, 2009; Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Collins & Mowbray, 2008). In a 2000 study, 38% of students without an official psychiatric diagnosis reported being "too depressed to function" (American College Health Association, 2012; Gruttardo & Crudo, 2012).

The stigma of mental illness is a potent source of shame and embarrassment for students with a mental health related disability and is the primary obstacle to disclosure (Corrigan et al., 2001; Eisenberg et al., 2009; Martin, 2010; Perlis et al., 2008; Rusch et al., 2010). Students fear their professors' unfavorable reactions to disclosure (Eisenberg et al. 2009; Perlis et al., 2008; Rusch et al., 2010). In addition, students with a mental health related disability fear being considered "unfit" for specific areas of study, careers, or professions where internships, certification, employment, and/or licensure require a background check (Bathurst & Grove, 2000; Corrigan et al., 2001). The concern that documentation of one's mental health related

disability could/would haunt students as they pursue their life goals is also affected by their own struggles of acceptance and adaptation to their mental health related disability (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Corrigan et al., 2001). This can lead to students with a mental health related disability to try to “go it alone” and often results in these students disclosing and requesting accommodation only after receiving poor grades (Harper & Peterson, 2005; Hartley, 2010; Singh, 2011).

It is in this atmosphere that the human services student with a mental health related disability fears the stigma of mental illness and of being considered “unfit” for their chosen profession. This negatively affects disclosure decision-making. Anecdotally, there seem to be three groups of students with a mental health related disability attracted to human services. Some of these students seek to become human services professionals because they benefited from human service intervention in their own lives and want to give back or “pay it forward.” Other students may not have received benefit from human services intervention and want to improve the system and services. Students in the third group have a history of struggling with mental health related concerns, have not had treatment, have various levels of understanding or acceptance of their difficulties, and become human services students to vicariously benefit from learning about human behavior and helping professions. The rates of mental health distress in college students, the personal reasons students choose human services as their major, the training responsibilities of college-based human services programs, and the requirements of the ADA-AA result in the need for human services programs to develop a protocol to advise, assist, and accommodate students with a mental health related disability without resorting to the application of subjective indicators of “fitness” for the profession.

“Fitness” and a Human Services Career Path

The issue of “fitness” is one that many students with disability struggle with when studying to enter many professions. The human services profession requires students to be aware of their thoughts and feelings and how they may affect clients and their work in agency settings. In addition, the human services profession requires students to maintain empathic but well-defined boundaries in their relationships with clients and co-workers. We believe that the issue of whether a student is “fit” for the human services profession is too broad of an indicator of a student’s ability to complete a human services course of study, including internship. In addition, determining “fitness” may lead to abrogating a students’ rights under the ADA-AA (2008) and may result in litigation. Under the ADA-AA (2008), colleges do not have the right to determine if someone is “fit” in a global sense for a specific course of study. The mandate is to provide reasonable accommodation (See Appendix A).

The issue of *reasonable* is open to interpretation. Students, faculty, and college administrators may have widely different ideas of what kind of accommodation is reasonable (See Appendix B). Therefore, it becomes important for all college-based programs to clearly enumerate the essential functions of a human services major. These requirements should be descriptive of the skills and abilities students need to possess before entering the program.

In addition, programs need to indicate their commitment to the Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals (National Organization for Human Services, 2015) by publicly displaying the Standards in various places where human services students gather (office, lounge, mailbox area, etc.). Both the essential functions and the Ethical Standards become concrete touchstones to guide student behavior. This avoids personalizing the rules, responsibilities, and expectations but makes them part of the human services campus community if and when a

students' disability becomes a source of concern. This also provides a containing community structure for all students.

The essential functions for the program and the Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals (NOHS, 2015) also become the foundation for creating reasonable accommodations for students with a mental health related disability to be able to complete the course of study and internship. Human services educators are covered under this same code, indicating that we will strive to provide access and inclusion for differently-abled students (Standard 38). Accommodations can help a student meet the essential requirements.

Accommodations are not reasonable if they some way obstruct the Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals (NOHS, 2015). On the other hand, accommodations that help students meet the requirements of the Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals would be reasonable. Standard 38 states, "Human service educators are committed to the principles of access and inclusion and take all available and applicable steps to make education available to differently-abled students."

Advisement, Assistance and Accommodations

Human services students who disclose to the college's office of services to disabled students are claiming their civil rights. The students remain responsible for informing their instructors of the disability. Instructors then typically are able to communicate with the college's office of services to disabled students for help in determining reasonable accommodations. At other times, students may ask their advisor in the office for services to disabled students to help craft accommodations with the instructor. Students with a mental health related disability may need to be advised to choose alternate courses or electives from the typical human services program because some of the required courses could re-traumatize the student. Anecdotal information in the form of case vignettes helps to illustrate various advisement strategies.

Case Study: Barry

Barry, a 24 year-old sophomore, tried twice to take and pass a course on human services work with children. Both times, he functioned well in the class until the midterm. He would stop doing assignments and eventually stop attending the course. His advisor wanted to understand Barry's difficulties without being intrusive or making their meeting a therapy session. The advisor pointed out that there was something about the course on children that did not work for him. Barry then disclosed that he was viciously abused as a child and that he was being treated for depression. Barry began to sob and wanted to leave the advisor's office. The advisor convinced him to stay and offered to explore whether he could take an alternate course to take the place of the children's course. Ultimately, Barry took a course on human services and disability that he successfully completed with a B grade.

Barry is no different from any other human services students except perhaps he is a bit more self-aware of some of his areas of difficulty and their root causes. Barry was informed of the campus-based counseling services to support his treatment for depression and help him manage the college environment. Perhaps as Barry heals, he will be able to work effectively with children if he chooses. While the advisor helped him make an appointment, Barry's follow-through on the appointment was not and cannot be a condition of his continuing in the program, as that would be discriminatory under the ADA-AA (2008).

Some students with a mental health related disability do not identify themselves to the office of services to disabled students. Rather, they may approach one or two instructors they feel comfortable with and disclose only to them. This leaves the faculty members in a quandary. While they can address the student's needs in their own courses, they cannot effect a similar accommodation in other faculty members' courses. So while the college's office of students with disabilities can help students negotiate accommodations with a department chair, director, or coordinator of a specific major to effect accommodations throughout the course of study, this typically cannot be accomplished by an individual faculty member. The individual faculty member is not able to share the student's personal information about disability with other faculty without permission. To do so would violate the student's privacy. This dilemma leaves the faculty member holding a student's secret if the student is unable to cope in other courses.

Case Study: James

James, a 19 year-old freshman, often disrupted his Introduction to Human Services class by asking questions that seemed unrelated to the class discussion. At other times, he frequently left the classroom during discussions and returned to the class making noise. He would tap a pen on his desk, or sigh loudly. By the fourth class, the instructor asked to meet with James after class. James explained that he was in special education courses throughout his primary education. He decided he was done with being "special" once he entered college and described his problems as being "nervous." The instructor asked James what he thought would make him less nervous in class. James thought sitting away from other students but closer to the instructor could help because it worked in high school. When this was successful, the instructor encouraged James to "check-out" the services offered by the students with disability office and offered to go with him.

The faculty member did not know the name of James' disability, yet James felt comfortable with this particular instructor. The relationship between them remained within bounds of a professor/student relationship. James was aware of his behavior, and willing to use a previously successful accommodation. The instructor used the strength of her relationship with James to help him rethink his decision not to use the services he needed to be successful in her program and in college. Frequently, human services faculty members will extend themselves to help a student by using their listening and empathy skills. We model the principles of our profession by using our skills while maintaining appropriate boundaries so that we do not treat our students as if they were our clients.

While the human services faculty may be able to use their skills to effect the type of problem-solving that enables students with mental health related disabilities to successfully complete a course, internships are another, more complex area of concern.

Case Study: Judith

Judith, 23 years old and one year away from graduation, was ready for her internship experience. Judith was considered highly irritable, was offended easily, and was isolated within the human services program. Her grades were strong and she did well on tests and papers but was argumentative with her fellow students during class discussions. Judith wanted to work with medically fragile children. However, the human services placement coordinator feared that Judith's demeanor, numerous facial piercings, and explicit tattoos on her arms would make her very difficult to place. The placement coordinator felt she had a responsibility to the program and Judith to address all of these issues. First, the program coordinator explored Judith's

interest in working with ill children. Judith shared that her younger brother had died from a brain tumor at age four. Judith was only three years older and felt helpless. The program coordinator reviewed all of Judith's problem areas within the context of wanting to help her obtain the placement she wanted so very much. Instead of her usual blow-up in reaction to criticism, Judith asked how she could change to be able to get the placement she desired. The placement coordinator made a referral to the college's counseling services. While the placement coordinator could not learn what, if anything, occurred in counseling, Judith's behavior gradually changed as she demonstrated patience and flexibility in her discussions with fellow students and faculty. Her various distracting piercings diminished until all she wore to college was pierced earrings. She came to class wearing clothes that covered her tattoos. She became a good candidate for a placement working with medically ill children.

The internship coordinator used basic relationship-building interventions as well as a few techniques from Motivational Interviewing to help Judith reach her own stated goals. Unlike a course instructor, an internship coordinator may at times become involved with a student's personal issues in order to help the student have a successful placement experience. Self-awareness is often a central factor in a student's successful placement experience. While an internship coordinator may do some uncovering of a student's issues, the focus is on making an appropriate referral for additional services. Was Judith rendered "fit" to continue her human services training, or was Judith helped in a humane manner using human services principles? Perhaps faculty in other disciplines do not have the knowledge base to attempt either intervention with Judith, but human services faculty do, and we represent our profession and its principles in teaching as well as in social services environments (Price, 2014). Judith's placement was frequently reviewed with her and her field supervisor. Careful attention was paid to Judith's ability to manage the stress of a placement where children might die, and to her ability to manage constructive criticism. Judith had difficulties with loss, but close monitoring by her supervisor in placement and her counselor at the college was able to help her manage and solve these issues before they became crises. In this way, Judith had a successful internship experience and her clients benefitted from her empathy and sensitivity without her disclosing her personal story.

Managing Campus Crises

Stress related and mood disorders can manifest in situations that entail a danger to one's self or others (Paris, 2013). When this occurs on campus, public safety may be called to protect the student as well as their fellow students, faculty, and staff. In addition to a staffed crisis telephone line for public safety, colleges should have a staffed telephone line for crisis counselors. Crisis counselors and public safety officers work collaboratively with municipal or county emergency medical services (EMS) to assist students to a local psychiatric emergency room for evaluation and possible hospitalization. This is not punitive but humane, as students in psychiatric crisis are suffering, needing treatment and protection. When this involves a student within a human services program, two additional issues need to be addressed. Other students in the program may have experienced or heard of the psychiatric emergency involving a fellow human services student and may need to be debriefed and reassured, bearing in mind that the student still has many privacy rights. In addition, human services faculty need to help students understand the need and practice of protecting a fellow student's privacy and his/her re-entry to the program (Price, 2014). Paul's story helps to demonstrate these points.

Case Study: Paul

Paul, 18, is the youngest of five siblings and the only one still living at home. He is a freshman and was removed from his classroom by public safety because he became belligerent and threatening to a female student who disagreed with an opinion he shared in his Human Services and Gerontology course. Public Safety removed him from class and brought him to the campus counseling center. Paul informed the crisis counselor and EMS that his father was placed outside of the home into an Alzheimer's unit at a local nursing home. His mother was seriously depressed since his father left the house. She was threatening to throw Paul out of the house because he refused to leave school and get a full-time job to help support her. Paul stated that he could not live with his mother and felt the only solution was to shoot himself with his father's licensed gun. Paul was transported to the nearest emergency room and psychiatrically hospitalized.

In addition to assisting Paul, human services faculty and relevant campus staff need to address the needs of the female student Paul threatened. Offering an opportunity for her to express her concerns and reactions to the incident are essential to providing her with a harassment-free learning environment. When a psychiatric emergency occurs within the classroom, the students witnessing it require the opportunity for debriefing from human services faculty or other campus personnel. The authors believe that human services faculty have additional responsibilities because they model professional acceptance, non-judgmental attitudes, and empathy towards fellow students (in this case, both Paul and the student he threatened).

Paul's instructor debriefed her students who witnessed Paul's outburst and removal from the classroom by public safety. She enabled the students to ventilate their fears and concerns about their safety. The students were both worried about and angry with Paul, and protective of the student he threatened. The instructor was able to facilitate the students' discussion about their sadness for Paul's suffering, as some knew about his home situation. The instructor cautioned students to treat Paul's situation with respect for his privacy (Price, 2014). In addition, the instructor asked her students to critique her interventions and those of the public safety officers.

Paul's hospitalization was considered as private, though many students knew about it as Paul called them during his hospital stay. The instructor did not permit or encourage discussion of this private information. Two weeks later, Paul, now living with his cousin, on medication and in treatment, returned to the college and to the class. He was required to do additional assignments to make-up for lost instruction time. His due dates for missed assignments were pushed back by two weeks. Public Safety established other conditions for his return to ensure the safety of the female student, and she did not feel endangered by Paul's return to the college. Paul reported that he was not intimidated by the public safety officers, but rather that he felt contained.

Conclusions

The human services profession is especially committed to helping vulnerable, ill, and fragile populations. Human services higher education programs and their faculty need to embody and demonstrate a human services approach towards students with a mental health related disability. This goes beyond what the college needs to do and provide under the law to all students with a disability of any description. We must recognize that "fitness" for our profession is not based on notions of human perfection but on self-awareness of our imperfections and a belief that voluntary treatment ultimately helps individuals function in healthy and productive

ways. As professionals, educators, and life-long learners, we take responsibility for our difficulties, seek and obtain help from our social supports, obtain treatment when needed, and remain vigilant through self-reflection and supervision in order to insulate clients from our own foibles, problems, and mental health concerns. Our profession is not for everyone, but we must guard against insidious discrimination that excludes people who are different because we believe they do not “fit.” For who among us in our field, is typical? No one; we are extraordinary because we chose to be human service workers.

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Appendix A

Excerpt from *ADA Q & A: Section 504 & Postsecondary Education* (Leuchovius, 2003)

“The postsecondary program cannot have eligibility requirements that screen out people with physical or mental disabilities. Application forms cannot ask applicants if they have a history of mental illness or any other disability. Institutions may impose criteria that relate to safety risks but these criteria must be based on actual risk and not on stereotypes or assumptions....

“The most challenging aspect of modifying classroom policies or practices for students with disabilities is that it requires thought and some prior preparation. The difficulty lies in the need to anticipate needs and be prepared in advance. The actual modifications themselves are rarely substantive or expensive. Some examples are rescheduling classes to an accessible location; early enrollment options for students with disabilities to allow time to arrange accommodations; substitution of specific courses required for completion of degree requirements; allowing service animals in the classroom; providing students with disabilities with a syllabus prior to the beginning of class; clearly communicating course requirements, assignments, due dates, grading criteria both orally and in written form; providing written outlines or summaries of class lectures, or integrating this information into comments at the beginning and end of class; and allowing students to use note takers or tape record lectures. Modifications will always vary based on the individual student's needs. Modifications of policies and practices are not required when it would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity....”

Appendix B

Excerpt from *Questions and Answers on the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 for Students with Disabilities Attending Public Elementary and Secondary Schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2012)*

“The Amendments Act emphasizes that the definition of "disability" in Section 504 and the ADA should be interpreted to allow for broad coverage. Students who, in the past, may not have been determined to have a disability under Section 504 and Title II may now in fact be found to have a disability under those laws.

“Specifically, Congress directed that the definition of disability shall be construed broadly and that the determination of whether an individual has a disability should not demand extensive analysis. 42 U.S.C. § 12102 note. Among other changes, the Amendments Act specifies that:

- “An impairment need not prevent or severely or significantly restrict a major life activity to be considered substantially limiting. *Id.*
- “In the phrase ‘a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity,’ the term ‘substantially limits’ shall be interpreted without regard to the ameliorative effects of mitigating measures, other than ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses. Amendments Act § 4(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 12102). Mitigating measures are things like medications, prosthetic devices, assistive devices, or learned behavioral or adaptive neurological modifications that an individual may use to eliminate or reduce the effects of an impairment. These measures cannot be considered when determining whether a person has a substantially limiting impairment. Therefore, impairments that may not have previously been considered to be disabilities because of the ameliorative effects of mitigating measures might now meet the Section 504 and ADA definition of disability. For example, a student who has an allergy and requires allergy shots to manage that condition would be covered under Section 504 and Title II if, without the shots, the allergy would substantially limit a major life activity....
- “An impairment that is episodic or in remission is a disability if, when in an active phase, it would substantially limit a major life activity. Amendments Act § 4(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 12102). For example, a student with bipolar disorder would be covered if, during manic or depressive episodes, the student is substantially limited in a major life activity (*e.g.*, thinking, concentrating, neurological function, or brain function)....

“Therefore, rather than considering only how an impairment affects a student's ability to learn, a recipient or public entity must consider how an impairment affects any major life activity of the student and, if necessary, must assess what is needed to ensure that student's equal opportunity to participate in the recipient's or public entity's program....”

Developing the Professional “Self”: Working with Adult Learners in an Online and Hybrid Human Services Program

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Online and hybrid college courses and programs are growing in popularity, especially with adult learners. Adult learners often balance family, employment, and other commitments while attending college. Balancing these responsibilities often leads to stress that results in behavior, academic, and professional challenges. Two composite student profiles are presented in this article illustrating the common factors that lead to challenges for adult learners in online and hybrid family and human services programs. Based on the case study profiles, this article provides in-depth descriptions of procedures and policies for addressing challenging behaviors and facilitating the development of human services professionals in online and hybrid environments. Specific strategies for student retention and professional growth include: a) building the foundation for student success through orientation and other activities; b) creating connections with faculty, supervisors and peers; c) utilizing campus support services; d) teaching critical professional skills; and e) creating individualized remediation plans.

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Online course delivery has been a growing trend in higher education programs around the country (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2013; Heyman, 2010). Current demand for online college courses is a key strategy for growth in institutions of higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Mann & Henneberry, 2014). A 2011 report on the online higher education market found that of the 21 million college students in the U.S., approximately 32%, were taking at least one online course and almost 3 million were enrolled in fully online programs (Eduventures, 2012). Public four-year institutions saw one of the largest increases (7.2 %) over the last decade in students taking online courses in the U.S. (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2013).

Many students who enroll in these online classes fall under the umbrella of “non-traditional students” (e.g., working, parents, over age 24 years), and the online format can be an ideal option to access relevant higher education requirements (Mann & Henneberry, 2014). Online courses can offer students the flexibility they need to balance education, work, and family responsibilities. Rural students are another population that often takes advantage of online college programs, thus reducing some of the primary barriers to higher education associated with rural students: Distance and cost of transportation (Howley, Chavis, & Kester, 2013; Murphy, 2014).

Despite the many benefits of online education, Heyman (2010) found that as more students enroll in online programs, retention of those students has become a growing concern. In addition to the typical challenges for adult learners in balancing school, work, and family responsibilities, students in online courses face further challenges such as maintaining motivation

in an independent learning environment, lack of personal connection to faculty and students, and technology barriers (Park, 2007; Park & Choi, 2009). One of the primary reasons online college students drop out is frustration regarding technology (Mansfield, O'Leary, & Webb, 2011). In a study of student retention, experts in the field of online education suggested that students enrolled in online college programs need to receive adequate and ongoing support from the institution in all areas (financial aid, academic supports, counseling, tutoring), and frequent and timely interactions between faculty and students (Heyman, 2010). These student supports are even more crucial for non-traditional students, first-generation college students, and students of color (Habley, 2004; Lee, Pate, & Cozart, 2015; Lightweis, 2014).

Online and hybrid education programs clearly offer many educational benefits. At the same time, these programs create unique challenges and may leave students feeling isolated and unprepared to function successfully as professionals in the field. With an increase of online and hybrid courses, human services faculty need to be intentional about building specific supports to promote student retention and address the development of professional behaviors in these online settings. The Council for Standards in Human Services Education (CSHSE, 2013) specifically addresses professional behavior as a standard for accreditation in human services education programs. Students need to demonstrate skills in interpersonal communication, be able to articulate and practice ethical behavior, develop awareness of their personal values and biases, and exhibit strategies for self-care (CSHSE, 2013). This article describes our experiences helping students develop professional skills and behaviors that provide the means for retention and success in an online and hybrid human services training program designed specifically to meet the needs of adult learners in the field of human services and early childhood education.

Family and Human Services-Early Childhood Emphasis (FHS-ECE)

A number of recent changes in early childhood education requirements created the impetus for the Family and Human Services program-Early Childhood Emphasis (FHS-ECE) at the University of Oregon. The Head Start Act of 2007 included provisions that increased early learning standards and also required 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide in center-based programs to have a baccalaureate or advanced degree in early childhood education (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2007). In addition, recent federal education initiatives have increased funding for Early Head Start programs (serving ages birth through three) and greatly expanded pre-kindergarten education for low-income families. These initiatives created a pressing need to provide bachelor's degree training for individuals who wish to maintain teaching roles in Head Start, or prepare for new careers in the field of early childhood education.

Family and Human Services (FHS) faculty and staff worked with faculty from the university's Early Intervention graduate program in Special Education to develop an online early childhood emphasis option within the existing FHS program. We collaborated with local, state, and regional Head Start representatives to ensure that the program would comply with Oregon Department of Education early childhood education requirements and also meet the needs of potential students, many of whom were already working full time in Head Start programs statewide. A majority of the new ECE courses were offered in online formats, and existing FHS courses were modified to be delivered in hybrid formats with a combination of online content and weekend classes on campus. In addition, participants were given flexibility to enroll in field studies placements within their home communities with supervision delivered virtually by FHS program faculty and staff.

Students in the early childhood emphasis complete a specialized version of the FHS major. Requirements include coursework in human services and early childhood education, field studies experiences in Head Start and other related settings, and a capstone senior project. Upon completion, students earn a bachelor's degree in Family and Human Services, with an emphasis in early childhood education. As of spring 2016, three cohorts of students had entered and completed the program.

FHS-ECE Student Demographics

This section provides an overview of the students who enrolled in the first two cohorts of the new FHS-ECE online training program. The students in the first cohort were recruited in collaboration with Head Start directors. Two Oregon Head Start sites identified employees who were good candidates for the program. One Head Start was local to the University of Oregon and the second was in a rural community over 100 miles away from the university. Twelve students applied to the program and attended the fall term orientation in 2013. We had an initial attrition of three students in the first two weeks of the first term. During spring term, two more students left the program. Barriers that prevented the five students from continuing in the program included lack of flexibility from their employer, family illness, and lack of funding. Of the seven remaining students in the first cohort, two students were Latina, all were female, and all were working full time in early childhood settings. The average years of work experience with children and families was approximately 11 years. Five of the seven women had young children and two were single parents. All but one student had an Associates of Applied Sciences (AAS) degree and all needed additional coursework to satisfy general education requirements.

The second cohort was significantly different from the first. This may have been due to our recruiting efforts during the previous school year and outreach to other early childhood and human services agencies in our state. We also recruited students with undeclared majors at the University of Oregon and at many Oregon community colleges. Sixteen students were accepted into the program fall of 2014. Half of the cohort lived in communities outside Eugene and had to travel one to three hours to attend weekend classes. All students were women; one student was Latina and all others were Caucasian. Ten of the seventeen students were actively raising their own children and working full time. Six of the students were traditional college students and all others transferred from a community college with an AAS degree. Two students had significant disabilities and needed accommodations, including transcription services.

While the demographics of the FHS-ECE cohorts have changed over time, one thing remains consistent. Students attracted to this program for a variety of needs and aspirations also have challenges that may impact their completion of coursework and ability to consistently meet and maintain profession standards. Many of our non-traditional and traditional students have family and work challenges that impact their education and professional development. A challenge to student success for all college students is maintaining a program of study when work or family problems arise. Research has consistently shown the two primary reasons students drop out of college are related to work (54%) and family challenges (41%) (Park & Choi, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2013). By working together in partnership with our students, we have learned a few things about helping students balance work and family expectations and supporting them as they develop professional skills and behaviors. Although we offer a set of proactive supports and services to all students, we have also developed targeted strategies to respond to and support students facing individual or family barriers interfering with their educational goals. The following are two case studies, composite profiles of students in the FHS-

ECE program, including the supports we provided as a program and the lessons learned through these experiences providing professional development to adult learners in an online and hybrid training program.

Case Study: Alberta

Alberta is a Latina woman in her mid-thirties. She works full time as an early childhood assistant teacher in a rural Head Start classroom. Her classroom serves approximately 20 children and low-income families. Alberta is enthusiastic about continuing her education. She earned an Associates of Applied Science (AAS) degree in early childhood education at her local community college ten years ago and is the first in her family to earn a college degree. Alberta took a break from working in early childhood when her first child was born. Her second child had many health and development problems, so she continued to focus on raising her family. It was only after her divorce and when her children started public school that she decided to go back to work. She was hired by Head Start, first as a substitute aide, then as an assistant teacher. Alberta's goal was to earn her bachelor's degree and move into a lead teaching position or other higher paying position within Head Start. Her supervisor and education manager encouraged Alberta to think about going back to school to earn a bachelor's degree.

Alberta first learned about the FHS-ECE program during a recruitment event sponsored by Head Start. The FHS-ECE program coordinator, academic advisor, and field study coordinator had a friendly discussion with interested Head Start teaching staff. Alberta said later that she felt "welcome" and "less scared" about attending a university after the meeting. Alberta also got to hear how the program aligned with Head Start values and goals and that the program was designed to provide all the professional competencies she would need as an early childhood teacher and human service professional. The academic advisor helped review her community college transcript and she could see that there were additional general education requirements she would need to take once she got into the program. The application process was discussed and she decided she would go home to think and talk to her family about it. She would also need to get the recommendation and support of her work supervisor, a requirement of the program.

Alberta received mixed messages from her mother when they discussed Alberta's plan of going back to college. Her mother was excited about the possibilities for her daughter's future, but she was concerned about the implications for her own life. Alberta's mother would be crucial to her success; she was one of the few people Alberta trusted with her children. She knew her mother would also be taking on a huge commitment to stand beside her in the journey ahead. After some heartfelt discussion, Alberta's mother offered her support and commitment. Alberta turned to her work supervisor and discussed the potential issues and need for support at work. Her supervisor offered supports such as flex time on Fridays so Alberta could focus on her schoolwork. She also said she would write a letter of recommendation and support.

Alberta turned in her application and hoped for the best. Within a few weeks, she was called in for an interview. She was extremely nervous, but she had already met her interviewers at the recruitment event, which helped her to relax. She felt at ease talking about her passion of working with young children and families. One week later, she got her acceptance letter and her mother threw her a party in celebration.

The FHS-ECE coordinator stayed in touch with Alberta by email throughout the summer, but Alberta seemed not to be thinking about school during that time. She missed the orientation and when the coordinator emailed her after the event, she said she had forgotten about it. During

the orientation, students learned important information about program requirements and received training on how to access and use the online educational platform for all their courses. Alberta, who was not computer savvy, quickly fell behind in her coursework. The FHS-ECE coordinator made a mental note to reach out to new students in the future using different formats during the summer prior to starting the program. It has been shown that this is a vulnerable time for students and that connections made early on help sustain interest and investment in returning to school (Park, 2007).

The first weekend class was held between the second and third weeks of the term. The instructor asked Alberta to come in an hour early to receive the technology training. It was during this training that Alberta revealed she had minimal Internet access in her home and that she was not able to access all the materials in a timely manner due to slow Internet speed. With this knowledge, the coordinator empowered Alberta to contact her supervisor to discuss supports the agency could provide. It was decided that Alberta could stay after work in the evenings and on Friday afternoons to use the site's Internet access. Alberta also struggled with basic technology skills that most traditional college students have mastered. For example, downloading and uploading documents, organizing documents into folders on a computer, accessing email, updating operating systems and applications, and managing passwords were all difficult for Alberta. Faculty and staff provided individualized supports in the form of office hours, instant messaging through the learning management system, and extra time on the weekend classes to assist Alberta until she felt comfortable with the technology needed to progress in the program.

Alberta's mother adhered to her commitment to provide support while Alberta earned her degree. She offered help with childcare during homework sessions and during the weekend classes. This allowed Alberta to focus her attention on her studies. Alberta was engaged and active in the weekend classes. She started building relationships quickly with other cohort members and exchanged contact information. She discovered that another student, Shelly, lived within a short distance and worked at a different Head Start site in her community. Soon Shelly joined Alberta for the after-work study sessions and they shared rides to weekend classes. This provided the encouragement both of them needed. By the end of the term, Alberta was feeling more confident in her ability to juggle school, work, and family. Then her youngest child became ill.

Although Alberta finished the term strong, earning A's in all courses, she again started the term with a deficit. Her child was in fragile health and had been in and out of the hospital over the break. Alberta's mother, her main support, had to leave town to help Alberta's sister's family. Alberta's sister had just been admitted to a drug and alcohol treatment center and her young children needed a supportive family member to help stabilize the family while she was in treatment. These family problems, work, and school were too much for Alberta to manage; she considered dropping out of the program. Alberta did not communicate her situation to her professors or program staff. Professors started noticing her missing assignments and online check-ins right away and contacted her, but she did not respond.

Weekly confidential faculty meetings are devoted to discussing students who may need extra support. This policy is essential in identifying and assisting students before problems become entrenched. Faculty identify specific students who are having problems, the student's name is added to a confidential list, and faculty discuss the student's progress each week until

the situation is resolved. This policy is also included in the student handbook to ensure transparency.

Alberta's struggles were discussed in the weekly confidential meeting and it was decided that she would receive a Plan of Assistance (POA) meeting with the faculty. A POA meeting is designed to provide support for students who are exhibiting academic or behavioral needs. Alberta's POA provided her with the opportunity to explain her situation. It was during the POA that Alberta revealed all the family problems she was experiencing. The faculty, staff, and Alberta came up with a plan for Alberta to finish the term with Incompletes. Strategies for self-care were discussed and Alberta came up with three things she could do to relieve some of the stress: Yoga (she checked out a yoga CD from the library and practiced at home with her children), setting aside two hours for herself on Sundays, and working on some crafts. Professional communication was another goal that was discussed and set with her. She agreed that in the future she would reach out immediately when family or other problems were affecting her ability to complete her coursework.

Another program support available to students is an academic advisor trained specifically in working with non-traditional students. The advisor keeps detailed records and evaluates students' progress throughout the program. The advisor, Samantha, contacted Alberta to set up a phone advising appointment. With Alberta at home on her computer and Samantha at her office on her computer, Samantha walked Alberta through her progress and academic standing at the end of winter term. Alberta had quite a few general education requirements to complete and initially, her plan was to complete one per term as she was going through the FHS-ECE coursework. However, she discovered having an extra class each term was too much. She decided to focus on her FHS-ECE coursework and try to finish up her general education requirements during the two terms after her major coursework was completed. Samantha was able to revise Alberta's graduation plan and help her set realistic goals.

Students start their first field study experience during summer term in the FHS-ECE program. The first internship experience is meant to provide students with a broad look into the field of human services. In addition to completing their internship hours, students also participate in weekly group supervision meetings. During group supervision, students gain knowledge about the process of being an intern, and reflect on their internship experiences with other students. At the beginning of the term Alberta was proactive in communicating with her university supervisor, the field studies coordinator, and potential internship sites in her rural community. Alberta indicated her first choice was the Department of Human Services (DHS), Child Welfare. By the second week of the term, her children were out of school for the summer and she missed several opportunities to connect with the DHS volunteer coordinator by not answering emails or phone calls. She also neglected to log on and attend her virtual group supervision meetings. Alberta was busy getting her children to different activities. Knowing her history of communication problems, the FHS-ECE coordinator reached out to Alberta by phone. Alberta indicated she would like to talk using Facetime on her smartphone. During the Facetime meeting, Alberta discussed her desire to spend time with her children conflicting with her field study commitment. The coordinator helped Alberta come up with a plan to utilize her supports, make up the field study hours she had already missed, and attend the group supervision meetings.

With the help of the field studies coordinator, Alberta was placed into a small non-profit agency that provided free developmental, health, dental, and behavioral screenings for children birth to five years of age. Alberta was excited for this opportunity as it was outside of any type of

work she had completed before. The agency was thrilled to have Alberta's expertise with young children and families and her ability to speak Spanish also met a need of the agency in communicating their services to the Latino community. The agency immediately put Alberta to work organizing the summer screening programs. Along with completing her internship hours, Alberta started to attend her group supervision meetings and share her experiences with her peers. By the end of the summer, Alberta reported that her internship experience gave her a newfound sense of accomplishment unlike any other. Now she could see herself as a professional in the fields of human services and early childhood and clearly define her strengths and areas where she needed further development.

The coordinator and Alberta decided it would be good for her to set up regular Facetime meetings. Alberta indicated this helped keep her on track and accountable as issues came up in her life. Alberta mastered professional communication over the second year in the program. The relationships she made with the coordinator, instructors, her university supervisor, the cohort, and her academic advisor were key in Alberta's success. Her family and employer were instrumental in providing the supports Alberta needed to balance family, work, and college. With a team approach, Alberta confidently walked down the aisle to graduation with her children, mother, and her employer there to proudly witness this event.

Case Study: Molly

Molly is a Caucasian woman in her forties. Molly has two teenage children and a husband that works for a tire shop in their midsized urban Oregon city. She has been working for a non-profit agency that serves families at risk for child maltreatment for two years. Before that, she worked part-time as a self-sufficiency intake clerk at DHS while she was earning her associate of arts transfer degree. Molly has aspirations of earning a bachelor's degree and then going to graduate school to earn her master's in Social Work. She learned about the FHS-ECE program through a friend who attended a recruitment event at her community college.

Molly was attracted to the program because of her interest in helping children and families struggling with issues such as poverty, abuse and neglect, and drug and alcohol problems. When she learned the program was online with only two weekends per term on campus, 40 miles away, she decided she would apply. Molly neglected to talk with her family about applying and only mentioned her interest in the program in passing. Her thinking was that if she got into the program she could "sell" the idea to them. Molly is a first generation college student and her husband has a high school degree; they had conflicting opinions on the importance of higher education.

Molly contacted the FHS-ECE coordinator to learn more about the program and process of applying. Molly turned in all her materials after the deadline, but she was admitted into the program contingent on meeting some further requirements including: 1) attending the orientation; and 2) turning in her FBI background check before school started in the fall.

Molly emailed the FHS-ECE coordinator to let her know that a family problem prevented her from attending the orientation—her husband had made arrangements for them to attend a sporting event. An accommodation was made and Molly was able to get the information through a video recording of the orientation event. Molly also failed to turn in her background check by the due date. Program data has shown that students who miss these two important expectations often have continuing problems. This knowledge raised some red flags for the faculty and staff, who resolved to keep a close watch on Molly.

The first two weeks of the term, Molly appeared to be doing well with her coursework and she seemed to manage her time well. However, she arrived two hours late the first day of the weekend class. Breathlessly, she came up to the instructor during the middle of a lecture and announced, “The instructions were unclear about where to park and I couldn’t find the classroom!” Soon Molly settled in, started working with the small group of students at her table, and was actively engaged in class discussions.

Molly was late the following day and missed the librarian’s presentation on how to search for resources at the university library and the instructor’s discussion of the requirements for the term research paper. Molly’s research paper received a failing grade with an opportunity to revise and resubmit. Angrily, she emailed the instructor, berating her for her harsh grading and lack of instruction. She resubmitted her original draft with minimal changes.

By the beginning of her second quarter in the program, other instructors were reporting similar issues with Molly. These were discussed at faculty/staff meetings and by midterm she was contacted to come in for a POA. The afternoon of her POA, she arrived 30 minutes late and with a fluster of activity entered the room. Her body language expressed her annoyance with the meeting and she announced, “I hope you know that I have a client that is in dire need right now and you are taking me away from him!” It was clear that she felt the meeting was not important.

One of the additional program supports available this particular year was a social work graduate student intern from a nearby university. The intern was mentored in the role of retention support specialist for students at risk of failing. One of the intern’s experiences was attending POAs. During Molly’s POA, we discussed issues such as professional behavior (e.g., promptness, respectful behavior, communication, attendance) and academic expectations (e.g., writing expectations, citing sources). Once Molly began to understand that FHS faculty and staff were there to help her grow professionally, she began to relax and open up.

During the POA, she revealed that her family was not supportive of her return to school. It was taking time away from the family and they did not see the need for her to seek an advanced degree. Professional development goals were established for Molly and it was agreed that she would work one-on-one on professional behavior with the retention specialist intern. Eventually, it became clear to Molly that not approaching her family honestly from the start was a mistake for which she needed to take responsibility. Molly admitted she had a problem with being defensive and putting the blame on others when she was under stress.

Molly’s professional behavior started to improve after meeting with the retention specialist intern and other program faculty and staff over the course of winter term. Coursework during winter term included a seminar on self-care and Molly made some real progress in identifying strategies that would assist her in reducing stress. Molly took responsibility for any late or sub-standard work she turned in and was proactive in communicating her questions about assignments before due dates. She also met with staff at the tutoring center on campus to work on her writing skills.

By the end of spring term, Molly had met all the goals set in her POA. She was looking forward to the internship opportunities coming up summer term. Molly already knew where she wanted to intern—a women’s drug and alcohol treatment facility. She contacted the volunteer coordinator, Betsey, before the start of summer term. However, Betsey was out sick and did not respond to Molly’s repeated phone calls and emails. Molly arrived at the agency and demanded to speak with Betsey, who was still out sick. When Molly and Betsey connected a week later,

Molly made no attempt to hide her frustration at the lack of previous communication. Betsey discussed the internship opportunities available but Molly argued that the opportunities were beneath her level of professional experience. Betsey called the university internship coordinator the next week to discuss her concerns regarding Molly's professional behavior.

Once again, Molly was called in for a POA. This time she humbly and quickly admitted that she had let stress affect her professional behavior again. Molly was stressed because her internship might interfere with her summer plans. Her family was counting on her being finished with her school commitments by a certain date so they could go on a family vacation. Molly agreed she had let the pressures build up and took matters into her own hands to ensure a quick start at the agency she wanted. We discussed the strategies she had previously identified and revised her self-care plan. Included in those strategies was making use of the support of her university internship supervisor. One of the functions of a university supervisor is to act as a liaison and advocate between students and their internship sites. Molly agreed to contact her university supervisor first if she felt stressed or anxious about internship related issues. Another aspect of this situation was Molly's sense of entitlement since she was already working in the field. Part of being a college student in the FHS-ECE program is taking a step back and becoming an observer and learner. The university supervisor was also able to work through these concepts using the required human services text (Sweitzer & King, 2014) and supervision group discussions regarding the benefits of taking this approach to learning.

Molly continued to work on her professionalism throughout her time in the program and was able to earn positive feedback from her site supervisors and university internship supervisor. Her family's lack of support continued to affect her progress in subtle but important ways. Molly took a leave of absence due to family issues and was not able to graduate with her cohort. She instead took another year to complete her studies. Family support has been shown to be crucial in the success of first generation college students (Park & Choi, 2009). When one person in the family attends college, everyone else is affected to some degree (e.g., financially, emotionally, time, stress, etc.).

Alberta and Molly's stories help us understand the many challenges non-traditional college students face, including lack of family support, issues such as family health, limited resources, insufficient study and technology skills, working while going to college, and not prioritizing self-care routines. Our role as a professional training program is to bring out the strengths in our students, encourage them to succeed, and assist them in their professional development. In the following section we discuss interventions that can lead to professional growth for human services students.

Intervention for Professional Growth

Alberta and Molly give us a composite view of typical professional development challenges and strategies for growth within an online and hybrid family and human services bachelor's degree program with an emphasis in early childhood. With the increasing growth of online programs, it is important to provide the supports necessary to retain and graduate competent individuals into the human services and early childhood workforce. Tinto's (1975) model of student integration proposes student commitment and success is related to interactions between students, faculty, and support services. More recent models of student retention describe an interactive approach of both formal and informal student supports with committed partners on campus, especially for struggling students (Habley, 2004; Rovai, 2003).

Several limitations should be noted prior to our discussion of implications for practice. First, these case studies are based on the composite experiences of a small number of human services students in a single program and thus do not reflect the entire range of needs demonstrated by adult learners. In addition, the policies discussed in this article were developed for an on-campus program and have been adapted for an online and hybrid program that is relatively new. The outcomes relating to professional growth and student retention must be taken with caution. With only three years of data on how these policies are helping students with professional and behavioral development, we cannot conclusively state these policies resulted in improved student outcomes.

Despite these limitations, these case studies provide us with an insight into problems that create stress and barriers for many students; in turn these challenges can affect students' professional behavior and development. In this section, we provide a number of strategies that we have developed and implemented to respond to these challenges. We will discuss these challenges in the light of student retention as the primary goal, and the evidenced-based strategies shown to be effective in improving retention and professionalism.

Building the Foundation

Building a solid foundation for student success begins with establishing expectations. Shortly after students are admitted into the program, they are required to attend an orientation. The orientation is scheduled toward the end of spring term, three or four months before formal classes begin. The goals of the orientation are to: 1) meet cohort members, faculty, and staff; 2) learn the culture of the program and the behavioral expectations for professionalism; 3) discuss the student handbook components; and 4) review requirements (e.g., FBI background check, mandatory reporting training, weekend classes). Program staff and faculty have learned to keep in frequent contact by email or phone calls over the summer preceding the start of the program. Additionally, students are encouraged to make use of a cohort website. Each cohort has their own website where important information can be disseminated; for example, term registration information, textbook lists, scholarship information, and documents such as the student handbook and important forms. A week before courses start, students come back to campus for a technology training and pre-service event. The technology training gives students the opportunity to practice logging into their courses, uploading documents, writing on a discussion board, and other commonly used features of the online platform. Students more advanced in technology skills are able to assist those with fewer skills. During the pre-service, students learn about university supports such as the counseling center, tutoring, and health center; ethical and behavioral concerns regarding field placement; and a mandatory reporting training. The pre-service is another opportunity for making connections with their cohort, faculty, and staff.

Creating Connections

Relationship-building is an intentional process within the Family and Human Services program at the University of Oregon. Relationship building begins with initial contact during recruitment and application periods, orientation activities, pre-service, technology training, individualized advising, and personal check-ins and feedback once classes start. Additionally, relationship-building is emphasized within group supervision during students' internship experiences.

Building relationships with community providers and employers is also part of our strategic plan in supporting students. Our recruitment efforts within the community help

establish professional relationships with agencies, including Head Start and other early childhood and human services programs. One admission requirement is a letter of support from the student's employer. The purposes of the letter are to provide a recommendation focused on the student's commitment to the field, *and* to gain the employer's assurance they will support the student while attending the program. The employer's support has been essential to student success through providing flexible time, financial support, and tangible supports such as study space.

The cohort model optimizes relationship-building between students since cohort members attend the program together for two years. Students start building relationships with each other during the orientation and continue to form strong bonds as they attend online and hybrid courses and come to campus for meetings and weekend classes. In addition, during their internship experiences students attend weekly virtual group supervision meetings where they share their experiences and problem solve together. The cohort members can be a tremendous support system, providing study partnerships, emotional encouragement, and ride-sharing during weekend travel to classes.

Building effective and nurturing professional relationships with students establishes trust and credibility. This becomes even more important when faculty, staff, and university supervisors model professionalism. Professionalism is modeled in numerous formats, including discussion boards, emails, supervision groups, advising sessions, and during POA meetings. These online and face-to-face experiences establish trust and rapport that assist in positive results before any remedial intervention is needed (Flannery, 2013; Lightweis, 2014). Faculty and staff relationships with students are an essential component of the POA meetings as the goal is to provide support for students who are struggling, not to make punitive decisions (Lichtenstein, Lindstrom, & Kerewsky, 2005).

Utilizing Support Services

Providing extensive student supports can be costly and time-consuming. Most campuses have existing student supports that can assist programs to meet the needs of students experiencing challenges. These include nontraditional student support groups, tutoring, federal programs such as TRIO, parenting supports, campus childcare, and counseling services. The Federal TRIO Programs are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs (U.S Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.) Assisting students to access these programs and giving a warm handoff helps empower students to be proactive in utilizing services. Partnering with other programs to provide extra support is another innovative method we have used to assist in student supports. By partnering with the social work department of another university, we were able to add a retention specialist intern to our team without bearing further cost to our program.

Teaching Critical Skills

Students going into the fields of human services and early childhood need to learn and practice skills associated with self-care. The concept of self-care is so important that it is explicitly named in the CSHSE national standards for the baccalaureate degree in human services (CSHSE, 2013). Infusing the concepts of personal wellness, stress reduction, and

professional self-development within the human services curriculum is essential in giving students a broad perspective on these concepts and how these skills can improve the effectiveness of professional practice (Riley & Rouse, 2015). The concepts of self-care and personal wellness are woven throughout the FHS-ECE curriculum and discussed in depth during POA meetings, supervision, and other face-to-face meeting times. Additionally, students study and discuss issues around self-care and professionalism in the required text, *The Successful Internship: Personal, Professional, and Civic Development in Experiential Learning (4th Edition)* (Sweitzer & King, 2014).

The Sweitzer and King (2014) text is also utilized within supervision groups. Supervision is a key component of the FHS-ECE program and serves as an essential format for working on critical skills. Students placed in internships require supervision to ensure that they have guidance in meeting professional expectations and receive feedback about their performance. In addition to learning about self-care, students gain experience in critical skills such as personal boundaries, verbal communication, and professionalism. Virtual supervision groups also provide the opportunity to practice professional behaviors unique to online supervision formats. This includes learning how to appropriately access online platforms and apply traditional group supervision expectations within an online environment. Adhering to traditional group supervision expectations can be challenging for students, since they typically access virtual supervision meetings from home, after a full day of work, with their families present. Students learn to exhibit professional behavior by limiting distractions (e.g., finding a quiet place where others in the house will not interrupt), maintaining confidentiality (e.g., meeting in a space that is private so that others do not hear the conversation), and exhibiting a professional demeanor such as appropriate dress (e.g., attending virtual meeting in professional clothing rather than pajamas). Supervisors check in regularly with students and provide guidance and feedback regarding all aspects of professional behavior related to group supervision.

Students' abilities to meet the CSHSE standards (2013) relating to professionalism and self-care are regularly assessed through field study and supervision evaluations (e.g., self, site supervisor, and UO supervisor evaluation forms). Students meeting the standards receive a passing grade for their internship hours and supervision; students who do not meet professional standards receive remedial instruction, additional supervision, and often, a POA meeting. Coursework and subsequent assessments related to professionalism are additional methods of insuring that students meet CSHSE (2013) national standards; for example, term papers that include ethical scenarios, final exams that include prevention and intervention strategies for self-care, and a senior capstone project presentation where students demonstrate professionalism and how they navigated challenges.

Creating Individualized Plans

Students in the FHS-ECE program have unique stories, experiences, problems, and goals. Meeting the diverse needs of non-traditional students can be challenging. The Family and Human Services program, established in 1998, has had an exceptional graduation rate of 97%. Many of the student supports developed for the FHS program have been utilized for the Early Childhood Emphasis students, including POA meetings. When a student is experiencing continued problems with academics, life, or behavior, the faculty discuss these issues in a confidential session. A potential plan for remediation is outlined and meeting with the student is set. The student is an active participant in the meeting and together with staff and faculty, develops the finalized plan (Lichtenstein, Lindstrom, & Kerewsky, 2005). The POA process has

been successful in effectively remediating students' problems in the program and assisting them to graduation (Lichtenstein et al., 2005).

Similarly, individualized advising is essential in keeping students informed of their progress toward graduation. When life happens and students get off-track, the academic advisors are there to meet individually with students to revise their graduation plan. Advising the FHS-ECE students has been especially challenging due to complicated transcripts from community colleges, lapses in education, and funding problems. The academic advisors are committed to providing the support needed to reduce frustration and stress regarding their academic progress.

Future Implications

As online and hybrid college programs increase and attract diverse adult learners, colleges and universities must recognize and respond to the unique challenges of these students. In the FHS-ECE program, we have found there is an association between student stress levels, behavioral problems, and academic problems. These problems are often associated with students' ability to balance work, family, and school, factors that have been shown to significantly affect graduation rates (Park & Choi, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2013). A program value we strive to achieve is providing the means to support students' development as professionals. The comprehensive supports we have outlined in this article have been effective with diverse students, including adult learners in an online and hybrid program, and assist in student retention and professional growth.

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