

**“WHERE HAVE ALL THE
ORGANIZERS GONE?” A STUDY OF
HUNTER CO ALUMNA FROM 1996-
2006**

**Perspectives on the Competencies and Values in the
Curriculum Looking Back and Career Tracks Moving
Forward**

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HIGHLIGHTS

151 alumna completed the questionnaire; about a 50% response rate.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

- **Alumni responded favorably to the CO curriculum and found almost all of the course objectives extremely relevant to their work. They made many positive suggestions for ways to improve the curriculum (sample quotes at the end), although many said it was fine the way it is.**
- **Fewer alumni are working in CO related jobs and have fewer CO related job responsibilities over time.**
- **Almost all (94%) of the graduates identify professionally as a social worker. 52% belong the NASW. Additionally, 2/3 alumni also identify as organizers, even though for many it is not their primary job title or responsibility.**
- **Many alumni are very active in their communities as volunteers, and over 1/4 work a second job—mostly in CO/macro activities. On the social activism scale, a majority had been active but less currently than in the past.**
- **In spite of their job classification, alumni overwhelmingly say their CO training has influenced the way they approach their job regardless of whether they hold a direct CO job or not; almost all say they employ a CO perspective in their work (samples are found at the end).**
- **The offer lots of advice for current students, most of which was overwhelmingly positive and useful.**
- **Most alumni said they are interested in networking with other CO alumni; 2/3 would like continuing education in components of C.O. P. D. and a majority would like to mentor students.**

RETROSPECTIVE VIEWS OF HCSSW PROGRAM (N=132)

Alumni were asked to reflect on all the components of graduate social work education at the time when they completed it and currently after having been in the field for a while. At the time they graduated, more than 50% of alumni identified the following as contributing immensely to their education in order of frequency:

- **field placement (61.8%),**
- **peer group interaction (54.2%),**
- **co courses (53.4%)**
- **field instructors (50.8%)**

Over time, the percentage who said the curriculum immensely contributed in all components of the curriculum dropped below 50 % except for field work (60.3%).

RETROSPECTIVE VIEWS OF THE THREE REQUIRED COURSES (N=130)

Most alumni ranked the relevance of the three required courses—CO I, CO II, and CO III—for CO & P practice today as highly or very relevant III with very few exceptions. **The modal response for almost all the objectives was “highly relevant” for all but a few competencies.**

More than 50% of the alumni said the following objectives were highly relevant:

- **for CO I:** “The opportunity to explore personal biases related to CO practice (69%) ;” cultural competence and pursuit of social justice,(65.1%) ” “written and oral expression (50.8%) ...”
- **for CO II:** examine one’s own personal strengths/tactical self-awareness; (71%)” “the ‘isms’(63.7%), “alternative models of community building, (51.2%);
- **for CO III:** “understand multiple constituencies, ethical issues, conflicts (51.6%),” “influence of “isms’ (53.3%), “coalitions and collaborations...(62.5%).

INFLUENCE OF FRAMEWORKS FROM THE CO CURRICULUM ON WORK

The following were identified as critically important or had influenced them a lot.
In order of influence (N=120)

FRAMEWORK	%
Tactical self awareness	84.3
Self-leadership	83.2
Cultural competency and addressing “the isms.”	79.5
Strategic perspective (focus on goals and objectives and means to accomplish them)	77.7
Leadership development with community/client members	77.0
A participatory planning model	73.1
Leadership development with staff	65.6
Problem solving using a Freirian approach	58.3

CAREER PATHS (N=108)

44 of the alumni (37.3%) considered their first job primarily organizing (N=118); but only 32 (29.6%) considered their current job organizing. [NOTE: For about ½ of the alumni, their first job is also their current job.]

First Job Out of School

	N	%
CO related	53	42.7
Social Work-not CO	60	48.4
Different field or Student or Unemployed	11	8.9

Current Job (if not first job)

	N	%
CO related	42	33.9
Social Work-not CO	60	48.4
Different field or Student or Unemployed	22	17.7

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FIRST JOB TITLE (N=120)

	N	%
Program Director/ Coordinator	45	37.2
Community organizing/planning/development	22	18.2
Casework/clinical	18	14.9
Administration/supervisor	17	14.0
Unemployed or other	7	5.8
Policy/Research	12	9.9

CURRENT JOB TITLE (N=71)

	N	%
Program Director/ Coordinator	42	34.7
Community organizing/planning & related	16	13.2
Casework/clinical	25	20.7
Administration/supervisor	19	15.7
Unemployed or other	10	8.3

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES (N=111)

	<i>First Job After HCSSW</i> % Most, a lot, some	<i>Current</i> % Most, a lot, some
Legislative Advocacy/Lobbing	32.4	33.3
Community/Consumer Mobilization	58.1	81.6 *
Coalition Building & Interorganizational Activiti	64.3	51.3
Program Planning	74.5	75.2
Program Administration	68.8	65.1
Staff Supervision	45.4	55.8 *
Case Management	51.3	43.8
Individual, Family or Group Services	61.1	57.0
Policy Analysis & Development	38.9	46.9 *
Leading/Organizing Groups	65.1	62.6
Fundraising: Grassroots	19.5	13.9
Fundraising: Grant Development	33.1	32.0
Leadership Development	63.7	63.8
Training/Teaching	63.9	64.2
Community Education/Outreach	61.2	60.1
Public Relations/Newsletters	44.9	33.8
Research/Evaluation	43.5	52.6 *
Facilitating meetings	70.6	68.0
Using Media including Technology	58.9	57.7

* = Responsibilities that increased with current job.

ADDITIONAL EMPLOYMENT

33 of alumni (28.5%) have additional paid employment (N=116), almost all of those work 10 hours or less per week. They do it equally to supplement income (73.5%) and provide additional professional challenges and opportunities (70.6%). Eleven were doing educational and training activities; 8 were doing macro related work; 6 worked at the micro level.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVISM OUTSIDE OF WORK (N=122)

Almost half of the alumni (56/45.9%) have been active or a leader in community-based organizations and campaigns. Of the 46 who specified their activism, 12 were involved in issue-based, non electoral activities; 6 were in electoral/political work; 7 were in active in coalitions or cbo/neighborhood organizations; 6 were doing more hands on volunteering; 5 were on boards or in the leadership of local organizations.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFY AND ACTIVISM

Almost all the alumni identify as social workers (94%); about 1/3 supervise MSW employees or students; about 30% are LMSW's, and 64 (52%) are members of NASW.

About 66% also identify as an organizer, and about 21% (25) belong to other professional associations. The most common of those were ACOSA and the NWSWM.

ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

	% yes since graduation	% yes in last year
	N=115	N=106
Testified before a public body	28.4	20.0
Lobbied a legislature or other government agency	47.8	38.1
Signed a petition	88.7	82.1
Worked on a political or social cause	68.7	61.5
Financially contributed to a political or social cause	73.9	67.9
Organized a community meeting or event	57.4	52.8
Attended a protest rally	68.7	53.8
Engaged in civil disobedience	19.1	8.6
Joined a picket line	10.5	10.3
Played an active role in community or civic affairs	53.5	46.2
Played an active role in a professional social work Organization	27.8	20.8

IMPACT OF THE CURRICUM AND THEIR CO & P SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION ON WORK (Open Ended Questions)

About 55% (n=87) responded to the question about the impact of CO training on their job responsibilities. A content analysis of responses indicated that 75 of the comments were positive; 8 were negative, and 4 were mixed.

	<u>Comments</u>
	<p>Even though I direct a case management program, spending the majority of my time directly working with individuals and families, my CO training causes me to constantly be aware of how the macro is affecting the micro. This influences how I approach my job responsibilities by reminding me that I must also engage in working for systemic changes that impact my clients' individuals situations, i.e. joining a coalition to reform Adult Protective Services, in addition to advocating with the agency on behalf of individual clients.</p>
	<p>I see bigger picture. Integrity in working one on one and in groups. How to organize meetings, groups, participatory/ task oriented models. Political perspective when analyzing office culture and social problems. Joining client where is - bringing additional lens. Always examining the multi issues and the diversity issues in group work White privilege and other issues of race and gender, class, sexuality in the workplace and around us.</p>
	<p>My community organizing training helps me bring a macro perspective to my work as a clinician. it is imperative that all social workers, especially clinicians, have some knowledge about community organizing principles in order to help their clients most effectively.</p>
	<p>Despite the fact my current job is more focused on mental health services, the ideological base of CO&P constantly carries me in my work. Understanding the cultural, social, racial, environmental, economic, etc contexts that the youth are coming from resonate with my CO training.</p>

Question: In what ways, if any, do you employ a C.O. & P. perspective in your everyday work, 75 responded. Of those, 70 (93%) had positive comments as per below; 5 said they did not or had negative comments.

	<u>Comment</u>
	In all our program planning and fundraising, I think about community input, bottom-up planning, our organization's accountability to the community. I also use planning techniques to manage groups of staff and achieve objectives.
	ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION FROM ALL IN TERMS OF COLLECTIVE PROCESS. HEIGHTENING AWARENESS AROUND THE ISSUES SUCH AS "ISMS" THAT DIRECTLY IMPACT OUR WORK.
	I use historical movements as examples of how people can change over time. I try to promote change through pushing county policies that directly impact my customers. I inform my culturally unaware staff of historical references that shape the way our customers think and act. I use spirituality and religion as part of my assessment even though it is not on the county assessment. I advocate for my customers when dealing with employers, county workers and my own agency.
	Doing macro and micro issues- thinking of policy implications and activism necessary based on issues, problems, challenges. How relate to colleagues , develop leaders in community and at work. Bring teaching into the workplace thru student work. Using Co lens work one on one - - thinking of organizing and advocacy modalities during assessment. bringing CO to an office climate through knowledge and work. Organizing a collective, non profit, outreach to groups, designing a campaign for a political and social end.
	Mostly taking into account the opinion and needs of the community being served and encouraging clients to demand their rights. Also engaging in self awareness at all times. Having a C.O. background helps me to have a better understanding of policies and an appreciation of how it impacts the community at the various settings i have worked.
	I approach everything with a CO&P perspective. I try to always be conscious of my motivations/ biases, I try to empower workers/ clients, I attempt to understand the specific challenges faced by clients, I am involved in the community, political groups etc and attempt to approach issues from a micro and macro perspective.
	Strength based approach with students, providing opportunities for community members to become leaders and voice their thoughts/feelings, constantly reflecting on myself in relation to the people I am working with.
	I try to see how individual cases add up to a bigger picture and how systems effect outcomes for individuals
	I TRY TO EXAMINE THE NEEDS OF OTHERS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW TO FORM COALITIONS AND MAKE THE MOST OF INDIVIDUAL SKILLS. THIS HELPS IN MANAGING A

	STAFF OF VOLUNTEERS, MEEING THEIR NEEDS AS WELL AS THOSE OF CLIENTS AND ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDERS.
	Always recognize and invest key stakeholders in planning and implementation process.
	leadership development, participatory planning model, strategic perspective in counseling.
	Everyday my mission is to connect what we are doing with our clients back to what is happening in their communities.
	I approach everything with a CO & P perspective. I try to always be conscious of my motivations/ biases, I try to empower workers/ clients, I attempt to understand the specific challenges faced by clients, I am involved in the community, political groups etc &; attempt to approach issues from a micro &; macro perspective.
	My supervision w/ directs is more of a coaching style w/ having the director own their vision &; projects
	I go to work every day to try to help foster community: to try to give voice to people without one. Some days are better than others!
	Understanding how the “isms” affect the community and participants, planning programs &; agency strategic planning, in dealing with people - participants, staff, families, etc.
	Try to involve clients in helping shape programs/ policy and services
	Foster active collaboration with other agencies
	In everyday work - CO II has been most helpful - the use of self in all situations & interactions with people - including tactical self & strategizing to sway higher-up opinions to better serve the needs of people. Also - engaging people in the process - so they can see the benefits of the big picture.
	Meet people were they are, get to know them and their story, and bring them to another level of understanding about their strengths and areas that need improvement.

Question: If you were teaching C.O. & P. today, what would you keep or add to the curriculum to increase skills, knowledge and values? What would you omit or revise?

Among the themes, alumni suggested adding **more current case studies, hands-on problem-solving**, in other words **more practical skills** and application; another major theme was **current models and contexts for organizing**. A few suggested **strengthening field**.

<u>SPSS ID</u>	<u>Comment</u>
139	it feels like such a blur nearly 4 years later - but i would liked to have spent more time with specific problem sovling, talking about what is difficult in this work. i would want more specific leadership training skills. i would have liked to have learned more rather than helping others "catch up" to where i was when i entered school - although i totally understand the challenges of teaching to the group. i would have liked to have taken more advantage of my peers and educators at the time.
126	I appreciated the education with CO&P, but am disappointed not to have more experience in the other methods. I think there should be more diversity and encouragement of learning other methods. Overall, I think the classes need to be more challenging and that professors should hold students to a higher standard. Also think the internship placements need to be stronger for CO, Hunter should have a clear agreement with the placement. My placements were both very weak and disappointing due to poor supervision and lack of challenging work to do.
119	Revise planning course so more student participatory and applicable to today's anti -planning climate in the social work field. How planner in a developers world.
117	I would reduce the historical material and focus on what is currently happening in today's world relating to CO activities, methods utilized, what has been most successful, and what has not.
140	I would nail it down and decide what the heck CO is even about. Instead of all the wasted time and group exercise nonsense, I would walk through substance - social theory, heavy policy from ALL perspectives, and a pragmatic, realistic view of where CO is now, and what use it has and how effective it can be. Content would be refreshing, for example - some BOOKS, instead of thin-broth articles. And no more Friere and dated Left-wing hocus-pocus from the early 70's. I'm a Leftist, of sorts, myself, but I don't support Chavez, or Castro or Mao. Let's stop dressing up the truth - much of CO is right-wing - people organizing to oppose busing...that was CO. Right? So let's see how it can be dangerous and how it can be abused, .
98	Self awareness is critical since it is almost the only tiem when one can reflect on how he/she wants to be as an organizer, working with vulnerable populations. There is nothing really from the curriculum that has to be eliminated.

	However, what was missing was real concrete examples of what is organizing. It is important to take time to acquire theories and self reflection, however, since it is a practical field, I would have liked many more speakers working in the field who could have answered questions and give their vision of what are the joys and difficulties of doing organizing.
95	i thoroughly enjoyed electoral activism and hope it is still part of the curriculum.
92	More hands-on experience workshops
87	Honestly, I believe that the breadth of topics covered in our CO&P courses was amazing and important! Now that as a CO student in youth mental health services, I think it would be so interesting and important to discuss counseling services utilizing a CO&P model.
81	I would not change objectives. I would add classes that allow students to hone skills and discuss and share work being done in field placement. Learning how to run meetings, overcoming obstacles w/ regards to coalitions, tips on how to interact and organize community members etc.
80	Keep: Tactical Self awareness, teachings of Freire, Needs Assessment, historical framework to social work practice/CO, citizen participation, coalition building, strategies and techniques for working with communities. Revise/include: Public speaking and general admin type influences that exist in CO work (i.e. policy)
71	Movement building strategies and skills; history of social movement organizing against oppression; anti-oppression work; confronting the truth about non profits; anti racist work
66	I would change nothing
64	I would encourage students to have at least 2 courses on ethics. I would add a few more classes on policy/advocacy, and options to combine CO with other fields and areas of training. I would add a creative writing class or some other artistic/expression classes with all the methods.
58	I will keep the perspective of looking at the past and dissecting how people planned to put things into action. Also speaking about racism out in the open. I would not revise anything at this moment.
46	CO III should be less of an overview and more in-depth into participatory models of organizing. Political advocacy should be a required course for Co students
45	I would not omit any of the courses
40	I would not change objectives. I would add classes that allow students to hone skills and discuss & share work being done in field placement. Learning how to run meetings, overcoming obstacles w/ regards to coalitions, tips on how to interact & organize community members etc.
6	the electoral and political activism courses were not available when I was a student. I would encourage greater education on the political process and supporting systems change through leveraging political resources.
2	CO 3 was too compressed - thus tended towards superficial and/or irrelevant- either stretch it to two semesters or break it into more focused electives. - add more on tactical campaign planning

Question: What advice do you have for HCSSW C.O. & P. Graduates?

74 alumni answered the question.

Below are the range of responses. **The most commonly made suggestions include: networking; being open and flexible, continuing learning including post graduate opportunities, and taking additional methods.**

<u>SPSS ID</u>	<u>Comment</u>
137	TAKE IT ALL IN LIKE A SPONGE AND KEEP SQUEEZING IT OUT WHEN YOU HIT THE REAL WORLD!!!
133	The education part is easier than real practice. You have to pay a lot of attention to ethics and understand your role and responsibility as part of this profession. It's not something to take lightly. At times you'll find yourself doing a lot of advocacy for yourself and your clients to people who you would think are on your team. #1 make sure that you surround yourself with other social work professionals who still value their education and the meaning of being a Social Worker.
132	Unfortunately, direct practice positions generally pay more than those labeled as "organizing" jobs. However, you can always engage in organizing activities along with direct practice, so you should never feel that you have "sold out." Financial well-being is a valid concern for the social worker.
117	Focus on developing your own ideas and strategies for CO. Do not be tied to old approaches about how to organize. Take an honest, multi-dimensional look at situations within communities, don't be afraid to be critical of old ideas as to cause and effect, be open to having your ideas about things challenged. Seek input, and information from a broad diversity of community members.
90	STICK TO ORGANIZING! There are a lot of organizing opportunities available; be patient and open-minded. Also, find a support network of like-minded organizers who you can depend on for advice, motivation, and ideas! Always, always, always remember your role, your weakness, your strengths and your ability to either keep things in place or to rock the boat!
80	Don't freak out if you can't keep up with the reading. Get a head start on Freire. Form peer groups with students and meet regularly to reflect, debrief, and have light-hearted conversations. Be open to self reflection. Take advantage of the opportunities to get involved and get involved outside of HCSSW
76	Although you may find yourself in a social work position that is not primarily C.O., you will quickly realize how necessary it is to utilize many of the C.O. skills you learn – outreach has been the most imperative for me!
56	The CO & P track is an exciting one with many different options for employment. That is what I found to be the best gain for me professionally. I was always interested in social policy and its effect on the community. CO was the only method that addressed this issue in depth and allowed for students like me to be engaged in the social work profession.

40	It may take time to find the job/ career you want. Continue to volunteer & get involved in issues you love. If you work hard & are dedicated, doors will open up. Do not be afraid to take a job that is not perfect, just so long as you know you will learn something from it.
30	Working in conservative/ conventional institutions can be difficult with a CO framework. Finding colleagues @ our workplace (very difficult) or even outside of your workplace that agree with your perspective & can hear you out & perhaps give you some tools is invaluable. Also, change is sometimes gradual...knowing the players & personalities will guide your push for change. often times, too much change too quick can backfire. know your players!

BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

AGE (N=109)

	N	%
UNDER 25	4	3.7
25-29	31	28.4
30-34	33	30.3
35-39	23	21.1
40-44	7	6.4
45 & OVER	11	10.1

YEAR GRADUATED (N=130)

	N	%
2005-2007	72	55.4
2001-2004	31	23.8
1996-1999	27	20.8

GENDER AND SEXUALITY (N=111)

	N	%
FEMALE	92	83
MALE	18	16
TRANSGENDER	1	0.9

RACE AND ETHNICITY (N=112)

	N	%
CAUCASIAN/WHITE	62	55.4
AFRICAN AMERICAN	13	11.6
HISPANIC/LATINO/A	15	13.4
ASIAN & PI	11	9.8
OTHER	11	9.8

POLITICAL AFFILIATION (N=107)

	N	%
RADICAL (LEFT)	26	24.3
LIBERAL	56	52.3
MODERATE	12	11.2
CONSERVATIVE OR RADICAL RIGHT	1	.9
OTHER	12	11.2