

# **Musings on the History of Social Work Education**

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Recently I had occasion to take note of the fact that The Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University was celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday as a social work degree granting institution. And, similarly, the College of Social Work at The Ohio State University celebrated its 100th birthday in 2016. The MSASS degree is, and always has been, a master's degree. OSU's first degree in 1916 was a Bachelor's of Science in Social Administration; a master degree was added in 1923

The two birthdays and the two different degree programs got me to thinking and recollecting about the prodigious and often divisive 20th century conflict between two opposing social work education organizations representing two very dissimilar approaches to social work education. And so, as a way of saying "Happy Birthday" to both MSASS and OSU, I have assembled this brief essay for those who like to recall history, as well as for those who may learn about it for the first time.

## **The Early Years of the "Troubles"**

From the OSU undergraduate perspective, the story begins with one man, namely, James Edward Hagerty, a 20th century higher education pioneer in sociology and economics. Dr. Hagerty's extraordinary career is intimately connected to the story about two opposing voluntary educational associations, namely: The American Association of Schools of Social Work (AASSW) and the National Association of Schools of Social Administration (NASSA) and

the opposing views on the structure and philosophy of social work education which these organizations represented. First, let me tell you about Dr. Hagerty.

Having completed his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania in sociology and economics, Dr. Hagerty was appointed in 1901 as an assistant professor at OSU and became the first chair of that combined department in 1903. In 1916, Hagerty became the first Dean of the newly created College of Commerce and Journalism (which became Commerce and Administration in 1921.) He remained chair of sociology and Dean of Commerce and Administration until 1926 when he returned to teaching, only to be pressed back into academic leadership again in 1927 as the first Director of the newly established School of Social Administration, now the OSU College of Social Work. Hagerty's history at OSU is a history of "*firsts*". He is also credited by his biographers with creating and teaching the *first* course on "marketing" to be offered anywhere in the USA. In recognition of his extraordinary service to OSU and for his exceptional leadership in the realm of higher education, within weeks of his demise in 1946, the OSU Board of Trustees renamed the Commerce Building "Hagerty Hall". His building continues to be an essential and popular classroom and educational program facility on the OSU Oval. (OSU Archives)

As Dean of the newly created College of Commerce and Journalism in 1916, Dr. Hagerty envisioned an academic entity which would "place an emphasis on professional training" in a wide range of fields. Hagerty's college included curricula in accounting, banking and finance, charity organization, insurance, journalism, manufacturing, marketing, public service, social service, and transportation. This college was a place where education in the newly emerging "white collar" professions would take place.

Courses on social service, charity organization, and public service had been offered at Ohio State in Hagerty's Department of Sociology and Economics since 1901 and by 1910 this training had taken a more definite form requiring two years of course work and a one-year internship in a social service agency. Hagerty's students did their "field work" in a Columbus slum neighborhood not far from the OSU campus known locally as "Fly Town" because the open sewers there attracted large numbers of these disease carrying insects. Hagerty was on the Board of Directors of the Godman Guild, a neighborhood settlement agency located in the heart of Fly Town, and his students interned there (Ukockis, 2005).

By the decade of the 1920's, education in social work was taking place in many institutions around the country at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Dr. Hagerty was a strong advocate for undergraduate social work education. His widely read and influential book *The Training of Social Workers* (1931) includes a chapter entitled "Graduate or Undergraduate Schools of Social Work" in which he discusses the growing divisions in the debate over this question. From its inception in 1919 the American Association of Schools of Social Work consisted of several prestigious private institutions whose members advocated that the first social work degree should be a graduate level degree offered after the completion of a baccalaureate. Hagerty disagreed vigorously with this position. He and other AASSW members, who primarily represented public institutions, argued that the first social work degree should be the baccalaureate. In the chapter mentioned above, he argues extensively for the idea that the purposes and aims of the colleges of commerce and of education coincide most closely with those of schools of social work (p. 83). He especially favors comparing social work education

with teacher education: a four-year undergraduate curriculum with a strong, supervised internship.

In 1937, the AASSW (mostly private schools including the predecessor to MSASS) moved to limit membership in the Association to graduate schools, and in 1939, AASSW voted to extend its accreditation function exclusively to programs with “two years of graduate study leading to the master’s degree” (Social Work Year Book, 1957, p.218). This action on the part of AASSW caused several land grant and other state institutions, including Ohio State, to form the National Association of Schools of Social Schools Administration (NASSA). This organization advocated for the baccalaureate degree as the first professional social work degree and for a one-year master’s degree in social work. By 1950, NASSA’s membership included 32 colleges and universities (Social Work Year Book, 1960, p. 224). The curricula for the AASSW graduate schools and the NASSW baccalaureate departments were much the same. Courses in both camps reflected what social work educators at the time were calling the “Basic Eight”: case work, group work, community organization, social administration, social research, field instruction, medical information, and psychiatric information.

This was clearly an untenable situation for professional social work education. There were two very dissimilar pathways to the first social work degree, both approaches employed very similar curricula, and each association claimed rights to accreditation, although the claim by NASSA was not as well recognized by accrediting bodies that regulated accrediting organizations at the time. The conflict was moved toward resolution, after extensive study, by the publication in 1951 of the so-called Hollis-Taylor report entitled *Social Work Education in the United States*. This report recommended the formation of a single organization with broad

representative membership that could define accreditation standards and promote the enrichment of social work education. Thus it was that in 1952, the Council on Social Work Education was created and AASSW and NASSW were dissolved. Significantly, in 1952 with the establishment of CSWE, agreement was reached that the accrediting function of the newly created Council would be discharged only in relation to graduate professional schools (Social Work Year Book, 1957).

In a private conversation (circa 1969) between the author and John Kidneigh, then the Director of the University Of Minnesota School Of Social Work, Mr. Kidneigh disclosed that this decision, in which he played a significant role, was the result of a very hard fought negotiation. According to Director Kidneigh, The NASSA group was very reluctant to give up accrediting baccalaureate social work programs and the one-year master's degrees. According to Kidneigh, he and his associates who favored the two-year masters organized a campaign of friendly persuasion, horse-trading, and social cooptation involving many cocktail parties and upscale dinners before the votes were available to support the "graduate only" position. Following the vote and at a private gathering of the advocates for "graduate only," Kidneigh revealed that the group celebrated their victory by chanting "NASSA in the "cold, cold ground" to the tune of the minstrel song by Stephen Foster.

Of course, the story did not end with the "graduate only" victory song and dance. In 1956, membership in CSWE consisted of 59 graduate schools, 19 undergraduate departments, NASW, and 30 employing social service agencies. So, the camel was diminished but still had a nose and perhaps a leg in the tent. Early in the 1960's, person power projections for the field of social welfare published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, estimated that several hundred

thousand of newly minted social workers would be required in the next decade to meet burgeoning social service demands. Then, in 1969, the membership in NASW recognized the baccalaureate degree as the first professional social work degree, thus making BA's in social work eligible for full membership in the professional body. After some delay, in 1974 CSWE assumed responsibility for accrediting baccalaureate social work programs. Soon thereafter, the one-year, advanced standing masters option was sanctioned by CSWE's Commission on Accreditation.

So, the fight was over but it is worth noting that for 35 years-- from 1939 to 1974-- the only accredited social work degree in the USA was the master degree.

### **Afterthoughts**

Notwithstanding the 35 years during which the "master's only" position was the standard, when one examines the landscape of today's social work education structure, it is reasonable to conclude that the vision of James E. Hagerty and his colleagues at the state institutions that advocated for the BA plus one-year of graduate education for the masters has been realized. And, similarly, the "master's only" position is still evident insofar as several outstanding institutions offer only the master's degree (Chicago, Columbia, Case Western Reserve, Washington U. in St. Louis, Denver and others), although most of these schools do offer some reduced study time or advanced standing for qualified students. Thus, we have arrived at a completely workable accommodation. Happy Birthday MSASS and OSU! And grateful Birthday Greetings also to those institutions which participated in the initiation of professional social work education 100 years ago: Bryn Mawr College, Columbia University,

Smith College, Simmons College, the Universities of Chicago, Minnesota, Missouri (Columbia), Pennsylvania, Pittsburg, and Virginia Commonwealth.

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