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# **Mental Health Program Student Characteristics and Employment 2005–2010**

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## INTRODUCTION

The California Mental Health Service Act (MHSA), passed by voters as a 2004 ballot initiative (Proposition 63), requires large-scale system change in the public mental health system through a shift to recovery-oriented services for diverse populations. In-service training for existing professionals and nonprofessionals and development of a new workforce for revamped systems are drivers for successfully achieving and maintaining systemic changes. To support workforce development, MHSA provides funding through the Workforce Education and Training (WET) component to support local and statewide efforts.

Established in 1990, the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) is a consortium of schools of social work, county child welfare and behavioral health agencies, state agencies, the California chapter of the National Association of Social Worker, and foundations. CalSWEC provides professional education, student support, in-service training, and workforce evaluation research—all directed toward developing effective, culturally competent public service delivery in California. Since 2005, the CalSWEC Mental Health Program (MHP) has received MHSA WET funds to address mental health social work workforce shortages, diversity in the workforce, and preparation of social work professionals for careers in recovery-centered systems of care. MHP distributes stipend funding for almost 200 full-time MSW students annually to schools of social work in California. CalSWEC participants also have collaboratively developed a set of core competencies for behavioral health MSWs that each school incorporates into classroom and fieldwork education. In return for a one-year \$18,500 stipend, each student is expected to complete a placement, take specialized coursework grounded in the competencies, and work for one year post-graduation in a county mental health agency or contract community-based organization.

From its first year, MHP has gathered data pre- and post-graduation about the stipend recipients for administrative reporting purposes and to investigate the following questions:

- Who receives stipends?
- What are the graduation and employment patterns for students who receive stipends?
- Do graduates complete the payback obligation, and if so, how?
- Once payback is complete, do graduates continue to work in the mental health system?

In 2009, CalSWEC published the *Mental Health Social Work Stipend Program Three-Year Outcome Report, 2005–2008* by Graduate Student Researchers Siroj Sirojudin and Anupama Jacobs, under the direction of Harry and Riva Specht Professor James Midgley, CalSWEC Principal Investigator. (Midgley, Sirojudin, Jacobs, 2009). That report addressed the study questions for the MPH’s first three cohorts. This report examines demographic characteristics of the stipend recipients in all of the cohorts through the 2010 graduates, their payback employment, and their post-payback employment.

## **GRADUATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

Between 2005 and 2009 MHP distributed 196 stipends annually to each of 17 schools of social work. Out of a possible 980 stipends, the schools awarded stipends to a total of 911 students. Information about these students is grouped into five cohorts (2005–2006, 2006–2007, 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010). The great majority of the students completed academic program requirements, graduated, and secured employment in California’s community mental health system within the required timeframe. Most also completed their obligation of employment for one calendar year in a mental health agency. The number of students who met their obligation through cash payback in lieu of employment has steadily declined since the first year.

The following table summarizes information previously reported about graduation and employment patterns for the first three cohorts (2005–2006, 2006–2007, and 2007–2008), and adds information for the last two cohorts (2008–2009 and 2009–2010). At the time that data were collected for this report, some graduates in the last two cohorts were still in the payback process and a few were still seeking employment.

**Table 1: Graduation and Payback Summary: 2006-2010 Cohorts**

COHORT	N	Graduated on Time	% Graduated on Time	Employment Repayment	% Emp. Repay.	Cash Repayment	Payback Completed
2005-2006	174	153	88%	154	89%	20	174
2006-2007	187	172	92%	177	95%	10	187
2007-2008	184	178	97%	171	94%	13	184 <sup>1</sup>
2008-2009	183	171	93%	175	96%	8	181 (2 still paying back)
2009-2010	183	172	94%	154	% 84%	4	NA

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS**

**Student Diversity**

In addition to addressing the shortage of professionally qualified social workers able to practice effectively in California’s community mental health system, as previously noted, the MHP also seeks to increase the number of ethnically and linguistically diverse social workers. Workforce diversity and cultural competence in the state’s community mental health system has been viewed with concern for many years, since a strongly held value in community mental health settings is that an ethnically and linguistically diverse workforce is fundamental to quality care for consumers and their families

Accordingly, the MHP schools have made a determined effort to ensure that each student stipend cohort is diverse. The graduation of significant numbers of students from underrepresented ethnic minorities and from various regions of California is an important achievement of the program.

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<sup>1</sup> One graduate in this cohort died; payback requirement was waived.

Table 2 describes student ethnicities in the five cohorts. Over half the students self-report that they are from minority groups. Approximately 25% of the recipients are Hispanic/Latino/Chicano; 14% are Asian or Pacific Islanders; 10% are African American; and 1% are American Indian. Forty-three percent (43%) of the students are White/Caucasian. In the first five years of the program, only two students (0.2%) declined to state their ethnicity, and 6% self-identified as “other,” i.e. various religious, linguistic, or multiethnic backgrounds.

**Table 2: Ethnic Background of Students**

ETHNIC GROUPS		2005-06		2006-07		2007-08		2008-09		2009-10		SUB-TOTAL	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Minority Students</b>	American Indian	2	1%	0	0	2	1%	3	2%	1	1%	<b>8</b>	<b>1%</b>
	Asian/Pacific Islander	24	14%	35	19%	23	13%	20	11%	24	13%	<b>126</b>	<b>14%</b>
	African/African American	17	10%	19	10%	18	10%	21	11%	19	10%	<b>94</b>	<b>10%</b>
	Hispanic/Latino Chicano	40	23%	47	25%	45	24%	49	27%	50	27%	<b>230</b>	<b>25%</b>
	Other	9	5%	8	5%	16	9%	12	7%	12	6%	<b>57</b>	<b>6%</b>
	Declined to state	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	1	1%	<b>1</b>	<b>0.1%</b>
<b>Total Minority Students</b>		<b>92</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>White/ Caucasian</b>		<b>82</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>174</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>100</b>

### Languages

Information on language capabilities was not collected for the first cohort (2005–2006), but has been collected for all other cohorts. The most commonly used language besides English across all four cohorts was Spanish (265 students or 34%). The next group of languages most commonly used were Asian/Pacific languages (103 students, 13%), including Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. European languages including French, Russian, Portuguese and Armenian were used by 56 students (7%), followed by African languages, including Amharic, Swahili, and Zulu (9 students, 1%).

**Table 3: Languages**

LANGUAGE GROUPS	2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009		2009-2010		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
English only	77	38%	91	48%	83	44%	77	41%	<b>328</b>	<b>43%</b>
Asian or Asian Pacific (Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Hindi)	37	18%	23	12%	21	11%	22	12%	<b>103</b>	<b>13%</b>
Native North American	0	0.0	0	0	0	0		0.0	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Spanish	65	32%	56	29%	69	37%	75	40%	<b>265</b>	<b>35%</b>
European (French, Russian, Italian, Portuguese)	17	9%	15	8%	12	6%	12	6%	<b>56</b>	<b>7%</b>
African (Ethiopian, Zulu, Swahili)	2	1%	3	2%	3	2%	1	1%	<b>9</b>	<b>1%</b>
American Sign	4	2%	2	1%	0	0	0	0	<b>6</b>	<b>1%</b>
TOTAL <sup>2</sup>	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>767</b>	<b>100</b>

**Distribution by Geographic Region**

An important MHP goal is to increase the number of professionally qualified social workers throughout California's rural underserved areas, which are predominantly, but not exclusively, in the Superior Region (far northern counties) and the Central (Valley) Region. Table 4 reports on the geographic distribution of the students who enrolled in the program. The data show that the largest number of students (277 or 30%) was enrolled in schools of social work in the Los Angeles area. In the Bay Area counties, 219 students (24%) were enrolled. The third and fourth largest regions, respectively, are other Southern California counties, with 182 students (20%), and the Central Region counties, with 176 students (19%). The schools of social work in the Superior Region enrolled 57 students (6%).

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<sup>2</sup> The total number of languages spoken by the students from the four cohorts is different from the total cohort numbers because some of the students speak more than one language other than English (for example, French and Spanish).

The schools of social work in the most urban areas of California—Los Angeles and the Bay Area—accounted for the majority of stipend recipients. Superior and Central Regions were allocated the fewest stipends for students and consequently had the fewest students. However, schools in these regions used more of their stipends each year than did some schools in urban regions, and account for 25% of the total stipend recipients.

**Table 4: Geographic Region and Schools**

REGION	UNIVERSITIES	STIPENDS ALLOCATED (ANNUAL)	STIPENDS AWARDED					SUB-TOTAL	REGION TOTAL	% STIPENDS USED STATEWIDE
			2006	2007	2008	2009	2010			
Superior	CSU Chico	9	8	6	8	9	9	40	57	6%
	Humboldt State University	5	3	5	2	3	4	17		
Central	CSU Fresno	10	8	8	10	10	7	43	153	17%
	CSU Sacramento	20	12	20	20	20	18	90		
	CSU Stanislaus	5	5	4	4	4	3	20		
Greater Bay Area	CSU East Bay	15	10	15	15	15	15	70	219	24%
	San Francisco State University	10	10	10	9	10	10	49		
	San Jose State University	10	10	10	10	10	10	50		
	UC Berkeley	10	10	10	10	10	10	50		
Southern	CSU Bakersfield	5	3	5	5	5	5	23	205	23%
	CSU San Bernardino	15	15	14	15	12	15	71		
	San Diego State University	15	13	15	14	15	15	72		
	Loma Linda	10	16	8	6	4	5	39		
Los Angeles	CSU Long Beach	20	14	20	20	20	20	94	277	30%
	CSU Los Angeles	7	7	7	7	7	7	35		
	UCLA	10	10	10	10	9	10	49		
	USC	20	20	20	19	20	20	99		
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>196</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>100%</b>

## EMPLOYMENT

### **Payback Employment**

As part of its contractual obligations - originally with the California Department of Mental Health, and now with the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development - CalSWEC is required to collect information from each participating school about payback employment of the graduates. Table 5 shows the numbers of graduates who either met the payback obligation through one year of employment in a county-operated or contract mental health agency, or through cash repayment. It also shows whether graduates in the first three cohorts who paid back through employment worked in a county or nonprofit contract agency. Unfortunately, type of agency information was not collected for the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 cohorts. In addition, some students in the 2009-10 cohort were still completing academic or payback requirements, and others were still seeking employment when data were collected.

**Table 5: Payback Employment**

COHORT	2005-2006		2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009		2009-2010	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	174	100%	187	100	184	100	183	100	183	100
<b>PAYBACK REQUIREMENT</b>										
Met via employment	154	89%	177	95%	171	94%	175	96%	154	84%
Met via cash payback	20	11%	10	5%	12 <sup>3</sup>	6%	8	4%	4	2%
<b>FIELD OF SERVICE</b>										
Mental Health	154	100%	175	99%	171	100%	175	96	154	84%
Non Mental Health	0	0	2	1%	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TYPE OF AGENCY</b>										
Public	98	64%	90	51%	89	52%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Contracting CBO	56	36%	87	49%	82	48%	NA	NA	NA	NA

<sup>3</sup> One graduate is deceased; payback waived.

## **Post-Payback Employment**

MHP is not required to track its graduates after they complete the payback. However, because retention is a factor in sustainability of the workforce, MHP decided that it would be useful to investigate whether graduates of the program continued to work in the mental health system after they met the one-year post-graduation employment/cash requirement.

An initial effort to trace the subsequent careers of the 2005–2006 cohort was conducted in 2008. CalSWEC Graduate Student Researchers contacted the project coordinators (PCs) at each of the participating schools to obtain information about graduates' post-payback careers. Generally, the PCs were able to provide that information.

A questionnaire was developed to gather and record information from the PCs about the graduates. Telephone interviews were conducted during 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 with each PC. They were asked, to the best of their knowledge, whether 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 cohort graduates were still employed in California and working in a community mental health agency, or whether they had moved into another field of practice. It was expected that PCs might not have information about each student; however, most were still in contact with the graduates and knowledgeable about their careers. The data were aggregated to protect confidentiality.

Data for 2008–2009 were incomplete since one school did not provide any information about its graduates' post-employment status. In addition, some graduates were still completing their payback employment when data were collected. In this cohort, of 163 graduates who were traced, 133 had completed payback, and 116 were still employed. Of the remaining 24 who were traced and had completed payback, 16 were still completing their payback employment, and 8 were still completing financial repayment. For the purpose of maintaining reporting consistency, only data for the 116 graduates who had finished payback and were still working are included in Table 6. The 2009–2010 cohort is not included because the majority of graduates was still completing payback employment when data were gathered.

**Table 6: Post-Payback Employment**

COHORT	2005-2006		2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009	
	N (174)	%	N (187)	%	N (184)	%	N (183)	%
<b>TOTAL TRACED</b>	139	80%	145	78%	143	78%	163	89%
N traced who had completed payback and were still employed							116	71%
<b>Employer (Agency)</b>								
Payback agency	103	74%	109	75%	83	58%	106	65%
Different Agency	36	26%	36	25%	60	42%	10	6%
<b>Field of Services</b>								
Mental Health	128	92%	133	92%	139	97%	114	70%
Non-Mental Health	11	8%	12	8%	4	3%	2	1%
<b>Type of Agency</b>								
Public	82	60%	78	54%	67	47%	25	15%
Contracting CBO	57	40%	67	46%	76	53%	91	56%
<b>Place of Employment</b>								
California	136	98%	145	100%	143	100%	116	71%
Out of state	3	2%	0	0	0	0	0	0%

## CONCLUSION

These findings indicate that MHP is a successful mechanism for diversifying and increasing the mental health social work workforce in California. Over half of the first five cohorts are members of minority groups; approximately 25% of the graduates attended schools serving rural communities; and over half are fluent in at least one language in addition to English. The majority met their payback obligations by working in a county or contract mental health agency following graduation. A high proportion of those that CalSWEC and the schools were able to contact after they met their payback obligation have remained at their payback agency or in the field at a different agency in California.

The results from the first five years of the program show that stipend recipients closely mirror the diverse demographics of the state. The wide range of languages used by MHP participants indicates that the program is succeeding in recruiting students from diverse ethnic and linguistic groups who are able to serve California's multicultural population, and can address needs for specific languages that have been identified in county workforce development plans.

This report about CalSWEC Mental Health Program MSW student characteristics and post-graduate employment is one indicator that the Mental Health Service Act Workforce Education and Training funding component is “moving the needle” toward increasing the clinical social work workforce shortages and increasing workforce diversity. However, more must be done.

The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, using statistical modeling on the results of the 2007 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), estimated that 2.2 million adults 18 years and older experienced moderate psychological impairment in at least one domain of daily functioning (Grant et al., 2011). About one-quarter had received minimally adequate treatment<sup>4</sup> (MAT), one-quarter had received treatment that did not meet MAT criteria, and half (50.4%) reported not having received any type of mental health treatment at all in the past 12 months.

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<sup>4</sup>Minimally Adequate Treatment = four or more visits with a health professional in the past 12 months and use of prescription medication for mental health problems in the past 12 months. This definition is based on evidence-based guidelines for the treatment of a serious mental illness.

The study also investigated unmet need by other variables, including ethnicity, English proficiency, and region of residence:

- *Race/ethnicity:* Asians and African Americans were more likely to have unmet mental health needs compared to other subgroups. Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and multiracial groups had the highest rate of receiving treatment that did not meet MAT criteria.
- *English proficiency:* Treatment for mental health needs was directly associated with English proficiency, with those who did not speak English well or at all having the highest rate of unmet mental health needs.
- *Region:* Adults in all regions of California had high rates of unmet mental health needs.

The CHIS report underscores the need to continue to focus on workforce development for multidisciplinary professional and paraprofessional staff equipped to serve ethnically, geographically, and linguistically diverse populations. It is important to continue offering financial incentives for individuals planning careers as social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, marriage and family therapists, nurse practitioners, or physician assistants in the public behavioral health system or in allied systems in order to maintain momentum in workforce development.

The use of administrative data is a valuable tool for evaluating the overall role of the Mental Health Program in addressing social work workforce shortages and will continue to be central to conducting future research about diversity, recruitment, and retention. With additional resources and university human subject research clearances, surveys of students and graduates directly would provide invaluable information about key program factors for building and retaining a diverse social work workforce committed to careers in public behavioral health systems.

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