Alternative Routes to Professional Status: Social Work and the New Careers Program under the Office of Economic Opportunity

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At different times, social work has been caught between its commitment to the poor and disadvantaged and its professional aspirations. This article examines social work’s response to New Careers, a program started under the Office of Economic Opportunity to advance employment for indigenous nonprofessionals in social work, teaching, and nursing. The implementation of New Careers at the University of Minnesota is used as a case study to examine how this program raised jurisdictional tensions between social work and the government and exposed struggles within the profession related to its identity and credibility and to issues of class.

The attainment of professional status has been a hard-won battle for social work. Its complicated mission and constant struggles over who is and is not a social worker have made it necessary for the profession to regularly negotiate its identity (Walkowitz 1999). While professional status has offered social workers social recognition and standing, it has also created hurdles that deprive would-be social workers full entry into the profession. Social work’s control over access to social opportunity was particularly evident in New Careers, a program created in 1966 that gave eligible Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) recipients the chance to enter, among others, the fields of nursing, teaching, and social work.
service. In addition to providing financial support for education and on-the-job training, this program tried to remove the institutional barriers that would block career advancement and the development of meaningful and permanent jobs.

This article examines how social work responded to an external challenge to address the issues of the poor by focusing on the response of the profession to New Careers. First, I focus on the New Careers concept and illustrate its development by describing the implementation of the New Careers program at the University of Minnesota as a case study. Second, I focus on the responses to New Careers by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), and professional social service agencies that employed New Careerists and on the professional literature on New Careers that appeared at that time. Finally, I discuss the response of the social work profession to the use of its professional structures to solve problems of poverty. Material for this study is drawn from the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society Archives, and the University of Minnesota Archives.

The Setting

The 1960s were a time of economic affluence and of movement in civil rights related to the demands of African Americans. Against the backdrop of economic success, Michael Harrington, in *The Other America*, exposed regional poverty and the misery of the invisible poor and declared that poverty affected 40–50 million people in the United States (Harrington 1962). The huge migration of African Americans from the South shifted the poverty center. The increase in juvenile delinquency during the 1950s, illegitimate births, and the number of female-headed households prompted Daniel Moynihan (1965) to write a report that exposed the social reproduction of illegitimacy and family instability among African Americans. According to the findings of social scholars of the day, social problems such as these correlated best with low incomes (Patterson 1986). Liberal economists and influential institutions such as the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan asserted that America could do away with poverty in one big move (Morgan et al. 1962). The country appeared to possess the means to do so as well as the understanding that poverty was an anomaly and immoral in such an affluent society.

Moreover, the country’s economic success softened business’s attitude about the influence of government. This reduced the opposition to the significant legislation passed during the first half of the decade (Noble 1997). The 1962 public welfare amendments to the Social Security Act increased federal support to the states for the provision of casework services, job training, job placement, and other direct services to public
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assistance recipients. That same year, the Manpower Development and Training Act was passed. It provided training or retraining for workers displaced by economic and technological change. The Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Act of 1963 provided federal funds for the construction and staffing of community mental health centers throughout the United States. The Medicare and Medicaid amendments to the Social Security Act passed in 1965 provided a system of health insurance for welfare recipients and the elderly (Trattner 1994). These amendments and acts created new services and increased the demand for manpower to staff them.

The optimism that colored the passage of this legislation also fueled the Great Society and the War on Poverty. Walter Heller, chairman of President Kennedy’s Council of Economic Advisors, and others in the Kennedy administration pushed for the elimination of poverty through government intervention. Effective legislation for the War on Poverty was passed under the Johnson administration. Sargent Shriver was named to head the OEO, which administered the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act (EOA). The overarching goal of this legislation was to eliminate poverty by helping the poor help themselves; the method was to open up opportunity. Some of the programs started under OEO included New Careers, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), Job Corps, Upward Bound, Neighborhood Youth Corps, Operation Head Start, and Community Action Program that used the philosophy of maximum feasible participation to involve the poor in combating poverty.

Funding was low from the start, and OEO had little opportunity to gain momentum. Spurred on by the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the rise in black militancy, conservatives objected to leftists or blacks getting OEO funds. State and local politicians resented federal efforts to go around the customary governmental structures. Confusion over goals resulted in administrative difficulties such that U.S. News and World Report chastised OEO for “administrative chaos, bureaucratic bungling, waste, extravagance, costly duplication of existing services, [and] internal squabbling” (U.S. News and World Report 1965). Beginning in 1964, the costs of the Vietnam war began to rise, and signs of inflation began to emerge. By 1966, some labor leaders began to grumble at the economic threat posed by new workers who were trained under the antipoverty programs and who might drive down the wages and benefits of union members. By 1967, President Johnson, under pressure from conservative Democrats and Republicans, agreed to cuts in OEO programs in return for a 2-year, 6 percent surcharge on corporate and personal income taxes to help pay for the Vietnam war (Noble 1997). By the early 1970s, Congress had deprived OEO of its operating functions and scattered the remaining programs among the federal bureaucracy. By 1974, OEO was dead.
New Careers


The Concept of New Careers

New Careers was the brainchild of Frank Reissman, a professor of educational sociology at New York University, who, together with Arthur Pearl, published New Careers for the Poor (Pearl and Reissman 1965). In their book, Reissman and Pearl laid out the philosophy that influenced the Scheuer amendment in 1966. They contended that the problem of poverty was not the result of personal inadequacies or past injustices but that poverty resulted from locking people out of what had become a credentialed society (Pearl 1981). Most of these people were young and black (Pearl and Reissman 1965). For the poor, lack of education limited the passageway to employment. Consequently, a career ladder needed to be established that ranged from nonskilled entry positions through intermediate subprofessional functions and terminated in full professional status. That ladder would be created by simultaneous employment in a private or public institution and participation in a training program offered partially on the job and partially in a sequence of college courses (or training that could be counted for college credit). As Pearl and Reissman (1965) described their program, “No longer would professional status be attained only by first completing between five and eight years of college. The requiring of this training prior to entrance into a field of endeavor effectively eliminates almost all the poor from eligibility. A sequence beginning with the unskilled aide and proceeding through an assistant (two years of college equivalence plus experience); an associate (four years of college equivalence plus experience); and terminating in an accreditation as professional is manageable and opens areas to which the poor can hardly hope to aspire” (p. 14).

Pearl and Reissman (1965) justified the necessity of an alternative route to professionalism by maintaining, first, that technological ad-
vances were erasing society’s need for unskilled labor and, second, that
growth in education and health and other services was necessary to
meet future societal need. “In light of the tremendously expanded need
envisioned in the next decade in the helping professions—social work,
teaching, nursing, etc.—there is no reason why we cannot anticipate
the employment of a minimum of four to six million nonprofessionals
in these fields” (Reissman 1963, title page). They advocated creating
meaningful and permanent jobs normally allotted to highly trained pro-
fessionals or technicians but that could be performed by less trained
individuals or developing jobs not currently performed by anyone.
These jobs had to be incorporated into the matrix of the industry and
agency that employed the nonprofessional. Pearl and Reissman (1965)
maintained: “These opportunities exist now, and for the foreseeable
future, primarily in areas currently restricted to affluent, well-educated
applicants. In order to open the system to the poor, jobs must be re-
defined to enable the unskilled, inexperienced, and uneducated to be
eligible for employment in these areas, and once employed, machinery
must be introduced so that advancement to higher paid, more respon-
sible jobs, is possible. Therefore, rather than employ, for example, more
welfare workers with advanced degrees to administer aid to the poor,
it is suggested that new jobs be defined in welfare administration which
could be performed by the recipients of aid” (pp. 21–22).

Reissman proposed partnering these so-called new professionals with
those professionals already ensconced in social institutions. In a paper
written in 1963 for the Training Department of Mobilization for Youth,
Reissman (1963) maintained that although some saw the indigenous non-
professionals as handmaidens of social work, he saw them as having a
distinct role to play by virtue of their “militancy and action focus, enthuzi-
siasm, lower class know how, and relationship to lower class people” (p.
21). He further asserted that capitalizing on these skills, “which when
intelligently combined with the skills of professionally trained workers,
[would] . . . produce a revolution in social work” (Reissman 1963, p. 4).

As envisioned by Reissman, New Careers would affect existing pro-
fessionals in two ways. On the one hand, New Careers was marketed as
providing the manpower that would “free the professional for more
creative and supervisory roles” and reduce the manpower shortage in
education, health, and social work (Powledge 1968, p. 4). On the other
hand, to actualize these opportunities, existing professionals had to
create and support institutional change relative to job development, the
division of labor, and educational barriers. Without restructuring jobs
and career ladders, New Careers could not succeed, and, as Reissman
contended, a large number of citizens would be relegated to a per-
manent, nonworking, stable, spectator class (Pearl and Reissman 1965).
While not overtly antiprofessional, Reissman clearly sought to go around
what he considered elite and exclusionary professional structures to
achieve professional status for the new and excluded potential professional. His stance perhaps made him appear antiprofessional to those in power.

The New Careers Program at the University of Minnesota: A Case Illustration

In September 1967, the University of Minnesota began a New Careers program administered locally by the Community Action Program of the Mobilization of Economic Resources for Hennepin County (MOER). It was funded by the Department of Labor and federally administered by the Bureau of Work Programs. The University of Minnesota was the first institution of higher education to cooperate with such a project. Participants were employed in user agencies that contributed 10 percent to the New Careerist's salary the first year and 50 percent the second year (Wattenberg 1968; Chmiel 1969). The program, which lasted 2 years, provided an innovative mix of sheltered education, employment, and social support. Though touted as highly successful, it was also beset with financial, political, and communication problems in conjunction with the local OEO administration as well as limited user agency response.

Description of the program.—The 207 New Careerists were selected on a first-come basis. Over nine hundred people sought admission to the program, and 438 were certified as eligible (Wheatley 1968; Chmiel 1969). To be eligible, New Careerists had to be over 22 years old, Hennepin County residents, unemployed or underemployed with an annual income of $3,200 or less for a family of four, and willing to accept an opportunity to work in a nonprofit agency or institution that had agreed to provide ladders of upward career mobility in the human services (Wattenberg 1968).

Available demographic statistics on 201 New Careerists are in table 1. Sixty-one percent of participants were female, and 39 percent were male. Over 50 percent were ethnic and racial minorities (principally African American and Native American). The participants ranged in age from 22 to 59 years, and the median age was 34. The majority of participants had completed high school. Twenty-nine percent had some college. The largest group that completed the program was single, female heads of households in their mid- to late thirties with two dependent children. The program also included a large proportion of mothers on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), several fathers who were unemployed, and a number of ex-offenders (Wheatley 1967; Falk 1988).

In contrasting New Career students with the typical Minnesota student population, Edward Knop, Margaret A. Thompson, and R. Frank Falk (1969) stated: “It must be kept in mind that New Careerists are by no means a typical group of students—many of them have not graduated
### Table 1

**Demographic Description of 201 New Careers Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
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<td><strong>Age of participant (years):</strong></td>
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<td>59</td>
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<td>31–40</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>41–50</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>51+</td>
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<td><strong>Education completed:</strong></td>
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<td>Caucasian female</td>
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<td>African-American male</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Minnesota State Employment Security</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban League</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workhouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Assistance</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>49</td>
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</table>

**Source.**—Compilation based on Falk (1988) and statistics on total applications found in Wheatley (1967).

**Note.**—TCOIC = Twin Cities Opportunity and Industrial Center.

from high school; most come from low-income families; most have several children and many are alone in the care and support of these children; nearly all have extensive needs for health care and insurance; and most have heavy personal financial responsibilities during their participation in New Careers” (pp. 10–11).

By the end of New Careers, 105 participants had completed the 45-credit certificate program (equivalent of 1 year of college), 22 had completed an A.A. degree, and 2 had received a B.A. degree. They achieved higher grade point averages than the average junior college student (2.5
compared with 2.3) and only slightly lower grade point averages than University of Minnesota students enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts (2.5 compared with 2.6) (Falk 1988).

Of the original participants, 102 either dropped out of the program or did not complete it. According to Falk (1988), research director for New Careers, most dropped out during the first 2 months and many within the first 2 weeks of the program. Nineteen percent of those who dropped out were Native American. Some of the participants dropped out because of perceived inaccuracies of expectations and requirements of the program.

Financial considerations also affected the attrition rate. In 1966, the minimum wage was raised to $1.40 an hour (U.S. Gov/Info Resources 2002). New Careerists were paid $2.00–$3.00 an hour. However, many of those who left New Careers claimed that the program did not pay enough to support them or their families. Only 24.6 percent of the participants previously made less than they made in New Careers. For about 27 percent of the participants, joining the program could be done only at a financial sacrifice. For another 48.6 percent, joining the program represented a sacrifice with no improvement for them. Only about one-fourth of the participants, then, benefited financially from the program in the short run (Falk 1969). Male participants (50 percent of whom dropped out) were particularly disadvantaged because of low salaries and the lack of means to buttress the salaries through AFDC (Wattenberg 1968). Moreover, after September 1968, the earnings exemption allowed to OEO participants for AFDC was removed (Larson, Bible, and Falk 1969).

The success of the New Careers program at the University of Minnesota is attributed, in part, to the fact that it was housed in General College, a junior college within the university that offered traditional and experimental programs. General College entrance requirements and curriculum were geared to accommodate the participants (Chmiel 1969). The college also offered innovative programming and courses tailored to the needs of New Careerists.

For example, when university administrators realized that many New Careerists could not work half time in their user agencies and complete an A.A. degree in 2 years, they introduced a 45-credit certificate program that both recognized the achievement of a year of university credit and could be applied in the future toward an A.A. degree. The employment of New Careerists in user agencies was treated as fieldwork experience, and participants were able to earn two credits per quarter toward the 45 certificate credits.

The approach to curriculum development was shaped by the conviction that an educational component should contain (1) a wide choice of courses in general education for personal development, (2) an opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge in communication and social
problems and an understanding of human behavior, (3) developmental possibilities for acquiring an enlarged perspective, and (4) an analytical and critical approach to the social scene and human condition. Given the heterogeneous background of the participants, the curriculum, therefore, reflected the need for a flexible and diverse set of options. Courses included, among others, “Education Methods for Teacher Aides,” “The Helping Process in the Social Services,” “Probation and Parole—the Court System and Its Services,” “American Public Welfare: Policies and Programs,” “Reading and Vocabulary Development,” and “How to Study.” Many of these courses were taught by senior faculty (Wattenberg 1970). Esther Wattenberg, program director of New Careers, describes the classroom atmosphere created by the New Careerists and the conventional students: “Since the majority of students were older, their worldly knowledge outstripped that which the conventional student [brought] into the classroom. The background and personal experiences of these students brought a lively exchange into the classroom, adding to the educational experience of the traditional student as well as the faculty” (Chmiel 1969).

The University of Minnesota also had a counseling and testing center available to students. The HELP (Higher Education for Low-income Persons) center (also called Project HELP) was organized to counsel low-income students with special needs or problems, to offer them financial aids, and to facilitate their adjustment to university routine. An arrangement was worked out to provide these same services for enrollees in New Careers with the provision of additional counseling and tutorial assistance. Law school personnel provided free legal services, and health coverage and insurance were provided in the program. Records indicate that HELP was widely used as participants experienced the need for social support, encouragement, remedial help, and financial counseling (Knop et al. 1969).

Nine user agencies served as employers for New Careerists during the program’s 2-year existence. These agencies were required to develop a promotion ladder reflected in both job titles and pay and to tie promotion to educational attainment. Supervisors were identified to link training to education and job tasks. In defining the job ladder, the agency could not duplicate existing structures. The job tasks also had to tap the unique cultural and community understanding and skills possessed by the low-income participants. Finally, the agency had to recognize the New Careerist and demonstrate commitment to credentialing by providing release time for education while providing full-time pay (Falk 1988).

As shown in table 1, the vast majority of New Careerists were employed in the Minneapolis Public Schools as both teacher and social work aides. This user agency, along with the Minnesota State Employment Security and the Department of Corrections, attempted to open new permanent
positions higher than Aide I under Civil Service. The police department, Workhouse, and Twin Cities Opportunity and Industrial Center (TCOIC) used the program to recruit participants into already existing jobs after their 2 years of education. This was possible using conventional hiring criteria (Larson, Belding, and Falk 1968). It was generally believed that career ladders could be created more easily by large bureaucratic agencies rather than by small nonbureaucratic ones (Falk 1988).

Research also played a prominent role in the New Careers program. Under an independent grant, the University of Minnesota received funds to study all aspects of the New Careers program and the New Careerists. Wattenberg (1968) reported: “The Minneapolis Program has probably the most advanced research component of any New Careers program in the nation. A great deal of information has been collected on the important question of what kinds of personal or role change take place in people while in a New Careers program. Repeated administration of a general questionnaire, as well as an ongoing panel study with a small randomly selected group of enrollees, have given us sound data concerning change questions” (p. 46).

Additionally, research was completed on user agencies as well as on job satisfactions of New Careerists and dropouts from the program. The extensiveness of the research is evident in the minutes of a New Careers Resident Advisory Board (1967): “Research done through the Counseling at the University was a very strong topic of discussion. The Board is very concerned about the many surveys that are being conducted. They feel the University should either change its approach or cut down on the Research being done with New Careerists.”

The success of the New Careers program at the University of Minnesota was directly attributable to Wattenberg’s work as the director. Wattenberg, a professor in the School of Social Work, ran the program through the Office of Career Development, which was part of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the university (CURA) (Chmiel 1969). Administering New Careers through CURA allowed Wattenberg the latitude and flexibility to pull in university and community resources as needed and to circumvent much of the bureaucracy that might have restricted the program’s development. The University of Minnesota, therefore, was in a unique position to model New Careers after Reisman’s philosophy. By housing the academic wing in General College and the administrative wing in CURA, Wattenberg was able to circumvent the rules and procedures of the College of Liberal Arts that offered the traditional B.A. degree.

Implementation problems.—Although the promise of the New Careers program was partially realized through the creative use of the administrative structure of the University of Minnesota and its educational programming, problems with funding and relationships with user agencies threatened the viability of the program and created additional hard-
ships for the students. In 1968, it cost almost $8,000 per person per year for salary support and education (Falk 1988). The New Careerists themselves reported countless problems, which included no money for transportation, lights turned off, federal checks not arriving in time, and lost credits. Some of them also questioned the worth in the job market of a 45-credit certificate. They commented about poor class attendance, goofing off, courses that were too sheltered, and teachers who talked down to them (Larson 1969).

The biggest problems, however, were the relationships between the university, the New Careers administrative office, and the MOER board. These problems and the relationships between the user agencies and the New Careerists impeded the program’s development. As is evident in this article, a large number of institutions were involved in running New Careers. Letters between representatives of the institutions as well as minutes from meetings about the running of New Careers suggest that there were numerous tensions related to the performance of the director of the New Careers administrative office.

In the fall of 1969, financial friction surfaced between the university and the MOER board about promised budgetary support to help the original New Careerists complete their educational program. In addition, there were concerns about funds owed the university by MOER for services already provided under the New Careers program. These were just a few of the many instances of alleged injustices or mismanagement (Lukermann 1969b). Although the stories about these events are incomplete, correspondence suggests that there were communication difficulties and limited coordination between Wattenberg and the administration of New Careers outside of the university (Lukermann 1969a).

Besides the political entanglements, the research on this New Careers program indicates there were significant problems with the user agencies. Wattenberg (1968) stated in a progress report early in the program that there was a “lack of time for supervision, tension in perceiving the New Careerist as a genuine staff member, and a paucity of ideas in the creative use of New Careerists. Certainly, the training of supervisors in the use of paraprofessionals as team members requires urgent attention and time will be devoted to plans for dealing with the neglected part of the program” (p. 49). Some of the problems were related to the existing agency structures. For example, the staff members employed by TCOIC were principally paraprofessionals, some of whom did not appreciate the need for or the demands of academic work. The agency evidently had trouble adapting to the New Careerists’ school schedule and appears to have dropped out as a user agency after the first year (Larson et al. 1968). Some of the problems were related to work assignments that could make productive use of New Careerists’ skills. As stated in one report, “Social work aides often perform[ed] clerical or
office tasks that [were] really very different from the work of their professional counterparts. . . . There [was] a definite need to allow social work aides to do work which allow[ed] them to have contact with other people both clients and professionals” (Thompson, Falk, and Knop 1969, p. 61).

Many of the problems with user agencies involved staff relationships. Comments such as “often many of the social workers don’t think of aides as prospective colleagues” or “some teachers admit it is difficult for anyone to share a classroom, and some admitted they’ve just ignored the aide—let her hang” indicate that staff were ambivalent about the presence or purpose of New Careerists (Larson et al. 1968, p. 14). Some of their struggle was related to inadequate preparation of supervisors and agency staff to deal with New Careerists. Some of their struggle was related to social class differences between themselves and the professionals.

Difficulties with user agencies were particularly evident in a meeting between Wattenberg and Fred Lukermann, assistant vice president of the University of Minnesota, on July 24, 1969. Lukermann’s private notes (1969a) from that meeting indicate that all the old user agencies had pulled out and no new ones had come forth. While it appears that the existence of General College allowed the New Careers program to circumvent some of the educational barriers in route to achieving professional status, the user agencies were not ready or equipped to provide meaningful access to professional ranks. Overall, bureaucratic agencies, such as the Minneapolis Public Schools, moved furthest in job development. These agencies seemed to have more understanding of the complexities involved in bringing about institutional change through the development of a new staffing pattern. Referring to bureaucratic agencies, one researcher noted, “once the decision [had] been made to join New Careers this [became] a policy decision which tend[ed] to ameliorate any unfavorable reactions by singular individuals within the agency” (Falk 1969, p. 3).

The New Careers program at the University of Minnesota appeared to be the recipient of OEO administrative chaos, bureaucratic bungling, and internal squabbling as reported by U.S. News and World Report (1965). The experience with the user agencies also bore out Reissman’s prediction that without restructuring jobs and career ladders, New Careers could not succeed.

The Profession’s Response to New Careers

How did social work as a profession deal with New Careers and the restructuring called for by Reissman? The response of the profession can be gauged by looking at two national organizations—the CSWE and the NASW—and their reactions to New Careers. Reactions of user agencies in other cities to the presence of New Careerists are another mea-
The School of Social Work is not organically nor administratively related to the New Careers Program, hence I would not want to leave an erroneous impression by serving on your Advisory Committee. Your reference to “implications for the profession of Social Work” . . . reinforce my conviction. If you or your committee have matters of this kind you believe should be considered by the faculty of the School of Social Work, we will be glad to receive and consider them. We are always happy to receive suggestions from the profession, the social agencies, or representatives of educational programs, and we will subject such suggestions to our considered review.

Council on Social Work Education

Though long concerned with providing adequate manpower to meet social service needs, CSWE did not consider New Careers as a possible solution. The CSWE noted the increase in manpower shortages since the 1950s. In much of the correspondence and reports from the late 1950s, CSWE representatives recognized that schools were graduating only 1,800–2,000 new MSWs each year, while 10,000–15,000 new recruits were needed annually to respond to social service needs. A report by Mary Baker (1960), CSWE consultant on recruitment, indicates that “the 195,000 social workers in the 1960 survey of social work manpower represented a 43 percent increase in numbers over 1950. The proportion of this total with 2 years or more in a graduate school of social work was 21 percent. The proportion rose only 5 percent” (p. 3).

The CSWE gave consideration to the possibility that paraprofessionals, or those with less than a graduate degree, could be used to relieve this gap and free professionals for more creative or specialized work. Available contemporary literature referenced the need for differential job description that would identify task categories and rate them relative to their required level of skill. One author (Baker 1960) expressed concern that if the field did not act soon, someone else would.

In the early 1960s, the literature indicated that the 1962 public welfare
amendments to the Social Security Act had accelerated the need for additional manpower. In a 1963 speech, Lillie Nairne (1963) suggested one solution was to use B.A.-level workers. A conference held at Columbia University began to address the training needs of the B.A.-level practitioner.

By March 1964, a demonstration training project was proposed and endorsed by CSWE. It included both course work offered by the Columbia School of Social Work and agency field experience. The merits of the proposal included “bringing a substantial number of new recruits into social work, and of giving them a secure base from which to carry on their work. Undoubtedly, many of these recruits [would] ultimately wish to undertake full professional training” (Columbia University School of Social Work 1964, p. 4). Trainees who completed the program would receive certificates designating them “Social Welfare Associates.” Trainees were expected to be recent college graduates.

Although CSWE was formed in 1955 as an accrediting body to give validation at the master’s level to training programs in social work, it took 10 more years before CSWE moved into territory that required less than the MSW degree (Wenocur and Reisch 1989). This was done with trepidation and concern for the quality of service to clients. Indeed, while CSWE recognized the need for more staff and their differential use, the organization maintained that workers should not be required to take on a level of work for which they did not have the theoretical base or the accompanying opportunity to use that knowledge. Moreover, it was better to refer clients out than to try to provide a service using workers who were not qualified (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare 1965).

The commitment of CSWE to maintaining professional standards was particularly evident in the correspondence with people who were developing or wanted help developing programs for paraprofessionals who had less than a B.A. degree. The following situation exemplifies CSWE’s position. On the suggestion of Julius Samuels of Hebrew University’s School of Social Work, Robert Carr wrote CSWE for consultation regarding a request from the Ford Foundation to develop a social work technician training program in a community college or local branch of a state university. Katherine Kendall, associate director for CSWE, responded to the request by noting Carr’s lack of educational objectives, deciding not to endorse the proposal, and referring him to volumes 1 and 2 of the Council’s Curriculum Study. Werner Boehm, professor at the University of Minnesota and representative of CSWE, also responded, stating, “While I agree that reducing the shortage of personnel is of crucial importance to social work, I am very doubtful about the usefulness of your solutions to either the persons envisaged or to the profession of social work or to society as a whole.” Finally, there is correspondence from Samuels to Kendall in which Samuels states, “Mr.
Professionals and New Careers

Carr is a very nice, sincere young man. . . . I dare say that between Werner and yourself you have set him pretty straight” (Council on Social Work Education Collection 1959).

Other requests for assistance in developing programs that would utilize minorities to reach underserved populations received similar responses. Arnulf Pins (1966), associate executive director of CSWE, referred a social work professor to VISTA when she asked for suggestions on the development of subprofessional training for Navajo Indians to serve their communities. Kendall (1963), then executive director of CSWE, responded to a request on how to use minorities with an A.A. degree by declaring that “it would be a step backward” to initiate training at the junior college level and reminding the writer that “in anything so important as the development of a new educational program, I am sure you would want a completely candid reply to your question.”

In addition to responding to requests for assistance in developing training for paraprofessionals, CSWE also sent letters when independent efforts by other organizations appeared to put pressure on CSWE’s efforts to maintain professional standards. For example, when the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene attempted to use professional social workers to provide a 2-year in-service training program with supervision to psychiatric social work technicians, Kendall (1963) wrote the director claiming that “your plan will discourage persons from obtaining MSW education. . . . Certainly there is a glaring need . . . [but] this cannot be done by a direct attack on standards of education which it has taken the social work profession long hard years of experience and thinking to evolve. This will result in abandonment of the client all over again.”

The CSWE recognized the need for additional manpower to respond to social needs. Instead of encouraging the development of educational programs to recruit and train indigenous personnel, the organization endorsed the B.A. worker. The CSWE developed training at the B.A. level for young and idealistic college graduates who might later enter graduate social work programs. It justified this decision by referencing the medical model and reminding others that they would not allow an untrained person to perform an appendectomy (Alman 1967). The CSWE’s recognition of New Careers began in the late 1960s and early 1970s when several summer institutes were held at the initiative of a few member schools so that schools of social work could exchange information on how to supervise paraprofessionals.

National Association of Social Workers

The NASW also did not see New Careers as a possible solution to the manpower need. A statement made by Congressman John E. Fogerty (1966) that appeared in the Congressional Record recognizing National
Social Workers Month said that “100,000 new professional social workers [would] be needed by 1970 and that the 60 accredited graduate schools of social work [could] turn out only 3,000 more each year.” The NASW noted the “famine” in social work manpower and put their efforts into passing the Social Work Education Act (H.R. 15311), which would have provided federal funds to expand social work education at the graduate and undergraduate levels. The development and introduction of H.R. 15311 (called the Mills-Ribicoff Bill and the Social Work Manpower Training Act) occurred at the same time that the legislation was passed for New Careers.

Indeed, it appears that NASW’s involvement in the development of OEO programs was limited. Although it is not clear whether the organization was excluded or reluctant to get involved, there was correspondence in 1964 between Heller and Kidneigh, chairman of the Federal Relations Committee for NASW, “indicating generally the Association’s attitude toward the employment of the less than fully trained personnel in various programs of the proposed EOA” (Federal Relations Committee 1964). However, Kidneigh wrote Congressman Donald Fraser on May 6, 1964: “It seems strange to me that the one major profession with a long interest in and possessing basic professional qualifications on this subject (what other profession approaches our experiences with poverty) should have been so completely if not pointedly ignored by those who have done the planning and constructed the proposals for an attack on poverty. No overtures to my knowledge have been made to us seeking consultation on the problem despite several offers on our part to be helpful and to bring the knowledge, expertise and experience of the social work profession to bear on the problem in the planning (or operating) stages. Certainly the government deserves to have the advice at least of the one profession on the American scene best qualified to speak on the subject” (Kidneigh 1964).

Although NASW may have disregarded the development of New Careers specifically, it took a strong stand, at one point, in recognizing the validity of a career line for both B.A.-level workers and paraprofessionals. In 1967, CSWE and NASW established a joint committee on manpower issues that was housed in NASW. Although both CSWE and NASW endorsed the addition of the B.A.-level worker as an answer to the manpower problem, CSWE had no accreditation function in undergraduate education. The NASW, however, could include a B.A.-level worker in its membership categories. The CSWE viewed a partnership with NASW as a useful way to advance the entry of the B.A.-level worker into the field. In 1968, an ad hoc committee of the joint committee was assigned to develop a career line concept.

The ad hoc committee gave credibility to New Careers in its final report stating, “This is an important new manpower resource for the social welfare field.” It went further in claiming that “the preparation
of ‘new careers’ personnel must be within educational institutions or under their direction” (Berlatsky 1968, p. 4). This report found its way into Public Affairs Pamphlet 447 on New Careers. The author claimed that New Careers had been strongly endorsed by a special committee set up by CSWE and NASW (Powledge 1968).

In truth, CSWE questioned the implications of the report and recommendations from the ad hoc committee to the joint committee. Two members of the 12-member committee issued a minority report asserting that the ad hoc committee did not mention the word “professional” as a circumlocution for “lowering educational requirements” (Kindelsperger and Schwartz 1968). The president of CSWE wrote a letter to the president of NASW on July 22, 1968, that delicately suggested that the matter was controversial and needed to be reviewed by the joint committee prior to any implementation: “Since manpower issues and their resolution are the major concern of both CSWE and NASW, it was wise for us to set up a joint committee to consider the problems and come up with recommendations. We believe that it is also important and necessary that we find mechanisms to review jointly the recommendations and if possible to move on them in a cooperative and coordinated fashion” (Stein 1968).

Evidently, the recommendations related to New Careers were voted down, and no further action was taken. With the exception of the report made by this ad hoc committee, NASW seems to have limited its involvement on manpower issues to support for B.A.-level and graduate-level practice.

User Agencies Nationally

The work-study formula used in New Careers meant that many agencies were used throughout the country as employers or would-be employers for New Careerists. Several national studies on New Careers programs suggest that the professional social workers at many of these user agencies had problems with New Careerists (Houston 1970; Alley and Blanton 1976, 1978; Cleckley 1981). When the jobs of the paraprofessionals were similar to those of professionals, the professionals felt uneasy about the threat to their work. When the jobs were different and New Careerists were engaged in social action efforts to help make the agencies more responsive to the needs of the community, the professionals reacted with “dismay and disbelief” (Pruger and Specht 1968, p. 24).

The experience with user agencies nationally appeared to duplicate the experience reported in the New Careers research at the University of Minnesota. The user agencies’ lack of acceptance was shown through the lack of meaningful work and positions created to absorb New Careerists into the agencies (Alley and Blanton 1978). Moreover, professionals’ lack of acceptance was demonstrated in the use of middle-class
standards to evaluate the job performance of New Careerists. In one study, supervisors were reported to be dissatisfied with New Careerists relative to their tiring easily, complaining about physical ailments, and saying “odd” things. Thompson, Falk, and Knop were the researchers for this study. They stated: “[New Careerists] go to school half time and work half time and have responsibilities for their families and studies. . . . The number of hours they spend in activities surrounding the New Careers program is more than most people spend at work, and in most cases they also have heavier than normal loads of responsibility at home. The fact that they seem tired, then, may be a result of the fact that they are tired” (Thompson et al. 1969, p. 73). They concluded: “We can only suggest that the supervisors are judging the New Careerists as unsatisfactory for displaying some of the very characteristics that make them a good bridge between professionals and their clients” (p. 79).

User agencies were unprepared to deal with New Careerists and the dilemmas they presented. The pressure on CSWE in the late 1960s to provide a forum for social work educators on how to help graduate students work with paraprofessionals suggests that agencies were not equipped to train or supervise New Careerists. Agencies also seem to have been unprepared to distinguish personnel, which created role confusion for both New Careerists and professionals (see Ripple 1972a, 1972b).

Professional Literature

In contrast to CSWE, NASW, and user agencies, the professional literature positively promoted the New Careerist as an advocate for social action. Moreover, authors of articles in Social Work and Social Casework expressed concern that employment in mainstream agencies might diminish the effectiveness of New Careerists. George Brager (1965), for example, advised that the usefulness of indigenous workers might be diluted if they become professionalized and induced to act as middle-class persons. To protect their community identification, Brager recommended that agencies provide the nonprofessional with the safety of numbers. While supportive of supervision, he also cautioned that close monitoring of New Careerists might instill too strong an identification with the supervisor and suggested that, within the confines of their responsibilities, indigenous workers be given plenty of discretionary power.

Brager (1965), Robert Pruger and Harry Specht (1968), and Paul Kurzman (1970) warned that agencies were likely to hire only those New Careerists whose behavior relative to social action could be controlled. Kurzman expressed concern that the low-income person might be hired for the purpose of diverting and deflecting the militancy of community groups. He described the double binds that could cripple
the ability of New Careerists to be effective agents of change. That is, if New Careerists were placed in the very systems that consumers were trying to change, they would be caught between their loyalty to the needs of their communities and their loyalty to their employer. Moreover, if the New Careerists were to agitate, they would have no security in the form of a college degree, certification, licensure, or tenure against possible reprisals. Too much pressure from paraprofessionals might also endanger acceptance of New Careers by public agencies and their constituent professions.

Carol H. Meyer (1970) questioned some of the assumptions inherent in using New Careerists. Being indigenous to a community did not necessarily instill special knowledge and skill in conceptualizing community needs. Moreover, indigenous workers might be harder on their neighbors than professionals in their efforts to prove they are not naive or able to be manipulated. Being middle class, therefore, was not an obstacle as long as the client’s need was met. Instead of succumbing to the complaints against social work that justified using indigenous workers, Meyer challenged social work to modernize by moving its ability to provide individual services away from a narrow and exclusive delineation of the professional relationship: “Professionals can learn a lot from working with . . . [indigenous workers] and they have unique tasks to perform, but to overstate their qualities and affirm their use as substitutes for professionals is to beg the question of how to narrow the manpower gap and provide more relevant services to people in the cities” (Meyer 1970, p. 209). Meyer called for a generalist and ecological perspective for professional social workers. She proposed a separate career line for nonprofessionals with its own direction and goals.

In evaluating the responses of CSWE, NASW, and user agencies to New Careers, it is evident that all three groups either treated the program as not relevant to their interests or worked to discourage the entry of New Careerists into the profession. The parenting institutions remained steadfast in their loyalties to the field’s professional standards, practices, and norms. This is indicated by CSWE’s response to direct requests for guidance in preparing and training paraprofessionals, by CSWE’s and NASW’s attention to developing the B.A. practitioner to meet manpower shortages, and by the ad hoc committee’s rejection of recommendations to include paraprofessionals in a new career ladder. Likewise, the lack of agency-developed career ladders and the reactions to New Careerists by professional staff in user agencies suggest that the institutionalized structure that supports the practice of professional social work was not changed to support the restructuring that might make New Careers permanent and viable.

The professional literature promoted New Careers within user agencies but in different directions. Brager (1965), Pruger and Specht (1968), and Kurzman (1970) worked for the preservation of New Ca-
Meyer (1970) argued against the use of the New Careers program as a substitute for preparatory or professional status. In keeping with the mandate to modernize the profession, she called for the thoughtful realignment of staffing patterns and the differential allocation of tasks.

The Use of Professional Structures to Solve Problems of Poverty

New Careers was short lived. Indeed, it is difficult to find any mention of New Careers programs or concepts in the human services literature after 1975 (Arnhoff 1981). In hindsight, the demise of New Careers was predictable for a number of reasons. Funds for the War on Poverty and social spending under the Johnson administration were cut by $6 billion in 1968 and redirected to finance the Vietnam war. Support for New Careerists frequently came from large-scale bureaucracies that cut back or ceased services in the 1970s (Noble 1997). Incompetence and malfeasance in the regional and local administering of the War on Poverty stymied the ability of programs to operate and grow (Trattner 1994). The goals of New Careers were unrealistic and naive in light of the institutional barriers it encountered (Trattner 1994; Noble 1997).

One of the institutional barriers was the social work profession itself, which, in hindsight, appears to have done little to advance New Careers. Social work’s response, or lack thereof, may be accounted for, in part, by the challenges raised by New Careers. In this regard, the philosophy and execution of the program raised jurisdictional issues as conceptualized by Andrew Abbott (1988) between the government and the profession. The program also exposed struggles within the profession related to identity, credibility, and class. These tensions exacerbated the problems of New Careers, making it difficult for New Careers to survive.

Jurisdictional Tensions

Federal legislation that led to the 1962 public welfare amendments to the Social Security Act, the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Act of 1963, and Medicare and Medicaid amendments to the Social Security Act called for massive increases in manpower that affected the jurisdictional boundaries of social work as a profession. As a result of this legislation, the twelve thousand professional social work vacancies that existed in 1965 were projected to rise to one hundred thousand by 1970 (Meyer 1970). The 3,500 students that graduated annually from 60 graduate schools could not begin to meet the demand. The scarcity of professionally trained social workers to staff federally legislated programs led to developments that pushed the profession to open access at the bottom by admitting the B.A.-level
worker (Leighninger 1987). This decision was influenced by the fact that federal funding from organizations, including the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), had supported developments to expand undergraduate programs to prepare workers in state mental health systems. There was also a similar move to create undergraduate academic programs in human services, particularly in New York. By 1967, there were two hundred of these programs, enrolling 12,500 students. Many of the persons who participated in these programs were African American. In response to criticisms of racism and under threat of a possible new parenting organization for workers with a bachelor’s in social work, NASW made the move in 1969 to recognize such persons as members of NASW.

Opening doors to the baccalaureate worker may have been advantageous for social work. It increased the organizational power base of NASW, the size of its membership, and its financial resources. It also gave social work tighter control over its own division of labor and who had access to it (Leighninger 1987). The impetus to grant NASW membership to B.A.-level workers came about, however, because of jurisdictional disputes related to manpower needs. The state’s role in this situation was indirect in that it merely passed the laws that created programs that called for more manpower.

In contrast, the state’s role in the War on Poverty was direct and controlling. The social work profession was targeted as part of the credentialed society that excluded employment opportunities for the poor. Instead of just administering services for the poor, the government asked social work to solve the problems of poverty by providing jobs. It also made the profession an object of social action relative to its efforts, through New Careers, to restructure the profession’s educational requirements and job definitions to create an alternative route for the poor. The use of workforce policies to attain social change was met with a resounding thud. The NASW and CSWE ignored the presence of New Careers.

Jurisdictional disputes were waged in the user agencies that employed New Careerists. A professional social worker recalled his reaction: “The program nourishes unrealistic expectations. For example, it seemed built into the law that aides start to think in terms of wanting to be social workers, and aides expect certain things then when they come to work for an agency. Some just won’t get their MSW to be social workers. An applicant came to the Workhouse who wanted to be a social worker. I told him we had no opening for a social worker but we had an opening for clerk” (Larson et al. 1968, p. 7).

In comparison with the attitudes of the professionals, New Careerists often felt that they could better perceive the needs and required services of people in the community. Their claims generated tension over jurisdictional boundaries. One program participant maintained that New
Careerists were the true teachers in the university: “Many . . . thought they were about to educate a bunch of misfits, but it became very clear after a while that we became the educators. I don’t think the University quite knew what to do with us and the wealth of information and knowledge we had bottled up inside us. Sure, I walked those halls, attended classes, took tests, wrote papers, but I can truthfully say I got my education from the people around me” (Brose 1988, p. 13).

The retrospective literature on New Careers tends to portray these conflicts as evidence of the profession’s unwillingness to adapt to the needs of the changing urban environment (Alley and Blanton 1978; Pearl 1981). Another plausible explanation is that the government through its OEO program placed itself in a position to directly compete for control of entry into the profession. The government justified its intrusion by the need for manpower and its commitment to maximum feasible participation of the poor as reflected by the creation and operation of programs designed to combat poverty. This unilateral use of power created jurisdictional disputes for control of the work that belongs to the profession. By, in effect, rejecting New Careers, the profession reestablished its jurisdictional boundaries and its right to decide issues about access and work allocation.

**Struggles within the Profession**

Social work has long wrestled with issues related to credibility and professional identity. The urban crisis of the 1960s brought these issues to light all over again. The mass migration of unskilled African Americans and Hispanics into northern urban centers and the growing recognition of social inequities required immediate services that challenged traditional casework practice (Meyer 1970). Specifically, the push for social reform called into question the validity of approaches that focused on intrapsychic processes as well as the delineation of the professional relationship as necessarily objectified for treatment of the client and therefore distancing. Besides Meyer’s proposal to retool the professional social worker, social activists from within the profession called for a stronger commitment to changing the inequities responsible for poverty. These activists targeted casework as a conservative influence that diverted attention from the real causes of poverty (Reeser and Epstein 1990). Since professional attributes were reflected in the personage of the caseworker (Meyer 1970; Reeser and Epstein 1990), this criticism pitted social action against social casework as if these specialties were antithetical to each other. Although Linda C. Reeser and I. Epstein (1990) showed the dichotomy to be false, its social construction contributed to the unrest within the profession during the 1960s.

New Careers provoked questions about the relevance of social work to the problems of the poor. The participants reflected the profession’s
deficiencies. Mark A. Haskell (1969) comments that it was argued that some tasks do not require professional training and can be better performed by nonprofessionals who can gain the confidence of lower-class clients and who have more know-how in handling day-to-day problems that poor people face. Concerns that identification with a profession might co-opt the commitment of New Careerists to social action was a further reminder that the ideology of professionalization had the potential to undermine social reform.

New Careerists may also have confounded social work and social workers because these indigenous workers represented the clientele that the profession was supposed to serve. Indeed, as New Careerists, they entered agencies as colleagues and peers rather than as client and “other.” Daniel Walkowitz (1999) claims that until the 1970s, social work was seen as a white person’s profession. Moreover, the middle-class status of social workers was tied to social respectability, which was advanced, in part, by the pursuit of high professional standards. Accordingly, New Careerists directly challenged the otherwise hidden class tensions between the served and the servers.

New Careers, though exciting in vision, fueled with noble intentions, and addressing a critical need, did not move social work as a profession. Besieged by federal legislation, the shortage of manpower, and criticism for its inadequate response to the poor, social work responded by admitting the B.A.-level worker and challenging itself to be more flexible in its service delivery and more direct in its commitment to social reform. The originators of New Careers envisioned a likely match between the program and established professions. The government’s unilateral decision to use social work to reduce poverty by providing jobs and to target social work as an object for rather than an instrument of change helped ensure the profession’s resistance and nonresponse to New Careers.

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Notes

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1. Other social programs that were part of the Great Society included the Food Stamp Act (1964), a rent supplement program (1965), the Model Cities and Metropolitan Act (1966), the Work Incentive Program (1967), and federal subsidies for low-cost housing (1968) (Trattner 1994). Moreover, the federal legislation passed during the 1960s helped many Americans to increase their incomes. For example, nearly 90 percent of those qualified received welfare benefits through Aid to Families with Dependent Children by the end of the 1960s (Noble 1997).

2. It is probable that Reissman’s knowledge about utilizing paraprofessionals came from his experience as director of Lincoln Hospital’s Neighborhood Service Center, a community service that was staffed by nonprofessional community neighborhood residents and cited as a model for antipoverty programs and community mental health centers throughout the country.

3. Federal interests were represented by the Manpower Administration of the Department of Labor in Washington, D.C. Locally, those interests were represented by Fred Boeder (director of the New Careers Administrative Office), Ed Pillow (Community Action Program director of the Mobilization of Economic Resources, Inc. under the Hennepin County Office of Economic Opportunity), Robert MacGregor (New Careers subcommittee chairman and alderman on the city council), and Roger Mielke (Bureau of Work Training Programs). The University of Minnesota interests were represented by Malcolm Moos (president of the University of Minnesota), Fred Lukermann (assistant vice president of the University of Minnesota and responsible for General College), and Esther Wattenberg (director of New Careers through the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs). The user agency interests were represented by Earl Beatt (director of Family and Children’s Service and member of the MOER board) and T. Williams (director of Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House and member of the MOER board). These names were collected from minutes of meetings related to the running of New Careers and letters between these individuals. See Wheatley (1967–68) and Lukermann (1968–70) for examples of correspondence and minutes that reflect the ongoing tensions between groups.

4. See letter from Lillian Anthony (1969), director of the Minneapolis Commission on Human Relations, to Moos, president of the University of Minnesota. Anthony references the letter sent to Moos by Boder on June 24, 1969, charging that New Careers was not in compliance with the Civil Rights Act and was on probationary status for 90 days awaiting a comprehensive affirmative action relative to the lack of both Native American and African-American members of the staff of the training center and the HELP center.

5. Memo from Fred Lukermann about New Careers makes recommendations for legal action on the MOER board debt.

6. See particularly the proceedings from the New Jersey Neuro Psychiatric Institute (1959) and a letter from Werner Boehm to the director of Family Service of America (Boehm 1959).

7. These observations were made after reviewing a report from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1965) prepared under consultation from CSWE entitled “Utilization of Social Work Staff with Different Levels of Education for Family Services in Public Welfare and Selected Illustrative Job Specifications for Local Agency Personnel.”

8. See letter from Cathryn Guyler, director of the National Commission for Social Work Careers, to the Honorable Rodney M. Love, March 31, 1966, which describes recruitment literature as appealing to “young people” or “social action–minded young people such as those drawn to the human rights movement, the Peace Corps and Vista” (Guyler 1966).

9. Margaret A. Thompson, R. Frank Falk, and Edward Knop (1969) note that saying “odd” things was defined by the supervisors as the tendency to express a great deal by means of gestures or to express oneself in physical terms rather than in terms of concepts or abstraction.