Within the Masters of Social Service Administration (MSSA) at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, the Community Practice for Social Change (CPSC) concentration aims to prepare students to influence social change through work with groups, organizations, communities, and other institutions that influence the lives of individuals and families. The CPSC concentration is concerned broadly with macro-level social work practice that occurs at the local, state, national and international levels and in the non-profit, public and private sectors. The concentration examines the relevance of community practice for promoting social justice and increasing quality of life, particularly for the most marginalized and vulnerable populations.

The goal of the concentration is to prepare students of diverse educational and experiential backgrounds with the opportunity to master skills for flexible roles and emerging social issues that can be addressed through community practice in the U.S. and abroad. The concentration seeks to recruit students who are interested in building macro skills in order to work with groups, organizations, communities and in systems reform and policy change efforts.

**Defining Community Practice**

Community practice is a well-established subfield in macro-level social work but its focus has shifted and evolved over the years. Over time, community practice has shifted focus from place-based community organizing to issue-based social action efforts at multiple societal levels to an emphasis on planning and coordination of service delivery. More recently, the emphasis has shifted to working toward change at organizational and larger political, economic, and social systems levels.

At the Mandel School, we build on the four major processes developed by Marie Weil (2013, pp.10-11) as core elements of the Community Practice for Social Change curriculum.

*Development.* The processes that focus on enabling and empowering citizens to work in united ways to change their lives and environments and improve their economic conditions, quality of life, and social, employment, and opportunity structures. This work includes social, community and economic development and, more recently, strategies of sustainable development.

*Organizing.* This includes those processes of empowerment that engage citizens in projects to change their social, economic, and political conditions.
Organizing includes neighborhood organizing, consensus organizing, organizing against unjust policies or institutions, organizing communities of interest and identity at multiple levels, developing local leadership, and coalition building.

Planning. This includes the processes engaged in by citizens, advocacy groups, advocate planners, and public and voluntary sector planners to design projects, programs, and services appropriate for specific neighborhoods, municipalities, counties, states, regions, or international programs. Planning also relates to the design of more effective services, the coordination of services, and the introduction of major reforms of human services. It includes models of social planning, program development and coordination, and program evaluation.

Progressive change. This involves actions taken by groups to effect social, economic, and political changes that expand human rights, promote social justice, enhance human capacities, and create expanded opportunity structures. Change efforts include political and social action, legislative and media advocacy, leadership development, popular education, action research, coalition building and maintenance, and participation in social movements. Such efforts embrace levels of change from local to global.

The Mandel School’s view of community practice is rooted in our long tradition of community work and builds upon our commitment to community based practice. The ten principles community-based practice articulated by the faculty in 1999 have been integrated into the CPSC curriculum. Community practice:

1. embraces an inclusive definition of community
2. values community as a process
3. views the individual in the context of a pattern of relationships that includes family, groups, organizations, and communities
4. integrates community and individual practice
5. builds interventions on the strengths and assets of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
6. emphasizes participation, teamwork, collaboration, and partnerships at all levels;
7. recognizes that comprehensive interventions are shaped by all interactions and exchanges within the social ecology
8. involves interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches
9. facilitates empowerment through a reciprocal, educational process of lifelong learning
10. encourages innovation and improvement of services
CURRICULUM FOR COMMUNITY PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Overview
The Community Practice for Social Change advanced curriculum focuses on the knowledge, skills and values needed to support the essential process of community practice such as capacity building, community organizing, strategic planning, organizational assessment and strategic positioning, research and assessment, and policy analysis and advocacy in organizations, communities and systems in the U.S. and internationally. For each of these essential processes students will understand and be able to apply relevant theories, policies and practice methods. Experiential learning and the acquisition of skills will be encouraged in all areas. The advanced curriculum will consist of 5 required 3-hour courses, 3 elective 3-hour courses, and 2 semesters of field education.

Required Advanced Courses

SASS 534:
THEORETICAL CONTEXTS SHAPING COMMUNITY PRACTICE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of the course is to provide students in the Community Practice for Social Change concentration with a thorough overview and analysis of the range of individual, group, organizational and community-level theories that inform our practice with organizations, neighborhoods, communities, social institutions and policies. The course seeks to help students: (1) develop an appreciation of the main traditions, theoretical debates, experiences and research findings in community practice both as a change process and as an interdisciplinary field; (2) identify the key ideological assumptions underlying these theories with attention to the broader historical, economic, social, demographic, institutional and political influences that affect these assumptions as well as resultant practice both in the United States and internationally; (3) identify, articulate and apply theories of change through the practice of theorizing; and (d) understand and apply logic models for community problem solving. The course emphasizes application of theory to practice settings and developing skills and competencies for community work in diverse settings. As such, this course serves as the theoretical, contextual, and strategic foundation for the other four courses in the Community Practice for Social Change advanced curriculum. Courses in the rest of the advanced curriculum will provide opportunities to apply and scrutinize the concepts discussed in this course.
SASS 567
ASSESSING, BUILDING, AND ORGANIZING COMMUNITY

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine strategies of community and social development, focusing on community as a means of impacting social change and improving the quality of life for individuals and families in low-income urban communities. Students will learn the history, frameworks and models of community building and community organizing. The course will include critical analysis of the goals, strategies, and the potential and the challenges that these efforts have faced and the lessons learned to date.

Students will also learn practice skills in the related social processes in the United States and internationally, such as strategic planning, participatory action research, consciousness-raising, and direct action. As community and social development models are presented, students will participate in a comparative analysis of the roles played by community organizers, community builders, community-based organizations, and community initiatives. Through real world experience and case studies, students will develop skills in neighborhood assessment, civic engagement, empowerment, leadership development, group work, relationship building, social capital formation, conflict resolution, democratic process, social policy analysis and change, and other methods.

The course will provide specific applications of these models, processes, and skills in relation to the dynamics of diversity and social justice. The course aims to provide students with models and skills for promoting social change and a framework for critiquing and using community-based approaches to social change.

The Community and Social Development advanced curriculum will incorporate a service learning focus on East Cleveland which borders the Case Western campus. Each of the advanced courses will include class assignments which are intended to provide useful analysis and benefit to our community partners and relevant stakeholders.

SASS 569
PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL CHANGE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course builds skills for the design, planning and implementation of social change. The focus of this course is on promoting social change through more strategic and impactful planning, positioning and partnerships. The premise of this course is that the impact and sustainability of programs, initiatives and other change efforts can be strengthened through more effective planning, better strategic positioning and organizational adaptation to external circumstances and trends, and stronger collaborations and partnerships. Students will strengthen their ability to
work effectively within organizations, in collaborations and coalitions, and within communities and systems. Course content includes the development of theories of change and action, logic models, strategic planning, organizational assessment, strategic positioning, collaboration and coalition building, systems reform, and effective working relationships with funders and local intermediaries. A service learning assignment with a community partner organization is a key skills-building experience in the course.

**SASS 532:**
**NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION**

**Course Description**

This course covers research methods and analytic tools that are used in planning, monitoring and evaluating programs and policies. It builds upon the research methods course in the foundation curriculum and deepens and expands this content as applicable at the advanced practice level. The content prepares students to use quantitative and qualitative research methods in carrying out needs assessments, assets mapping, program monitoring, quality improvement, program evaluation and policy impact studies. These research methods and tools are used by students to improve and evaluate practices, policies and programs.

The major rationales for this course are:

1) The strong desire for accountability in nonprofit and public programs
2) The importance of informing organizational and program decision making to promote program improvement, and
3) The need to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of programs, or policies and contribute to the knowledge base on “what works” in specific program areas.

Students will develop their understanding of and use of skills in the interpretation and conduct of different types of evaluation research, including needs assessment, monitoring/process evaluations, and outcome/impact assessments. This course is especially relevant for students interested in community or program research in the nonprofit and public sector. This course is particularly appropriate for students who anticipate the need to develop practical skills in data driven decision making, program or project planning or managing towards results and accountability.

The course will explore a variety of ways of viewing communities, organizations and programs can assess their assets, program plans, and effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes. The course will employ a critical perspective with the goal that students will be able to judge the strengths and weaknesses of various tools and approaches and the degree to which ethical standards have been met. Students will be introduced to a variety of methods for community and needs and assets assessment, demographic, statistical and geographic analysis, qualitative and
quantitative data gathering methods and program and policy evaluation designs. The importance of conducting research in ways that respect cultural diversity and are valid across diverse populations will be emphasized. The course will also introduce a “strengths” perspective, or development based on assets.

**SASS 561: Community Practice Policy: Analyzing and Changing Social Policy**

**Course Description**

This course teaches knowledge, values and skills for analyzing and changing social policy. The course uses a policy practice framework to examine the development and implementation of community and social policy and to prepare students to participate in policy change. A Policy Practice Project provides an opportunity for students to develop skills in planning, advocacy, and policy development. Students work in groups to develop and implement a change strategy targeted at the agency or community level. Course content includes policy analysis, logic models, and advocacy methods. The course will also cover essential social policies relevant to community practice including place-based and population-based policies for improving communities such as community development, employment and housing policies.