The Curriculum Study of the Council on Social Work Education, conducted under the leadership of Dr. Werner W. Boehm, is now available for review. The Study has been in the forefront of social work interest from the time the Study staff began its work in October, 1955. Many persons, in addition to the staff, participated in the various projects, serving as members of panels, preparing statements and documents, reading and commenting on preliminary drafts of reports, and so forth. Because the Study took place in the open arena and not in an ivory tower, social workers everywhere have tended to take sides and draw battle lines. Heated arguments and debates about particular recommendations have been taking place at informal gatherings as well as at formal meetings. The Study has been so widely prejudged that the problem of making an objective appraisal presents difficulties for almost everyone.

Now that the thirteen volumes are available, both educators and practitioners must undertake the formidable task of reading them and of relating the parts to each other and to the whole. They must also keep in mind that the final product represents only the conclusions of members of the Study staff. The panel members of each project served in an advisory capacity, and are not necessarily in agreement with the report for that section. Dr. Ernest Witte, executive director of the Council, refers to the action of the Council’s board in relation to responsibility:

Publication and distribution of the Curriculum Study reports does not imply Council acceptance of the findings or recommendations;

Implementation of any of the recommendations of the Study can come only after the field has had full opportunity to consider the reports, and the appropriate bodies of the Council have considered and recommended action which would modify or change existing policies and standards.

We are pleased to publish six appraisals of the Study which are related to particular aspects of the project and not to the whole. Planning a review of such a comprehensive report presented many technical and practical difficulties. After considering various ways of reviewing the Study, the Editorial Advisory Committee of SOCIAL CASEWORK agreed upon the plan used here. The focus of the appraisals is primarily on aspects that relate to casework practice, not only in general, but to practice in the three settings—public social services, corrections, and rehabilitation—which were singled out by the Study for special examination. Our reviewers did not read all thirteen volumes, but each read at least two, one of which was the comprehensive report. We trust that these appraisals, even though somewhat fragmentary, will help to highlight the major issues involved. Obviously, they should be studied in connection with reviews in other journals.

The necessity for testing the soundness and practicability of the Study's recommendations is stressed by our reviewers. This point is also emphasized by Dr. Boehm in his foreword to the comprehensive volume. He indicates that the reports are an attempt to "establish a design for an effectively balanced social work curriculum whose courses present both substance and method." He indicates that answers to the questions raised must be "sought through carefully designed educational experiments to test several possible patterns geared to the different needs of institutions in different regions."

What the Curriculum Study has provided, therefore, is not a blueprint to be accepted or rejected, but a general design which the field must fill in piece by piece. The task of creating the parts of the pattern, and of fitting them together, devolves on the entire
profession. Social agencies have as great a stake in molding the pattern of future social work education as do the graduate schools and undergraduate departments and should gear themselves to participate responsibly in developing and testing social work theory and methods of field instruction.

The questions raised by the Study about relevant social work theory are similar to those raised by other persons and groups. Frequent allusion is made in the current literature to the need for the field to develop a framework that includes social science, as well as behavioral, theory. There is general agreement that the solution is not to be found by discarding the present psychological base in favor of the newer socioeconomic insights, or by merely adding one set of concepts to the other. Rather, the task is that of building theory useful to social work practice through a process of integration and careful testing. No one expects that the integrative task will be accomplished quickly or that it will ever be completely finished. The Curriculum Study should have the value of stimulating further effort in this direction on the part of both schools and agencies.

One of the most controversial recommendations of the Study is the proposal to realign the educational responsibilities between graduate schools, undergraduate departments, and social agencies. The Study proposes that social work education be considered a continuum, covering the junior and senior years of undergraduate study, one year of graduate study, a practicum (a year in an agency), and a summer of institutes. A number of questions about the feasibility of the plan, as well as about its educational soundness, are raised by our reviewers.

Another area of disagreement is about proposed changes in field instruction. The Study postulates that the field experience, occurring in both undergraduate and graduate years, should be organized in four stages: (1) observational, (2) limited responsibility, (3) direct responsibility, and (4) a practicum. Under this plan, agencies providing field instruction would find themselves involved in new kinds of relationships with both graduate schools and undergraduate departments. A recasting of methods of field work teaching would be required, since experience has been largely with the third stage. Our reviewers question whether a practicum might not, in reality, be a step backward, since there is risk of its becoming an apprenticeship rather than an educationally focused experience.

Less controversial is the proposal that a position of “social work associate” be created. This recommendation is in line with similar ones made in the past, with which there has been some experimentation. Although the public services may be in a particularly strategic position to pursue study of the question, the problem of utilizing available personnel to the best advantage is of equal importance to other agencies.

The reports of the projects devoted to examination of practice in three selected settings seem to confirm opinions held by leaders in these fields. Training for work in the field of corrections and rehabilitation is viewed as generic, reinforcing the general trend away from “specialization.” Of particular importance is the Study’s confirmation of the need for highly skilled personnel in the public social services. It is to be hoped that the Study will give increased impetus to the efforts in the public welfare field to secure fellowship funds in order to raise the educational level of its personnel.

The Council on Social Work Education is to be congratulated for its courage and enterprise in conducting such a comprehensive study. The troublesome problems of staff shortages and inadequately trained personnel, which gave rise to the study, have been with the profession for many years and have become more, rather than less, acute as it has advanced in status and public acceptance. The necessity to provide adequately trained personnel for all social work services is becoming increasingly more urgent. Perhaps one of the major values of the Study lies in its sharpening of the educational issues and in its challenge to the profession to seek new solutions.