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Lisa Schelbe, Helen E. Petracchi, and Addie Weaver



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Lisa Schelbe¹

Helen E Petracchi²

Addie Weaver³

¹ Florida State University College of Social Work

² University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work

³ Curtis Research Center, University of Michigan School of Social Work

Please address all correspondence to Lisa Schelbe, Florida State University College of Social Work, 296 Champion's Way, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2570 or lschelbe@fsu.edu

Abstract

Service-learning is a pedagogical approach that integrates students' classroom instruction with community experiences. This paper discusses qualitative results of a national survey examining service-learning in Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited baccalaureate programs. Almost 80 percent of the 202 respondents required service-learning. Respondents reported benefits of incorporating service-learning in baccalaureate social work curriculum include assisting students in building community connections; applying theory and skills; socializing to the social work profession; and increasing self-awareness and exposure to diverse populations. Cited challenges include securing agency sites, time, and, logistics. Findings support existing research suggesting that service-learning benefits social work students.

Service-learning is a pedagogical approach that integrates meaningful community-driven service activities with coursework in an effort to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). In the courses to which it is attached, service-learning enhances educational value through the promotion of student reflection of their experiences, critical thinking about how those experiences relate to the course, and problem solving (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Courses that include a service-learning requirements place equal emphasis on course content, service activities that meet community-identified needs, and the development of collaborative and mutually respectful relationships between students and community members (Harkavy, 2004). Service-learning activities do not stand alone; they are designed to meet course objectives and are weighted into calculation of the final course grade.

The use of service-learning pedagogy in social work education has increased over the last 20 years, in part due to the signing of The National and Community Services Trust Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-82), which reestablished “higher education's commitment to solving social problems in the communities in which such institutions reside” (Lemieux & Allen, 2007, p. 309). However, despite this increase, social work’s response to service-learning has still been described as sluggish (Phillips, 2007). Service-learning seems a natural fit with social work education as both emphasize the importance of identifying and addressing community needs. Further, service-learning provides an opportunity for students to engage and serve vulnerable, oppressed populations within the confines of a safe classroom environment that encourages reflection about the experiences, critical thinking as the experiences relates to course objectives, and self-awareness needed to recognize and address privilege and bias.

It is important to note service-learning is neither volunteerism nor social work

education's signature pedagogy, field education. While service-learning provides an additional practical community experience and may complement field education, field education requires an extended, supervised practice experience designed to meet specific learning goals associated with degree requirements. Service-learning offers an experience that addresses a community-identified need that connects with course concepts, but is not driven by curriculum requirements.

Existing research examining service-learning in social work education, though limited, suggests it has potential benefits for students (Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Authors, under review). Social work students engaged in service-learning have demonstrated gains in professional development, including increased awareness of social justice (Belliveau, 2011; Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; Sanders et al., 2003), increased cultural awareness and understanding of diversity (Belliveau, 2011; Ericson, 2011; Jones, 2011; Nino, 2011; Sanders et al., 2003), and other social work values (Rocha, 2000; Williams et al., 2002). Service-learning in social work education has also been identified as a way to link theory and practice (Lowe & Clark, 2009; Nino et al., 2011; Twill et al., 2011). Previous studies suggest service-learning may improve students' direct practice skills (Nino et al, 2011; Poulin et al, 2006). Additionally, some studies report incorporating service-learning into social work research and social welfare policy courses may also increase student self-efficacy and enthusiasm in these areas of the curriculum (Anderson, 2006; Kapp, 2006; Knee, 2002; Lowe & Clark, 2009). Finally, studies suggest service-learning increases social work student satisfaction (Knee, 2002; Powell & Causby, 1994).

Despite the documented benefits of service-learning activities for students, existing literature also identifies challenges associated with implementing service-learning in social work education; however these challenges are largely glossed-over.

Poulin and colleagues' (2006) study revealed students engaged in service-learning had concerns about their experiences in community organizations and agencies that included inadequate workspace, insufficient organization structure, lack of clarity about staff roles, and a need for additional staff training; all of which were seen as necessary to support service-learning. The faculty workload and time required to implement service-learning have also been identified as potential drawbacks (Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Service-learning may not be feasible due to students' class and field education schedules, faculty workload within a given semester, and agency space and time (Kapp, 2006). Other potential practical and ethical challenges related to implementing service-learning include power imbalances, reporting abuse and neglect and closure at the conclusion of the project (Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011). To date, these challenges cited in the literature have been largely descriptive observations. The demands on students, faculty, and agencies involved in service-learning projects should not be overlooked. These challenges may be related to the perceived reluctance of social work educators to embrace service-learning.

Though the literature suggests consistently that service-learning is an effective teaching strategy for social work education with multiple benefits accruing to students (Lemieux & Allen, 2007), the currently available empirical studies cannot be generalized beyond the specific courses or program assessed. Additionally, existing studies neither adequately address challenges related to the implementation of service-learning within social work education nor identify the impact of institutional characteristics, such as location (e.g., urban, rural) or affiliation (e.g., public, private) on the implementation process. Reviews of literature examining service-learning in social work education also

assert there is insufficient research in this area and report a lack of clarity, and possible confusion, about service-learning and its successful implementation within social work courses (Authors, under review; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). In fact, according to Lemieux and Allen (2007), "...the research evaluating service-learning in social work shows that the state of the knowledge is rudimentary, at best" (p. 316).

Hence, the current study emerged due to a perceived paradox uncovered in the literature. That is, if service-learning provides opportunities for students to reflect, think critically, and work collaboratively to address community-identified needs; it *ought* to be a fit for social work education. Yet, there is no identified literature describing service-learning in social work which can be generalized across programs, as existing studies report course-by-course or program-by-program assessments and rely primarily on student self-report data. Collectively, these individual studies suggest service-learning has shown some benefits and presents some potential challenges when implemented within social work courses. However, there are no identified nationally representative studies of service-learning across programs that assess the benefits and challenges of incorporating service-learning in social work education or suggest themed experiences.

This qualitative analysis reports perceived benefits and challenges of service-learning among a national sample of CSWE-accredited baccalaureate program representatives, with attention to potential differences by program location and program affiliation. The data was collected as part of a national survey of CSWE-accredited baccalaureate social work programs that examined the state of service-learning in baccalaureate social work education, the results of which are reported elsewhere (See Authors, under review). The current study takes a first step in addressing identified gaps

in the literature focused on service-learning in social work education by presenting program representatives' perspectives of the benefits and challenges of service-learning within baccalaureate social work education and increasing the generalizability of findings by utilizing national survey data.

Methods

This paper reports qualitative results from a national survey examining the state of service-learning among CSWE-accredited baccalaureate social work programs. In 2010, a web-based survey was administered to all currently CSWE-accredited baccalaureate programs in order to assess the implementation of service-learning within their programs. CSWE's publicly available Directory of Accredited Programs (www.cswe.org/Accreditation/Accredited-Programs) was used to obtain email and telephone contact information for designated baccalaureate program representatives. The representatives were contacted and asked to participate in this survey. A trained graduate student made follow-up telephone calls to non-respondents to the web-based survey with an offer to administer the survey over the telephone.

The survey consisted of 21 items, five of which were open-ended questions focused on obtaining more detailed, specific information about respondents' experiences implementing service-learning. This article reports the qualitative analysis of responses to two open-ended prompts seeking respondents' perceptions about the benefits and challenges of incorporating service-learning in their baccalaureate social work programs. The first item read, "Please discuss ways in which you perceive your BSW/BASW students have benefited from their service-learning activities." The second prompt was "Please discuss the challenges, if any, you have faced implementing required service-learning in your courses."

Sample Characteristics

Of the 471 CSWE-accredited baccalaureate programs at the time of survey implementation, 202 (42.9%) responded to this survey. Nearly 80% (N=162) of respondents reported incorporating service-learning as a required component of at least one course in their baccalaureate social work program. When asked about program affiliation, a little more than half of the respondents (N=106; 53.2%) identified their university or college affiliation as public or state-related. Approximately one third reported their schools were private with a religious affiliation (N=66; 33.2%). The remaining respondents identified their university or college as being private with no religious affiliation (N=27; 13.6%). The responding programs were almost evenly divided by location, with about 40% (N=78) of respondents reporting their program was located in an urban area, nearly 30% (N=59) identifying as suburban, and another 30% reporting their program was in a rural location (N=65).

The demographics of baccalaureate programs comprising this sample are comparable to those of baccalaureate programs reported in CSWE's 2009 Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States (CSWE, 2011). Our respondents described the composition of their baccalaureate social work programs as follows: 85.7% (N=156) reported that over 80% of their students were female. About three-quarters (N=132; 74.2%) of 178 responding programs indicated that over 50% of their study body was white, with 25% (N=47) reporting that 90% or more of their study body was white.

Survey respondents were asked several open-ended questions about service-learning including questions about the benefits and challenges of incorporating service-learning. Over 60% (N=121; 60.4%) provided responses to the open ended questions. All of the respondents who answered the open-ended questions also indicated that service-learning was incorporated into their baccalaureate programs. This means that almost three-quarters of respondents who

reported using service-learning within their programs (74.7%; N=121) provided insights about the benefits and challenges of implementing service-learning.

Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis of responses to the two open-ended prompts assessing respondents' perceived benefits and challenges of implementing service-learning within their baccalaureate social work programs was conducted using NVivo8, qualitative data analysis software. Respondents' answers to the open-ended prompts were uploaded to NVivo8 and coded by location and affiliation prior to open coding. The research team identified themes through an iterative and inductive process during which responses were read and discussed among the research team. Following the identification of themes, differences among programs' locations and affiliations were explored through the use of matrix queries.

Findings

The open-ended prompts about the benefits and challenges of service-learning were varied in length and depth. Some respondents used short phrases and words to answer the prompt, while others elaborated on their thoughts. After writing a lengthy response, one respondent included her name and phone number and offered to talk in a more in-depth way about her thoughts. These answers suggest many respondents held strong convictions about perceived benefits of service-learning. It is also obvious respondents face complicated challenges to incorporating service-learning in their courses.

Perceived Benefits of Service-Learning

Respondents frequently shared multiple perceived benefits of incorporating service-learning in baccalaureate social work courses. The most commonly identified perceived benefits fell within four categories: 1) assisting students with networking and community connections, 2)

facilitating students' application of theory and skills learned in the classroom to "real life" experiences in the community, 3) providing students with an opportunity for professional socialization, and 4) increasing students' self-awareness and exposure to diverse populations.

Networking and community connections. When respondents discussed how service-learning assisted students' with their networking and creation of community connections, they talked about the benefits students received from having contact with the community. Respondents believed students engaged in service-learning activities became familiar with the community and local agencies and were introduced to available social programs and services. Participating in service-learning activities also provided students with opportunity to understand better issues facing the community. One respondent believed service-learning students benefit from getting "a chance to see what agencies are like." This orientation to agencies and the community was perceived as a key benefit of the service-learning experience for students. Moreover, several respondents discussed students' developing relationships with professionals in their service-learning agencies as a benefit. One respondent said that service-learning "teaches networking and how to be engaged in the communities in which we live and work."

Application of theory and skills. The second theme regarding the benefits of service-learning was that students were able to apply theory and skills learned in the classroom to real-life experiences. The importance of applying what is learned in the classroom to practice—whether in direct practice with clients or community-based practice—was evidenced by the responses in which the phrase "real life" was used frequently when respondents discussed benefits. One respondent commented, "[Service-learning] allows knowledge to come to life for them." Respondents also discussed service-learning as allowing classroom discussions and textbook readings to come "alive."

While respondents spoke generally about the implementation of skills or “social work skills”, several specific skills were identified by respondents as being utilized during service-learning. The experiences of applying these skills then became part of classroom discussion. Specific skills identified included, “interviewing skills”, “interpersonal skills”, “relationship building with clients”, “assessment skills”, “analytical skills”, “understanding ethics”, “group work”, and “research.” Respondents discussed their belief that students’ service-learning experiences increased their understanding of processes and problem solving being taught in the classroom. They further explained that students gained confidence as a result of their service-learning experiences. One respondent explained:

Students gain hands-on experiences for developing skills, applying knowledge, developing cultural self-awareness, exploring sources of privilege and how privilege relates to power and oppression, develop global skills (improved communication, learning to be accountable to others, etc.), and acquire competencies that do not emerge through more traditional pedagogies (applying critical skills to actual service experiences that content to the curriculum).

Socialization to the profession of social work. Respondents’ perceived benefits of service-learning also included the opportunity for their students to be socialized to the social work profession and to determine areas of practice in which they might be most interested in working. While some of the responses exemplifying this perceived benefit overlapped with comments about the benefit of applied skill development mentioned above, there are components to this discussion unique to professional socialization. For example, as one person wrote, “[Service-learning provides a] better understanding of the social work profession.”

Some respondents indicated service-learning benefited students by introducing them to the scope of social work practice and exposing them to settings, methods, populations, and social problems they might not otherwise have been aware. Through service-learning, students have a chance to develop professional behaviors as well as to clarify expectations of the profession. One

comment captures this, “[Students] get a realistic picture of day-to-day social work. They get an understanding of the clients served.” This was echoed by another respondent who wrote, “[Service-learning] gives the students a framework for understanding what social work is all about and for seeing how it is implemented in the field.” Several respondents discussed how service-learning provided their students with experiences that helped them determine whether or not social work was the correct career choice. “[Service-learning] introduces [the students] to the practical aspects of human services and social work practice in particular. This experience helps them decide on a career in the human services or pursue other career options.”

Increased self-awareness and exposure to diverse populations. Finally, respondents commented that service-learning benefited students through exposure to different cultures and diverse groups of people. One respondent explained that service-learning can “expand [students’] awareness of many populations, break social stigmas, and barriers to engaging the entire population of the area in projects.” Service-learning was seen to “sharpen diversity awareness” and respondents discussed how service-learning “exposed students to other cultures.” In fact, one respondent described four ways service-learning addresses culture and diversity. “[Service-learning] increased understanding of one’s own culture and other cultures, increased citizenship commitments, increased cross cultural communication skills, [and] increased understanding of diverse communities.”

Included with the comments about diversity were comments about privilege and power experienced by students in service-learning activities as demonstrated by this comment: “[Students are]...developing cultural self-awareness, exploring sources of privilege and how privilege relates to power and oppression.” One respondent wrote service-learning allows students to “Get into [the] real world of oppressed population and meet people who face

challenges unaware of previously.” This expanded view of the world was mentioned by multiple respondents.

Moreover, respondents perceived service-learning as helping students increase their own self-awareness. Some respondents stated service-learning placed students in areas “out of their comfort zones” and exposed them to new experiences. As one respondent said, “[Service-learning allows students to] see the world and see themselves.” Service-learning was also credited with providing an opportunity for students to gain insight about themselves as they identified and challenged stereotypes they may have harbored about different groups of people. Service-learning was seen as expanding students’ leadership skills and their ability to work with others. By increasing students’ self-awareness, service-learning also increased their confidence.

Perceived Challenges of Service-Learning

The perceived benefits of service-learning were not without challenge, and respondents shared their difficulties integrating service-learning into their baccalaureate social work programs. Responses reflecting perceived challenges fell into three main themes: 1) securing appropriate agency sites for students, 2) time, and, 3) logistics.

Securing agencies for service-learning activities. By far the most frequently cited challenge to implementing service-learning within baccalaureate social work coursework was securing appropriate agency sites. Respondents volunteered three major reasons for this difficulty. First, some community agencies wanted students to commit to more hours than the students’ needed in order to fulfill their service-learning requirements. In other words, service-learning is distinct from field education in purpose and requires less hours and a shorter duration. Some agencies did not find the limited number of hours dedicated to service-learning as desirable in exchange for their commitment to supervise students. One respondent described the

challenge as, “Finding agencies willing to take students for only 25 hours because they want 150 hours for field.” Respondents also believed that agencies had expectations for service-learning students that were inconsistent with the students’ academic level; that is, while these undergraduate programs were providing service-learning opportunities for baccalaureate-level courses, agency expectations for the students were more consistent with those one might anticipate for a graduate student. According to respondents, agencies wanted students who possessed advanced social work skills.

Several respondents mentioned obtaining appropriate clearances for students to serve in the agency as a challenge to service-learning. These challenges included determining responsibility for processing the clearances and clarification about who will pay for the clearance. It was mentioned the responsibilities do not lie clearly with the service-learning agency, the student, or the classroom instructor requiring the service-learning.

Finally, respondents indicated service-learning agencies did not always have appropriate opportunities for students to interact with clients. One respondent commented the challenge of providing service-learning was “Finding placements that offer client contact.” Respondents stressed it could be difficult to find meaningful opportunities that went beyond “filing or wiping-up spills.” In fact, one respondent wrote, “[A]gencies do not always offer the range of assignments in different modalities so some students do not have first-hand [service-learning] experience e.g. with groups.” Several respondents further mentioned students’ service-learning experiences were not equal given the range of agency sites, “[Service-learning] experiences are uneven with some students involved in more meaningful activities with clients and others a more passive, observation, office helper role.”

Several respondents discussed the bind agencies may experience when they already

accept students for field placements and are then asked to accept service-learning students as well. Service-learning students in effect competed with their field peers for agency time. One respondent shared, “We are in a very rural area. While we'd like to require more service-learning, we have to guard against over taxing our agencies. Just having Field Practicum students and interviews from students in lower division courses is about all the agencies can manage.” This sentiment was echoed by a respondent who wrote, “In a small community agencies can get inundated with demands for service opportunities; we've been doing it forever, but other departments are jumping on the bandwagon and clogging the agencies...” The challenge of finding agency sites is also related to the commonly cited challenge of not having enough time.

Time. The next most common challenge identified by respondents to incorporating service-learning was “time.” Sometimes respondents simply wrote the word “time” when asked to identify challenges, though they often would elaborate that time was perceived as a challenge for both students and faculty. Respondents indicated students, especially those with full-time jobs and families, found it difficult to balance their service-learning activities with other courses and field education requirements. Several respondents shared that students expressed concerns about the number of hours required for service-learning and felt overwhelmed. Students’ schedules were also identified as a challenge to completing required service-learning activities. Sometimes this was due to enrollment in multiple classes with similar service-learning requirements, as one respondent explained, “Some students have difficulty finding ways to complete their hours since they have several courses in one semester that require service-learning experiences.” Also, some students’ schedules conflicted with community agencies’ needs.

“Time” was also framed by some respondents as “time management.” One respondent explained, “Students believe they are not available when the service-learning activities are

needed by the agency. Twenty five hours are not enough hours for the agency, yet seems like a large commitment by students.” Time constraints sometimes were addressed by working creatively with agencies, as one respondent said, “most of our students work full time. Because of this, we attempt [to work] with an agency to develop projects that the students could work on either at the agency or at home. They will present their work to the agency.” Of course, working creatively with agencies may also become a “time” challenge for faculty.

Again, when students are challenged by an activity, this same activity challenges faculty and such is the case with “time.” In fact respondents, who by nature of the sampling frame were faculty, identified “time” as an issue for them as well. They reported the amount of work it takes to organize service-learning activities as an enormous challenge. A few respondents explained their ambivalence about service-learning because it was a challenge to organize, yet it goes unrecognized by their administration. Respondents also stated there was “little reward” in the tenure and promotion process for service-learning so that time spent developing service-learning activities, and integrating them with classroom instruction may be counterproductive toward being retained or promoted.

Logistics. Respondents further described incorporating service-learning as “time-intensive” due to the logistics of arranging placements and coordinating individual service-learning activities throughout the course. As identified above, respondents reported incorporating service-learning into their courses added hours to their faculty workload. Other logistical challenges identified by respondent’s included, student transportation to service-learning sites, student supervision at service-learning sites, and coordinating service-learning experiences for non-traditional and international students, as well as students with special needs.

Transportation was perceived as a particularly daunting challenge and identified

frequently by respondents. Those who elaborated on this challenge discussed the difficulty students faced transporting themselves to agencies given either agency location, or their lack of access to transportation. Perhaps surprisingly, transportation was identified as a logistical issue regardless of where the program was located (e.g., rural, suburban, and urban).

With respect to supervision, respondents often cited the challenge of keeping students accountable and tracking service-learning hours. Some students were left unsupervised at their agencies. Sometimes this was due to staff turnover or the simple fact that the agency committing to a service-learning student might be doing so because they are already overburdened and understaffed, and view the student as an additional resource for the agency. Lack of supervision and timely feedback to students was described by respondents as a consequence of this scenario.

Several respondents discussed student anxiety as they approached service-learning and the challenge this created – making students feel comfortable and safe. Simply put, some students did not want to participate in required service-learning. One respondent explained, “[There is] [s]ome initial student resistance. This usually dissipates as students become engaged.”

Differences Among Program Affiliation and Location

After the themes were identified in the questions about benefits and challenges, we examined whether the themes varied by program location or affiliation. No patterns related to respondents’ perceptions of benefits or challenges were found based of their program affiliation. There was no difference in the perceived benefits of service learning by program location. However, analysis revealed trend of a pattern of differences in the perceptions of challenges among the different locations of schools with rural and urban programs citing challenges differing from those of suburban schools. Overall, logistics were cited as challenges more

frequently by rural and urban programs, although suburban programs more frequently reported transportation, one aspect of logistics, as a challenge. The observed trend of difference by location was subtle and not consistently found across all of the challenges cited.

Discussion

Utilizing service-learning in social work education appears to be an obvious fit. The limited existing literature suggests incorporating service-learning in social work education has potential positive outcomes for students. However, the literature to date has focused on individual programs implementing service-learning, rather than assessing experiential themes across programs. This study contributes to the literature by presenting a national overview of baccalaureate social work programs' perceptions and experiences about service-learning from a survey of over 200 CSWE-accredited baccalaureate social work programs. Analyses were conducted to examine whether perceived benefits challenges differed by school location and/or affiliation.

The findings of this survey echo findings of previous research conducted with smaller samples about the benefits of service-learning to participating students. However, one theme not discussed previously in the literature but identified by the respondents' to this survey is that service-learning assists students with networking and community connections. This has important implications since these connections can assist students in assessing options for future field placement opportunities as well as career planning. Engagement with the community is important to social work, and undergraduate students may have limited opportunities to become involved. The exposure to agencies and social workers provided by service-learning may improve students' ties to the community and their understanding of current issues the community faces.

Related to this issue of community connections is the perception that service-learning facilitates students' application of theory and skills learned in the classroom to "real life" experiences. The application of theories and concepts has been addressed in previous studies (Lowe & Clark, 2009; Nino et al, 2011; Twill et al., 2011) showing students' practice skills improved after engaging in service-learning projects (Nino et al, 2011; Poulin et al, 2006). Consistent with these smaller sample results, the current study found respondents believed service-learning students benefit from the opportunity to practice skills and apply theory while simultaneously learning it in the classroom. While field education likely provides these opportunities as well, in service-learning the emphasis is on practice application as it is being taught simultaneously in a course. Unique to service-learning also is course-required reflection which can provide social work students an opportunity to use their experiences to examine issues such as power, privilege, and inequality.

Service-learning also provides students with the opportunity to be socialized to the profession of social work. Echoing previously reported findings of Jones (2011), respondents reported students engaged in service-learning were able to examine their career options. Expanding upon Jones, this study found service-learning provided students with exposure to different career opportunities, introduced them to different populations of clients/consumers with whom social workers work, and afforded opportunities to experience different types of social work practice (e.g. policy, macro practice, gerontology). These were experiences not previously considered by the students engaged in service-learning (Anderson, 2006; Cohen et al, 2006). Several participants commented service-learning helped some of their students realize the profession of social work was not the best choice as a career. In these cases an unanticipated consequence of service-learning was that it assisted students in choosing another career path

before they had devoted more time to their studies or tried to enter field.

Beyond increased self-awareness of professional identity, awareness of self and sense of self were themes throughout the responses in this study. Students' increased self-awareness was often explained as an understanding of power and diversity. Other studies have cited exposure to diverse populations and appreciation of cultural differences among the benefits of service-learning (Belliveau, 2011; Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; Sanders et al., 2003). This was evident in the responses given to the study under discussion as well.

Respondents to this study are comparable to all CSWE-accredited baccalaureate programs with racial and gender composition. Approximately three-quarters of the sample reported over half of their student were white and a quarter reported that 90% or more of their students were white. Eighty-five percent of the programs in the study reported 80% or more of their students were female. Taking this into consideration, diversity within classroom settings may be limited and service-learning projects offer additional and needed exposure to ethno-cultural diversity as well as an opportunity for self-reflection resulting from this exposure.

The benefits of service-learning described by respondents in this study support an argument for further inclusion of service-learning in social work education. However, challenges exist to incorporating and implementing service-learning; challenges largely overlooked in current social work education literature. Perceived challenges are consistent with some limited work examining challenges of implementing service-learning within social work education. While there are no published studies exploring why social work educators have not integrated service-learning more fully into their courses, results of this study suggest there are implementation challenges for both educators and students. The findings of this study outline three major challenges of incorporating service-learning in baccalaureate social work education.

Respondents most frequently identified securing agencies for service-learning activities as a challenge to incorporating service-learning in their courses. Some programs addressed this challenge by finding on-line or campus-based alternatives to agency-based service-learning. Several respondents shared that campus-wide initiatives requiring service-learning for all baccalaureate students prior to graduation sometimes assisted students and faculty in finding agencies. However, the drawback of having a service-learning graduation requirement is increased competition among students for good experiences that meet community-identified needs and are related to the objectives of any individual course in which service-learning is a requirement. Not all agencies offered appropriate opportunities for service-learning.

The challenge of “time” that was a theme in this study is one other researchers have identified (Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Developing relationships with community partners; developing projects that engage students in the community, providing service, meeting course learning objectives; and dealing with the many details of service-learning as a required course component undoubtedly necessitates a time commitment by faculty in order for successful service-learning experiences for students to eventuate. However, respondents also explained explicitly that time was an issue for students as well with service-learning requirements conflicting with other course schedules, multiple classes requiring service-learning, and with their needs to work to support themselves.

The logistics required in coordinating service-learning projects can also be a significant challenge. As Kapp (2006) explained, service-learning may not be feasible when added to existing faculty workload responsibilities. The supervision of students and ensuring appropriate placements for students who may be hard to place are details requiring additional time for planning and thoughtful consideration. Some respondents mentioned faculty members had

assistance in coordinating these details. Yet, even if the service-learning project is developed with policies and supervision in place to facilitate the experience, the lack of reliable transportation can threaten students' involvement. Respondents' frustration with the logistics and other challenges to incorporating service-learning was evident in what they shared. The findings also revealed trends toward different perceptions of challenges among the different locations of schools. Rural and urban program representatives often cited challenges that differed from those of suburban schools. While the pattern of responses between the rural and urban schools may be similar, the mechanisms that created the challenges may be unique and there may be different strategies to address these challenges.

By understanding social work educators' perceptions of the challenges of incorporating service-learning into their courses and programs, it is possible to explore ways to integrate service-learning while minimizing the challenges. For example, the challenge of transportation and the challenges of agency opportunities may be minimized, as respondents suggested, by utilizing campus and internet-based or campus-based activities. Understanding potential challenges can also assist faculty in assessing their adoption of service-learning. In a program with few resources and limited community partners, faculty may determine that large-scale incorporation of service-learning is unfeasible.

Perceived challenges are consistent with some limited work examining challenges of implementing service-learning within social work education; however, more importantly, challenges perceived by participants may reflect improper implementation of service-learning. What is noticeably absent in comments about perceived challenges is integrating service-learning experiences into course content and/or assignments. Only two respondents mentioned these as challenges. These responses suggest service-learning activities were managed in a similar

manner to field education placements. Many respondents talked about “finding placements” for individual service-learning students. This is a concern as then the activities become driven by the learning objective rather than meeting community need and no longer meet the definition of service-learning. This is further exemplified by respondents stating that not all students engaged in service-learning had "meaningful opportunities" and that some consisted of doing office work at the agency. Several respondents mentioned agencies may not have experiences for service-learning projects after accepting students for field placements. Perceived challenges also indicate that the purpose of service-learning was not adequately communicated to agencies taking service-learning students, and, as a result, agencies did not have accurate expectations of these students or appropriate service-learning activities in which they could engage. For example, several respondents explained agencies wanted students who possessed advanced social work skills. Finally, respondents described their own challenges related to finding service-learning experiences for students, but did not discuss any challenges related to integrating the service-learning experience with coursework. It may be that this is not a perceived challenge for respondents or it may indicate that not all respondents were integrating service-learning activities with coursework. If service-learning activities are not completed in conjunction with reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving offered via coursework, the service is simply volunteerism and is not likely to afford students the same benefits. Volunteerism is not service-learning.

Recommendations

Implementing service-learning in baccalaureate social work can be done in a way that maximizes student benefit while complementing curriculum. Considering the benefits of service learning identified by respondents in this study, it makes sense to incorporate service-learning as a component to an introductory course. This would expose students to the community and

clients while also providing a safe classroom environment to reflect critically on and discuss biases, privilege, self-awareness, and professional values. Service-learning may serve to prepare students better for more advanced coursework, including field placements and to understand the social work profession more realistically.

Since several challenges identified in this study were related to securing appropriate service-learning sites and projects, identifying ways to reduce the number of agencies hosting service-learning students at any given time may be an effective strategy to decrease the time demands and logistical issues of service-learning. One idea is to partner with an agency to tackle a larger service-learning project that would only be possible with a large number of students working together with the community to complete it (e.g., playground clean-up/refurbishment or serving together at a soup kitchen every weekend for a month). Alternatively, groups of students could have projects associated with their college or university (e.g., . conducting a needs assessment for first generation college students or a public health campaign about a specific topic). While service-learning can be conducted by individuals, it may increase benefits and connection to course concepts, by identifying a time-limited group project that meets a community-need and reduces perceived challenges.

Limitations

This study is the first national survey of CSWE-accredited baccalaureate social work programs querying program representatives about their experiences with service-learning. The study has several limitations which should be noted. First, the response rate to this study was approximately 40 percent. Analyses confirmed the schools represented in the study are similar to CSWE-Accredited baccalaureate programs on several measures—including affiliation and location as well as racial and gender composition (Authors, under review). However, it is

unknown if the programs in the sample are representative of those that incorporate service-learning. Selection bias is a possibility in that programs with more successful or more challenging service-learning experiences may have been more likely to have participated in this study. It may also be possible that the programs declining to participate in this study have little experience with service-learning or may have discontinued it because they did not perceive benefits to outweigh challenges. Though the results of this study represent over 200 CSWE-accredited baccalaureate programs, with a response rate of 40% the question of selection bias remains.

A second limitation of this study is that the data analyzed came from responses to two short answer questions. To more fully understand the benefits and challenges of incorporating service-learning in baccalaureate social work programs, in-depth qualitative interviews and focus groups should be conducted with faculty and students regarding their service-learning experiences as well as with representatives of community agencies that have hosted service-learning students.

Future studies should explore the practical ways that baccalaureate programs have overcome challenges to incorporating service-learning. Special attention should be paid to the unique differences among programs in different locations. Additionally, there is a need for more research focused on both students' and community agencies' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of service-learning for baccalaureate social work education.

Conclusion

Service-learning aligns with the values of social work education and can benefit baccalaureate social work students. The findings of this nationally representative sample support previous research on service-learning; with the scope of this study allowing more global

statements to be made about service-learning in baccalaureate social work education as a whole. Incorporating service-learning into baccalaureate social work courses can assist students with networking and making community connections and provide them with “real life” experiences in the community where they can apply practice skills and theory as they are learning it in the classroom. Additionally, service-learning activities provide social work students with the opportunity to be socialized to the profession of social work and increases exposure to diverse populations.

Incorporating service-learning into baccalaureate social work education is not without challenges. The challenges include securing appropriate agency sites for students, time, and logistics. Organizing the service-learning opportunities may require creative solutions and support from administration. Future research should explore further how to successfully incorporate service-learning within baccalaureate social work programs and identify how documented challenges can best be overcome. As challenges are explored, special attention should be paid to the unique needs experienced by programs in different locations, and this should be taken into consideration while concurrently developing strategies to secure service-learning opportunities for students.

The challenges described by respondents suggest some confusion about service-learning as a pedagogical strategy and its proper implementation within baccalaureate social work programs. As social work programs adopt service-learning, it is important to distinguish service-learning from require field education and volunteerism. Service-learning must be linked to course objectives and meet community-identified needs. Successfully implementing service-learning has a potential for baccalaureate social work students.

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