

**Using Community-Based Research to Improve Students' Learning in Community Practice:  
Bringing the Macro into Focus for Face-to-face and Distance Learners**

**Introduction**

Social work has long been characterized by its focus on social justice and practice across multiple, interacting systems and structures. Specifically, social work has historically been committed to macro practice in which we engage with and intervene on behalf of organizations, communities, and entire groups of people in order to bring about planned change across systems (Meenaghan, Gibbons, & McNutt, 2005; Netting, Kettner, McMurty, & Thomas, 2011). Despite this historical tradition in social work to attend to macro issues, macro social work has become a marginalized area of practice in the field and in schools of social work ((Fisher & Corciullo, 2011; Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). A recent call to action among professional groups and educators to reinvest in macro social work (ACOSA, 2014) has highlighted the need to reinvigorate social work programs' macro practice curricular offerings in order to cultivates students' interest in macro social work and train the next generation of macro practitioners (Reisch, 2016).

Community-engaged teaching methods are a natural fit in macro practice courses and may be the pedagogical answer for reinvesting students in macro social work. One form of community engagement that has shown promising results for teaching students the dynamic connections between research, policy, and macro practice is community-based research (CBR). CBR is a collaborative research effort in which academic and community partners share in all aspects of the research process (Israel, Schelz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). An expanding literature documents the effectiveness of integrating CBR in social work courses ([Author], 2015; Brown & Kinsella, 2006; Larson, 2008; Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Postlethwait, 2012; Sather, Weitz, &

Carlson, 2007; Shannon, Kim, & Robinson, 2012). Consistently, this literature demonstrates that using community-engaged teaching methods increases students' investment in course content. However, there is additional need for further evaluation of CBR in macro practice courses, specifically those that use distance education delivery methods. It is possible that the unique difficulties and isolation that many distance learners face may be partially mitigated by innovative, community-engaged teaching approaches that more aptly connect students with their communities in the process of their learning. Further, engaging students in CBR in a macro social work course may provide them with a chance to hone their community engagement, assessment, and intervention skills in a real-world context while potentially increasing their commitment to macro work. This paper will detail the planning, implementation, and evaluation of an intensive CBR project that was carried out in two sections of macro practice, one in a face-to-face classroom and one in a distance learning classroom. We define distance learning as instruction that is delivered to remote campuses across the state using internet video conferencing (IVC) and other learning technologies, commonly referred to as synchronous distance education.

## **Background**

### **Literature Review**

Social work is, by nature, an applied professional field of study. In social work, experiential learning is the mechanism that builds necessary skills, knowledge, and values. According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning is a process whereby concepts are derived from and continually modified by experience. Additionally, Kolb (1984) described experiential learning as learning through actual, applied experience and contingent on four different abilities: (1) experience, (2) reflection, (3) conceptualization, and (4) experimentation. As opposed to a

passive model of didactically transferring knowledge to students, experiential learning fosters meaningful experiences for students allowing them to engage more deeply with classroom content in a cyclical process of learning (Chan, 2012).

Field education is typically the way that experiential learning manifests in social work education. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) calls field education the “signature pedagogy” of social work education and describes the intent of field education as an integration of “theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting” (CSWE, 2015, p. 12). A challenge that may accompany field education is the difficulty students may encounter when they try to practice the skills they have primarily learned in classroom settings (Knee, 2002). If students are indeed increasingly less interested in macro social work (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014) and they are only receiving classroom-based instruction in this domain, then their motivation to absorb and apply macro concepts in their field education may be compromised. One solution for increasing interest, absorption, and application of macro concepts is to offer students a compelling hands-on learning experience in which they are able to bring macro concepts into focus. Our model uses experiential learning philosophy and community-engaged teaching methods to foster student investment in macro social work. This model specifically uses CBR as a vehicle for community engagement.

### **Community-Engaged Teaching and Learning**

Community engagement is a term often used synonymously with service learning. We refer to community-engagement because it fits more aptly within our CBR teaching model. According to the Carnegie Foundation (2016), community engagement refers to collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. Thus

community-engaged teaching refers to establishing a learning environment for students that exists both *in* the community and *for* the community. Community-engaged teaching allows students to practice what they learn and learn while they practice—a cyclical process that conforms to experiential learning principles. Pedagogically, community-engaged teaching can foster student learning motivation (Duffy & Raque-Bogdan, 2010). Ambrose and colleagues (2010) describe how students' motivation is driven by their expectations for successful attainment of learning goals and the value they ascribe to those goals. When students believe they can achieve the goals they set, they are more motivated and better learners. When students see the real-world value in their learning goals, they are more apt to truly engage in the content ([Author], 2015). In addition to positive learning outcomes, community engagement leads to positive personal (e.g., efficacy, identity, growth), social (e.g., social responsibility), and career (e.g., connections with professionals in their field) outcomes (Vanderbilt Center for Teaching, 2016). Particularly, student community-engaged learning projects increase efficacy within students' personal lives and within their relationship to the broader community context (Moore, et al., 2014). In the end, community-engaged teaching that employs a CBR model may be especially important in macro social work courses that aim to increase the value students ascribe to macro social work, increase students' motivation to develop skills in macro domains, and ultimately develop a sense of self-efficacy that will inspire students to be change-makers at the community-level.

A growing number of studies describe the pedagogical integration of experiential learning in social work research methods aimed at engaging undergraduate students in the research enterprise (Brown & Kinsella, 2006; Holley, Risley-Curtiss, Stott, Jackson, & Nelson, 2007; Knee, 2002; Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Postlethwait, 2012; Rice & Walsh, 2014; Sather, et

al., 2007; Shannon, Kim, & Robinson, 2012). For example, Postlethwait (2012) connected small groups of undergraduate research methods students with local agencies to conduct agency-driven research projects, and students reported increased appreciation for research and confidence in completing research tasks. Similarly, Knee (2002) involved his undergraduate social work students in a research project that included an official from the participating community organization as a co-instructor for the course. His students overwhelmingly reported that the CBR project helped bridge the gap between an abstract, theoretical understanding of research and its real-world application. While Postlethwait (2012) used small groups and various community partners, Knee (2002) involved an entire course in one community partnership. On the contrary, Scott (2008) used a service learning model across three separate courses in which individual students engaged in research, policy practice, and community interventions related to existing social problems in their communities. Similar to Knee (2002), the model we present in this paper involved all of the students from one course (2 sections) in a single, large-scale research project with an actively-involved community partner. While our CBR project involved data collection and analysis, it primarily focused on using data to drive community-intervention, similar to Scott's model (2008).

There are numerous studies that evaluate the effectiveness of community-engaged teaching methods in macro practice courses specifically ([Author], 2015; Carey, 2007; Sather et al., 2007; Scott, 2008; Johnson, 2010). For example, Sather et al. (2007) integrated community service in an undergraduate sequence of policy, macro practice, and research methods and found that students experienced a shift in professional goals and deeper understanding of the role of research in the social work profession. Johnson (2010) used a service learning approach in her macro practice course in which students engaged in a participatory photography project in their

community. Students in her course were able to make deep connections between the photo narratives and programs/policies at the macro level. In her macro practice course, [Author, (2015)] partnered with the Department of Workforce Services to conduct a statewide needs assessment of human service providers' perceptions of employment and education barriers for refugees. Students in her course reported a deeper appreciation for macro practice and a broader understanding of how community assessment fits in the practice model for macro social work. These studies show the benefits of integrating experiential, community-based projects in macro social work courses and provide a helpful starting point for social work educators who are interested in using these methods in their classroom. Unfortunately, much of the growing literature has not evaluated this model in a distance education context (e.g., online classes), but particularly within non-traditional distance education models (i.e., IVC).

### **Distance Education**

Research points to the unique challenges and attributes around distance education and the distinct needs of adult learners (Vernon, Vakalahi, Pierce, Pittman-Munke, & Adkins, 2009). Social work students enrolled in distance courses are typically older than their on-campus counterparts and often have children and jobs in human service agencies (Coe & Elliott, 1999; Colorado & Eberle, 2010; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000). Oliaro and Trotter (2010) note that social work distance education students typically work part-time and live further distances from their campuses than what a traditional-aged, main campus college student might. It is important to note that the demographic profile of distance learners may have shifted in recent years as distance learning in social work has expanded in course delivery and numbers of students enrolled (Pelech, Wulff, Perrault, Ayala, Baynton, Williams, et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the distance learners that are the focus of the present study tend to fit the profile cited above (e.g.,

rural, older, employed). Adult learners in distance education may experience a tension between their own flexible learning style and the closed nature of distance education learning systems (Christidou, Gravani, & Hatzinka, 2012). Gravani (2015) argues that distance education needs to be more flexible, mutual, and promoting of autonomous systems of teaching and learning.

Numerous articles point to the importance of creating a sense of community for distance learners (Shen, Cho, Tsai, & Marra, 2013; Moore, 2014). Distance education students are often scattered throughout the region and face geographic separation from each other and their professor. This isolation may place an extra burden and increase the desire to feel connected and addressing this can require creativity and flexibility. Having a sense of community improves students' relationships with their instructors and classmates while simultaneously increasing their connection to the content itself (Moore, 2014).

Although there is a growing literature on using CBR and principles of community-engagement in traditional, face-to-face college classrooms, there is not yet a literature on the same for distance education classrooms. However, we can look to the health-based literature that evaluates experiential learning in distance and online classrooms. The face-to-face classroom literature on experiential learning points to the positive effects this application has in terms of students' self-awareness, cultural competence, and understanding of abstract concepts (Bell, Limberg, Jacobson, & Super, 2014; Carey, 2007; Giordano, Stare & Clarke, 2015; Pugh, 2014). One study that focused on nursing students' experiential learning experiences in distance education classrooms found that distance learners benefit from experiential learning opportunities even though face-to-face learners may benefit more sharply (Colella & Beery, 2014). Engaging distance learners in experiential learning through CBR holds potential for creating a sense of community through collaborations across sites and the sharing and reflection

of experiences related to real-world challenges. It is possible that students across distance sites may utilize one another as sources of information and support, and find validation and encouragement in new ways. Using a community-engaged model of teaching in distance education may also push distance learners to connect with their geographically remote professors and more fully engage in the content. However, these ideas have remained unexplored in the literature given the disproportionate attention paid to face-to-face learners. Although there is an emerging evaluation literature on implementing CBR in social work courses, there is a need to expand this literature to include macro social work courses and extend this inquiry to comparisons between distance learners and face-to-face learners.

### **Project Context**

In the fall of 2014, our social work program partnered with Utah's Fair Housing Division to conduct a statewide survey that assessed the general public's awareness concerning Fair Housing Law. Using a CBR model that was tested in a traditional, main campus face-to-face classroom the prior year ([Author], 2015), we designed this CBR project to be integrated in two separate macro practice courses each with its own instructor. One was the main campus face-to-face course, and the other was our regional campus distance education course. In our program, macro practice is taken in the spring of students' junior year, immediately after having completed research methods and social work practice with individuals in the fall. Students are concurrently enrolled in social work practice with groups and numerous other electives and/or general education requirements when they take macro practice. The two professors worked closely together to develop a syllabus that included the adopted text, resources from the Community Toolbox (Workgroup for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas (2016), information from ACOSA's (2014) Special Commission to Advance Macro

Practice, current readings from the *Journal of Community Practice*, and most germane to the course project, assignments that connected substantive course content to the CBR project while attending to experiential learning principles.

Our community partner, the state's Educational Outreach Specialist at the Division of Fair Housing, took an active role in preparing for the spring courses and the implementation of the project. As a team, we applied for and were awarded a service learning mini-grant from our university's Center for Civic Engagement and Service Learning. The grant dollars went toward the costs we later incurred for educational outreach materials that students developed as part of their community interventions. As the Educational Outreach Specialist, our community partner regularly presented to agencies and individuals across Utah on topics related to the fair housing law (e.g., landlords, city and regional governments, rental companies, and realtor associations). Prior to our partnership, his educational outreach efforts were not data driven, therefore our partnership embodied a mutually beneficial CBR relationship—one in which he gained useful assessment data and our classrooms gained practical experience that connected research to macro practice. In the months preceding the spring semester, we worked together to refine our purpose, instrumentation, methods, Institutional Review Board protocol, and syllabus. Importantly, we adopted a community partner-focused approach (i.e., what resources did we have that would enhance the mission of our community partner?). Our community partner was particularly interested in assessing the public's baseline knowledge and attitudes related to fair housing law in order to tailor his outreach efforts in targeted communities throughout the state. To see a detailed timeline of project components, refer to Figure 1 below.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Students were integrally involved in every aspect of data collection, data analysis, and data dissemination. Our community partner guest lectured in-person at our face-to-face campus course and over IVC to our remote, distance campuses multiple times throughout the semester. We often relayed encouragement to students from our community partner as well. Using three methods of data collection (i.e., neighborhood canvassing, social media sharing, and community/religious outreach), we had 73 undergraduate students collect over 1,000 surveys. The professors trained students in data analysis and highlighted the critical connection between assessment and intervention at the community-level. In general, we found that Utahans had little knowledge about Fair Housing Law and the rights they were ensured under the law. Additionally, we found that 14% of our sample had experienced some form of housing discrimination. We were able to determine what categories of persons seemed to be at greatest risk for housing discrimination, and we were able to do some urban and rural comparisons on knowledge and attitudes related to fair housing. Students were extremely invested in interpreting the results due to their integral involvement with data collection. This provided an excellent context in which students could see the value of data-driven community intervention strategies. Following the analysis of the data, students identified a community group, designed an educational outreach presentation, and presented educational information on the Fair Housing Law to their identified community group. Our students reached over 300 individuals, many of who were in a position to be an important connector to their clients who might experience housing discrimination. Additionally, students were involved in advocacy tasks as at the time, legislation on Fair Housing was introduced in our state. Consistent with an experiential, service learning model (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999), we also integrated numerous opportunities for

students to reflect on their learning and connect the project and its components to various theoretical concepts we were teaching.

### **Present Study**

Drawing from student reports of their experience with the Fair Housing Project, this paper answers the following research questions: (1) Does participation in CBR increase professional interest/change professional goals related to macro (community) practice for undergraduate social work students enrolled in macro practice?; (2) Does CBR learning contribute to students' sense of self-efficacy?; and (3) Are there any differences in student experiences based on curriculum delivery (i.e., face-to-face and distance learning classrooms)?

### **Methods**

#### **Sample**

The study sample included students enrolled in undergraduate macro practice at our main and regional campuses (N=73) during spring 2015. Eighty-two percent of students responded to both the pre- and post-test (N=60). The sample was approximately 83% female and was 25.1 years old on average. Distance learners were 10 years older on average than face-to-face learners, and both groups were overwhelmingly White (82% for face-to-face learners and 100% for distance learners), with the remaining students primarily identifying as Latino.

[Insert Table 1 here]

#### **Design**

Following Institutional Review Board approval, we administered a hard copy pre-test on the first day of class and a post-test on the final day of class. The tests were administered by a graduate teaching assistant at the main campus and classroom facilitators at the distance campuses to avoid the risk of coercion. Each distance classroom had a classroom facilitator who

assists with technology. The facilitators at each campus site collected the surveys with coded identifiers and scanned and sent to the professors. The pre-test survey consisted of a scale measuring their perceived sense of self-efficacy engaging in CBR as well as individual survey items that probed their beliefs about macro practice, research, and professional roles. The post-test included the same measures as well as open-ended questions about how the CBR project affected their learning. These measures are detailed below.

### **Measures**

**CBR self-efficacy.** CBR Self-Efficacy ( $\alpha = .70$ ) was assessed at pre and post using a 6-item scale that asked students to rate on a 5 point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree) the degree to which they “can be an effective researcher;” “can contribute to a multi-researcher study;” “can effectively engage in community-based work;” “can educate the public about social issues;” “can effectively promote equity and social justice;” and “can effectively engage in social work at the macro level.” Scale scores ranged from 6 to 30—higher scores indicated higher levels of CBR self-efficacy.

**Professional interest in macro practice.** Professional interest in macro practice was assessed at pre and post using a single Likert scale survey item, “How professionally interested are you in macro social work practice?” Responses ranged from 1=Not at all interested to 5=Extremely interested.

**Beliefs about macro practice, research, and professional roles.** Beliefs about macro practice, research, and professional roles were measured at pre and post by a series of researcher-constructed and adapted (Bolin, Lee, GlenMaye, & Yoon, 2012) Likert-scale items such as “I believe that research is necessary in social work;” “I believe that community research is beyond the scope of an undergraduate course;” and “I believe that educating the public is an essential

part of social work practice.” There were 10 items in total, but they do not perform as an overall scale, rather as individual items. Students were asked to rate on a 5 point Likert-scale the extent to which they agreed (1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree) with each statement of belief.

**Project’s impact on professional goals.** This was measured at post-test by 2 survey items. The first question asked “Have your professional goals changed as a result of the Fair Housing Project?” with response options being, “no;” “somewhat;” and “yes.” The second question was open-ended and asked students: “If your goals have changed, how did your participation in the fair housing project influence this change?”

**Project’s impact on student learning.** This was assessed at post-test using an open-ended question asking students: “In your own words, can you please describe how the fair housing project influenced your learning, for better or worse?”

### *Analytic Plan*

Descriptive and paired sample *t*-tests were conducted to analyze the quantitative data from pre- and post-tests. For the qualitative responses, codes were developed using a constant comparison approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Two of the authors read responses, took notes, and then collaboratively developed an initial coding rubric. They then finalized the coding structure using an iterative process of inspecting the data, and testing their coding scheme for inter-rater agreement.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative Results**

Results show students reported moderately high levels of self-efficacy related to CBR at the outset of the course. On a scale ranging from 6 to 30, with higher scores indicating higher self-efficacy related to CBR, students reported a mean score at pre-test of 22.80. Paired sample *t*-

tests showed a significant increase in self-efficacy between pre- ( $M=22.80, SD=3.41$ ) and post-test ( $M=25.43, SD=2.71$ );  $t(59) = -6.82, p < .001$ . Results from a repeated measures ANOVA with a specified interaction between time and course (face-to-face or distance) showed no significant differences between courses in terms of the magnitude of change across time. However, it should be noted that distance learners rated their self-efficacy higher (though not statistically significantly) than face-to-face learners, particularly at the outset of the course. When we examined bivariate relationships between study variables we found that self-efficacy had a strong, significant, and positive association with professional interest in macro social work at pre-test [ $r = .429, n = 45, p = .01$ ] and post-test [ $r = .421, n = 45, p = .01$ ], but only for face-to-face learners. No other significant correlations or mean comparisons were found.

As it relates to our individual items of beliefs about macro practice, research, and professional roles, there were some differences between face-to-face and distance learners. However, the distance learners saw few statistically significant improvements over time when compared to the face-to-face learners. For students in the face-to-face course, there were significant improvements in 6 out of 10 individual items. At post-test, students from the face-to-face course reported significantly higher agreement that: (1) research is necessary in social work; (2) many researchers contributing to one research study is beneficial; (3) educating the public is an essential part of social work practice; (4) conducting research on the community's understanding of social issues is important; and (5) class assignments and projects can contribute to my sense of importance. For the face-to-face course students, we also saw significantly lower agreement at post-test that community research is beyond the scope of an undergraduate course. For the distance learners, only 2 items showed significant differences. At post-test, distance learners had lower levels of agreement that (1) community research is beyond the scope of an

undergraduate course; and (2) community research would push me beyond my comfort zone. See Table 2 for statistical details.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Regarding professional interest in macro practice, there were no significant differences from pre- to post-test on the single Likert-scale item. It should be noted, however, that face-to-face learners reported a slight increase in professional interest in macro practice whereas distance learners reported a slight decrease. However, at post-test, students were asked if their professional goals had changed and 90% agreed that they had changed as a result of the project (indicating 'somewhat' or 'yes' in their responses). Shifts in professional goals are contextualized in qualitative responses below.

### **Qualitative Results**

Although we saw gains in self-efficacy and promising improvements in numerous quantitative items, it was imperative that we get a better contextual understanding of how the project actually impacted students' shifting professional goals and influenced their learning process. Student responses to the two open-ended questions about the project's impact on their professional goals and learning are summarized below. When we compared qualitative themes between face-to-face and distance learners, no differences were found. Thus, we present these results for the full sample. In regards to their shifting professional goals, their responses centered on broad themes of: (1) increased interest/enthusiasm (n=36); (2) increased understanding (n=17); and (3) increased competence (n=11). In general, students discussed how the project piqued an interest they did not know they had, and that was in part due to their previous lack of understanding regarding what macro practice was. Additionally, students discussed how their increased sense of competence in macro practice made a macro career seem more within reach.

Specifically related to increased interest/enthusiasm, one student noted: “It created an excitement that I lacked before. I feel like this is one of the most practical classes I have ever taken and it has given me real experience.” Regarding an increased understanding of what macro practice is, one student said,

The fair housing project opened my eyes to new possibilities of employment. I thought that social workers only worked with individuals at agencies, but it goes way beyond that. Social workers can help pass laws that will benefit the community. I have considered looking more into community work at a macro level.

Discussing her increased sense of competence and how that relates to shifting professional goals, one student said, “It helped me realize how I can network in the community and educate people on important issues.” Another student said, “I feel more confident that if I were to pursue macro practice, it would go well.”

In regards to the project’s impact on their learning, student responses centered on broad themes of (1) application of materials and increased competence (n=60); (2) increased understanding/identification with professional social work values (n=25); and (3) personal transformation (n=25). Students generally discussed how the project gave them hands-on or real-world experience that they had not found in other courses and how this type of applied learning helped them better understand the concepts of macro practice as well as identify more closely with social work values. In addition, students discussed how they felt personally transformed as a result of their participation in the project and how this transformation related to their learning process. Related to the application of materials and increased competence, one student said,

Being part of something real makes all the difference. I could sit in a class and get lectured to and read a book all about how community projects are supposed to work but

that means nothing if I can't implement it. The fair housing project gave me real experience and it wasn't boring!

While another said, "This project put everything we learned into a real life situation. We got to work hands on in this class and it was way easier than to learn just from a book." In regards to increased understanding and identification with social work values, one student said, "It pushed me outside of my comfort zone in the classroom and took me out into the community. I learned to work and think like a social worker." Another student noted, "The project made it easier to see and understand the importance of the material we learned in class." When it came to personal transformation, one student said, "The fair housing project allowed me to be a part of something bigger than a class assignment and feel as though I did make a difference in our community. It also gave me the confidence to speak to the public comfortably and inform them of how these issues affect them." Another student noted that the project "changed [her] thought processes," while another noted, "I learned that I can do community work and I can make a difference."

### **Discussion**

The findings from our evaluation study of two macro practice courses involving community-based research and intervention show promising evidence that using a community-engaged teaching model not only improves students' learning experience and self efficacy, but can increase students' commitment to macro practice. In particular, this study illuminates how community-engaged teaching and research can be effective in multiple learning contexts (i.e., face-to-face classrooms and distance classrooms).

Both face-to-face and distance learners experienced increases in their sense of self-efficacy between pre- and post-tests—pointing to the effectiveness of this community-engaged teaching model. These findings are consistent with the broader community-engaged teaching

evaluation literature that report increases in students' confidence and sense of competence as a result of their participation in CBR ([Author, 2015]; Johnson, 2010; Postlethwait, 2013). The difference between pre-test levels of self-efficacy between distance learners and face-to-face learners is a point of interest as the distance learners indicated higher levels of self-efficacy prior to the course. Bandura (1986) defines perceived self-efficacy as "people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute a course of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p.391). He also notes that "mastery experiences" (Bandura, 1994, p. 72), the experiences any given person has with success or failure, are the most effective means of creating a sense of self-efficacy. Given the nature of distance learning, coupled with the demographic differences in the students within that system (e.g., older, rural, and working professionals), it may be necessary that distance learners develop or utilize skills that help them navigate their educational experience more independently; thus, contributing to a greater sense of self-efficacy. The correlation between self-efficacy and professional interest in macro practice among face-to-face learners may be tapping into the perception that students may have regarding the abstract or unwieldy nature of macro social work (Sather et al., 2008). If students perceive themselves as more self-efficacious in tasks and roles directly tied to macro social work, they may therefore have greater professional interest in macro social work. Thus, the implication for social work educators who are committed to increasing professional interest in macro social work among their students is to foster students' self-efficacy in this domain. This necessarily connects back to the philosophy of experiential learning and our particular model of community-engaged teaching. If a student is able to experience, reflect, conceptualize, and experiment in the cyclical process of learning (Kolb, 1984), especially in real-world contexts where they feel as

though they are making a demonstrable difference in their community, then their self-efficacy may increase.

Our study found that students' professional goals changed as a result of the CBR project. Although there were only increases in professional interest in macro practice from pre- to post-test for the face-to-face learners, both groups of students expressed how their professional goals had shifted and many students reported that the CBR project opened up new professional possibilities for them. This finding was consistent with Sather et al.'s (2007) evaluation that found that students' professional goals shifted to include macro possibilities as a result of their service learning project. For instance, students had increased interest, enthusiasm, understanding, and sense of competence as it relates to macro practice. Additionally, we found that the shifts in professional goals and the project's impact on their learning were no different for face-to-face learners when compared to distance learners. This finding suggests that community-engaged teaching that uses CBR as a vehicle for learning has the potential to transcend course delivery methods. Distance learners were citing similar themes of increased interest, enthusiasm, understanding, competence, and personal transformation as the face-to-face learners—this suggests that the experiential learning process was deeply felt by students regardless of course delivery. In today's social work education climate, where students are increasingly choosing direct clinical practice routes (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014), these are especially promising results. As we reinvigorate our macro practice curriculums, we may find that future professionals are more committed to bring the macro back into focus for our profession. Ultimately, macro practice is essential to the social work profession, especially for rural social workers coming out of distance education programs who may be the only social worker in their community and are, out of necessity, working across levels of social work practice. With committed and sustained

adjustments to macro social work curriculum, particularly for distance education students, we may see an increase in the amount of awareness, time, and energy that social workers give to macro issues.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

One notable limitation from this evaluation study is the small sample size of distance education students. Diminished statistical power calls into question the validity of statistical differences reported for distance education students. A limitation of our CBR teaching model was the lack of choice that students had in terms of the research topic. Despite other successful models (e.g., Knee, 2002), it is possible that while some students may have discovered a previously unknown passion for fair housing issues, other students may have remained disconnected from the project due to their lack of interest in the topic. Additionally, although the two professors worked closely together to deliver the same content and worked from identical syllabi, some differences between face-to-face and distance learners could have been attributable to differences in pedagogical style between the two professors. These limitations point to the need for future evaluation of community-engaged teaching in the distance education context. Future studies that evaluate the effectiveness of using a community-engaged teaching model in macro practice courses are warranted and necessary in order to continue to build a justification that supports this model of teaching and learning in macro practice courses. We suggest that interested faculty members contact their University's office for civic engagement and service learning (or equivalent office) for support. Additionally, the Association for Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA) can be a helpful resource. As we are beginning to grow our program of community-engaged teaching at our own University, we are working to develop a model that will institutionalize community-engagement across three

courses: research methods, macro practice, and social policy. Additionally, we intend to continue to implement these models of teaching across face-to-face and distance contexts.

### **Conclusion**

Social problems are complex and require informed and sustained social work engagement, assessment, and intervention at all levels. When educators provide students with opportunities to learn, practice, and reflect on their macro skills in a real-world context, students may be more apt to value and subsequently pursue macro practice in their professions. This may also result in more skilled social work leadership at the grassroots, policy, coalition, and elected official levels, something for which leading macro scholars have expressed an urgent need (Reisch, 2016; Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). This research continues to build the case for the importance of community-engaged teaching that empowers students to feel competent in engaging with and assessing complex issues they will encounter in macro practice. Further, this study shows that implementing CBR projects in distance education contexts can provide a successful experiential learning environment for students.

### References

- Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- [Author], 2015
- Association of Community Organization and Social Administration [ACOSA] (2014). Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work Summary Report June, 2013-June, 2014 Retrieved from <https://www.acosa.org/joomla/pdf/FINALSpecialCommissionPhaseOneReport.pdf>
- Association of Community Organization and Social Administration [ACOSA] (2016). Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work. Retrieved from <https://www.acosa.org/joomla/special-commission>
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bell, H., Limberg, D., Jacobson, L., & Super, J.T. (2014). Enhancing self-awareness through creative experiential-learning play-based activities. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 9, 399-414. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2014.897926>
- Bolin, B. L., Lee, K. H., GlenMaye, L. F., & Yoon, D. P. (2012). Impact of research orientation on attitudes toward research of social work students. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 48, 223-243. doi: 10.5175/JSWE.2012.200900120
- Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (1999). Reflection in service learning: Making meaning of experience. *Educational Horizons*, 179.

- Brown, E. E., & Kinsella, S. (2006). University/community partnerships: Engaging human service and Social Work students in service learning. *Human Service Education, 26*(1), 59-73.
- Carey, L. A. (2007). Teaching macro practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 27*, 61-71.  
doi: 10.1300/J067v27n01\_04
- Carnegie Foundation (2016). *Definitions of community engagement and partnerships*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.niu.edu/outreach/documents/Definitions%20of%20Engagement/Carnegie%20-%20Definitions%20of%20Engagement%20and%20Partneships.pdf>
- Chan, C.Y. (2012). Exploring an experiential learning project through Kolb's Learning Theory using qualitative research methods. *European Journal of Engineering Education, 37*, 405-415. doi:10.1080/03043797.2012.706596
- Christidou, V., Gravani, M., & Hatzinikita, V. (2012). Distance learning material for adult education: The case of the Open University of Cyprus. *Ubiquitous Learning: An International Journal, 4*(2), 33-46.
- Coe, J.R., & Elliott, D. (1999). An evaluation of teaching direct practice courses in a distance education program for rural settings. *Journal of Social Work Education, 35*(3), 353-365.  
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23043561>
- Colella, C., & Beery, T. (2014). Teaching differential diagnosis to nurse practitioner students in a distance program. *Journal of Nursing Education, 53*, 433-438. doi:10.3928/01484834-20140724-02

- Colorado, J. & Eberle, J. (2010). Student demographics and success in online learning environments. *Emporia State Research Studies*, 46(1), 4-10. Retrieved from: <http://academic.emporia.edu/esrs/vol46/colorado.pdf>
- Council on Social Work Education (2015). 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs. Retrieved from <http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=81660>
- Department of Workforce Services. (2014, February). Hard at work—Women in the Utah labor force. Retrieved from: <https://jobs.utah.gov/wi/pubs/womencareers/factsheet.html>
- Duffy, R. D., & Raque-Bogdan, T. L. (2010). The motivation to serve others: Exploring relations to career development. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 18, 250-265.  
doi:10.1177/1069072710364791
- Fisher, R., & Corciullo, D. (2011). Rebuilding community organizing education in social work. *Journal of Community Practice*, 19, 355–368. doi:10.1080/10705422.2011.625537
- Freddolino, P.P., & Sutherland, C.A. (2000). Assessing the comparability of classroom environments in graduate social work education delivered via interactive instructional television. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 36(1), 115-129. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23043741>
- Giordano, A.L, Stare, B.G., & Clarke, P.B. (2015). Overcoming obstacles to empathy: The use of experiential learning in addictions counseling courses. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 10, 100-113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2014.947011>
- Gravani, M.N. (2015). Adult learning in a distance education context: Theoretical and methodological challenges. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 34, 172-193. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2014.982728>

Holley, L.C., Risley-Curtiss, C., Stott, T., Jackson, D.R., & Nelson, R. (2007). It's not scary.

*Affilia: Journal of Women & Social Work*, 22(1), 99-115.

Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 19, 173-202. doi: 10.1146/annurev.publhealth.19.1.173

Johnson, M. (2010). Teaching macro practice through service learning using participatory photography. *Journal of Community Practice*, 18, 297-314.

doi:10.1080/10705422.2010.486961

Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Knee, Ryan T. (2002). Can service learning enhance student understanding of social work research? *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 22: 213-225.

[http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J067v22n01\\_14](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J067v22n01_14)

Larson, G. (2008). Community service learning: What does it mean for social work education?

*Canadian Social Work Review*, 25(1), 89-96. Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41669884>

Lemieux, C. M., & Allen, P. D. (2007). Service learning in social work education: The state of knowledge, pedagogical practicalities, and practice conundrums. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 43(2), 309-325. Retrieved from [https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-](https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-166091813.html)

[166091813.html](https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-166091813.html)

Meenaghan, T. M., Gibbons, W. E., & McNutt, J. G. (2005). *Generalist practice in larger settings: Knowledge and skill concepts* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: Lyceum.

- Moore, P.J., Gratzer, W., Lieber, C., Edelson, V., O'Leary, J., & Terry, S. (2012). Iona College community centered family health history project: Lessons learned from student focus groups. *Journal of Genetic Counseling*, 21, 127-135. doi:10.1007/s10897-011-9392-7
- Moore, R.L. (2014). Importance of developing community in distance education courses. *Tech Trends*, 58, 20-24. doi:10.1007/s11528-014-0733-x
- Netting, F. E., Kettner, P. M., McMurty, S. L., & Thomas, M. L. (2011). *Social work macro practice* (5th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Oriolo, L. & Trotter, C. (2010). A comparison of on-campus and off-campus (or distance) social work education. *Australian Social Work*, 63, 329-344.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2010.496866>
- Pelech, W., Wulff, D., Perrault, E., Ayala, J., Baynton, M., Williams, M., Crowder, R., & Shankar, J. (2013). Current challenges in social work distance education: Responses from the illuminati. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 33, 393-407. doi: 10.1080/08841233.2013.834863
- Petracchi, H.E. & Patchner, M.A. (2000). Social work students and their learning environment: A comparison of interactive television, face-to-face instruction, and the traditional classroom. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 36(2), 335-347. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23043824>
- Postlethwait, A. (2012). Service Learning in an undergraduate social work research course. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 32, 243-256. doi: 10.1080/08841233.2012.687343
- Pugh, G.L. (2014). Revisiting the Pink Triangle Exercise: An exploration of experiential learning in graduate social work education. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 34, 17-28.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08841233/2013.863264>

- Pugh, G.L. (2014). The experiential learning cycle in undergraduate diversity and social justice education. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 34*(3), 302-315.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2014.906531>
- Ramachaudran, V.S. (1994). *Encyclopedia of human behavior* (Vol. 4, p. 71-81). New York: Academic Press.
- Reisch, M. (2016). Why macro practice matters. *Journal of Social Work Education, 52*, 258-268.  
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2016.1174652>
- Rice, K., & Walsh, K. (2014). Building university-community partnerships in rural settings through a community-based learning assignment. *Contemporary Rural Social Work, 6*, 126-135.
- Rothman, J. Mizrahi, T. (2014). Balancing micro and macro practice: A challenge for social work. *Social Work, 59*, 91-93. doi:10.1093/sw/swt067
- Sather, P., Weitz, B., & Carlson, P. (2007). Engaging students in macro issues through community-based learning: The policy, practice, and research sequence. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 27*, 61-79. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J067v27n03\\_05](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J067v27n03_05)
- Scott, D. L. (2008). Service learning: The road from the classroom to community-based macro intervention. *Journal of Policy Practice, 7*, 214-225. doi: 10.1080/15588740801938068
- Shannon, P., Kim, W., & Robinson, A. (2012) Implementing a service learning model for teaching research methods and program evaluation. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 32*, 229-242. doi:10.1080/08841233.2012.680867
- Shen, D., Cho, M.H., Tsai, C.L., & Marra, R. (2013). Unpacking online learning experiences: Online learning self-efficacy and learning satisfaction. *Internet and Higher Education, 10-17*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2013.04.001>

Strauss A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

US Census Bureau. (July 1, 2014). *Utah quick facts*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/49>

Vanderbilt Center for Teaching (2016). *What is service learning or community engagement?*

Retrieved from: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-through-community-engagement/>

Vernon, R., Vakahali, H., Pierce, D., Pittman-Munke, P., & Adkins, L. F. (2009). Distance education programs in social work: Current and emerging trends. *Journal of Social Work Education, 45*, 263-276. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2009.200700081>

Workgroup for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas (2016). Community Toolbox. Retrieved from <http://ctb.ku.edu/en>

Figure 1. Project Timeline and Components

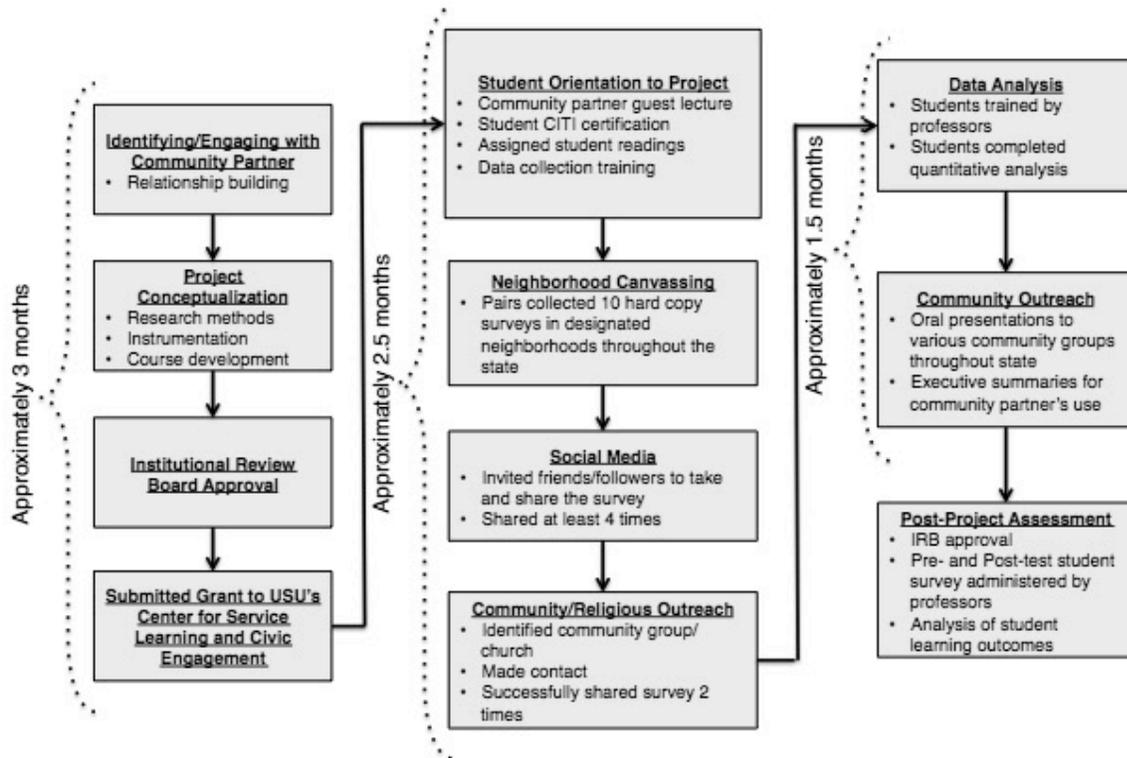


Table 1. Sample Demographics

|   | Face-to-Face Course<br>(n=45) |           | Distance Course<br>(n=15) |           | Full Sample<br>(N=60) |           |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|
|   | Mean<br>(n)                   | SD<br>(%) | Mean<br>(n)               | SD<br>(%) | Mean<br>(N)           | SD<br>(%) |
| Age   | 22.69                         | 4.14      | 32.20                     | 10.37     | 25.07                 | 7.46      |
| <i>Gender</i>   |                               |           |                           |           |                       |           |
| Male  | (9)                           | (20.0%)   | (1)                       | (6.7%)    | (10)                  | (16.7%)   |
| Female  | (36)                          | (80.0%)   | (14)                      | (93.3%)   | (50)                  | (83.3%)   |
| <i>Race</i>   |                               |           |                           |           |                       |           |
| White   | (37)                          | (82.2%)   | (15)                      | (100.0%)  | (52)                  | (86.7%)   |
| Latino  | (5)                           | (11.1%)   | -                         | -         | (5)                   | (8.3%)    |
| Asian or Pacific Islander                                     | (1)                           | (2.2%)    | -                         | -         | (1)                   | (1.7%)    |
| Native American   | (2)                           | (4.4%)    | -                         | -         | (2)                   | (3.3%)    |
| <i>Professional Interest in Macro Social Work<sup>a</sup></i> |                               |           |                           |           |                       |           |
| At Pre-test   | 3.73                          | 0.84      | 4.33                      | 0.72      | 3.88                  | .846      |
| At Post-test  | 3.87                          | 0.79      | 3.93                      | 0.70      | 3.88                  | .761      |

Notes: <sup>a</sup>At pre-test and post-test, students were asked to rate their level of professional interest in macro social work on a scale of 1 to 5 with higher values indicating greater professional interest.

*Table 2. Pre- and Post-test Differences on Individual Items related to Research Orientation, Professional Roles, and Beliefs about Macro Practice*

| Item   | Logan Face-to-face campus<br>(n=45, 75.0%) |                |                   |                 |             |             | Distance Education<br>(n=15, 25.0%) |                |                   |                 |             |             |
|--|--|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
|  | Pre-test<br>Mean                           | Pre-test<br>SD | Post-test<br>Mean | Post-test<br>SD | t-<br>value | p-<br>value | Pre-test<br>Mean                    | Pre-test<br>SD | Post-test<br>Mean | Post-test<br>SD | t-<br>value | p-<br>value |
| I believe that research is necessary in social work.   | 4.51                                       | 0.51           | 4.84              | 0.37            | -3.96       | 0.00        | 4.67                                | 0.49           | 4.67              | 0.49            | 0.00        | 1.00        |
| I believe a major part of social work education should be research training.                       | 3.84                                       | 0.77           | 4.07              | 2.12            | -0.74       | 0.47        | 4.00                                | 0.93           | 4.20              | 0.56            | -1.15       | 0.27        |
| I believe that many researchers contributing to one research study is beneficial.                  | 4.29                                       | 0.59           | 4.51              | 0.55            | -2.12       | 0.04        | 4.40                                | 0.74           | 4.33              | 0.62            | 0.44        | 0.67        |
| I believe that social workers should engage in community-based work.                               | 4.47                                       | 0.63           | 4.44              | 0.62            | 0.22        | 0.83        | 4.73                                | 0.46           | 4.53              | 0.64            | 0.90        | 0.38        |
| I believe that community research is beyond the scope of an undergraduate course                   | 3.18                                       | 1.13           | 2.33              | 1.28            | 4.78        | 0.00        | 2.87                                | 1.13           | 2.27              | 0.88            | 2.81        | 0.01        |
| I believe that community research will push me beyond my comfort zone.                             | 4.13                                       | 0.94           | 4.09              | 2.12            | 0.13        | 0.90        | 2.93                                | 1.16           | 4.00              | 0.54            | -3.34       | 0.01        |
| I believe that educating the public is an essential part of social work practice.                  | 4.53                                       | 0.59           | 4.71              | 0.46            | -2.07       | 0.04        | 4.67                                | 0.49           | 4.60              | 0.51            | 0.37        | 0.72        |
| I believe that conducting research on the community's understanding of social issues is important. | 4.33                                       | 0.56           | 4.62              | 0.49            | -3.10       | 0.00        | 4.33                                | 0.62           | 4.47              | 0.52            | -0.62       | 0.55        |
| I believe that part of the role of being a social worker is to promote equity and social justice.  | 4.73                                       | 0.50           | 4.80              | 0.41            | -0.77       | 0.45        | 4.67                                | 0.49           | 4.87              | 0.35            | -1.38       | 0.19        |
| I believe that class assignments and projects can contribute to my sense of importance.            | 3.78                                       | 0.90           | 4.31              | 0.63            | -4.00       | 0.00        | 4.13                                | 0.64           | 4.20              | 0.41            | -0.44       | 0.67        |

Notes: All items were measured on a scale of 1 to 5, with higher values indicating greater levels of agreement with each item.