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Mapping Social Justice: A Case Study of a School of Social Work Student-Led Social Justice Initiative

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"Mapping Social Justice":
A Case Study of a School of Social Work
Student-Led Social Justice Initiative

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University - University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

Throughout the history of social work, two different branches – micro social work and macro

social work – have emerged. Micro social work is largely focused on treating mental and

behavioral health problems in individuals, couples and groups. Macro social work, meanwhile,

focuses on making systemic changes through advocacy like lobbying and community organizing.

Despite their differences, a key principle unites these branches: social justice. Although the

National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Council on Social Work Education

(CSWE) identify social justice as a guiding principle of social work, there is little consensus in

the field of what the term actually means and how it can be achieved. Master of Social Work

(MSW) programs are likewise struggling with how to educate students on social justice and

prepare them to engage in macro-level advocacy after graduating. This research examines how

one student-led social justice initiative at a school of social work in St. Paul, MN is working to

increase student engagement in macro-level social justice work through the use of targeted

advocacy alerts. A case study design was utilized to explore the project's intricacies and evaluate

first-year feedback, ultimately providing other MSW programs with a blueprint to adopt their

own version of the project. Findings suggest that the targeted alert model may be successful in

engaging clinical MSW students in social justice advocacy. Future research should explore long-

term outcomes of this initiative at the original institution, as well as how it has been expanded to

and implemented at other social work programs.

Keywords: Social justice, advocacy, macro-level social work, micro-level social work

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Throughout the history of the social work profession, two distinct branches have emerged: macro social work and micro social work. Micro social work – working directly within the healthcare system to treat individuals and families with behavioral or mental health struggles – has become the more dominant branch of social work in recent decades. It is not that social workers no longer care about macro practice, which is defined as work that affects communities and larger systems, such as policy writing, community organizing, and political lobbying. Rather, the high prevalence of mental illness among children and adults in the United States has created a demand for clinical professionals that social workers have largely filled. Social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health providers (Congressional Research Service, 2015) and both federal law and the National Institutes of Health recognize social work as one of five core mental health professions (Congressional Research Service, 2015).

Thanks to social workers' intimate knowledge of and experience with at-risk populations, members of this field have unique knowledge on how social policy may impact these groups, thus enabling better advocacy for change. However, with only so many hours in a work week, and so much need for mental health treatment, social workers are only spending about two percent of their weekly time in community advocacy (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). That trend will likely continue. The field is expected to experience great growth in the next decade, largely driven by demands for healthcare. Indeed, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics notes that social work employment is expected to grow 12 percent from 2014 to 2024, faster than the average for all other occupations (2016).

Differences may exist between the branches of social work, but one principle unites them: social justice. The concept has been a prominent term in both national and international social work since the late 1990s; scholars have stated that social work surpasses all other human services professions in commitment to social justice (Bonnycastle, 2011; Morrison Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006). Despite the field's long-standing emphasis on social justice, social work struggles to define the concept and affectively advocate for social change. A review of the available literature demonstrates that no singular definition of social justice exists in the profession. This has led to a great deal of confusion over what social justice actually means and how it can be achieved.

As the institutions tapped to prepare the nation's new social workers, schools of social work are required to include education around social justice in order to maintain accreditation standards (Funge, 2011). The CSWE stipulates in its 2001 Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) that accredited programs must include curriculum that teaches students to combat discrimination, oppression and economic inequality (Council on Social Work Education, 2001). But between intense faculty and student workloads – combined with a lack of clarity surrounding definitions of social justice and unease in discussing such topics in the classroom – schools, like the field, are struggling to fully engage social work students in social justice advocacy. Masters of social work programs are utilizing multiple formats to incorporate social justice within curriculum. Examples include mandated social justice courses and classes simply "infused" with social justice curriculum; other schools offer experiential learning opportunities, such as workshops, presentations and film screenings, to supplement classroom teaching (Deepak, Rountree & Scott, 2015; Van Soest, 1996; Vincent,

2012). But great debate still exists as to whether social work programs are adequately preparing students to be life-long social justice advocates.

Efforts have been made to address this question. At the University of Washington's School of Social Work, graduate students established a Social Justice Committee (SJC) to improve curricular focus and institutional support for social justice education (Hudson, Shapiro, Moylan, Garcia, & Derr, 2014). Faculty at a school of social work in California developed a new innovative approach to teach students the theory of policy practice and help them develop the skills necessary to enact social change (Heidemann, Jansson, Fertig & Kim, 2011). Another school created an experiential service learning course that required student to participate in community action projects (Rocha, 2000). These models have shown varying degrees of success in engaging students in advocacy.

A new program to bridge the macro advocacy gap for clinical social workers has been introduced at the St. Catherine University – University of St. Thomas School of Social Work (SCU-UST SSW). Named "Mapping Social Justice," the student-led initiative targets advocacy alerts to clinical MSW students based on their field placement. This study seeks to describe how this project worked to engage students in social justice advocacy. A case study methodology was utilized to address the research question.

Literature Review

At its core, the social work profession seeks to meet the needs of disadvantaged, at-risk populations and address social, economic and political injustices (McBeath, 2016). When the field first emerged in the 1890s during the Progressive Era, two distinct branches of practice emerged: micro-level and macro-level social work (Austin, Anthony, Tolleson Knee & Mathias, 2016). Micro practice, largely led by pioneer social worker Mary Richmond, entailed working

with individuals and families through traditional case management work (Austin, Anthony, Tolleson Knee & Mathias, 2016; McBeath, 2016). Macro practice, developed by Richmond's counterpart Jane Addams, focused on achieving social reform through larger community or systemic changes (Austin, Anthony, Tolleson Knee & Mathias, 2016; McBeath, 2016). Together, micro and macro social work together helped to alleviate immediate, individual suffering, while also changing the systems that created that suffering in the first place (Austin, Anthony, Tolleson Knee & Mathias, 2016).

Micro vs. Macro Social Work Today

Today, micro and macro practice look much like they did when social work first began. Micro (or clinical) social work still entails working directly with individuals or families to help create emotional, behavioral and social change (McBeath, 2016). Clinical social work is often defined by fields of practice that include mental health, children, youth and families, and aging adults (Austin, Anthony, Tolleson Knee & Mathias, 2016). Macro practice, meanwhile, works to affect change on the community, societal, or national levels through community organizing, political lobbying, policy development, and research (Austin, Anthony, Tolleson Knee & Mathias, 2016).

At different times in history, one type of practice has somewhat overshadowed the other. Micro-level work became increasingly popular in 1917 after Richmond published her landmark text, *Social Diagnosis* (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). Social work can also thank psychologist Sigmund Freud, who made his international debut in the 1920s, for a renewed interest in micro social work during that time (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). But macro-level social work saw a surge in popularity during the Great Depression in the 1930s, when large-scale social and economic issues were on full display (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014).

Social work practice today is overwhelmingly clinical in nature. A 2008 survey by the

NASW of its members found that 86 percent of social works engage in micro practice and only

14 percent in macro practice. Another study found that social workers spend only two percent of

their professional time each week on macro-level tasks, such as community organizing or policy

development (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014).

This may partly be due to the growing demand for mental health workers in the United

States; with one in five American adults struggling with a mental health disorder, there is a huge

need for professionals trained in counseling and psychopathology (Center for Behavioral Health

Statistics and Quality, 2016). And social workers are answering the call: According to the

Congressional Research Service, social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health

services providers (2015). There are more clinically trained social workers – more than 200,000

– than psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses combined. Additionally, both federal

law and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recognize social work as one of five core mental

health professions (Congressional Research Service, 2015).

As the field continues to move towards a more micro focus, fewer opportunities are

available for macro-level social workers. One author describes the macro practice job market as

"small, poorly funded by public sources and thus often requiring subsidization by private

sources, and unstable," (McBeath, 2016, p. 7). Macro social workers face additional barriers,

including fewer job opportunities, lower salaries, and a lack of availability of macro-level

trainings and supervision (Pritzker & Applewhite, 2015). Licensing has also become an issue in

macro social work. According to recent research, there are over 201,000 licensed clinical social

workers in the U.S., but only 11,460 macro social work (Plitt Donaldson, Hill, Ferguson, Fogel

& Erickson, 2014). Although all clinical social workers are required to be licensed by the state in

which they practice, not every state requires a license for macro-level social work (Plitt

Donaldson, Hill, Ferguson, Fogel & Erickson, 2014). Minnesota is one of the states that does not

recognize macro practitioners in the licensing system (Netting, O'Connor, Cole, Hopkins, Jones,

Kim, Leisey, Mulroy, Smith Rotabi, Thomas, Weil & Wike, 2016). This licensing gap has

contributed to an impression that macro work is not as serious or important as micro; researchers

believe it plays a role in discouraging MSW students from pursuing macro career goals (Netting

et al., 2016).

Social Justice in Social Work

Despite the historic divide between macro and micro social workers, one common

principle unites them: social justice. The concept of social justice has been a prominent term in

both national and international social work since the late 1990s (Bonnycastle, 2011). Some

scholars contend that social work, in fact, surpasses all other human services professions in

commitment to social justice (Morrison Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006). Despite the field's

emphasis on the term, no clear definition exists. Contemporary social work pulls from definitions

by three individuals: philosophers John Rawls and Amartya Sen, and political theorist Iris

Marion Young. However, neither the NASW nor the CSWE, the field's leading bodies, put forth

one singular definition. The NASW does highlight five social justice priorities (voting rights,

criminal justice, juvenile justice, immigration reform, and economic justice), which at least gives

social workers an idea of the arenas in which social justice work is done ("Social Justice," n.d.).

The CSWE similarly has a Coalition for Policy Education and Practice in Social Work, which is

tasked with advancing equity and social justice ("The Coalition for Policy Education in Social

Work," n.d.). But again, no concrete definition of social justice is explicitly offered by either

organization.

One author notes that social work often links social justice with diversity and

multiculturalism, as well as with challenging normative power structures and the oppressions

they produce (Reisch, 2002). Other authors have defined social justice in terms of empowerment

– but neither term is ever fully defined (Cox, 2001). Some scholars define social justice in terms

of human rights; some equate social justice goals with redistribution of society's resources; social

justice is sometimes presented as a global perspective rooted in antiwar sentiments; others define

social justice as the pursuit of social change for vulnerable populations (Beck & Eichler, 2000;

Van Soest, 1994; Witkin, 2000).

Regardless of the specific definition, social justice is the ultimate outcome of social work.

Although social justice work is often defined within a macro-level context, it does not just exist

in the macro sphere. Good social work strives for social justice on all levels – micro and macro.

For example, an anti-oppressive practice model was developed to incorporate social justice into

micro social work (Larson, 2008). The model encourages the social worker to be aware of

existing social relations that perpetuate social injustice so those dynamics are not reproduced in

the clinical social work setting (Larson, 2008).

Social Work Education

As the institutions tapped to prepare future social workers, schools of social work often

mirror trends seen in the field. For example, similar to the overall social work field, masters of

social work programs have become much more clinical in recent decades (McBeath, 2016). A

2014 survey of accredited MSW programs found that out of the 37,699 MSW students in field

placements in 2014, only 6 percent (2,247) were in macro-oriented internships (McBeath, 2016).

Only 23 percent of accredited MSW programs offer advanced practice concentrations in

community, management or policy practice (McBeath, 2016). Additionally, a 2011 survey

conducted by The Association for Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA) of its macro-level social work faculty members found that respondents face several challenges working within decidedly micro-focused programs: lack of support and uncooperative attitudes from fellow colleagues and deans; little to no hiring of macro faculty; and inadequate recruitment and financial support for macro students (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014).

Just like the field in general has struggled to define social justice, MSW programs have likewise been challenged. The CSWE, the profession's educational accrediting body, first stated in 2001 that social work educational programs have a responsibility to integrate social justice content into curricula (Funge, 2011). Specifically, in its 2001 EPAS, the CSWE mandated that accredited programs must include curriculum that teaches students to combat discrimination, oppression and economic inequality (Council on Social Work Education, 2001). As further example of the CSWE's commitment to social justice, Wiener and Rosenwald note that the body has also established a Commission for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice (2008).

Despite this emphasis, the CSWE does not provide a concrete definition of social justice. Even the most recent EPAS, published in 2015, fails to define the concept explicitly (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). Scholars have pointed out for the last decade that the EPAS' social justice standards are vague and may lead to faculty experiencing difficulty in implementing the standards into teaching practices (Reisch, 2002; Pardeck, 2005).

Research does show that MSW programs profoundly influence graduate students' commitment to client empowerment through social justice advocacy, even if that definition is not altogether clear (Morrison Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006). A 2006 study surveyed 85 full-time MSW students during their first month of graduate school, and then again during the month prior to graduation. Results showed that MSW students significantly increased their commitment

to social justice advocacy during their education, particularly regarding advocacy on behalf of the LGBTQ community (Moorison Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006). The authors concluded that MSW programs must continue to empower students by giving them opportunities to work directly with disadvantaged clients. In addition to feeling more empowered to make changes as a social worker, students will also believe more fervently in empowering their clients (Moorison Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006).

Teaching Macro Social Work and Social Justice in the Classroom

With a murky definition of social justice and a decreased emphasis on macro-level social work, MSW programs are taking a variety of approaches to incorporate these concepts in the classroom. Some offer (or mandate) courses specifically on social justice concepts; others infuse those concepts into existing classes, such as in Human Behavior and the Social Environment (Deepak, Rountree & Scott, 2015; Van Soest, 1996; Vincent, 2012). In social work education, learning material that is delivered through courses is considered "explicit content" (CSWE, 2015). The majority of CSWE-accredited graduate programs combine both the designated course and infusion models of explicit content in order to meet social justice accreditation standards (Deepak, Rountree & Scott, 2015). Deepak, Rountree and Scott advocate for a both-and, rather than either-or, approach – that is, an approach that both infuses curriculum *and* offers specific courses on social justice (2015). "Having an advanced social justice course … doesn't mean that it is OK to not infuse the whole curriculum with this content – it must be both," the authors note (Deepak, Rountree & Scott, 2015, p. 119).

Experiential learning opportunities to supplement classroom teaching – like special workshops, presentations, service and learning opportunities, film screenings and follow-up discussions, and J-term "mini-courses" – have also been developed to meet CSWE standards

(Deepak, Rountree & Scott, 2015; Wiener & Rosenwald, 2008). These learning

opportunities outside of the classroom are referred to as implicit curriculum (CSWE, 2015).

       The literature encourages MSW programs to be proactive in their own work of modeling

social justice advocacy to students through implicit curriculum. For example,

Wiener & Rosenwald suggest that administrators conduct a review on how strongly social justice

is tied to the program's mission; they also advise MSW programs to establish relationships with

local agencies, so students, faculty and administrators can directly engage with social justice

work (2008). Whatever the model, Vincent states that incorporating social justice in social work

education is a complex task. In particular, it requires a "long-term effort, creativity, full

integration of concepts with content in syllabi, a safe and trusting classroom environment, social

work educators' own critical- consciousness work, and evidence- based pedagogy," he notes

(2012, p. 207).

       Faculty and student barriers. Most MSW programs' delivery of social justice content

centers on the explicit learning classroom approach and relies heavily on faculty participation

and commitment. This may be problematic, as research suggests that social work faculty

members face many obstacles when it comes to teaching social justice concepts to graduate

students (Funge, 2011). In a 2011 qualitative study on the role educators play in promoting social

justice in the classroom, faculty reportedly disagreed on whether it is their job to *ensure* students

engage in social justice work, or to simply expose students to those concepts (Funge). Workload

is also a great concern; with increased demand on faculty members' time to serve on committees

and work groups, faculty are resistant to additional demands. Finally, faculty report no formal

training in Doctor of Social Work (DSW) programs – or upon hiring at schools of social work –

on how to teach social justice concepts to students. Many faculty simply feel unprepared and

daunted by the task (Funge, 2011). As noted above, the CSWE's vague definition of social justice presents additional challenges for faculty in teaching social justice in the classroom (Funge, 2011). Funge states that student experience of social justice is "highly contingent" of educators' understanding of the CSWE's social justice standard; if faculty members don't understand the standard, Funge asks, how can faculty teach in a manner consistent with those standards? (2011).

Research suggests that students, like faculty members, struggle to engage with topics related to social justice and diversity (Deepak, Rountree, & Scott, 2015). Deepak et al note that lack of faculty and student racial diversity can have profound ripple effects on both how students engage with topics in the classroom, as well as in creating discomfort for students of color (2015). The authors argue that creating a safe classroom space for students to grapple with social justice topics is just as important as providing discussion opportunities; simply introducing the topics is not enough to ensure that students will engage in the discussion, the authors note (Deepak, Rountree, & Scott, 2015). The authors recommend that classes be capped to 20 to 25 students, so there is enough space and time for all students to share their thoughts (Deepak, Rountree & Scott, 2015).

The question of when students should be introduced to social justice concepts is disputed throughout the literature. Deepak, Rountree and Scott encourage schools to plan for social justice classes during students' second semester, so they have had the opportunity to get acclimated to and become comfortable in the program (2015). However, Holtz Deal and Hyde argue that second-year students are more developmentally ready to tackle social justice and multicultural issues because advanced students generally report increased self-awareness and reduced feelings of vulnerability (2008). In short, advanced students are less threatened by self-exploration around

cultural identity and their own worldview; they are more ready to engage in these topics than they were their first year (Holtz Deal & Hyde, 2008).

     Success examples. Despite the challenges, examples of programs that wholly engage graduate-level social work students in macro-level social justice work can be found throughout the literature. In one such case, students took it upon themselves to create more space for social justice work in their program. Graduate students at the University of Washington's School of Social Work established a Social Justice Committee (SJC) after pressuring the dean and program director to improve curricular focus and institutional support for social justice education (Hudson, Shapiro, Moylan, Garcia, & Derr, 2014). The SJC ultimately developed several Social Justice Learning Objectives (SJLOs) to hold the doctoral program accountable to its goal of providing students with social justice-oriented curriculum (Hudson, Shapiro, Moylan, Garcia, & Derr, 2014). The authors note that competing definitions of social justice were not an obstacle to the process but rather "lent vibrancy" to the committee's work. The SJAC embraced the varying social justice concepts, incorporating multiple understandings into its plans, thereby ensuring the needs and opinions of diverse students were represented (Hudson, Shapiro, Moylan, Garcia, & Derr, 2014).

     Schools are also specially designing curriculum and programs to better prepare students to do macro-level social justice work. One such school created an experiential service learning course, in which students were required to participate in activities that met community needs (Rocha, 2000). The goals of the course were to expose students to real-life problems that social workers seek to solve, encourage students to participate in aspects of policy practice, and prepare students to readily engage in macro-level social justice work after graduation (Rocha, 2000). Students met these goals by building or joining task groups and coalitions with community

leaders; organizing letter writing and phone banking campaigns; testifying before legislative

committees; and working with the media to produce articles and editorials on community issues

(Rocha, 2000). Ultimately, students designed and implemented a change campaign using the

methods detailed above (Rocha, 2000). Research suggests this experiential service learning

model is effective in preparing students to engage in social justice work: an evaluation of the

experiential service class found that, compared to students who took a traditional policy course,

students in the service learning class were significantly more likely to feel prepared to utilize the

media to educate the public about issues, plan and implement a change effort, and create

informational literature through computer programs (Rocha, 2000). The findings also suggest

that students who complete experiential service learning courses – in addition to traditional

classroom activity – will be more likely to engage in social change or political action after

graduating (Rocha, 2000). A similar study compared two methods for teaching Bachelor of

Social Work (BSW) students about social welfare policy through experiential approaches: a

service learning course and an integration of social welfare education into students' practicum

placement (Anderson & Harris, 2005). The authors of this study found that the experiential

pedagogies are equally affective in increasing students' knowledge of public policy; students in

both classes also report feeling more comfortable using policy-related skills (Anderson & Harris,

2005).

A school of social work in California similarly developed an innovative approach for

teaching students about social justice and macro-level advocacy. Entitled "Practicing Policy,

Pursuing Change and Promoting Social Justice" (3P), this approach consists of eight stages:

committing to a new approach; choosing the issue; identifying leadership and instructors;

designing the course and syllabus; developing a strategy; implementing the strategy; evaluation;

and reflection and revision (Heidemann, Jansson, Fertig & Kim, 2011). This model not only

teaches students the theory of policy practice, it also helps them develop the skills necessary to

enact social change. The 3P projects, which target a single policy issue, are worked on for a span

of several years (Heidemann, Jansson, Fertig & Kim, 2011). The article provides readers with a

comprehensive case study to illustrate how the 3P approach was implemented: For four years,

MSW students worked on policies related to homelessness in California

(Heidemann, Jansson, Fertig & Kim, 2011). By the end of the 3P approach, legislation to address

the issue of homelessness was proposed, lobbied for, and passed at the state level, and was also

introduced at the federal level (Heidemann, Jansson, Fertig & Kim, 2011). Although the authors

note that their students alone did not bring these major policy changes about, they do note that

the students' work was "instrumental" in swaying the local city council and state legislature to

take action on the complex issues of homelessness (Heidemann, Jansson, Fertig & Kim, 2011).

Summary

Based on the literature, it is clear that social work is facing several challenges. In both the

profession itself and within MSW classrooms, struggles abound in defining social justice and

giving macro social work the attention it deserves. These challenges make it difficult for social

workers to fulfill their mandated obligation to create a more socially just world. It is time for a

new kind of approach, one that takes into account the many challenges facing faculty members

and students when learning about social justice in graduate school. The following case

study describes a new initiative – dubbed Mapping Social Justice (MSJ) – for engaging clinically

focused MSW students in macro-level social justice work through targeted messaging of

advocacy alerts that are tailored specifically to that student's field placement.

Conceptual Framework

Having noted that different definitions of social justice abound in social work, it seems particularly important to share with the reader this author's own understanding of social justice, as that definition will be used to conceptualize the following case study. Borrowing the same definition that Wiener and Rosenwald put forth, this author defines social justice as a demonstrated commitment to and investment in fighting multiple and intersecting forms of oppression, including but not limited to racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, ageism, ableism and classism (2008). The author's practice of social justice is also grounded in the SCU-UST SSW guiding document "Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles" (2010). This document – which is taught to every SCU-UST SSW graduate student – outlines several key principles of social justice that are based in Catholic Social Teachings, including: *human dignity, priority for the poor and vulnerable, dignity of work and the rights of workers, promotion of peace and solidarity* (2010). The guidelines further state that social work practice at all levels – micro, mezzo and macro – must strive toward social justice. That practice can take many shapes, including direct service, community organizing, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education and research, and evaluation (2010).

To echo the words of Peter Henriot, this author believes that "Social justice means loving people so much that I work to change structures that violate their dignity," (St. Catherine University – University of St. Thomas School of Social Work, 2010).

Methods

Purpose of Study

This descriptive study seeks to describe the history and development of MSJ, as well as examine implementation and propose modifications for improvement. It also details the outputs

of this program and comments on short-term outcomes. Finally, this study reports on feedback from students and makes recommendations for future program engagement and expansion. It is important to note that this evaluation is formative; ongoing modifications to the program will be made. The primary task of this research is to give another MSW program the understanding and tools to implement its own MSJ initiative by detailing its key components: what was done, how it was done, and who did it.

Research Design

A case study was selected as the research design for this project. According to Stake, a case study is the examination of the particularity and complexity of a single case; its goal is to allow readers to understand a case's activity within important circumstances (1995). A "case" can be many different things, depending on the research question; a case can be an individual client, an agency, or even a program (Stake, 1995). Case studies can accomplish different tasks: Some generate theory; some are simply descriptive; and some are more analytical, comparing one case to another (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of this research, the case being analyzed is a single program: MSJ, a graduate student-led social justice initiative from an MSW program in St. Paul, MN. In the 2017-2018 academic year, 305 total graduate students were enrolled in the MSW program (L. Dalsin, personal communication, November 9, 2017). The average student age was 30 and 91 percent of the student body identified as female (L. Dalsin, personal communication, November 9, 2017)). Only 18 percent of the students were students of color (L. Dalsin, personal communication, November 9, 2017)).

Data

Several pieces of data – both quantitative and qualitative – were gathered during the course of this research to present the reader with a thorough understanding of MSJ.

Qualitative data. A great deal of this study's data is qualitative in nature. Several qualitative data sources were supplied by MSJ's faculty supervisor, Dr. Lisa Kiesel. Dr. Kiesel has been involved in MSJ since its inception and thus had a great deal of information in the form of original planning documents, the project's application for grant funding and the grant outcome report, a project logic model and proposed budget, and anecdotal descriptions of the program's first phases. In addition to Dr. Kiesel's contribution of data, much of the paper's qualitative data was provided directly from the author of this study, who served as a MSJ Research Assistant (RA) from January 2017 to May 2018. This data includes internal messages and notes from MSJ team meetings, as well as examples of alerts sent by MSJ. Several photographs of MSJ alerts, social media posts, projects and community advertisements are included throughout to give the reader a visual depiction of the initiative.

Quantitative data. Several pieces of quantitative data were analyzed during the course of this research, including: statistics on the number of and types of alerts sent to students over the course of the project; survey results from students; and budget information on staffing and programming costs. Three surveys in particular were sent to various student populations.

Survey A. Survey A (Appendix A) was electronically sent to all MSW students in a field placement in the fall of 2016. In addition to gathering information on the student (name and email address), the survey also captured specifics of the student's field placement: what the target populations/target issues are and what kind of social work setting it is. Approximately 150 students received the survey and 96 completed it, for a completion rate of 64 percent (Mapping Social Justice, 2016). For more information about Survey A, see page 29.

Survey B. Survey B (Appendix C) gave graduating MSW students the opportunity to stay engaged with MSJ after leaving the program. If a student wanted to continue to receive alerts,

they filled out the survey with their permanent (non-school associated) email address. Survey B

was sent to 144 graduating students in May 2017; 21 elected to continue receiving alerts, for a

completion rate of 14.6 percent (Mapping Social Justice, 2017). For more information about

Survey B, see page 41.

      Survey C. Finally, Survey C (Appendix D) was an online student feedback survey sent to

all MSW students in May 2017. It surveyed students on how relevant the alerts were, whether

they received too many or too few, and how many they took action on/what kinds of action they

took. The survey was sent to 326 individuals; 67 filled out the survey (Mapping Social Justice,

2017), for a completion rate of 20.55 percent. For more information about Survey C, see page

41.

Program Background

      Mapping Social Justice (MSJ) is a project within SCU-UST SSW. The School is a joint

program between two highly respected universities in the Twin Cities. The MSW program is

specifically focused on clinical social work; while some graduate social work schools offer either

"micro tracks" or "macro tracks," this program has a decidedly micro emphasis. However,

students *do* learn how to integrate macro practices within clinical social work. The concept of

social justice is heavily emphasized throughout coursework and school events. For example,

each year, the School chooses a "justice theme" and hosts events on that topic to engage students

in social justice discussions. Past justice themes have included: Participatory Justice; Justice for

Victims of Human Trafficking; Justice for Children, Youth and Families; and Economic Justice

(C. Lorah, personal communication, August 24, 2017).

      The SCU-UST SSW established a Student Justice Initiative (SJI) in 2014 after students

and faculty expressed a desire to engage more meaningfully in political advocacy and social

justice work (Kiesel, 2016). In its first year, the SJI participated in a state-wide Restore the Vote

initiative, engaged in phone banking, maintained a robust social media presence on Facebook,

sent action alerts to students, and directly lobbied state lawmakers on legislation that would

restore the voting rights for persons who have been convicted of a felony (Kiesel, 2016). After a

failed attempt to restart the project the following fall due to a lack of student participation,

coordinators agreed that expecting students to "show up" for such a caliber of advocacy – on top

of course work, internships, jobs and family responsibilities – was unrealistic (Kiesel, 2016).

They also learned that the clinically-focused student body felt limited in its ability to create

macro-level change (Kiesel, 2016). With these lessons in mind, the group shifted focus and

looked to engage students in a wide variety of social justice issues – not just one topic, like

Restore the Vote (Kiesel, 2016). Operating under the assumption that all social workers are

social justice workers, the SJI set its sights on connecting students with advocacy opportunities

related directly to their field placement (Kiesel, 2016). Thus, MSJ was born.

Goals

Led by Dr. Kiesel, an assistant faculty member with extensive career experience in social

work practice, research and advocacy, MSJ launched in fall 2016. The project's goal was to

expand and enhance student opportunities to see policy in action and to develop policy practice

skills, while advancing individual knowledge of the intersections of race, ethnicity, and poverty

(Kiesel, 2016). In an application for grant funding to the CSWE (2016), Dr. Kiesel explained that

the project's goals would be met primarily through sending students targeted social justice

advocacy alerts based on their course enrollment and field placement:

> *"We seek to target information to specific course learning rather than a universal*
>
> *dissemination in order to engage and empower students already engaged in the area of*

concern. This will allow students to relate their current clinical learning with broader or emerging macro aspects of the issue, and we believe they will feel more empowered with this knowledge to take advocacy action."

Through those specific alerts, the project hoped to enhance the policy-related field experience of all MSW students (Kiesel, 2016). The rationale was simple: If students are sent advocacy alerts related to issues they are already working on or studying, they will be more likely to take action. This plan also took into account the extreme demand on graduate students' time. Between course work, field placements, family obligations, full- or part-time jobs and more, students were often overwhelmed by the daily barrage of news being sent through social media and email. When there is so much to take action on, it is often difficult to know where to start; MSJ posited that targeted alerts would move students past apathy and into action.

Staffing and Finances

The project was funded through a Policy Practice in Field Education grant from the CSWE (Kiesel, 2016). Dr. Kiesel requested $9,880 to hire five graduate RA's and two faculty members to supervise, as well as to cover additional costs related printing and copying (Kiesel, 2016). The grant was fully funded. The RA's were officially employed through St. Catherine University and paid an hourly wage of $13.75. Hours worked per week varied during the academic year, ranging on average from four to 10 hours per week (Kiesel, 2016). Faculty members supervising the project were provided a stipend of $800 to compensate for work on the initiative (Kiesel, 2016).

Faculty and Institutional Support

Support from faculty and administrators proved to be an important aspect of establishing MSJ. Dr. Barbara Shank, the School of Social Work dean until May 2017, lent her support to the

project and committed to continue funding it after a successful pilot year (Kiesel, 2016). Her

support proved vitally important when it came to technology issues, which will be discussed

further. The School of Social Work's communications team also helped advertise MSJ to alumni

by including a blurb about the project in its fall 2016 and spring 2017 *Perspectives* newsletters

(figure 1) (St. Catherine University – University of St. Thomas School of Social Work,

2017). However, operating within two Catholic institutions proved to be difficult at times,

especially when RA's wanted to send out alerts regarding reproductive health or other social

justice topics deemed "too progressive." These limitations will be discussed further in the

"Discussion" section of this paper.

Figure 1. MSJ was featured in the fall 2016 and spring 2017 editions of *Perspectives*, the

School of Social Work's biannual newsletter.

Program Implementation

Semester I

During the fall of 2016, Dr. Kiesel began meeting in person with the team of RA's every other week (Kiesel, 2017). As they worked to establish the project, Dr. Kiesel maintained weekly email communication on upcoming tasks and challenges (Kiesel, 2017). The team's primary focus during this period was to identify online sources that could be used to track legislation or policy updates related to the various issues of race, ethnicity, and class inequalities (Kiesel, 2017).

Video production. Early MSJ team conversations focused on how to best engage students in social justice advocacy. A great deal of work was spent in the spring, summer, and fall of 2016 on shooting and editing a video to impress upon students the importance of integrating advocacy into a social work career, no matter the setting or service type (Kiesel, 2016). Dr. Kiesel and the MSJ RA's worked with another graduate social work student with multimedia editing experience to produce a nearly seven-minute-long video (Gavin, 2017). The overall tone of the video was humorous and lighthearted; it featured real social work graduate students and faculty members as "actors." It even portrayed Dr. Shank as social work pioneer Jane Addams (Figure 2) (Gavin, 2017). Another scene filmed a graduate student discussing a social work issue with real-life MN House of Representatives member Dave Pinto (Gavin, 2017). The video was completed in early winter 2017, just in time for the spring semester (Gavin, 2017).

Figure 2. Former Dean Barbara Shank portrays social work pioneer Jane Addams in a student-created video to promote advocacy in social work.

Student information infrastructure. Early work also focused on determining how to best gather all the student information necessary to successfully target alerts as planned. That information included students' zip codes (to determine congressional districts), field placement information, and course enrollment information (so that, for example, students in a class on clinical work with children could be targeted action alerts on legislation related to children's healthcare). Since no mechanism was in place to gather and store all this information, the team had the great task that first semester of essentially building a MSJ database. Student information was pulled from various places in order to build a primitive database. Student addresses and directory information were provided by the School of Social Work. Information on individual field placements details would be gathered through an online survey sent to students in the fall semester. This information lived in various spreadsheets, accessible only by Dr. Kiesel. Although the team had been in contact with the university IT department about designing a more robust database through the university's customer relationship management (CRM) tool, Salesforce, little progress was made during the first semester. The team planned to utilize Salesforce by the winter break, but as the program was not ready, RA's and Dr. Kiesel used the

various spreadsheets and Blackboard once the spring semester began and alerts started being

sent.

Student survey design. The team worked to design a Qualtrics field placement survey

(Appendix A) that would be sent to all students in a field placement (identified in the Methods

section as "Survey A"). In addition to asking for the student's first name, last name and email

address, the survey also requested information on the target populations of the student's field

placement, the target issues addressed in the student's field placement, as well as the setting of

the field placement (Mapping Social Justice, 2016). Kiesel also met with field seminar

instructors to help facilitate survey completion by their students (Kiesel, 2017). Approximately

150 students received the survey and 96 completed it, for a completion rate of 64 percent

(Mapping Social Justice, 2016).

In the survey, students were asked to select the target populations they work with in their

field placements; answers ranged from children and adolescents to military/veterans, LGBTQ

individuals, immigrants and refugees, the elderly/aging, and more (Mapping Social Justice,

2016). Students were also asked to select the target issues of their field placement – for example,

Severe Persistent Mental Illness (SPMI), family functioning, foster care/child welfare, housing,

etc. (Mapping Social Justice, 2016). Finally, students noted the setting in which they worked

(school, behavioral health clinic, shelter, crisis center, adoption agency, etc.) (Mapping Social

Justice, 2016).

Election Engagement. Beginning its work in the fall of 2016 provided MSJ with a

unique opportunity – to engage students immediately in advocacy related to the 2016

presidential election. MSJ capitalized on the highly charged political atmosphere to encourage

students to vote and participate in discussions on important voter issues. In total, three alerts

were created and disseminated regarding the November election. Additionally, the project created a platform for students to literally "map" their votes. RA's posted a large map of the state, as well as smaller maps with individual counties, on a prominent bulletin board in the School of Social Work. Students were invited to place a pin in the district/city where they voted and also leave a "Why I Vote" comment. This interactive display encouraged students to participate in the electoral process and also gave a preview to the type of work MSJ would do once fully established in the spring semester.
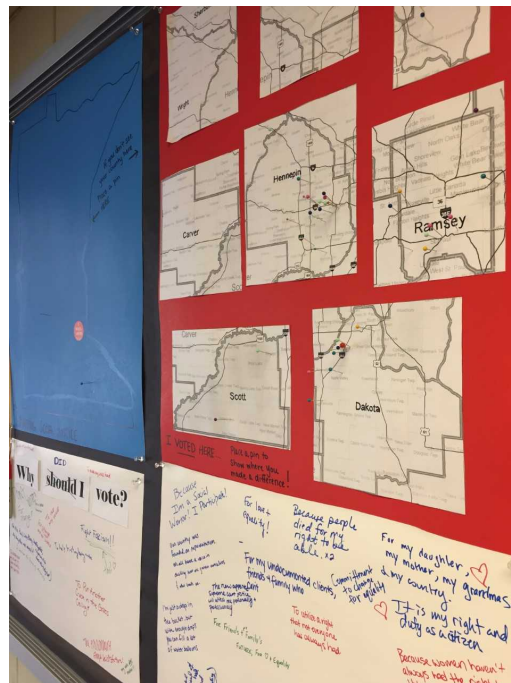

Figure 3. MSJ's 2016 election mapping display.

Semester II

The campus' political atmosphere was electric at the start of the spring 2017 semester. The Women's March in Washington, D.C. (and sister marches throughout the world, including locally in St. Paul) had just been held, bringing millions of advocates together across the globe. With interest in advocacy seemingly at an all-time high, it was the perfect time for MSJ to begin sending its targeted alerts. To kick start the new semester, RA's and Dr. Kiesel visited 25 classes

during the second week of school to introduce the project, screen the newly completed video,

and answer any student questions (Kiesel, 2017).

Branding. One RA with design and marketing experience took on the task of developing

an MSJ logo, so the program had a distinctive brand. The final logo featured a map pin with a

fist in the center, indicating social justice (figure 7). The design was featured in social media

pages, alerts sent to students, and in all print advertisement for the project.
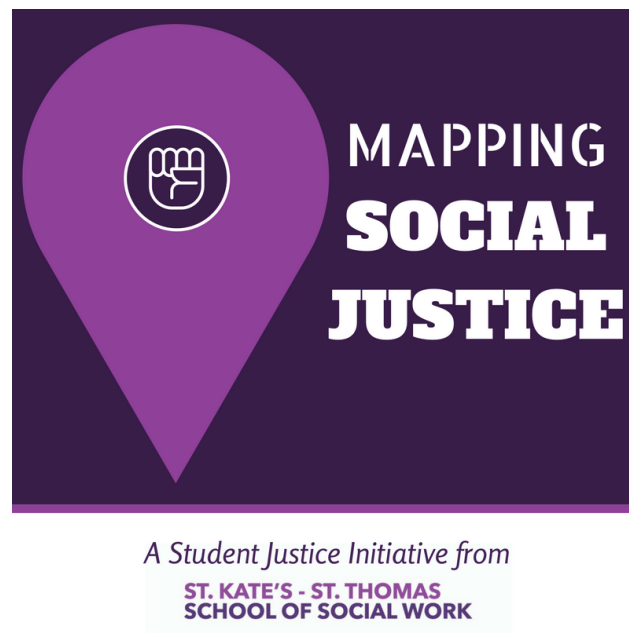

Figure 4. The MSJ logo, created by an RA for branding purposes.

Drafting and sending alerts. RA's divided up the various target populations and issues,

with each RA "owning" two to three topics. For example, one RA was responsible for tracking

legislation/social justice issues related to the LGBTQ community, veterans and women. Another

focused on mental health, suicide prevention and racial injustice. Dr. Kiesel herself tracked the

child welfare system. Delegating the different topics proved to be quite simple, as all the RA's

naturally had different areas of interest and were already connected to organizations that worked

on those topics. When new topics came up over the course of the semester – for example, the

Congressional healthcare debates in the spring of 2017 – that had not been previously assigned to

an RA, the MSJ team would discuss the subject at its bi-weekly meetings and assign the topic to

one of the students.

RA's sent three types of alerts: *Information alert*s, *action alerts* and *event alerts*. An

information alert is typically an update with new facts on a specific population or issue area that

will better help students serve their clients and be advocates. For example, the creation of a

new free hotline for homeless veterans in the Twin Cities would be sent out as an *information*

alert. Whenever possible, *information alerts* include links to news articles or websites with more

information on the given topic. Below is an example of an *information alert* sent out in March

2017:

The U.S. Supreme Court has unanimously ruled that schools must offer an education program for students with disabilities that provides for more than minimal progress. The AP article link below states that this decision, although it does not go as far as parents / advocates had hoped, "has major implications for about 6.4 million disabled students who want to advance in school and rely on special programs to make that happen."

Read more: http://bigstory.ap.org/article/8946add74b7745219f06d65e0eda2d87/high-court-bolsters-rights-learning-disabled-students

Do you know of other action or information alerts that your fellow MSW students should know about? Email the Mapping Social Justice team at sswmappingsj@stthomas.edu so we can send it out!

Figure 5. An *information alert* sent to students regarding a recent U.S. Supreme Court

ruling that affects students with disabilities.

Action alerts advertise a specific call to action – for example, telling students to call their

state senators regarding minimum wage legislation. Whenever possible, *action alerts* include

how to find information for the person the alert is encouraging the student to contact; these alerts

also typically include a sample script, so students have an idea of what to say. The goal of *action*

alerts is to make the action as simple and anxiety-free as possible. If the action was time-

sensitive, the alert's email subject included wording like "urgent" or "immediate." Figure 6 is an

example of an *action alert sent* out in March 2017:

Last year, the U.S. Senate introduced The Mental Health Reform Act of 2016. Although the legislation garnered 29 co-sponsors -- including Minnesota senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken -- it was never voted on.

It's time for the Senate to once again re-introduce *and finally pass* The Mental Health Reform Act. This critical bill would achieve the following:

- Authorize the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline program
- Authorize new grants to increase the mental health workforce, so more trained professionals are available to help.
- Strengthen enforcement of the mental health parity law, so health plans are held accountable for the coverage people paid for
- Invest in early intervention, so people get the right mental health care at the right time to promote healthy lives.

Social workers should lead the charge to get Sens. Klobuchar and Franken to renew their commitment for The Mental Health Reform Act. Call or write them today (Franken contact info, Klobuchar contact info) with the following script:

Dear Senator [Franken or Klobuchar],

As a social work student and Minnesotan, I'm [writing or calling] to ask you to once again support The Mental Health Reform Act. So far in this Congressional session, a 2017 version of this legislation has not been introduced. I'm asking you to lead the charge for the millions of Americans who live with a mental illness and re-introduce this life-saving bill.

Thank you very much,

[Your name]

Do you know of other action or information alerts that your fellow MSW students should know about? Email the Mapping Social Justice team at sswmappingsj@stthomas.edu so we can send it out!

Figure 6. An *action alert* sent to students regarding The Mental Health Reform Act.

Finally, *event alerts* promoted an upcoming event related to social justice. RA's attempted to send *event alerts* with as much notice as possible; similar to *action alerts*, if the event was being hosted in the next 24 hours, the alert's email subject line would typically say so. Below is an event alert sent out in June 2017:

On July 6, Congressman Keith Ellison and Richfield Mayor Pat Elliott will host a Civics 101 community forum where attendees can learn:

- How federal, state, county, and city governments work
- How to exercise your rights and privileges to the government
- How laws are passed and implemented
- How citizens influence public policy

Interested in learning more about policy and the different levels of government? Don't miss this event! More details here: https://www.facebook.com/events/1394384080656382/

Do you know of other action or information alerts that your fellow MSW students should know about? Email the Mapping Social Justice team at sswmappingsj@stthomas.edu so we can send it out!

Figure 7. An *event alert* sent to students regarding an upcoming community forum with Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN).

RA's aimed to send two to three alerts total each week. Some weeks, all of an RA's

assigned issue areas were represented in the sent alerts; other weeks, one topic

attracted significant attention (for example, when President Donald Trump announced that

transgender Americans would be barred from serving in the military). There were weeks where

more than three alerts were sent, especially for topics that were rapidly changing (like the U.S.

Senate discussions on repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act). And certain weeks were

quieter than others, like when the state legislature or U.S. Congress were recessed. In addition to

sending out alerts via email and posting them to social media sites, paper versions of the alerts

were printed and posted to a bulletin board located prominently in the School of Social Work's

building on the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University campuses. Alerts were

also forwarded to faculty members in specific courses with an explanatory email from Dr.

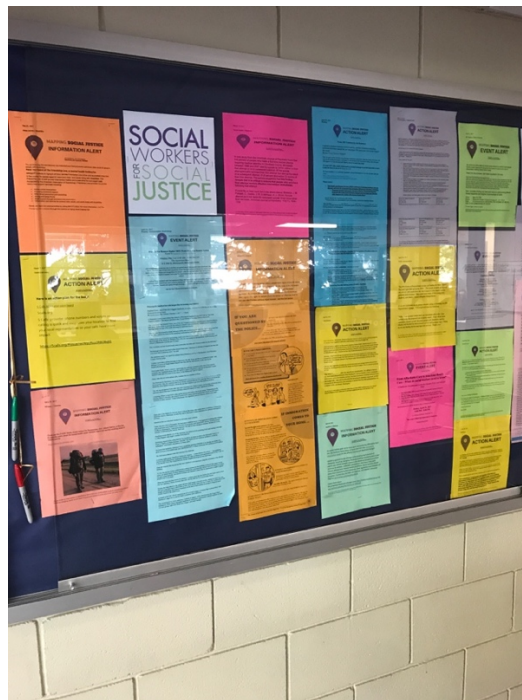Kiesel that they could use the information in their classes, if they deemed it appropriate.

Figure 8. The Mapping Social Justice bulletin board on the University of St. Thomas

campus.

In total, 84 alerts were sent out during the Spring 2017 semester, which averaged out to about 4.6 per week. The figures below provide a summary of the types of alerts sent out (Figure 9) and which populations (Figure 10) and issue areas (Figure 11) were represented within those alerts:

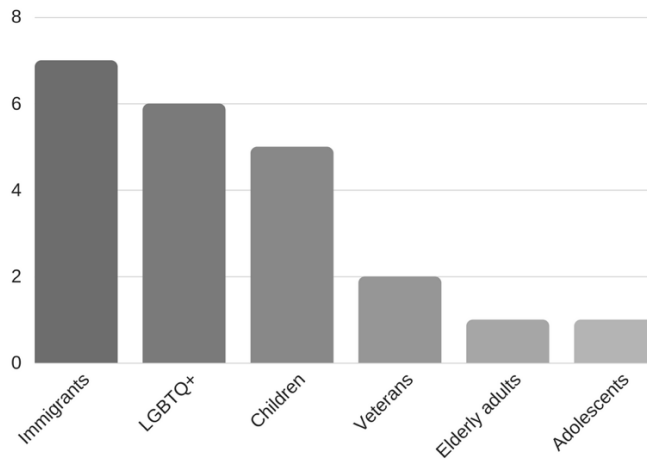*Figure 9. T*ypes of alerts sent to students during the spring 2017 semester.

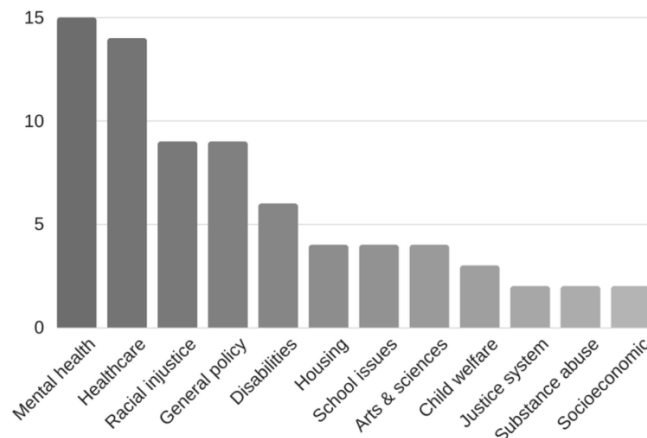*Figure 10*. Populations represented in alerts sent during the spring 2017 semester.

Figure 11. Issue areas represented in alerts during the spring 2017 semester.

Social media. During planning for semester two, when alerts would be regularly sent out, the team decided that a more robust social media presence would be an important component of the project. Although a Facebook had been created during the project's first semester, it was not updated regularly. One RA, the author of this study, was assigned the task of managing MSJ's social media accounts. Every alert that was emailed to students was also posted to the Facebook page. This strategy was critical for two reasons: first, email was not the best way to reach every student. With dozens of messages from professors and classmates each day, some students simply deleted or ignored extraneous emails that didn't *need* to be read immediately. Therefore, posting to social media gave MSJ a second chance to put alerts in front of students. Second, students who followed the Facebook would also see alerts that had not been specifically targeted to them. This gave students the chance to learn about advocacy work in populations/settings they were not already working with. It is also important to note that the Facebook was open to any user; you did not have to be a social work student to "like" the page. This opened MSJ work to other Minnesotan or national advocates interested in social justice and social work.

Figure 12. An example of an MSJ Facebook post from August 2017.

In September 2016, when MSJ began work, its Facebook page (which had originally

been the SJI page, but was re-adapted for MSJ in Fall 2016) had 69 "likes," or people who

followed the account. By May of 2017, after the project's first full year, the page "likes" grew to

175 and reached more than 9,000 Facebook users through its nearly 100 posts.

Campus events. MSJ held or participated in several campus events during the spring

semester to further engage students in advocacy work. In March, Dr. Kiesel co-hosted a campus-

wide "Train the Trainer" Advocacy 101 event. This event, co-led by social work administrators

Dr. Katharine Hill and Dr. Sarah Ferguson, taught attendees the basics of advocacy and

encouraged them to pass along that knowledge to friends or neighbors in small community

gatherings. Dr. Hill had developed several advocacy resources – including information on how to

contact lawmakers and how to track legislation – for students to use. After Dr.

Kiesel participated in the training, she and Dr. Hill agreed that the advocacy training component

would be added to MSJ's work.

In addition to "Train the Trainer," MSJ also held a "Postcard Party" on campus in April, the week following Social Work Day at the Capitol. Each year, the MSW Student Association (MSWSA) designs a justice-related shirt that all UST/SCU SSW students wear to the state-wide social work lobbying day in St. Paul. Recognizing the potential to work with the MSWSA, Dr. Kiesel and the MSJ team converted the shirt design to postcards that could be mailed to legislators (figure 16). Dr. Kiesel had 300 postcards professionally printed and stamped with the proper postage (for a total cost of $165), so that sending a message to legislators would be as easy as possible. One week after Social Work Day at the Capitol, RA's hosted a "Postcard Party" in between classes in the social work building student lounge. Students were invited to draft a postcard to legislators on the issues they care about. Sample postcard messages were provided; contact information for legislators was also made available. RA's played music and handed out candy to encourage students to engage. About 30 postcards were filled out during the event; attendees reported being appreciative that the process was made so easy for them.

Figure 13. MSJ created postcards that students could send to legislators during a "Postcard Party" on campus.

Finally, MSJ was given permission to make a short presentation at new student orientation in May 2017. Dr. Kiesel spoke briefly at the orientation to introduce students to the program and explain why they would be receiving a survey in the fall. Fliers promoting MSJ were also included in orientation folders distributed to new students.

IT infrastructure. Technology challenges increased during the spring semester, once RA's were sending out alerts frequently. In order to target students accurately, information was pulled from two sources: the field survey (Appendix A) and the School of Social Work's internal student database. Information on students – name, zip code, course enrollment, field placement specifics – lived in several spreadsheets. In order to "target" a student, Dr. Kiesel faced the tedious task of manually searching through the spreadsheets and copying appropriate student email addresses. For example, if Dr. Kiesel was targeting students who lived in Minneapolis or worked in child welfare, she had two steps to complete. First, she would identify all the students with a Minneapolis zip code, as provided by the School of Social Work's database. She would then scan the field survey responses and identify any student who had marked Foster Care/Child Welfare as their target issue, as well as CPS/Foster/Adoption Agency as their field placement setting. All of the email addresses for those identified students would be copied and pasted into an email's "send to" field. Those students would then receive the alert on Minneapolis child welfare. Sometimes the process would identify 10 to 20 students; sometimes it only identified three. Alerts were ultimately emailed to students through Dr. Kiesel's email account. Due to privacy concerns, only Dr. Kiesel – and not the RAs – sent out alerts during the second semester.

This was a major limitation in the functionality of the project. If a time-sensitive alert needed to be sent right away, RA's had no choice but to wait until Dr. Kiesel was free from her many professional obligations to go through the arduous process of targeting the correct students.

It put a great burden on Dr. Kiesel and slowed down the entire process. Sometimes, by the

time Dr. Kiesel was able to send an alert, it was no longer "newsworthy" or timely. It was

apparent from early on that these IT infrastructure issues needed to be resolved for the project to

function more effectively and seamlessly.

Meetings between a University of St. Thomas IT team, Dr. Kiesel and the author of this

study began in the spring of 2017 to build a custom database that would house the various

student information. The task of creating such a database was assigned a computer science

graduate student. The vision for the custom database was simple: It would feature a user-friendly

frontend where RA's could "check" the different criteria for students being targeted. For

example, an RA would be able to search for all students who live in St. Paul *and* also work in a

hospital setting; or, the search could be modified to target students who live in St. Paul *or* work

in a hospital setting. Once the total criteria were selected, an RA could press "submit" and a new

webpage would load with the email addresses for all students who matched that search. Those

addresses could be easily copied and pasted into an alert email. All of the student information –

zip codes, class enrollment, field placement survey information – would live in a database in the

back-end of the website. RA's would work with the IT department each semester to update

student course enrollment; in addition, every year, new information from the annual field

placement survey would be uploaded.

In early meetings, the IT team was confident the project could be completed by the end of

the spring 2017 semester. However, the task proved more difficult than originally anticipated.

Communication was a major barrier between the MSJ team and the IT team. It was frequently

apparent that the two groups were simply speaking different languages – the IT team in

technological jargon and the MSJ team in social work specifics. This created confusion when

decisions were being made about the website's interface. Additionally, once the spring semester ended and the project still had not been finished, the original computer science graduate student was replaced. This created a new set of challenges, as the teams now had to bring a new IT student up to speed on the project and what was left to accomplish.

Despite the 20+ hours Dr. Kiesel and this author spent working with the IT team to develop a database, a functional version was never completed. As of the fall 2017 semester, Dr. Kiesel and the MSJ team re-started planning for long-term IT infrastructure.

Alumni engagement. During the spring semester, with two of the four RA's set to graduate that May, the MSJ team began to have conversations about how to best engage alumni after leaving the school. RA's reported hearing anecdotal evidence that students wanted to continue to receive MSJ alerts after graduation. Therefore, the team created an Alumni Survey (identified in the Methods section as "Survey B") (Appendix C) that was sent to graduating students, giving them the opportunity to stay connected with MSJ after commencement. The survey requested new email addresses for the graduates (since they would soon no longer have access to their University of St. Thomas emails) and gave them the chance to select new issue areas or target populations to receive alerts about. The survey was sent to 144 graduating students in May 2017; 21 signed up to continue receiving alerts.

<div align="center">

Program Feedback

</div>

At the end of the project's first full year, the MSJ team spent a great deal of time seeking feedback on its work and brainstorming improvements for the future. A survey (identified in the Methods section as "Survey C") (Appendix D) was sent to MSW students requesting feedback; the MSJ team used those comments to outline future changes. Dr. Kiesel was also selected to present on MSJ at the Influencing Social Policy Conference 2.0 in St. Louis, MO in June 2017,

which provided an opportunity to collect input from social work and social service professionals from across the country.

Student Feedback

The MSJ team emailed an online survey (Survey C) to all MSW students in May 2017 (Appendix D). The survey was sent to 326 individuals; 67 filled out the survey (Mapping Social Justice, 2017), for a completion rate of 20.55 percent. To incentivize completing the survey, students were given the opportunity to enter their name for a prize drawing. Prizes included shirts from the 2017 Social Work Day at the Capitol, Caribou Coffee gift cards and UST/SCU SSW coffee mugs. Of the 67 students who completed the survey, 61 entered themselves into the drawing. Three winners were selected randomly by Dr. Kiesel and awarded a prize.

Q1. Question one asked students: Were the alerts you received relevant to your field placement learning? More than 75 percent of students answered yes; from this data, the team learned its targeting system was generally working and students were receiving alerts applicable to their field placements (Mapping Social Justice, 2017).
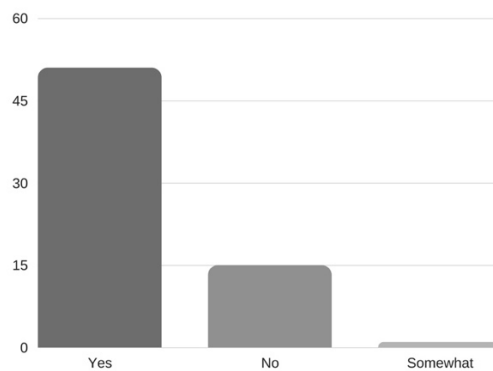

Figure 14. Graphic breakdown of responses to Q1 on the 2017 feedback survey.

Q2. In question two, students were asked to rate the frequency of alerts received, with responses including too many, just right or too few. Nearly 65 percent reported the frequency

was just right (Mapping Social Justice, 2017). These responses supported anecdotal evidence the

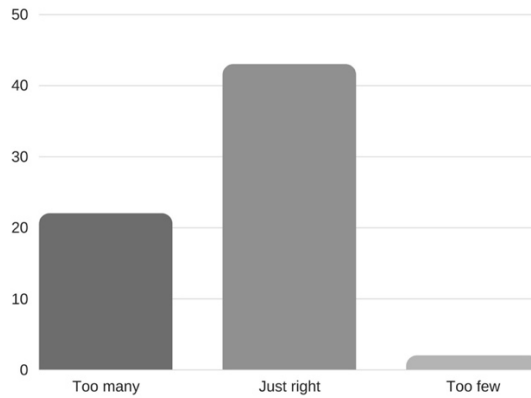MSJ team had been hearing from students throughout the school year.

Figure 15. Graphic breakdown of responses to Q2 on the 2017 feedback survey.

Q3. Question three provided examples of taking action on an alert (sharing an alert or

Facebook post; talking to friends, family, or colleagues about it; applying it to practice;

discussing it in class or field; contacting a legislator or other leader; attending an event; or simply

learning from the alert) and then asked students how many actions they took in response to

alerts. The majority of surveyed students reported taking between one and four actions (Mapping
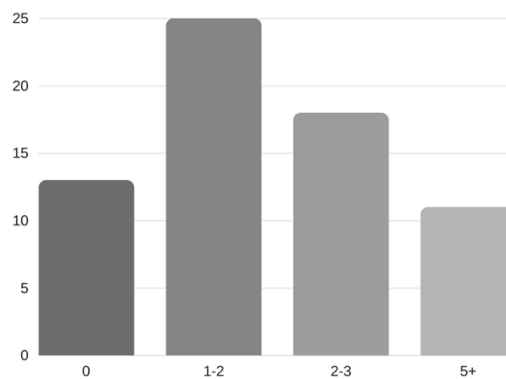
Social Justice, 2017).

Figure 16. Graphic breakdown of responses to Q3 on the 2017 feedback survey.

Q4. Question four asked respondents to describe the actions they took after receiving a MSJ alert. Respondents were provided with a text box and able to write as much or as little as they wanted. Seventy-seven actions were described, with nearly half of surveyed students reporting contacting a legislator via email, phone call or postcard (Mapping Social Justice, 2017).
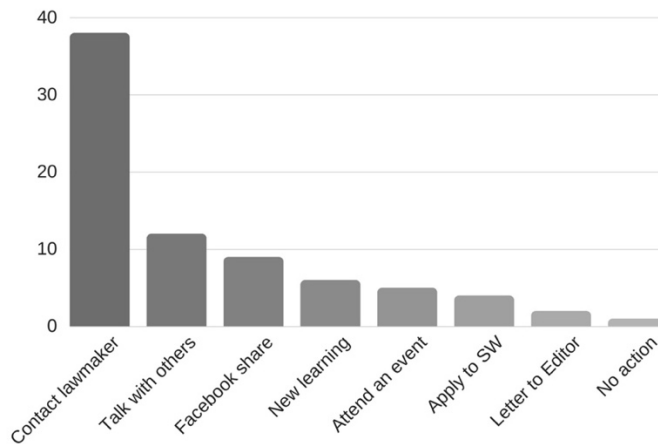

Figure 17. Graphic breakdown of responses to Q4 on the 2017 feedback survey.

Team Feedback

At the end of the semester, the MSJ team met to review student feedback and discuss changes for the following year. Between the student feedback survey, anecdotal evidence and a semester's worth of experience sending out alerts, there were plenty of ideas suggested to improve MSJ.

Survey A edits. As noted in the feedback in Survey C, more than 20 percent of surveyed students felt they were receiving too many alerts (Mapping Social Justice, 2017). The team decided to revise the original survey (Appendix B) sent out to students in the fall, in which they detail the target issues and populations covered in their field placement. First, the team decided that students needed to be limited in the number of boxes they could check. In the original

survey, there was no limit; therefore, several students checked many or all of the boxes. In the

new survey, students would only be allowed to select up to three boxes per question. That change

would hopefully force students to be more specific and careful in choosing the answers that

apply to their field placement. Some of the answers were also combined or deleted to make the

options more succinct and specific.

      The team also decided to add a section where students can select up to three areas of

personal passion or interest. RA's reasoned that students would like to receive alerts on issues

they already care about and are committed to, not just ones covered in their field placement.

      In addition to changing the content of the survey, the team changed who would receive it.

During its first year, MSJ only targeted students who were enrolled in a field placement.

However, this left out a population of students in the three- or four-year track of the program

who might not have been in a field placement that year. After gauging student interest, the team

decided to include *all* students, not just those completing a field placement, in its targeting.

Students not enrolled in a field placement were instructed to skip the survey questions related to

field and answer only the personal passion question. At the very least, the MSJ team reasoned,

students should be supplied with advocacy alerts for the issues they care about, even if they were

not in a field placement. The team also decided to include an option for faculty or alumni to

identify themselves and answer the personal passion question.

      Student feedback survey. After reviewing the answers to the student feedback survey,

the team discussed changes to this form to better measure the effectiveness of MSJ. In the

original survey, question three asked how many actions the respondent took in response to alerts.

The possible answers were: zero, one to two, three to four, or five and up. This question,

however, did not address whether students would have taken those actions without prompting

from MSJ. It would have been helpful to add a question such as "how many actions did you typically take before receiving MSJ alerts," in order to better gauge how effective the program is. It is important to know if students were already taking five or more actions a semester, or if those actions were solely the result of MSJ.

Drafting alerts. After reviewing comments in the student feedback survey, the team agreed that closer attention needed to be paid to the topic areas most often written about. For example, alerts related to the federal healthcare debate – with specific emphasis on changes to Medicaid – dominated much of the spring semester. In total, fourteen alerts sent out were related to Congressional healthcare debates. While this issue was critically important to cover, it may have overshadowed other topics – for example, housing policy in the Twin Cities – that were not getting as much media attention. The feedback survey was a helpful reminder that RA's need to be digging for relevant alerts on *all* subject areas, not just the ones dominating media headlines.

Discussion

There is great potential and opportunity to expand the MSJ model to other social work master's programs. Its unique concept of tailoring social justice alerts to students based on field placement and personal passions may make students more likely to engage in advocacy – and it certainly helps fulfill CSWE requirements to teach students to combat discrimination, oppression and economic inequality. As the MSJ team learned in its first year, however, implementing such a project takes a great deal of energy and significant financial and technological resources.

Benefits of the Model

Perhaps most importantly, early research has shown that the MSJ model is effective in engaging students in social justice advocacy. More than half of the surveyed students (64.18 percent) took one to four actions due to MSJ alerts (Mapping Social Justice, 2017). The fact that

so many students contacted a legislator suggests the team's dedication to providing lawmaker

contact information and a sample script was fruitful. It was also heartening to read many student

reports of discussing alerts in their classrooms, field placements and homes.

Although more data collection will be required to determine if MSJ impacted program

graduates' integration of micro and macro social work practice, early evidence supports that this

model has to some extent been successful in what was intended. MSJ addresses many challenges

that schools face when implementing social justice into programs, as described in the Literature

Review. Funge (2011) notes that faculty members often feel unprepared to or daunted by the task

of incorporating social justice in the classroom. With so many committees and working groups to

serve on, on top of teaching courses and conducting research, adding "ensure competence in

social justice" to that list can feel like a burden. MSJ, however, only needs one or two committed

faculty members – as well as a team of dedicated RA's – to run this initiative. It is certainly

helpful to have faculty buy-in and support in promoting the project, but this model does not add

to educators' already-full plates. That is not to say that any mention of social justice in the

classroom should be erased; as Deepak, Rountree and Scott noted, programs should embrace a

both-and, not either-or, approach (2015). While faculty members teach the basics of social

justice and how it applies to social work broadly, MSJ provides students with direct advocacy

opportunities to put that classroom knowledge to use. When further supplemented with movie

screenings and discussions or other experiential learning opportunities, this multi-pronged

approach can fulfill social workers' ethical obligation to teach and uphold social justice. And

perhaps even more than that, such an approach may even better prepare clinical program

graduates to incorporate macro-level advocacy into a micro-focused curriculum.

Challenges & Recommendations for Improvement

Trial-and-error. Because MSJ is the first model of its kind, Dr. Kiesel and the RA's took on a process of trying out new things, figuring out what worked and what did not, and then making improvements moving forward. Some things the team got right on the first try; for example, RA's and Dr. Kiesel learned from student data that nearly half of surveyed students contacted a lawmaker as a result of an MSJ alert. This could be due to the fact that the team frequently included scripts in the alerts, because they anticipated students would feel more comfortable calling or writing a legislator if they had an example of what to say. However, there were also elements of trial-and-error in which the team made a mistake or overlooked a small detail that ended up being a big deal. For example, in Survey A, there was no limit on the number of selections a respondent could choose; as a result, many students selected all or many of the options available. This meant that, later in the spring semester, they were essentially receiving all of the alerts being sent out. This potentially contributed to more than 20 percent of surveyed students reporting they received too many alerts. This was a big lesson for the MSJ team in the importance of thinking through all decisions carefully – even the smallest decisions, they learned, could have big implications on the project. It is the hope of this author that this paper is used by other schools of social work to implement MSJ initiatives. That is partly why the mistakes made in creating this program have been included throughout this paper: so other schools can learn from these errors and avoid them moving forward.

Financial support. MSJ is a time-consuming and intensive project. In order to attract high-quality RA's and professors to run the initiative, financial incentive is a must. This should not be a volunteer project; it is simply too much work and the level of dedication it requires is certainly equal to a part-time job. The first year of MSJ was funded through a nearly $10,000

grant from the CSWE. However, it was a one-time funding cycle and Dr. Kiesel was not

permitted to re-apply. Therefore, funding for year two was challenging to find and future funding

for the project remains uncertain. It would certainly be helpful to have long-term financial

support from the UST/SCU SSW. Similar programs created to engage social work students in

policy work – as described in the Literature Review – have been offered as academic courses, so

financial support from the institution is guaranteed. Schools that are considering implementing

their own MSJ should work to secure both short- and long-term funding from the start, so to

avoid some of the financial headaches MSJ faced after year one.

   IT infrastructure. As noted above, a major challenge of implementing MSJ was

establishing an IT infrastructure that could store various student data and allow team members to

search for specific variables. Even while working with an experienced team of IT professionals,

this aspect of the project took many months longer than anticipated and was never ultimately

completed. Approximately 20 collective MSJ team hours were devoted to the unfinished project.

This may party be due to communication difficulties between the IT team and the MSJ team; it

often felt as if the two parties were speaking different languages, with technical and social work

jargon being used on either side. This is an issue that is likely also seen in other working groups

around the country tasked with building healthcare databases for consumer information. If the

database is ever finished, the MSJ team should consider making the code for its database "open

source," so it may be accessed and edited by other users. This would prevent other programs

implementing their own MSJ from "recreating the wheel. IT infrastructure, along with financial

support, should also be an early conversation for programs adopting an MSJ model. How will

student data be recorded and stored? Who will have access to it? How will you sort through the

database for targeting purposes? These are all questions the MSJ team grappled with and is still struggling to figure out.

        Working within a Catholic institution. Since UST and SCU are both Catholic institutions, it was sometimes challenging when RAs wanted to send alerts in conflict with traditional Catholic values – for example, alerts related to abortion or birth control. Ultimately, MSJ chose not to send alerts that would be in conflict with UST and SCU's principles. None of the team members were happy about the decision, but we felt compelled to be respectful to the institutions in which we operated. It will be interesting to see how other MSW schools – both within and outside of religious institutions – handle this dilemma.

        Competing definitions of social justice. As noted in the Literature Review, many definitions of social justice exist within the social work profession. Having a concrete definition is crucial to successfully running a MSJ initiative. The UST/SCU School of Social Work's definition of social justice is rooted in the guiding document "Social Work for Social Justice," which outlines several key principles of social justice that are also grounded in Catholic Social Teachings, including: human dignity, priority for the poor and vulnerable, dignity of work and the rights of workers, promotion of peace and solidarity (2010). The MSJ team would return to this document – as well as the NASW Code of Ethics – many times during the course of its work when drafting alerts. Even with such a framework to utilize, it was not always clear whether certain alerts should be sent out. Every alert needed to be connected back to either the "Social Work for Social Justice" principles or the NASW Code of Ethics. The team constantly asked itself: Are we sending this alert because it is truly related to social work values and social justice, or is this motivated by personal politics? That can be a fine line to walk, especially during such divisive political times. This is one reason why it is important to have a MSJ *team*, not just one

individual doing the work. It is immensely helpful to have a sounding board where you can have these tough discussions and decide whether an alert should be sent out. The team grappled with many topics and events (like gun control and anti-President Trump rallies, to name a few) that were motivated more by partisan politics than by social justice values. MSJ is a sounding board for what issues social workers should be paying attention to and acting on; that responsibility cannot be taken lightly. This author recommends that a group of at least three students and one faculty leader be hired for any institutions considering starting its own MSJ initiative. If more funding is available, more RA's could be hired. This will only diversify the content of alerts and increase the number of alerts being sent out.

Conclusion

The purpose of this descriptive case study is to provide another school of social work with the knowledge and tools to implements its own MSJ initiative. Early research suggests MSJ is an effective model in engaging graduate social work students – especially those with a clinical concentration – in macro-level social justice advocacy. More than half of surveyed students reported taking between one and four advocacy actions after receiving alerts from MSJ. The model is not without its challenges – a great deal of time and energy, as well as a financial commitment from a funding source, is necessary to make the program a success. And even then, IT infrastructure remains a challenge. But at a time when social work is struggling to maintain onto its macro-level presence, programs like MSJ are more needed than ever to train a new generation of social workers to be life-long social justice advocates.

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Appendix A

Survey A

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Email Address: _____

What is/are the target population(s) of your field placement? (select all that apply)

Children

Adolescents

Women

Men

LGBTQ

Military/Veterans

Immigrants and Refugees

Elderly/Aging

Criminal Offenders

Racial Minorities

Other (specify): _____

What is/are the target issue(s) addressed in your field placement? (select all that apply)

Family functioning

Mental health conditions

SPMI

Disabilities

School problems

Child Abuse/neglect

Socioeconomic disadvantage

Substance abuse/addiction

Foster Care/Child Welfare

Juvenile Justice

Medical Conditions

Housing

Racial inequality

End-of-life/Palliative

Adoption

Domestic Violence

Other (specify): _____

What is your field placement setting? (select all that apply)

School

Group Home

Health Setting

Behavioral Health/Integrated Health Clinic

Residential/Inpatient Treatment Center

Gero. Practice Setting

Criminal Justice Agency

CPS/Foster/Adoption Agency

Government Services

Crisis Center

Shelter/Drop-in Center

Other (specify): _____

Appendix B

Revised Survey A

This survey seeks information about your current field placement as well as your own issues of

interest. The Mapping Social Justice Project, which finds and shares information about

community, research, and policy relevant to clinical social work, will use this information to

email you TARGETED information about issues that relate to what you are learning and doing

in social work. You are then able to use or act upon that information as you see fit. Thank you

for your time in completing this; it should not take you more than a minute or two.

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Please write in the county where you reside (i.e. Ramsey): _____

School role:

        Current student

        Alumni

        Faculty

What is/are the target population(s) of your work/role in your field placement (select up to 3 that

apply). SKIP IF YOU ARE NOT IN FIELD OR WORKING IN HUMAN SERVICES.

        Children

        Adolescents

Women

Men

LGBTQ+

Military Service Members/Veterans

Immigrants/refugees

Elderly/aging adults

Criminal Offenders

Racial Minorities

What is/are the target issue(s) addressed in your work/role in your field placement (select up to 3 that apply). SKIP IF YOU ARE NOT IN FIELD OR WORKING IN HUMAN SERVICES.

Family Functioning

Severe and Persistent Mental Illness

Disabilities

School Problems

Child Abuse/Neglect

Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Substance Abuse/Addiction

Foster Care/Child Welfare/Adoption

Juvenile Justice

Medical Conditions

Housing

Racial Inequality

End-of-life/Palliative Care

Domestic Violence

What is your field placement setting/context? (select the best choice). SKIP IF YOU ARE NOT

IN FIELD OR WORKING IN HUMAN SERVICES.

School

Health Setting

Behavioral Health/Integrated Health Clinic

Residential/Inpatient Treatment Center

Government Services

Crisis Center/Crisis Line

Shelter/Drop-in Center

What issues (in addition to field placement/work choices) are you the most passionate

about/interested in when it comes to social work practice? (Select up to three issues areas).

Children

Adolescents

Women

Men

LGBTQ+

Military Service Members/Veterans

Immigrants/refugees

Elderly/aging adults

Criminal Offenders

Racial Minorities

Family Functioning

Severe and Persistent Mental Illness

Disabilities

School Problems

Child Abuse/Neglect

Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Substance Abuse/Addiction

Foster Care/Child Welfare/Adoption

Juvenile Justice

Medical Conditions

Housing

Racial Inequality

End-of-life/Palliative Care

Domestic Violence

Please select if you are involved in the following:

DSWAP

Social Work HEALS

AEA Scholar

AEMP Scholar

AEIR Scholar

<u>Please rate the following:</u>

1. I am confident in my ability to find and use information about participating in advocacy

   in my community:

   o   Strongly Agree

   o   Somewhat Agree

   o   Neither Agree nor Disagree

   o   Somewhat Disagree

   o   Strongly Disagree

2. I am aware of current advocacy efforts/events for the issues and populations I'm

   interested in or concerned about:

   o   Strongly Agree

   o   Somewhat Agree

   o   Neither Agree nor Disagree

   o   Somewhat Disagree

   o   Strongly Disagree

3. Participating in advocacy could mean sharing advocacy info on Facebook, talking to

   friends, family or colleagues about the advocacy issues or events you care about,

   applying or integrating issue advocacy into your work / practice, discussing it in class or

   field, contacting a legislator or other leader, attending an advocacy or community event,

   attending a rally or march, writing a letter to the editor, or simply seeking to learn more

   about a current advocacy issue.

In the last 9 months (since January) I have participated in advocacy / community

involvement about the issues and populations I'm interested or concerned about this many

times (enter a number please): _____

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

Appendix C

Survey B

This survey seeks information about your current field placement as well as your own issues of interest. The Mapping Social Justice Project, which finds and shares information about community, research, and policy relevant to clinical social work, will use this information to email you TARGETED information about issues that relate to what you are learning and doing in social work. You are then able to use or act upon that information as you see fit. Thank you for your time in completing this; it should not take you more than a minute or two.

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Email Address: _____

City/town where you live: _____

State where you live:

- o   MN

- o   WI

- o   IA

- o   ND

- o   SD

- o   Other

Zip code where you live: _____

School role:

- o   Current student

o   Alumni

o   Faculty

What issues /target populations in regard to social work practice do you want information about?

(Select up to six).

Children

Adolescents

Women

Men

LGBTQ+

Military Service Members/Veterans

Immigrants/refugees

Elderly/aging adults

Criminal Offenders

Racial Minorities

Family Functioning

Severe and Persistent Mental Illness

Disabilities

School Problems

Child Abuse/Neglect

Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Substance Abuse/Addiction

Foster Care/Child Welfare/Adoption

Juvenile Justice

Medical Conditions

Housing

Racial Inequality

End-of-life/Palliative Care

Domestic Violence

Appendix D

Survey C

As the School of Social Work's student-led social justice initiative, Mapping Social Justice

wants to know how we are doing and what we can do better. THANK YOU so much for your

time completing this brief survey. If you are interested in being entered into a drawing for a

prize, please make sure to fill out the last question of the survey.

1. Were the alerts you received from Mapping Social Justice relevant to your field and class

   learning?

   Yes

   Somewhat

   No

2. How would you rate the frequency of alerts you received via email or through your

   course instructor(s)?

   Too many

   Just right

   Too few

3. Taking action on an alert could mean sharing an alert or Facebook post, talking to

   friends, family, or colleagues about it, applying it to practice, discussing it in class or

   field, contacting a legislator or other leader, attending an event, or simply learning from

the alert. Based on the description above, how many actions did you take in response to

alerts:

      0

      1-2

      3-4

      5+

4. If you took action in response to an alert, please describe action(s) taken:

_____

5. What kinds of things would you like more alerts about?

_____

6. Did you like or follow Mapping Social Justice on Facebook?

Yes

No

THANK YOU for your feedback! If you would like to be entered in to a drawing to win a Social

Work Day at the Capitol t-shirt, SCU-UST mug, or coffee card, please list your email here:

_____