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Research Result Summaries

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Development of a Web-Based GIS Learning Module for Community-Asset Mapping to Improve Service Learning in Social Work

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Given the increasing demand for GIS education in social work and the lack of appropriate training opportunities, this study aims to develop an online learning module to teach social work students how to use GIS tools to create community asset maps in order to promote service learning in social work education. The module was piloted in two graduate-level social work courses (community practice course in the foundation year of the program and the program evaluation course in the advanced year of the program) at the University of Windsor. In order to assess students' learning experience and learning outcome before and after using the module, a retrospective pretest survey was administered in paper and pencil format to students enrolled in the two courses. The students were asked to self-report their demographics, prior experiences with GIS, use of the module, experiences using the module, and perceptions of module contribution to their learning within and beyond the course. The survey results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 23).

The respondents were largely females (due to the large proportion of females within the general social work student population) of various age groups enrolled in the first or second year master of social work program. Most of respondents reported that they didn't have any experience with GIS before the course. More than half of students reported revisiting the module after initial use. A majority of students felt that the module was easy to use and was delivered in a way that allows for logical and manageable learning pace. However, less than half of students felt that the module suited their learning style or improved self-governed learning. This finding needs to be considered in future development of the module.

The results also indicate that the module significantly increased the extent to which students felt confident in performing several GIS-related tasks. And these changes were significantly influenced by their age, the course in which they enrolled, and their prior experience with GIS. Most of students felt strongly that the module improved their understanding of the course material as well as their overall satisfaction with a course. Over 60% of respondents felt that the module should be implemented into more courses at the university. With respect to each question related to service learning, students overwhelmingly perceived that the module has better prepared them for their future service learning activities.

In sum, the overall positive feedback on the module indicates its contribution to social work study as well as its potential applicability to larger contexts. Further research is warranted, such as collecting data from a larger sample size with representation from different courses and programs. The study can serve as a starting point for developing best practices for the training of students in mapping and spatial thinking in their community practices and program evaluation that would benefit other disciplines as well.