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Student Perceptions of Integrative Field Seminar: A Comparison of Three Models

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Student perceptions of 63 concentration year MSW students, grades, and faculty perceptions were examined to evaluate differences in educational outcomes and in learning experiences among a traditional classroom model, a mixed or hybrid model, and a webinar online model for delivery of integrative field seminars. No significant differences were found in the grades among the three models. Findings showed strong support for the traditional model for students in local field internships and the webinar model for students in distant site placements. Reciprocity among students and faculty was a major factor in seminar integration and effectiveness, regardless of the mode of delivery.

Keywords: MSW field internships, distance site field placements, webinar model, reciprocity, online courses

INTEGRATIVE FIELD SEMINARS

There is arguably no more exciting time in social work education than the field practicum or internship. The integrative seminar is central to the interplay between classroom curriculum and field practicum. As students seek field internships in distant site locations, delivering the integrative field seminar is increasingly challenging. Phone-in participation in traditional seminars and on-line field seminars are approaches to providing the seminar to students placed away from the campus. The question, however, is whether or not they are educationally equivalent. Do students who are not “in the classroom” for integrative seminars receive the same benefits from the seminar experience? This study examines one program’s attempt to address these questions.

Why Have Field Seminars Anyway?

According to Wayne, Bogo, and Raskin (2010) and Birkenmaier and Berg-Weger (2007), the seminar is a specific method for meeting CSWE mandates that programs ensure the integration of theory and practice. The field seminar provides a forum to share field learning, explore values and ethics, discuss and compare policies and procedures in agencies, examine evidence informed practices, evaluate personal responses, and facilitate networking. Seminars provide safe environments for discussion of field experiences, processing of feelings, and examination of best practices. Most programs provide weekly or bi-weekly integrative seminar meetings to process field experiences and share case (identities disguised) issues and resolution (Favier, Eisengart, & Colonna, 2000).

Accreditation

In the latest iteration of the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) provided by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), field education is identified as the signature pedagogy of social work education. For many programs, the field experience is the final educational experience in the curriculum and includes the summative evaluation of the students’ demonstration of competencies. Current accreditation standards address the integration of field education with the program curriculum in this way:

Field education is an integral component of social work education anchored in the mission, goals, and educational level of the program. It occurs in settings that reinforce students’ identification with the purposes, values, and ethics of the profession; fosters the integration of empirical and practice-based knowledge; and promotes the development of professional competence. (CSWE, 2008)

Further, the newly approved EPAS state that “the intent of field education is to connect the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting” (2008). Accreditation standards focus on standardizing a number of elements in the field education experience. All students must have a minimum number of hours in a field setting that meets program criteria. Supervision is provided by social workers with degrees from accredited programs or at a minimum the program provides to each student a social work perspective for the field experience.

Connection of Theory to Practice

As programs connect the theoretical to the practice setting, students in integrative field seminars meet regularly to interact around their practice experiences. Some field seminar models are process only; others include content and assignments, while others are a mix of the two. The field seminar provides a forum for students to compare practice experiences, agency policies and procedures, differences and similarities in ethical issues, and to experience diversity in both context and client populations. Competencies that are standardized and evaluated across agency experiences provide a basis for assessment of professional development and for gatekeeping. This evaluation is achieved when students present practice scenarios, dilemmas, and interventions while peers and faculty members make an assessment of the student’s application of knowledge and practice skills.

Despite the clear value of the integrative field seminar, some programs are eliminating it, particularly for the MSW concentration year. One explanation is the difficulty of delivering the seminar as students increasingly request field practicum experiences in locations around the country and globe. As this trend developed, it was not surprising that block placements became the preferred delivery model for students doing their field internships in sites far removed from the campus and standard classroom. There is some indication that the value of the integrative seminar is recognized as supporting field as the signature pedagogy in social work education (Wayne, Raskin, & Bogo (2010).

One Program’s Field Seminar Model and Challenge

At Baylor University’s School of Social Work (BSSW), the integrative field seminar is a central mechanism for linking classroom curriculum and the field practicum experience. While agency social work practitioners are the instructors of social work in the field, students also discover broader application of their learning through the seminar classroom faculty and through the shared experiences of their colleagues. The seminar faculty also serves as field liaison with regular contact with field instructors. Similar to the model described by Royse, Dhooper and Rompf (2007), the seminar is interactive and participatory. Seminar assignments flow out of the field experience, providing a rich seminar opportunity for exchange of experience between students. The combination of feedback from seminar faculty, students, and on site field instructors informs the critical interfaces between classroom and practicum. Each student intern prepares a learning contract with the field instructor that addresses the program learning objectives by operationalizing them with tasks in the agency. This standardized rubric is particularized to the agency tasks and evaluated by both field instructors and field seminar faculty. Field instructors and field seminar faculty complete field orientation and training to provide consistent, reliable and valid grading of students.

Concurrent and Block Placements

The Baylor University School of Social Work is a mid-size school with both BSW and MSW degree programs. The BSW program has been accredited for almost 40 years. The program added an MSW program in 1999, graduating the first class in 2001 from a fully accredited program. The BSW field program uses a concurrent model, with students completing one field placement of a minimum total 480 hours over two semesters. MSW students in the foundation year complete 480 hours over the fall and spring semesters. The concurrent nature of the BSW and foundation placements makes it necessary for students to be placed in the local geographic area. These generalist placement sites are within 50 miles of the university and typically within 10-15 miles. However, concentration year students are in a modified block placement arrangement that makes distant site placements possible. Field placement assignments are made in the spring and summer prior to the concentration year. Students complete an orientation to the field and develop their basic learning contracts during the fall semester while engaged in the majority of their concentration coursework. Field instructors and field seminar faculty complete an orientation to the field that speaks both to the construction of the learning contract and grading rubric and to the assessment process and criteria. The spring semester is



a block placement that begins the first week of January and concludes the middle of April. Students complete a research project and paper during the internship and return to campus for the final two weeks to complete a full time Capstone Seminar. During the block placement, students are engaged in an integrative field internship seminar once a week for two hours designed to provide both processing of the internship experience and presentation of a case and treatment approaches. Thirty percent of the field internship grade comes from seminar assignments, including weekly log/journals and a case presentation to their colleagues. The block nature of the field internship allows the flexibility of placements in distant sites, including out of state and international placements.

The Challenge of Distance

The delivery of integrative seminars with block placements in distant locations is particularly challenging when students are geographically separated from the school and each other. Students placed within 120 miles of the school have historically driven to campus once a week for the seminar, which creates an unnecessary time burden. The school has tried a number of avenues for providing the seminar experience for students in distant site placements. For several years, students in field internships more than 120 miles from the campus were registered for standard integrative field seminars and used web cameras to connect to colleagues in the classroom. Challenges included hardware and software issues as the program determined the minimum necessary equipment for students to connect through web camera technology. Another challenge was adequate broadband access. Securing adequate technology on both ends of the connection did not solve the problem of busy internet traffic and areas with minimal broadband width. As students in distant sites experienced technological problems, students on site in the classroom experienced interruption of their seminar.

The decision was made to explore the use of several different models to deliver the integrative field seminars for concentration students. The three models included a traditional model, a mixed model, and a webinar model. The traditional model is an integrative field seminar with 10-12 students in a variety of local field placement assignments who meet each week at the school for two hours. The mixed model includes 8-10 students placed locally and 2-3 students in placements more than 120 miles away who telephone in to the seminar and interact on the phone for the two hour weekly seminar. The webinar model includes up to 10 students, all of whom are in placements more than 120 miles from the school and who participate in the weekly webinar. The webinar model is provided through Elluminate Live, an interactive software program provided by the university through the Blackboard software system. Prior to implementation, the field seminar faculty reviewed the literature for other integrative field seminar models and for evidence of the use and effectiveness of various field seminar models.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND FIELD SEMINARS

There is very limited research on integrative field seminars and an increasing literature on distant site education particularly in the past 3-5 years. There is no previous literature on distant site webinar integrative field seminars. It is, however, a topic of some discussion on field and social work education list serves. List serve conversation includes seminars that meet as few as three times a semester to a number of programs using hybrid models combining traditional sessions in the classroom and online sessions. Some programs are using online field instructor training, though there is no current literature examining the equivalency of those programs. Innovations in field education in the early 1990s included the trends toward multi-method generalist practice; part time, older students working and attending school; field placements accommodating student requests for non-traditional and international settings (Lough, McBride, & Sherradan, 2012); and the move away from MSW practitioner-educator to PhD research-educator (Sneck, Grossman, & Glassman, 1991). Field education is historically a venue for innovation in social work education (Sheafor & Jenkins, 1982). The purpose of this research is to examine both outcomes and student perceptions of a field innovation in social work practice; specifically, the use of distance site education to provide educational support for national and international field practicum.

The population of students being served via distance learning and the availability of online learning has been expanding, resulting from outreach efforts to students previously limited by geography, cost, family or work concerns (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Ayala, 2009; Vernon, Vakalahi, Pierce, Pittman-Munke, & Adkins, 2009). While the use of distance learning in social work education is widespread, the use of internet technology for integrative seminars has

only recently begun to emerge (Birkenmaier, Wernet, Berg-Werner, Wilson, Banks, & Olliges, 2005). Research on student satisfaction with the use of internet technology is mixed. Some results show students significantly favor live instruction over televised distance learning, and other research suggests that internet technology that supplements a course (such as a class e-mail project) enhances the educational experience (Birkenmaier, et al., 2005).

Comparison In-class and Online Field Seminars

Wolfson, Magnuson and Marsom (2005) compared both in-class and online field seminar sections around meeting learning objectives and student satisfaction with the learning environment over a 3-year period (2000- 2002). Online (70%; $n = 10$) students rated the experience as equally or more favorable than in class or traditional seminar. The ability to participate on their own terms and at convenient times was reported as a definite asset. Some students who had been quiet and reluctant to share in the classroom setting participated more in the online course. These students reported feeling more comfort in sharing their experiences and thoughts. Even so, more than half of the respondents suggested that future online seminars include some type of in-class sessions during the semester. Nearly half the students reported they disliked the absence of face-to-face interaction and missed the physical presence of their peers. They also noted that computer-mediated communication could be more easily misunderstood. Generally, the online seminar was successful in assisting students to meet their individual learning objectives and the school's practicum objectives. The convenience of the online seminar outweighed its limitations.

McFall and Freddolino (2000) compared MSW field instruction at one local and two distance campus locations. Local resources, sensitivity, and on-campus field office resources were evaluated. The research question examined whether students in the two distance sites had significantly different perceptions of their field instruction environments than did on-campus students. The results indicate that while the geographic location and the strength of the difference varied, in none of the cases can we assume comparability across all three sites. Students in both distance sites reported more positive experience with local field recourses than students on campus. A similar pattern appeared as distance cohorts reported more positive perceptions regarding agency climate agency support for protecting the student role. However, students on campus perceived the operation of the field office more positively than did the students in distance sites.

These findings suggest that with planning and the willingness to commit sufficient resources, it is possible to implement a quality field instruction component in a distance education setting at least comparable to what is provided on campus, and which, in some cases, provides benefits over the traditional offering. Specifically, the innovative nature of many distance education programs seems to provide a level of creativity and energy that surpasses ongoing campus-based programs (McFall & Freddolino, 2000). Researchers generally agree that there is no difference between campus students' and distant students' acquisition of course content (Cummings, Foels, & Chaffin, 2012; Webber, Currin, Groves, Hay, & Fernando, 2010). Abels (2005) concludes that results from distance education evaluations suggest that satisfaction levels with instructional quality are at least equivalent to those obtained for traditional courses.

Equivalence and Outcomes

Evidence supports the idea that distance education can make graduate study available to a larger number of students and that it is at least as effective as classroom instruction in terms of student learning (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Blakely, 1992). Online students also frequently commented that they came to know their online classmates well and relied on their help with course material (Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Interactions among students and between students and instructors were strengthened through the use of technologies such as interactive television, teleconferences, computer discussion groups, videoconferences, and e-mail (Berger, Stein, & Mullin, 2009; Huff, 2000). According to instructors, the computer has enhanced practicum experience discussions and the integration of theory with practice (Birkenmaier, et al., 2005).

Critical Appraisal

No differences were found between distant social work students and on-site social work students with regard to their level of critical appraisal and research method skills (Webber, Currin, Groves, Hay, & Fernando, 2010). Abels' (2005) findings support the proposition that the educational achievements of distance education students are at least comparable to those of traditional students (p. 102). Compared to an on-campus cohort, distance education students



appear to earn equivalent grades. Abels found the rewards of distant site education included providing learners with more professionally trained social workers, increasing understanding of community-specific needs and resources, and accessing a diversity of rural communities.

Some studies included concerns about distance education in social work. Blakely (2005) found that in one distance education system, faculty were not routinely personally available to students, requiring extra effort to assure positive socialization outcomes. A criticism of online learning has also been that the critical element of human contact is missing (Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Some MSW students described a loss of autonomy because barriers prevented them from attending school in the preferred traditional classroom environment (Pardasani, Goldkind, Heyman, & Cross-Denny, 2012). Abels (2005) identified these challenges in distance education—difficulty adjusting and creating a classroom environment, the need to adjust the instructor's teaching style, and obstacles to effective communication restricting opportunity to assess the effectiveness of teaching as the semester evolves. Some studies have found that students prefer face-to-face classes, citing difficulties with technology, the learning environment, access to libraries and other student services, and classroom interaction. Others have suggested that there are significant pedagogical losses because of technology (Huff, 2000).

THE STUDY

The literature suggests that online field seminars can provide students with a successful experience. The students in the school expressed requests for distant site placements and interest in having the integrative field seminar experience while in block placements across the country and, in some cases, in international settings. The faculty's interest is in meeting student needs and ensuring academic excellence.

Research Questions

This study asks several questions. Is there a difference in student perceptions of learning experiences in field practicum across three models of integrative field seminar (traditional, mixed, and webinar)? Does the model of integrative field seminar make a difference in student outcomes (grades) both in seminar assignments and in field practicum evaluation? What is the most effective model of integrative field seminar for students in local placements and in distant site placements?

Methodology

Sample. Sixty-three students participated in the MSW concentration year experience at the BSSW in academic year 2007-2008. Forty-eight field instructors supervised and graded the concentration students' work; of those, thirteen (almost one-third) are faculty in the School of Social Work and intimately acquainted with the curriculum, program objectives, and field education program. Six faculty members taught the integrative field seminars. The students and field office completed practicum assignments in August, 2007. Students were assigned to sections of the integrative field seminar based on concentration, practice focus, and distance of the placement site from Baylor University. Traditional= 41 interns; mixed=17 interns, and webinar=5 interns. Students in placements further than 120 miles from Baylor were placed in a webinar with the exception of students in congregational placements. They were placed in mixed seminar sections with no more than three students phoning in to any mixed section. A total of 23 interns participated in distance and/or mixed seminars.

All concentration field students participated in a fall course entitled *Introduction to the Internship*. Students were required in the fall to complete orientation to the agency and develop a learning contract for the spring block placement. Additionally, students in the webinar section were required to secure hardware and software and complete orientation and training to the Elluminate Live system. That orientation included successful webinar sessions on campus, off campus, and in their distant site placement location prior to the launching of the spring block internship. Field instructors and seminar faculty participated in the orientation and training as well.

Instrumentation. Several data points were considered in this study. Student outcomes were defined as performance in the major grading categories: case presentation, class participation, and field evaluation. Case presentation is 15% of the seminar grade. Each student prepares written information for colleagues, including background of the case, description of the problem, the work, the policies impacting the work, and the current status of the case.

Seminar participants read this material prior to the presentation. The presenting student makes a 45 minute case presentation that includes a power point of major points, a sample of work that is audio, video, or process recording, and facilitation of the case discussion. Class participation is a difficult variable to quantify. Students receive a grade for class participation partly based on attendance and largely based on contributions made to the learning of others.

The final evaluation of the field internship includes the student and field instructor's assessment of 21 course objectives that have been operationalized in the agency with specific agency tasks for which the student is responsible. The data includes student grades on each of the 21 objectives and a final field evaluation grade constituting 70% of the field internship seminar grade for each student. The large percentage of the grade derived from the field evaluation is significant in assessing differences in student grade outcomes among the three models of seminar.

To examine student perceptions of the equivalency of the experience, all students were asked to complete a pre-test in January on the first day of the integrative seminar. That pre-test included four Likert scale questions asking students to assess, after the fall semester together:

- Relationship with Seminar Professor
- Relationship with Student Colleagues
- Ability to benefit from seminar experience
- Ability to contribute to colleagues' seminar experience

The same questions were asked in a post-test on the last day of the spring seminar experience. It is expected that student response to these four 5-point Likert scale questions will help in measuring the effectiveness of each of the three models under consideration. Responses for each question were assigned numeric values (1=Poor, 2=Minimal, 3=Fair, 4=Good, 5=Excellent).

Data Analysis

Of the 63 MSW students in concentration internship placements, 95% ($n = 60$) completed the pre-test. Eighty-seven percent ($n = 55$) completed the post-test, and 95% percent ($n = 58$) of the students completed the survey instrument. The focus of the study is to compare students' learning experiences and performance across the three models of field seminar. Sixty-seven percent ($n = 41$) were in the traditional seminar model. Twenty five percent ($n = 17$) were in the mixed seminar model. Eight percent ($n = 5$) participated in the webinar model. In this first year of offering the seminar options, since only five students participated in the webinar model, an analysis of the data is provided with the recognition that the small sample size makes accurate comparisons more difficult.

A Wilcoxon signed rank test was performed for each student's pre-test and post-test scores on each of the four items that relate to their perception of the quality of the experience. This test was used to compare the differences in the pre- and post-test scores for each of the four questions as a combined sample including all three seminar models, followed by comparing the traditional model to the mixed and webinar models. Finally the three models were analyzed individually for any differences that might be present within the sample between the different models. This is a non-parametric test that assumes the paired differences (Post-Pre) are independent and each paired difference comes from a symmetric distribution with identical medians. The test uses the ranks of the paired differences to compute its test statistic. Paired differences of zero are ignored in the analysis. For each question, we wanted to investigate the change in response values after attending the spring seminars. For example, if a student rated their relationship with their colleagues as a "1=Poor" on the pre-test, we would expect an increase (ideally to "5=Excellent") on the post-test. Therefore, we want to test the following hypotheses:

H_0 : The median of the paired differences (Post-Pre) is less than or equal to 0,

H_A : The median of the paired differences (Post-Pre) is greater than 0.

Therefore, we will reject H_0 when the statistic T is less than or equal to the critical value $T_{\alpha(1),r}$ where T is the sum of the negative ranks assigned to the paired differences, α is the type I error (significance level), and n is number of valid paired differences minus paired differences of zero.

FINDINGS

There were no significant differences among the students' average final grades (Table 1) and among the final evaluation grades (Table 2) for the three seminar models for all of the assignments.

Table 1. Final Grades by Seminar Model

Model	85-90	91-95	96-100	Total
Traditional	7.89%	44.73%	47.36%	38
Mixed	0%	53.33%	46.66%	15
Webinar	0%	100%	0%	5

Table 2. Final Evaluation Grades by Seminar Model

Model	85-90	91-95	96-100	Total
Traditional	7.69%	35.89%	56.41%	39
Mixed	0%	20%	80%	15
Webinar	0%	100%	0%	5

Final evaluation grades are computed by the field instructor, i.e. the practitioner on site in the field experience who evaluates the student's practice. This final field evaluation is 70% of the final overall grade in the course. While the seminar faculty member has final grade authority, the field instructor's grade assessment is almost universally retained. The other 30% of the final overall grade comes from student presentations and participation and is assessed by the seminar faculty member.

There is very little difference in the assessment of student performance by field instructors and by seminar faculty totals in the three models. There is an indication that seminar faculty are somewhat more distinguishing between high and low "As" in the traditional and mixed models. All students in the webinar model received an A in both the final field evaluation and the final overall grade, but the low N (5) makes that finding inconsequential.

The Wilcoxon signed rank test was performed for each student's pre-test and post-test scores on each item of the four questions as a combined sample. Table 3 summarizes the results of the test for the entire sample, combining all three models, using a type I error of $\alpha = 0.05$. For each question, the number under the column T- is the number to be compared to the critical value which determines the conclusion and p-value of the test for that question.

For Question 2, the null hypothesis is rejected since $T = 84.5 \leq 100$ with $p < 0.025$, as shown in Table 3. Overall there was a significant increase in response values on the post-test for students feeling a stronger connection with their fellow colleagues after attending the seminars. That is, there was a significant move in the direction of responses toward excellent on the post-test for Question 2.

Next, the complete sample was divided into two separate groups: (1) traditional and (2) mixed and webinar. The assumptions and hypotheses will be the same as those mentioned previously. However, due to the small sample sizes for the two groups being considered, a type I error of $\alpha = 0.10$ will be used instead. Table 4 summarizes the results of the test for the traditional seminar group and Table 5 displays the results for the mixed and webinar group combined. Again, for each question, the number representing T- is the number to be compared to the critical value which determines the conclusion and p-value of the test for that question.

Table 3. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Results for Total Sample, including all 3 Models

Question	<i>n</i>	$T_{\alpha(1),n}$	<i>T</i> -	Conclusion	<i>p</i> -value
1) Relationship with Professor	20	60	86.5	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$
2) Relationship with Colleagues	25	100	84.5	Reject	$0.01 < p < 0.025$
3) Benefit from presentation	23	83	114	Fail to Reject	$0.10 < p < 0.25$
4) Benefit from Colleagues	23	83	128.5	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$

For Question 2 (Relationship with Student Colleagues), the null hypothesis is rejected for both groups in Tables 4 and 5 since $T = 30 \leq 31$ with $p < 0.10$ and $T = 15.5 \leq 17$ with $p < 0.10$, respectively. Hence, students in both groups experienced a significant increase in responses regarding their relationship with other student colleagues after attending the seminars. That is, there was a significant move in the direction of responses toward excellent on the post-test for both groups regarding Question 2.

Breaking down the group containing both mixed seminars and webinar into their respective groups further addresses the results found in Table 5. In Tables 6 and 7, the results for the mixed seminar and webinar are shown with $\alpha = 0.10$. For the webinar sample, the small sample size prevented the use of the Wilcoxon signed rank test on three of the questions. However, notice there were no negative differences (Pre-Post) in responses for the webinar sample. For all four questions, there was not a single student who responded numerically less on the post-test than they did on the pre-test, suggesting the webinar model successfully improve students in all four of these areas to some degree.

Table 4. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Results for the Traditional Seminar Sample

Question	<i>n</i>	$T_{\alpha(1),n}$	<i>T</i> -	Conclusion	<i>p</i> -value
1) Relationship with Professor	10	14	22.5	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$
2) Relationship with Colleagues	14	31	30	Reject	$0.05 < p < 0.10$
3) Benefit from Presentation	16	42	48	Fail to Reject	$0.10 < p < 0.25$
4) Benefit from Colleagues	16	42	51	Fail to Reject	$0.10 < p < 0.25$

Table 5. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Results for the Modified and Webinar Sample

Question	<i>n</i>	$T_{\alpha(1),n}$	<i>T</i> -	Conclusion	<i>p</i> -value
1) Relationship with Professor	10	14	23	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$
2) Relationship with Colleagues	11	17	15.5	Reject	$0.05 < p < 0.10$
3) Benefit from Presentation	7	5	15	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$
4) Benefit from Colleagues	7	5	17.5	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$

The results for the mixed seminar group in Table 6 show no significant differences in student responses for any single question between the pre- and post-tests. However, the webinar group in Table 7 rejects the null hypothesis for Question 2 since $T^- = 0 \leq 0$ (the critical value is 0) with $p < 0.10$. Therefore, the results of Table 5 can largely be attributed to the webinar sample of students. Both the traditional and webinar groups experienced significantly increased response values on the post-test compared to the pre-test for Question 2 relating to student colleagues relationships. However, the mixed seminar group experienced no such change, suggesting that the mixed seminar group may be the least effective in improving relationships and providing convenient methods for benefitting from and contributing to the seminar experience. Examining the mean response for Question 2 on the pre-test for the different seminar models yields $\bar{x} = 4.375$ for traditional, $\bar{x} = 4.533$ for mixed, and $\bar{x} = 3.400$ for webinar. Post-test mean responses for Question 2 give $\bar{x} = 4.543$ for traditional, $\bar{x} = 4.600$ for mixed, and $\bar{x} = 4.600$ for webinar. Hence, the webinar sample experienced the greatest increase in mean response for Question 2 and then the traditional seminar group. However, the mixed seminar group experienced the smallest increase, which resulted in no significant changes between the pre- and post-tests.

Table 6. Wilcoxon Signed Rank results for the Modified Seminar Sample

Question	<i>n</i>	$T_{\alpha(1),n}$	<i>T</i> -	Conclusion	<i>p</i> -value
1) Relationship with Professor	8	8	20	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$
2) Relationship with Colleagues	7	5	10.5	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$
3) Benefit from Presentation	5	2	11	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$
4) Benefit from Colleagues	5	2	13	Fail to Reject	$p > 0.25$

Table 7. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Results for the Webinar Sample

Question	<i>n</i>	$T_{\alpha(1),n}$	<i>T</i> -	Conclusion	<i>p</i> -value
1) Relationship with Professor	2	-	0	-	-
2) Relationship with Colleagues	4	0	0	Reject	$0.05 < p < 0.10$
3) Benefit from Presentation	2	-	0	-	-
4) Benefit from Colleagues	2	-	0	-	-

Student Comments

While this study was primarily a quantitative analysis, students were provided opportunity in the survey instrument to comment on the strengths and challenges of their particular seminar model and to make recommendations for the future. Student comments were grouped by model and by positive or negative response. Overwhelmingly (73%; $n = 22$ of 30), students commented that a positive feature of the traditional model is the opportunity to be present with colleagues and interact around the field experience. More than half (55%; $n = 11$ of 20) in the traditional model commented that students who drive in some distance for the seminar experience a significant challenge in the traditional model. They recommend that those students be allowed to participate in a webinar option to prevent tardies and absences.

Students in the mixed model recognized that there was an advantage to students at a distance not having to drive in (22%; $n = 2$ of 9) and recognized the benefit of conversation about field in the seminar (33%; $n = 3$ of 9). However, those same students commented repeatedly (80%; $n = 12$ of 15 comments) about the difficulties in interacting in the mixed model. Those students recommended that students be offered either the webinar model (distant site) or the traditional model, but that the school should not provide a mixed model. Students in the webinar model commented on the benefit of being able to be in distant site placements and still interact with their colleagues. The primary challenge noted was around technology (occasional difficulty connecting or being “bumped off the network.”). Students in the webinar model recommended continued use of the webinar, with increased work around preparation in the fall semester through hardware and software in-service training. Students in the webinar model mentioned several times the benefit of recorded webinar sessions to “make up” sessions that were missed because of technology challenges.

Faculty Comments

While seminar faculty did not participate in the survey experience for this study, they were interviewed by phone or in person for their impressions and perception of the seminar experience. Of the six sections of integrative field seminar, three were traditional model, taught by three different faculty members. All three commented that the traditional model works well with the exception of students driving some distance for the seminar. All three noted problems with absences and late arrivals for those students who were driving in from out of town. Two faculty members taught mixed model seminars, and both commented about the challenge of securing equal participation of those students who were phoning in to the seminar. Audio quality was a particular challenge. However, neither felt that the students’ field experiences or case presentation experiences were compromised by the mixed model. Only one faculty mem-



ber taught a webinar. That faculty member commented on her surprise at the relative ease of the experience, the benefit of being able to record the sessions, and the remarkable response of students to the webinar option.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Students in a mid-size graduate social work program participated in an integrative field seminar as part of their modified block field internship. The program provided the seminar through traditional, mixed, and webinar models and compared student grades and pre-post test perceptions of their ability to participate fully in the experience including both their relationship with professors and colleagues.

Perhaps predictably, there was no significant difference in student grades in the internship evaluation, seminar case presentation, or class presentation. This is a final block field internship and, thus, it is anticipated that students will do well academically in this experience. These students have all completed extensive, rigorous coursework prior to the internship, including successful completion of a foundation/generalist practice internship. It can be argued that gatekeeping processes eliminate students without capability or drive to make good grades in the final internship. Additionally, class participation and case presentation assignments are designed to help students transition from the student role to the role of colleague with their peers. One would anticipate competence for this transition in the semester prior to beginning professional practice.

The analysis of student pre- and post-test responses with regard to the seminar experience did not demonstrate significant differences between models with regard to student relationship with professors or with regard to their perceptions of their ability to contribute to or benefit from the seminar. However, there was a significant difference in the webinar students' perception of relationship with colleagues before and after the seminar experience. Notably, these five students reported that their relationships with colleagues were much improved despite not having been in the historically preferred traditional model of internship seminar. We might speculate that the shared experience of trying something new, the need for collaboration and collegiality in trying out a new model, and the need for a group in those students in distant site locations for placement contributed to this result. In any case, the webinar held its own and in fact excelled in the pre-post test comparisons.

Limitations

This study was limited in scope in several respects. It covers one program in one academic year. It includes only 5 students in the webinar model. The small number makes it impossible to generalize much from the results. The program plans to repeat the study this coming year with at least two differences:

- No mixed model seminars. Students beyond a 50 mile radius to the school will be allowed to participate in the webinar model.
- Two sections of webinar seminars with a minimum of 12 webinar students with formalized preparation for the webinar experience in the fall semester.

Recommendations

Both student comments and faculty comments were consistent with the quantitative findings and with the following recommendations:

- The traditional seminar is the preferred model for integrative internship seminar when possible.
- The mixed model is least effective and preferred for the integrative field seminar.
- The webinar model provides an effective alternative for the integrative field seminar for students in distant site placements.
- Continued training of both faculty and students is essential to success of the webinar model.
- Refinement of hardware and software are important to success of the webinar model.
- Small class size is important to the webinar model.

Conclusions

Field internship is for most students the highlight of their social work education. It may only be rivaled by that first day in the first social work class when students wonder what this profession called social work really is and whether or not it is for them. Field internship marks for students the launching of their own social work practice. The face of the client is central to the experience while classroom readings and theories are integrated into the field experience. Field instructors in agencies are the seasoned professionals and mentors who structure the learning for students. The integrative field seminar is the bridge insuring learning exchanges between field and classroom, between concept and practice. The online seminar is an effective venue for delivering the integrative field seminar to students whose placements take them too far from the school to participate in traditional seminars. Students in the webinar option experience equivalent educational outcomes and report improved collegial relationships with seminar participants.

Implications of this study are limited by the small number of participants and one year of data collection. Even so, they are important. The student grades and responses suggest that the delivery of synchronous on-line field seminars produces equivalent educational outcomes. This is a strong statement about the possibilities of distant site placements in field education that include the substance of the integrative seminar and the role of faculty in guiding the practicum experience. This is one interface between the models of practicum education of the past and the possibilities of practicum education in the future as technology makes more of the world accessible to students and to faculty. In a global economy and higher education that is dually invested in competencies and outcomes and in the effective use of technology, this study provides one example of maximizing a number of those values simultaneously.

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