

# The Role of Educators in Preparing the Confident Graduate Student

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*With large numbers of non-BSW graduates gravitating toward MSW programs of study, BSWs must demonstrate their ability to handle the rigor of graduate school in order to remain competitive in the classroom and field. This study utilized an online survey of MSW students (N=107) from four different universities to examine how well students believe their particular undergraduate degree program prepared them to meet the academic demands of the MSW programs. Bivariate and multivariate analyses were performed and results indicate BSW graduates feel more prepared than non-BSWs to complete their MSW program. The exception for BSWs was found in areas of research and statistics when compared specifically to those with psychology bachelor degrees.*

## The Bachelor of Social Work Degree

The Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree is designed to provide the knowledge, values and skills of generalist social work practice. BSW curriculum equips students with a broad understanding of the concept of social welfare and well-being. BSW students enter social work programs with a wide range of worldviews and life experiences. Undergraduate social work programs' curricula expose the BSW student to the rich traditions and history of the profession and how social work is shaped by the profession's vision, mission and purpose. Also, BSW curricula provide instruction on how generalists must understand and apply multiple theories to inform effective and efficient practice, and how social work core values serve to guide practice on multiple levels. Finally, the BSW student learns how social work research focuses on questions that directly address policies and interventions that serve to promote social well-being, prevention, and equal opportunity for all people. Consequently, BSW students are expected to develop a conceptual framework for the essential helping functions of generalist practice that span interventions within and between individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities (Kisthardt, 2015).

Therefore, to create a consistent curriculum amongst the over 490 accredited programs, the Council on Social Work Education has designed criteria for minimum non-elective content (CSWE, 2014). Since introduced in 1974, the criteria have continued to evolve, with the most recent Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards (EPAS) put in place in 2008.

Since the BSW program inception, the preparation for generalist social work education has focused primarily on promoting human and community well-being guided by a person and environment construct. The curriculum emphasizes that students gain a global perspective, respect, human diversity, and acquire knowledge based on scientific inquiry. Social work's purpose is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life

for all persons (CSWE, 2011). Consequently, the broad knowledge base of a generalist social work education and the unique licensing opportunity for the graduates often leads to a variety of employment opportunities for the BSW graduate. However, Karger (2012) argues that in light of recent economic trends, concern exists around the livable means employment or career advancement potential that a BSW degree provides. He suggests the abundance of BSW graduates has driven down the value of the BSW degree in salary. Furthermore, evidence suggests that for career advancement and increased compensation the bachelor's level social worker will need to pursue an advanced degree (Jones et al., 2013; Whitaker & Wilson, 2010). Therefore, this paper emphasizes that when laying the groundwork for student success, BSW programming needs to keep current and monitor BSW curriculum to assure opportunities for advanced education for the BSW (Aguilar, Brown, Cowan, & Cingolani, 1997; Jones et al., 2013). The focus of this study is to investigate BSW students' feelings of preparedness for the academic rigor of MSW curriculum.

## Literature Review

In the past decade the number of students seeking MSW degrees has grown exponentially (CSWE, 2014). Furthermore, the reach of social work education into vocational fields such as criminal justice, substance abuse counseling, and education underscores a need and increases the value of the MSW degree. However, the role the BSW degree contributes to the growth of the MSW programs is somewhat perplexing. In the most recent CSWE (2014) Education summary of the 2013 academic year, universities conferred over 5,400 more MSW degrees than BSW degrees. These data indicate the total number of BSW degrees awarded in 2011 fell about 8,000 students short of the MSW degrees awarded in 2013. Based on these data, it conservatively estimated a minimum of 35% of all MSW students are alumni of programs outside a BSW.

Reasons exist to explain this particular phenomenon. The MSW degree and subsequent advanced licensing opportunities give this degree a sense of practicality to those interested in the helping profession with a focus on the individual therapeutic employment (Aguilar et al., 1997; Osteen, 2011). Furthermore, individuals seeking a change of pace from their undergraduate education may find the MSW program complementary to their general education degree (Austin, 1997; Gelman & Lloyd, 2008).

The authors found limited research since 1990 that specifically evaluates BSW and non-BSW program success with the MSW degree (Johnson-Motoyanna, Petr, & Mitchell, 2014; Noble & Hepler, 1990). However, the limited literature found on the topic suggests BSW program graduates performed poorer than non-BSW students in MSW programs, as well as in placement exams (Fortune, Green, & Kolevzon, 1987; Johnson-Motoyanna et al., 2014; Noble & Hepler, 1990). Further, the literature indicates many BSW programs fail to provide academic rigor in their programs and experience inflated grading scales (Adam, Zosky, & Unrau, 2004; Bremner & Zastrow, 2008; Noble & Hepler, 1990; Sprech, Britt, & Frost, 1984).

Although the literature underscores the importance of a research orientation, current evidence suggests it may be a point of weakness in BSW education. Historically, the practical use of research for the social work discipline lacks focus on empirically based modeling, but rather in the exploration of established methods to serve a specific client(elle) (Adam et al., 2004; Witkin, 1992). Evidence-based proponents support decision making at the generalist level remain in available intervention outcomes (Gitterman, 2014). The ability to evaluate and extract current information from the literature requires the generalist social worker to formulate a critical assessment of both the method and analysis a study utilizes (Davis et al., 2013). Peterson, Phillips, Bacon, and Machunda (2011) support providing the generalist with a research based education and suggest this may be the route to encouraging more research-informed practice in the field.

In 1995, Gibbs identified the application of research in practice to be the most common deficiency among programs in the accreditation or reaffirmation process. More recent research supports Gibbs' (1995) findings, identifying lower levels of research confidence in BSWs than non-BSW students (Elliot, Choi, & Friedline, 2013; Wells, Maschi, & Slater, 2012). In their field interviews, Hessenauer and Zastrow (2013) found a common theme among BSW graduates regarding research methods course work. Specifically, these BSW graduates were unable to identify the usefulness of methods courses or in some cases even had difficulty recalling research exercises and activities they found applicable to their work (Bolin, Lee, GlenMaye, & Yoon, 2012; Hessenauer & Zastrow, 2013; Morris, 1992). Relevancy to the field remains the pivotal component to making research and statistics courses meaningful to both student and faculty (Bolin et al., 2012; Peterson et al., 2011). Since self-efficacy or confidence is a result of success and mastery of a concept or activity, creating meaningful research and statistics courses could enhance the students' confidence (Bolin et al., 2012; Clem, Mennicke, & Beasley, 2014; Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004). Although self-reported preparedness is not a direct measure of success in coursework or competency in practice, research indicates that academic confidence does indeed predict academic achievement and persistence (Bolin et al., 2012; Dunlap, Henley, & Fraser, 1998; MacPhee, Farro, & Canetto, 2013).

CSWE required sections of EPAS 2.1.10 *Engage, Assess, Intervene, and Evaluate* outline research competencies; however, according to the literature, resistance at both undergraduate and graduate education have perpetuated what Elliot et al. (2013) refer to as the research reluctance of the social work discipline (Bolin et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2013).

## Summary

An MSW degree is required if BSW professionals choose to advance their career and achieve advanced licensure. The literature suggests BSW students vary on level of preparedness for the rigors of an MSW education. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of preparedness of BSW students for an MSW education.

This study compares those graduates who completed a BSW degree to those from Psychology, Sociology, Criminal Justice, and other Human Services disciplines. The BSW curriculum is unique in that graduates from accredited programs complete a standardized curriculum. Evidence of self-reported preparedness for the rigor of MSW studies will be gleaned through a survey. Based on the literature it is expected BSW graduates will report less confidence (feelings of being less than well prepared) than other disciplines in areas of research and statistics of graduate curriculum. Conversely, based on the completion of a standardized core curriculum, it is expected that the BSW graduates will self-report greater confidence in areas such as: case management, policy analysis, cultural competencies and ethics.

## Method

This study is unique for several reasons. First, the goal of this project was to examine how BSW and non-BSW degree earning MSW students felt prepared by their individual bachelor's program for the academic rigor of a MSW degree (Rishell & Majewski, 2009). As stated, the literature is noticeably void when evaluating BSW success in MSW programs. Next, this study examined not only one institution's MSW students but four institutions.

This study sample's origin was shaped on information gleaned from a pre-accreditation assessment of alumni from one BSW program. This BSW program is a stand-alone program with no MSW program existing in the department and would be considered a *Bac/Diverse* institution by the Carnegie Classification. At the time of this study, the program had two full-time faculty, and about 132 declared or pre-

major/intended BSW students. A purposive sampling of six regional MSW programs listed most frequently as 'applied to' by this university's BSW seniors was utilized. This study's intent is to develop a better understanding of the unique features of MSW programs most frequented by this BSW program's students to improve advisement for advanced degree seeking students. In addition, these participating institutions were visited by faculty and BSW student researchers to interview and learn more from the MSW program faculty. Of these six programs, four agreed to participate in this process. Two of these universities are considered *Research Universities* (RU) by the Carnegie Classification; whereas, the other two universities are considered *Masters M* institutions. An electronic survey was developed (Scantron: Class Climate<sup>®</sup>) and sent to each participating MSW program. Surveys were electronically distributed to the MSW students by the participating MSW program. These surveys intentionally were released past the midpoint of the spring semester to ensure students receiving the survey had experience in their Master's level course work. MSW students at these four institutions were surveyed to determine how well they believed their specific bachelors program prepared them to succeed in their MSW education (Rishell & Majewski, 2009). The survey data were supplemented by face-to-face faculty interviews at each of the four participating institutions. Interviews were conducted using a collaborative interview team of four different BSW students and three different faculty members. This study did not focus on any single BSW program's alumni.

**MSW students at these four institutions were surveyed to determine how well they believed their specific bachelors program prepared them to succeed in their MSW education.**

Due to the participating MSW programs request to internally distribute the electronic instrument to their listserv, the method's return rate was hampered by the inability to control for distribution and to evaluate the number of surveys received and or declined. Based on the return a conservative estimate of response rate would be in the low range (16-22%). This rate should be considered when examining and evaluating results. Each participating institution received a summary report of their findings compared to the full sample of the four participating MSW programs.

The survey instrument requested participants to identify the institution and discipline they received their Bachelor's degree from prior to entering the MSW program. Of the 107 usable surveys, respondents identified 45 unique institutions that conferred their individual Bachelor's level degree. Of these 45 institutions, 29 were identified only once by these MSW students and 4 schools identified 5 or more MSW student respondents. Only 3 students from the research team's university participated.

## Results

Table 1 provides a summary of self-reported (demographic, personal and educational) variables. The responses were compared based on their reported undergraduate degree earned: BSW ( $n=39$ ; 36.4%) and non-BSW students ( $n=68$ ; 63.6%). In sum, the sample was primarily white, female and had a mean age of 33.0. No statistically significant differences were found based on these three factors between the BSW and non-BSW groups (see Table 1). In addition, no statistically significant differences were found between these two groups self-reported undergraduate GPA (UGGPA) or graduate GPA (GGPA). As expected, the BSW group was significantly more likely to report longer undergraduate internships and more likely to be in advanced standing programs (see Table 2). No significant differences existed between these two groups in other areas of undergraduate applied learning experiences such as research presentations, publication, or study abroad.

Table 1

*Description of Self-Reported Demographics: BSW & Non-BSW MSW Students (N=107)*

Variable	Total	BSW	Non-BSW
N (%total)	107	39(36.4%)	68(63.6%)
Gender (%female)	95.4%	100. %	92.6%
Race (%white)	82.2%	79.5%	83.8%
Age (mean/sd)	33.0/10.01	30.6/8.33	34.3/10.68
UGGPA (%<3.0)	13.1%	10.3%	14.7%
MSW GPA (%<3.0)	2.8%	0%	3.0%
Employed (%>20 hours)	45.8%	46.2%	45.6%
Employed Social Service (%yes)	61.7%	64.1%	60.3%
Research Project (%yes)	23.4%	25.6%	22.1%
Internship (%>250 hours)**	45.8%	89.7%	20.6%
(%<100 hours)**	49.6%	7.7%	73.5%
Presentation (%yes)	29.0%	30.8%	27.9%
Publication (%yes)	9.3%	12.8%	7.4%
Study Abroad (%yes)	12.1%	7.7%	14.7%

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . To determine significance chi-square was used to examine categorical data. A *t*-test was used to examine age in years.

Table 2

*Description of Self-Reported Demographics by Bachelors Discipline (Four Categories; N=107)*

Variable	Total	BSW	Psychology	Human Services	Non-Human Services
N (%total)	107	39(36.4%)	25(23.4%)	23(21.5%)	20(18.7%)
Gender (%female)	95.4%	100. %	92.0%	91.3%	95.0%
Race (%white)	82.2%	79.5%	88.0%	82.6%	80.0%
Age (mean/sd)**	33.0/10.01	30.6/8.33	30.9/8.57	32.8/9.82	40.4/11.8
UGGPA (%<3.0)	13.1%	10.3%	8.4%	13.2%	25.0%
MSW GPA (%<3.0)	2.8%	0%	0%	8.6%	0%
Employed (%>20 hours)	45.8%	46.2%	52.0%	34.7%	50.0%
Employed Social Service (%yes)	61.7%	64.1%	60.0%	56.5%	65.0%
R Project (%yes)**	23.4%	25.6%	44.0%	4.3%	15.0%

Variable	Total	BSW	Psychology	Human Services	Non-Human Service
Intern (>250 hours)**	45.8%	89.7%	12.0%	30.4%	20.0%
Intern (<100 hours)**	49.6%	7.7%	84.0%	65.2%	70.0%
Presentation (%yes)	29.0%	30.8%	44.0%	13.0%	25.0%
Publication (%yes)	9.3%	12.8%	12.0%	4.3%	5.0%
Study Abroad (%yes)	12.1%	7.7%	12.0%	26.1%	5.0%

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, To determine significance chi-square was used to examine categorical data. A t-test was used to examine age in years.

Due to the number of unique degree programs indicated by MSW students, a second independent variable was created utilizing four specific categories. In part, the creation of broader categories resulted from the interviews with MSW faculty who addressed their personal experience with non-BSW degreed students and specifically with students with a bachelor of psychology degree. Groupings were created using the most frequently reported non-BSW program of *Psychology* (23.4%), other *Human Services Field*<sup>1</sup> (21.5%) and *Non-Human Services*<sup>2</sup> (18.7%) (see Gelman & Loyd, 2008). The *Non-Human Services* category indicated students' ages as significantly older than each of the other three groups ( $M > 7.54$  years), but there were no significant differences in gender or race between these four groups.

### Feelings of Preparedness

Participating MSW students addressed feelings of 'preparedness' through a series of 11 scaled questions (*very poorly prepared* to *very well prepared*). Students were asked to rate how well their particular bachelors program prepared them for areas of application within the MSW program. These areas included: *Research, Theory, Ethics, Statistics, Clinical Diagnosis, Policy Analysis, Case Management, Administrative Theory, Cultural Competencies, Leadership* as well as *Overall Success* in the program (see Table 3). As a second outcome measure, we created a dichotomous variable from the Likert-type scale: 1 (*uncertain to very poorly prepared*) and 0 (*well prepared or higher*). This measure is designed to secure an indicator of whether the MSW student defined being 'prepared' as opposed to 'uncertain'.

Table 3 provides a bivariate summary of the 11 categories utilizing  $\chi^2$  test of significance. Those students indicating that they completed a BSW program prior to entering the MSW graduate program self-reported a statistically significant higher level of 'preparedness' in areas of: *Ethics* ( $p \leq .01$ ), *Policy Analysis* ( $p \leq .01$ ), *Case Management* ( $p \leq .01$ ), and *Cultural Competencies* ( $p \leq .05$ ). BSW students reported a lower percentage of preparedness in areas of *Research* and *Statistics*, but not significantly lower. In addition, somewhat surprising was the finding that the category *Overall Success* was slightly lower for BSWs than non-BSWs.

<sup>1</sup> Human Services Fields include: Criminal Justice, Sociology, Human Services, Family Studies, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Non-Human Services Fields include: Business, General BS/BA, Accounting, Communication Arts, etc.

Table 3

*Self-reported Preparedness by Degree Program: BSW (n=39) and Non-BSW (n=68) ( $\chi^2$ )*

Prepared for MSW	Degree		$\chi^2$	$\phi$
	BSW	Non-BSW		
Research	66.7%	72.1%	3.771	.188
Theory	76.9%	69.1%	2.228	.144
Ethics	100%	73.5%	13.272**	.352
Statistics	43.6%	51.5%	8.112	.277
Clinical Diagnosis	38.5%	33.8%	.118	.118
Policy Analysis	79.5%	35.3%	24.727**	.481
Case Management	87.2%	25.0%	42.738**	.635
Administrative Theory	43.6%	25.0%	9.184	.293
Cultural Competencies	92.3%	75.0%	9.807*	.304
Leadership	82.1%	75.0%	3.324	.176
Overall Success	76.9%	77.9%	5.906	.235

*Note: \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ , Percentage indicating 'prepared or higher' only reported. Phi coefficient values .1 small effect size, .3 medium effect size, .5 large effect size (Cohen, 1988).*

An analysis of the relationship between students identifying they received a BSW degree with those identifying specifically with a psychology degree is provided in Table 4. This analysis provides evidence that MSW students with a psychology bachelor's degree do indeed report they are more confident to face the rigors of graduate level course work, typically found in general in social sciences (*Research and Statistics*), but do not identify as feeling well prepared in areas that receive much attention in BSW programs (*Ethics, Case Management, Cultural Competencies & Administration*). No statistically significant differences were found between these two Bachelors program alumni for the categories of *Theory* or *Leadership*. Both groups identified themselves as being well prepared for the MSW (77% BSW, 88% Psychology).

Table 4

*Self-reported Preparedness by Degree Program: BSW (n=39) and Psychology (n=25) ( $\chi^2$ )*

Prepared for MSW	Degree		$\chi^2$	$\phi$
	BSW	Psychology		
Research	66.7%	92.0%	8.378*	.362*
Theory	76.9%	88.0%	1.980	.176
Ethics	100%	60.0%	20.204**	.562**
Statistics	43.6%	76.0%	12.241	.437*
Clinical Diagnosis	38.5%	60.0%	9.649*	.388*
Policy Analysis	79.5%	20.0%	32.826**	.716**
Case Management	87.2%	24.0%	27.948**	.661**
Administrative Theory	43.6%	16.0%	13.864**	.465**
Cultural Competencies	92.3%	72.0%	12.308**	.442**
Leadership	82.1%	72.0%	4.257	.258
Overall Success	76.9%	88.0%	5.902	.304

Note: \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ , Percentage indicating 'prepared or higher' only reported.

### Summated Scale

An overall measure was built by summing the scaled questions representing self-reported feelings of being 'well prepared' by their undergraduate degree program to successfully complete the MSW program. This measure provides a measure of internal consistency of our construct representing how prepared MSW students believe their bachelors program prepared them to be successful in the MSW program (Gliem & Gliem, 2003; Warner, 2008). A Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) reliability measure was used to examine the internal consistency. This scale was found to have a standardized score of .85 which is considered to be in the strong range for a summated scale. A test for improvement *if items were deleted* failed to show scale strength would be gained if any of these 11 measures were deleted.

Utilizing the dichotomous independent variable BSW or non-BSW, results indicated a statistically significant difference between the summated measure for BSWs and non-BSWs,  $t(102) = 4.25, p < .001$ ; equal variances assumed. Results indicate BSW alumni identified themselves as feeling more prepared for completion of the MSW program ( $M = 22.45, SD = 5.92$ ) than those from other bachelor's programs ( $M = 28.72, SD = 7.94$ ), when factoring in all areas addressed in the Likert-type scale. When utilizing the four categories of Bachelor's degrees, results showed a significant difference between groups,  $F(3,100) = 6.36, p < .001$ . Post-hoc test (LSD) indicates a significant difference between BSW and all other categories, but no statistically significant differences between the other categories *Psychology, Human Services, or Non-Human Services* for the summated scale ( $p > .05$ ) representing feelings of preparedness.

Again, those students identifying they did complete a psychology degree were examined using the summated total representing the overall feelings of perceived preparedness, with those identifying they completed a BSW prior to entering the MSW program. Summated scale scores representing the overall perceived feelings of preparedness, abbreviated Likert values equal (1-*less than agree*) and (0-*agree or higher*), resulting in higher than average scores for those with a Psychology degree indicating lower levels of perceived preparedness. There is a statistically significant difference between these two group of MSW students,  $t(61) = 3.59, p \leq .01$ . Findings indicate those identifying themselves as receiving a BSW reported feeling more prepared ( $M = 22.45, SD = 5.92$ ) when combining all categories, than did those from the Psychology major ( $M = 28.00, SD = 6.14$ ).

### Multivariate Models

To explore possible sources of MSW students' preparedness (individual or institutional), multivariate regression (OLS) was used. The summated scale again using values of 1 (*agree*) to 5 (*disagree*) representing an overall belief in preparedness for a MSW education was used as the dependent variable while controlling for individual, vocational, and educational/institutional factors (see Table 5). The first model provides the primary independent variable BSW or non-BSW while the second model introduces demographic factors: *gender, race* (white/not white) and *age*. The third model inserts institutional factors of grades into the equation. Employment in the field of social services was used in the fourth model. Finally, experiences in applied or experiential learning were inserted in model five.



Table 5

*Multivariate OLS Models of Regression: Summated Preparedness as Dependent Variable (N=107)*

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>
R <sup>2</sup>	.142	.133	.164	.186	.244
SEE	7.271	7.308	7.177	7.081	6.825
F	18.078**	4.963**	4.374**	3.951**	3.558**
df	1	4	6	8	13
Bachelors Program					
BSW/Non Demographic	-.388**	-.384**	-.361**	-.370**	-.232*
Gender		.076	.123	.105	.106
Race		-.104	-.098	-.093	-.090
Age (years)		-.005	.014	-.015	-.025
Academic/Vocational					
UGPA			-.204*	-.164	-.127
GGPA			.086	.086	.073
Employment					
Employed				-.191	-.164
Employed in Social Service				.187	.175
Experiential Learning Conference Presentation					-.220*
Internship (length)					-.188
Research Project					-.045
Study Abroad					.035
Publication					-.052

*Note:* \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05  
Standardized coefficient reported

Results of the OLS models indicate students earning a BSW were significantly more likely to identify they believe they are well prepared for the MSW program. When controlling for demographic (model 2) indicators, demographic and institutional factors (model 3), as well as employment (model 4), BSW remained statistically significant. No other variables were found to be significant in models 2, 3, or 4, with the exception of the primary independent variable. When adding self-reported experiential learning experiences to these models the dichotomous variable representing '*presented at an academic conference*' was found to be a significant predictor of overall preparedness. This mitigated the impact of the bachelor's degree earned, moving the BSW/non-BSW degree, but it did remain significant at p<.05. On further examination of these data, psychology students were significantly more likely to present at conferences than all other degree categories, including BSW, with 44% of all psychology students reporting presenting at an academic conference as a part of their undergraduate experience (see Table 2).

### Discussion

CSWE (2014) reports a significantly higher number of MSW degrees earned compared to BSW. Jones et al. (2013) argue for additional attention by BSW educators on preparing students to successfully navigate the next level of higher education. The results gleaned from this study support these findings. This study indicates approximately 35% of Masters of Social Work students' sampled self-identified completing a BSW as their undergraduate degree. This would imply BSW students enter a highly competitive arena when completing applications for

acceptance and funding to MSW programs. Specifically, these findings support the concerns found in the literature regarding the preparedness of the BSW alumnus to compete at the graduate level.

Although this study was specific to BSW education, the authors believe the findings suggest deep rooted issues regarding exposure to applied research learning at the undergraduate level of education. For this study, student feelings of preparedness to complete areas of the MSW (graduate course work) were the primary dependent variables. In this study, BSW students rated an overall perception of preparedness as higher than non-BSW students, but a lower percentage of preparedness in areas of research and statistics. Consequently, the literature found self-efficacy linked to previous tasks accomplished, such as individual course work and assignments, as a strong indicator of performance in academia (Lane et al., 2004). According to literature, those

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students more confident in their preparedness are more likely to pursue course work and opportunities outside their individual comfort zone (Elliot et al., 2013; MacPhee et al., 2013). In this study those students who reported having presented at a conference during the completion of their bachelors' degree were more likely to express confidence on the overall scale of feelings of being prepared for the MSW program. When examining BSW alumni only, those who reported presenting at conferences were more likely to indicate they felt prepared to complete research and statistics in graduate course work than did those who did not present at conferences. Only psychology students, rather than BSW students, were more likely to report having presented at a conference.

As expected, BSW students in this study did report they felt significantly more prepared in areas of policy, case management, ethics and cultural competencies in MSW program work. Furthermore, a summated measure of 'feelings of being prepared' showed BSW students in this sample felt more prepared to successfully complete the MSW than those who did not complete a BSW as a part of their bachelor degree. This indicates BSW students do in fact believe they are well prepared for MSW coursework in the discipline's language, application and interpretation. Also, as expected, this study found those who identified as completing a BSW were less likely to report they felt prepared to complete graduate course work in the areas of research and statistics. However, these differences were not statistically significant when compared to all non-BSWs in this study. Only when comparing BSW graduates to the psychology graduate category were these categories found to be statistically significant (Bolin et al., 2012). Results indicated no statistically significant differences between BSW graduates and those from other human services and non-human services bachelor programs in research and statistics. Sample size limited examination of BSW graduates to other individual social science degrees, such as Sociology, Criminal Justice, or Political Science, as well as Business (Bolin et al., 2012).

## Limitations

Several issues should be considered when generalizing the results of this study. First, the MSW programs were not randomly selected, but selected due to the reported likelihood students from the particular BSW (home of study) would apply to as their first option after graduation. Of these, six MSW programs were originally requested to participate, but only four MSW programs assisted in this study. These findings should not be generalized to all MSW programs without replication utilizing a more 'diverse' group of MSW programs. Next, the sample size was relatively small ( $N=107$ ). The sample limited groupings by disciplines, but did

provide evidence to what disciplines non-BSW students in MSW programs typically come from. As previously discussed, each MSW program distributed the online survey to their student listings, so it is difficult to assume an accurate response rate. This rate should be considered when examining and evaluating results. Finally, although prior research indicates a direct relationship between self-efficacy, confidence and achievement, we cannot provide a direct causal relationship between self-reported feelings of being prepared and actual success achieving the goals of the coursework or MSW degree program.

## **Conclusion**

In order for BSW professionals to advance their careers and achieve advanced licensure, secondary degrees, such as the MSW, are required. Literature supports that many students from a variety of disciplines seek the MSW degree. Isolating the role a BSW degree program plays when measuring success in MSW education has been largely ignored in the literature. The evaluation and future of individuals provided advanced standing status seems to be the ongoing concern by researchers in social work education (Aguilar et al., 1997; Bremner & Zastrow, 2008; Fortune, 2003; Osteen, 2011). The lack of research evaluating the BSW students' overall success in MSW programs is somewhat disappointing considering the efforts to develop a consistent curriculum for accredited BSW programs. BSW educators should be concerned with how well prepared for success their students are after graduation, whether it is in the field or in the next level of education. Examining strengths and deficiencies of their former students in Masters, or Masters/PhD programs should precede a reevaluation of curriculum or service needs for the current BSW student. Accrediting bodies can incorporate indicators of program strengths in the design and delivery of BSW course requirements that support success in both the field and MSW or MSW/PhD programs.

Establishing new models of instruction specific to the discipline, but carrying the weight of social science methods and designs may indeed be the new call to arms for BSW educators if BSW alumni are to remain competitive at the next level of higher education. These models should include the components of research and evaluation (statistics) as well as appropriate dissemination for an intended audience.

The discipline's popularity and resulting expectations for BSW faculty can limit the amount of time for faculty and student collaborations that involve co-presenting or co-authoring in a formal environment. Therefore, building in-house academic presentations into existing curricula may produce a reasonable substitution. Similar to the conference presentation, these would include numerous reviews by faculty and peers and rewrites during the process. It would include formal presentation of the work in a public venue that may include other disciplines, peers, and family members of the student. Whether an informal local setting or in a formal setting of a conference the guided approach influences bachelor's students' feelings of being well prepared. Faculty and student collaborations are often supported by higher education institutions for faculty tenure and promotion, as well as course load. To further assist in experiential learning opportunities, many disciplines provide student-only or student-faculty opportunities for presentation.

In conclusion, BSW faculty should play a more active role when examining the success of BSW students in MSW or MSW/PhD programs. The role of the BSW educator remains crucial in the success of students whether in the field or academia. Research collaborations between MSW and BSW programs, such as in this present study, allow BSW programs to better grasp the challenges both student and faculty currently face at the 'next level' of social work education. Further, collaboration with MSW programs allow BSW faculty to better advise students of specific MSW program requirements, focus or faculty expertise. Lastly, these collaborations develop mutually beneficial relationships between degree programs, linking students to partners in Masters of Social Work programs, address student concerns.

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