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BRINGING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION TO THE PRAIRIE

MYRNA HAGA AND THOMASINE HEITKAMP

This article reports on an evaluation of a distance education program that offered all undergraduate social work courses over an interactive television network to four rural sites. Evaluations indicate few differences in satisfaction and student outcomes between the on-campus and distance cohorts. The on-campus and distance-site instructors also report a high level of satisfaction. Furthermore, results of an alumni survey conducted seven years following termination of the program found all graduates licensed to practice social work and 92% of these graduates currently employed as professional social workers. The article concludes with a description of lessons learned from the program.

DISTANCE EDUCATION is generally defined as instruction that occurs when teachers and learners are separated from each other. Historically, this involved correspondence study, but more recently it includes the use of technology to deliver instruction. The technology used can vary in cost and application, and often includes the use of telephone, computer communications, or various video op-

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tions such as interactive video (Witherspoon, 1996). The availability of this technology, combined with the increased pressure on institutions of higher education to provide educational curriculum to adult learners who do not wish or are unable to relocate to a university campus, has created a clear demand for offering courses at a distance (Dubois, 1996). In response, by 1995, one-third of all institutions of higher education were offering distance opportunities (Shoemaker, 1998).

Some social work programs also have responded to this demand. A recent study found that 16% of the 259 schools of social work that responded to the survey used distance education methods in their social work programs (Siegel, Jennings, Conklin, & Napoletano Flynn, 1998). A variety of technologies have been used, however, to deliver distance social work

education in rural areas (Deaton & Clark, 1988; Granger & Nooe, 1982; Heitkamp, 1994; Raymond, 1988; Sheafor, 1994; Waltman, 1990; Weinbach, Gandy, & Tarataliga, 1984). Early social work distance education programs focused on the development of distance programs that would serve primarily rural students. Recently, however, more urban areas also have begun offering programs (Conklin & Osterndorf, 1995).

To assist schools of social work in addressing accreditation issues while developing and delivering distance education, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Commission on Accreditation developed a set of comprehensive guidelines (CSWE, 1995) outlining issues that should be addressed in planning, implementing, and evaluating social work distance education programs. Clearly, however, there is a need to evaluate distance programs comprehensively to measure comparability with on-campus programs, student outcomes, and general student satisfaction. While success with distance education offerings has been documented (Deaton & Clark, 1988; Heitkamp, 1994; Patchner, Petracchi, & Wise, 1998; Sheafor, 1994), concerns have been raised about student satisfaction with distance offerings (Thyer, Artelt, Markward, & Dozier, 1998).

This article presents the results of a comprehensive evaluation of one social work distance education program from 1990–93 and compares the academic outcomes and satisfaction of on-campus students with that of distance education students. Data gathered also describe student and faculty members' general satisfaction with the distance education program. Finally, the article reports on information gathered regarding the professional credentials and employment outcomes of alumni who graduated from this program.

Description of the Distance Education Program

From 1989 to 1993, a midwestern university offered all required undergraduate social work courses over interactive television to students residing in four rural communities located a substantial distance from the university. This was the first program in the nation to offer its entire curriculum over interactive television. The students who graduated from this program were never required to relocate to campus in order to complete any course work for their degree. Under the experimental program status, CSWE (1992) granted permission to deliver this program.¹ At the time the program was offered, CSWE had not yet developed its distance education guidelines.

Located between 90 and 360 miles from the main campus, and without local access to other social work education programs, the four participating communities were chosen by the Department of Social Work. Moreover, the courses were transmitted to fully equipped classrooms within this university's state system. Full-time, on-campus faculty, with the assistance of local on-site adjunct instructors, taught all distance courses over an interactive, voice-activated video system.

The system transmitted live high-quality audio and color video among multiple sites. An instructor at the home site could see and hear students at all receiving sites. In turn, students could see and hear the teacher and all other students enrolled in the class. When technical difficulties occurred, a technician was present in the classroom to assist, and on-site adjunct instructors were available to assist with course instruction.

¹ In 1997, Evaluative Standard 8—Experimental Programs was retitled Innovative Programs.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided partial funding to deliver this program. These funds were necessary because the distance program operated in conjunction with the existing on-campus undergraduate program and created additional responsibilities for faculty. USDA funds were targeted to assist displaced homemakers by offering outreach education to remote rural areas and to, in turn, assist rural communities by providing more trained professionals. USDA funds reimbursed the additional cost of planning, administering, delivering, and evaluating this program. Among the faculty and staff involved were 11 faculty members who taught courses over television; a part-time project coordinator; a part-time support staff person; nine on-site adjunct faculty who assisted at the various sites; and a field coordinator who accepted additional responsibility for developing placements across the state for distance students. If grant funds had not been available, students would have been required to pay an additional 40% in tuition dollars to cover these expenses. The USDA grant also funded the infrastructure that established the interactive video network (IVN). The IVN allowed the Department of Social Work and one other department on-campus to offer the first distance degrees over television at this university. Funding also was provided separately through the USDA to employ a program evaluator to measure general program effectiveness.

Increased Responsibilities

Because additional full-time faculty were not hired to administer or deliver this program, the designated faculty accepted increased responsibilities and reimbursement was provided. The program coordinator, a senior faculty member in the department, organized and adminis-

tered all aspects of the program on a part-time basis. Her main focus was to assist students in maneuvering their way through a series of university policies developed primarily to serve on-campus students, not distance students. (Moore, 1994, describes the ongoing difficulties apparent when academic policies are developed primarily to serve on-campus students and not the needs of students at a distance. Blakely, 1992, urges schools of social work to become more involved in developing campus policies that make the most effective use of distance technology.)

The program coordinator organized program activities with numerous on-campus and off-campus university officials. Collaborative relationships were encouraged and, to some degree, spearheaded by personnel employed within the university chancellor's office. The coordinator prepared yearly reports describing program activities and the result of preliminary evaluation data for funding agencies, including USDA and the state chancellor's office. Additionally, the coordinator provided information regarding academic progress and program plans to students enrolled in this program. The students also had access to a toll-free telephone line, which became a critical resource for concerns and questions. Serving also as academic advisor, the coordinator provided recommendations three times a year to students enrolled in the program's four distant sites. Such advisement activities required monitoring the students' progress toward fulfilling general and extra-departmental education requirements, especially when the students attempted to transfer credits to fulfill degree requirements at the university. Finally, because the coordinator taught an introductory social work course and was serving as the students' academic advisor, she chaired the admissions committee to assure adherence to

on-campus admissions standards for the distance program.

The same faculty member taught courses in the distance and on-campus program, whenever possible, to assure comparability between programs. Also, the same examination materials were used in the on-campus and distance programs. Distance courses were offered during evening hours to allow students the opportunity to maintain employment, and faculty were compensated for their time providing instruction. Because distance courses were taught from a classroom on campus, on-campus students also were allowed to enroll. Experts underscore the importance of faculty preparing interactive study guides for distance courses (Cyres & Smith, 1990), and the benefits outweighing the time involved. Furthermore, faculty attended a training seminar prior to beginning instruction over television. Participants received a training manual, an introduction to teaching over interactive television, and time to rehearse teaching over the system. The lecture was taped for peer and personal critique.

The project employed nine additional on-site adjunct instructors, with one instructor available in each session. These skilled MSWs had several years of post-master's experience and were employed as social work supervisors in their communities. Their program responsibilities included: leading group discussions and overseeing group projects, proctoring examinations, and informing students of professional activities in their communities. Adjuncts brought more social work experience to the program than would graduate assistants, typically used in the on-campus program to assist with the laboratory component of practice classes. Since their role was not as a primary course instructor, a PhD was not required for this position.

Program Evaluation

Evaluation Protocol

Evaluation of the program occurred during three of the four years the program was in operation, and was designed to determine program effectiveness and student satisfaction. The primary focus of the present study was to compare distance students' outcomes and satisfaction with the program with the outcomes and satisfaction of on-campus students. Another purpose was to assess the professional accomplishments of alumni who graduated from the distance program during its four-year existence. Existing protocols for conducting an evaluation of a full degree-granting social work distance education program did not exist in the social work literature when this program began in the early 1990s. Other distance education literature did, however, underscore the importance of comprehensively evaluating distance education programs to assure academic quality. Kabat and Friedel (1990), Kirkwood (1987), and Woodley and Kirkwood (1986) suggest that effective evaluations of distance learning programs should contain both formative and summative components. Feasley, (1987), Hannafin, Phillips, and Tripp (1986), and Ho, Savenye, and Haas (1986) discuss empirical approaches to designing and evaluating distance education programs that address the achievement of educational competencies. As a result, the program evaluation gathered ongoing data to assess the satisfaction of distance students and to assess the professional accomplishments of graduates from this program. The initial evaluation was completed by a program evaluator who was a faculty member in the Department of Social Work. The alumni evaluation was completed by the project coordinator.

Student Perceptions of Program

Students completed satisfaction surveys over the course of the program. These surveys included a faculty evaluation form required for use by all course instructors prior to the termination of the course for the semester. The instrument measures 13 items, including teacher accessibility, teacher fairness, teacher knowledge of subject, teacher preparedness, teacher interest in student learning, and similar items. The last question asked students about overall quality of instruction, and was used to compare evaluations received by faculty in courses taught at a distance with the regular on-campus courses. Between 22 and 30 distance students participated in each course evaluation, with the exception of an introductory social work course (Social Work in a Modern Society) that had only five students. (The course had been offered at the various community colleges and most students had successfully completed the class prior to beginning this program.) The number of on-campus students who partici-

pated ranged from 8 to 67 students. The student evaluation form used a five-point scale for assessing the quality of instruction (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree).

Results indicate a high degree of student satisfaction with course instruction and strikingly few differences in terms of general student satisfaction between on-campus and distance instruction. In most instances, the distance class evaluations mirror those obtained in the on-campus classroom. At this university, where class evaluations are used as data for determining salary increases, tenure, and promotion, this is a serious consideration for faculty who wish to teach at a distance.

Getting comparable data was a challenge, given that not every course section was taught by the same instructor on campus and through IVN. Mean evaluation scores for each course are presented in Table 1.

The same instructor taught on-campus and distance sections during the same semester in the following areas: Social Work in a Modern Society (Fall 1990), Social Welfare (Spring 1991), Methods

Table 1. Mean Evaluation Scores by Course from Students in Distance and On-Campus Sections

Course	Distance	On Campus	Difference
Same Instructor, Same Semester			
Social Work in Modern Society	4.6	4.6	0
Social Welfare	4.7	4.7	0
Methods III	4.6	4.9	-0.3
Senior Seminar	3.8	2.8	1.0
Different Instructors, Same Semester			
HBSE I	4.1	4.2	-0.1
Different Instructors, Different Semesters			
Methods I (Instructor A)	4.5 (Fall 1991)	4.6 (Fall 1990)	-0.1
Methods I (Instructor B)	4.6 (Spring 1992)	n/a	n/a
Same Instructor, Different Semesters			
HBSE II	4.5 (Spring 1991)	4.6 (Fall 1990)	-0.1
Research Methods	3.2 (Fall 1991)	4.2 (Spring 1991)	-1.0
Social Work Administration	4.3 (Fall 1991)	4.0 (Spring 1991)	0.3
Social Welfare Policy	4.3 (Spring 1992)	4.0 (Fall 1990)	0.3
Methods II	4.2 (Fall 1992)	4.3 (Fall 1990)	-0.1

Note: Evaluation scores measured on a five-point scale (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree).

III (Fall 1993), and Senior Seminar (Fall 1993). Data indicate that student evaluations of two of these required undergraduate courses resulted in identical scores. Both sections of Social Work in a Modern Society received a mean score of 4.6, and both sections of Social Welfare received a mean score of 4.7. The mean score evaluation of distance students enrolled in Methods III was 4.6, while the score for the on-campus section had a slightly higher mean of 4.9, resulting in a difference of 0.3 between the distance and on-campus students. Senior Seminar students in the distance section rated the course as 3.8, while the mean score from the evaluation by their on-campus cohort was 2.8, a difference of 1.0.

In the instance of Human Behavior and Social Environment (HBSE) I, taught in Fall 1990, one instructor taught the course at a distance and another taught the on-campus course. Both instructors were new to this particular course. Consequently, for comparison purposes, no student evaluation data existed for these instructors so data for the two distance courses were compared. Despite the difference in instructors, the evaluations varied by only 0.1. The on-campus class mean was 4.2, and the distance class mean was 4.1.

In a second instance, one instructor taught a distance section of Methods I in Fall 1991 and another instructor taught a distance section in Spring 1992. Instructor A obtained a mean evaluation of 4.5 from distance students in Fall 1991, and a mean of 4.6 from the on-campus students in Fall 1990. Instructor B obtained a mean evaluation of 4.6 from distance students in Spring 1992, which was identical to the on-campus mean of Instructor A. The difference in means between the two instructors in their distance classes, taught during two different semesters, was only 0.1.

The same instructor taught the remainder of the courses but during different

semesters. The semester chosen for comparison was the semester the instructor last taught the class on-campus. The decision to use the student evaluations of the same instructor over different semesters, rather than two different instructors teaching in the same semester, was based on the belief that it was more important to keep the instructor fixed for purposes of comparison. HBSE II, Research Methods, Administration, Social Welfare Policy, and Methods II each fell within this category. When HBSE II was taught at a distance (Spring 1991), the mean derived from student evaluations was 4.5; when taught on-campus (Fall 1990), the mean was 4.6. The means for Social Work Research Methods differed by 1.0: 3.2 for the distance class (Fall 1991), compared to 4.2 for the on-campus class (Spring 1991). (Distance students described difficulties understanding statistical concepts when presented over television.)

The Social Work Administration course received a mean score of 4.3 when taught at a distance (Fall 1991) and a mean score of 4.0 when taught on-campus (Spring 1991). Social Welfare Policy received a mean of 4.3 from distance students (Spring 1992) and a 4.0 from on-campus students (Fall 1990). The mean scores for Methods II were nearly identical, with a 4.2 distance mean (Fall 1992) and 4.3 on-campus mean (Fall 1990).

Data indicate, therefore, very little difference between students' perception of course instruction provided at a distance and course instruction provided for students in on-campus classes. The authors speculate that these similarities occurred because faculty participated in quality training on how to teach at a distance. Furthermore, full-time faculty with several years of teaching experience were generally hired to teach courses at a distance. These faculty had consistently received positive student evaluation in previous semesters.

In addition to regular classroom evaluations conducted by the university, distance students were asked to complete an evaluation form designed to measure specific issues related to instruction at a distance. This instrument was adapted for use in evaluating all IVN courses offered by the university and is still being used. Three major areas were addressed, including technical aspects, teacher's interactive skills, and resource availability. The results of 317 surveys completed by students at the end of each distance class are discussed below.

Technical problems were a frequent concern, particularly during the first year of program operation. Table 2 provides a summary of student responses on the subject. Students indicated problems with how the system worked, especially the audio and video components. Data found that 20.1% of the students felt dissatisfied with the sound quality of the teacher; 12.2% felt dissatisfied with the sound quality of the classrooms; and 18.5% questioned the sound quality of audio and video tapes. Another 11.5% disliked the monitor picture of videotapes and other instructional aids. Several respondents stated that sites were too noisy, making it difficult for instructors to be heard. However, some stated that the problems were understandable due to the newness of the system and, despite the problems, the experience proved beneficial and positive.

Table 3 provides an overview of the students' perceptions of their teachers' interactive skills when providing instruction over IVN. Ten percent of the students indicated a problem with the overall quality of interaction with distant classrooms during lectures, and another 9.2% indicated the inadequate amount of interaction with distant classrooms during lecture. Overall, general satisfaction is suggested by the high numbers in the agree/strongly agree categories. Students frequently stated in open-ended comments that more interaction between sites would have been helpful. The open-ended comments also indicated that adjunct instructors were also found to be helpful, and some students wrote that improvements were made over the semester.

Table 4 provides a review of student perceptions concerning the availability of textbooks, library resources, and laboratory facilities. Significantly, 39.2% of the total responses indicated a problem regarding access to library materials. Interlibrary loan was widely used, but it was time consuming. Bookstore and library hours did not meet the needs of 3.2% of the respondents, and 6.2% stated that access to classroom and laboratory materials was a problem. Of particular concern was access to interviewing laboratory facilities, necessary for practice course requirements. Adjunct instructors proved

Table 2. Distance Student Evaluations of Technical Aspects of Classroom Learning

Evaluation Item	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Monitor of teacher is clear and easy to follow	88.3%	3.8%
Monitor picture of classroom is clear and easy to follow	84.9%	5.2%
Monitor picture of videotapes and other instructional aids is clear and easy to follow	75.9%	11.5%
Sound quality of teacher is clear and easily understood	61.3%	20.1%
Sound quality from classroom is clear and easily understood	72.4%	12.2%
Sound quality of audio and videotapes is clear and easily understood	60.0%	18.5%

helpful in locating interviewing laboratories at local human service centers and hospitals, but this still remained a problem.

Student Demographics

Demographic data was secured from 21 distance learning and 28 on-campus student during the program’s first year. Information gathered included gender, marital status, age, ethnicity and income of student participants. Results indicate that marital status, age, and income represent the major differences between the on-campus students and the distance learners. As anticipated, distance learners were more likely to be married, older, and earning higher incomes.

At the time of survey completion, specific findings indicated a slight difference between the two groups in terms of gender; males comprised 10.7% of the on-campus group and 14.3% of the dis-

tance learners. The on-campus number is representative of the social work program’s enrollment. It is noteworthy, however, that upon completion of the distance program, all graduates from the program were female. Regarding age, the authors anticipated that distance learners would be older because the program was designed to serve “displaced farm wives.” With 91% of distance students over 26 years of age and 39.3% of on-campus students over 26, this was the case. The on-campus cohort represented the typical campus population of social work majors compared to the past year, with generally 40% of the students being identified as older than average students. Marital status of students was a major difference between the two programs. The majority of the subjects at the on-campus site were single (60.7%), while the majority of the distance learners were married (68%). More of the on-campus participants, however, were divorced

Table 3. Distance Student Evaluations of Teachers’ Interactive Skills

Evaluation Item	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Teacher’s verbal communications are clear and easily understood	79.2%	6.4%
Teacher’s nonverbal communications are clear and easily understood	87.8%	5.2%
Amount of interaction with distant classrooms during lecture is adequate	74.7%	9.2%
Quality of interaction with distant classrooms during lecture is adequate	70.6%	10.4%
Teacher attempts to use audio and visual aids which are easily understood via monitor	79.6%	7.0%
Teacher appears comfortable working with interactive setting	91.2%	2.7%

Table 4. Distance Student Evaluations of Course Resources

Evaluation Item	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Required textbooks are readily available	94.8%	3.2%
Necessary classroom and laboratory materials are readily available	83.9%	6.2%
Library and research facilities are adequate and easily accessible	41.8%	39.2%

(21.4%) as compared to the distance learners (14.3%). An examination of income differences between the two groups found the percentage of distance learners with annual incomes exceeding \$10,000 (42%) to be approximately six times greater than that of on-campus students (7.1%). This was expected because the distance program allowed students to maintain full-time employment, except when enrolled in full-time field placement. Regarding ethnicity, little difference existed between the two groups, with all distance learners and 96.4% of the on-campus group identified as Caucasian. Because of the midwest/rural nature of the program, it was anticipated that the distance population would be Caucasian. But this demographic is somewhat lower than for on-campus students program-wide; typically 8% of enrollment is identified as American Indian.

Student GPA

Table 5 provides a comparison of 16 distance students' grade point averages (GPA) with 16 on-campus students' GPAs. The students gave permission for GPA information to be used in aggregate form only. All participating students had secured their BSW from this university. The average overall GPA of distance learners was 3.33, compared to 3.23 for on-campus students; the average social work GPA for distance learners was 3.32, compared to 3.19 for on-campus students. Again, the same social work examina-

tions were used for distance learners and on-campus learners. While distance learners obtained higher overall and social work course GPAs than the on-campus cohort, the differences were minor: 0.10 for the overall GPA and 0.13 for the social work courses. These findings must be used cautiously, however, due to the small number of students participating in this study.

Final Student Opinion Survey

Twenty-four distance students completed an opinion survey following completion of all academic course work. With 26 graduates from this program, this represented a 92.3% response rate. Students rated their satisfaction with advisement assistance, adjunct instructors, and clerical support services. Nearly 96% of students were greatly satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the support staff, and only 19% had difficulties with advisor accessibility, which was positive given the students' distance from campus. A high majority of students (85%) expressed satisfaction with advisement information and on-site adjunct instructors. However, in an open-ended question, students expressed concerns about their access to financial aid resources and library resources.

The same group rated their satisfaction of courses in the curriculum content areas established by CSWE. Again, a high majority of students were greatly satisfied or satisfied with practice (87.5%), HBSE

Table 5. Grade Point Average (GPA) by Student Group

	3.50–4.00	3.00–3.49	2.50–2.99	2.00–2.49
Overall GPA				
Distance Students	18%	53%	29%	–
On-Campus Students	15%	35%	43%	7%
Social Work GPA				
Distance Students	5.00%	25.0%	25.0%	–
On-Campus Students	25.0%	37.5%	37.5%	–

(100%), social welfare (87.5%), professional foundation (87.5%), and field content courses. In the area of research, the responses were not as strong. It should be noted, however, that the research sequence did include a statistics course the students took at their local campus, which may be the reason on-campus students indicated more satisfaction with the course than distance students. Also, distance students indicated more satisfaction with administration and policy than on-campus students (administration on-campus $M=4.0$, distance $M=4.3$; policy on-campus $M=4.0$, distance $M=4.3$). One explanation for this difference is that distance students were older and had more human service related experience.

Withdrawal of Students From Program

The authors discerned that 12 degree-seeking students left the distance program over the four-year period. Each completed a form indicating their reason for withdrawal. Four transferred to another institution, 3 were not meeting academic standards, 2 reported personal difficulties, and 3 more students either moved to another state, reported health problems, or were counseled out of the program by an adjunct instructor. The authors noted that there were students who took introductory social work courses, but who did not plan to complete a social work degree. Thus, an initial degree-seeking cohort of distance learners was difficult to ascertain at the beginning. Only after advisement visits to sites did it become possible to judge the number of degree-seeking students who formally discontinued their involvement in the program.

Alumni Survey

Overall, the success of this program is best measured by the success of its alumni. In June 1999, seven years after comple-

tion of this program, 26 alumni participated in a telephone survey conducted by the project coordinator to determine current employment status and professional credentials. Because all alumni possessed current licenses to practice social work in the state where they completed their degree, addresses were secured through the State Board of Social Work Examiners. Twenty-four of the 26 alumni (92.3%) were currently working in a professional social work position. Furthermore, of the 24 alumni who were currently practicing social work, 22 (92%) were practicing in communities with a population of less than 1,700. Clearly, the major objective of the USDA grant to place trained professionals in rural areas was achieved. Seven were working with hospitals and nursing homes, five with state human service centers, two with county social service centers, three with federal Native American programs, four with private nonprofit social service agencies, two with community outreach agencies, and one with the juvenile court system. Among the employment tasks identified were supervision of day treatment programs, federal grants administration, school social work services, treatment for persons with substance abuse problems, case management services for persons with serious mental illness, counseling for at-risk families, youth probation services, treatment for sexual abuse offenders, and discharge planning for rural hospitals.

Furthermore, five alumni have obtained or are securing an MSW via distance education from this or another neighboring university, which also offers its MSW degree over interactive television. Two alumni have completed their MSW degrees, and two others will have completed their degrees by December 1999. Another alumna is completing her master's degree in education from another distance program.

Adjunct Instructors' Perceptions of the Program

An open-ended questionnaire completed by all on-site adjunct instructors at the end of each course resulted in generally positive comments. The questionnaire measured perceptions of technological aspects, communications, preparation, resource availability, and any changes they would make in the program. Adjuncts were assured anonymity in their responses.

Regarding technology, adjunct professors liked the ability to relate to a diverse group of students statewide, and they liked the highly interactive technology. However, the interactive system became problematic when students talked at the same time and the voice-activated camera became confused. The two-second sound delay, an aspect of the system, resulted in communication difficulties occasionally between the professor and students. Given the complexity of operating this system, each site required a technician.

Concerning their role and the lack of clear expectations, adjuncts described some initial confusion which interfered with their ability to respond to student concerns. They suggested that training be offered earlier, especially since the initial training for adjuncts occurred after the program began.

The "largest problem area" noted by instructors and adjuncts was similar to the concerns noted by students: the unavailability of library resources. Some of the libraries on junior colleges where classrooms were used were unequipped for the required research related activities. Although the on-campus library staff were considered "extremely helpful," the interlibrary process was difficult due to the time it took to receive the materials.

Many adjuncts described positive relationships with students and faculty at the university as the most rewarding aspect

of this employment. The adjuncts appreciated witnessing students' professional growth as they matriculated through the program. Being involved in the "learning environment" was also described as a growth producing experience.

Perceptions of On-Campus Teaching Faculty

All but one of the 11 faculty members completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of teaching over television. The questionnaire asked 17 open-ended questions to determine the instructors' opinion of the technological aspects, classroom interaction, instructor-student relations and instructor education.

Clearly, teaching over television was a new experience for the faculty, and they described a variety of techniques used for adjusting their teaching styles to accommodate the system. Because the camera had to be moved from podium to blackboard each time the instructor wished to move, and this movement was distracting to students, the instructors did not "wander" about the classroom or use the blackboard, which constituted a major change. Faculty also stated that the on-site technician was an important resource in the classroom, and suggested that the technician more frequently zoom the camera in on students speaking to enhance the students' interaction.

The interactive study guide required for the distance courses was considered essential by some faculty, but clearly limited their flexibility in teaching, which some respondents found problematic. The general belief, however, was that teaching at a distance required that they become more organized and prepared. This took additional time but was beneficial, they reported. Faculty stated that the training provided on teaching over television was essential. However, the three-hour evening classes jeopardized the stamina of both faculty and students,

faculty reported. Some mentioned that maintaining a high level of student interaction was difficult at times. Group exercises eliminated a strict lecture format for the classes, but several faculty believed that less material was covered.

The primary problems with technology occurred during the first year of the program. On occasion, some or all of the sites could not receive either the audio or video signal. Not only did difficulties arise in ensuring that all sites were given the same information, but class time was lost. Audio echoes were a major frustration for faculty, but the problem was reduced when students learned to use the microphones appropriately. Attempts to make up the time lost due to technical difficulties often were not successful. Some faculty chose to tape classes, but there were logistical problems in finding a time for students, individually or collectively, to view the tape. And there were concerns about the tapes being used for purposes other than student learning. Faculty saw few problems with testing procedures because adjunct faculty were professional in proctoring examinations.

Faculty found it difficult to establish the same type of relationship with the distance learners as the on-campus students, thereby limiting their assessment of learning needs and interfering with their teaching. However, the on-site adjunct instructors made their presence a important component of the program by developing positive relationships with distance learning students. Some faculty noted that the on-campus students were "upset" that the class was being taught over distance, and resented distance learning students being in "their" classroom.

All faculty, however, supported offering the undergraduate program through IVN. Many commented that it improved their teaching and helped them feel connected to other parts of the state through working with the students and with adjunct instructors. Hence, distance instruc-

tion provided an opportunity to serve the rural population in a meaningful manner.

Lessons Learned

The Department of Social Work used the findings from the undergraduate evaluation to assist in developing future distance learning programs. Following the offering of this program, the midwest university began offering graduate elective courses, continuing education units, and an interdisciplinary minor in additions. Currently, a part-time MSW program is offered at a distance, using this same system. The lessons learned in offering education at a distance have been incorporated into future distance programs. Following is a summary of these lessons.

Support, Training, and Rewards Are Critical

Faculty reward systems should be established for distance education instructors prior to beginning a program. Faculty rewards should include additional salary to compensate for any increased workload. Unfortunately, adequate research describing how distance teaching affects workloads is not available. Other authors, however, have reported on the increased responsibilities (Caffarella, Dunning, & Patrick, 1992). Specifically, teaching at a distance requires using different teaching strategies, adapting course materials for instruction at a distance (Cyres & Smith, 1990), traveling to distant sites, and possibly teaching during weekends. Salary enhancements should be made to compensate for the additional work. Moreover, recognition for the importance of this work, particularly in rural areas, should be given in tenure and promotion decisions. Institutional support in the form of release time to prepare courses for instruction at a distance and training on technology use should

also be in place for faculty who are teaching distance education courses (Dillon & Walsh, 1992).

Preplanning of courses is critical in delivering courses by distance (Greenwood & McDevitt, 1987). Ultimately, this planning will improve faculty teaching competence on-campus because of the advanced preparation required prior to providing instruction. New competencies must be taught and new roles assumed when providing instruction using technology (Thach & Murphy, 1995). Instructors indicated that training was helpful in this evaluation, and should include basics about the use of the technology and instruction on overcoming the challenges of teaching students who are geographically isolated from the university. Training should also include information on how to work with adult-learners, who were the vast majority of distance learners enrolled in this program. Schlenker (1994) discusses the importance of enhancing student interaction in distance courses, an area of concern for instructors who participated in this study. Specific techniques on enhancing student interaction must be included in faculty training. Furthermore, based on evaluation data, training provided on-campus for adjunct instructors prior to the program beginning is valuable. Furthermore, ongoing training is provided to clarify expectations and discuss students' progress.

Another lesson learned from faculty evaluations is that due to the lack of laboratory facilities at the distant sites and the problem with interaction at a distance, some content must be taught on-campus. The current graduate distance program requires that students complete a practice and specific research class on-campus, thereby allowing students to use interviewing and computer laboratory facilities. This requirement also assists in alleviating the problem of access to computers and interviewing

laboratories for students to do their work. The face-to-face interaction that occurs while students are on campus enhances the community of learners as students develop friendships between sites and share common experiences. Another suggestion which has been incorporated in all distance classrooms is the expectation that the on-site technician zoom the camera in on students when they are speaking. Current training materials include suggestions on how to work with technicians and their role in the classroom. Instructors and students suggested scheduling shorter time periods for classes to prevent fatigue, which has occurred to some degree. However, when students are traveling a great distance to attend class they often request longer class periods. Clearly, not all such requests can be honored. From the authors' experience, the role of the student as customer is accentuated in distance education, so educators must be mindful of not compromising the learning process to meet personal needs of students. Faculty also must be trained on how to use other computer software, such as the PowerPoint presentation package, which can enhance instruction. To facilitate student interaction and provide information to students, Internet access should also be established as a requirement of any distance program (Huff & McNown Johnson, 1998). Many of the students' concerns about access to information are alleviated with e-mail access. Also, the interactive video equipment used to deliver this program has been updated to prevent the technical problems experienced earlier and overall fewer problems exist. A portable microphone was installed to allow faculty to move about the classroom. A clear lesson learned, based on faculty evaluation, was the importance of scheduling an additional class period over the system. This time can be used, if necessary, to make up lost class time due to technology problems or storm days.

Responsive Institutional Policies Need to Be Established

Policies affecting students and faculty who work on campus may not work with off-campus students. Accommodations, such as electronic library access, telephone registrations, and providing electronic mail services to students and other types of computer support have made some of these concerns less problematic (Huff & McNown Johnson, 1998). While such resources continue to be developed, incorporating these technologies optimally into teaching methodology will require faculty training. Another concern is financial aid procedures that do not serve students who are enrolled in various institutions. Since tuition is often more expensive for distance programs, difficulty in accessing financial aid can become a problem that affects student retention and recruitment. A cooperative relationship with financial aid personnel is critical in resolving these problems. Regarding library access issues, a publication which describes how to access library materials through use of a state-wide computerized network has been put together by library staff specifically for distance social work students. Also, library staff provide training over the system and meet with students to assist with questions, when they are on-campus completing course work.

Videotaping Policies Must Be Developed

The distance classroom allows for the taping of all classes. The issue of faculty copyright material arose when these tapes were viewed outside the classroom, making faculty use of copyright material a concern. Another issue involves student privacy concerns when tapes are shared outside the classroom and the students wished only to share information with the class. Agreements for taping must be secured from the instructor prior to tap-

ing the lecture, which now is standard at the university. Assurances should be made when classes are taped that this content will be used for students only, unless permission is given by both the instructor and students for other use. Also, faculty must secure the necessary permission to show videotapes over interactive lectures.

Support for Off-Campus Students Is Necessary

Students appreciate information that helps them determine their appropriateness for a distance education program, and that will assist in student recruitment and retention (Kirkwood, 1987). For example, the full-time field requirement should not have been a surprise to students, and it may require that students sign a contract agreeing to a time commitment prior to beginning a distance program. However, face-to-face contact with distance education students obviously enhances a program and encourages clear communication. Instructors should teach from the remote distant sites at least twice during the course of an academic semester, enhancing student interaction and allowing faculty to develop relationships on a face-to-face basis. Academic advisement should be provided on-site, to the degree possible, to assist students in securing necessary information about program offerings and thesis requirements. Early and frequent face-to-face contacts with the field coordinator are necessary to eliminate confusion caused in the undergraduate program offered earlier.

Necessary resources must be secured prior to beginning a program. The USDA grant funding for this project and university support was critical in mounting and maintaining this program. Also, the cost of using the technology must be considered along with the additional program costs when deciding to offer this pro-

gram as an addition to an existing program. This midwest university does not pay line charges when using this system to teach at a distance. And of course, student retention is critical in securing tuition dollars to operate programs.

Conclusion

The research shows success with distance education programs. There is interest, as well as political pressure, for social work educators to respond to the needs of adult learners through the use of distance technology. While the program discussed here has experienced successful outcomes, the evaluation study has limitations. Because this was a descriptive study, there were significant relationships that were not measured quantitatively. Future research should address quantitatively the relationships between groups and within groups. Certainly, the body of literature on this topic will continue to grow. In summary, distance education requires educators to think differently about how we teach students. This method can be rewarding, because it expands access to the profession to a wider range of qualified persons. However, the most important lesson learned is that there must be a solid commitment from the faculty to teaching at a distance and working with distance learning students if such a program is to be successful.

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