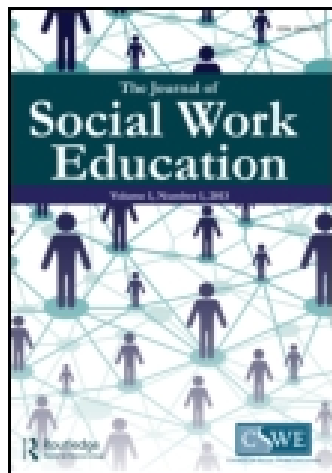


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EVALUATION OF THE FIRST WEB-BASED ADVANCED STANDING MSW PROGRAM

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The first completely Web-based advanced standing master of social work program began in 2002, and 32 students had graduated by 2005. This article presents a preliminary evaluation comparing the first two online cohorts with a face-to-face (F2F) cohort of advanced-standing students. Results showed several demographic differences between groups (e.g., online students were older and had more work experience than F2F students). There were few differences on a variety of educational and satisfaction outcomes with the exception of field, where instructors rated online students lower on several sections of the field evaluation measure. The implications for social work education are discussed.

AS TECHNOLOGY HAS DEVELOPED over the years, so too, has distance education, enabling scores of students to obtain undergraduate and graduate degrees who may have otherwise had no opportunity to do so. The population of students being served via distance learning has been expanding, resulting from outreach efforts to students previously limited by geography, cost, or family/work concerns (Card & Horton, 2000). Distance education course offerings have continued to grow. For 2000–2001, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 56% of 2- and 4-year institutions were providing distance educa-

tion courses; a 44% increase from 3 years earlier, and an additional 12% planned to begin offering distance education courses in the next 3 years. In the 12-month 2000–2001 academic year, more than 3 million students enrolled in distance courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Wilson (1999) writes of three distinct phases in the development of distance education in social work that includes *off-campus programs*, whereby instruction is provided by faculty traveling from the main campus to the distance learning site, or by adjunct instructors from the local community; *distributed*

education in the form of technology such as interactive television (ITV); and the current phase of *computer-mediated education* including Web-based courses. Each of these phases has required innovation and caution over issues of educational quality and comparability. The most recent published data in social work found that 16% of degree programs offered distance learning (Siegel, Jennings, Conklin, & Flynn, 1998). Our own recent survey of master of social work programs (data not shown) found that of the 160 programs responding, 25% provide off-campus programs, and 15% use ITV. Further, 15% of MSW programs offer at least one complete course online, although it should not be assumed that those are provided for the purpose of distance education.

Distributed education is principally defined by the student and instructor being in separate locations with course content delivered by a variety of means such as satellite transmission, television, and compressed video (Coe & Elliott, 1999; Siegel et al., 1998). Typically, off-campus students are at a remote site viewing a video broadcast of the course content while live instruction is conducted at the main campus (Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000).

Computer-mediated education can take the form of computer-based technology in the classroom (e.g., the use of PowerPoint® lectures or incorporating Web sites into lectures) to course Web sites available through platforms such as Blackboard® or WebCT®. Course Web sites can be used as a repository of information such as syllabi, to more interactive features such as discussion boards and chat rooms. Beyond incorporating computer technology into the traditional classroom, many educators have developed entire classes for

online, asynchronous learning, taking distance learning to the next level.

As might be imagined, there are supporters and detractors of distance education, both ITV and Web based, who put forward compelling arguments. 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 (Coe & Elliott, 1999; Thyer, Artelt, Markward, & Dozier, 1998; Thyer, Polk, & Gaudin, 1997). Others have suggested that there are significant pedagogical losses because of technology. Krueger and Stretch (2000) argue that the interactional nature of social work demands face-to-face teaching and beyond that, opportunities for professional socialization and role modeling are lost when technology interferes with spontaneous "teachable moments" in the classroom or with informal conversations with students after class or in an office. In addition to philosophy, other barriers to effective distance learning include the expense of program development (e.g., technological enhancements, time for course development, etc.) and the lack of technical support for programs (Siegel et al., 1998).

However, there are also many proponents of ITV and online classes who focus on increasing the opportunities for students whose options are limited by geography, or work and family obligations (Smith, Smith, & Boone, 2000). Distance education may be particularly important for rural or geographically isolated communities (Card & Horton, 2000). Students who attend classes at home may be more likely to stay and continue contributing to their communities increasing the presence

of professionally trained social workers in much needed areas.

Further, while some studies report that students prefer face-to-face learning, others suggest that may be mediated by opportunities for interaction. For example, Stocks and Freddolino (2000) found that increasing opportunities for interaction resulted in greater involvement in the course and more positive experiences reported by students compared to those who took the same class without the enhanced interactive options. Jaeger (1995) argues that distance learning promotes collaboration and interdependence, and that dissatisfaction of distance education may be idiosyncratic to the course. This cannot be ruled out in most of the studies on distance education classes in social work as they have relied on individual classes.

Finally, making a commitment to online learning means a pedagogical shift that moves faculty from being the "sage on the stage" (Wilson, 1999) to one that embraces student-centered learning. Sparrow and colleagues suggest that this philosophy requires students to assume a great deal of responsibility for their own learning, including managing when and where they learn (Sparrow, Sparrow, & Swan, 2000). Technology can be used to enhance this process and facilitate life-long learning (Geer, 2000).

Significant steps have been taken in the past few years to evaluate distance education by measuring student learning outcomes such as grades for particular assignments, final course grades, etc. (Macy, Rooney, Hollister, & Freddolino, 2001). More studies exist for ITV, as that has been in existence for a longer period of time, although the number of evalua-

tions of online courses has been steadily increasing. Central to these evaluations is an effort to ascertain if the learning outcomes of distance students are comparable to the learning outcomes of traditional, face-to-face students (Macy et al., 2001). Evaluations of distance learning are typically individual courses using a pretest-posttest format. Studies are inconsistent in who delivers the course content; some use the same instructor for both the face-to-face and distance format where others do not.

Several studies have been conducted on the efficacy of ITV. Dalton (2001) conducted an evaluation of an MSW research methods class that consisted of four comparison groups (two traditional F2F, one distance but in the on-campus studio, and one viewing the lecture via ITV). He reports that after controlling for demographic characteristics, there were no differences between groups on pretest to posttest changes, course grades, and course evaluations. Similar results were reported by Petracchi and Patchner (2001), who also conducted an evaluation of an MSW research methods course comparing F2F and ITV students across a 2-year period.

Hollister and McGee (2000) found comparable academic achievement between distance and F2F students in a substance abuse and child welfare course and also reported that there were no differences between student groups in their self-evaluation of learning. Huff (2000) reported students in a F2F and ITV graduate policy course significantly, and equivalently improved their critical thinking skills, and Coe and Elliott (1999) found no differences between on-campus students and distance students in terms of

grades and perception of instructors for a graduate direct practice class.

Beyond evaluation of individual course offerings, there appear to be two published studies of entire degree programs that have used ITV as the delivery mechanism for all courses. Haga and Heitkamp (2000) describe a BSW degree program delivered to four rural sites in North Dakota. They report that there were few differences between on-campus and distance students in terms of grade point average and course satisfaction. Where dissatisfaction existed, it was primarily related to technological difficulties (e.g., sound and picture quality). A 7-year follow up study was also conducted of the distance learners. Most of the alumni were employed as social workers practicing in rural communities. In separate studies of a distance MSW program delivered via ITV, Freddolino and Sutherland (2000) found few differences between on-campus and distance students' perceptions of the learning environment and comparable perceptions of the field environment as well (McFall & Freddolino, 2000).

There are far fewer studies on the efficacy of online learning in social work, although a literature base is developing in other professional fields. Several studies have addressed the process of online teaching and its related impact on student satisfaction and perceptions of quality and learning outcomes. For example, a qualitative study on a course in educational leadership examined differences in student perceptions of class discussions either via an online threaded discussion or face-to-face (Meyer, 2003). One general theme related to time. Students reported that it took much more time to participate in threaded

discussions, but that they appreciated the opportunity to give more consideration to others' ideas and be more thoughtful in their own responses, particularly compared to the face-to-face discussions. However, despite the enhanced quality of the discussions, students also reported missing the interpersonal aspect of face-to-face discussions such as facial expressions, etc.

The level of student involvement in online classes also appears to affect perceptions of learning. In a satisfaction survey of all online classes in the SUNY system, students reporting the highest amount of interaction with faculty and other students also reported the highest perception of learning (Fredrickson, Pickett, Shea, Pelz, & Swan, 2000). These students also believed they learned as much, if not more than they would have in their face-to-face classes. Stocks and Freddolino (2000) found that when the level of interactivity was increased in the second iteration of an online social work research methods class (e.g., self-tests, discussion questions, etc.), students participated more in class discussions and viewed the course more positively than the previous cohort of students. These authors suggested that increased interactivity created an active community of learners.

Florida State University began an asynchronous, online, advanced-standing MSW program in fall 2002, the first of its kind. It offers a completely Web-based master's curriculum to qualified advanced standing students in Florida and is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. The program is designed as a 6-semester part-time curriculum with a clinical focus that allows

students to fulfill the academic requirements for licensure in the state of Florida. Students take two courses per term for 4 semesters and then enter their field placements (usually taken over the course of 2 semesters). The curriculum consists of two advanced sequence classes (psychopathology and evaluation of social work practice), six additional courses, an integrative seminar, and field. Students admitted to the online MSW program are expected to meet the same admission criteria as students admitted to the face-to-face program.

The purpose of this study is to expand the knowledgebase on distance education by comparing face-to-face and online student cohorts for the entire MSW curriculum. There are several questions guiding this evaluation: (1) Do online and F2F students have comparable knowledge and skills? (2) Are the grades of online and F2F students comparable? (3) Are online and F2F student course/instructor evaluations comparable? Florida State University Institutional Review Board approved this study.

Method

Design and Sample

A pretest–posttest design was used to examine changes in scores on instruments measuring social work knowledge, skills, and values. Pretests were administered during the first few weeks of the program and posttests just prior to graduation. The instruments were treated confidentially but were not anonymous so that pretests, posttests, field evaluations, and demographic and academic information could be matched.

During fall 2002 and fall 2003, 41 students enrolled in the Online Advanced Standing

MSW Program. By summer 2005, 32 of these students had graduated, three had dropped out, two failed to earn the required 3.0 GPA, and four students were still enrolled. The retention rate for the first cohort of online students was found to be similar to that of F2F advanced standing students who began at the same time. The main comparison group for this study consisted of 96 F2F advanced standing MSW students who began the master's program between fall 2002 and fall 2003.

Both online and F2F students took courses in advanced research, advanced HBSE, and field. Electives varied for F2F students. Online students took six classes from the following list: Mental Health in Child Welfare, Child Welfare Practice, Chemical Dependency Problems and Programs, Theory and Practice of Crisis Intervention and Brief Treatment, Aging and Old Age: Social Work With the Aged, Case Management in Social Work, Social Work in Health Care Settings, and Family Counseling. With one exception, online instructors taught each of these classes in both formats (online and F2F), thus making comparison across formats possible in terms of grades and course/instructor evaluations.

While the instructional method differed, course content and expectations for learning outcomes were essentially the same between the online and F2F courses, while some assignments needed to be modified for the online environment. For online students, lecture material was delivered via PowerPoint® presentations, some of which were supplemented with audioclips of the instructors highlighting or describing course content. Many instructors used these same PowerPoint® presentations in their F2F classes.

Assignments such as research papers were easily adaptable to the online environment, while others (presentations, role plays) needed to be modified. In some instances, online students needed to videotape their presentations or role plays and mail them to the instructor for evaluation; in other instances, students were expected to meet with an FSU staff member based in the local community to take an exam or participate in a role play. Group presentations for online and F2F students typically involved a PowerPoint® presentation with F2F students orally presenting the content and online students using the notes feature of PowerPoint® to explain the material to their classmates.

The most significant difference between the online and F2F classes involved expectations and evaluation of class participation. Online students participated in class via graded threaded discussions, using questions that often mirrored F2F discussions. Depending on the class, threaded discussions included debates, evaluation of client presenting problems, discussion of assigned reading materials, and critique of classmates' clinical skills (having observed the videotaped role plays).

Measures

Content and area survey. The Content and Area Survey is a 36-item self-assessment of social work knowledge, skills, and values. Twenty-four items were derived from the Council on Social Work Education's (2001) *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* and 12 items reflect advanced clinical practice areas (case management, practice with individuals, families, and groups). Items are scored from 1 (low

level of knowledge or very limited skills) to 5 (exceptional knowledge or highly advanced skills).

Field evaluation. The Final Evaluation of Student's Performance is a 110-item tool that is completed by field supervisors. The measure is divided into nine sections: learning; supervision and professional identification; conceptual frameworks; relationship skills; professional communication skills; case management; work with individuals, groups, and families; and ethical legal issues. Each item is rated on a scale of 1 (low or very limited) to 5 (outstanding) and the mean for each section is calculated. Field instructors providing the evaluation were not blind to whether a student participated in the online or F2F program.

Grades. Letter grades were converted to points for the purposes of analysis (4=A, 3.75=A-, 3.25=B+, 3=B, etc.).

Exit survey. The Exit Survey asks students how well prepared they feel for a social work career after completing the social work curriculum (1=poorly prepared, to 5=very well prepared). Students rate the availability of faculty and staff and quality of library and computer services on a scale of 1 (poor), to 5 (excellent). The Exit Survey also asks students if they would recommend the MSW program to others.

Course/instructor evaluations. All students are asked to complete a university-wide course/instructor evaluation when they near completion of a course. Items include: (1) description of course objectives and assignments, (2) communication of ideas and information, (3) expression of expectations for performance, (4) availability to assist students in or out of class, (5) respect and concern for stu-

dents, (6) stimulation of interest in the course, (7) facilitation of learning, and (8) overall assessment of instructor. Items are rated as excellent (5), very good (4), good (3), fair (2), or poor (1).

Data Analysis

Chi-square tests were used for analyzing nominal data (i.e., comparing percent of minority online and F2F students). Independent-samples *t* tests were used to examine differences in group means, and pre–posttest differences were examined using paired-samples *t* tests.

Results

Characteristics of the Cohorts

Demographics. There were no differences between the online and F2F cohorts with respect to gender (95% female versus 84% female, respectively; $\chi^2(1, n=136)=3.19, p=.08$), minority status (17% minority versus 30% minority, respectively; $\chi^2(1, n=131)=2.44, p=.12$), and number of caretaking hours per week (Table 1). Online students were signifi-

cantly older than F2F students (mean age 33 versus 28) and worked more hours per week on average than F2F students (36 versus 22 hours per week).

Academic characteristics. Online students graduated earlier with a BSW degree than F2F students and had a lower mean undergraduate upper division grade point average (Table 1). Face-to-face students more often recently graduated from the same institution at which they were earning their master’s degree; whereas, online students had typically graduated from other institutions. Mean verbal GRE scores did not differ for online and F2F students; however, the mean quantitative GRE score was higher for the F2F students.

Knowledge and Skills

Mean ratings for items on the Content and Area Survey were compared at pretest and posttest for the two groups. Pretest–posttest differences for each group were also examined. At pretest, F2F students rated themselves higher on all of the individual, family, and

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Online and Face-to-Face (F2F) Students

Characteristic	Online (<i>n</i> =41)	F2F (<i>n</i> =96)	<i>p</i>
Age	33.7	27.6	<.001
Paid work hours per week	35.6	21.9	<.001
Unpaid caretaking hours per week	17.9	8.0	ns
Year BSW earned	1997	2002	<.001
Number of years of human service experience	5.2	2.5	.002
Undergraduate GPA	3.4	3.6	.011
Verbal GRE	423.5	409.5	ns
Quantitative GRE	405.8	447.3	.014

group practice skills (assessment, intervention, and evaluation), as well as case management assessment skills and knowledge about the politics of organizations. At posttest, however, there were no significant differences between the online and F2F groups.

All pretest–posttest differences for self-assessed advanced skills relating to assessment, intervention, and evaluation in case management, individual, family, and group practice were positive and statistically significant for the online students (Table 2). In contrast, pre–posttest differences were significant for only 4 of the 12 advanced practice items for the F2F students (group work items and case management intervention skills). Roughly half of the foundation knowledge and skills showed improvement from pretest to posttest for the groups as well.

Grades

Grades earned by the online students were compared to grades received by students enrolled in the F2F version of the same class. All online and F2F classes but one were taught by the same instructor, thus controlling for variability. For this analysis, students in the F2F courses were both traditional 2-year and advanced standing students. Letter grades were transformed into quality points with A equal to 4.0 quality points, A– equal to 3.75, B+ equal to 3.25, B equal to 3.0, etc.

The online students enrolled in 16 courses (the field course was evaluated separately), thus yielding a total of 308 (duplicate count) students. Grades for these students were compared to 217 F2F students who had taken the same courses.

Grades ranged from A to F for online students and A to D for F2F students. Overall, there was no significant difference in the mean quality points earned for the two groups (3.44 versus 3.50 for the online and F2F students, respectively; $p=.341$).

Field Evaluations

Items on the Final Evaluation of Student's Performance measure were organized into nine sections. Differences between the online and F2F groups were seen for five of the nine areas, thus affecting the overall mean (Table 3). The online students' field instructors rated them lower on learning, supervision and professional identification, professional communication skills, case management practice, work with individuals, work with groups, and ethical and legal issues. While these differences were statistically significant, all mean ratings for both groups were high and the range was narrow.

Exit Survey

While the online students rated their preparation for a social work career more positively than F2F students, the difference was not significant. There were also no differences for ratings of faculty and staff availability as well as library services. Online students did, however, rate computer services significantly higher than F2F students (3.97 versus 3.23; $p=.023$). Similar proportions of online and F2F students said they would recommend the MSW program without hesitation (80% versus 77%) or would recommend but with some reservations (20% versus 18%). Less than 5% of the F2F students and none of the online students said they would not recommend the program to others.

TABLE 2. Content and Area Survey Mean Ratings for Online and Face-to-Face (F2F) Students

Measure	Online (n=26)		F2F (n=42)	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Advanced Practice Items				
Case management assessment	3.46	4.38***	3.90	4.21
Intervention	3.27	4.35***	3.70	4.03*
Evaluation	3.00	4.04***	3.58	3.85
Individual assessment	2.77	4.15***	3.78	4.10
Intervention	2.69	4.04***	3.68	3.95
Evaluation	2.65	3.92***	3.50	3.75
Family assessment	2.50	3.85***	3.30	3.73
Intervention	2.46	3.62***	3.28	3.63
Evaluation	2.46	3.50**	3.18	3.58
Group assessment	2.15	3.35***	3.20	3.88**
Intervention	2.19	3.35***	3.15	3.83**
Evaluation	2.15	3.31***	3.08	3.63*
Foundation Items				
Critical thinking	3.50	4.04**	3.74	4.26***
Values	4.62	4.54	4.67	4.76
Client privacy	4.69	4.65	4.64	4.74
Client self-determination	4.46	4.58	4.45	4.64
Ethical dilemmas	3.81	4.12	3.83	4.29***
Oppression	3.92	4.42**	4.07	4.19
Cultural diversity	4.23	4.50*	4.17	4.38
Personal biases	4.15	4.27	4.14	4.19
Advocacy	4.27	4.42	4.07	4.21
Social justice	3.27	3.81**	3.17	3.81***
Politics of organizations	3.69	4.00	3.10	3.78***
History of the profession	3.15	3.88***	3.52	3.52
Ecological assessment	2.85	4.00***	3.28	3.88**
Ecological care planning	2.88	3.88**	3.17	3.90***
Generalist perspective	2.96	4.12***	3.31	4.00***
Link theory and practice	3.17	3.88**	3.40	3.98***
Refer to resources	4.27	4.54	4.17	4.40
Analysis of social policies	2.84	3.48**	3.26	3.79**
Evaluation process	3.42	3.96**	3.81	4.14
Measure effectiveness	3.31	4.04***	3.62	4.07*
Communication skills	4.42	4.77**	4.50	4.64
Use of supervision	4.46	4.50	4.45	4.56
Use of feedback	4.08	4.54**	4.14	4.50*
Seek organizational change	3.73	4.04	3.93	4.17

Scale: 1=very limited, to 5=outstanding. **p*≤.05; ***p*≤.01; ****p*≤.001.

Course/Instructor Evaluations

Course/instructor evaluations were compared for 212 online and 192 F2F students (duplicate count) who had taken the same (16) classes with the same instructor with one exception. There were no overall differences, indicating that student satisfaction and perceptions of instruction were similar for the online and F2F students.

Discussion

Distance and Web-enhanced teaching in social work education are now relatively common but teaching an entire MSW curriculum online is a new development. The first online advanced standing MSW program began in the fall of 2002 and two cohorts of students have now completed their degrees. At admission, the online students were older, earned their BSWs earlier, worked more hours at paid employment, and had more years of human

service experience. These types of students are often targeted by nontraditional programs across academic disciplines. Here they were shown to succeed, despite some differences in academic characteristics, when offered a degree program in an alternative format.

This study compared five broad measures of academic and program success for online and F2F students who had advanced standing status. The measures looked at self-assessed and field instructor rated knowledge and skills, course grades, perception of preparedness, whether students would recommend the program, availability of faculty and staff, quality of library and computer services, and quality of instruction. Stimulation of interest and facilitation of learning were also measured. Results were not only positive for online and F2F students but comparable. It is important to look at both. Whereas online students were found to rate themselves lower than F2F students on a number of knowledge and skill

TABLE 3. Mean Scores on Field Evaluations of Online and Face-to-Face (F2F) Students as Rated by Field Instructors

Group of Items	Online (n=30)	F2F (n=30)	<i>p</i>
Learning, supervision, and identification	4.50	4.76	.038
Conceptual frameworks	4.40	4.63	ns
Relationship skills	4.58	4.79	ns
Professional communication skills	4.53	4.85	.009
Case management	4.35	4.64	.024
Work with individuals	4.39	4.62	ns
Work with families	4.29	4.57	ns
Work with groups	4.27	4.79	.048
Ethical and legal issues	4.44	4.77	.027
Overall	4.42	4.71	.026

Scale: 1=very limited, to 5=outstanding.

items at pretest, such differences disappeared at posttest. It is possible that despite having more experience, having been out of school longer prior to starting the master's program negatively affected the online students' confidence in their knowledge and abilities. This may also help to explain the differences in quantitative GRE scores found at admission.

A criticism of online learning has been that the critical element of human contact is missing. Although communication was not face-to-face, it is interesting to note that online and F2F students assessed the availability of their instructors both in and out of the classroom in a positive fashion on two different measures. In addition, the groups' ratings were comparable. Online students also frequently commented that they came to know their online classmates well and relied on their help with course material. Since online students all took the same classes over a 2-year period and continuously communicated via discussion boards and e-mail, it is no wonder that despite not having physical contact, they felt part of a supportive learning community.

An important finding was that online students were rated lower on five of nine areas of the field evaluation measure. This is an area requiring careful monitoring as additional cohorts progress through the online program, as it raises the possibility that online students do not receive adequate opportunities for skill development. However, it is important to note that the mean ratings for every area were quite high (between 4.29 and 4.58 on a 5-point scale) raising a question about substantive versus statistical significance. Also, as previously noted, most of the F2F advanced standing students had entered the MSW program

directly from their undergraduate program whereas most of the online students had several years of professional experience. One possibility to explore is whether those with professional experience are more confident in their skills (and perhaps less open to feedback) compared to those with no professional experience, thereby affecting their final evaluation.

To test this possibility, we conducted an additional post hoc analysis using linear regression (data not shown). We regressed each of the section means on years of human service experience and a dummy variable for group (online or F2F). After controlling for years of professional experience, there were no significant differences between groups on any of the section means with the exception of professional communication skills. This indicates that as a whole, regardless of online or F2F delivery of content, students with more experience going into their placement scored lower on their final evaluations in eight of the nine areas measured. Again it should be noted that these analyses are exploratory and used a small sample. Finally, an additional possibility worth investigating is whether there is a bias against online MSW education on the part of field instructors. Regardless, if differences in field placement evaluations persist, a comprehensive review of opportunities for skill development in the online environment should be undertaken.

These results should be viewed within the context of the study's limitations. First, as this is a relatively new program, a small number of students have completed their degrees resulting in a small sample size. As such, this is an exploratory study with results that should be

considered very preliminary. Second, there were demographic differences such as age and years of professional experience between the comparison groups. Therefore, while the online students may be representative of students participating in part-time or off-campus programs, these differences may have had an impact on overall academic performance and course satisfaction. While all students were advanced standing and admitted at the same time, a stronger comparison group would be those students in an off-campus, part-time program, an analysis not possible for us at this time. Third, field instructors were not blind to the status of their students (online or F2F) and this may have influenced their evaluation. This is a possible explanation that we will be investigating in future research. Finally, some researchers (e.g., Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000) have questioned if satisfaction scores from distance education students are inflated because of their gratefulness at being able to participate in a degree program. This possibility cannot be ruled out in this study given the small number of students who have thus far been evaluated.

We argue that the critical question is whether online social work education is effective in imparting knowledge, skills, and values. However, we acknowledge that while this study begins to address the question of "can we?" it does not address the question of "should we?" Pedagogical questions go beyond the scope of this study and may be unanswerable until online students have progressed in their careers. FSU does conduct studies of their alumni on regular intervals, and plans are underway to follow our online students longitudinally.

Caution is clearly warranted not to overgeneralize these results. Online social work education is still in the early phase although more than one cohort has now gone through an online program at one school. Each semester introduced instructors who were new to the online delivery mechanism to students who were gaining experience with it over time. Methods of instruction will undoubtedly be modified as a result, so careful evaluation of subsequent cohorts of online students is needed. Initial results seem to indicate support for the efficacy of online teaching of an advanced standing MSW degree program, thereby making advanced training available to many students who might otherwise be prevented from receiving an MSW.

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