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Brian Warner
Minnesota State University Mankato

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Diversity Within Bachelor of Social Work Programs: Perspectives and Interventions

Brian Warner
Department of Social Work
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Introduction

Diversity is a term that has become increasingly relevant in the field of social work. Perhaps there is no other sector of the social work profession where diversity is more relevant than in higher education. With the ever changing ethnic and racial make-up of the United States, it is imperative that social work educators are able to convey the differences and/or challenges that working with diverse individuals will present. One of the easiest and most direct ways for this to occur is for the student body itself to be diverse. Yet, many social work programs have remained ethnically and racially uniform. It becomes even more puzzling when statistics show that the ethnic and racial diversity of college campuses has become more diverse. Therefore, if the profession of social work wants to continue to be relevant in its practice with minorities, it is imperative to identify where social work in higher education comes up short.

Research Questions

1. Do BSW program directors in the Upper-Midwest believe their programs lack diversity?
2. What (if any) effect does location have on the racial and ethnic makeup of students and professors?
3. What interventions (if any) do the BSW program directors use in an effort to increase diversity within their program?

Literature Review

- Minority students provide crucial support for teachers and research. For many students, a university is one of the first places where many Caucasian have a chance to interact with students different from themselves (Klomegah, 2006).
- Klomegah (2006) stated educating diverse populations means that more minorities will be in position of policy making. Having diverse leaders in our country is "our most valued asset" (Klomegah, 2006, p. 305).
- Roberts & Smith (2002) suggest that minority students would feel more comfortable in a social work program if there were more minority faculty members.
- James (1998) suggests that minority students suffer simply because they have to deal with other burdens in addition to scholastic achievement. These burdens include issues such as discrimination, poor schools, and poverty.
- Watson & Rycraft (2010) both suggest using alternative methods for admission to social work programs. Using strictly GPA's and SAT scores may be keeping minority students out of social work programs.

Methodology

The research design for this study is a cross-sectional electronic survey. The sample for this cross-sectional survey contains BSW program directors at colleges and universities from a ten state area in the upper midwest. A 14 item online survey was sent to 123 BSW Program Directors. Three questions examined the perspective of the BSW director regarding diversity within his/her program. Three questions examined diversity interventions. The literature review revealed that additional financial aid and scholarships were specifically designed for ethnic minority students. Another intervention discovered was using alternative methods for admissions. This would include using methods other than GPA and test scores to admit students. Finally, additional academic support, such as tutoring sessions, was recommended.

Strengths and Limitations

This study had some major limitations. First, the response rate was 34%, which is rather low. There were also some inconsistencies with the number of total students, minority students, total part and full-time professors, and minority professors. For example, one respondent gave a response for number of minority students that was higher than the overall number of students. There were also student and professor numbers given where the student-teach ratio was around 1 to 3. This number seems highly unlikely. It is possible that some respondents may have included the number of teaching assistants that they employ as part-time professors. This unintended error may account for some of the high student to teacher ratio.

Conclusions

- Those programs in which the BSW Directors stated lacked diversity had a lower EMR rate of minority students and professors, used fewer interventions, and had a lower intervention efficacy rate than those that stated they did not believe they had a lack of diversity.
- The results of this study do seem to dispute the idea that just having a large program means that there will be more racial or ethnic minority. Those that believed that they lacked diversity had a program nearly twice as large (152.58 to 86.25), yet they had almost the exact same average of minority students (26.37 to 25.40). Therefore, based on face value the size of the program is not a predictor of a lack of diversity.
- The most popular intervention for rural schools was scholarships for minority students. Over 80% reported that they incorporate this type of intervention. However, the effectiveness rating for rural schools is much lower than suburban and urban schools. Suburban and urban institutions used additional academic support as the most popular intervention. These interventions were rated as more effective by these interventions and consequently these institutions had a higher rate of ethnic and racial minorities. This may suggest that while financial assistance may aid racial and ethnic minority students' ability to enter college, personal interaction methods (i.e. additional academic support) may be more effective in the recruitment and long-term success of minority students in BSW programs.
- A correlation measurement between minority students and minority faculty resulted in $r = .539$, $p = .001$. This is large relationship between the variables. However, this question becomes does the presence of minority faculty increase the presence of minority students or does the increased presence of minority students lead to the addition of minority faculty?
- A t-test was run between rural versus non-rural schools and minority faculty and students. For minority faculty $t = 1.742$, $p = .09$. For minority students it was $t = 2.127$, $p = .04$. This strengthens the idea that setting of an institution affects the number of racial and ethnic minority students.

Data/Results

Students

	Total Number of BSW Students (Average)	Total Number of BSW Students that are Racial or Ethnic Minorities (Average)	Average Rate of Ethnic or Racial Minority Students (EMR)	Percent of BSW Program Directors that believed their program lacked diversity
Rural Institutions	104.15	10.38	9.97%	66%
Urban Institutions	135.40	33.33	21.45%	43%
Suburban Institutions	99.08	32.83	33.13%	33%

Professors

	Total Number of BSW Full-time/Part-time Professors (Average)	Total Number of BSW Professors that are Racial or Ethnic Minorities (Average)	Average Rate of Ethnic or Racial Minority Professors (EMR)
Rural Institutions	3.58/ 2.09	0.55/0.11	15.4% / 5.3%
Urban Institutions	11.5/6.46	3.62/ 2.85	31.5%/ 44.1%
Suburban Institutions	4.00/5.20	0.92/ 1.33	23.0% / 25.6%

Interventions

	Scholarships	Financial Aid	Additional Academic Support	Alternative Admissions	No Interventions Used	Effectiveness Rating of All Interventions (1= Poor, 5= High)
Rural Institutions	81.8%	45.5%	53.6%	10%	0%	2.75
Urban Institutions	33.3%	8.3%	50%	16.7%	33%	3.7
Suburban Institutions	58.3%	25%	66%	16.7%	16.7%	3.4

Implications for Practice

The results of this study identified that many BSW program directors believe their programs lacked diversity. Rural schools especially believed that their schools lacked diversity and found their interventions less effective than those of urban and suburban institutions. While the lack of diversity does not necessarily mean that institutions that lack diversity cannot provide a well-rounded social work education, the lack of diversity may hamper the experience of all involved in an ever changing world.

References

References are available from the author upon request.

