

I Spy Implicit Curriculum: Assessing the Climate of an Undergraduate and Graduate Social Work Program

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Abstract: *The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2022) requires undergraduate and graduate social work programs to conduct self studies to ensure programs meet required standards for accreditation. Of particular interest in this case study was the examination of implicit curriculum – the program’s commitment to inclusive excellence, policies and procedures, advising, student participation, faculty engagement, administrative structure, resources, etc. (CSWE, 2022). A Department of Social Work located in the Midwest collected data from graduating students (n = 269) in both the BSW and MSW programs regarding their overall learning climate from 2020-2022. This project introduced a new scale for assessing implicit curriculum using a cross-sectional, web-based design. Overall students believed the programs allowed them to speak up about diverse issues important to them. Students felt vested partners in the department demonstrated a meaningful commitment to diversity, respected students, and provided a comforting environment for sharing concerns. Inferential statistics also indicated no significant differences in experiences between students based on race/ethnicity, online versus face-to-face, or first-generation student status. A significant difference did exist with students from diverse sexual orientations feeling less comfortable in sharing dissatisfaction with classroom discussion of gender and sexuality. The article concludes with implications for social work education and future research directions. This includes specific ways programs can identify concerns related to implicit curriculum from a proactive lens.*

Keywords: *Social work education; implicit curriculum; accreditation; assessment; student success*

The learning that occurs in a classroom of a professional degree program is typically more than what is presented in lectures or other course materials. Rather, the culture of a particular learning environment - in terms of structure, norms, and punishment/reward systems - also teaches students how to conduct themselves within the profession at large (Grady et al., 2018; Grady et al., 2020; Morton et al., 2019). Ideally, a degree program's learning environment (its "hidden" or "implicit" curriculum) should support the program's mission and goals (its "explicit" curriculum).

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2022) requires undergraduate and graduate social work programs to conduct self-studies to ensure programs meet required standards for accreditation. These self-studies require social work programs to examine both their explicit and implicit curriculum. Of particular interest in this case study is the examination of implicit curriculum – the program’s commitment to inclusive excellence, policies and procedures, advising, student participation, faculty engagement,

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administrative structure, resources, etc. (CSWE, 2022). These implicit curriculum components link directly to many of the core values within the profession of social work including: (1) respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, (2) recognition of the value of human relationships and reciprocal communication, and (3) belief that all citizens should have identical rights, protections, opportunities, obligations, and benefits regardless of their backgrounds (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021).

The purpose of this case study was to learn about students' perspectives of the overall learning climate of a midwestern university's Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) programs. Reviewing the implicit curriculum perspectives of students could provide faculty and staff with valuable information to improve and enhance programs (Grady et al., 2020). After examining 20 implicit curriculum scales from accredited social work programs, the components of the learning climate included: (1) whether students felt they were treated with respect by faculty/staff, (2) whether students felt they could openly express their ideas and opinions when participating in the program, (3) whether cultural competence and responsiveness was valued by faculty/staff, (4) whether students felt they could discuss concerns about the program with faculty/staff, and (5) whether and to what extent students felt support services and co-curricular opportunities for personal and professional growth were available to them. Existing literature also supports the identified components of implicit curriculum (Grady et al., 2018; Krase et al., 2022).

A secondary purpose of the case study was to explore whether the studied BSW and MSW programs were experiencing known challenges related to implicit curriculum (Jacobsen, 2019; Keyes et al., 2023). Existing data on programs that do not perform as well in their implicit curriculum show challenges in a variety of areas. First, some programs identify barriers between marginalized and privileged identities (Keyes et al., 2023). Students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups (Lilly et al., 2023), LGBTQIA+ students (Timbers, 2023), and faith-based students (Barker et al., 2023) often report more concerns about implicit curriculum. Second, students learning in an online environment often find diversity, equity, and inclusion to be less prevalent in their educational experience (Jacobsen, 2019). Third, first generation college students often feel a lack of belongingness, comfort, and respect within higher education settings (Laemmler et al., 2022). This study looked specifically at differences among many of these demographic groups.

Literature Review

Implicit Curriculum and Social Work Education

Recent research illustrates the importance of studying the role implicit curriculum has on social work education (Friedman et al., 2020; Goode et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2020; Morton et al., 2019). First, assessing implicit curriculum provides educators the opportunity to identify areas of diversity that students do not believe receive adequate attention within the explicit curriculum (Friedman et al., 2020; Hosken, 2018; Kattari et al., 2020). Second, feedback on implicit curriculum provides students a voice for

discussing the culture and climate of a program as it relates to respect and comfort with faculty and staff (Hosken, 2018; Kattari et al., 2020; McClendon et al., 2021; McMahan et al., 2020). Third, student feedback provides guidance for further engaging students in educational and co-curricular activities (Goode et al., 2021; Mapp & Gatenio Gabel, 2019; Morton et al., 2019; Roth et al., 2018). Fourth, implicit curriculum feedback provides programs with an opportunity to reflect upon student opinion and to alter the learning environment for enhanced student success (Cox et al., 2021; Grady et al., 2020).

Implicit curriculum feedback provides a context for examining how student perspectives relate to other constructs of professional development. A program's implicit curriculum is meant to support the professional development of students and prepare them for future social work practice (Morton et al., 2019; Peterson et al., 2014b). For example, a program's emphasis on implicit curriculum empowers students to be involved in program governance, to participate in extracurricular activities, to feel valued by the program, and to have a higher sense of community (Peterson et al., 2014a). These experiences translate to greater satisfaction in academic advising, a deeper understanding of practicum education, and feeling more encouraged within the classroom environment (Peterson et al., 2014a). The cumulative outcome of implicit curriculum efforts is professional socialization – students understanding the importance of relationships and normative structures (Miller, 2013). The concept of professional socialization helps connect implicit curriculum with the values of the social work profession (Bogo & Wayne, 2013; NASW, 2021).

Through routine evaluation of the implicit curriculum, social work programs can also be proactive in identifying concerns that can exist in programs. Implicit curriculum challenges in social work involve navigating the unwritten and unofficial aspects of training and practice (Friedman et al., 2020; Goode et al., 2021). These challenges can include biases and stereotypes present in academic settings or the workplace, which may influence the attitudes and behaviors of students and professionals (Barker et al., 2023; Lilly et al., 2023; Timbers, 2023). For instance, systemic biases can impact the treatment and representation of marginalized groups. Additionally, students may face difficulties in reconciling theoretical knowledge with real-world practice, particularly in complex and emotionally charged situations (Cox et al., 2021). Addressing these challenges requires ongoing self-reflection, mentorship, and a commitment to equity and inclusion in all areas of social work education and practice.

Assessing Implicit Curriculum

There is little research on assessing the implicit curriculum of social work programs, as much of the research on implicit curriculum views the concept from a larger campus climate (Grady et al., 2018; Grady et al., 2011; Goose, 1999). Thus, there is a need for researchers to develop instruments specifically designed to evaluate the implicit curriculum in social work programs. Scale development should include a thorough review of existing scales, gathering information from potential users, drafting scale items, piloting a draft of the instrument, and revising the pilot draft to ensure the instrument is both valid and reliable (DeVellis, 2003). The researchers associated with this study followed these steps in the development of an implicit curriculum scale. The researchers empirically measured the

instrument's internal consistency reliability and construct validity through an exploratory factor analysis (DeVellis, 2003; Grady et al., 2018).

Current Study

This case study aided in understanding whether the program's implicit and explicit curricula align. According to CSWE (2022), explicit curriculum is the program's formal educational structure and includes its courses and curriculum design. The programs at the university in this study are generalist (BSW) and advanced generalist (MSW) and adhere to the core competencies and practicum education requirements evaluated through measurable practice behaviors comprised of knowledge, values, and skills. The goal of this approach is to demonstrate the integration and application of competencies in practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (CSWE, 2022).

The data provided information for reaffirmation - a required CSWE (2022) component. Data from this assessment helped the Department of Social Work in their journey for inclusive excellence, especially around the integration of diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belongingness in undergraduate and graduate programs. It also allowed for a thorough review of known demographic factors (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, first-generation status, and program modality) impacting the implicit curriculum results of other social work programs.

Method

Research Design

The Department of Social Work collected data from graduating students in both the BSW and MSW programs regarding their overall learning climate from 2020-2022. While previous research investigated the heterogeneity of student experiences with implicit curriculum within social work programs (Grady et al., 2020), this case study was unique to the specific department and population of students. This project used a cross-sectional, web-based design to collect scale data from students regarding their perceptions of the BSW and MSW program climate.

Data Collection

BSW and MSW students completed the scale during their final practicum seminar before graduation. Students completed the scale through the Qualtrics© system. A graduate assistant provided students with the link and remained present as students completed the scale. Participation in the scale was 100% voluntary. Students received notification of the voluntary nature of this study both verbally from the graduate assistant and before answering any questions in the Qualtrics© system. There were no faculty, staff, or administrators from the social work program present during data collection. The scale took 10-15 minutes to complete and received approval from the appropriate Institutional Review Board.

Implicit Curriculum Scale

The scale asked students to identify the extent to which they agree with a series of questions on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” and 5 = “Strongly Agree”). The scale contained two initial questions about whether the social work program allowed students to speak up about diversity issues and whether the program demonstrated a commitment to social justice. These broader questions transitioned into a section about whether the social work program encouraged discussion about specific areas of diversity (i.e., sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, age, personal culture, family, and political ideologies). The scale then asked questions about how the curriculum, practicum education, program faculty, academic advisor, and program administrators demonstrated a meaningful commitment to diversity. There were also questions about how faculty members, program administrators, academic advisors, staff members, and fellow students respected one another and how comfortable students felt discussing concerns with these various stakeholders. The final two Likert-scale questions asked students if they felt they grew professionally in the program and whether they were able to participate in leadership development activities.

Other questions were dichotomous in nature (yes or no). These questions explored whether students had an opportunity to participate in a variety of curricular (e.g., student research, volunteer practicum experiences, immersive learning, etc.) and co-curricular activities (e.g., campus events, student organizations, etc.). Students indicated whether they utilized campus services during their time at the university (e.g., writing center, student disability services, financial aid services, campus counseling, etc.). The scale also asked students if they requested faculty members to write letters of recommendations for career placement and/or graduate school, sought informal consultation from faculty members, and whether students applied for scholarships at the departmental, university, or community level.

The scale contained a series of demographic questions. Demographic questions asked students to share their age, race, ethnicity, gender identification, sexual orientation, and overall GPA. There were also questions about status as a first-generation college student, program modality (online versus face-to-face), how likely students were to apply to the university’s graduate social work program (if a BSW student), and how likely students were to pursue a clinical license (if a MSW student).

Researchers created the scale after a thorough review of existing scales used by social work programs across the United States. Researchers reviewed scales from 20 CSWE accredited programs and reviewed recent literature on topics important to a program’s implicit curriculum (Barker et al., 2023; Bogo & Wayne, 2013; Grady et al., 2018; Grady et al., 2020; Krase et al., 2022). The final scale had a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.95.

Researchers conducted an exploratory factor analysis for the various question blocks on the implicit curriculum scale. Researchers began by confirming that the correlation matrix was factorable. Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) was used to ensure the correlation matrix was not random and Kaise-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic (Kaiser, 1974) was required to be above a minimum of 0.50. An exploratory factor analysis was employed.

Researchers used an iterated principal axis (PA) extraction method with initial communalities estimated by squared multiple corrections (Fabrigar et al., 1999). Using guidance from Velicer and colleagues (2000), parallel analysis and the visual scree test helped to determine the appropriate number of factors to retain. Due to the nature of the constructs, it was assumed factors would be correlated. Therefore, an oblimin rotation was used (Watkins, 2018). Researchers determined the criteria for factor adequacy a priori. Per Norman and Streiner (2014), pattern coefficients ≥ 0.37 were considered salient. Salient complex loadings on more than one factor were rejected to honor simple structure (Watkins, 2018). Factors with a minimum of three salient pattern coefficients, internal consistency ≥ 0.70 , and that were theoretically meaningful were considered adequate.

The results of Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated the correlation matrix was not random, $X^2 = 2.12$, $p < 0.001$, and the KMO statistic was 0.78, well above the minimum standard for conducting factor analysis. The eigenvalues for the various question blocks were above 1.00. Standardized factor loadings for items were 0.40 or higher. Researchers evaluated model-data fit for the exploratory factor analysis with normed chi-square (values were less than 5.00), the Comparative Fit index (values were greater than or equal to 0.95), the Tucker-Lewis Index (values were greater than or equal to 0.95), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (values were less than 0.80), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (values were less than 0.80).

Study Participants

There was a total of 269 students who completed the scale between 2020 and 2022 (see Table 1). This included 184 BSW students and 85 MSW students. This represented a 93% response rate. The mean age of BSW students was 22 years old. The mean age of MSW students was 27 years old. Students identified as 92% female, 4% male, and 4% non-binary. The largest percentage of students identified as White (81%) with other students identifying as Black or African American (11%), multiracial (4%), Hispanic (3%), and Asian or Asian American (1%). The largest group of students identified as heterosexual (78%). Twenty-two percent of students identified as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. The mean GPA was 3.44 (BSW = 3.35, MSW = 3.65). First generation college students comprised 41% of the sample. MSW students reported a high desire to pursue their LCSW after graduation ($M = 4.2$). This question used a five-point Likert scale with endpoints strongly disagree and strongly agree. MSW students also shared some interest in pursuing their LCAC ($M = 3.0$). This question used the same five-point scale. Of the graduating BSW students, 80 indicated they were very likely to pursue a MSW degree at the university, 28 were very likely. With the MSW program only being in the fourth year of existence, information on the tenure of MSW social workers remains limited. Only 10% of respondents indicated they took most courses online.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

	Total (n=269)	BSW (n=184)	MSW (n=85)
Age (years)	23.6	22	27
Gender			
Female	246 (91.4%)	168 (91.3%)	78 (91.8%)
Male	10 (3.7%)	7 (3.8%)	3 (3.5%)
Non-Binary	13 (4.8%)	9 (4.9%)	4 (4.7%)
Race/Ethnicity			
White	218 (81.0%)	149 (81.0%)	69 (81.2%)
Black or African American	29 (10.8%)	20 (10.9%)	9 (10.6%)
Multiracial	10 (3.7%)	7 (3.8%)	3 (3.5%)
Hispanic	9 (3.3%)	6 (3.3%)	3 (3.5%)
Asian or Asian American	3 (1.1%)	2 (1.1%)	1 (1.2%)
Sexual Orientation			
Heterosexual	210 (78.1%)	144 (78.3%)	66 (77.6%)
LGBTQIA+ community	59 (21.9%)	40 (21.7%)	19 (22.4%)
GPA	3.44	3.35	3.65
First Generation College Student	110 (41.0%)	90 (48.9%)	20 (23.5%)
Interest in pursuing additional education or credentials*			
MSW		4.3	na
LCSW		na	4.2
LCAC		na	3.0

*Average on five-point Likert scale with 1= strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree

Data Analysis

Researchers entered collected data into SPSS for data analysis. Faculty members used descriptive statistics to summarize major findings. Researchers used independent sample *t*-tests to determine any significant differences based on race, sexual orientation, first-generation status, and program modality.

Results

Overall students believed the social work programs allowed them to speak up about diverse issues that were important to them $M = 4.3$ (both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021) and $M = 4.6$ (2021-2022). They also believed the programs demonstrated a strong commitment to social justice with $M = 4.3$ (both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021) and $M = 4.4$ (2021-2022). Students felt encouraged with the program's approach to meaningful conversations about diversity topics $M = 4.1$ (both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021) and $M = 4.4$ (2021-2022). See Table 2 for a complete breakdown of student ratings related to specific diversity topics.

Table 2. *Student Ratings of Program Support for Diversity Topics*

	Average		
	2019-2020 (n=63)	2020-2021 (n=97)	2021-2022 (n=109)
The social work program encourages discussion about ...			
Sexuality	4.1	4.1	4.1
Gender	4.0	4.1	4.1
Race & ethnicity	4.4	4.4	4.5
Religion & spirituality	3.7	3.7	3.6
Ability & disability	4.1	4.0	4.0
Socioeconomic status	4.4	4.4	4.5
Age-based discrimination	4.0	3.9	3.9
Personal culture	4.2	4.1	4.2
Family, marriage, & intimate partner relationships	4.2	4.2	4.3
Political ideology	3.7	3.7	3.7

1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 5 = "Strongly Agree"

Students evaluated how well their practicum education experiences, program faculty, academic advisor, and program administrators demonstrated a meaningful commitment to diversity. Most students either agreed or strongly agreed that these areas of the BSW and MSW programs demonstrated a meaningful commitment to diversity (see Table 2). Students rated the level of respect they felt from their faculty members, program administrators, academic advisors, staff members, and fellow students. The largest percentage of students either agreed or strongly agreed with these statements (see Table 3). Students also had the opportunity to rate their level of comfort while discussing concerns about the program with their faculty members, academic advisor, and program administrators. Scores indicated a high level of comfort with seeking support from all of these individuals (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Student Perceptions of the Program's Commitment to Diversity, Approach to Respect, and Comfort With Discussing Concerns*

Topic	Average		
	2019-2020 (n=63)	2020-2021 (n=97)	2021-2022 (n=109)
Demonstrates a meaningful commitment to diversity...			
Social Work Curriculum	4.1	4.1	4.3
Practicum Education	4.1	4.0	4.3
Faculty	4.1	4.0	4.2
Academic Advisor	4.0	4.0	4.4
Program Administrators	4.1	4.1	4.2
I feel respected by my...			
Faculty	4.5	4.4	4.6
Academic Advisor	4.4	4.4	4.4
Program Administrators	4.5	4.5	4.7
Staff Members	4.5	4.4	4.6
Fellow Students	4.4	4.4	4.4
I feel comfortable discussing concerns with...			
Faculty	4.1	4.0	4.2
Academic Advisor	4.1	4.0	4.4
Program Administrators	4.0	3.9	4.1

1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 5 = "Strongly Agree"

Additional questions asked students about opportunities they had to participate in high impact learning experiences and their knowledge of campus resources (see Table 4). The scale also asked students about their utilization of available campus resources (see Table 5).

Table 4. *Student Chance to Participate or Had Knowledge About Curricular and Co-Curricular Resources (n=269)*

I had a chance to participate or had knowledge about...	Yes, Had Chance to Participate or Knowledge About [n (%)]		
	2019-2020 (n=63)	2020-2021 (n=97)	2021-2022 (n=107)
Research	58 (93%)	80 (83%)	95 (89%)
Immersive Learning	56 (90%)	77 (80%)	97 (91%)
Volunteer Experiences	58 (93%)	85 (88%)	104 (98%)
Campus Events	52 (83%)	67 (70%)	99 (93%)
SSWA	57 (91%)	93 (96%)	95 (89%)
BSSWA	na	81 (84%)	71 (67%)

Table 5. *Student Use of Campus Services (n=269)*

During my time at the university, I used the following...	Yes, Used [n (%)]		
	2019-2020 (n=63)	2020-2021 (n=97)	2021-2022 (n=107)
Writing Center	22 (36%)	28 (29%)	37 (35%)
Disability Services	11 (19%)	13 (14%)	26 (25%)
Learning Center	17 (27%)	24 (25%)	29 (28%)
Financial Aid	45 (73%)	67 (70%)	77 (72%)
Campus Counseling	15 (24%)	23 (24%)	39 (37%)
Academic Advising	59 (94%)	77 (80%)	94 (88%)
Scholarships	27 (43%)	31 (32%)	50 (47%)
Letter of Recommendation	41 (66%)	55 (57%)	84 (79%)
Professional Consult	52 (84%)	66 (69%)	92 (86%)

Overall, students across the three years of data collection agree the BSW and MSW program encouraged their professional development $M = 4.1$ (both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021) and $M = 4.3$ (2021-2022). The question about professional development was asked as a standalone question on the survey. Students also believed the programs afforded them opportunities to engage in leadership activities $M = 3.8$ (both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021) and $M = 4.0$ (2021-2022). Data collection is ongoing as part of a longitudinal effort.

Inferential Findings

Responses did not vary by selected demographic characteristics, except for sexual orientation. Students who identified as sexual minorities were more likely to express dissatisfaction with classroom discussion of gender and sexuality, respectively: $t(265) = 2.472, p = 0.018 (M = 3.89, SD = 0.93; M = 2.86, SD = 1.35); t(265) = 2.288, p = 0.027 (M = 3.71, SD = 0.96; M = 2.71, SD = 1.50)$. Students who identified as racial minorities, as first-generation college students, and students who took most courses online were not significantly more likely to express dissatisfaction in any particular area.

Discussion

Key Findings

A program's implicit curriculum should encourage student and faculty conversation about diverse topics (Friedman et al., 2020; Hosken, 2018; Kattari et al., 2020), evaluate the overall climate of a program (Hosken, 2018; Kattari et al., 2020; McClendon et al., 2021; McMahan et al., 2020), suggest strategies for student engagement in curricular and co-curricular activities (Goode et al., 2021; Mapp & Gatenio Gabel, 2019; Morton et al., 2019; Roth et al., 2018), encourage reflection on improving student experience (Cox et al., 2021; Grady et al., 2020), and help create a sense of community that translates to professional socialization (Peterson et al., 2015). Results from these implicit curriculum efforts illustrate the department's success in achieving these outcomes.

The department saw an increase in both the student's ability to speak up about diversity (+0.3) and the student's belief the program supported meaningful conversations about diverse topics (+0.3) from the first to third year of data collection. The department surveyed students about 10 specific areas of diversity. Scores from year one to year three remained consistent. The department has the largest room for growth in discussions related to religion/spirituality, age-based discrimination, and political ideology. Discussions about race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status consistently ranked the highest. Scores related to the program's commitment to diversity increased from year one to year three in all areas. This included higher scores for the social work curriculum (+0.2), practicum education (+0.2), faculty (+0.1), academic advising (+0.3), and program administration (+0.1).

Researchers assessed the overall climate of the department by looking at student perceptions of the respect and comfort they have with faculty, academic advisors, program administrators, staff members, and their fellow students. Scores for respect ranged from 4.4 to 4.7 across categories. The highest score for respect was with program administrators followed by faculty and staff. The student level of comfort was above 4.1 for all categories. Students felt most comfortable bringing concerns to their academic advisor.

To explore student engagement with curricular efforts, researchers looked at whether students had opportunities to engage in scholarly research, high-impact teaching practices, and volunteer experiences. Rates of student-engaged research ranged from 89-93%. By year three, 91% of students reported having access to classes using high-impact teaching practices, and 98% of students had opportunities to volunteer as part of a classroom requirement. Co-curricular activities included participation in campus events and student social work groups (e.g., Student Social Work Association and Black Student Social Work Association). Participation in campus events increased by 10% from year one (83%) to year three (93%). Exposure to student social work groups dropped from year to year. This is an opportunity for growth for the department. Utilization of campus services increased in nearly all areas from year one to year three.

Researchers looked at professional socialization by exploring student perceptions around professional development and opportunities to engage in leadership activities. The

department saw an increase in both professional development (+0.2) and engagement in leadership activities (+0.2) from the first to third year of data collection.

Utilization of Student Feedback

Assessing and improving the implicit curriculum in social work is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. The implicit curriculum encompasses the unspoken norms, values, and attitudes conveyed through the educational experience. By assessing and addressing these aspects, educators can help ensure that students receive a well-rounded and ethical education that aligns with the values of the profession. Improvement efforts can lead to the reduction of biases and stereotypes, promoting a culture of respect and understanding. This, in turn, prepares students to work effectively with diverse populations and challenges them to critically examine their own beliefs and assumptions. Ultimately, enhancing the implicit curriculum supports the development of competent, empathetic, and socially responsible practitioners who are better equipped to serve the needs of their clients and communities.

Researchers placed significant value in taking time to reflect on student feedback and to invest time and resources into strategic areas of change. These strategic areas supported growth in various areas of the implicit curriculum and will continue to provide structure and guidance moving forward. Completed or ongoing efforts include:

1. Review of BSW and MSW curricula to determine new strategies for infusing conversations about diversity components, with a special emphasis on the areas identified by students with the lowest rated scores. This includes a review of course objectives (both stated and unstated).
2. Create the Black Student Social Work Association. This mission is concentrated on the well-being of Black social work students and other students from underrepresented minority (URM) groups.
3. Explore strategies to keep students informed about available resources on campus, especially the Writing Center, Career Center, and Learning Center. Reminders about these services exist in each course in the social work curriculum.
4. Create SOCW 240: Critical Thinking and Writing for Social Work Professionals. This course helps undergraduate students connect CSWE competencies with career readiness competencies identified by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2021). These competencies include a focus on equity and inclusion, leadership, professionalism, and teamwork.
5. Review library resources and holdings to update specific resources and materials regarding diversity. This also includes a review of current textbooks, reading, and media.
6. Increase interaction and involvement with diverse aspects of the local community by engaging in specific immersive-learning and service-learning experiences addressing the needs and concerns of diverse populations.
7. Develop professional mentoring opportunities for social work majors with diverse peers and community professionals.

8. Use resources of the Office of Inclusive Excellence to assist with programming, increasing faculty's inclusive pedagogy, and implementing additional diversity research in the department.
9. Review of course policies to explore unintended barriers to student success.
10. Create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee with student involvement.

Study Limitations

First, while researchers made efforts to decrease discomfort with the scale, it is possible students felt pressure to respond in particular ways out of personal and/or academic concerns. Second, this study relied upon self-reported data. Without having the ability to verify participant responses, there was no way to know the legitimacy or honesty of participants' responses. Third, this study was unable to control the multiple covariates or confounding variables that could influence a student's perception of an academic program. While the study provided descriptive information, it is difficult to determine the true reasoning for student ratings. Fifth, most of the data collection occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Future Directions

Future research on implicit curriculum should include ongoing data collection to analyze longitudinal trends and shifts in student perspectives. This includes analyzing data from additional inferential and a multivariate statistical approach. Additionally, the utilization of focus groups could provide a qualitative component to enhance the understanding of student experiences. This survey also does not capture the concept of belongingness, which should be considered in future efforts. Belongingness can provide valuable insight regarding retention and persistence. Future studies could also look more closely at other demographic characteristics such as religion, political affiliation, gender identity, etc.

Conclusion

Implicit curriculum encourages student and faculty conversations about diverse topics, evaluates the overall climate of a program, suggests strategies for student engagement, and helps create a sense of community for self-reflection and professional socialization. This study provided an initial review of the climate of the BSW and MSW programs at a Midwest university. From this data, the social work programs can explore strategies for improving student success efforts, identify targeted areas for curriculum and faculty development, and strategies for supporting recruitment, retention, and persistence efforts.

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