IRB Synopsis of Proposal

Engaged Learning, Technology and Social Capital in Social Work Education

1. The subject population will be a cross-section of current undergraduate and graduate students from the Texas State University School of Social Work. Two focus groups will be conducted; one for undergraduate students and one for graduate students. Each focus group will be made up of 10 participants. The subjects will be recruited through the Organization for Social Work Students (OSSW), Phi Alpha, short class presentations, an email to all undergrad and graduate, social work students, and a posting on the School of Social Work facebook fan page. The criterion for inclusion would be that the participants are only from the School of Social Work. The exclusion criterion would be to not include those that are a part of the online master’s in social work (MSW) program. This is due to logistics as the focus groups will be face to face and the online MSW students are from rural areas outside of the San Marcos/Austin/San Antonio region.
2. The subjects for the focus groups will be recruited by one of the researchers going to the various sources (OSSW, Phi Alpha and the 2 courses- 1 undergrad and 1 graduate) to give a short presentation of what the research entails and why it is important. In addition to the presentations 2 separate emails (attached) will be sent through the School of Social Work to all current social work students to gain more interest. The same information contained in the emails will be posted on the School of Social work’s facebook fan page.

Both researchers’ contact information will be included in the consent form (attached) that will be attached in the email and handed out to any perspective participants in the class presentations. If prospective subjects consent to participation they will be asked to sign the written consent form and return it to the researchers. At the beginning of each focus group session, the researchers will read through the consent form to ensure that all participants remember what is contained in the form.

1. The proposed study is exploratory and will use purposive sampling. The focus groups will be held to gain a broad understanding of how social work students engage in, transfer and share learning, and how technology plays a role in these processes. Each focus group will be held for 90 minutes and will include 10 participants. The focus group will be tape-recorded, and notes will be taken by one of the researchers in order to close any gaps in the recording where the recording device may not pick up someone’s voice. Five open-ended questions will be asked (see attachment).
2. There are no foreseen risks involved with this proposed study. All the information will be confidential. The information that students share will be related to their learning experiences in and out of the classroom. One possible concern would be that a participant may not feel comfortable sharing their feelings about a particular topic that is introduced in the focus group setting. This risk of discomfort will be minimized by reminding participants in through the consent form, and verbally, at the beginning of the focus group that they do not have to answer any question or engage in any discussion they are uncomfortable with.
3. All efforts will be made to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of participants. Confidentiality will be maintained through assigning a code number to each participant. The participants’ data will be tracked by their code number, not their name. This code number will appear on all written documents. The list that connects the names to the code numbers will be destroyed after matching. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet to which only the researchers have access. The audio recordings will be maintained in a locked file for one year and will then be erased at that time. The transcribed data will be stored for approximately five years, then destroyed. Any data collected, transferred and stored to computer files will be password protected. Analysis of data will be completed in another password protected file that is solely accessed by Dr. Deepak and Ms. Gondek. Neither the computer nor our final reports will provide any information that will allow the linking of names to specific comments.
4. Conducting a focus group could increase exchanges, ideas and overall sharing via the nature of group dynamics. One participant’s experience could spark an occurrence, otherwise overlooked, from another participant. The subjects can gain insight for future understanding, research and practice of how engaged learning is impacted through technology and social capital. The findings from the research will be used to improve the delivery of social work education based on student strengths and observations.

Society could benefit to gain a more in-depth understanding of to engage learners, how information is shared, and how technology can be a part of this process. With this knowledge, entities such as the government, school administrators and faculty can determine what styles and methods can encourage increased engagement and social capital through technology.

1. There will be no compensation given to the participants.
2. Benefits outweigh risks for participants and society related to this study. Risks are minimal in that the information provided is no different than what the participants experience in their daily lives. The benefits could potentially evolve how curriculum, presentations, classrooms, conferences and meetings are developed in a variety of settings. Individuals could reap the benefits by feeling empowered to exchange ideas and information both verbally and technology to promote social change.
3. Recruitment will occur through various methods at Texas State University through the School of Social Work. The classroom presentations, mass email and student organizations are all within the School of Social Work. As Dr. Deepak is an Assistant Professor within the School of Social Work, the only approval needed would be through the Institutional Review Board.
4. n/a
5. n/a
6. n/a

13. Only Dr. Deepak and Ms. Gondek will have access to the data. After the data has been analyzed, Dr. Deepak and Ms. Gondek will have access to the results of this study and intend to publish them in professional and/or scientific journals. Results may also be used for educational purposes and/or professional presentations. The audiences that may be interested in the findings are: social work, communications, technology, psychology, sociology, political science, business, etc. A requirement of research is sharing the information to expand the knowledge base.